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ANDY McNAMARA
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The Highest Court

For all intents and purposes I was born a gamer, and I decided early on to “boldly go where no man had gone before.” The first games I played were in ASCII. In particular, one simply called Star Trek that used the letter E to represent the Starship Enterprise, and K to convey the vile Klingon warships. If those stars made of asterisks were any hotter, I think my screen would have melted.

I moved on to better things with more advanced graphics like the Atari 2600, but my love of gaming was born in those early ASCII days connected to what was, at the time, a super computer.

When I met other gamers as I grew up, I was astounded they were as fascinated by games as I was – gaming was a glue that held my early friendships together. My father even made games for me to play, so I learned to love and respect the effort and care that goes into making a game.

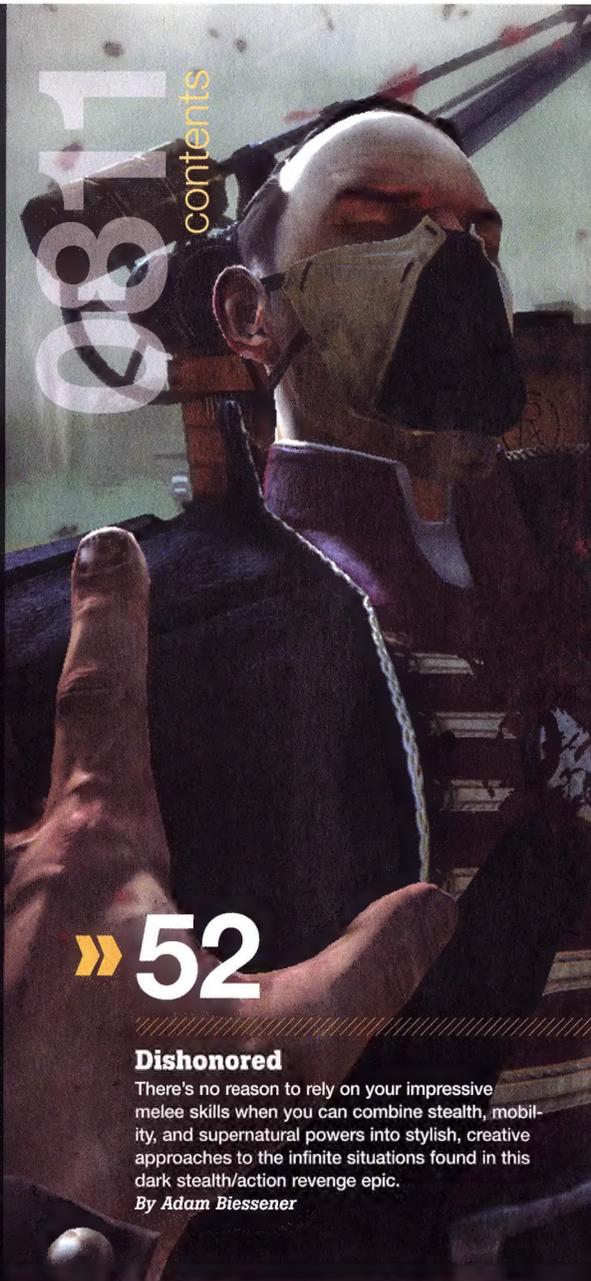
If this sounds like some love letter to gaming, it’s because I want to drive home a perspective of respect for gaming and those that dare to call themselves gamers.

I think you can understand why I never thought there would come a day when I would find myself appalled by another gamer, as I always thought that gamers were better, smarter, and faster than normal humans who didn’t share my passion.

The sin I speak of is the way gamers interact and behave from the anonymity of the Internet (Epic design director and outspoken gamer Cliff Bleszinski once called it “the Beavis effect” which has stuck with me as a great descriptor). Now don’t get me wrong, I am all for trash talk. In fact, I think I’m quite good at it. Giving my friends grief for poor play or making smartass comments is just part of the camaraderie and fun of gaming. However, far too often gamers use online gaming as a way to insult people on a personal level regarding their race, their sexual orientation, or even something as simple as how they speak. It doesn’t just happen occasionally in passing. It is a relentless assault on good taste in game after game.

I often refuse to play games online without friends due to the fact that the gamer community is so cruel and heartless. This truly makes me sad, as I expected more of gamers.

Gamers and the gaming industry just won a major victory in the Supreme Court, but I feel our biggest challenge is in the court of public opinion where we have to show the world that we aren’t childish idiots who spew slurs anonymously while mowing down virtual avatars. We need to show the world that gamers are just regular everyday Joes who like to blow off a little steam in a match online and can do it with respect for ourselves and others. When we win that battle, I’ll feel the same level of respect for games and gamers I had when my E attacked a K. Otherwise, this childish behavior will always be the black eye that keeps the rest of the world from respecting the medium.



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By Adam Biessener



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Gamers aren't the only folks excited about all the great stuff shown off at this year's E3. Learn what game makers like Tomonobu Itagaki and Yoshinori Kitase are most enthusiastic about from the show.



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NCAA Football 12



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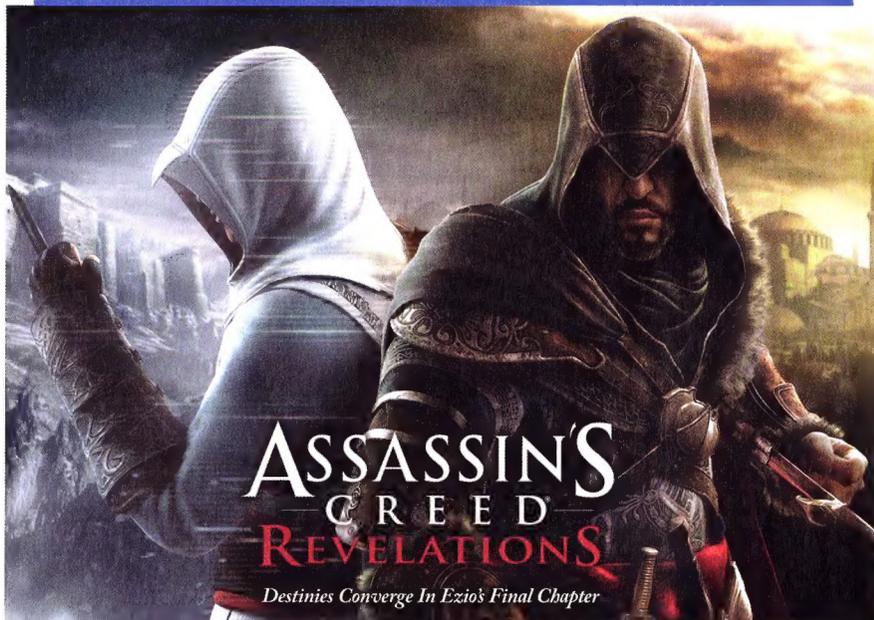


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This month in Feedback, readers rejoice for old-school Rayman, ponder third-party prospects for Nintendo's new console, kick the Call of Duty habit, and laugh at our misfortunes.



Reveling In Revelations

You guys did a fantastic job giving us the run-down of Assassin's Creed Revelations in issue 218. I've always loved world history, and the AC series delivers great gameplay along with one heck of a history fix. I am sad to learn that this will be the last we hear from Altair and Ezio, but the story can't continue if they linger, so in a way it's a good thing. I'm eager to hear about what happens to Desmond and the other assassins as well!

Isabel Porras-Best
via email

I have been a fan of Assassin's Creed ever since the first game, and am psyched to hear about the release of Revelations. But I can't help thinking that this could be the last Assassin's Creed game. It would suck a lot to see this franchise go. I am super excited for the release of Revelations and hope to see future AC games in my collection.

Vince Donohue
Farmington, MN

Don't worry, Vince. While Assassin's Creed Revelations aims to close the chapter on Altair and Ezio's adventures, Ubisoft isn't about to walk away from such a successful franchise. Expect to be doing plenty of assassinating in the future.



Call Of Duty: Time Vampire

This letter is coming from a previously avid Call of Duty online player. Recently, I've begun to actually think about what I'm wasting all these hours of my life on. I decided to pop back in my copy of CoD: WaW, and after getting shot up quite a bit, I quit in frustration. Then I moved back into my comfort zone with my usual gaming selection: Black Ops. I played for a little while and suffered more than my share of frustrating deaths. Then I rage quit and walked outside, thinking about what I had just endured. I asked myself, "Aren't video games supposed to be fun? Why am I wasting hours upon hours of my life on such a meaningless and even disturbing experience? Why does my kill/death ratio even matter?" I then stepped back and realized that Call of Duty is just a massive waste of time. I went into the barracks option and looked at the amount of time played. It read 10 days, 18 hours, and 34 minutes. Call of Duty, you were like a leech, sucking away at me and my time. I'm glad to be rid of you.

Matt Bernsdorf
via email

So we're guessing you don't plan on subscribing to Activision's new monthly Call of Duty: Elite service?

Contact Us

feedback@gameinformer.com

A Grown-up Gamer

I just wanted to say that I am pretty embarrassed by my fellow adolescent gamers. I'm 15 and gaming is one of my major hobbies. While I admit that I do not have many restrictions on the games I play, I do agree that, ultimately, the games I play are under my parents' jurisdiction. I just wish that my age group wasn't viewed as whiny, arrogant pain in the sides, but I know that is something that I will have to live with. I wear my headphones not to scream at other players, but to enjoy the surround sound and talk to friends. I just hope you guys at my favorite magazine don't despise us all.

Ben Witt
via email

While plenty of young gamers deserve the bad rap placed upon them, behavior is ultimately what defines how annoying a player is, not age. As long as you're polite on the digital battlefield, Ben, we won't hold your birth date against you...until you kill us, at least.



Not Just Mario's Party?

After seeing Nintendo's stuff at E3, like the Wii U and 3DS, I have to wonder whether the company will finally break its traditional and narcissistic relationship with third-party publishers. Outside of the Mario, Zelda, Metroid, and Donkey Kong franchises, Nintendo titles have been ridiculous. Potential third-party successes like No More Heroes and Mad World have fallen through the cracks. Personally, I would love to see the Castlevania and Mega Man Legends franchises on Nintendo's new systems.

Renato Monsalve
Florida

Nintendo's previous systems haven't always seen a lot of third-party support for a variety of reasons, so we were pleasantly surprised to see the company putting third-party Wii U titles at the forefront during its E3 presentation. In fact, we saw more third-party announcements for the Wii U than official Nintendo games. Let's hope that Nintendo's goodwill towards its new partners isn't voided by consumers refusing to buy anything that doesn't have a Nintendo mascot in the title.



Too Soon?

Is it strange that I feel a sense of dread every time somebody speculates about the next generation of consoles? It seems like it's too early to be thinking about them; I've only had my PS3 for four years. I spent so much time of the last generation dreaming about this one that it seems weird not wanting to hear about what's next. I guess after this generation's hefty price tag, I'm just not ready to spend that much again. Does anyone else feel the same way?

Stan Gruber
via email

Plenty of gamers aren't ready to drop another several hundred bucks on a new console. Don't forget that even if early speculation turns out to be true, you still have a lot of time before those rumored consoles are released, and even longer before the current systems are phased out. Feel free to partake in the gossip while knowing that your current platforms still have plenty of great games on the way.

Rayman's Roots

Seeing the news that Rayman is returning to his 2D days made me feel like the young child I was when I played through his first game. Rayman was my favorite game as a kid and still holds up as a great experience. When the second game came out, I never found it very fun. When Rayman Raving Rabbids came out, I simply denied it was a Rayman game. Ubisoft is finally making the right decision in returning to the style I actually consider to be Rayman.

Mark Wasson
via email

We're also excited to see an HD installment of Rayman featuring 2D art and classic platforming. Maybe someone at Nintendo will take notice of Ubisoft's efforts and start working on another side-scrolling Metroid. Please?



Short Answers to Readers' Burning Questions

"Hey is dan ryckert married :)
?????"

Ha!

"Do you feel the expansion of the humans into Citadel space is a metaphor for video games growing as a form of media? Think about it."

We will.

How do I get a question published in the July issue of the magazine?

First of all, you're going to need a time machine.

Quantified!

Two readers actually picked *Two And A Half Men* as a show they think should be made into a game. We hope they were joking.

Worst News Tip Of The Month:

"In madden 12 you should make the football gear get dirty when the players get tackled or thrown down to the ground"



[Left] Dan "Buck Cherry" Ryckert wasted no time getting bounced off the mechanical bull during Bethesda's E3 party at Saddle Ranch Chop House. [Center] Bethesda's Enn Losi and Tracey Thompson were pleased with the result [Right] Annette finds out that BioShock Infinite's Song-bird isn't big on high fives.

On Your Mind



TV Shows Made For Gaming
In issue 218, we asked gamers what television series they think would make a gaming experience. The results were surprising to say the least: Doctor Who was the most popular choice, followed by Burn Notice and Supernatural. Here are some less popular – but still great – choices.

One TV series instantly popped into my mind: *Firefly*. During its short run on air, the show created a unique universe with an interesting back story that would be perfect for a game similar in style to *Mass Effect*. Just imagine zipping around the galaxy in *Serenity* while battling Reavers and various criminal and government organizations.

Ed Sorrentino

My choice is *Battlestar Galactica*. If you have ever played the board game, you will see elements of why it would make a great multiplayer game. Fighting to keep humanity alive while trying to figure out who is a Cylon and who isn't could provide great entertainment and high replayability.

Dana Moffett

I believe a *Magnum, P.I.* game would be awesome. An open world game in '80s Hawaii? How could you resist? The success of *L.A. Noire* will pave the way for more detective games.

Why not have Tom Selleck return as our favorite private investigator? Island hopping, taking down goons, scoping the babes, and cruising in *Robin Masters' Ferrari* would be a great way to veg out with our gaming consoles. Long live the 'stache!

Jason Brentner

Twin Peaks would make an amazing video game. Sure, we've already got *Alan Wake* and *Deadly Premonition*, but those are only inspired by *Twin Peaks*. How about an old-school point-and-click adventure game where you play as Special Agent Dale Cooper while trying to find out who killed Laura Palmer? That would be a day-one purchase for me!

Lilikka Philandros

- Assassin's Creed Revelations **34%**
- TV Shows That Deserve Games **26%**
- Screw This Game! Praises **23%**
- Nintendo's New Console **11%**
- Green Gaming **6%**

Question Of The Month:

What was your favorite announcement from E3, and why?

continued from page 9

(Left) Bertz and Andy start E3 right by partying with Access Communications' extraordinary Kimmie Kaspar.

(Center) Also in attendance at E3: Nike's Hayden Walling, Universal's Peter Wanat, and THQ's newest catch, Patrice Désilets, whose non-competitive clause with Ubisoft just ended.

(Right) Snoop Dogg drops it like it's hot at the Yoostar 2 booth, while Dan drops it like it's not.

continued on page 12



Our Pain, Your Gain

I recently read some of the staff's memories of games that inspired us in their childhood (*Screw This Game*, issue 218). The article is one of the best I've read in your magazine, as it made me laugh and sympathize for the writers at the same time. But I think of it this way: What would we do without bad games? Without them, we wouldn't have anything to criticize, we wouldn't have your reviews to read – and most importantly, we wouldn't have people to argue at for buying a "spoilsport's" best game. So I thought I'd give you a taste of your childhood.

William Brown
 via email

After reading the *Screw This Game* article, I realized it was the best time anything you guys have ever written. It made me audibly laugh out loud. Great job, you guys are pretty funny here. Please make it a regular event.

Chris
 Tampa, FL

We've read our childhood games could bring smiles to so many faces; it makes all the pain and frustration we suffered worthwhile. Actually, now that we think about it, it totally doesn't. This must be what Sonic fans feel like all the time.

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1

1 Ben Howard Mario might have been doing Shy Guy a favor by throwing all those veggies at his face. Dude looks malnourished. **2 Carissa McDonald** Considering the system in this drawing is not a GDS, we'd suggest the owner contact Nintendo technical support ASAP. **3 Katelyn Yap** This drawing portrays the moment before Kirby let go of Prince Fluff's hand and informed him he wouldn't be in the new Wii game. **4 Brett Reinke** We'll give you three guesses as to what the Space Core is thinking about in this picture.



2



3



4

continued from page 10

(Left) Tim and Ben Hanson are all smiles when they meet Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto. Miyamoto must have missed the memo about plaid shirts. (Middle) Dan and Ben laugh at Mike "The Miz" Mizanin's crazy shenanigans after checking out WWE '12. (Right) Game Informer brings down yet another karaoke party with our rendition of Queen's "Don't Stop Me Now," accompanied by Harmonix's Eric Pope and a really happy blonde woman.





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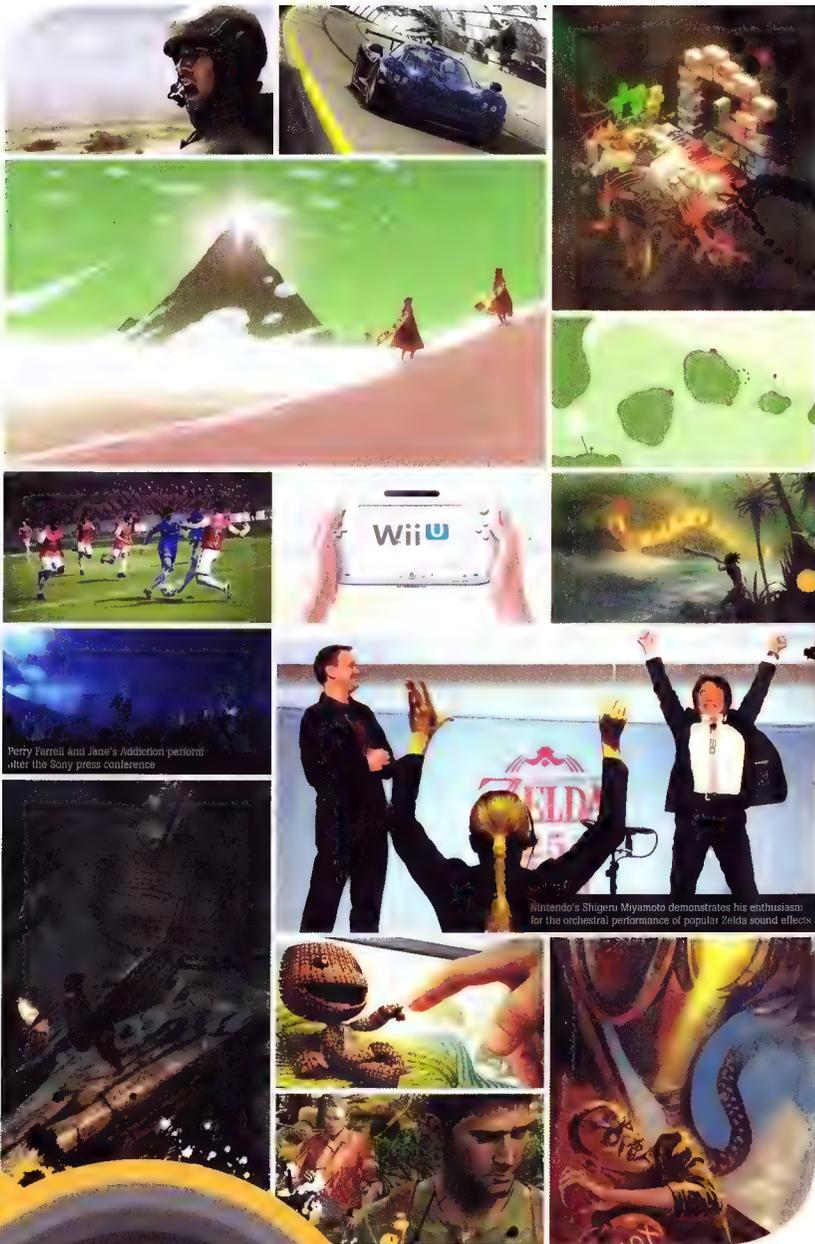
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Perry Farrell and Jane's Addiction perform after the Sony press conference

Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto demonstrates his enthusiasm for the orchestral performance of popular Zelda sound effects

NOTABLES

- 16 e3 2011: microsoft pushes kinect, teases new halo
- 22 e3 2011: sony introduces playstation vita, louts move and 3d
- 26 e3 2011: wii u's coming out party
- 34 killer looks: the trailers of e3
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- 50 opinion: better with kinect?



E3
2011

A Report From **The Big Show**

E3 is the biggest event in the gaming year. With tens of thousands of industry professionals descending on downtown Los Angeles for a week packed with parties, press conferences, and hype, the annual conference is often where games and systems gain or lose that elusive buzz.

This year, the stakes were higher than ever, with both Sony and Nintendo showing off brand new hardware (and giving them official names) and Microsoft kicking its support for Kinect into high gear. Outside of the console makers, third-party publishers and developers were on hand to show us the latest on their upcoming titles.

Whatever your feelings on Wii U and Vita are, one thing is certain: This E3 was packed to the gills with

great games – as many as we’ve ever seen at the show. Even better, many of them are coming out this year. To help you sort through the deluge of software, we’ve assembled a Top 50 list that breaks down the most impressive of the bunch (starting on page 62). Also, we have full reports on Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo, handing out our E3 report cards to each of the three major players on the console scene. Read on to get all the news you need to know about E3: the winners, the losers, and all the announcements that rocked the world of video games in Los Angeles.

Microsoft Pushes Kinect, Teases New Halo

With strong third-party support, Microsoft tries to sell hardcore gamers on motion controls. Will they buy in?



MICROSOFT



XBOX

Since Kinect's release last year, Microsoft has heard the complaints from both the press and gamers regarding the poor software support. At this year's E3, the company responded to those criticisms by putting the spotlight on Kinect with a bevy of new apps, games, and announcements of Kinect support for high profile third-party titles.

The conference started off predictably with a huge third-party game: Activision's Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3. Infinity Ward's Ryan Bowling and Sledgehammer's Glen Schofield showed



For Halo, A Trip To The Past And A New Beginning

With Bungie allied with Activision to develop a new game universe, Halo is now in the hands of Microsoft's 343 Industries division. At Microsoft's E3 press conference, we learned that the series is going both forward and backward at once.

On the eve of the 10-year anniversary of Halo: Combat Evolved, Microsoft announced it plans to release an HD remake of the game that started the pop culture phenomenon. This was welcome news, especially in light of Sony's success with next-gen revamps of series like God of War. The game features new high-definition textures, a "remastered" campaign, Xbox Live co-op play, and seven classic multiplayer maps.

Microsoft saved its biggest news for the end of the show: the public's first introduction to Halo 4. A brief video of the next proper installment of the Halo series showed Master Chief escaping from cryosleep right after the end of Halo 3, picking up Cortana, and almost being sucked into deep space before securing himself. A Halo 4 logo appeared onscreen afterwards with the words "the dawn of a new trilogy." This was definitely the most exciting moment of Microsoft's conference, and ended an otherwise dull presentation on a high note

off a dramatic gameplay sequence that featured an aquatic battle in the harbor of New York. It was classic Call of Duty, full of high production values and Hollywood blockbuster action. It was also announced that all Modern Warfare 3 DLC content would be exclusive to Xbox Live for a short window of time, just as it was for Modern Warfare 2 and Black Ops.

This was followed by an impressive demo for the Tomb Raider reboot, which continues to impress. Both of these game demos served to hammer home the point that the Xbox 360 has been the premier console for third parties in terms of both content and sales this generation.

Microsoft also continued to build on the strength of Xbox Live. Since the addition of partners like Netflix and ESPN, the service has become an all-in-one entertainment hub. At this year's conference Xbox Live general manager Marc Whitten announced some major new service and improvements that will be coming to the service [see sidebar].

After this, Kinect overtook the vast majority of the conference. Microsoft clearly wants to convince hardcore gamers that Kinect is more than just a few funny minigames. To this end, some of the industry's biggest developers and publishers took the stage to affirm their support for the peripheral. Perhaps the most intriguing announcement came from BioWare CEO Ray Muzyka, who revealed that Mass Effect 3 features Kinect voice support for dialogue choices and sending out squad commands in battle.

Ubisoft CEO Yves Guillemot also pledged Kinect support for upcoming Ubisoft games, including Ghost Recon: Future Soldier. This was followed by a quick demonstration of how voice and gesture commands can be used to customize weapons in the upcoming Tom Clancy shooter. Echoing these sentiments was EA Sports president Peter Moore, who said titles like Madden NFL, Tiger Woods PGA Tour, and FIFA would support Kinect in the future as well.

For its part, Microsoft attempted to demonstrate a greater core game presence on Kinect with a couple of exclusive titles. Crytek's Ryse (formerly Codename Kingdoms), a Roman-era hack 'n' slash that uses gesture control, was shown first. Later, an oddly subdued Peter Dinklage announced Fable: The Journey, a side-story in the Fable universe that exclusively uses Kinect controls. Finally, Turn 10 shared new details about Forza 4's incorporation of Kinect voice control and head tracking.

Despite these overtures to the core 360 audience, the most promising Kinect software was aimed at the casual adopters. The highlights were the always personable Tim Schafer's demonstration of Double Fine's charming Sesame Street: Once Upon a Monster, and Harmonix's Dance Central 2. The second title in the series showed particularly well later in the week, with show goers enjoying the new two-player simultaneous co-op play. Publishers showed off several family friendly Kinect products as well, including Kinect Disneyland Adventures, Kinect Star Wars (which was extremely unpolished when we got a chance to play it), and Kinect Sports: Season Two.

Xbox Live Adds New Services

YouTube, UFC Matches, and Bing Support Highlight the Next Dashboard Update

Xbox Live is the best online service in the industry, and Microsoft showed no signs of letting up at E3. Once again, Microsoft used its press conference to announce some high-profile partnerships with content providers, new Kinect navigation functionality, and yet another dashboard update that should make it even easier to find game and entertainment content. Here are the highlights.

- **New Content Partnerships:** With Netflix and ESPN finding success on Xbox Live, Microsoft naturally wanted to expand its partnerships. At the conference, the company announced that YouTube and UFC are coming to the service. Finally, Keyboard Cat on your flatscreen! UFC plans to broadcast live events, which will have interactive functions for viewers much like ESPN.

- **Bing Search:** While most still prefer Google, Microsoft's Bing search engine is coming to Xbox Live. Though it's not a general web search, Bing brings universal search to all of Live's content, be it games, DLC, television, movies, music, or video. Most importantly, it works across all the content provided by partners like Netflix. With Kinect voice support, Bing should make it much easier to learn if a movie is on Netflix instant streaming or whether you can rent it from the Zune Marketplace.

- **New Dashboard:** Microsoft plans to launch a new Live dashboard this fall intended to make it easier to navigate all the service's content. The look is heavily influenced by the streamlined box design of Windows Mobile 7. The update removes the Kinect hub, but it better integrates Kinect gesture and voice navigation.

- **Live TV:** He didn't provide concrete details, but Xbox Live general manager Mark Whitten confirmed that live television is coming to Xbox Live in the U.S. this fall. It's worth noting that the company has been talking about this since 2007, and AT&T already allows Xbox 360 owners to use the console as a set-top box with its U-Verse service

Microsoft creative director Kudo Tsunoda demoted Kinect Fun Labs, a new section of Xbox Live meant to showcase experimental "apps" like Kinect Me (which scans the player to create an amazingly accurate avatar), Object Scan (an app that lets you scan any object to create a full 3D model), and a finger painting app that lets you create 3D pictures.

All the Kinect talk had some hardcore fans in the audience feeling a bit left out, with the only highlight being Epic's Cliff Bleszinski and Ice-T stopping by to deliver a Gears of War 3 demo. Perhaps anticipating the discontent, Microsoft wrapped its press conference with some big news regarding the Halo franchise [see sidebar].

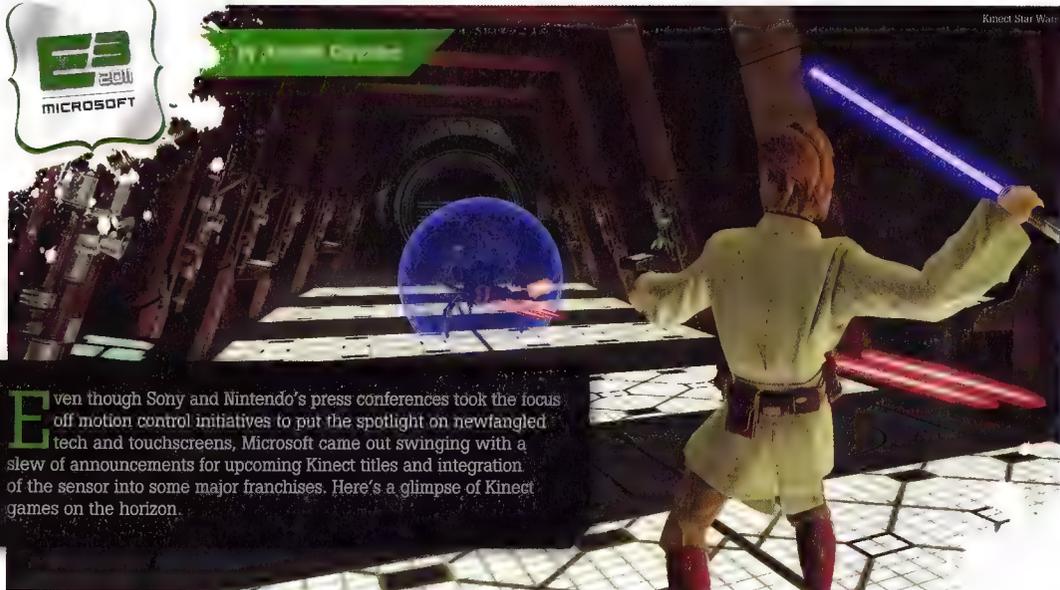


E3 is ruled by excitement, so Microsoft – which had no new hardware to promote – was at a natural disadvantage compared to Sony and Nintendo. It also found itself in a bind in regards to Kinect, needing to address the scarcity of compelling software support and to convince the skeptical hardcore base that Kinect is for them as well. Frankly, there was too much motion control at the conference for our tastes, especially since only a few of the implementations seemed compelling. It's interesting technology, but does it add up to a better game experience? That remains to be seen.

We're also concerned with how far Microsoft has fallen off as a first-party publisher of core games. The company is down to a handful of first-party franchises – Halo, Gears, Forza, and Fable. Compared to the way Sony continues to bring out new franchises and revitalize old ones, Microsoft is lagging behind.

That being said, a tremendous number of amazing third-party games will be available for 360 owners this fall. While nothing at this year's show changed the game for Microsoft, that's not necessarily a bad thing when you're winning.

Coming Up For Kinect



Even though Sony and Nintendo's press conferences took the focus off motion control initiatives to put the spotlight on newfangled tech and touchscreens, Microsoft came out swinging with a slew of announcements for upcoming Kinect titles and integration of the sensor into some major franchises. Here's a glimpse of Kinect games on the horizon.



Fruit Ninja Kinect

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios **Developer:** Halfbrick
Release: Summer

Halfbrick's popular iOS title *Fruit Ninja* is making the jump from Apple's mobile devices to Kinect. With full motion tracking, players will swipe their arms through the air to slice fruit that appears onscreen while avoiding dangerous bombs. For the Kinect version, Halfbrick is adding new fruit such as pomegranates that players will have to swing at multiple times for an additional challenge. In addition, two players can cooperatively slice fruit for a high score or compete in head-to-head matches. Leaderboards will also be included to encourage friends to compete for the top spot.



The Gunstringer

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios **Developer:** Twisted Pixel
Release: Holiday

'Splosion Man developer Twisted Pixel introduces a shooter set in the Wild West that stars a marionette on a quest for revenge. You can manipulate the character with hand gestures that mimic string control as you explore the humorous world the team has created. The fluid, responsive motion controls can be enjoyed whether you're sitting or standing. You'll be able to find *The Gunstringer* on retail shelves later this year.



Rise of Nightmares

Publisher: Sega **Developer:** Sega
Release: September

Rise of Nightmares has no shortage of dismemberment, mutilation, beheading, and blood, making this "M" rated title a huge departure from some of Kinect's more family friendly offerings. This first-person horror title tells the grisly tale of an American tourist trying to save his wife from a crazed scientist. Players can choose from 40 weapons such as a pipe, brass knuckles, or a chainsaw to beat hordes of zombie-like creatures to a bloody pulp.



Just Dance 3

Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** Ubisoft Paris
Release: October

The Wii's best-selling dance game is making its way to all motion platforms, including Kinect. With full body tracking you can move and groove to the likes of Black Eyed Peas, Katy Perry, Gwen Stefani, and more. The Kinect version will also feature a "Shout Out" mode that will allow players to also sing along to their favorite tunes.



MotionSports Adrenaline

Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** Ubisoft Vancouver
Release: October

Even though the original MotionSports was far from a critical success, Ubisoft is creating a sequel with an extreme sports focus that promises to bring a few changes to the franchise. Players can engage in wingsuit, mountain biking, rock climbing, kayaking, kitesurfing, and parkour activities alone or in split-screen multiplayer modes. Adrenaline also includes asynchronous online play features that will populate courses with ghosts of your online friends so that you can try and beat their best times.



Raving Rabbids Alive & Kicking

Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** Ubisoft Paris/Ubisoft Milan
Release: November

Rabbids have finally made their way onto Kinect with a full-body motion-controlled minigame collection for up to four players that features diversions such as a whack-a-Rabbit-style augmented reality game and other activities that involve filling a shape on screen by assuming awkward positions with your closest friends.



Your Shape Fitness Evolved 2012

Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** Ubisoft Montreal
Release: November

The latest Your Shape will offer 90 hours of gameplay with full workout programs, moves for specific target areas, and minigames. One new addition will be the ability to "run around the world" across locations such as Paris, New York, and London. Other features include dance workouts from genres including African dance, Bollywood, hip-hop, pop, and Latin to mix up your routine. If dancing isn't your thing, other training modes like boot camp, cardio boxing, yoga, sports training, and martial arts will be sure to get your blood pumping.

Better With Kinect

Developers are stepping up to the plate to support the Kinect platform by integrating the technology into titles that primarily use a standard controller. How the sensor will play into these experiences has yet to be determined for most titles at press time.

- FIFA
- Ghost Recon: Future Soldier
- Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary
- Madden NFL
- Mass Effect 3
- Minecraft
- Tiger Woods PGA Tour

For more information on upcoming Kinect titles, check out our previews of Dance Central 2 (page 53) and Forza Motorsport 4 (page 53), and visit our All Ages section for details on Kinect Disneyland Adventures and Sesame Street Once Upon A Monster (page 43).

NOS® and 2010 MLG National Champion

Justin "FearItSelf" Kats Power Through E3 2011



NOS sponsors and helps set the new Guinness World Record for "Most Consecutive Hours Played of a Fighting Video Game."



Demoing as many games (and weapons) as possible, Justin explores the future of gaming.



We help Tim and Ben from Game Informer power through the reporting-marathon of E3.



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Kinect Sports: Season 2

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Rare/
Big Park Games
Release: Holiday

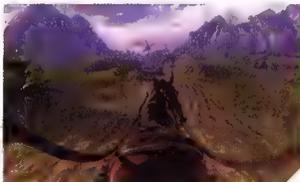
Rare and Big Park Games are bringing new sports and features to the Kinect Sports follow-up. Along with improved motion tracking and the inclusion of voice commands, Season 2 now includes tennis, golf, football, darts, skiing, and baseball with multiple difficulty levels that can be played alone or with friends. You can also send challenges to friends on Xbox Live, plus share in-game photos and videos on KinectShare.com or post your victories directly to your Facebook wall.



Kinect Star Wars

Publisher: LucasArts/
Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: LucasArts
Release: Holiday

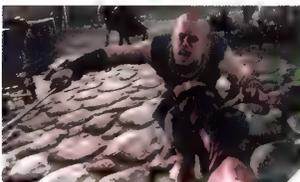
Star Wars fans can finally live out their childhood fantasy of swinging a lightsaber, using the Force, and becoming a Jedi master this holiday. In combat scenarios, Kinect Star Wars automatically targets enemies for the player, leaving it up to you to use Force Powers or the trusty lightsaber to dispatch enemies. The Kinect title promises pod racing and X-wing dogfights to break up the action as well. A second player can join the fray with drop-in/drop-out co-op, competitive, and duel modes.



Fable: The Journey

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Lionhead Studios
Release: 2012

Set within the Fable universe, players will have the opportunity to cover more than 300 miles of land by horse-drawn carriage as they make their way to the kingdom of Albion. That's a lot of traveling, so thankfully – unlike most Kinect titles – the game will be played from the seated position. The Journey, as Peter Molyneux has made clear several times, is not on rails, giving players full control over the direction their horse goes. You'll have the ability to use voice commands to guide the horse on your journey and can use hand gestures to perform a variety of magic spells.



Ryse

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: Crytek
Release: TBA

From the team that brought you Crysis comes an action title for Kinect that gives players the chance to take on the role of warrior in ancient Rome as they stab, kick, punch, block, and headbutt their way through legions of enemies for a bloody meleé brawl.

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HIGH PERFORMANCE ENERGY DRINK



**Sony Introduces
PlayStation Vita,
Touts Move and 3D**

Sony of America CEO Jack Tretton's prediction for Uncharted 3: "We're going to sell a few copies of that bad boy"

Sony's E3 felt similar to last year, and the press conference had that strong-but-not-dominant feel. Adopting that same vibe this year might indicate the company's confidence, but it also represents a missed opportunity when people had definite criticisms of Sony's competition.

Addressing the "elephant in the room," Sony America president and CEO Jack Tretton started out the press conference by both apologizing to and thanking customers, third-party partners, and retailers for their support during the recent PSN outage. He noted that network levels are back to over 90 percent of what they were before the April attack.

Where is Move Going?



From *Resistance 3* to *BioShock Infinite*, Sony touted Move support for just about every game it showed at the press conference. It claimed that 200 titles will use the motion peripheral (which has sold 8.8 million units worldwide to date) by year's end.

Despite Sony's support, Move is in last place among the motion-control options, and demonstrations like Kobe Bryant's less-than-intuitive grasp of using Move in *NBA 2K12* (he ran out of bounds and barely even moved his reticle) didn't necessarily signal a bright new era for the Move.

Perhaps the most interesting vote of confidence (sort of) for the Move came from Ken Levine, Irrational Games' creative director, who came out to stump for the peripheral after a trailer for *BioShock Infinite*. Levine relayed his extreme reluctance to adopting the Move ("We make core games. DualShock stuff," he explained), but then announced his change of heart and declared that *Infinite* would use the Move in some undisclosed way. If anything, the lengths at which Levine had to go to justify his use of the Move overshadowed an otherwise impressive trailer for the game. It shouldn't have to be that hard.

Rumor has it that Sony told third-party developers that if they wanted to be showcased in the press conference they had to feature Move support. We don't know if this is true, but we're still waiting for some developer to step into the spotlight and use the peripheral in an exciting way that captures our imagination.

The press conference showed off titles like *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*, *Resistance 3*, and the PS3 exclusive *Dust 514* (from Eve Online's CCP Games), and many of the games shown featured Move and 3D support [see sidebar]. If last year's press conference was the debut of these initiatives, this year showed that they were still very much in Sony's plans.

Although the majority of the press conference was devoted to Sony's first-party efforts, the company took some time to highlight a clutch of third-party exclusives like *BioShock Infinite*'s inclusion of the original *BioShock*, *SSX's Mt. Fuji* stage, content for *Saints Row: The Third*, and the *Battlefield 3* pack-in of *Battlefield 1943*. None of the announcements are game-changers, but they at least show Sony is trying to differentiate itself in an era of few blockbuster exclusives.

Sony saved the PlayStation Vita for last, and used demos of *Ruin* and *ModNation Racers* to show off the handheld's features. Highlights included its connectivity to the PS3 for things like access of PS3 content, the ability to continue your save on both systems, and even cross-platform competitive play (flip the page for more on Vita). Sony says that 80 titles are in development for the console from the likes of EA, Activision, Ubisoft, and more, and that the Vita will be out this holiday for \$249 (Wi-Fi mode) and \$299 (3G). The handheld's price was a pleasant surprise in a press conference that was otherwise just pleasant.



CCP Games' PS3-exclusive MMOFPS *Dust 514* delivers a new level of collaboration between console and PC players. The ground wars that take place in this persistent world will directly affect the balance of power in the PC MMO *Eve Online*.



Jack Tretton, Sony of America CEO, apologizes for the PSN outage.

Sony's Depth of Field



Sony of America CEO Jack Tretton stated that gaming is the vanguard that will convert the masses to home 3D, and the company made an aggressive move to promote its plans by announcing a \$499 3D bundle that contains a 24-inch hi-def 3D monitor, *Resistance 3*, a pair of 3D glasses, and a 6-foot HDMI cable. The bundle comes out this fall, and the monitor's technology allows two people each with 3D glasses to see their own distinct full-screen images while playing multiplayer without the need for spatscreen. The company also announced that a separate pair of glasses would cost \$69.99.

Classic HD anthologies *God of War Origins* and the *ICO/Shadow of the Colossus* Collection will both support 3D when they come out this fall, and Sony says over 100 games utilize the feature for the system. Though 3D has yet to break through as a defining characteristic in video games (even with Nintendo in its corner with the 3DS) if it ever does, Sony should be well positioned to reap the benefits.



The PlayStation 3 has hit its stride, but that's good and bad for Sony. The console is turning a profit, but Sony is rightfully trying to use its brand exclusives — first-party software, Move, and 3D support — in hopes of improving its last place position.

But the declarations of a press conference can be at odds with the more mundane realities. For example, the Move was but a small part of Sony's own E3 booth, and the fact is, third-party publisher's multi-platform strategies have created a detente where it's harder to stand out even with attempts at differentiation like Move.

The biggest buzz coming out of the show for Sony was that the Vita's price wasn't as bad as it could have been. Could Sony have wowed gamers further if it had put software even more on display or announced *God of War 4* or the return of *Syphon Filter* like was rumored before E3? Sony has a better first-party stable than rival Microsoft, but in deference to the Vita, perhaps Sony felt it couldn't overshadow the handheld. If so, it's not a bad choice, just one that quiets some of Sony's bigger guns.

Street Fighter X Tekken producer Yoshinori Ono from Capcom showed off the Vita version's inclusion of Cole McGrath from *Inferno 2*.



PlayStation Vita:

New Name, New Games



Sony has been talking about its next-generation portable for months, so when the company staged the device's latest appearance at E3, many of our questions were already answered. Last issue, we ran an extensive hands-on feature detailing the system specs and several games, but Sony used E3 as an opportunity to address some of the remaining mysteries. Now dubbed the PlayStation Vita, the handheld formerly called the NGP made an impact on the showfloor with a lineup of cool titles, impressive technology, and a surprising price tag that puts it all within reach.

A Comfortable Price Point

WiFi Only	3G/WiFi
\$249.99	\$299.99
€249	€299
¥24,980	¥29,980

The Vita has a lot of flashy technology, including two cameras, two multi-touch surfaces, and an OLED screen. Many gamers thought that these features would lead to prohibitive cost, similar to the fiasco Sony faced when it announced the PlayStation 3's original \$599 price point. That didn't happen. Instead, the company announced that the basic package will cost \$250 – the same price as Nintendo's 3DS. The 3G-enabled version will strain your wallet a little more, releasing at \$300.

The Games



LittleBigPlanet

Considering that LittleBigPlanet has two PS3 entries and one on PSP, no one should be surprised to see Sackboy popping up on another Sony platform. The Vita version of LBP won't have any cross-compatibility with previous iterations in the series, but it does have a few tricks that wouldn't be possible on other systems. We saw pegs that you drive into the foreground or background by tapping them on the front and rear touch screens, platforms that you move by tilting the device, and paths that you create by dragging your finger across the screen (like Kirby: Canvas Curse on DS). These mechanics point to LBP on Vita returning to platforming-heavy action rather than leaning on the possibilities of content creation, which is probably a better fit for a handheld title. However, after everything that LittleBigPlanet 2 allowed users to do, some people may find it difficult to look back.



Ruin

At first, Ruin appears to be a traditional isometric hack 'n' slash in the vein of Diablo. While the meat of the gameplay is focused on plowing through enemies and advancing through skill trees, this title showcases some of Vita's unique features like Facebook and Twitter integration. It also uses cloud storage for saves, so progress is shared between the PS3 and Vita versions. This means you can play on your console at home, then pick up your handheld and continue your quest. Multiplayer in Ruin is a social affair, involving trading items with friends, attacking their hero's lair, and protecting your own lair against inevitable assaults. Bolstering your lair's defenses to protect your loot while you're not playing may be the creative edge Ruin needs to stand out.



Untitled Projects From Big Studios

One of the best ways to get consumers on board with the Vita is to make sure that the gaming industry's top developers are supporting the device. Two big names -- Ken Levine and Hideo Kojima -- have announced that they are currently developing games for the Vita. Kojima made his announcement in a prerecorded Konami press conference the week before E3, while Levine shared the news of Irrational Games' title (set in the BioShock universe) while onstage at Sony's press event. We would have liked more info on these projects beyond the admission that they exist, but it looks like the details will have to wait for another time.

AT&T Elicits Laughs and Groans



Though E3 allowed the Vita to put its best foot forward in most respects, one announcement caused an entire auditorium full of industry press and professionals to openly jeer. When talking about the

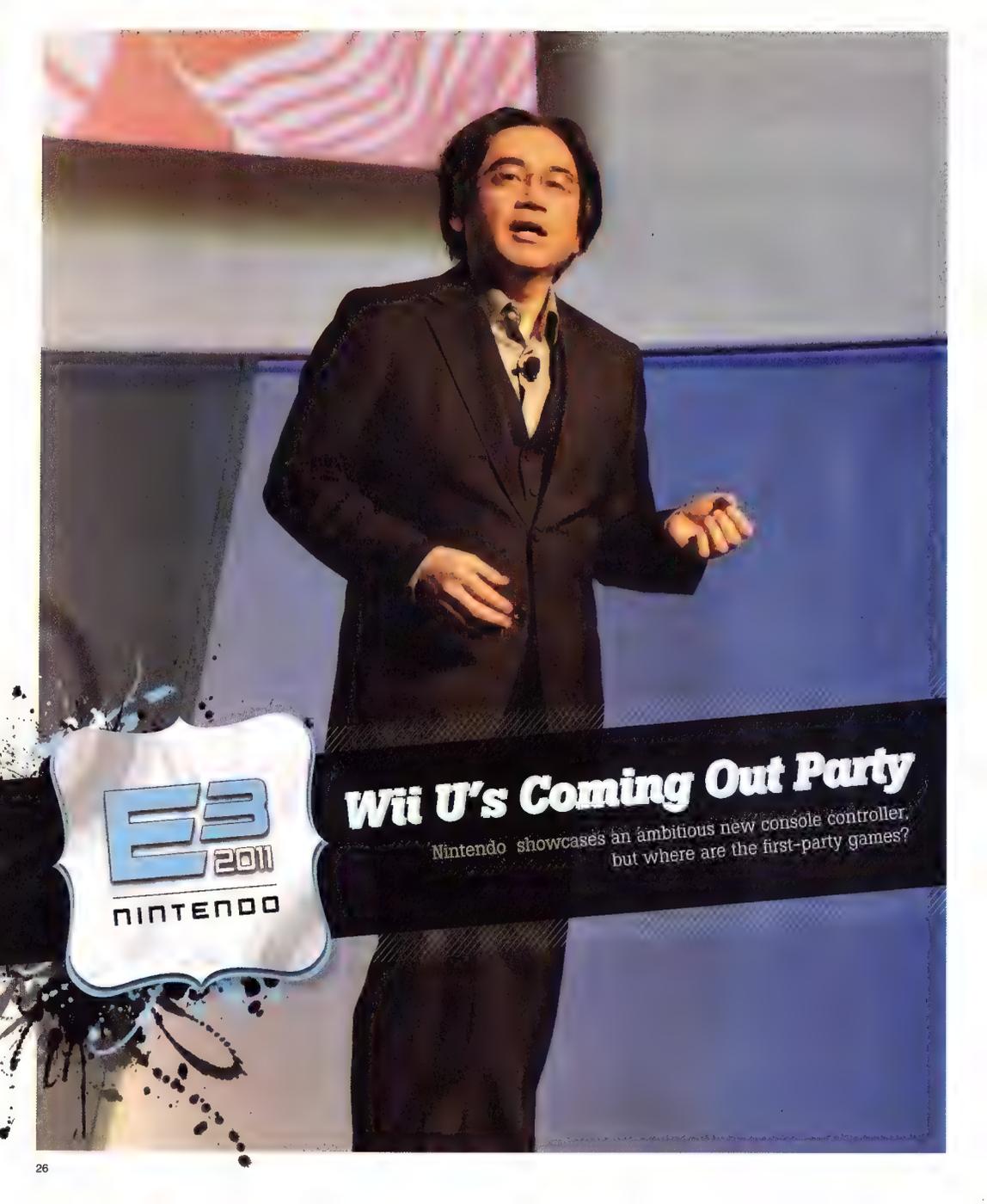
Vita's 3G capabilities at the press conference, Sony Computer Entertainment CEO Kaz Hirai revealed that the company is partnering exclusively with AT&T to provide the data service. Response from the audience began with groans, then transformed into boos and laughter -- with only scattered, barely audible (and possibly sarcastic) applause. Hirai seemed to take the negative reaction in stride; if anyone at Sony owned an iPhone during AT&T's exclusivity deal, they must have seen that one coming.

More to Come

Like all new consoles, the success of the Vita will ultimately depend on having quality software. We've been hearing about games like Uncharted: Golden Abyss since the NGP was first unveiled (read our full preview on page B2 for more), but the system still has some surprises in store. Several announcements of upcoming Vita projects flew under the radar in the chaos surrounding E3, but this list covers some of the most exciting newly revealed games for Sony's new handheld. Keep in mind that these aren't all necessarily Vita-exclusive titles; some are also on PS3 as well as 360 and 3DS.



- Dragon's Crown (Ignition)
- Dust 514 (CCP Games)
- LEGO Harry Potter Years 5-7 (Warner Bros.)
- Michael Jackson: The Experience (Ubisoft)
- Mortal Kombat (Warner Bros.)
- Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee (Just Add Water)
- Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath (Just Add Water)
- Rayman Origins (Ubisoft)
- Silent Hill: Book of Memories (Konami)
- Street Fighter X Tekken (Capcom)
- Virtua Tennis 4 (Sega)

A photograph of Satoru Iwanzaki, Nintendo's president, speaking at a podium during the E3 2011 event. He is wearing a dark suit and glasses, gesturing with his hands as he speaks. The background is a blue stage with a large screen displaying a pink and white striped pattern.

Wii U's Coming Out Party

Nintendo showcases an ambitious new console controller,
but where are the first-party games?

A stylized logo for E3 2011 Nintendo. It features the letters 'E3' in a large, blue, blocky font with a white outline, and '2011' in a smaller, white font to its right. Below this, the word 'NINTENDO' is written in a white, sans-serif font. The entire logo is set against a white, shield-like background with a blue border and some black splatter effects at the bottom.

E3
2011
NINTENDO



From the fanboys that openly wept at the unveiling of the Twilight Princess to the collective "huh?" we all experienced when Nintendo had Shigeru Miyamoto conducting a haphazard virtual orchestra, Nintendo's press conferences have always provided us with memorable E3 moments.

This year felt a bit different, as the story that would have been the big surprise from Nintendo – the existence of an HD console with a touch screen controller – had leaked to the press prior to the show. As it turned out, a majority of the rumors were pretty accurate, but more on that later.

For a press conference focused on the future of Nintendo, the company oddly led with a tribute to its past. The show kicked off with a small orchestra performing music from The Legend of Zelda series, accompanied by footage from various Zelda games. Following this, Zelda creator Shigeru Miyamoto took the stage to

speak about the franchise's 25th anniversary.

Miyamoto showcased a flurry of products to celebrate Zelda's 25th: The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening for the 3DS Virtual Console eShop, the new 3DS remake of Ocarina of Time, a new, free download of The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords planned for release in September, and The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword coming this holiday season for Wii. He also revealed that Nintendo has planned several 25th Anniversary The Legend of Zelda orchestral concerts around the world for later this year. Finally, he welcomed to the stage Takashi Tezuka, Yoshiaki Koizumi, and Zelda director Eiji Aonuma, three veteran Nintendo developers whose contributions to Nintendo's success over the years is often overlooked.

Next up was Nintendo head Satoru Iwata, who elaborated on the thinking behind the new Nintendo console. Iwata said he hoped the console could bridge the gap between hardcore and casual players with gameplay that was both

"deeper and wider" in appeal.

While the anticipation was high regarding the new console, Nintendo did not overlook the 3DS, which has gotten off to a slower-than-expected start at retail. Reggie Fils-Aime came onstage to introduce five new high-profile 3DS titles: Mario Kart (holiday 2011), Super Mario 3D (holiday 2011), the previously announced Star Fox 64 remake, Kid Icarus Uprising (which showed multiplayer and AR card functionality), and the surprise announcement of Luigi's Mansion 2.

After a brief roundup of third-party 3DS games and the announcement of a new 3D Pokédex (which Nintendo seemed to think was very exciting), it was time for the main event: the new home console. Many wondered what the new system would be called, and Reggie answered it emphatically: Wii U. The name was met with polite, perhaps perplexed applause, and many were left wondering just what Nintendo was thinking.

The system's functionality and specs were close to what we'd expected (for more see page 28), but many gamers were confused about whether it was a new console – which is an indication that your press conference did not go as planned. Because the actual console was barely shown, and so much was made of the new touch screen controller's compatibility with original Wii peripherals like the Balance Board, many got the impression that it was merely a new controller for the existing Wii.

Nintendo emphasized that third-party support would be better this time around. A video presentation featuring such gaming luminaries as Irrational Games' Ken Levine, EA Sports' Peter Moore, Junction Point's Warren Spector, and Ubisoft's Yves Guillemot waxing enthusiastic about the Wii U was shown. THQ has already committed Darksiders 2 as a Wii U launch title. Other notable games headed to Wii U include Batman: Arkham City, Dirt 3, Ghost Recon Online, Tekken, Metro: Last Light, Ninja Gaiden 3, and Aliens: Colonial Marines. One new IP, an open-world LEGO game entitled LEGO City Stories, was also announced.

Strangely, Nintendo did not show or announce any first-party games for the Wii U. While Iwata did say a new cross-platform Super Smash Bros. game would be coming to both 3DS and Wii U, no footage was shown. All the playable Wii U "games" on the show floor were little more than glorified tech demos. Some were admittedly impressive, particularly a buoic Japanese nature scene intended to show the hardware's graphical power, and Chase Mili, a Pac-Man style game that uses both Wii remotes and the Wii U touch controller. However, none of these had the impact of an actual game announcement on the order of Mario, Zelda, or Metroid.

EA's John Riccitiello ended the show, asking viewers to "imagine" what EA games like Madden and Battlefield 3 would play like with Nintendo's new system and controller – while stopping short of actually confirming any titles. He also said the Wii U would have an "open" online service that would allow for downloading DLC, community functions, web access, and social media.



While some of Nintendo's thunder was stolen before the show even started, the official unveiling of the Wii U – although at least some of the chatter was in regards to the less-than-stellar console name. On the whole, the perception of Wii U seemed to be one of cautious optimism. While it's great to finally see a Nintendo console capable of high-definition graphics on par with 360 and PS3, that move should have happened years ago. Once again, it looks like the latest Nintendo console will rise or fall based on its key innovation – in this case, the touch controller.

Nintendo made a couple of blunders in the unveiling. One, by focusing so much on the controller and not showing a clear shot of the actual Wii U console during the conference, there was confusion about whether it was a new system or just a new controller for Wii. That's just poor communication. Two, not showing any Wii U-exclusive games seems like a tactical error. Outside of announcements of planned Pikmin and Super Smash Bros. games for Wii U – neither of which were actually shown – gamers didn't get much to hold on to outside of the (admittedly cool) possibilities represented by the new touch screen controller.

wii u

Nintendo's new HD system and its controller bring the dual-screen concept to big screen gaming

As we revealed in our June issue, we knew that Nintendo was planning to introduce a new HD console at this year's E3. Beyond those confirmed details was only a swirl of rumors regarding what shape the console and its controller would take. Many gamers were surprised when Nintendo revealed little about the console itself at the show, focusing instead on the possibilities surrounding the new controller.

I went hands on with the Wii U and its strange new interface at E3 2011, and these are my impressions along with the firm details that Nintendo shared.



The controller of the future

Like with the Wii, Nintendo's major innovation for the Wii U comes in the form of its imaginative controller. While the company has taken important steps toward making it easier to support every type of game, plenty of elements set this gamepad apart from anything else we've seen.

1 Traditional Controls

Gone are the days of developers struggling to translate an Xbox 360 or PS3 game's control scheme to the unwieldy motion controllers of the original Wii. The new controller features a more traditional setup, including a d-pad, four face buttons, two shoulder buttons, and two triggers. The analog controls are in the form of two circle pads, like those found on the 3DS and PSP, rather than actual analog sticks. The circle pads are placed above the d-pad and face buttons, a choice that may take getting used to for hands that are accustomed to the stick placement on 360 and PS3 controllers. The Wii U will also support regular Wii remote controllers and accessories including the Classic Controller and Balance Board.

When speaking to Nintendo representatives, I stumbled upon a touchy subject: whether or not the Wii U can

handle multiple touchscreen controllers at once. No demo on the show floor had more than one of the new controllers active at once; every multiplayer experience had one player using the touchscreen while others used standard Wii remotes. Early reports suggest that the Wii U may be able to support multiple controllers, but Nintendo seems hesitant to discuss it for the moment.

2 Touch Pad

Nintendo rarely settles for being the same as the competition. What sets Wii U apart is the 6.2-inch, 16:9 touchscreen in the middle of the controller. It is single-touch only, which limits the possibilities somewhat. Nintendo also showed off the ability to take the gameplay happening on the TV screen and move it to the controller's screen, allowing other people to use the TV for something else while you remain gaming — though how far you can stray from your console is not currently clear.

3 Camera

Nintendo has not revealed how powerful the camera on the front of the Wii U's controller is, but it will likely match or exceed the 0.3 megapixel camera on the 3DS, allowing easy transfer of pictures between the handheld and the console.

4 Stereo Speakers

The new controller features built-in stereo speakers as well as a headphone jack. In addition to providing the tiny noises that Wii games would sometimes pump through the controller speakers, this addition should make playing games on the controller a much more comfortable aural experience. A built-in microphone allows for voice communication, and the reveal of the system showed two people video chatting via the controller, similar to the iPhone's Face Time feature.

5 Battery Powered

Given its wide range of functionality, one major concern about the Wii U is how quickly it will drain battery power. Nintendo isn't speaking about battery life yet, but the controller has a built-in rechargeable battery, so at least we won't need to be swapping out double-A's constantly. Note that it looks like the controller will be charged via an AC adapter that can be plugged in on the back.

6 Other Perks

The Wii U controller also includes rumble functionality, an accelerometer, and a gyroscope. The latter were showcased in several demos, allowing for control of your view in first-person shooters among other possibilities.





Other system details

Nintendo is seriously embracing the HD era with Wii U. It supports resolutions up to 1080p via HDMI or component cables (S-video and composite are also supported). While early tech demos we saw were mostly on the less impressive side graphically, Nintendo was adamant that third parties will have a much easier time porting games over from the competitors' systems, and various publishers and developers who spoke during Nintendo's E3 press conference agreed.

As for specifics on the Wii U's power, details are still sketchy. Nintendo has revealed only that the CPU is an IBM multi-core microprocessor and the GPU is based on AMD Radeon technology. According to a report from Engadget, the GPU is "similar to the R770 found in AMD's last-gen cards," which supports DirectX 10. While not the most powerful GPU possible, this tech would place the Wii U's power slightly higher than the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3.

Wii U software will come on proprietary "high-density optical discs," but it can also read Wii optical discs. Neither Blu-ray discs nor DVDs are supported, and Nintendo is dropping GameCube disc backward compatibility too.

For storage options, game saves and downloadable titles are written to internal flash memory, though Nintendo has not yet announced how much memory is present in the system. If you want more storage, you

can expand your memory via SD card or through an external hard drive connected by one of the Wii U's four USB 2.0 slots.

As for online support, a major point of contention on the Wii, Nintendo remains tight-lipped. Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aime told Kotaku that the system's online service will be "flexible," with the ability to connect with social networks and mobile experiences of some sort. Nintendo president Satoru Iwata told investors that the company will be taking advantage of voice-over-IP, social networking, and other areas "where our systems have been seen as being weak in the past." A Ubisoft representative speaking to MTV said that the new system will ditch

the Wii's frustrating friend codes for the "equivalent to a Gamertag on Xbox Live." A much stronger, more unified online service is sounding likely, so keep your fingers crossed that Nintendo can get it right from the start this time.

Technologically, the Wii U matches what we've come to expect from Nintendo hardware: solid but frugal, with the potential to be surpassed by the inevitable next iterations of the PlayStation and Xbox. The question is how much those big, impressive controllers will drive up the price. We may not know the pricing details for a while, since Nintendo's current release window for the Wii U is April 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012.





Going hands-on

While Nintendo wasn't ready to reveal any full first-party games for the Wii U, I played several tech demos – Nintendo called them “experiences” – that showed off some of the interesting functionality of the controller and system.

Bird in flight

This demo existed for one reason: to prove that the Wii U can pump out crisp HD graphics. In it, a bird flies through a Japanese pond as the weather changes around it from sun to rain. While the visual style was far from the most impressive I've ever seen in a video game, it did have an incredible amount of detail, especially in elements such as the way that drops of rain splashed into the pond. This demo had no gameplay, but it also showed off how the visuals from the TV could be streamed onto the controller's screen.

Chase Mii

Looking like something that could be included in one of the Wii's countless minigame compilations, Chase Mii is a surprisingly fun party game. Five players are required, with one on the new touchscreen controller and the other four wielding Wii remotes pointed at the split-screened TV. The solo gamer on the pad controls a Mii dressed as Mario, while the four Wii remote gamers have Mii's dressed as Toad. Mario must run and hide for a set amount of time, but he is aided in his stealth by a map showing where all of the Toad Mii's are at any moment. If one of the Toads finds and tackles him, he loses. Chase Mii proves how multiple screens and control methods can provide for a unique local multiplayer experience, though it also highlights the question of whether the Wii U will support multiple touchscreens controllers.

Battle Mii

While this demo only requires three players, it has a similar vibe to Chase Mii, splitting the TV screen for two Wii remotes while a third player views the action on the controller's touchscreen. In this Metroid-themed session, the television-using gamers have Mii's dressed in Samus' iconic armor (sans helmet), and the touchscreen gamer is in control of the bounty hunter's gunship. The Samus Mii's must work together to destroy the gunship before it takes them out.

Battle Mii features a multiplayer arena full of great hiding spots and perfectly-placed risk-reward power-ups. It shined when playing the polished, third-person shooting of the Samus characters. Unfortunately, the gunship didn't fare so well. This unwieldy bit of machinery is primarily controlled by use of the new controller's gyroscope – so physically moving the screen around changes your aim and direction in-game. I got demolished when playing as the ship because I couldn't aim as quickly

and easily as if I were pointing a remote at the screen or using analog sticks.

Shield Pose

Shield Pose is a minigame that looks and plays like something I'd expect to see in a Rhythm Heaven title. The player is on a ship floating in the ocean surrounded by pirate ships. A goofy undead pirate captain screams orders to his minions, revealing which direction incoming arrows will be fired from. The player must raise his or her shield (by physically raising the controller in the direction shouted) in time with the beat, at which point correctly blocked arrows appear on the touchscreen and must be shaken off by thrusting the controller downward. Of all the “experiences” shown, this is the one that seems most likely to make its way into a game in some form.

360-degree camera

In one purely non-gaming (but very cool) tech demo, the TV played simple SD footage of a car moving down a street in Japan in first-person. The screen on the controller also had a first-person view, but I was able to manipulate it and look in any direction as I was driven down the street – even down at the street itself or up at the sky. Nintendo representatives told me to consider how this type of technology could be utilized in games, but I'm almost more interested to see it used in non-gaming apps. Think of a Google Maps app on the Wii U that allows you to do this!

Zelda HD

Much more of a teaser than an actual game, Nintendo described this brief Zelda demo as “an example of what Zelda might look at on this system if it were designed with the Twilight Princess art style.” In the non-interactive tech demo, Link walks into a temple and is attacked by a huge spider. The level of detail on everything – Link, the environment, and the monster – is beautiful and definitely beyond what any previous Zelda game has pulled off. I was also able to switch the lighting effects between daytime and nighttime, showing off even more attention to detail.

The most promising element of the Zelda demo was the use of the controller. The in-game map, inventory, and Link's health meter all appear on the controller rather than the TV screen, leaving your view into the game world clean and open. With a single button, the screens can be swapped, allowing you to play the game on the touchscreen. If this hypothetical Zelda project is really in development (as it should be), then I hope Nintendo runs with this idea of emptying the screen of all clutter by relegating it to the touchscreen.



So what games are coming?

While Nintendo wasn't willing to announce anything, one of its big pushes with the Wii U is for better third-party publisher support. A number of third parties were on hand and ready to announce games for the Wii U.

Batman: Arkham City

By the time the Wii U is released, Arkham City will have already been out on 360, PS3, and PC for some time. Hopefully Warner Bros. will have time to throw in some bonuses for this promised late port.



LEGO City Stories

This new Wii U-exclusive title from longtime LEGO developer TT Games moves away from the franchise norm of riffing on a popular film franchise. While not much has been shown, the screens at the press conference paint LEGO City Stories as an open-world Grand Theft Auto-style title that the whole family should be able to enjoy.



Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Online

Since Ubisoft participated in a developer roundtable with Nintendo, this is one of the Wii U releases we know the most about. Ghost Recon Online will debut as a free-to-play game on the PC, but its transition to Wii U hints at what will hopefully be a much more robust online service than the Wii. Ubisoft showed off the touch-screen being used to give orders and place waypoints that are then visible in-game for allies.



Also coming for Wii U

- » Darksiders II
- » Aliens: Colonial Marines
- » Metro: Last Light
- » Dirt
- » Unannounced Sega titles
- » Unannounced EA titles



Tekken

This unnamed Tekken project will be the first Tekken game to appear on a Nintendo system. Early video footage shows familiar Tekken fighting mixed with the ability to customize your characters by drawing on them via the touchscreen.



Assassin's Creed

While Ubisoft hasn't yet specified if Assassin's Creed for Wii U will be one of the games appearing on the other consoles or an exclusive entry, a representative gave some hints about how it could work on the new system. The touchscreen may be used for an always-on map or interactive database, quick weapon select, or solving puzzles. It also could provide an eagle vision view of the game world.



Ninja Gaiden 3: Razor's Edge

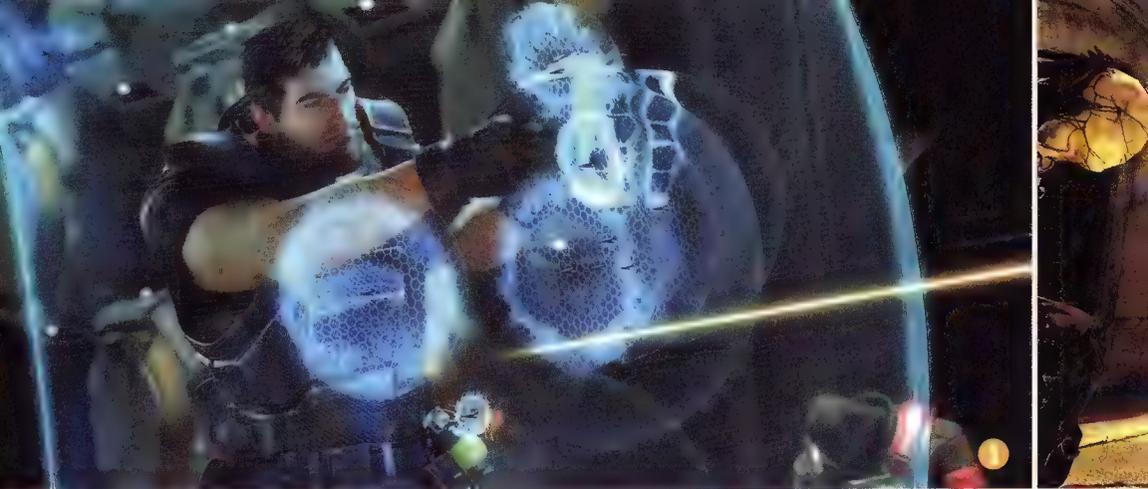
Although technically based off the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 version of Ninja Gaiden 3, Razor's Edge will offer a unique experience on the Wii U. Ninja Gaiden 3 lead Fumihiko Yasuda told Joystiq that the developer is "thinking of different modes and different combat action – something different" for this version of the game.



Killer Freaks From Outer Space

This offbeat alien shooter from Ubisoft was showcased in two different modes at E3. Single-player is a fairly standard run-and-gun shooter, but it was entirely controlled using the touchscreen controller's gyroscope for aiming. Yes, this looked as awkward as it sounds. For the multiplayer demo, one player was on the TV screen using a classic controller while his opponent used the touchscreen to choose where enemies would spawn in. This unique idea for competitive multiplayer seemed fun. Let's hope Killer Freaks has more of those.





Killer 7

The Trailers of E3





ooks

E3 is all about showing off upcoming games, but a few of the convention's big-name games only appeared as trailers. These titles may not have been eligible for inclusion in our Top 50 list (on page 62), but that doesn't mean there's not plenty to get excited about.



1 Overstrike

Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 • **Release:** TBA

Insomniac's long-awaited multiplatform title with Electronic Arts is a stylized action shooter that brings together four different agents of an organization called Overstrike Nine. Different members have unique skills, whether that's being a thief, scientist, mercenary muscle, or a detective. The game naturally features four-player co-op and Insomniac's usual bevvy of creative weapons, including invisibility cloaks, electric crossbows, and guns with shield attachments.

2 Devil May Cry

Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 • **Release:** TBA

Heavenly Sword's Ninja Theory takes the reins of this iconic series for this prequel reboot. Naturally there has been lots of debate over Dante's looks, but seeing the trailer in action shows that Ninja Theory is very capable of bringing to life the series' signature stylistic action. Perhaps as even a nod to the franchise's earlier games, in the trailer Dante's hair turns white when he enters what may be a form of the original games' Devil Trigger.

3 Darksiders II

Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii U, PC
Release: 2012

Death rides to avenge the apocalyptic setup of his brother War in the first Darksiders game, and he also traverses the Abyss on a journey to restore Humanity. The game features more dungeons, larger enemies, a Diablo-style loot system, and an open world full of quest-giving NPCs and other secrets to uncover. Read more about it in our issue 219 cover story.

4 Ryse

Platform: Xbox 360 • **Release:** TBA

Microsoft showed off a lot of games that integrate Kinect into their regular gameplay, but Crytek's Ryse uses the technology full on. The game is set during Rome's dark days, which are a far cry from the city's civilized zenith. You won't be eating grapes from a reclined couch, you're going to be slashing and head-butting everyone in your path. It's not known if the game moves on rails, but judging on looks alone, Ryse is going after hardcore gamers with its brutal action.

5 Halo 4

Platform: Xbox 360 • **Release:** 2012

The brief teaser trailer for Halo 4 starts off with Master Chief in stasis for an undisclosed amount of time, presumably aboard the ship from the end of Halo 3. After a brief reunion with Cortana, he floats through the ship as it's being destroyed by some unseen force. At the end of the trailer he emerges to confront what looks to be some sort of giant alien craft or entity.

With 343 Industries taking over from original Halo developer Bungie, the studio used the trailer to announce that Halo 4 is just the start of a new trilogy. Master Chief is far away from Earth in deep space confronting new enemies, so the setting is ripe for a host of new vehicles, characters, and gameplay

The downloadable games

by Matt Miller

Some exciting and impressive sequels dominated E3, but the retail channel left something desired in terms of new, original franchises. Not so in the downloadable space, where incredible games like *Bastion*, *Crimson Alliance*, *From Dust*, *Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet*, *Journey*, and *Payday: The Heist* all made our top 50 games of the show (p. 62). It was a hard choice, as there were a number of other great-looking titles that got crowded out. For this month's column, I highlight some of our other favorites from the show, especially focusing on games you may not have heard of yet. One thing is for sure: it's going to be a good year for downloadable games.



you may have missed at E3

Papo & Yo has the biggest potential of any debut at the show, but a lot remains to be seen about how it plays. The concept is certainly intriguing. The game stars a young boy named Quico, who lives in the favela towns of South America, and his best friend, a towering beast named Monster. Sadly, Monster is addicted to poison frogs, and when he eats them, he turns on Quico and attacks. With the help of a robot named Lula, Quico must find a cure for Monster. The platforming/puzzle mechanics look promising, like the ability to move a small box around a playground that subsequently moves a nearby building in the same way, creating a path to move forward. Quico travels through some beautiful landscapes during his quest, but the most compelling aspect of *Papo & Yo* is its inspiration. Vander Caballero, creative director at Minority, says the game is based upon his relationship with his father, who struggled with drug and alcohol addiction. I have very high hopes for the game, which is set to release in 2012.

Combining multiplayer online battle arena play with platforming, and injecting a well-deserved dose of old-school Saturday morning cartoons, **Awesomenauts** is a creature all its own. The game features characters like space frogs (with mohawks) fighting Russian monkeys on jet-packs in furious online throwdowns. E3 footage revealed fast-paced and crazy action as opponents wildly tried to bring one another down. Players maneuver their team member through platforming sequences, firing all the way as they aim to topple other team's base shields. These barriers are protected by turrets, which in turn blast out minions to add cannon fodder to the mix. The game is easy to pick up and play, but my instincts say there may be a deeper experience underneath all the explosions.



One of the winners of the 2010 IGF Student Showcase, **Puddle** is blossoming from student project to full-fledged release thanks to Konami. The innovative game tasks players with navigating a puddle of liquid through various environments by manipulating the entire surrounding stage left and right. The levels are surprisingly distinct, like an X-ray of a human body or a grimy industrial foundry. You control the speed and precision of the liquid by the degree of tilt. Complexity arrives via the many obstacles that show up along the way, like fires that can evaporate the liquid and rifts that can swallow it up. Friction and momentum factor into the complex physics emulation, which does an excellent job of imitating true liquid movement. Both PSN and XBLA versions include normal controller support, but the PS3 version adds Move controls. Neko Entertainment should have the game ready for release later this summer.



I'm a big fan of the PixelJunk Shooter games, so I was stoked to learn about Q-Games' next project, **PixelJunk Sidescroller**. Based on an unlockable mode from Shooter, Sidescroller borrows many familiar ideas from the original game; you pilot a ship through a dangerous series of tunnels, using water, lava, and other materials in concert to progress. Unlike the original, Sidescroller plays like an old-school space shooter, where you're constantly moving in one direction across the screen, shooting enemies as you go. Machine guns, lasers, and guided missiles put a bigger focus on the action than

the puzzles, and challenging level design evokes the difficulty of classic horizontal shooters. The PSN exclusive is targeted for release in the next couple of months.



I'm thoroughly charmed by another upcoming PSN exclusive called **Okaba**. The adorable visuals of the game depict two cooperating cloud whales (Kumulo and Nimbe) who descend to Earth to deal with a growing threat of pollution ravaging the world. This light-hearted environmental message is backed up by exploration and puzzle solving. A number of specially powered heroes they meet in the world below ride on their backs along the way. Each of these tribal heroes has his or her own abilities, like the ability to play music that drives tribesmen on the ground to follow behind you in a trail. The game is played with the two clouds always present (à la Iomio) and you can switch back and forth, but the better way to play will likely be with a friend in co-op. The gameplay mixes action and puzzle solving, and the visuals call to mind colorful titles like *Katamari Damacy* and *Loco Roco*. Developer Hand Circus has found great success in the mobile space with its game *Rolando*. Here's hoping *Okaba* is as fun to play as it is cute to look at when it releases later this summer.

I was not a fan of the concept behind **Gotham City Impostors** when I first heard about it. A bunch of Batman and Joker look-alikes dress up and fight each other? No thanks. I may have to change my tune; the game looked awfully fun at E3. The team-focused FPS has a familiar array of shotguns and machine guns, but with a significant twist provided by the Batman visuals and, more importantly, gadgets. Tools like the grappling hook and batarang assure both unusual attack options and a highly vertical battlefield. Colors are brighter and more exaggerated than we're used to with Batman games, but these guys are the Impostors, not the real thing. *Gotham City Impostors* is expected to release by the end of the year.

Looking for more details on these and other downloadable and independent games? Head to gameinform.com/impulse for extended E3 previews of all the best games from this year's show, and keep up with weekly reviews and previews on other upcoming games. For more in this issue, make sure and check out all the downloadable games in our E3 Hot 50, and read our reviews of *Trenched* (p. 112) and *Ms. Splosion Man* (p. 111) as well as our scores for *The Adventures of Shuggy* on p. 114.



Stacking Up Against the Giant:

The MMOs of E3 2011

by Adam Bessener and Phil Kollar



WoW

Star Wars: The Old Republic

PC • 2011

How it's like WoW: Parties are made up of the traditional tank/healer/damage per second structure, and combat consists of activating familiar-sounding skills by clicking on buttons on a hotbar. Even the slightly cartoony visual style seems like a nod to Blizzard's massive success.

How it's not: Old Republic features full voice acting and Mass Effect-style dialogue choices that affect how your story progresses as well as where your character falls in the battle between light and dark side.

Why you should care: The original Knights of the Old Republic and the Mass Effect games prove that BioWare can craft an intricate, interesting space drama where player choice genuinely affects the outcome. If they can bring that feeling of immersion and control to the MMO space, Old Republic could be ground-breaking.

Why you shouldn't: The tank/healer/DPS dynamic is an awkward fit when you're cramming it onto Jedi, but that's the path BioWare chose.

See more: New cinematic and gameplay trailers as well as an expanded preview are online at gameinformer.com.

Tera

PC • 2011

How it's like WoW: This fantasy MMORPG retains the genre's traditional classes, levels, character progression, and hotbar-activated skills.

How it's not: Action-oriented combat removes targeting in favor of positional gameplay—whether or not your attack lands is based on where your sword swing is in the world, not a die roll. The politics system has potential for an interesting player-driven metagame.

Why you should care: Tera is shaping up to be an intriguing compromise between the theme-park ride of WoW and the Wild West of Eve Online's free-for-all galactic intrigue. Hands-on time with the game revealed exceptional combat that engages the player more actively than target-and-autoattack systems.

Why you shouldn't: Tera was GI's MMO of the show, but it's still a new concept from an unproven Korean developer.

See more: Read more details both online at gameinformer.com and on page 84.

If there's one message to take away from E3 2011 on the MMO front, it's that the genre is starting to spread its wings in a big way. More MMOs than this were at the show – Perfect World and Nexon both had a few mildly intriguing free-to-play products from Asia – but the days of every company under the sun having to publish their own WoW clone are over. We couldn't be happier.

You've seen many of these MMOs before, but how do they compare to Blizzard's eleven-ton gorilla? Check out what we thought of these four noteworthy upcoming MMOs' showings at this year's E3 convention.



Defiance

PS3, 360, PC TBA

How it's like WoW: Levels, loot, and progression are all part of this sci-fi shooter. Players undertake co-op missions to mend the world of bad guys.

How it's not: Combat is 98 percent shooter in Defiance, and the content shown at E3 is more like Rift's, with multi-stage outdoor boss battles.

Why you should care: How long have we been waiting for a decent post-Planetside shooter/MMO? Trion did well with Rift, and the console tie-in likely means more resources.

Why you shouldn't: The Syfy Network tie-in is scary. Remember the Stargate MMO?

See more: An extensive play-by-play of the E3 demo and a trailer can be seen at gameinformer.com.

End of Nations

PC | TBA

How it's like WoW: It's...online? And...has some persistence? That's about it.

How it's not: A session-based real-time strategy MMO is about as far as you can get from a traditional entry in the genre and still fit into this article, but we're on board with anything that has 50-plus player co-op.

Why you should care: End of Nations already plays great, and it's wonderful to see such a unique idea being made. If anyone can pull off this wacky concept, it's Trion and the Command & Conquer vets at Petroglyph.

Why you shouldn't: MMCORTS is beyond unproven, and End of Nation's lack of base building may turn some people off.

See more: Dig into the nuts and bolts of how an End of Nations mission works at gameinformer.com.

Not WoW

Pixel Perfect

A Roundup of Upcoming HD Remakes



Gameplay often outlasts graphics, but that doesn't mean that every game released before 2005 has to be kept far away from your HDTV. Recognizing the value of their pat hits, many publishers are bringing their beloved classics back from the dead with a fresh coat of paint. Here are some of the biggest HD re-releases to keep on your radar.

by Ben Reeves

God of War: Origins Collection

- Platform: PlayStation 3
- Release: September 13

WHY YOU WANT IT: God of War: Ghost of Sparta and God of War: Chains of Olympus are two of the PSP's standout titles, but if you never owned Sony's handheld you missed out on some of Kratos's earliest adventures.

WHAT'S NEW: Fully remastered in 1080p and stereoscopic 3D, God of War: Origins Collection brings these two handheld titles to consoles for the first time.

Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary

- Platform: Xbox 360
- Release: November 15

WHY YOU WANT IT: Exactly 10 years after the original Halo revolutionized the console FPS, Microsoft plans to release an updated version of the game.

WHAT'S NEW: In addition to the remastered single-player campaign, players can play co-op over Xbox Live. Using a modified version of Halo: Reach's engine, 343 Industries has reworked the art and tweaked the layouts for some of Halo's most beloved multiplayer maps. We may never LAN again.

House of the Dead Overkill: Extended Cut

- Platform: PlayStation 3
- Release: October 25

WHY YOU WANT IT: House of the Dead Overkill was one of the funniest B-movie horror parodies we've ever played, and yet few people tried this on-rails shooter when it released on Wii. Hopefully the Move-enabled PS3 version will garner more interest.

WHAT'S NEW: With seven remastered levels and two brand new scenarios, House of the Dead Overkill: Extended Cut looks like the kind of gruesome bloodbath that would make Robert Rodriguez take note.

Ico and Shadow of the Colossus Collection

- Platform: PlayStation 3
- Release: September 27

WHY YOU WANT IT: Team Ico's titles command our emotions like a half-remembered childhood fantasy. This might be the only package that can tide us over until the mysterious The Last Guardian finally materializes.

WHAT'S NEW: These breathtaking epics have been optimized for PlayStation 3 consoles, boasting HD graphics, a smoother framerate, and 7.1 surround sound.

Metal Gear Solid HD Collection

- Platform: PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360
- Release: November

WHY YOU WANT IT: Metal Gear fans looking for a refresher should pick up this collection, which features three standout entries in the saga. Sadly, the exclusion of the original Metal Gear Solid and the PSP's Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops make this an incomplete collection.

WHAT'S NEW: HD versions of the PSP game Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker and two PS2 titles, Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty and Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater.

Silent Hill HD Collection

- Platform: PlayStation 3
- Release: Fall

WHY YOU WANT IT: Few series give your pulse a workout like the Silent Hill franchise. Konami's Silent Hill HD Collection brings two of the best entries in the series together for the first time: Silent Hill 2 and 3. While this collection doesn't feel complete without the first game, we can't wait to wander through the foggy streets of Silent Hill again.

WHAT'S NEW: In addition to high-definition graphics and trophy support, the Silent Hill HD Collection features re-recorded voice work for both games.

Splinter Cell Classic Trilogy HD

- Platform: PlayStation 3
- Release: September

WHY YOU WANT IT: As international tensions tip the world towards war, Sam Fisher sneaks onto the scene and quells each uprising with a few quiet assassinations. This trilogy collects the original Splinter Cell, Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow, and Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory.

WHAT'S NEW: Nothing fancy here. Sam Fisher creeps onto the PlayStation 3, but now every shadow looks sharper and blacker than ever. Like Ubisoft's The Prince of Persia Collection, this entire set will be available via retail or download.

Zone of the Enders HD Collection

- Platform: PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360
- Release: 2012

WHY YOU WANT IT: Created by Metal Gear mastermind Hideo Kojima, the Zone of the Enders series features a lot of high-flying aerial warfare. Set during the late 22nd century, human colonies stretched across the solar system begin to revolt against Earth using aerial-based mechs called Orbital Frames.

WHAT'S NEW: The PS2 originals featured some of the most stunning lighting effects of their time; hopefully this remastered bundle can put some shine back on these games.





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the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

news
with a
sarcastic
spin



Original Left 4 Dead creators and former Valve developers Turtle Rock Studio has signed a deal with THQ. Turtle Rock's next project with its new publisher will be a new IP first-person shooter set to come out in 2013, and similar to Left 4 Dead (shown), it'll have a multiplayer focus.

Everyone's anxiously waiting to see what former Infinity Ward/Call of Duty heads Vince Zampella and Jason West are planning with Respawn Entertainment, and according to a recent comment by EA president Frank Gibeau, Respawn's game for the publisher will be a sci-fi shooter.

Bad



Here's a quick list of just some of the games that were either rumored to be at E3 or we hoped would be there but didn't show up:

God of War 4, Syphon Filter 4, Max Payne 3, Bungie's title, Starbreeze/EA's Syndicate reboot entitled Project RedLime, Respawn Entertainment's title, Metal Gear Solid: Rising, Rockstar's Agent, the Kingdom Hearts franchise, Beyond Good & Evil 2, Final Fantasy Versus XIII, and anything from Half-Life.



Bethesda Softworks and developer id Software have delayed Rage from September 13 to October 4.

Ugly



The industry's security problems continue as numerous companies' sites, forums, and more are hacked, resulting in the theft of a range of personal user info (thankfully no credit card information, however). Nintendo, Sega, Bethesda, Epic, BioWare, EVE Online, Mncraft, and Codemasters are some of the victims as of this writing. Worldwide police have arrested suspected Anonymous and LulzSec members, but so far nobody has been found guilty of any one, specific industry attack in particular, and the PSN hacker(s) remain at large.



Add Ubisoft E3 press conference presenter Aaron "Mr. Caffeine" Priceman to the company's ever-growing list of embarrassing press conference moments. He kept making annoying time travel sound effects, and he couldn't even pronounce "Tom Clancy" right, saying several times, "Tom Culancy." You don't even have to be a gamer to know how to pronounce Tom Clancy's name. To top it off, later in the show during his Assassin's Creed: Revelations demonstration Mr. Caffeine started s--- talking Harmonix, whose booth was across from Ubisoft's. Somewhere Jeff Bell is laughing.

Opinion

"Sony's presentation was solid, and the pricing on the PlayStation Vita – the second dumbest name for a device after Wii U – was quite a surprise."

—Wedbush Morgan industry analyst Michael Pachter captures the feelings of many quite succinctly





The Other E3

Core games grabbed most of the headlines, but plenty of great games for kids and families are on the horizon



by Jeff Cork

In addition to Military Shooter 3 and its sci-fi variants, a fair number of family-friendly games made appearances at E3 2011. Because I'm a self-ish parent, I'm not talking about the ones that the kids can play while I'm off doing dad things. No, these are the games that I wouldn't mind playing even once the little ones are sleeping.

1 This year, Disney Interactive renewed its focus on games for families and younger players. While I was a little bummed about not seeing anything along the lines of *Split/Second*, the games on hand were still impressive. The company debuted **Disney Universe** at the show, which is set inside a make-believe Disney game. The "game" has been hacked, and it's up to you and up to three co-op buddies to make things right again. You'll find dozens of costumes for your avatars to wear from a variety of Disney and Pixar classics, including the Mad Hatter, Captain Hook, and Sully from *Monsters, Inc.* In addition to looking downright adorable, each outfit comes with its own special abilities, like *Stitch*'s array of stringed instruments. Don't let the game's superficial resemblance to *LittleBigPlanet* fool you; it is about pure mad-cap action, not construction. Look for it later this year on PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, and PC.

2 If you missed out on the *EyePet* bandwagon last year, don't worry. Sony's **EyePet & Friends** expands on the pet sim, adding another creature to the mix. Two players can interact with their own virtual pets simultaneously using their Move controllers. Personally, I'm most excited about the game's retooled progression. Rather than proceed along a linear path, you earn points when your pet does things, and you determine how to spend them in the game's store. My sons and I had a lot of fun with the original, and it should be interesting to see how it works with two new pets at home. At least we won't have to clean up after them; that lesson will have to wait.

3 Returning once again to the world of Disney, Microsoft's Kinect game **Disneyland Adventures** is thankfully better in practice than its embarrassing on-stage presentation may have led you to believe. In addition to offering a faithful representation of the park—complete with autograph-signing cast members who you can hug—you'll find a variety of minigames based on familiar attractions. For instance, the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad level has players zooming through

canyons and pumping their arms to maintain the train's speed. My surprise favorite level was *Alice in Wonderland*'s croquet match; playing alongside another player, we're knocked around a fantastical garden by Alice and the Queen of Hearts. If you can't afford a trip to the park this year, this could be the next best thing for the younger members of your household.

4 I've always had a soft spot for *Sesame Street* (Bert forever!), and it's great to see that the public television mainstay is getting the game that it deserves. **Double Fine's Sesame Street: Once Upon a Monster** is a Kinect game with an emphasis on co-op play. Unlike other educational games (which typically focus on colors, shapes, numbers, and the alphabet), *Once Upon a Monster* aims to teach kids about something that's often overlooked but that is just as important: social and emotional development. During the game, Cookie Monster and Elmo help their friends with various problems. In one chapter, a fairly menacing creature named Grhroof wants to befriend the bunny-like Puffalopes. In an attempt to win them over, Grhroof has tried to camouflage himself to look like them. Unfortunately, his leafy covering and fake ears only frighten the flighty critters more. Elmo and Cookie help Grhroof learn to be himself through a series of minigames (collecting fireflies, tossing treats to the Puffalopes), and he eventually wins his little buddies over. It's a charming game that nails the look and feel of the show. I don't think I'm overstating things by saying this is the direction that educational gaming needs to be heading.

5 Finally, Microsoft and Rare debuted the follow up to last year's Kinect Sports. **Kinect Sports 2** isn't likely to revolutionize gaming, but I can certainly see my family gathering together and having a lot of fun with some of the events. This time around, the sports have more of an American flair, with football, baseball, darts, and skiing entering the arena. The golf game is the breakout star though, since it accurately translates your swing into the game. Make sure you have enough headroom before playing this one. ♦



01

Link vs. Ganon
(The Legend of Zelda series)

Don't let Ganon fool you. He may refer to himself as the Prince of Darkness and King of Evil, but every time the iconic antagonist sets out to reunite the pieces of the Triforce and use its power to control Hyrule, he's bested by a teenage boy in a green tunic. Time and time again Link has proven that no dungeon is too complex to stop him from defeating the boar-faced boss, freeing Hyrule and saving Princess Zelda in the process.

02

Chell vs. GLaDOS
(Portal series)
The conversations may be one-sided, but that doesn't stop Chell and GLaDOS from making our list. As Chell dutifully solves an endless



series of test chambers, Aperture Science's devious AI mocks the protagonist for her performance, appearance, and even her lack of parents. Despite GLaDOS' soft and emotionless tone, we're pretty sure she enjoys torturing her personal lab rat almost as much as we enjoy listening to her monologues.

The Belmont vs. Dracula
(Castlevania series)

The Belmont family is full of jerks. Their bloodline's sole purpose is to kill Dracula, but even when Simon slays the Prince of Darkness in the first game, he's not content. Instead, he returns seven years later, gathers Dracula's dismembered body parts, and resurrects him — only to kill him again. Now every 100 years something brings Dracula back from the dead, causing another Belmont to take up the family's Vampire Killer whip. If Dracula just decided to stay dead, the Belmonts would be out of a job.



03



04

Mario vs. Bowser (Super Mario Bros. series)

Every gamer knows the drill: Bowser kidnaps Mario's girlfriend, Princess Peach, and the Italian plumber foils the King Koopa's plan and gets her back. At this point Mario and Bowser have spent more time battling each other than they have with the Mushroom Kingdom's ruling lady, but let's face it: Without their eternal grudge match they'd both be as lame as Luigi.



05

Assassins vs. Templars (Assassin's Creed series)

Who ever thought that a brotherhood of assassins would turn out to be the good guys? The Templars seek to bring peace and order to the world by controlling mankind. The Assassins prefer chaos, as long as it means that humans retain their free will. This fundamental ideological rift serves as the source of a conflict that has spanned thousands of years and generations of devoted (and deadly) followers.



06

Kratos vs. Zeus (God of War series)

Here's an important life lesson: If you're going to kill the god of war, make sure he's actually dead. As Zeus began fearing the fury of his illegitimate son-turned-god, the king of Olympus hatched a plan to drain Kratos of his power and kill him. When Kratos recovered, he set out to fulfill the Oracle's prophecy of killing all of the Olympian Gods, including his father — a role Zeus himself played when he overthrew Cronos.



07

Scorpion vs. Sub-Zero
(Mortal Kombat series)

Scorpion and Sub-Zero might look like simple palette swaps, but their backstories are epic. After Sub-Zero killed Scorpion and was responsible for the slaughter of his family, Scorpion was resurrected and killed his nemesis during the first Mortal Kombat tournament. Their stories became even more ludicrous in subsequent games, but that hasn't lessened the enjoyment players get from beating the crap out of each other with the iconic pair.



08

John Marston vs. Dutch
(Red Dead Redemption)

Not every rivalry is black and white. When John Marston is confronted with his shameful past, the outlaw-turned-family-man is forced to hunt down his former gang leader Dutch Van Der Linde. But as the two men meet for the final time, their showdown defies action genre conventions, leaving Marston with mixed emotions and players pondering the consequences of their actions.



09

Bismol vs. Frost
(Fight Night Champion)

If there was ever a guy who deserved getting punched in the face, it's Isaac Frost. Andre Bishop's rivalry with the cocky heavyweight champion becomes personal when Frost's manager frames him for a crime he didn't commit, and Frost hospitalizes Bishop's younger brother in a particularly brutal title bout. A wicked difficulty spike makes Bishop's fight with Frost especially frustrating, but landing that final, slow-motion blow is profoundly gratifying.



10

Superman vs. Villain

Out of all the rivalries on the list, this one is the most frustrating. With all of the great open-world comic book games from the past few years, how has someone not made a decent Superman game? Rocksteady's vindication of Batman has us hopeful for the Man of Steel's future, but until a developer delivers an Arkham Asylum-like breakthrough, we're just going to say it: Superman and video games do not mix.



The Verdict On Violent Video Games

The Supreme Court declares video game law unconstitutional

by *Matthew Kato*

On October 7, 2005, then-California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law a bill from state senator Leland Yee that restricted the sale or rental of "violent video games" to minors. The law also required that such titles display an "18" sticker on the front of their boxes. The Entertainment Software Association (ESA) and Entertainment Merchants Association (EMA) won an injunction against the law by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which the state successfully appealed. In April of 2010, almost five years after being signed into law, the Supreme Court decided to hear the case, officially known as *Schwarzenegger v. EMA*. Recently, on June 27, 2011 – at the very end of the current session – the court struck down the law 7-2 on the grounds that it was unconstitutional, ending a long legal debate that is just one part of a continuing conversation about violence and video games.

A Matter of Obscenity

Justice Scalia delivered the majority opinion, which justices Kennedy, Ginsburg, Sotomayor, and Kagan joined. Justice Alito concurred with the majority, but filed an opinion that detailed his own thoughts on the matter – which Chief Justice Roberts signed as well. Justices Thomas and Breyer wrote in dissent.

Speaking for the majority in the case, now known as *Brown v. EMA* due to Jerry Brown being the current governor of California, Scalia upheld the Ninth Circuit's original ruling that the law was unconstitutional because it restricted content that is protected as free speech (video games, in this case) and didn't satisfy strict scrutiny. Ultimately, the court decided that there wasn't a compelling enough public interest for the government to step in – and in the process restrict free speech.

Even though it seems against common sense to let retailers sell or rent violent video games to kids, that's not what the court was deliberating. The majority's ruling upheld previous court decisions that only speech classified as obscene may be

lawfully restricted, and that video games – even if violent – aren't obscene in the eyes of the court. The modern court definition of obscenity comes from *Miller v. California*, which established that something is obscene if it violates community standards, contains offensive sexual material specifically defined by state law, and that the material as a whole has no artistic, literary, scientific, or political value.

Scalia is clear in his opinion that the law unfairly singles out video games as opposed to other media, and the violence therein shouldn't be added as a new category of unprotected speech "by a legislature that concludes certain speech is too harmful to be tolerated." He isn't entirely unsympathetic to the sentiment of the law, but in this case he doesn't think the government has a legitimate role. "While some of the legislation's effect may indeed be in support of what some parents of the restricted children actually want, its entire effect is only in support of what the State thinks parents ought to want."

Going beyond a straightforward First Amendment ruling,

Scalia disputes that the interactive nature of video games makes it more dangerous than other media. He also calls into question the state's use of various studies claiming that violent video games are detrimental to kids.

These two arguments are cited in Justice Breyer's dissent, who asks: If video games didn't affect people, then why would the ESRB have a ratings system in the first place? Why does the armed forces use them for teaching tools? He also takes on the First Amendment argument by citing that the law doesn't dissuade adults from buying the material or it being made in the first place. "This case is ultimately less about censorship than it is about education. In my view, the First Amendment does not disable government from helping parents make such a choice here." In his own dissent, Justice Thomas goes a step further and claims that minors have no free speech rights whatsoever without a parent's prior consent.

Case Closed?

Although Breyer states that laws in the future should be more narrowly tailored to survive scrutiny, the ESA and EMA believe that the court's decision closes the door on any subsequent laws. "The court didn't just close the door," stated Sean Bersell, vice president of public affairs for EMA in an interview with *Game Informer*, "it seemed to pretty much nail it shut on these types of laws.... This wasn't some sort of narrow ruling."

Ed Cavazos, a partner at Bracewell & Giuliani who teaches a class about video games and the law at the University of Texas School of Law, told us the decision is a "really important, strong opinion from the court that violence in video games is not the kind of thing that warrants government regulation."

Despite the setback and hundreds of thousands of dollars spent by the state in the process, Adam Keigwin, chief of staff to state senator Leland Yee, who introduced that struck-down law, doesn't believe it was all in vain. "We need to continue to do what we've been doing in terms of educating parents and pushing the industry to be better corporate citizens." Keigwin told us "it's possible" that Yee's office will introduce another bill for law, but at the moment they are sitting through the dissenting opinions (and the concurring, but different majority opinions of Justice Alito and Chief Justice Roberts) and weighing all the options.

Keigwin admits that the ESA and its ESRB ratings board has improved, but hopes it can be better. He suggests that the ESRB separate from the ESA so there's no possible conflict of interest, and he also wants the board to judge games in more detail. Instead of judging publisher-submitted video footage and info, Keigwin wants the ESRB to "dig into these games and see the total content like the movie industry ratings board does."

In the eyes of the ESRB, however, the court's ruling only serves to affirm what it has already been doing – Justice Scalia even praised the ratings board in his opinion. "The ESRB is in fact, as we've been saying for years, the right approach," declared ESA president and CEO, Mike Gallagher. Whether you agree or disagree that the ESRB ratings are sufficient for minors, the Supreme Court has now declared that it's up to parents to decide. ♦

"Any state that tries to pass a bill that regulates video games based on content is just asking to be paying my legal fees..."

– ESA counsel Paul Smith

interview



photo: Ed Carson

Square Enix Around the World

In the world of gaming, the name "Square" once meant great RPGs and little else. After merging with Enix in 2003 and absorbing Eidos in 2009, the company now has a global presence and a library of games that spans practically every genre. **Mike Fischer** is the president and CEO of Square Enix North America, and we talked with him about the company's expanding portfolio, navigating multiple markets, and listening to input from diehard Final Fantasy fans.

interview by Joe Juba

What is Square Enix North America's role in the larger organization?

Yeah, that's the right way to frame it, because you can't really look at our organization out of the context of the larger company. Of course, now that Square Enix also includes not only Taito but also Eidos, in a lot of respects, I think we're the most well-balanced global publisher in the world.... It gives me a lot of freedom to go and pursue local, Square Enix North America-sourced projects that are smaller, more agile, and allow me to take more creative risks. I'm focusing more on things like mobile, social, online, browser-based—but also projects like *Dungeon Siege III*.

How would you describe the communication channels between Square Enix North America and Japan? Does Japan run the show and hand down orders, or is it more collaborative?

It is a very collaborative environment. Sometimes I start my day with a call to [Square Enix Europe CEO] Phil Rogers and I end my day in a call with the Japanese executives. I do speak fluent Japanese, so that definitely helps smooth over the communication, but it's really not a micro-managed organization. I feel very fortunate to have the charter that I do—to run this business in the way that's judged by its success. That being said, just like if you're working on a George Lucas or Steven Spielberg movie, we're dealing with very strong-willed creators, and not just on the Japan side. To be a successful publisher, you really have to tap into the creative vision that those creators have. It's their creative product we're bringing to market; it's not a shampoo with no natural qualities of its own that you need to imbue with fake brand attributes. These are creative products, and our success is really built on effectively communicating that to the world. For me, it's more about creative collaboration than working with a parent company in Japan.

The Square Enix brand was long associated almost exclusively with JRPGs. Now, how do you handle the challenge of essentially juggling dual identities?

For me, it's a no-lose situation. If people think of Square Enix products as great JRPGs, then that's a win for me, because there are very few brands where people see the publisher name and go "Wow, I'm gonna get that product." Maybe Disney. I can't really think of anyone else right off the bat. On the other hand, in a lot of

the other genres, people tend to judge them on their own merits. So, if we're to look at pre-acquisition, I wouldn't necessarily say people go, "Oh, that's an Eidos title. They made *Tomb Raider*, so I want that," any more than people see a movie studio and say, "That's Universal pictures, I want to see that." So the good news is the Square Enix brand does give me equity on a really good part of my business, and then the other part of the business—brands like *Hitman*, *Tomb Raider*, and *Deus Ex*—are so strong that they kind of speak for themselves.

Final Fantasy has a devoted and vocal group of fans, and I imagine that you get a lot of contradictory feedback about what works and what doesn't. How do you absorb that kind of criticism?

With any property that has a hardcore following, whether it's *Final Fantasy* or *Star Wars*, your most vocal critics can also be your most devoted fans. To some degree, I subscribe to the old Oscar Wilde quote: "The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about." We do seriously listen to our fans....in the case of *XIII-2*, you're seeing a game that's a lot more interactive, a lot less linear, a lot of components added based on what we've heard people say. So we do hear them. We're not letting our games be designed by committee or focus group...but we're very fortunate to have a fanbase that genuinely loves our products, sticks with us—and I believe in the long term—helps us make our games better.

In May, Square Enix announced significant losses for the fiscal year. From your perspective, do you see the company shifting priorities to address the situation?

Well, a lot of this was based on a one-time accounting issue. Another big part of it was *Deus Ex* and *Dungeon Siege* both moved into the next fiscal year—decisions we made to give the games more time to be great. We could have shipped those and really missed the opportunity to make great franchises that will continue to deliver sales as well as help build up the Square Enix brand.

In previous generations, Square tended to lean heavily on one platform, like the SNES or PlayStation 2. Would that even be possible in the industry today?

We've been very explicit and open with our strong belief in a multiplatform environment and a multiplatform strategy for our company. Certainly, if you look back, in years past that wasn't the case. But I think you're also looking at a different environment. By that I mean, there's a more even share of success among

platforms. It used to be that there was a very dominant platform, and we're in an era now where three big companies share the success. They all, to some degree, choose different areas to focus on, and we may still make our platform decisions based on that affinity. But it isn't about picking winners or playing kingmaker. It's about getting our franchises out to as wide an audience as possible. And it's not just the 3D consoles anymore, right? iPhone, Android, browser-based—and multiple browsers—that sort of proliferation suits a company like ours that has 25 years of rich IP to develop.

How do you see the company's position in terms of new IP?

Every publisher has to keep developing new IP, not only to keep the market fresh, but to continue challenging their own creative teams. I think it is important to keep in mind that while we've kept the *Final Fantasy* title on a number of different titles, they're all different characters, different stories, and different worlds. So I think that it is a bit misleading to look at something like *Final Fantasy* as just the same IP; it's 14 different worlds and characters. We have iterated on those—we have *X-2* and *XIII-2*—and we have taken other stories and developed our content across different media as we did with *Advent Children*. As we look here at Square Enix North America, I'm particularly interested in pursuing new IP because iPhone games, Xbox Live and PSN games, browser-based games can allow us, almost like a TV series pilot, to keep trying new ideas.

At the mention of mobile gaming or casual gaming, a lot of hardcore gamers flinch...

It's kind of like the first time you saw your mom wearing Nike. [Laughs] It can take away a bit of the edge, but it doesn't mean that Nike doesn't sell the best athletic wear to the hardest core audiences. The fact of the matter is that the gaming audience is growing organically. Gamers who used to be teenagers are now in their 30s and 40s. I'm one of them! I started playing *Pong* and *Space Invaders* and, all the way through, I'm still a gamer. For one thing, gamers are naturally becoming older. They're having families of their own, and they want games they can play with their kids. Obviously, there are whole new groups of people that are playing through *Zynga*—I don't see why anyone should feel threatened by that. The interesting thing is that I think that this growing audience, some of them are going to become hardcore gamers as well. So there's no downside for me...even though it may seem strange sometimes to see folks who don't fit the stereotypical "gamer." I think that's a good thing. ☺

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

**1990
A GOOD START**
Fischer begins his career at Sega's Tokyo headquarters as international product manager. He works on the Master System, Genesis/Mega Drive, and Game Gear platforms. His projects include Genesis classics like *Mickey Mouse* and the *Castle of Illusion* and Michael Jackson's *Moonwalker*.

**1995
COMING TO AMERICA**
Fischer transfers to Sega of America and becomes product manager for the Pro platform, an educational learning aid built on the Genesis architecture. The system was more successful in Japan than it was in the West.

**1997
CHANGING LANES**
Fischer becomes head of marketing at Namco, whose star franchises at the time include *Ace Combat*, *Teiken*, *Soul Calibur*, and *Ridge Racer*.

**2001
BACK AGAIN**
Fischer returns to Sega of America as VP of entertainment marketing, leading the company's transition from a platform manufacturer to a third party publisher. In this position, Fischer helps bring *Virtua Fighter* to PS2, *Super Monkey Ball* to GameCube, and *Panzer Dragoon Orta* to Xbox.

**2003
MICROSOFT'S MAN**
Fischer joins Microsoft and manages the Japanese and U.S. marketing teams for the launch of the Xbox 360. Fischer also runs the company's U.K. marketing for Windows, mobile, and online business.

**2010
HEAD HONCHO**
Fischer becomes president and CEO of the U.S.-based Square Enix, Inc. The company continues efforts to diversify its offerings beyond the Japan-developed role-playing game that defined the company in previous years.

...your most vocal critics can also be your most devoted fans.



Xperia Play

Can dedicated gaming handhelds stay relevant as mobile phones continue to take a bigger piece of the mobile gaming market?

While devices like the PlayStation Vita and Nintendo 3DS will answer that question, Sony Ericsson is trying to narrow the gap between mobile phones and mobile gaming with a smart phone that features a dedicated gaming interface. In some ways it succeeds, but in others the Xperia Play's attempt to serve two masters results in a phone that excels at nothing.

The unit ships with Android 2.3 Gingerbread, giving users instant access to the web, email, and Android's growing list of apps. However, the system's big draw is its game-centric design. The unit's slide-out gamepad is helpful for those who spend a lot of time playing games on their phone. Sony's Xperia Play service offers a mix of classic PlayStation One games such as Crash Bandicoot and Wipeout, as well as newer titles like The Sims 3 and Guitar Hero:

Warriors of Rock. Android's market is also constantly updated with new Xperia titles such as the upcoming Minecraft adaptation.

The Xperia's analog touchpads come close to replicating real analog sticks; they're not as nimble as a true controller, but I'll take them over the featureless touchpads on most modern phones. Unfortunately, the device is too small, causing hand cramps if held between your palms for more than a couple hours – which is about all the playtime you get out of its battery anyway.

The Xperia Play tries to be a jack-of-all-trades, but its versatility might make it hard to find a market. As a gaming device it's nice, but it pales in comparison to what Nintendo's 3DS and Sony's upcoming PlayStation Vita can do. As a multimedia device it lacks an HDMI port and captures subpar images and video. Those looking for a future-proof smartphone will be disappointed by the lack of 4G LTE support. The Xperia Play probably doesn't represent the future of mobile technology, but it's a nice experiment and its ideas could be refined to deliver a worthwhile experience.

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1 Orb BR for PlayStation 3

Orb's Internet TV streaming software uses a networked PC to funnel content from Hulu, Netflix, Amazon, ABC, CBS, Comedy Central and other sites onto your PlayStation 3. Smartphone and tablet users can download a remote app that allows them to browse thousands of on-demand programs as well as music and video located on their home computer. Navigating this wealth of programming is a clumsy endeavor, but thankfully the search feature makes finding the most recent episode of *Archer*, for example, a breeze. Many newer TVs come with built-in software that lets you stream all this content off the web for free, but if you're a year or so from upgrading your set, Orb's software is a cheap and easy way to move the wide world of Internet-based content over to your television.

AVERAGE **★★★★**

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2 Buff Monster's Destroyer Figures

Sometimes you want a figure from your favorite game or comic, and sometimes you just want a figure that looks awesome. These designer toys from the creative folks at The Loyal Subjects stand 14 inches high, have four points of articulation, and look like something that Godzilla would cuddle up with at night.

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3 Zombie Attack Hoodie

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Better With Kinect?

by **Annette Gonzalez**,
Associate Editor,
Game Informer

Microsoft had a hit on its hands almost immediately after it launched Kinect. In a matter of weeks, the peripheral became the fastest-selling consumer electronics device of all time. However, past the initial software support for casual players, the flow of releases slowed to a drip. Kinect owners cried foul over the lack of games, so it's no surprise that Microsoft used E3 as an opportunity to demonstrate its continuing commitment to the device. That sounds like good news for Kinect owners on the surface, but does Kinect support really enhance your games?

Even though big-name developers such as BioWare and Turn 10 are showing support for the peripheral by making their games "Better With Kinect," the added features have yet to prove that a Kinect owner will have an improved experience with these titles over someone who doesn't own the sensor. Using Kinect to deliver dialogue in *Mass Effect 3* or inspect cars in *Forza Motorsport 4* may seem like good ideas, on paper, but come off more like showstopping gimmicks when a controller can perform those types of functions with greater ease. While the motion control faithful might be thrilled at the prospect of using hand gestures or voice commands to complete tasks in their favorite franchises, I'll need some more convincing that the peripheral will actually enhance my gaming experience before I'm willing to hand in my controller.

Kinect support isn't always about improving an existing experience; it can make the difference between someone being able to play or not. For instance, with *Kinect Disneyland Adventures*, my three-year-old niece can have the opportunity to explore a virtual Disneyland and give Mickey Mouse a hug. If you handed her an Xbox 360 controller and asked her to execute the inputs for the embrace, it wouldn't have the same effect. She'd probably be more confused than

enthralled. In this instance, the interactive experience has proven to be better (and more accessible for people with little gaming experience) with Kinect.

Kinect may struggle to find its footing in the core games space, but it doesn't mean the peripheral is incapable of delivering solid controller-free experiences. The most entertaining Kinect offerings are ones that fully embrace the technology, such as Harmonix's *Dance Central* or Good Science's *Kinect Adventures*, where precise body tracking offers an experience a standard controller simply can't. Playing *Dance Central* with a controller in hand while sitting the couch wouldn't only be less enjoyable – it would be a fundamentally different game. This high-quality implementation is currently reserved for Kinect-exclusive titles (usually aimed at a casual audience), but that doesn't need to be the case. Now it's just a matter of developers using this knowledge of where controller-free gameplay succeeds to augment traditional games in more innovative ways.

While I may not want to tire out my arms customizing weapons in *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* when a controller can do the job, tools such as the ones shown off in *Kinect Fun Labs* could offer some more interesting uses of the controller-free technology in high-profile games.

going forward. These tools were designed to teach developers the types of features they can utilize in their own titles. For instance, instead of working through menus to customize Commander Shepard to your likeness in *Mass Effect*, perhaps a quick face scan with Kinect could someday do the trick. Consider a game like *The Sims* that allows for tons of personalization; perhaps Kinect could take a snapshot of my living room for a faithful recreation in my Sim's home in no time flat.

Or take a game such as the beloved *Jet Grind Radio* (I will forever hope for another entry in the series) where you could create graffiti by scanning images of your art work via Kinect and editing your piece using the sensor's finger tracking capabilities that offer a precision analog sticks wouldn't do. Or, you could even begin your hand-drawn masterpiece from scratch using Kinect. You could then tag all over enemy territory with a few quick hand gestures following the classic arrow prompts before continuing your sprint on skates with a controller.

Kinect is a great piece of technology that is just now rolling out the types of experiences promised when it was announced (with the exception of Milo, may he rest in peace). With the bevy of new features announced in upcoming sequels such as *Dance Central 2* and *Kinect Sports: Season 2*, developers appear to be catching up to the peripheral's learning curve. Even though the "Better With Kinect" suite of game features leave something to be desired right now, I'm not ready to write off the possibilities of Kinect motion control just yet.

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



August

02 New Releases

- Bleach: Soul Resurrection (PS3)
- Phineas and Ferb: Across the Second Dimension (PS3, Wii, DS)
- White Knight Chronicles II (PS3)

04 A Good Time To Be Judged

The latest Play Arts Kai series features Judge Gabranth from Final Fantasy Dissidia. This amazingly detailed nine-inch figure comes packaged with interchangeable swords and hands. These figures usually fly off of toy shelves, so make a baseline to your store today!

05 Ape Escape

At the end of the original, *Planet of the Apes* Charlton Heston discovered he was still on Planet. The apes had destroyed it! Didn't you always wonder how that happened? Of course not, but you're going to find out in today's theatrical release *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*. The James Franco stars, but don't worry. His performance can't be worse than it was at the Oscars.

07 The Coolest Pony Of Them All

If My Little Pony was too frilly for your tastes, yet you always wanted a tiny horse of your very own, *S.O.I.A. Toys' Dark Riders* stable is for you. This monstrous sculpture of War and his steed, Ruin lights up, and retails for the reasonable price of \$249.99. With this prized collectible on your game shelf, you can stop eBaying Pinkie Pie.

16 New Releases

- Nicktoons MLB (360, Wii, DS)

17 Zombies in Space!

DC Comics' Resident Evil comic book series is available today in graphic novel form. This 144-page book tells the tale of the awesomely named Holiday Sugarman, a mercenary tasked with cleaning up the G-virus outbreak in Grozdekistan. A portion of this story also takes place on the Joint Nations' space station, which, surprise surprise, is overrun with undead astronauts! And you thought zombie stories were played out!

19 Sex, Violence, and Slow-Motion

Conan is best known for killing and humping. In today's theatrical release *Conan the Barbarian*, Robert E. Howard's legendary character returns to the screen. Thanks to all of the recent mind-blowing advances in killing and humongous technology, the original movies are bound to look like crap compared to this necessary remake.

23 New Releases

- Angler's Club: Ultimate Bass Fishing (3DS)
- Deus Ex: Human Revolution (PS3, 360, PC)
- Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor Overclocked (3DS)
- The Lord of the Rings: War in the North (PS3, 360)

24 Avengers...Er...Ultimates Assemble!

Marvel's *The Ultimates* comic book is nothing like the upcoming Avengers movie. In the *Avengers* movie, Thor has a different shade of blonde hair. Captain America has a larger nose, and Iron Man

is less of a drunk. We think. Even though they're totally different, you should still check out the newest *Ultimates* comic series. It's penned by Jonathan Hickman, drawn by Esad Ribic, and probably created by Joss Whedon. The cover art makes it look like a prequel to the *Avengers* film.

26 Next Stop: Love

Final Destination 5 opens today. What, you've never heard of it? It's a poignant French drama about two strangers who meet on a train, form a brief (but significant) bond, and then return to their everyday lives. Now, just kidding! It's about a bunch of teenagers getting eaten by escalators and stuff.

30 New Releases

- Driver: Renegade (3DS)
- Driver: San Francisco (PS3, 360, Wii, PC)
- James Earl's Hollywood Crimes (3DS)
- Madden NFL 12 (PS3, 360)
- Red Orchestra 2: Heroes of Stalingrad (PC)



DISHONOR



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

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Bethesda Softworks

» **Developer**
Arkane Studios

» **Release**
Spring

BY ADAM BIESSENER

DISHONORED

CARVING THROUGH CHAOS

*Assassin.
Killer.
Thug.
Savior.
Terrorist.*

The hero's name is immaterial next to the labels players earn for themselves. However you approach your desperate quest to topple the fascists who have wrongfully imprisoned you and wrung your dying city dry, you'll have to break a few eggs to make this omelet. Or will you?

D

ishonored is a first-person action game, but it couldn't be more different from Call of Duty or Halo. Developer Arkane Studios' mission is to create an immersive, visceral experience that lets players experiment and be creative in affecting the world around them. This philosophy revolves around what co-creative directors Harvey Smith (Deus Ex, Thief: Deadly Shadows) and Raf Colantonio (Arx Fatalis, Dark Messiah of Might & Magic) lovingly refer to as "the simulation." Against the backdrop of a revenge tale that pits the Empress' former bodyguard against the regime that convicted him for her murder, the simulation is a complex machine that the player can affect in dozens of interesting ways.

The word "simulation" in this context is the difference between Minecraft and Animal Crossing. Smith and Colantonio live and breathe games that create experiences through the rich tapestry woven by layers of interacting systems, not guided tours through series of scripted events. Dishonored's stealthy assassination gameplay will be different for everyone; simply using a different combination of powers and tactics along a single path yields dramatically different results.

Creating a playground that reacts to the player is a multifaceted challenge. The AI has to be robust, so that it responds to changes in the world believably and not because the player stepped on an invisible trigger placed by a designer. The environment must be stuffed full of interactive elements: ledges to mantle onto, vases to knock off of tables, fires to light or douse, tables to hide under, carpets

to muffle your footsteps. The final piece of the puzzle – likely the most important one – is to ensure that players have a satisfying toolbox at their disposal.

The player assumes the role of Corvo, a lethal assassin with unparalleled mobility, skillful fighting techniques, supernatural powers, and improvised-yet-powerful gadgets at his disposal. "The last thing we wanted to do was come up with a model where you're weak, and that's why you had to sneak," Smith says. "You're like a ninja, but you can only last so long and there are many, many, many guards." Players have both a timing-based parry and a dedicated block button for defense, and lightning-fast dagger strikes complemented by crossbows and other weapons on offense. As in many stealth games, though, a stand-up fight is your last resort.

Corvo's quest for revenge is a bare skeleton

that players flesh out with their own play styles and choices. Dishonored lets you own your actions and their consequences and take an active hand in crafting your own experience to an impressive degree. Arkane didn't quite confirm, but the team is trying hard to include non-lethal ways to remove every target from the equation.

How's that for player freedom in a game starring an assassin?

Though the protagonist has been touched by the supernatural Outsider (see sidebar) and has uncanny powers from that enigmatic encounter, you won't find a healing spell or a magical sword in his arsenal. "We would never put a fireball in Dishonored. We have powers that affect the simulation, and we allow you to layer them," explains Smith. "You have abilities like the power to bring forth a swarm of AI-driven rats that react naturally to their surroundings. They'll attack people (including you!) in sufficient numbers. They'll seek food, cleaning the bones of dead enemies for easier disposal. Another power allows you to possess one, giving you an easy escape through tunnels far too small for any human."

This layering of effects lies at the heart of Dishonored. Arkane could have easily made the rat swarm a simple visual effect that distracted

THE OUTSIDER

This supernatural being is the source of all magic in Dishonored's world, including the many powers at the player's disposal. Its nature and intentions are shrouded in mystery; the Outsider is part devil, part angel, and entirely ambiguous. It walks among us – as ubiquitous graffiti madly gibbers from Dunwall's architecture – but why? How has Corvo touched it? Arkane teases that players will meet the Outsider during the game, but that's all the studio would reveal. Smith and Colantonio spoke at great length of their love of Lovecraft, though, which could be a clue...



Thalibors' armor plating and explosive arrows make them deadly foes



You can probably win a three-on-one stand-up fight, but expect to spend some resources doing so

or killed a single enemy for a mana cost. That's what magic spells in most games do. Creating a group of AI-controlled beings that interact with other powers, the environment, and other entities in the world is vastly harder – but commensurately more interesting.

All of this has to be recognized and reacted to by the AI for hostile guards, neutral NPCs, animals, and any other ambulatory entity. Colantonio and Smith refer to their solution as an “analog AI” that has a number of characteristics which can be modified on the fly, rather than a simple “alert” or “passive” toggle based on whether an alarm has been set off. Two guards in conversation with each other, for instance, have narrower cones of vision and duller hearing than a single enemy on patrol. The effects of light, mental state, ambient noise, and more dynamically affect the perceptiveness and reactions of every active AI in the game.

For this simulation-based design to work, players must not feel like the game cheats. What use is it to plan an infiltration if you're just going to be spotted by a guard walking into the room after magically spawning next door? Arkane's solution is to only rarely spawn in new enemies, and only in conjunction with alarms. Even then, they always enter the level from a believable location, like a reinforcing squad coming in through the back door of a mansion.

Viktor Antonov, Half-Life 2's art director and the man who designed the seminal City 17, is responsible for much of Dishonored's look and feel



WHERE THE WORLD WENT WRONG

To understand Dishonored's unusual fantasy world, where a handful of cities cling to life on a small set of islands, Arkane walked us through how it devised the setting.

START WITH 17TH CENTURY LONDON. Burgeoning populations ensure the rise of a great city on the water's edge. Poverty and wealth rub shoulders in the cramped streets.

ISOLATE IT FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD. Some minor civilization exists on other islands in the same archipelago, but a deadly monster-infested ocean separates Dunwall from the Pandysian continent. Only the bravest adventurers risk that distant land's infinite dangers – and few of them return.

ADD A VOLATILE, CHEAP ENERGY SOURCE. The real world had to wait for widespread exploitation of coal to start the Industrial Revolution. Dunwall's inhabitants built theirs on powerful oil harvested from monstrous whales of the deep.

MIX IN POWERFUL BUT DANGEROUS MAGIC. The Outsider is neither god nor devil, but it inarguably walks in the world. A few lucky (cursed?) people have been touched by this unearthly being, and can affect the world for good or ill in fantastic ways.

BLOW IT ALL UP WITH A WORSE PLAGUE THAN WE'VE EVER SEEN. Half of Dunwall is dead, and yet more are still terminally infected, courtesy of a rat-born plague that has brought civilization to the edge of collapse.

KILL THE EMPRESS. The protagonist Corvo didn't do it, but everyone thinks he did. Either way, she's dead. Greedy, powerful men have stepped into the void her passing has left. Loudspeakers blare propaganda and the people live in as much fear of the Lord Regent's government as of the plague.

JOIN THE RESISTANCE. An underground opposition group opposes the evil regime. After wrongfully serving five years for the Empress' death, the movement has decided to seek your aid and offer you much in return.

ONE WAY THROUGH A GUARDED MANSION

Creep through door. Plant dagger in guard's neck undetected. Next room: shouts from behind. They found the body. Go back and dispatch second enemy with well-timed parry and counterattack. Bleeding now; too many foes. Windblast to get space. Drop third enemy with flurry of strikes. Surrounded again. Drink elixir to restore health. Adrenaline full from fighting; eviscerate third guard for instant kill. Turn on last enemy, no match in one-on-one fight. Path clear to objective.

THREE PATHS TO POWER

Dishonored is an action game first, but it has a significant amount of RPG depth under the hood. These three vectors allow you to customize your hero:

POWERS

The supernatural powers at your disposal — Bend Time, Windblast, etc. — can be unlocked and upgraded by spending runes found in the world. Many powers have multiple upgrades to choose from, and you won't find nearly enough runes on a single playthrough to get everything. Even if you scour every inch of every level, you'll have to make hard choices.

GADGETS

Players have access to a number of fancy gadgets, such as spring razor traps, sticky grenades, and several types of ammunition like sleep darts. Appropriating wealth for your own use on your travels, from cutting a valuable painting out of its frame to stuffing your pockets with the nobility's jewelry, allows you to improve your loadout with upgraded tools or passive buffs like increased carrying capacity.

CHARMS

Many people in the world believe whalebone charms have mystical properties.

In the player's case, the popular superstition is correct. Players can only find 12 or so out of the 40 total charms in a single playthrough, and each one is randomly selected from the master list. These minor buffs give you unusual powers like a mana refill when drinking from a fountain, or a health boost from eating certain colored rats.



Arkane's strong history with first-person melee combat should dispel any fears over Dishonored's extensive use of it



LAYERS UPON LAYERS

Aside from its effects on the environment and other characters, the complexity of a power like the rat swarm brings dangers with it for the player. You can make things worse by causing an NPC to freak out at being swarmed by rats and calling more guards to your location. You could even kill yourself with it by not ensuring the rats have a more appealing target than your wounded self. But that's okay with Arkane. "We like the opposite of protecting the player," Colantonio says. This means giving players enough rope to hang themselves with, but also giving exceptional freedom and agency.

The simplest approach to disabling a watchtower in the middle of an open square you need to cross is avoiding its rotating beam by creeping from cover to cover and avoiding patrolling guards. That's the base level of gameplay that anyone would expect out of a stealth/action game, and there's nothing tactically wrong with it. In Dishonored, however, you could alternatively climb a building and use a

combination of celerity (supernatural speed), your natural double-jump, and blink (a short-range teleport) to cover a surprising distance in the air and land on the top of the tower itself.

Allowing players to combine their tools in whatever ways they can think of has hazards within development. Smith chuckles as he remembers the first time the celerity-double

jump-blink combo came up. "When we first started seeing people do that, our lead level designer said, 'Please, turn this off! People are going to get out of the map!' And we said, 'No, it's improvisational and that's the whole f---ing goal,'" he relates.

"That's the point. People want to maximize the efficiency of those combinations," Colantonio adds. Despite the challenge they have set for their team, Colantonio and Smith are happy with the results so far. "I don't think there was at any point something cool that we had to back out of because it breaks the game," Colantonio proudly states.

This mobility package is as crucial to Dishonored as the supernatural powers. Players can accomplish marvelous feats without touching their magical arsenal. In addition to a double-jump, players can sprint, slide, lean, and sneak. The levels are designed to encourage vertical experimentation; any surface at a 30-degree or shallower incline can be mantled onto, and chains and ropes can be climbed. By exploring the world, players may stumble upon the goodies and side missions sprinkled across all three dimensions.

A whaling ship parades its grim cargo through Dunwall's harbor. It's not a cheery sight



"If you told us tomorrow that we'd have to work on a racing game, we'd just die." —Harvey Smith

"Or we'd add an inventory to the car. And you could assassinate other cars." — Raf Colantonio



The aristocracy has no compunctions about enjoying the isany fruits of its ill-gotten wealth.

TWO HEADS THINK AS ONE

Dishonored's co-creative directors are widely different on the surface. Harvey Smith is an enthusiastic Texan several studios into his game development career. Smith has an undisputed classic (*Deus Ex*) and an ambitious and contentious follow-up (*Deus Ex: Invisible War*) both to his name, and a series of smaller projects that found varying degrees of success since. Raf Colantonio is a soft-spoken Frenchman who founded his own company and then moved to Austin simply because he wanted a bit of adventure beyond his native Lyon, France. *Arkane's*, and therefore Colantonio's, two big titles are a well-loved RPG that transcended a tiny budget and lack of marketing (*Arx Fatalis*) and a flawed title with unique, groundbreaking elements that suffered from a publisher that struggled to find a direction for the franchise (*Dark Messiah of Might & Magic*). When they start to talk about games, though, the kindred nature of their spirits is obvious.

If you take the successful games and the good bits from the less successful ones, it's easy to see what drives Colantonio and Smith both. The visceral, first-person melee in *Dark Messiah* was the highlight of that game, but a similarly excellent system is a small piece of *Dishonored*. The branching paths of *Deus Ex* are much loved, and *Dishonored* combines them with a mantling/sprinting/sliding/double-jumping mobility package that JC Denton could only dream of.

Put all of these elements together with the simulation elements of early PC games, and you can see the vision that drives Smith and Colantonio to create *Dishonored*. "All that stuff is magic to us, and the reason we're still in games," Smith says. "Both of us loved *Dungeon Master* in the late '80s, and we both loved *Underworld* and we both loved *System Shock*. That's the magic of those games — the developers went the extra mile."



A SECOND, STEALTHIER WAY THROUGH THE MANSION

Creep through door. Sneak past guard warming hands by fire. Accidentally bump vase off table. Guards come to investigate. Stop time, sprint into next room, slide under table before time resumes. Confused guards now alerted, searching room by room. Carpet muffles footsteps; sprint down hallway to objective. Low alert still in progress, but escape unseen.

THE HEART

One particular item exists beyond the crossbow, pistol, grenades, and traps most reasonably prepared assassins carry. The so-called heart is a mystical object that beats faster as you face your objectives, giving the player some basic guidance to keep them on track in Dishonored's large levels.

More disturbingly, it whispers directly into your mind, pulling secrets from the consciousness of others and sensing interesting things within the world that lie beyond mortal senses. You can learn something about every named character in the game with the heart, but allowing a barely-understood ancient artifact psychic access to your mind may not be without consequences.



Animals are always vulnerable to your possession ability, while humans need to be unaware of your presence

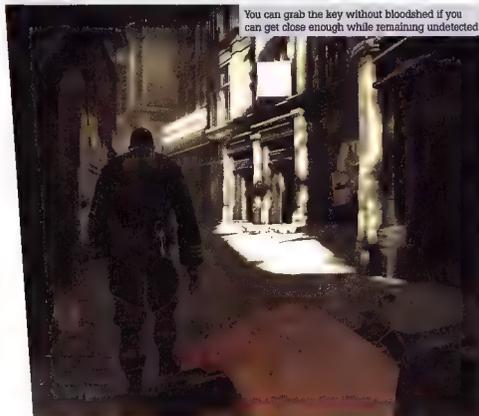


You can grab the key without bloodshed if you can get close enough while remaining undetected

GOING OFF THE RAILS

"One of our philosophical points that Raf and I strongly believe is that modern game developers go way too far out of their way to protect the player from anything being broken or low drama. They try really hard to make sure everything is insulated and protected and you're only looking in this direction while this scripted thing happens and you therefore get the maximum roller-coaster ride. Games can either be described as rollercoasters — which is all crafted and very high-drama — or that time when you were 16 and you and your friend broke into an abandoned house and you had the most intense moments waiting for the door to open, and then there were moments where, 'Ah, I expected something grand to happen but nothing happened; it was just an empty room.' But it was all your experience, right? So they can either be this crafted roller-coaster drama or they can be this 'explore an abandoned house with your friends [experience].' The latter is what we're going for."

— Harvey Smith, co-creative director



PLAY YOUR WAY

The one level we saw in action tasks the player with eliminating a corrupt magistrate. This malefactor is falsely accusing landowners of being infected with the plague in order to confiscate their property, and making an example of him will hopefully demonstrate the resistance movement's worth to the citizenry. This task requires getting past dozens of guards on the streets outside of the target's residence, then infiltrating the mansion before the final bit of gnsly business. Several paths lead to the goal — through the streets, over the rooftops, etc. — but many stories play out alongside the main thrust of the scenario.

Dishonored's world is largely defined by the interlocking systems of the simulation, but it's also stuffed full of designer-created content waiting to be discovered. Taking your time and listening to the conversations going on in the world can clue you into secondary bits along the way. Two thugs might be talking about a bureaucrat they're planning on robbing to get the key to a safe hidden on the second floor of

a nearby building. All of that stuff is in the world; the bureaucrat is following his own AI routine in another part of the level, the safe is sitting behind a painting, and the building is across the street.

A vignette in our demo had a woman being accosted by a thug in a dark alleyway, crying out for help. Move in to rescue her and you'll find yourself ambushed by the two of them and their three skull-cracking friends hiding out in a nearby alcove. Since everything exists inside the simulation, you can find the ambushers first and deal with them separately. You could set a trap of your own, luring them into a battlefield more to your liking. You could use your powerful stealth capabilities to lead them toward a guard outpost and vanish into the night when the constabulary spots them and a melee ensues. You could skip dealing with them entirely and focus on your mission.

However you choose to approach the obstacles and objectives in front of you, your actions have consequences. Arkane isn't using the

traditional "A follows B" method of branching storytelling seen in, for example, *Mass Effect*. Instead, the studio is modeling morality along an axis common to assassin and spy fiction: the idea of being a butcher who cares little for collateral damage along the way, or a ghost who nobody knows was there until they realize the secret documents aren't in the safe where they're supposed to be.

Stomping around Dunwall killing anyone in your way is a viable way to play *Dishonored*. It's also sloppy from the perspective of the insurgent group you're aiding as well as the rest of the city's residents. Unnecessary bloodshed and other displays of brutality increase the chaos in the world, destabilizing an already fragile society and breaking down the veneer of civilization over the increasingly desperate city.

Chaos is a measured, aggregate value in *Dishonored*, but it's not a meter or score that players track. You'll be notified when your actions have raised or lowered the level of chaos, but it's an under-the-hood story

mechanic rather than an explicit light/dark or paragon/renegade score with gameplay effects. "Things just happen. A character betrays you, or not," Smith explains. Arkane didn't go so far as to detail alternate endings (or much of anything else about the plot, for that matter), but the studio's goal is clear. "The fate of the world is not just lip service," Smith says.

Though the team was reluctant to fill in the vague sketches they shared about *Dishonored*'s plot, a sense of tragedy permeated every discussion on the subject. Not limited to the awful plague, this doom and gloom seemed to suggest that the exploitation of whale oil and general disregard for the natural order of things has brought the civilization to the brink of oblivion. The macabre sight of the rotting corpse of a once-vibrant whale being suspended over a polluted canal as plague victims are unceremoniously dumped into the water is not a subtle image. How the Outsider is tied to the crisis looming on the horizon is a mystery as well, but unimaginably powerful



It's a very good thing that *Dishonored* has more looks than "grim, foggy, and grey"



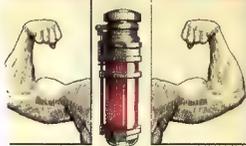
A THIRD TAKE ON MANSION INFILTRATION

Creep through door. Possess guard while hidden. Casually stroll into room using his body. Vision starts to flash; make it to dim nook before popping out of guard's body. Dagger to his neck as he vomits in reaction to possession. Other guards closing in on room, nowhere to hide. Trap one door with gadgets, hide in shadows near second. Spring razors dice incoming guards from one side, dagger takes care of other with minimal fuss. Path clear to objective



SOKOLOV'S FLIXIR

PROMOTES ROBUST
HEALTH & FITNESS



SHIELD TO PROTECT YOUR FAMILY FROM
THE SAVAGES OF THE REAL PLANE!



extra-dimensional beings with no identifiable concept of morality generally don't take corporeal form to dispense puppies and rainbows.

Whatever the specifics may be, the fate of this grim world is determined over a linear series of levels that largely revolve around eliminating one target or another within the Lord Regent's corrupt regime. This isn't an Elder Scrolls game that turns you loose to explore the world at your leisure, though everyone's experience will be different as they choose their path and affect the simulation in radically different ways based on their gameplay choices. The Hound Pits pub serves as a hub between missions and a base for the resistance organization. Here you can upgrade powers and gadgets (see sidebar) get briefed on the state of the world, and receive your next task.

Dishonored has dialogue options, but they're

infrequent and only come up when you have a real choice to make. The vast majority of the conversations takes place without stopping the action, keeping you in the first-person perspective while delivering the exposition or background you need to put current events into context. Players are never bogged down in gossipy dialogue trees.

SO MUCH MORE TO EXPLORE

We've only seen a fraction of Dishonored so far. We don't know how upgrades will improve your powers; the only variation we saw was a basic band ability that slows time instead of stopping it. We know very little of the story or the supporting cast of characters; all Arkane has shared is the basic premise. The developers said the one level we saw may not even make it into the final game.

And yet, Smith and Colantonio's vision for the game is a wonderful change of pace from the rank and file of modern mainstream action games. As *Deus Ex* and *Thief* proved, using a powerful set of tools in creative ways to solve problems is a proven approach to compelling game design, and *Dishonored* venerates that ideal beyond all others. Its mix of powers, mobility, environment, and AI goes so far beyond "use this piece of cover or another" and "use a machine gun or a sniper rifle." With Bethesda's creator-centric, vision-driven publishing model behind them, Arkane has a real chance to make something great.

Many games that share design elements with *Dishonored* – including even great titles like the first *Deus Ex* – give the players a discrete set of choices to make when faced with a situation. You can take a stealth approach, or a combat approach, or maybe a third approach if you have the right skill or power to unlock it. If *Dishonored*'s simulation lives up to Colantonio and Smith's dreams, it will do more than give players a choice of three doors to walk through. It will put them in a crowded city, with as many paths to the goal as players have ideas.

"We always thought this type of game would eventually be dominant; that an RPG is not physical and not visceral enough for people, and that a shooter is not deep enough," Smith reveals. If *Dishonored* doesn't live up to its promise, it won't be for lack of enthusiasm. ♦

Go to gameinfarmer.com/dishonored throughout the month for in-depth features on *Dishonored*, including but not limited to video interviews with co-creative directors Harvey Smith and Raf Colantonio, an interactive world map detailing the game's lore, and a look at how the cover image was created, and much more



Guards react differently to Corvo and other people at different times of day



Rats, whether natural or summoned, avoid lighted areas

TRICKS OF THE ASSASSIN'S TRADE

Some of the creative combinations you can come up with using Dishonored's powers:

BEND TIME + POSSESSION: Save your own ammunition by freezing the flow of time just as an enemy opens fire, then possessing him and moving him into his own line of fire. All projectiles are fully physics modeled, so have some fun with it.

RAT SWARM + POSSESSION: Fashion a quick escape by summoning a rat swarm and taking control of one of the little guys to slip out during the ensuing chaos. Just make sure not to get stepped on; dying while possessing something is a game over.

RAT SWARM + WINDBLAST: Crack a well-guarded, well-lit room by summoning a rat swarm and then using windblast to put out the fire illuminating the space. With no light to drive them away, the rats should go on the offensive, giving you the distraction you need.

A FOURTH OF MANY APPROACHES TO A SINGLE PATH

Creep through door. Didn't listen first, bad timing; spotted immediately by first guard. Summon swarm of rats to distract him. His friends respond to shouts, help him shake off rats. Too late; already possessed one of rats, ducked through tunnels into hallway during commotion. End possession, sprint down hallway before found by searching guards, objective reached.



E3
2011

THE HOT 50

E 3 2011 delivered the usual game-centric spectacle we've grown accustomed to, along with a pair of hardware announcements. Never mind the fact that Sony revealed just about everything about its Vita handheld in Japan a few months earlier, or that Nintendo's Wii U had all but been announced in a series of leaks. Some amazing games were on hand this year, showing that there's still plenty of life in this hardware generation, too. Take a look at the most impressive titles from the show.



Booker can wield powers in one hand and weapons in the other

Bioshock Infinite

Irrational Games aims high

With excellent franchises like *The Elder Scrolls*, *Mass Effect*, and *Assassin's Creed* on the show floor, picking one title as the best of E3 2011 might seem impossible. Even in such impressive company, *Bioshock Infinite* made the process much easier with a jaw-dropping performance that earns it our unanimous vote for the game of the show.

Highlighting interesting characters, spectacular cinematic moments, and high-flying combat, the section of *Bioshock Infinite* on display gives a tantalizing taste of how the final product will weave all of its elements together. A light-hearted exchange in a novelty shop instantly turns into nail-biting tension as the hulking mechanical Songbird lands outside and peers into the window, searching for protagonist Booker DeWitt and his companion, Elizabeth. A bizarre scene involving a dying horse is quickly followed by a firefight with one of the warring factions of Columbia. *Bioshock Infinite* seems to effortlessly hop between these various gameplay notes, lingering long enough to make an impact without overstaying its welcome.

For those who have been following *Bioshock Infinite* since it was first revealed last summer, it's important to note that a few things have changed and become better defined in the intervening months. First of all, the flying beast originally referred to only as "Him" is now named Songbird, and he is terrifying to see in action. Powerful and relentless, Songbird seems to be an impossible foe to fight; all of Booker's attempts in the E3 demo are unsuccessful. If players eventually have to defeat Songbird, we're curious about how Irrational plans to level the playing field.

Another major reveal is the nature of Elizabeth's true power. From the beginning, we know that she was being held captive by Songbird because of special abilities she possesses, but the aforementioned incident with a dying horse demonstrates how powerful she really is. Elizabeth can apparently access different realities and time periods, folding them over her current surroundings. In her efforts to treat

the injured horse, she apparently teleports the animal, Booker, and herself to an alternate future with cars, modern buildings, and a movie theater playing *Revenge of the Jedi* (the original working title for *Return of the Jedi*). This mind-boggling development begins to explain some of the anachronistic imagery and music that accompanied the first gameplay footage when the game was revealed.

Elizabeth's power also has combat applications; after Booker uses telekinesis to lift some bad guys off the ground, Elizabeth taps into another reality to make a cargo car appear on a nearby Sky Line (the rail system connecting the different sections of Columbia). The container crashes into the suspended enemies with the force of a train, taking them out of the fight. Booker can also use the Sky Lines himself thanks to an apparatus on his arm, soaring between areas, engaging in aerial battles, and jumping from one Sky Line to another. How exactly that last part will work without players missing the mark and plummeting through the sky has not been explained, but creative director Ken Levine has previously told *Game Informer*, "I want to make it clear: This is not a game where you stumble off a ledge and fall to

The wounded horse seems beyond help, but Elizabeth's powers might be able to twist reality and save the animal



THE TRUE PATRIOT HAS NOTHING TO FEAR FROM THE SONGBIRD

your death." Obviously, more specifics about the game's mechanics and controls will be revealed before release.

"Detractors want to believe that *Bioshock Infinite* is "more *Bioshock*, except in the sky," but no one who saw Irrational Games' latest project in action would make such an erroneous statement. *Bioshock Infinite* is not only poised to surpass its predecessors — it is also among the early frontrunners for the best game of 2012." — Joe Juba

» **Platform:** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC

» **Style:** 1-Player Action

» **Publisher:** 2K Games

» **Developer:** Irrational Games

» **Release:** 2012



The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

By Todd Howard, Lead Game Designer at Bethesda Game Studios

PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

1-Player
Role-Playing

Bethesda Softworks

Bethesda Game Studios

November 11

Between our Skyrim cover story and the ensuing month of online coverage, we've written plenty about Bethesda's upcoming RPG. None of that coverage lessened our excitement for seeing a new demo of the game at E3, narrated by designer Todd Howard.

The most readily apparent upgrade in Skyrim is the improved graphical capabilities of Bethesda's new engine. Objects in the world cast realistic shadows, and foliage is detailed and plentiful, which makes the outdoor areas look more authentic than Oblivion. As the player walks down a dirt path alongside a river leading to a small village, he stops to take in the sights. Howard takes the opportunity to remind us that the towering mountains we see in the distance actually exist in the game; travel long enough and you can make your way to the peak. Developers often use comments like these to demonstrate scale, but given the history of the Elder Scrolls franchise, we have no doubt Bethesda will deliver on the promise.

If you want to see your character and the scenery at the same time, you're in luck. Bethesda has continued refining the third-person view; smoother movement transitions make your character appear more natural when navigating the environment, and melee combat is no longer plagued by stilted animations. We doubt it will replace the default first-person perspective for most players, but for those who prefer it, Skyrim now looks playable from the third-person view.

In addition to the visual upgrades, the E3 demo shows off gameplay changes, including Skyrim's new emphasis on dual wielding. You equip each of your hands with weapons, shields, or magic, and their stats will level up naturally. Finding good combinations appears key to combat; using a freezing spell on a bandit temporarily stows him and turns him a frosty white. Follow that up with a sword strike from the opposite hand and the bandit barely stands a chance. Binding magic spells to both hands and using them simultaneously creates new effects, something we're look-

ing forward to experimenting with.

The most impressive aspect of Skyrim so far is the ability to encounter dragons. The intimidating size of the massive creatures is matched by their offensive capabilities. The dragons we saw circle their prey from the sky and swoop in for the kill, unleashing deadly fire-breathing attacks and claw swipes. Howard says that dragons serve as Skyrim's version of boss fights, and that there will be plenty of them in the final game. Unlike most video game boss fights, however, your encounters with dragons will be completely dynamic – don't expect any QTEs to save you from death. Luckily, you'll have Dragon Shouts to help take down your flying adversaries.

When Bethesda first revealed Dragon Shouts, we were unsure of the concept. Using chants in combat sounded awkward, but after seeing them in action, we're excited by the new

gameplay avenue they bring to gameplay.

Dragon Shouts serve as a third form of attack, and each shout you learn can be upgraded by discovering new words.

Toward the end of the demo, a dragon chases the player into a tower, circling up above as the player covers in the starway. Traditional weapons don't have much effect on the flying beast, so the player invokes a storm-based Dragon Shout. With just a few words, the clouds overhead turn black and rain pours down. Thunder rumbles in the distance, and just as the dragon swoops in for an attack, a bolt of lightning strikes the beast. Back on the ground, the player finishes the wounded dragon off with a combination of magic and melee attacks, but the vocal attack left us pondering the possibilities. If all Dragon Shouts are this impressive, we can't wait to expand our vocabulary.

Players will see a lot more variation in the Writ of Storms.





Here's a few tips: if you see a skeleton's eyes with glowing eyes, he's probably not your friend



Bethesda has put a lot of work into making these look more like



Battlefield 3

DICE deploys Battlefield's revamped multiplayer

» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

» Style
1-Player Shooter
(24-Player Online:
PS3, Xbox 360)
(64-Player Online: PC)

» Publisher
Electronic Arts

» Developer
DICE

» Release
October 25

The single-player Battlefield experiences have gradually improved with each installment, but it's no secret that the vast majority of people play the game for the online competition. While I extracted some basic multiplayer details from the team during our visit to Stockholm for the cover story in issue 215, they saved the big-est reveal for a hands-on E3 demo.

Before I could jump into combat, DICE general manager Karl-Magnus Troedsson shared some new details about how the class system has been restructured. The biggest change is the marriage of the assault and medic classes. After analyzing players' gameplay habits in Bad Company 2 and listening to community feedback, the team decided that since the assault class is typically the bullet fodder on the frontlines, it makes more sense to endow those soldiers with healing abilities like medic packs and defibrillators. These soldiers are armed with your standard array of assault rifles like the M4.

Combining those two classes cleared the way for the return of the support class, which now replenishes ammunition for teammates and uses LMGs in the field of battle. These weapons feature bipods that can be deployed on the ground, short walls, or even cars for increased stability when firing. In addition to re-supplying ammo to teammates, support players can rack up points via a new suppression mechanic. When firing at enemies, support players don't need to actually

hit them with bullets to affect their ability to fight. As bullets whiz over their head, the opposing player will lose combat awareness thanks to a gradual screen blur that evokes the sensation of being caught under fire. This forgiving scoring mechanic should make players with less twitchy trigger fingers still feel like they are contributing to the team.

The two other classes received small but interesting tweaks. Engineers still carry the anti-vehicle weapons and repair tools, but their weapons now support underling attachments. The one DICE showed off was a flashlight that can be used to blind approaching enemies in low-light conditions.

The biggest change to the recon class is a new sniping mechanic that requires shooters to press a button to hold their breath, which momentarily increases accuracy. Once your character exhales, however, the weapon will sway more for a short period of time, so timing your shot is critical. DICE added this mechanic to kill off the quick scoping exploit that plagued Bad Company.

Since snipers can go prone in BF 3, you might think it will be even harder to tell where shots are coming from. To even the playing field, the studio has added lens flare to sniper scopes, which should make it easier to spot aggressors at a distance and discourage snipers from camping in the same position the entire game.

DICE also overhauled the vehicle damage system. In the past, everyone inside a tank would die when a rocket took out the remaining vehicle armor. In Battlefield 3, this damage is location based, so if a rocket hits the back of the tank only the soldier in the rear is killed. Vehicles also become incapacitated now, so soldiers can use the turrets but can't move before an engineer repairs it.

When I spoke with DICE earlier this year about the lack of character customization, Patrick Bach admitted they would like to give players more control, but that it had to be done with respect to the uniforms. At E3 the team finally revealed their solution—customizable dog tags. Now when you knife an enemy to take his or her tags, you'll receive a unique item that highlights that person's Battlefield triumph of choice. The examples DICE offered included the number of kills with a specific weapon and total hours served.

Though it was nice to see the game in action again, I'm still eagerly waiting to see the epic 64-player PC battles, get my hands on the console version, and dig deeper into the Battlefield feature that promises stat tracking, social features, and possibly even media sharing. Look for more info on these features as we move closer to Battlefield 3's October 25 release date. » [Matt Bertz](#)



Thunder Run

At the EA press conference, DICE showed off a new eight-minute slice of action taken from the single-player campaign's Thunder Run mission. This tank-centric battle in the Karvaz desert in Iran started in the barren wasteland and eventually shifted to a PLR forward operations base. The battle unfolded more deliberately than the typical balls-to-the-wall moments in *nVai Call of Duty*, which hints that DICE may be striving for a documentary approach rather than showing as many set-piece moments as they can into the campaign. The most impressive part of the demo was the Frostbite 2 engine. The lighting, environmental detail, and explosions all looked spectacular. The sense of scale was also impressive, with a dozen tanks doing battle, LAVs deploying troops, soldiers moving into encampments, and strafing runs from planes overhead.





The First Tour of Duty

With no consoles in sight, the only hands-on multiplayer available at E3 was a 32-player PC match pitting the U.S. Marines against the Russian Spetsnaz. Though I was only able to play through one round, the experience was gratifying enough that I'm eagerly anticipating my next multiplayer battle.

The four-stage Rush map, Operation Metro, starts in an open urban garden, transitions into the underground subway, and eventually spills into the financial district directly in front of the Paris stock exchange. From the more open fight in the urban garden to the tighter choke points in the metro, each section of the map plays out differently. It's a refreshing change of pace in the midst of battle, and I'm betting DICE employs this philosophy with other maps in the game as well.

Even once the bullets started flying, it was hard not to stop and admire the impact the Prostate 2 engine makes on the battlefield. The varied lighting, realistic soldier animations, and impressive facade damage to buildings amidst the multiplayer chaos all take the experience to another level. Like *Mirror's Edge*, soldiers move with more of a sense of weight. When vaulting through the environment you can actually see your character plant his hands and swing his legs over the obstacles.

As a *Battlefield* vet, it didn't take long to adjust to the gunplay, which is a good thing in my book considering the series' pedigree. The attention to detail in the guns is impressive, the sporting mechanic introduced in *Bad Company 2* is back, and helping teammates by reviving them or dropping ammo boxes is the best way to generate tons of experience points in between kills.

Look for more multiplayer impressions in the coming months.



The sense of scale in *Battlefield 3* is impressive





Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

Naughty Dog keeps firing on all cylinders

» Platform:
PlayStation 3

» Style:
1-Player Action
(12-Player Online)

» Publisher:
Sony Computer
Entertainment

» Developer:
Naughty Dog

» Release:
November 1

When you release a revolutionary game, it's tough to preserve the innovative concepts. Other developers start adopting the influential design elements, and over time what was once a fresh approach becomes commonplace. Given the universal acclaim *Uncharted 2* received, Naughty Dog should be facing a similar challenge at the moment. But as the impressive *Uncharted 3* demos at E3 proved, other developers still have a way to go before they catch up to the talented studio.

At the Sony press conference, Naughty Dog once again wowed the audience with a thrilling new chapter of Nathan Drake's latest adventure. The demo joins our favorite adventurer on board a derelict cruise ship. A storm is sweeping over the sea, making it tough for Drake to keep his balance. Working his way to the interior of the ship, he stealthily takes down enemies until he's spotted in a large cargo hold. He puts his hands up, and when one of the antagonists approaches, Drake quickly head butts him, grabs a handgun and grenade, and starts shooting at the targets around the room. Drake tosses a grenade, but when it detonates it doesn't have the desired effect; it blasts a hole in the hull of the ship, and all hell breaks loose.

Water starts pouring into the hold, the cargo lurches across the floor, and suddenly the ship begins to capsize. The subsequent escape sequence showcases the game's impressive physics technology, while Drake navigates the ship's shifting content as water violently pours into every opening it can find. As the demo concludes, we see Drake desperately trying to avoid being overtaken by the oncoming flood.

Behind closed doors, Naughty Dog showed off a completely different demo that reunites Drake and his on-again/off-again love interest Elena at an airport under the moonlit cover of night. As they climb up to the top of a hangar, their destination presents itself in the background—a large cargo plane loading up for a journey. They climb down a ladder, only to find a gate standing

between them and the plane.

Drake tells Elena he'll climb to the top of the fence and help her up, but instead of assisting the lady he drops to the other side. Elena gives him that "not again" look, and Drake makes an excuse about this being a million-to-one shot and him not wanting to put her in harm's way again. She acquiesces, and Drake tells her to leave via a nearby jeep.

Before Drake makes it to the plane, a gate comes crashing closed and bullets start flying. They've been expecting him. He dodges the fire, avoids an explosion, and makes his escape up a ladder. Drake always shines in these unpredictable circumstances, and Naughty Dog is doing its best to make him look more capable than ever. As he works his way to the plane, he leaps into a group of barrels and lands on his feet like an agile street cat, jumps onto an enemy to take him out, and pulls armed foes from cover, neutralizing them with a punishing elbow. He successfully avoids the ambush, but the plane is already heading down the runway.

Living up to her reputation as a lifesaver, Elena screams onto the runway in the jeep and yells at Drake to grab on. His only shot is boarding the

plane via the landing gear. Once Elena catches up to the plane, he leaps onto the wheels and works his way up to the belly of the plane.

Alone in the dark bowels of the plane, Drake climbs his way up to the cargo via a series of vents. He's spotted by a burly guy in a headscarf who doesn't take kindly to Drake's stowaway status. The thug yanks Drake through the grates, puts him in a chokehold with one hand, and uses the other to open the cargo door. Not too enthused about being thrown out of a plane at 30,000 feet, Drake says, "Let's talk about this." The massive man throws him onto the extended cargo door and a fistfight ensues. After landing a few good blows, Drake makes his way back into the plane and breaks loose some of the cargo, which pours out the back of the plane, taking out the tough guy in the process.

The shifting cargo unsettles the rest of the gear, and Drake desperately fights against the tide of boxes and machinery. He tumbles over the gear as it pours out of the back of the plane, clinging at the last second to a loose piece of tarpaulin netting.

Just another day in the life of Nathan Drake. **» Matt Bertz**

Stating the Case for Multiplayer

Though *Uncharted 2* had a compelling multiplayer experience, most people remember the game for its best-in-class polish, impressive voice acting, and Hollywood-style action. With *Drake's Deception*, Naughty Dog hopes to boost its online community with several new features. The biggest changes include customizable characters, scripted events that recall the impressive set pieces from the campaign, and a new cooperative treasure-hunting mode that pits your team against enemy AI in a race to recover ancient artifacts.



Mass Effect 3

This is how the world ends



Commander Shepard has set foot on unexplored planets in the far reaches of space – locations containing giant beasts, lost technology, and extinct civilizations. For all of that adventuring, however, Shepard still hasn't visited one of the most important places in the galaxy: Earth. That is changing with Mass Effect 3; the game begins with a Reaper assault on the humans' home planet, and I got my hands on the sequence where Shepard flees the carnage in hopes of mounting a counterattack.

As the game begins, Shepard is on Earth to answer for a choice that left thousands of Batarians dead (detailed in Mass Effect 2's

Arrival DLC), but more urgent matters quickly surface. The Reapers descend on the planet, strategically striking key cities with overwhelming firepower. When I pick up the controller, my party consists of Shepard (male soldier version) and Captain Anderson surrounded by explosions and chaos, with multiple Reapers visible in the background.

Explosions can be heard from all directions, and the sky is filled with bullets and lasers. Suddenly, a wave of husks (humans repurposed into Reaper slaves) attacks, but the two seasoned warriors take them down with no problem – especially since I use Shepard's adrenaline rush ability to slow down time and line up some

good shots. After the assault, Shepard goes into a nearby building and finds a boy hiding from the Reapers in a ventilation shaft. Shepard kindly tries to coax him out (my other dialogue option was "Get out of there!"), but he slips away while the commander is briefly distracted by Anderson. Time is scarce and they don't pursue the child, since they need to signal the Normandy for extraction.

Once outside, I see an Alliance ship hovering over the city hopelessly trying to fight back... then it explodes in a nuclear flash. The blast sends Shepard and Anderson reeling, tumbling down an incline. Stepping over debris of fallen buildings, the duo encounters a new type of enemy called cannibals. They are like husks except they appear to be repurposed Batarrians, and are capable of devouring their fallen comrades to regain health. After mowing down the cannibals and activating a beacon for the Normandy to follow, the ship shortly appears overhead, but Anderson refuses to leave. He explains that the survivors on Earth need a leader, charging Shepard with traveling the galaxy and rallying other races. He then orders the Normandy to leave without him – but not before officially restoring Shepard's Alliance rank of commander.

As the Normandy lifts off, Shepard sees some civilian survivors boarding Alliance shuttles, including the boy from the ventilation shaft. Just when it seems like they may escape, a Reaper laser tears through the shuttles and they both explode, undoubtedly killing everyone on board. The death of the young boy clearly affects Shepard, but thousands more like him will die unless the Reapers can be stopped. The Normandy then leaves Earth, and it won't return until it has an entire fleet behind it. » Joe Juba

» Platform:
PlayStation 3,
Xbox 360, PC

» Style:
1-Player Shooter/RPG

» Publisher:
Electronic Arts

» Developer:
BioWare

» Release:
March 6



You won't just be seeing Reapers around around in space, Shepard and his team will have to fight the enormous machines.



The omni-blade is a melee weapon that allows Shepard to perform better in close combat, but you can still use the old-fashioned rifle butt, too.

Batman: Arkham City

The Dark Knight meets another classic villain

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

» **Style:**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher:**
Warner Bros. Interactive

» **Developer:**
Rocksteady Games

» **Release:**
October 18

Last issue we brought you news of Catwoman being a playable character in Arkham City, and while the hands-on demo at this year's E3 was based largely on the same section of gameplay, we picked up a few bits of new info along the way.

As the demo opens, Batman is perched atop the gargoyle of one of Arkham City's dilapidated buildings. The sheer scale of the Caped Crusader's new environment impressed me immediately; Batman is dwarfed by the size of the buildings in mayor Quincy Sharp's makeshift prison. After getting a bat's eye view of the slums via the new flight mechanics, it becomes clear that Arkham City features a lot more vertical gameplay. Gliding down alleyways and dropping on your prey from the rooftops makes you feel appropriately badass, and tempted me off the path to my objective more than once.

The main story mission serves as an introduction to a recently announced villain: the Penguin. Rocksteady is taking a realistic approach to the iconic antagonist, portraying him more like a tough, streetwise character in a Guy Ritchie film than Tim Burton's *Batman Returns*. The Penguin wastes no time in goading a dozen henchmen into fighting Batman for a spot on his gang, but new combat options makes it a fruitless exercise. Environmental takedowns, such as slamming a foe's head into a nearby railing, add even more flair to the Arkham City's stylish combat, and the ability to use gadgets mid-combo evokes a feeling similar to *Bulletstorm*, encouraging players to finish off foes with a creative flourish.

Despite Batman's new moves, the biggest treat of the demo was seeing Catwoman in action. Her back-and-forth repartee with Batman will surely entertain fans of the comics, and her purpose for being in Arkham City—to loot the treasures of other iconic villains—sounds like an exciting diversion on par with the new Riddler challenges. Catwoman navigating the city with a speed and grace that puts Altair and Ezio to shame doesn't hurt, either. With moves like that, this femme fatale may just steal the show from the Dark Knight. • Jeff Marchiafava



Catwoman is considerably faster than Batman, especially in combat.

Detective mode still comes in handy for sussing out dangerous situations.





The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword

By Andrew Reynolds

While getting a Zelda title at the launch of the Wii was a treat, *Twilight Princess* was essentially a GameCube game with tacked-on motion controls. Its overall quest was solid and the dungeons were as tricky as ever, but wagging the remote to slash Link's sword seemed like a poor replacement for a button press. With *Skyward Sword*, we're finally getting the first Wii Zelda built from the ground up for motion control. We played three distinctly different demos on the E3 show floor, and they have us excited about the game's direction.

First up is the bird racing minigame. Its place in the game's story isn't clear, but it certainly feels like an optional sidequest or (at most) a brief distraction in the overall quest. Link wears an outfit similar to his farmer's clothing from *Twilight Princess* as he competes to win a trophy in this flying competition. The race starts with Link and his three opponents diving off a cliff, then mounting their birds in mid-air. Shaking the Wii remote causes you to gain altitude, and pressing the A button activates a speed boost similar to Epona's carrots in *Ocarina of Time*. My objective is to reach a trophy bird before my opponents, and it gets more difficult on my second pass. They start shooting eggs at me in an effort to slow me down, but I eventually snag the trophy and ride off with Princess Zelda atop my giant bird.

The second demo is the most substantial of the three: a look at one of the dungeons. While it stays in line with series tradition by tasking you with finding keys, obtaining items, and making your way to the boss, I am surprised

by how clever some of the enemy encounters are. Most of my fights incorporate some sort of motion-based mini-puzzle. Most notable are the Skulltulas, who dangle from the ceiling in the dungeon's main hub area. To take them out, the first order of business is to snip their web line with the motion-controlled flying beetle item. Once they're on the ground, standard sword attacks do no damage thanks to their protective shell. You need to hold the Wii remote low to the ground, then flick it up in an effort to flip the spiders over. Once their weak bellies are exposed, all it takes is a few forward stabs of the Wii remote to defeat them. This strategy may not be complex, but it's more engaging than the "wait for them to turn around" strategy against *Ocarina's* Skulltulas.

Taking on a boss character is my last task. A ghostly, skinny female slowly approaches Link, and I notice her hand follows the location of my sword. When I try to strike, she catches the

blade between her fingers and knocks me back. After a couple failed attempts, I realize that I need to lure her hand to one location, then quickly alter my blade placement and slash before she can react. I start doing some damage with this method, so she switches tactics. She starts disappearing and throwing lines of five projectiles at me. These can be avoided by side-stepping, but it is also possible to send the projectiles back at her by matching their arrangement with a well-aimed swipe of Link's sword. I keep chipping away at her with various methods before finally taking her down, concluding one of the most unique boss fights in the series to date.

While almost every Zelda game reaches critical and commercial success, gamers have complained for years about the reshaped format. *Skyward Sword* doesn't shake up the pattern as a whole, but the clever inclusion of MotionPlus makes this entry the freshest since *Wind Waker*.

Wii
1-Player Action/Adventure
Nintendo
Nintendo
Holiday





Tomb Raider

Lara's looking better than ever

» Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC

» Style: Player Action/Platform

» Publisher: Square Enix

» Developer: Crystal Dynamics

» Release: Fall 2012

We broke the story on Crystal Dynamics' reboot of the Tomb Raider franchise with our cover story in issue 213, and we've been waiting to see more on the game ever since. Thankfully, at this year's E3 Square Enix had a new behind closed doors live demo.

The first half of the presentation revolved around the familiar sequence where a young Lara escapes death in a waterlogged cavern—a scene first described in our cover story. However, the second half of the demo showed a new level that takes place in a mountain village. It provided us with more insight into the game's attempt to develop Lara Croft as a character, and also showcased her legendary platforming abilities.

The sequence starts with Lara stumbling upon Conrad Roth, her mentor of sorts, locked in a battle with a wolf. The deadly Lupine eventually retreats, but not before mauling Roth badly. Lara rushes to his aid, helping him walk closer to his base camp and the campfire.

The situation is dire. Roth needs medical attention and a radio transmitter he left in the wolves' den. Lara is forced into action and begins platforming over the building in the village to reach the opening to the abandoned mine that serves as the den. Overall, the platforming seems easy and fast—more akin to Assassin's Creed than the laborious platforming of earlier Tomb Raiders. Weather also factors in, making things more difficult; at one point Lara slips off a rain-slick fuselage of a crashed plane suspended in the mountain.

After Lara makes it to the highly perched mine, she enters the dangerous den. Suddenly, she's attacked by a wolf and is forced to use one of her arrows as a weapon in an encounter that plays out in a brief quick-time event. Finally, she finds the transmitter and the first aid kit. From there, Lara negotiates her way back down to the base camp and ministers to Roth's wounds. At this point, the presenter stopped to tell us that base camps are where Lara can buy skills and upgrades, craft gear from salvage, and fast travel to other campsites.

Here, we get to see a more emotional side of the game. Roth tells Lara she has to be the one to find and climb the radio tower to install the transistor that might bring them help. As opposed to the quippy Lara of past games, this Lara is unsure of herself and scared, but also willing to risk her life to help her mentor. It's a nicely done sequence and helps cast Lara in a more complex light. The demo ended there, and we once again came away impressed by Tomb Raider. In terms of both gameplay and storytelling, Crystal Dynamics seems to have the franchise headed in a promising new direction. » **Matt Helgeson**

One man versus an entire fleet doesn't seem like such bad odds when there's a flamethrower in the mix



The team at Ubisoft Montreal is working to make combat more tactical, relying less on defensive posturing.



She may be the master assassin, but he's got Yusuf knowing the

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3

By Jason Richman and Jeff Labrecque



Delta squad assaults an enemy sub in the "Hunter Killer" mission



Slow-mo breaking-and-entering sequences make their setup



31 PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

33 1-Player Shooter
(Online TBA)

35 Activision

37 Infinity Ward/
Sledgehammer

39 November 8

Call of Duty historically hasn't featured much variance in its single-player campaigns. While they have their own unique setpiece moments, they're all action-packed, bullet-riddled, linear affairs. You might know what to expect year to year when it comes to single-player offerings, but the series has been all over the map in terms of multiplayer modes. Earlier entries featured standard deathmatches, but new options started springing up with Treyarch's zombie mode in *World at War*. Infinity Ward ditched the zombies for *Modern Warfare 2*, but added the two-player Spec Ops missions. Now the studio is looking to do more with MW 3's version of this mode; no longer a strictly mission-based affair, Spec Ops now features survival modes on every multiplayer map.

The survival missions are similar to the clones of *Gears of Wars'* horde mode that are in virtually every modern shooter, but they still manage to be a fun challenge. Early waves of enemies are of the standard variety, but dogs and boss fights join the fray later on, with the latter appearing regularly after a set amount of rounds. Bosses include juggernauts and helicopters, and they are often accompanied by standard forces. Things get crazier as you progress, with suicide bombers and even suicide dogs with C4 strapped to their backs. A red light starts flashing on their bombs after they fall, forcing you to get out of the blast radius if you want to escape unscathed.

A currency system is in place, rewarding you with cash for kills, streaks, and assorted per-round criteria. You can purchase various items with this cash, and they come in the form of new guns, ammo refills, autoturrets, equipment, and perks. You can also order air support, which is a great help when it comes to managing the relentless waves of enemy soldiers. Not only can you drop various air strikes, you can also enlist the help of fellow infantry. Delta squads will rappel down from a helicopter and join the fight if you have the cash.

Treyarch's zombie modes placed you against slow, plodding waves of the undead. This new Spec Ops mode feels like a completely different beast, as you're holding your ground against faster and much smarter enemies. With no wave cap, it's a sure bet that competitive COD players will post some insane scores to the leaderboards.

MW 3's multiplayer presence at the show was confined to Spec Ops, but a new campaign mission was showcased at Microsoft's press conference. "Hunter Killer" starts with the player joining a squad of soldiers in New York Harbor as they plant bombs on a Russian submarine. Once they take down the submerged target, they surface to see a war-torn New York City skyline get barraged by missiles. They board a surfaced sub and toss a grenade into the hatch, followed by an invasion on the craft. Fighting through the interior of the submarine reveals the return of the slow-mo breaking-and-entering mechanic we've seen in previous games. Once the good guys make it into the sub's control room, they launch missiles against an unknown target.

After an escape from the sub, the player boards a small seacraft and takes off amid the chaos in the harbor. Fighting off enemy boats, dodging explosions, and following the rest of your squad, your task is to safely make it to the escape helicopter before it takes off. This sequence resembled the driving-and-shooting snowmobile section of MW 2, albeit with far more activity onscreen.

If that sequence is any indication, the campaign won't be straying from the jaw-dropping, fast-paced missions from the series' past. Time will tell if gamers are trying of the same formula being repeated every year, but there's no doubt *Modern Warfare 3* will be near the top of the list of 2011's biggest sellers.



Modern Warfare 3 brings the war to NYC, along with several other iconic cities



Gears of War 3

Epic injects tower defense into Horde mode

When brainstorming concepts for Gears of War 3, Epic had a long list of improvements and features it wanted to integrate: make the biggest single-player campaign in series history, expand the co-op to include four players, fix the party matchmaking in multiplayer, and build a new multiplayer mode where players can become the Locust horde to fight against Marcus and Dom. Though it was undoubtedly the most popular addition to Gears of War 2, Horde mode also received a revamp.

Since Horde mode was introduced in 2008, the cooperative competition that pits a team of players against increasingly more difficult waves of enemies has become ubiquitous in shooters, appearing in a wide range of franchises including blockbusters like Halo (rebranded as Firefight mode), Call of Duty (Zombie mode), and Uncharted (Siege mode). To stay ahead of the pack, Epic knew it needed to step up its game.

Horde 2.0 preserves the primary mode construct—you're still squaring off against 50 waves of badlies—but adds a currency system, boss fights, and elements of tower defense to the

mix. By killing enemies and helping teammates, players earn cash to spend on ammo, new weapons, reviving downed comrades, or a new array of defensive deployments.

These new tools, which include barriers, manned turrets, sentry guns, and decoys, each have four tiers of upgrades. For instance, the first-level barrier is a spiked wall. If you upgrade it to the top tier it becomes a devastating laser fence. Mother Theresa types can also gift money if a mate is running low on cash and ammo, and strongly organized teams can pool their resources to acquire the more expensive, desirable toys like the Silverback, a mech armed with dual chainguns and rocket launchers.

If you find yourself short on cash, pay attention to the special challenges, which occur every fourth wave. Completing these team-based secondary objectives earns you a nice cash bonus that can reinvigorate your team, but they won't be easy to accomplish given their criteria. This could range from killing every enemy with headshots to dispatching a certain amount of Locusts with chainsaws.

The added firepower and defensive armaments, available for purchase come in especially handy every tenth wave, when menacing bosses like Eburaks and Beserkers join the normal group of headstrong Locusts. Fighting off the gigantic beasts and a horde of enemies at the same time takes savvy defensive coordination.

Epic knows many gamers spent the bulk of their Gears time in Horde mode, and when you're logging in long hours sometimes a change of pace is appreciated. With the new Mutators, players in private matches can have fun with the experience by adding wacky variables like big head mode or a television audience-style laugh track to the action.

Looking at the breadth of the Gears of War 3 package, no one can claim Epic was resting on its laurels during the game's two-and-a-half-year development cycle. We have all the information about the game you could possibly want. Now all that's left to do is jump into the fray on September 20. **—Matt Bertz**

Platform

Xbox 360

Style

1 to 4-Player Shooter (10-Player Online)

Publisher

Microsoft Game Studios

Developer

Epic Games

Release

September 20



Brothers in Arms: Furious 4

The franchise's most ambitious yet, set in the wake of *World War II* and *Borderlands*



30 PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

11 1 to 4-Player Shooter
(10-Player Online)

30 Ubisoft

37 Gearbox Software

2012

The Brothers in Arms series isn't known for braggadocio, humor, or arcade-like action, but when Ubisoft asked Gearbox Software to breathe new life into the series, the studio unflinchingly abandoned the tactical combat and somber tale of 101st Airborne soldier Matt Baker in favor of four-player co-op with an absurdist bent. Mix the playful action of *Bulletstorm*, the XP addiction of *Borderlands*, and the irreverent tone of *Inglourious Basterds*, and you have a good idea of what to expect from this alternate universe Brothers in Arms.

"Furious 4 is a different kind of war game," said Gearbox creative director Mikey Neumann during an E3 demo. "It's about the stories between soldiers—the legends, the tall tales." Like Quentin Tarantino's award-winning *World War II* film, the game sets aside the grim reality of war in favor of a far-fetched yarn where an ultra-violent group of soldiers hunt down Adolf Hitler.

Four players can experience the campaign together online or in split screen, and like *Borderlands*, each of the four soldiers brings something unique to the table. The towering lumberjack-turned-Nazi-slayer Montana lugs around a chaingun, the wily Texan Crockett brands his victims with a cattle iron, the mentally unstable Irishman Stitch uses a homemade taser, and the Native American Chok prefers to take out his enemies by lodging hatchets in their skulls.

The E3 demo joins the ragtag group as they infiltrate a German town where the Nazis are celebrating Oktoberfest. Rumors point to the Führer's attendance, so the heroes crash the boozefest to introduce themselves. The town is in full party mode, with carnival tents, a carousel, a Ferris wheel, and a large zeppelin stationed above the festivities.

When the band of brothers comes across a bar full of soldiers at the edge of town, they each take a breaching position outside the establishment. Once everyone is in position, the game triggers the ambush. The soldiers burst through the door and start emptying their clips into anything that moves—no fancy tactics here. As in *Bulletstorm*, alerts flash across the screen when players score double kills or other small feats, and XP tallies as they rack up a bodycount.

Players can spend this XP on new weapons, perks, and makeshift gadgets. If the weapons I saw during the E3 demo are a good indicator, *Furious 4* features a more playful arsenal than your standard WWII shooter. The four Allies brandish several entertaining weapons in the ensuing bloodbath, including a flamethrower, chainsaw, and a bear trap armed with a grenade.

As the group moves through the town, they stumble upon an even bigger beer hall. Rather than knock politely, the *Furious 4* commander and Nazi vehicle and crash through the front door in glorious Hollywood fashion, downing surprised Germans before they have time to put down their beer steins in a stylish slow-motion shooting sequence. The battle eventually spills outside again and increases in magnitude when the Nazis break out the big guns—jetpack-wearing SS soldiers armed with rocket launchers, an attack chopper, and a massive miniboss armed with a chaingun protruding from a giant metal shield. The demo comes to a spectacular finish when the gang takes down the chopper, which crashes violently into the Ferris wheel and brings it tumbling down.

When Ubisoft announced Brothers in Arms: Furious 4 at its E3 press conference, I admit I groaned at the derivative premise, but after

What About Sergeant Baker?



When Ubisoft announced the bold new direction for Brothers in Arms, many fans wondered why Gearbox abandoned the strategy-centric philosophy and dedication to realism that steered the *World War II* series to this point. Though there is no timetable for the next game, Gearbox assured us that it still plans to return to the story of Staff Sergeant Matt Baker of the 101st Airborne in the future.

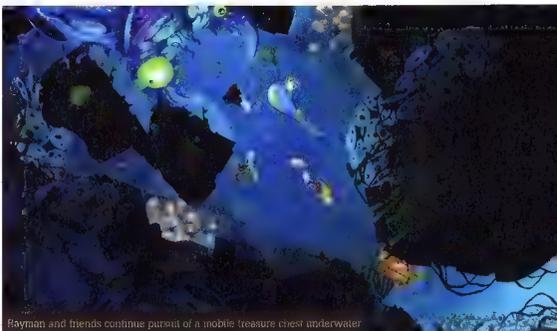
seeing the game in action I'm on board with the lighthearted shooter. The combat looks polished, the four-player co-op campaign is a major draw, and the deep leveling system should keep people coming back. If the 10-player multiplayer brings some new ideas to the table as well, this bubbegum shooter could be one of the surprise hits in 2012. »

Rayman Origins

13



Rayman Origins' colorful palette is a welcome change from the standard, dreary WWII shooters



Rayman and friends continue pursuit of a mobile treasure chest underwater

Eight years after the limless hero's last traditional console appearance in Hoodlum Havoc, Rayman reclaims the spotlight usurped by the wily Rabbids for an origin story packed with the franchise's most memorable characters. Under the direction of Rayman creator Michel Ancel, Origins is a colorful platformer boasting hand-drawn aesthetics that brings concept art to life.

In a hands-on demo, I take control of Globox while my other two companions assume the roles of Rayman and Teensy (up to four players can join in, but you're welcome to go at it alone). Once we give the accessible controls a quick test run, the three of us hop into a portal to kick off our adventure. An athletic level puts our heroes in pursuit of a mobile treasure chest, and we break into a speed run to catch the swift chest while taking calculated hops across platforms, avoiding spikes and other hazards along the way. We eventually encounter a Tetris-inspired sequence (complete with the classic tune) where blocks of different shapes drop down to create a path across a dangerous pit. We find ourselves in a hellish kitchen as we avoid hot lava and climb past vines lined with chili peppers to inch closer to our target. The next sequence places us underwater where we quickly swim to collect the newly designed Lums while being pursued by a large, prickly enemy. I was constantly surprised with the excellent, unpredictable level design that kept me on my toes.

Whenever our heroes fall into harm's way, they temporarily turn into balloons and float through the stage (under your control), which makes it easier to reach the end of a level if your platforming skills need some work. If the rest of your buddies fall into this state, everyone starts over from the last checkpoint. If you're feeling malicious, you're free to nudge your friends toward their doom—just don't walk right into an enemy projectile as the last man standing or you'll set your entire team back. These multiplayer features will either help strengthen friendships or tear them apart when the gorgeous platformer hits retail this holiday. —Annette Gonzalez

PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

1 to 4-Player
Platformer

Ubisoft

Ubisoft Montpellier

Holiday



Saints Row: The Third

Volition continues to impress with the Saints' latest showing

» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

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

» Publisher
THQ

» Developer
Volition

» Release
November 15

When we visited Volition for our Saints Row: The Third cover story earlier this year, it was evident that the franchise is moving in a direction that distinctly separates it from other games in the open-world genre, thanks in no small part to its wicked sense of humor and disregard for realism or decency. What I saw at E3 further enforced my feeling that Saints Row: The Third will be one of the most entertaining games of this holiday season, even amidst more straight-faced, heavy-hitting franchises.

The Saints are moving to the city of Steelport in this new game, and the demo mission kicks off the series of events that lead them there. Donning gigantic Johnny Gat bobblehead masks, the gang attempts a risky bank robbery in their old stomping grounds of Stilwater. Bursting in with guns blazing, the gang is confronted by an army of security guards and eventually SWAT teams. While taking human shields and indiscriminately firing grenade launchers at everything that moves, the gang makes its way upstairs to the bank's vault.

Helicopters rain minigun fire into the building as they drop waves and waves of additional police into the bank. After taking out several dozen officers, it becomes apparent their bold plan involves airlifting the bank's vault straight out of the ceiling with their own helicopter. Your character breaks inside the vault and tries to hold onto steady ground as the chopper lifts the structure and all of its valuables into the sky. Stilwater's police haven't given up yet, so you have to blast away while trying to keep your footing. When all is said and done, the odds are stacked against the Saints and your character is taken captive by police. This single mission in Stilwater is what eventually causes the boys in purple to move to Steelport. After an even more ridiculous mission involving a mid-air gun battle (detailed in our April cover story), you land in the new city and call on the rest of your gang to migrate.

After the bank mission concluded, senior producer Greg Donovan took the controls and gave me a glimpse of the open-world havoc you can wreak in Steelport. Sure to satisfy anyone with a juvenile sense of humor, every single weapon comes equipped with its own specific animation, for melee strikes to the groin. In addition, a wide variety of animations can be triggered by sprinting at an enemy or pedestrian and hitting the melee button. One features the player character sprinting up to an old woman, jumping in the air, slamming her head into the pavement, and then propping himself up on the sidewalk like he was posing for a photo shoot.

After torturing the groins of dozens of Steelport citizens, Donovan spawned the VTOL (Vertical, Take-Off and Landing) aircraft. This menacing vehicle resembles a Warhawk, and it can switch from hover mode to jet mode with the press of a button. With its built-in missile launchers and laser beam, players should have no problem getting into trouble with this dangerous new aircraft.

Many elements of Saints Row: The Third resemble a less cartoony and more violent version of Looney Tunes. Volition started separating the franchise from the rest of the open-world crime genre with Saints Row 2, but this year's installment looks to be the most unique and hilarious yet. — Dan Ryckert



Far Cry 3

Far Cry 3 was easily Ubisoft's biggest surprise at E3 – not just the fact that it exists, but that it appears to be such a departure from the last game. Returning to a tropical island setting similar to that from the original Far Cry, players take on the role of Jason Brody, a man whose boat has crashed on a lush locale full of inhabitants who seem to have gone crazy.

As the first demo for the game kicks off, Brody is on a ledge overlooking the island, stealthily taking pictures as some armed baddies ruthlessly beat and murder innocents in the distance. No sooner has Brody snapped a few photos than he is disrupted and knocked out.

When Brody returns to consciousness, he is staring into the terrifying face of a man named Vaas who recounts the definition of insanity: "Doing the exact same f---ing thing over and over again expecting s--- to change." This thug may be foul-mouthed, but he has a creepy eloquence that reminds me of Far Cry 2's antagonist, the Jackal.

He's also dangerous. After another half-minute of talking about what it means to be crazy, he informs Brody, "I don't like the way you are looking at me," and throws his chair. Players can make Brody struggle with the rope binding his hands, but otherwise they are stuck watching and waiting during this tense monologue.

Vaas finally snaps entirely, claiming that he has "already killed you once" and throwing Brody hundreds of feet down into a body of water with a block of concrete attached to his foot. After much struggling, Brody escapes and swims up past a disturbing scene of multiple other bodies left floating in this way. Clearly he's not the only one who has angered Vaas recently.

Brody swims out past a waterfall, using the sound of the water to mask the noise as he kills a patrolling guard. Here's where the differences between Far Cry 2 and 3 start sticking out. For one, the bottom left corner of the screen features a large map, useful for navigation but a noticeable change from the nearly HUD-less nature of the last game.

If that's not enough to pull you out of the experience somewhat, I also notice a big "+10" flash across the screen when Brody kills the guard, just like you see when killing someone in Call of Duty multiplayer. While Ubisoft won't spill many details, they confirmed that Far Cry 3 has a leveling system that allows players to develop the character and build skills. This new system has potential, but I'm surprised at how big of a change it is from Far Cry 2. Then again, the sequel was a huge departure from the original as well, so maybe that's the calling card of this franchise.

Brody can search the bodies of fallen foes for money and ammo, and any weapons that he can pick up flash yellow on the ground. Ubisoft representatives tell me that the island is fairly wide open for players to explore, but the rest of the demo is more or less a straight shot. Brody runs forward until he hears a helicopter and

decides that could be his ticket off the island.

Brody leaps down off a ledge, driving his knife right into the heart of a guard waiting below – plus 15 points. Then he sneaks over to another nearby guard, steals the knife that hangs from that guard's side, and stabs him with it – plus 10 points. As he gets closer to the helicopter, Brody gives up stealth and starts shooting up Vaas' henchmen with a machine gun – plus 15 points each for the first two headshots and plus 10 for a body kill.

As numbers and bullets fly around him, Brody makes it to the helicopter. He puts a gun to the pilot's head, demanding that he fly. They nearly escape...but someone on the ground has a rocket launcher and brings the helicopter down.

Brody passes out once more and once again wakes up to Vaas' crazed expression as the demo ends.

The constant back-and-forth between the tense stealth action and the RPG elements provides a strange juxtaposition. It's possible that they won't feel as immersion-shattering once I get my hands on the game. It's also possible the big floating numbers will be toned down in the end – this E3 demo was a very early look at the game, which isn't due out until 2012. However that portion of the gameplay ends up developing, I'm intrigued by Far Cry 3's mysterious island and crazy enemies, and I'm looking forward to discovering the definition of insanity for myself as I explore the game further. »

PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

1-Player Shooter
(Multiplayer TBA)

Ubisoft

Ubisoft Montreal/
Ubisoft Massive/
Ubisoft Shanghai

2012



Bastion

A chance to create your own story

16

Platform Xbox 360 & PS3 • Genre Action/RPG • Publisher Warner Bros. Interactive
Developer Supergiant Games • Release Summer

Rarely do downloadable games make a big splash at E3, but with the style and charm that Supergiant Games has infused into its quirky RPG, Bastion proved impossible to ignore.

Bastion's dynamic spoken narrative fills us in on the backstory as we explore the game's early levels, integrating our actions and on-screen events seamlessly into the story. The gravely voiced narrator describes enemies as they appear, the weapons we pick, and the objects we smash up along the way. When we accidentally roll off the edge of a nearby

cliff, the disembodied voice says "...and then he falls to his death" without missing a beat. The malleable narrative made us feel like active participants in the story, not just observers. Thanks to tight controls and a fast-paced mix of melee and projectile-based combat, Bastion is a lot of fun to play, too.

The best news is that unlike most of the games on our Top 50 list, you won't have to wait long to play Bastion. The game will be released in late July/early August, as part of Microsoft's Summer of Arcade promotion. » Jeff Marchiava

Final Fantasy XIII-2

Five big changes for the sequel



Platform PlayStation 3
Xbox 360
Style
1-Player Role-Playing

Publisher Square Enix
Developer Square Enix

Release January

Final Fantasy XIII may be a divisive game in the series, but it still achieved enough success to spark a direct sequel—a distinction previously held only by Final Fantasy X. We had an exclusive blowout of Final Fantasy XIII-2 in our last issue (complete with hands-on impressions), but after spending additional time with the game at E3, five major changes stand out as the things that FF XIII fans need to know.

Less Linearity

The loudest criticism from FF XIII was the lack of player freedom when it came to exploring the world and advancing the story. The development team is acutely aware of this issue, adding more branching paths to the environments and allowing players to proceed at their own pace.

Unstable Rifts

These puzzle sequences occur in isolated areas that players warp to while exploring dungeons. In the rifts, players collect crystals floating on increasingly complex paths of red tiles. Each tile can only be stepped on once before disappearing, so you'll have to plan your route carefully.

Button-Press Events

Instead of just watching cutscenes, now you'll have chances to participate by following on-screen prompts and pressing buttons during certain action sequences. Chasing after overused action game mechanics seems like an odd move for Final Fantasy, but we'll see how it all plays out in the finished product.

Monster Allies

Certain enemies now join you permanently, and can be rotated into battle to act as party members. These monsters are obtained as post-encounter drops after you beat them, and in combat they use their special abilities to fill roles in your paradigms (like ravager or sentinel).

Multiple Endings

While this sequel is still focused on telling a story, you'll have the opportunity to influence the conclusion. This isn't like the hidden endings of Final Fantasy X-2, where you need to attain a certain completion percentage to see the whole story; choice will determine which ending players receive. » Joe Juba

Twisted Metal

Vehicular combat makes an exciting return to form

17

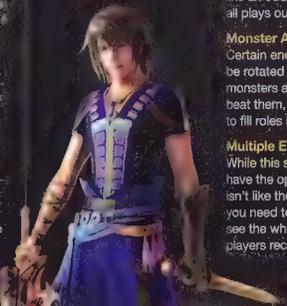
Platform PlayStation 3 • Style 1 to 4-Player Action (6-Player Online)
Publisher Sony Computer Entertainment • Developer Eat Sleep Play • Release October

With its big return set for October, I couldn't wait to get my hands on Twisted Metal on the E3 show floor. I checked out a massive boss fight and a good old-fashioned challenge match, and walked away more excited than ever about Eat Sleep Play's vehicular combat comeback.

Three boss fights pop up throughout the game's campaign, and I took a look at one called Iron Maiden. She's a monstrous robotic doll keen on showering you with explosive projectiles as you career down

a mountain path. You have to stay close to her during the chase, which is followed by a fight at a bridge she crashes through. There aren't many large-scale boss fights in the series outside of Dark Tooth and Warhawk, so it's nice to see a designed enemy encounter on this scale.

Boss fights aren't the only impressive aspect of this reboot. Everything I've seen from challenge mode to the easily accessible energy attacks—points to this entry standing alongside TM 2 and Black as one of the best in the franchise. » Dan Ryckert



Rage

Claustrophobic interiors evoke classic id shooting spaces



We didn't run into these mutants during our demo, but we're guessing that shooting them in their glowing bubbly areas is a good idea.



If you're lucky, Rage's different factions will occasionally nosh on each other, allowing you to sit back and watch the carnage.



Last year's E3 demo of *Rage* took players out of the tight corridors id shooters are known for and placed them in the expansive, wasteland of the game's post-apocalyptic setting. This year I went on a daring rescue mission in the claustrophobic hallways of an Authority prison, proving that the developer is still the king of close-quarter encounters and tight gunplay.

My objective was to break an ally out of the prison for undisclosed reasons, but as the level starts I'm less concerned with the particulars of the mission and more focused on the throngs of Authority soldiers trying to kill me. Unlike the wasteland's melee-focused mutants, members of the Authority pack formidable equipment, including body armor, bulletproof helmets (which thankfully have a penchant for flying off when shot), and electric shields.

As I make my way deeper into the decrepit facility, I see more diverse behavior from my new foes. Some take cover and duck out to fire in controlled bursts, while others form up behind shielded guards and methodically approach my position. I run low on ammo before long, requiring a hasty retreat into an adjacent hallway. Thankfully, I have a multitude of *Rage*'s quick-use items at my disposal. I use my EMP grenades to disable the enemies' shields and shut down the prison's laser gates, and place an automated turret in front of a doorway to help fend off trailing soldiers. My favorite technique is using the spider-like sentry bots to draw the attention of guards, allowing me precious opportunities to flank them and attack from the sides. Most of my foes didn't even know what hit them.

As I approach my jailed ally, I take advantage of an environmental trap to dispatch two patrolling guards. A quick flip of a switch releases some bloodthirsty mutants incarcerated nearby, and completing my objective is just a matter of watching the ensuing chaos and finishing off the survivors. The demo ends with a wave of Authority soldiers ambushing me and my newly liberated friend, but my time with the game was nonetheless reassuring. Unlike the sterile corridors of *id*'s old shooters, the interiors I saw were awash in unique details, and as fun to explore as *Rage*'s wide open vistas. » Jeff Marchiafava

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

» **Style:**
1 or 2-Player Shooter
(6-Player Online)

» **Publisher:**
Bethesda Softworks

» **Developer:**
id Software

» **Release:**
September 13

Metro: Last Light

A light at the end of the tunnel

» **Platform** PS3, Xbox 360, PC
» **Publisher** THQ » **Developer** 4A Games » **Release** 2012

Last year's *Metro 2033* was a solid if divisive shooter based on a popular Russian novel by Dmitry Glukhovsky. Its upcoming sequel, *Metro: Last Light*, was originally pegged to follow the story of the book's follow-up, *Metro 2034*. However, the team at 4A Games chose to head down a different path. Where the novel *Metro 2033* features plenty of action, world-building, and other stuff that works in games, *Metro 2034* is a more offbeat narrative that would be much harder to translate to gameplay.

Instead of being a slave to its source material, *Last Light's* independence should help improve on the areas where *2033* struggled. I witnessed one section

of the game where protagonist Artyom works his way up a series of train cars, taking out waves of enemies. Though it was hard to tell without going hands-on, gunplay seemed more responsive, and weapons seemed more powerful than last time around. That feeling was aided by the destructive environments that allow Artyom and his opponents to blow up sources of cover around the battlefield.

I am convinced of developer 4A Games' commitment to addressing the concerns some gamers had with *2033*. Now, I just need to be certain that the studio can maintain the fascinating world that drew me in without a book to guide it. — Phil Kollar



Uncharted: Golden Abyss

Nathan Drake makes an impressive jump to the small screen

» **Platform** Vita, PS3
» **Developer** Sony Bend » **Release** 2012

With the first two entries of the *Uncharted* franchise, Naughty Dog delivered gameplay experiences comparable to big-budget blockbuster films that showcased the PlayStation 3's power. Sony Bend is taking the reins as Nathan Drake makes the jump to handhelds for *Uncharted: Golden Abyss*, a prequel to the original *Uncharted* that already looks like it's delivering a cinematic experience on par with its console brethren.

Sony Bend, the team behind *Resistance: Retribution* on PSP, is making full use of the Vita's capabilities to deliver a faithful entry in the *Uncharted* series. One feature of note is the clever use of the handheld's

touch screen, which can be used while climbing to tap on your destination, prompting our favorite treasure hunter to automatically traverse the dangerous path. Standard controls that put your platforming skills to the test are still an option as well. Cover-based combat mechanics in *Golden Abyss* remain largely the same as its predecessors, and even with the absence of L2 and R2 buttons, *Uncharted* fans should get acclimated quickly.

Golden Abyss has been a great asset for Sony to showcase the Vita's capabilities, and it could be a real system-seller. — Annette Gonzalez

FIFA 12

A new physics engine takes EA footie to the next level

» **Platform** PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

» **Style** 1 to 4-Player Sports

(2-2 Player Online)

» **Publisher** EA Sports

» **Developer** EA Canada

» **Release** Fall

EA Sports' soccer series has enjoyed an impressive run over the last couple years but as with any sports title on the yearly cycle, the rough edges often robbed the experiences of their sense of realism.

For *FIFA 11*, the roughest edge was the atrocious clipping that occasionally occurred during tackles. Players were immediately yanked from the fantasy when player arms morphed through bodies as the flesh of two players merged while fighting for possession. *FIFA 12's* new player-impact engine attempts to eliminate these unsightly problems. As I played a pre-alpha build of the game at E3, I witnessed natural knee-on-knee collisions, forceful tackles with realistic outcomes, and physical on-ball defensive



encounters determined by a combination of the players' size, strength, and skill. The variation of these animations was impressive, and I wouldn't be surprised to see it become the new benchmark for sports animation systems when the game releases.

Another area that needed major improvement was the dribbling. In previous *FIFA* games, the players could dribble in 360 degrees, but they looked foolish when changing directions quickly because they always kicked the ball too far in front of themselves. *FIFA 12's* new precision-dribbling mechanics gives you more control in tight spaces, eliminating this hassle by keeping the ball much closer to your player. With skilled possession players like Lionel Messi, you can toy with lesser defenders by using your player's body to shield the ball from them and stringing

together quick dribbling moves that leave them eating grass.

FIFA is starting to capture the unpredictability of the sport by integrating the new dribbling system in tandem with a revamped defensive system, eliminating the do-it-all defend button that magically magnetized your back to his mark. By forcing defenders to manually tackle instead of relying on the pressure button, suddenly natural odd-man rushes develop and defenses stretch enough to allow the occasional offensive flourish. After playing two games, I practically forgot about my normal, predictable strategy of attacking down the wings and swinging a cross into the middle of the goal box.

Taken together, these new gameplay features have *FIFA 12* primed for a run for the top of the tables. — Matt Bertz





Forza Motorsport 4

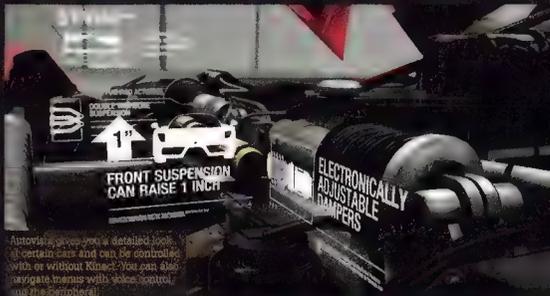
New twists and turns for the series

When the Forza Motorsport series first debuted on the original Xbox, the goal was to match the sim-based fidelity set by the Gran Turismo franchise. Now that the team over at Turn 10 Studios has met that challenge, it's looking for other ways to differentiate itself. Perhaps Kinect is the answer.

Forza 4 lets you race via Kinect in the one-off Quick Race mode (using auto gas/brake), but that's not how Forza 4 best uses the motion peripheral. Autovista is a new mode that makes use of Kinect in a car showroom setting to highlight the features of a select number of cars. You can use Kinect to walk around them, get inside the cockpit, and even turn the ignition using hand gestures (although you can also navigate using the d-pad). Detailed information is available if you look under the hood or point out specific areas of the vehicle, and you can also hear about the car in witty blurbs written and narrated by *Top Gear's* Jeremy Clarkson. Finally, out on the track you can use Kinect to move the car's camera to look around you as you race.

For the game's career mode, the calendar system in Forza 3 is being scrapped in favor of a globetrotting World Tour mode with new tracks. Microsoft says that even though the calendar is gone, you'll still have choices to make during your career (including what car you get when you win a race series), and the mode adds new racing types like drift and multiple-heat races to the normal circuit runs. Along the way you'll run into adaptive opponent AI that will try and match difficulty and car upgrades to test your skills.

It wouldn't be a Forza game without features to excite the online community, and Turn 10 is now offering car clubs in Forza 4 complete with shared garages and rivalry status. Whether you're into online racing and sharing your custom-created livery, the new Kinect features, or traveling the globe to be the best racer in the world, Forza 4 aims to be everything to every sim-racing fan out there. — Matthew Kato



Autovista gives you a detailed look at certain cars and can be controlled with or without Kinect. You can also navigate menus with voice control, and multiplayer.

- » **Platform:** Xbox 360
- » **Style:** 1 or 2-Player Racing (18-Player Online)
- » **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios
- » **Developer:** Turn 10 Studios
- » **Release:** October 11, 2011



The game features 80 manufacturers and new lighting engines, as well as new tracks and race types.



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Kirby Wii

Nintendo's most adorable character sucks harder than ever

- » Platform: Wii
- » Style: 1 to 4-Player Platforming
- » Publisher: Nintendo
- » Developer: HAL Laboratory
- » Release: Fall

Though Nintendo bafflingly left it out of its press conference, the follow-up to last year's excellent Kirby's Epic Yarn was on display at E3, and it's looking just as adorable and fun. The art style and gameplay hark back to a much more traditional Kirby style, but the number of possible co-op players has been upped to four.

This time around, each extra partner controls a unique character rather than a scowling Kirby clone. For reasons that remain unclear, Kirby is teaming up with old foes such as Meta Knight, and King Dedede on this adventure, and co-op players stepping into those characters' shoes will have their own weapons and their own unique feel.

As for Kirby himself, he's back to his classic,

endlessly voracious, pink puffball form, which means sucking enemies into his absurdly large mouth rather than just untangling them. As in the underrated SNES game Kirby Super Star, he can swallow enemies he's sucked up in order to steal their abilities. I didn't notice any abilities I had never seen in a Kirby game before, but fan favorites such as fire, eye beam, and boomerang are all present.

Extra-large, ultra-powered enemies provide a twist on the recognizable formula. In order to swallow these foes (or anything else larger than usual), Kirby performs a super-sucking move that's accomplished by shaking the Wii remote as he's inhaling.

Devouring an ultra-powered enemy is the equivalent of getting an invincibility star in Mario,

but cooler—Kirby becomes untouchable for a short period of time and gains an exaggerated version of the enemy's abilities. For example, I swallow a sword-using foe and transform into a giant Kirby swinging an oversized blade that would look at home on a Final Fantasy character. The weapon not only wipes out enemies with ease, it also destroys parts of the environment.

Kirby Wii is shaping up to be an excellent late-life Wii release that continues one of the few inarguably positive trends the system had: a return to fantastic 2D platforming titles from the publisher that perfected the style decades ago. Nintendo might be more or less ignoring this game, but I won't when it comes out this fall. » Phil Kollar

25

Tera

Politics and action-oriented combat differentiate this fantasy MMO

- » Platform: PC
- » Style: 1-Player Action/MMO
- » Publisher: En Masse
- » Developer: Bluehole Studio
- » Release: 2011

It takes a lot to sell me on a Korean MMORPG these days. The hands-on time I had with Tera at E3 this year accomplished it by pitting me, and four others against an enormous boss in an action-packed melee—and long-awaited details on the game's player-driven political system sealed the deal.

Tera's combat takes inspiration from classic MMORPGs like EverQuest and World of Warcraft in that you activate skills from a hotbar and chain them together to perform devastating combos, but the addition of true positioning and dodging makes the gameplay much more immediate and involving. You don't select targets; you swing your sword (or launch your fireball) and damage

is done if your attack animation connects with an enemy's hitbox. Manual dodging and positioning is therefore a key component of battle in Tera—and I can assure you that it goes much further than "don't stand in the fire."

We knew that players could be elected to political office or fight their way through group-based PvP before, but En Masse went into more detail on the political system. The Vanarch (governor of a province can set taxes, invite specialty NPC merchants to set up shop, and imprison opponents within his or her domain. However, Vanarchs need policy points to not get kicked out of office. These are gained when other players in your province voluntarily give them to

you if they think you're doing a good job, or by completing difficult max-level quests. I'm hopeful that the emergent gameplay around the title of Vanarch (and the yet-to-be-detailed continent-ruling Exarch position) creates a rich setting to adventure in.

Tera looks amazing, but I was impressed by the tight gameplay and intriguing political system much more than by the pretty art style. If everything goes right, this could be a great mix between World of Warcraft's rigid content and EVE's outthroat player-driven world. » Adam Blesener





Luigi's Mansion 2

Bustin' makes me feel green

If you recognize Next Level Games as the developer that recently revived Nintendo's long-dormant Punch-Out!! franchise on the Wii, then you probably already understand the studio's modus operandi for bringing an unexpected sequel to this oft-ignored GameCube launch title. Luigi's Mansion 2 remains faithful to the original game while building on that foundation to draw in new 3DS owners.

The core gameplay consists of exploring various haunted mansions – despite the title, there are several locations – and cleansing them of

their spectral inhabitants with a paranormal vacuum cleaner. The top screen features the spooky game world in half-curling full 3D, while the bottom screen has a map and HUD. The vacuum is controlled with the shoulder buttons, one of which sucks ghosts and other objects in, while the other pushes them away.

In the first mansion, I guide Luigi into the garage, collecting bits of money (in the form of traditional Mario coins as well as paper bills and gold bars) and sucking up cobwebs along the way. I open a treasure chest containing a key to

unlock a door further in the mansion. Before I can exit, the door seals shut with some otherworldly force, and a ghost pops up in the seat of the old automobile nearby, causing Luigi to jump with fright.

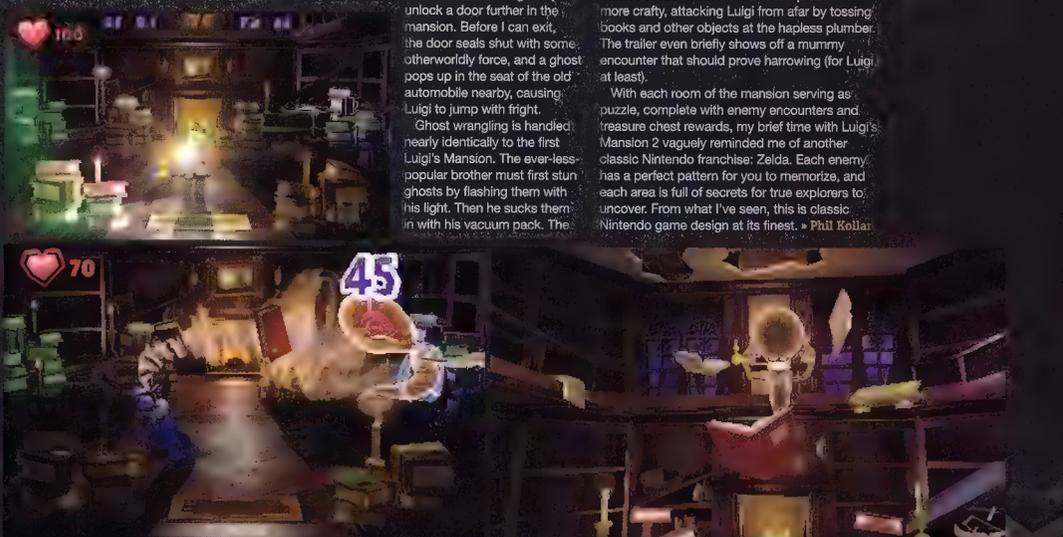
Ghost wrangling is handled nearly identically to the first Luigi's Mansion. The ever-less-popular brother must first stun ghosts by flashing them with his light. Then he sucks them in with his vacuum pack. The

ghosts will attempt to escape, dragging Luigi around the room. Pulling the stick in the opposite direction that the supernatural foes pull Luigi will lower the ghosts' health until they are sucked away for good.

Ghosts are color-coded based on their strength and how long it takes to put them away. The earliest ghosts I face are green, with only 10 health points to drain away, while later in the mansion I bump into a red ghost sporting a more threatening 30 health points. Future enemies that I didn't encounter in the demo will prove even more crafty, attacking Luigi from afar by tossing books and other objects at the hapless plumber. The trailer even briefly shows off a mummy encounter that should prove harrowing (for Luigi, at least).

With each room of the mansion serving as a puzzle, complete with enemy encounters and treasure chest rewards, my brief time with Luigi's Mansion 2 vaguely reminded me of another classic Nintendo franchise: Zelda. Each enemy has a perfect pattern for you to memorize, and each area is full of secrets for true explorers to uncover. From what I've seen, this is classic Nintendo game design at its finest. — Phil Kollar

- » Platform: 3DS
- » Style: 1-Player Action
- » Publisher: Nintendo
- » Developer: Next Level Games
- » Release: 2012





Sound Shapes

Vita ▶ Style 1-Player Platformer ▶ Sony Computer Entertainment
Queasy Games ▶ Release ▶ TBA

ound Shapes is the brainchild of Jonathan Mak, the mastermind behind PSN classic Everyday Shooter. Even with the number of well-known franchises hitting Sony's Vita, this unconventional musical platformer shouldn't slip under your radar.

Players control an adhesive, circular blob that rolls around the screen and sticks to walls and platforms. Though the mechanics are simple, the difficulty ramps up as more enemies and hazards – such as laser beams and rolling spikes – are introduced to each of the game's 30 levels. Even though Sound Shapes doesn't have a traditional soundtrack, every enemy, obstacle, and collectible creates sound effects that

seamlessly blend together for an auditory experience that will get your foot tapping.

Most impressive are the easy-to-use level creation tools that fit right into Sony's "Play, Create, Share" mantra. Players use the Vita's touch panel to add platforms and collectibles with simple screen taps and drag-and-drop techniques. Hopping between creating and playtesting is seamless, so you can ensure the final product is polished by the time you share it with friends online. The addition of user-generated content should keep players platforming and head-bobbing after finishing the core campaign. ▶



Torchlight II

PC ▶ 1-Player Action/RPG (3-Player Local or Online)
Runic Games ▶ Release ▶ 2011

lished indie dungeon crawler

Torchlight was a huge hit on PC and later on Xbox Live Arcade. This sequel is only coming to PC – for now – but it has all the expanded content and improved gameplay systems you could ask for. Fans can even stop crowing about LAN support, which Runic officially announced at E3 this year.

Instead of being stuck in the linear Ember mine below the town of Torchlight, players wander the world around three hub cities in Torchlight II. Overworld maps are speckled with dynamically generated quests and events, minor dungeons, mini

bosses, and more. The critical path contains elaborate boss fights and questlines as well. Fans can look forward to fewer but more meaningful stats on items, more diverse effects for skills, and areas of effect on normal attacks depending on the weapon type. The hands-on playtime I had at E3 impressed me a great deal.

This isn't an eight-figure budget, triple-A blockbuster like Diablo III. It is, however, a game from an experienced team who loves the genre and is making the game they want to make. I'll take that any day of the week.

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Crimson Alliance

Xbox 360

1 to 4-Player Action/RPG (4-Player Online)

Microsoft Game Studios

Certain Affinity

Summer

hile huge titles like The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim and BioShock Infinite are practically guaranteed to shine at E3, one of the most exciting parts of the show is discovering virtually unheard-of downloadable titles that stand out. Crimson Alliance filed that spot this year. This action/RPG from Bungie spin-off Certain Affinity takes the loot-filled magic of titles like Diablo and Torchlight and mixes it with lessons learned from Zelda and (surprisingly) first-person shooters.

One of the key phrases for Crimson Alliance is "environmental interaction." When I see a cluster of red barrels early in my demo, Certain Affinity president Max Hoberman shows me how my

character can run up, grab a barrel, carry it to a group of enemies, and toss it into the middle, instantly killing half of the foes. Red barrels explode, while other varieties spawn a poison gas cloud that lasts for a set amount of time and injures anyone in its area (including allies). Heroes also have tools such as "monster bait" to help distract enemies and get them into groups.

The Zelda piece of the equation comes with the game's primary upgrade system. In addition to finding bigger and better pieces of armor and weapons, heroes stumble upon heart pieces. Collecting four heart pieces increases the health meter. While the main path through the game focuses solely on hack-and-slash combat,

Hoberman shows me one of the bonus side areas where players can solve simple, Zelda-lite puzzles to get extra gold and loot. In the puzzle I'm shown, one player must stand on a button to stop some spinning blades long enough for the other player to grab the treasure.

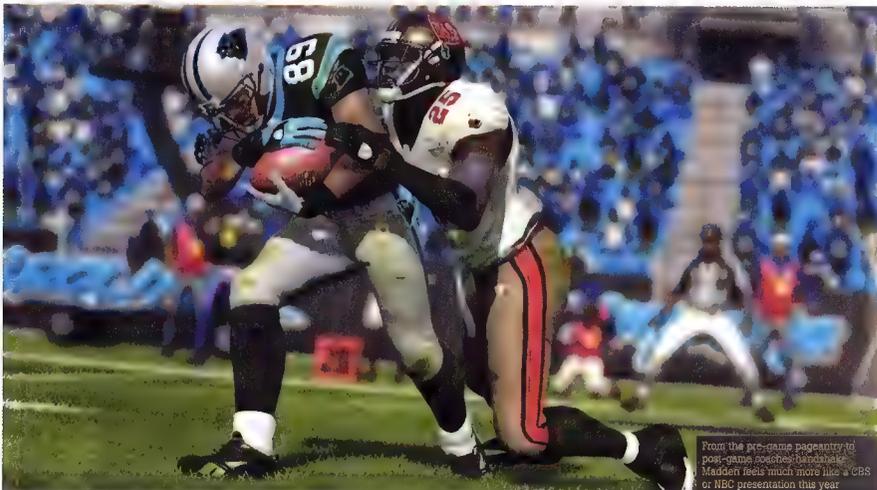
By stripping out RPG elements such as stat and ability selection and adding in co-op shooter features like partner revival, Certain Affinity's new game carves out a unique niche despite its familiar look. This isn't just yet another Diablo clone, which has me excited to pull together a band of co-op buddies to help me dungeon crawl when Crimson Alliance is released on Xbox Live Arcade later this summer.



Madden NFL 12

Is this the year Madden gets back on track?

30



From the pre-game pageantry to post-game touches, Madden 12 feels much more like a CBS or NBC presentation this year.

Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

Style
1 or 2-Player Sports
(Multiplayer TBA)

Publisher
EA Sports

Developer
EA Tiburon

Release Date
August 30

After its embarrassing debut on next-gen consoles, you can't deny that each version of Madden has improved this generation. Though EA Tiburon has added gameplay features like gang tackling and a new motion engine, its demanding fan base (and the gamers spurned by the death of the 2K football franchise) have criticized the series for ignoring the franchise mode and legacy issues like suction blocking and balls clipping through defenders.

Instead of focusing on new ideas to bring more non-hardcore gamers into the fold as it has the past few years, with Madden NFL 12 the developers are finally listening to the people who matter most — the hardcore fans who play fantasy football, own NFL Sunday Ticket, and even watch grown men run in shorts during the rookie combine. Given the popularity of the sport, that's a considerable pool to draw from. As one of these die-hards, this may be the most excited I've been for a Madden title since 2004.

Of all the new features introduced this year, my favorite is Dynamic Player Performance. One of the major problems EA has faced in previous installments is how to differentiate the play style of two athletes with similar ratings. The answer is this new system designed to bring true player tendencies to the forefront during gameplay. EA created 18 new traits with variable settings that help distinguish the various players in the league. For instance, the shaky gambler Jay Cutler is more likely to throw into double coverage than a seasoned pro like Peyton Manning, and mobile quarterbacks like Michael Vick will take off running much earlier in the progression than a pocket passer.

Dynamic player performance applies to defense as well. Opportunistic defensive backs

like Ed Reed aggressively pursue the ball rather than sitting back in coverage, and defensive linemen are more likely to use the pass rush moves they employ in real life.

Some of these tendencies will fluctuate based on the circumstances. For instance, the normally stoic Ben Roethlisberger, who demonstrates an uncanny level of comfort in the pocket, may start to get rid of the ball earlier if he's been sacked a few times. If an aggressive corner gets burned for a long touchdown, he may start to play more conservatively.

The franchise mode is also receiving a long-overdue revamp. This year's entry introduces oft-requested features like preseason roster cuts, a new draft scouting system, free agent bidding, revamped offseason team management AI logic, and the return of player roles. You can also trade future draft picks, practice without exiting to the main menu, and edit players within franchise mode.

On the field, the removal of suction blocking and momentum-based tackling were the two biggest things I noticed during my hands-on time at E3. In previous years I noticed that superstar defensive ends like Jared Allen rarely put up big numbers unless you played as them. I eventually stopped paying for good ends because I got the same production out of players with average ratings. The culprit was the atrocious suction blocking that dominated the line of scrimmage. With this legacy issue gone in Madden 12, I noticed



the premier pass rushers terrorizing quarterbacks in the backfield as they should.

The defensive player awareness is also drastically better than it was in previous years. The defensive backs and linebackers more consistently analyze their zone responsibilities, shading toward receivers who enter their assigned areas of defense. EA wasn't lying when it said that players can't exploit the flats as much as they did last year; in my experience, these areas are patrolled much more aggressively now.

If Tiburon can harmonize all of these long sought-after new features and gameplay mechanics, this could be the best Madden since the PS2 glory days. **—Matt Bertz**



E1

Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning

The Kingdom of Amalur widens its borders

Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

Style
1-Player Action/RPG

Publisher
Electronic Arts

Developer
Big Huge Games/
36 Studios

Release
2012

My anticipation for Big Huge Games' colorful, open-world action/RPG grows each time I see it. While I've already had an extensive look at the awesome combat, the focus at E3 was on the giant world the studio is building.

Reckoning executive designer Ken Rolston served as lead designer on *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, and like that series, *Amalur* is populated with various factions, each having a fleshed out storyline told through a series of sidequests. At E3, Big Huge Games showed off the Warsworn, a group of mercenaries that was once a devout religious order. The horrifying evil race that the Warsworn once wiped out has returned, so this faction's storyline takes them on a journey to rediscover their roots.

In order to have enough content to fill out these quests, Big Huge Games has crafted an astounding 120 dungeons. That number may induce fears of repeating environments along the lines of *Oblivion* (or even worse, *Dragon Age II*), but the studio created some amazing tools that allow them to quickly and competently put together unique dungeons. If all goes as promised, even dungeons that share the same tileset should not have a copy-and-paste feel.

The world isn't the only wide-open aspect of

Reckoning, though. It also contains an open-ended class system called destinies. Rather than choosing a class at the start of the game, you jump right in and the game molds your class around how you play. Depending on the stat and ability choices you make as you level up, you'll unlock destinies such as the melee-heavy Slayer, the magic-focused Shadowcaster, or the mixed rogue Wayfarer. Once a destiny is unlocked, you can switch it out at any time, upgrade it, and play around to your heart's content. The system should please casual players and stat-obsessed min/maxers alike.

If anything, I'm sad that I'll need to wait until *Reckoning's* planned early 2012 launch to jump into this increasingly intriguing world. If you're looking for the next big RPG worth playing after you rob *Skyrim* of all its treasures, keep an eye on *Amalur*. —*Yuh Kollar*





Hitman: Absolution

A new chapter for Agent 47

The stealth kill icon Agent 47 is on the comeback trail and looking better than ever. While it didn't have the pre-E3 hype of games like *Mass Effect 3* or *BioShock: Infinite*, *Hitman: Absolution* is quickly moving up my list of most anticipated games based on what I saw.

The demo opened with a shot of the Chicago skyline, with rain streaking on a window. Suddenly, Agent 47 crashes through the window with the police hot on his heels. Unarmed, he's going to have a hard time dispatching the hordes of cops searching for him. The setting is an abandoned library, a perfect location for stealth. As the cops spread out through the library, Agent 47 begins to stalk his prey, silently assessing the situation. In many ways, it's reminiscent of a setup in *Batman: Arkham Asylum*—a comparison that came to mind a few times during the demo. Moving in and out of cover appeared very smooth—a simple tap of the X button takes you in and out of cover and quickly between gaps in cover.

Thanks to a new ability called "Instinct," 47 can peer through bookshelves and walls to see the position of enemies. They are shown in ghostly, night vision green, and light trails on the ground show you the exact path the enemy is treading. This makes it easier to avoid enemies or time your attacks. Much of the game proceeds like classic *Hitman*, with 47 using visual distractions to separate enemies from the pack. By pulling a fuse, the flickering lights send a hapless police officer back to fix it—which quickly ends his life.

During this extended stealth sequence, it was clear how the basic character movement has improved from past games in the series. Much like in the new *Tomb Raider* or the *Uncharted* series, the new, more agile 47 can easily climb up and down ledges to avoid detection and get the drop on a target. The demo starts with 47

unarmed, using various items in the environment like a power cord and a marble bust to take out foes. At one point, he even jumps up, hangs from a ledge, and pulls an enemy over the balcony ledge to his doom like in *Assassin's Creed* or *Splinter Cell*. Some of the close quarter kills are violent, like quickly tapping the circle button to choke the life out of a cop.

After picking off the isolated, weaker members of the pack, 47 realizes there are too many police officers to take down individually. At this point, he springs into action, taking a gun purloined from a fallen officer and grabbing another cop as a human shield. As he holds off a horde of police with guns drawn, slowly climbing a staircase, 47 makes his move, knocking out his human shield and bounding off with the police in chase. Climbing and running up a series of balconies, he shoots a chain and sends a chandelier crashing to the floor below. At the top, 47 bursts through a fire door and we see the Chicago skyline.

Once outside, Agent 47 jumps to a nearby building, now with a helicopter equipped with a spotlight and machine guns tracking his progress through the top floor of the building. The extremely cinematic sequence calls to mind a similar section in *Uncharted 2*. He survives this onslaught and makes it to the next building. Unfortunately, the helicopter is blocking his path across the roof. Opportunity knocks in the form of another patrolling officer.

Now it was time for a classic *Hitman* tactic: a disguise. Agent 47 takes the downed officer's coat and hat, and strolls right past the helicopter and its spotlight. The next building he enters is a hippie den, complete with marijuana plants, psychedelic posters, and blaring acid rock. The hippies are alerted that the police have surrounded the building and begin to try to flush the pot down the toilet. Two police officers enter the room and question the disguised 47 about

his identity—he responds by grabbing a nearby glass bong and braining the inquisitive cop.

Agent 47 starts to play it cool, relying on his disguise. As he walks through the building, now teeming with police, he slowly strolls by his pursuers. Here, we see another use of his instinct abilities. Certain police officers he passes take notice of him, prompting a brief second of slow motion. In these instances, 47 reacts by pulling down the brim of his hat or pretending to talk into his clip-on walkie-talkie to avoid detection. At one point he even blends in by grabbing a quick donut. The demo ends with 47, still in disguise, riding the building's elevator down. Cutting between 47 and the police waiting for him downstairs, tension builds. I was half expecting a shootout to happen when the doors opened, but 47 breezed past the remaining police with calm precision. Walking out on a Chicago street scene crawling with hundreds of fully animated NPCs, the camera panned up...Agent 47 was gone, lost in the city.

It was an impressive demo. The controls looked very smooth and—even more importantly—the dodgy enemy AI that has plagued the franchise seemed to be much improved. The game runs on IO Interactive's new Glacier 2 engine, which performed admirably. Finally, *Hitman* seems to have state-of-the-art tech that can stand beside the industry standards. I've always liked this franchise, but often it seemed like an amazing concept plagued by spotty execution.

Hopefully, *Absolution* can establish *Hitman* as a true triple-A franchise. It's important not to read too much into a good demo—let's not forget IO's struggles with the Kane & Lynch franchise in recent years—but so far *Hitman: Absolution* looks like a promising reboot. **—Matt Helgeson**

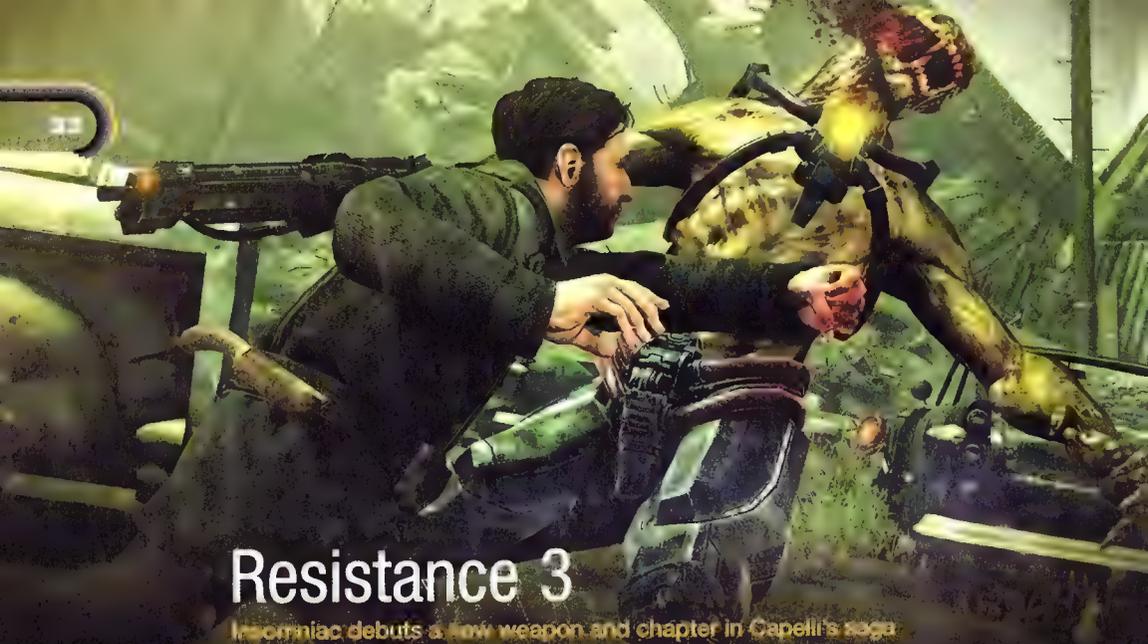
» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

» Style
1-Player Action

» Publisher
Square Enix

» Developer
IO Interactive

» Release
2012



Resistance 3

Insomniac debuts a new weapon and chapter in Capelli's saga

- » **Platform**
PlayStation 3
- » **Style**
1-Player Shooter (16-Player Online)
- » **Publisher**
Sony Computer Entertainment
- » **Developer**
Insomniac
- » **Release**
September 6

Last time we checked in with Resistance 3 we took part in a harrowing journey down the Mississippi and went a few rounds in multiplayer. This time Insomniac showed off a new battle through a ravaged city to recover a valuable power source during Sony's E3 press conference.

Resistance 3 creative director Marcus Smith took control of Joe Capelli during an ambush on a Chimera convoy moving down the war-ravaged streets. Capelli and his fellow survivors work in tandem to gun down a Chimera dropship. The vessel contains a powercore, the energy source needed in many of the post-apocalyptic world's jury-rigged vehicles. After the ship crashes to

the ground, Chimera soldiers jump on top of bombed-out cars and fire down on Capelli and his crew. Bad goes to worse when a pack of scanner drones descend, covering the aliens in a golden light that makes them invulnerable. Capelli reprioritizes, taking out the drones then dispatching the vulnerable Chimera.

The Chimera's numbers increase, calling for more drastic measures. Capelli produces a grenade launcher and blasts a projectile into the middle of the road. Lightning crackles as a black void emerges and hovers above the street. Cans, newspapers, and other debris swirl around the vortex as it grows stronger — even an immolated Chimera succumbs to the deadly spiral. Two Chimera emerge from a nearby alleyway as dual rays of light extend from the void to intercept them. The immobilized enemies fall to the ground and evaporate into clouds of red mist. This deadly new tool is evidence that Insomniac's heritage of insane weaponry is continuing in full force.

Smith then jumps ahead in the game, where Capelli obtains the powercore. Capelli must

escape a series of decrepit buildings with the coveted energy source. To make matters worse, Capelli's arms are occupied by the powercore, leaving him unable to wield weapons. The hero relies on his teammates as they attempt to evade a tremendous Widowmaker sniffling them out. An agile Long Legs Chimera leaps in front of Capelli, prompting an ally to take out the foe with a swift, melee attack. The same friend creates a path through the ruined building by firing at explosive orange plant life. Capelli and his partner make their way through dilapidated bathrooms and living rooms, struggling to find sanctuary. The demo ends as the Widowmaker crashes through a wall, stopping Capelli in his tracks.

Resistance 3 is shaping up to be the best entry in Insomniac's visceral FPS series yet. The polished controls, inventive weaponry, larger-than-life moments, and immersive multiplayer make up a winning combination. If the final product boasts the quality we've seen in these previews so far, Joe Capelli's dire adventure should stand out from the hordes of other shooters. » **Tim Turt**



The Immolated Chimera Capelli
uses to clear a path.



There wasn't a zombie in sight during my time with the game.

Resident Evil: Revelations

Prepare to once again enter the world of survival horror

Capcom reinvented the Resident Evil brand with the series' fourth installment. Resident Evil 4 implemented a slick new way to shoot undead creatures in the head with over-the-shoulder, third-person gunplay that set a new standard. As the series shifted towards ludicrous boulder-punching action with Resident Evil 5, fans began wondering if they'd ever see another atmospheric, puzzle-filled, survival-focused entry again. Now that I've gotten a chance to play Resident Evil: Revelations on the 3DS, I can confirm that a throwback bridging the gap between RE 4 and RE 5 is on the way.

The E3 2011 demo I played begins with Jill Valentine waking up on a dusty bed in a lavishly decorated bedroom evocative of the infamous Raccoon City mansion. The door to the room is locked via a control panel, and a secured plate guards the opening mechanism. Jill begins to hunt for a screwdriver. In a nod to the first Resident Evil, she finds the tool by draining a bathtub filled with dirty water. On her way back to the door, something bursts from a wardrobe: a tall, ghastly creature with long, spiked club-like arms. The bizarre beast is reminiscent of the terrifying Iron maidens from Resident Evil 4. As it shambles toward her, Jill draws her handgun, which zooms the camera into first-person, allowing players to line up the laser sight using the 3DS' circle pad. Shooting is similar to recent

Resident Evil games: smooth and reliable, but with the ability to strafe. After dispatching the beast, Jill uses the screwdriver to access the door's control panel, rearranges a puzzling series of circuits, and makes her exit. Capcom says Resident Evil: Revelations is filled with classic scenarios like this.

Exiting the bedroom, Jill discovers she's not in a mansion at all. She's actually aboard a huge ship infected with a host of bio-organic weapons. During my time with the game I explored a dimly lit storage area, a foggy dining room littered with rotten food, and several other offshoot compartments (one containing a powerful shotgun) with precious ammo waiting to be discovered. Rooting around for health and ammunition is a more interesting process than the older games' sparkling object hunts. Jill obtains a supply scanner, allowing her to comb environments in first person, highlighting useful things hiding behind curtains or in piles of rubbish. The scanner should be an invaluable tool as Jill makes her way through the ship.

The playable demo concludes with Jill rendezvousing with new partner Parker Luciani as they make their way to the bridge. A strange crimson-haired man emerges from the shadows and apprehends Jill, shouting threats in the process. Jill escapes the creep's grasp and retreats next to her fellow BSAA agent. The attacker and

Parker exchange words, hinting that the two share a mysterious past. Jill's surprise at this revelation is cut short as the new enemy draws his gun and fires.

A trailer for RE: Revelations reveals two other interesting locations I didn't get to see during the live demo. One involves Jill swimming through a flooded portion of the ship, where she encounters deadly underwater enemies that are best taken down with an expertly thrown sonic grenade. The other new location shows Chris Redfield trekking up a snowy mountain path with his enigmatic ally, Jessica. Learning more about Chris' formation of the BSAA (Biohazard Security Assessment Alliance) and the path leading up to the Kijuju incident in Africa is an exciting prospect. Chris' exact location is a mystery to us as well as Jill Valentine, whose main goal is to uncover her old partner's whereabouts.

The fates of the sea-bound BSAA agents are unknown for now, but what we do know is Resident Evil: Revelations could be the game hardcore Resident Evil fans have wanted for years. It merges the solid controls of Resident Evil 4, old-school survival horror, and the 3DS' immersive 3D graphics to deliver a rich, harrowing romp that may stand toe-to-toe with the console games. • **Tim Turf**

- Platform: 3DS
- Style: 1-Player Action
- Publisher: Capcom
- Developer: Capcom
- Release: 2012



Capcom says Revelations will be about as long as console Resident Evil games.



The supply scanner will become your best friend.

From Dust

Available on PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC

PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

1-Player Simulation

Ubisoft

Ubisoft Montpellier

Summer

Even before we learned more about From Dust's intriguing gameplay, we were entranced by its beauty. The brainchild of Eric Chahi (Out Of This World), From Dust impresses with its towering volcanoes, flowing water, and lush island landscapes. But what really makes the game shine is the way those landscapes shift and evolve at your touch.

The game is built around the concept of a tribe of natives seeking to rediscover long-lost power. Instead of controlling the members of this group, players manipulate a spirit that changes the shape of the world around the tribe, either plunging them into chaos or saving them from destruction. A god game in the classic tradition, From Dust encourages experimentation as you discover the ways different elements interact with one another.

Things remain relatively simple early on as you manipulate the earth and water, and see the way they affect each other. An accelerated timeline exhibits the effects of erosion in minutes instead of years, and you'll have to react in real time to the way an environment changes. As natural disasters begin to roll towards your adopted tribe, the process gets even more complicated. It takes quick thinking and intelligent environment shaping to ensure that lava drains off into the sea rather than across your defenseless town.

Beyond the ever-changing campaign to save the natives, From Dust is a remarkable playground. Just the act of making new landmasses and forming rivers from nothing is exhilarating.

We're apparently not the only ones impressed with the technology and gameplay in From Dust. Microsoft chose the game to be included in this year's Summer of Arcade promotion, which typically contains downloadable releases that deserve a little extra attention. Presumably, the expected PSN and PC releases will only be a short time later. Watch for the game's release in the coming weeks. »



You'll foster the growth of this unusual tribe, but you won't have any direct control over them.

From Dust is filled with many beautiful environments inspired by unusual, real-world locations.





Nail the moves displayed on gold flash cards for bonus points



Dance Central 2 allows two players to groove at the same time

Dance Central 2

Share the dance floor with simultaneous multiplayer

When Dance Central was released as part of the Kinect launch lineup, it was not only a critical and commercial success, but also revolutionized the dance game genre with accurate, full body tracking that made for an authentic dance experience. With Dance Central 2, the bright minds at Harmonix are kicking things up with a number of improvements that put this upcoming rhythm title on track to becoming the ultimate party game.

In the original Dance Central, two players took turns shaking their groove thing for the high score and bragging rights. With Dance Central 2, Harmonix is introducing simultaneous multiplayer that allows two players to bust a move at the same time for the duration of the track

(each player can choose their own difficulty). Even more impressive is the drop-in-drop-out functionality. This allows one player to seamlessly drop out, leaving his or her partner to finish off the track solo, or another person could jump in to continue the head-to-head dance-off. Even with two players jamming out at the same time and multiple players dropping in and out, Kinect didn't miss a beat during my hands-on time. To keep things moving, Dance Central 2 also allows you to create playlists for calorie-burning dance-a-thons.

Dance Central 2's menu interface is as smooth and responsive as ever and boasts a few tweaks. Players can hover over a track name during song selection for a preview video showcasing what

moves they can expect before jumping in. As for gameplay, the flash card system returns with the addition of gold flash cards that earn you bonus points for nailing the highlighted moves. Other improvements can be found in Break it Down mode, which implements voice commands and allows you to work on specific moves you're having trouble with as opposed to sloggling through a routine from beginning to end like in the original.

Finally, players can import songs from the original Dance Central disc and DLC into the sequel's music library, which Harmonix says makes for more than 100 tracks to master when Dance Central 2 launches this fall. » **Annette Gonzalez**

- » **Platform**
Xbox 360
- » **Style**
1 to 2-Player Rhythm/Music
- » **Publisher**
Harmonix/Microsoft
- » **Developer**
Harmonix
- » **Release**
Fall

36

SSX

Boarding across the roof of the world

A monstrous landmass sits between the border of Nepal and China in the Himalayan mountain range. Its name is Makalu, and it is considered one of the world's most difficult mountains to climb. Snowboarding down it, on the other hand, is as thrilling as it is dangerous. At this year's E3, I strapped on my snow boots and toured some of the world's most renowned mountains in the reinvention of EA's classic snowboarding series.

EA Canada has reconstructed more than 18 mountain ranges using real topography data collected by NASA. However, the studio has done more than photocopy the world's mountain ranges. Several strips of the Great Wall of China have been flown in and scattered along Makalu's slopes, and elements like this add texture to the

mountain's surface. The addition of the Great Wall also helps demonstrate SSX's new grind-mechanic. Players no longer have to grind on specific rails and logs. Instead the SSX engine continually scans the environment for edges sharp enough to grind. At any time, players can tap a button and start tricking off a nearby grindable surface, which should help players keep their combo flowing.

Kilimanjaro is the next stop on my world-spanning snowboard tour, but Africa's tallest peak isn't just a mountain; it's a collection of three inactive volcanic cones. Boarders begin each event at the top of one of these cones, and then race through the frozen inner workings of the mountain.

EA Canada says it is still refining the controls,

but the studio is committed to providing players with two active control schemes at any given time — meaning players can perform every trick in the game at least two different ways. Fans of EA's Skate franchise might gravitate towards using both analog sticks to perform

grabs and spins, while SSX traditionalists might be happier to dial in button combos to pull off the same feats. Other players might end up using a hybrid of the two controls, forming their own unique boarding style.

After Kilimanjaro, I zip across the world to Denali (a.k.a. Mount McKinley) in Alaska, where I struggle to outrace an avalanche. Events like this are called Deadly Descents, and they function like the snowboarding equivalent to boss battles, pitting players against the elements as they try to race safely through blizzards, over ice, or through fog and darkness. On Denali, the camera pans around to the front of the boarders as we gun for the foothills. Saquanes like this aren't scripted. SSX uses a snow technology system that replicates the effects of real-life avalanches, so every time boarders make a hard landing, they send more snow tumbling down the cliff after them.

My time with SSX only left me wanting more. The scope of content available to players is staggering, and EA Canada has promised to include a gear system with thousands of different character customization options, some of which will affect how a boarder traverses the mountainside.

That said, the controls clearly need some fine-tuning; SSX's combo system doesn't feel diverse, and the tricks don't seem as thrilling or exaggerated as I expect from this series. Still, EA Canada has some impressive technology running under the hood, and I'm hopeful that it will play as well as it looks. » **Ben Reeves**

- » **Platform**
PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360
- » **Style**
1-Player Sports (Multiplayer TBA)
- » **Publisher**
Electronic Arts
- » **Developer**
EA Canada
- » **Release**
January

37



Some races will start out at the top of one of Kilimanjaro's volcanic cones

Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet

The thrill of discovery...and frequent parkour...is a highlight.

» **Platform:** Xbox 360
 » **Style:** 1-Player Action
 » **Publisher:** Microsoft
 » **Developer:** Fuel Cell Games
 » **Release:** Summer

One of the most exciting downloadable projects on the horizon comes from the folks over at Fuel Cell Games. Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet mixes the exploration of Metroid with the 2D flight of Pixel Junk Shooter, and layers on a strangely alluring art style of shadows juxtaposed against vivid colors.

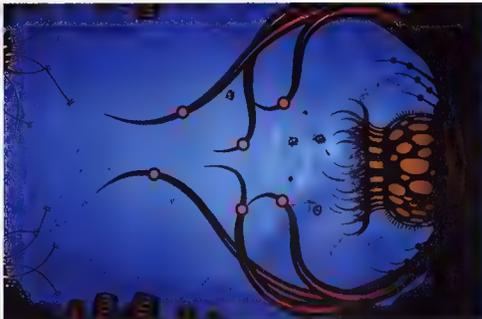
You control a floating UFO as it winds its way through a living planet of dangerous threats and puzzles. Along the way, you pick

up a continuous flow of ship upgrades and tools, many of which allow access to new areas of the map. Tools for your ship map to the face buttons, but a radial wheel can be pulled up to remap those abilities on the fly. From laser blasters to grasping claws, your ship gets more and more formidable with each passing hour.

Huge enemies fill the screen, towering over your ship and helping to reinforce the game's moniker. Challenging puzzles demand that you

think creatively about how to progress. Hidden upgrades lend an air of subtlety and the thrill of discovery.

One of the most exciting things about the game is the way it has come out of relative obscurity to astound E3 show-goers. The rest of the world will have its chance to be amazed soon enough; Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet is part of this year's XBLA Summer of Arcade. » **More Xbox**



Players can team up with a stranger to explore the desert on PSN.

Journey

The beauty of the...is a highlight.

» **Platform:** PlayStation 3 » **Style:** 1-Player Adventure (Online TBA)
 » **Publisher:** Sony Computer Entertainment » **Developer:** thatgamecompany » **Release:** 2011

With titles such as Flow and Flower, thatgamecompany made a name for itself by delivering unique gaming experiences known to strike an emotional chord. With the team's latest undertaking, Journey, players take the role of a small figure in a red cloak and set out to uncover the secrets of a mysterious desert.

Journey offers little gameplay instruction, so the second your character sets foot on the sand, it's up to your curiosity to run wild. Learning the game's mechanics requires exploration as you discover how collectible pieces of cloth augment your abilities and uncover what the glowing

symbols on your character's scarf represent. As you familiarize yourself with these details, you slowly move toward glowing structures in the distance.

This PSN title also offers an online component that allows you to discover other players in the vast desert who can join in on your adventure. According to thatgamecompany, roaming the vast expanse with strangers will "reshape the experience." While details on the online functionality remain sparse, you can look forward to a number of surprises when you hit the desert later this year. » **More PlayStation**



El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron

El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron...is a highlight.

» **Platform:** PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 » **Style:** 1-Player Action » **Publisher:** Ignition Entertainment » **Developer:** Ignition Entertainment » **Release:** July 26

We've shared our impressions of El Shaddai's unplayable demo and I detailed my playthrough of several levels of the game a few months ago, so there aren't many new details we can divulge in advance of next month's review. To get the last word on the project, I turned to designer Takeyasu Sawaki, who has previously worked on Devil May Cry and Okami, to explain why gamers in North America should be looking forward to El Shaddai:

"The gameplay is simple and straight to

the point. You don't need a manual; you can just pick up the controller and go. I did this so all people can feel free to come into this world. But for Western gamers, I want to say that El Shaddai isn't just a simple game. It's very deep, and the more you play, the better you get. It's sort of like a fighting game, like Street Fighter. You can play over and over, and your skill builds up. I intentionally made it so anyone can play, but hardcore gamers can enjoy it as well. Don't just beat it once. You'll want to play more." » **More Xbox**

Spider-Man: Edge of Time

Anti-Venom injects Spider-Man with a deadly cure

Beenox gave us a rundown of its upcoming Spider-Man: Edge of Time back in issue 217, but one detail that the studio kept close to its chest was the title's antagonist. During the game's newest demo at E3, the developer introduced us to two of Edge of Time's villains. The first is a man named Walker Sloan, who was created specifically for the game. Sloan is the crazed super genius who sets all of the time-warping events into motion. The other is one of Spider-Man's most infamous rivals, the ex-reporter Eddie Brock, now known in the comics as Anti-Venom.

In the year 2099, Walker Sloan builds a time portal, and then travels back in time to reshape the world in his image. Once in the present, Sloan implants a series of control chips into Anti-Venom's brain, forcing a conflicted Brock to seek out and kill the Amazing Spider-Man. Fortunately, Amazing Spider-Man has an ally of his own - his future counterpart from the year 2099.

In Edge of Time, both versions of Spider-Man have their own combos and power sets. The game's action bounces between the two heroes as each does battle in their respective times. During the demo, we witnessed a few of the wall-crawlers' new moves. Both versions of Spider-Man absorb choral energy from every enemy they defeat, and they can expand this energy on powerful attacks. For example, Amazing Spider-Man can enter a Hyper Sense mode, a

spedy state that allows him to zip across environments and roll out more hyperkinetic combos. Spider-Man 2099 creates choral duplicates of himself that pull enemies towards him, or he can release choral blasts that temporarily freeze the enemies around him.

As Amazing Spider-Man makes his way through the game, he will interact with the environment in ways that reshape the world. Spider-Man 2099 lives in. While there are no branching narrative paths, there will be side missions Amazing Spider-Man can complete that affect the future in different ways, changing the number and type of enemies that Spider-Man 2099 fights, or making certain sections of the game easier to navigate.

Near the end of the demo, Amazing Spider-Man encounters Anti-Venom, whose powers allow him to cure

people of any anomaly. Unfortunately, this means that Anti-Venom can "cure" Spider-Man of the mutations that give him his spider-powers. As the battle with Anti-Venom wears on, Amazing Spider-Man grows weaker. But just as Anti-Venom is about to deal what could be the final blow, the demo ends. Beenox claims that there will be some big revelations after the fight with Anti-Venom, but it isn't ready to reveal any further details until San Diego Comic Con. » Ben Reeves

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**
Activision

» **Developer**
Beenox

» **Release**
Fall



Anti-Venom can drain Amazing Spider-Man's powers and is invisible to his spider sense, making him a deadly foe

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Need For Speed: The Run

Driving narrative in a cross country race

With developers such as Criterion (Hot Pursuit) and Slightly Mad Studios (Shift series) taking the wheel on the Need For Speed franchise, Black Box has had a few years to come up with new techniques to deliver a racing experience unlike anything the team has done in the past.

In The Run, the mob has developed an interest in the game's protagonist, Jack, who participates in a high stakes race from San Francisco to New York (and marks the first time in the Need For Speed series that players can race in real locations). As part of a partnership with Battlefield developer DICE, Black Box has integrated pure racing into the Frostbite 2 engine (which powers the upcoming Battlefield 3). This not only makes for impressive visuals and environmental

destruction, but also allows the team to seamlessly weave narrative into gameplay.

For The Run, Black Box studied Hollywood techniques used in James Cameron's Avatar for pure performance capture to deliver a cinematic experience in racing and on-foot sequences. For players concerned that the story-driven, on-foot portions of The Run detract too much from actual racing, Black Box says that getting out of the car is less than ten percent of the game as a whole. Black Box assures that The Run is a racing game first and foremost, and allowing a character to get out of the car gives the developer more opportunities to put players in new scenarios when switching cars or jumping out of a race, and quickly looking for a way back in. Players

can burn through over 300km of track, which is roughly three times the size of past Need For Speed titles, so it's probably best that you won't be spending a whole lot of time on foot.

Beyond its single-player campaign, The Run brings back the Autolog introduced in Hot Pursuit last year. This social competition feature allows players to compare race times against friends for asynchronous competition. With The Run, Autolog is woven into the game's campaign, so not only will players race to New York against the 100-plus racers created by Black Box to compete against Jack, racers on your friends list will be added to the fray as well when the game launches this November. » Annette Gonzalez

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

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

» **Publisher**
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**
Black Box

» **Release**
November 15

42



Jack ditched the car for an on-foot sequence





Mario Kart 3DS

Minor tweaks improve upon the classic formula

- » Platform 3DS
- » Style 1-Player Racing (Online TBA)
- » Publisher Nintendo
- » Developer Nintendo
- » Release Holiday

If there's a sure bet in gaming, it's that every new Nintendo console will play host to a Mario Kart title. Each installment in the long-running series is a big seller, and fans seem to eat up every one regardless of how few changes are made to the format. I expected to see more of the same when I checked out Mario Kart 3DS, but was pleasantly surprised to see more improvements than any game in the series since Double Dash.

As seen at Nintendo's E3 press conference, each vehicle features a certain degree of customization. Previous titles in the series allowed your character to select different karts, but this is the first that allows for individual components to be customized. Players pick the frame of the vehicle, the wheels (some are tiny and light, some resemble monster truck wheels), and the glider style.

Gliders are new to the series, and Nintendo legend Shigeru Miyamoto joked that he considered calling the game "Mario Kite" because of their inclusion. These airborne sections popped up more than I expected throughout my three-hour Grand Prix, but they didn't interfere with

the action at all. You maintain full control of your kart while gliding, steering clear of obstacles or towards weapon pickups before you hit the ground. In addition to the glider, your kart will also sprout a propeller if the race takes you underwater. These sections are similar to the glider areas in that they mix up the action without drastically changing the mechanics of the race. Don't expect full air, land, and sea action like the hovercrafts and airplanes of Diddy Kong Racing, but these sections are still a welcome change of pace.

Coins are an element that we haven't seen in a Mario Kart title in a long time, but they make a return in Mario Kart 3DS. While they made your kart go faster in the series' SNES debut, it's unclear what function they're serving in this new title. I didn't notice any speed boosts upon picking them up, but I did see several locked parts when I was customizing my vehicle. This might suggest some sort of in-game store that allows you to purchase new kart parts using coins you pick up on the various courses.

Mario Kart's roster has never been lacking in star power, but the unique and entertaining

courses have always been the star of the franchise. This holds true for its 3DS debut, as the three courses I saw all played (and looked) great. One resembled Mario Kart Wii's Mushroom Gorge, with giant flowers high in the sky that karts can bounce off of. Another featured underwater sections, complete with oysters that guard coins and other goodies. My final track featured elements from Donkey Kong Country Returns, such as the falling stone towers.

Nintendo likes to utilize its unique hardware, so I was somewhat surprised at the lack of motion control for the glider sections. While the gyroscope and accelerometer weren't utilized in the E3 demo, the 3D effect is the best I've seen on the system thus far. Other 3DS racing games are difficult to play in full 3D, as it's hard to focus on both your vehicle and the road that stretches into the background. This wasn't an issue with Mario Kart, as I had the 3D turned all the way up with no problems whatsoever. Vivid colors and visually interesting courses are a staple of the series, and they really shine on 3DS.

Mario Kart 3DS looks to be doing a great job of retaining all the elements that made the series a massive seller while introducing new features that won't shake up the core experience too much. It's still essentially the same Mario Kart when you boil it down, but I was impressed enough by its improvements to make it one of my most eagerly anticipated 3DS titles. — Dan Ryckert



Crusader Kings II

Grand strategy for mortals



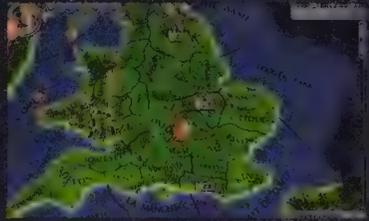
Learning to play one of Paradox Interactive's grand strategy games is like leafing through an organic chemistry textbook. While I've always loved the idea of playing one of these intricate and complex titles, their unbelievable density makes them far from accessible. I'm hopeful that the massive amount of work Paradox is putting into Crusader Kings II's interface may be the beachhead I need to finally conquer this complicated frontier.

Crusader Kings II is a sandbox strategy game to a far greater extent than even Total War. You can play as anyone from the King of England to a minor lord on the north coast of Africa, and follow your bloodline from the 11th to the 15th century. Your goals are what you make of them. Perhaps you want the challenge of surviving as a small breakaway pagan state in the Balkans, or you want to bring all of Scandinavia at last under Sweden's mighty banner. Maybe you're satisfied with nothing less than conquering the known world in the name of the Holy Roman Empire. The depth is there, should you go looking for it.

Therein lies the difference between Crusader Kings II and previous Paradox titles. While those other games are happy to overwhelm the player with minutiae about everything from tax rates to mining output and notable personages' opinions of you, Crusader Kings II allows players to engage the game at the level they choose with its cleverly redesigned interface. It could still end up inaccessible like the others if Paradox doesn't ensure that the simulation ticks along smoothly with little player input under the hood, but I'm hopeful.

All the iteration and polish in the world isn't going to make Crusader Kings II a simple or inviting game. It's about as detailed, intense, and hardcore of a war game as you'll find — but it has a chance to bring players in who don't already have a long history with the studio's titles. — Adam Biesenzer

- » Platform: PC
- » Style: 1-Player Strategy
- » Publisher: Paradox Interactive
- » Developer: Paradox Interactive
- » Release: January



Payday: The Heist

Left 4 Dead's 11

Overstating the similarities between Payday: The Heist and Valve's popular zombie-killing cooperative shooter Left 4 Dead is difficult. True, Payday is about pulling off movie-style heists instead of surviving the zombie apocalypse, but so much of its design is clearly modeled after L4D that you can't help but define it in those terms. The places where Payday does deviate from L4D are in service to its setting, which give the game its own distinctive flavor within the cooperative shooter subgenre.

The majority of Payday's action is tied up in keeping the cops off your back while you move through a series of objectives. The bank heist I played at E3 required players to retrieve a power drill and cans of thermite to bypass the vault's layers of security, then escape from the bank with money bags stuffed full of burning. An ingenious pacing mechanic where cops only spawn during on-and-off assault phases keeps things moving along.

Knowing the layout of the map and working as a team are key. The incoming cops and SWAT teams spawn randomly outside, but they must physically enter the building to arrest you. Keeping map awareness and covering the entrances to your location will save you from aggressive law enforcement. Regenerating health means that being surprised around a corner isn't a game-ending disaster, but with extremely limited ammo you have to be careful with your shots.

There's a lot more to talk about with Payday — shooting out cameras to keep the cops from knowing where you are, trading hostages for respawns, the five other heists in the game that aren't just different bank layouts — but you can relax with the knowledge that all of the incidental mechanics that I encountered seem well designed. Payday is already a ton of fun. Look for it on PlayStation Network and PC later this year. — Adam Biesenzer

- » Platform: PlayStation 3 • PC
- » Style: 1-Player Shooter; 4-Player Online
- » Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment
- » Developer: Overkill
- » Release: 2011

Shooting at civilians will make them cover in fear or run



Star Trek

Following the film to launch a series



Players will be able to use tricorders to affect the environment during battle, hack open doors, and overload computer panels, among other things



The game begins with Kirk and Spock navigating a minefield in order to board the *Enterprise*



Equipment upgrades are based on each character's skill. Weapons won't change much throughout the game, but each character will learn new tricks and get better at using them

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

► **Style**
1 or 2-Player Action
(2-Player Online)

► **Publisher**
Paramount
Entertainment

► **Developer**
Digital Extremes

► **Release**
2012

The *Enterprise* has been ransacked. Most of its crew is dead. Trapped by a series of mysterious energy streams, surrounded by explosive depth charges, and infiltrated by a band of terrorists, Starfleet's flagship sits dead in space. James Kirk and Spock discover the state of their vessel while returning from an away mission in a shuttle craft. In order to uncover the mystery behind the attack and rescue what remains of their crew, this duo must work together like never before.

Digital Extremes – the studio behind BioShock 2's multiplayer mode and the upcoming *Darkness II* – has the complicated task of developing a game set within the recently rebooted Star Trek universe. Working closely with J.J. Abrams' production company Bad Robot and God of War writer Marianne Krawczyk, Digital Extremes hopes to deliver more than just a unique co-op experience; it hopes to change the gaming market's expectation toward an entire franchise.

Star Trek is being built from the ground up to be a different kind of co-op experience. While players can to play the entire game with an AI ally, Digital Extremes demoed the game for us on two screens in order to demonstrate how the experience changes depending on whether players control Kirk or Spock. Spock's scientific mind and formal demeanor make him a surgeon on the battlefield, while Kirk's cowboy approach to combat often gets the duo into as much trouble as it gets them out of. While Kirk and Spock remain together for much of the game, their experiences and goals often differ.

In order to reboard the *Enterprise*, Kirk and

Spock strap on LSPUs (Life Support Propulsion Units that fans might recognize from the 2009 film) and leave their shuttlecraft for a short space flight that takes them to the door of the *Enterprise*. The duo hurtles through the minefield surrounding their ship and barrels into one of the *Enterprise*'s cargo bays. Digital Extremes conveys the two characters' personalities by showing how each reacts differently to many of the game's events. While Spock comes to a running stop upon entering the ship, Kirk tumbles end over end, eventually colliding with a tower of loose cargo boxes.

Once aboard, Kirk and Spock make their way through sparking corridors, using their tricorders to unlock doors and scan fallen red shirts. Hoping to figure out who's responsible for the attack, Spock interfaces with a nearby computer and discovers that someone initiated a ship-wide command lockout. Suddenly, the duo discovers a distress call that leads them to the shuttle bay.

The distress signal was a trap, and Kirk and Spock are ambushed. Both characters dive for nearby cover in an interactive cutscene where players retain control of their phasers and can take out a few enemies before reaching safety. During combat situations like this, players must make use of their tricorder's multiple functions. Tricorders can be used to remotely deploy portable Federation shields or overload a computer panel to take out a group of guards. We watched Kirk remotely activate a shuttle bay forklift, raise a cargo bin, and expose a few enemies who were using it for cover. Meanwhile Spock snuck around back and performed a mind meld on one of the enemies, who in

turn became confused and started firing on his friends.

During the firefight, Kirk takes a stray hit from one of the enemies and becomes infected by the same neurotoxin that has killed much of the *Enterprise* crew. Kirk collapses, and Spock runs over to help. Throwing one of Kirk's arms over his shoulder, Spock navigates both players towards sickbay, while Kirk uses his free hand to provide cover fire. Sequences like this are scattered throughout the game, requiring players to accomplish different goals while working together.

Once the duo reaches sickbay, Spock removes the toxin from Kirk's body, but their troubles are far from over. A second wave of enemies is bearing down on their position. Kirk leaps up from the bed and grabs a Federation rifle. He activates its secondary fire and a tiny shield shimmers to life in front of the gun. Even though Kirk holds the rifle, Spock can make use of it. Spock fires into Kirk's shield, building up a charge of stored energy. Once enemies begin flooding the sickbay, Kirk discharges all this energy, knocking out their pursuers. Kirk and Spock are safe, but this peace won't last long.

Developers have been making Star Trek games for nearly 30 years, but few were memorable. Like J.J. Abrams' *Star Trek* reboot, Digital Extremes hopes to craft a Star Trek experience that can be enjoyed by a wider fanbase. The studio has a lot of work cut out for it if it hopes to release the title alongside next summer's film. Hopefully, much like the iconic captain Kirk himself, Digital Extremes can defy all the odds. » **Ben Reeves**



Super Mario 3DS

A classic power-up floats into a brand new world

Most of Mario's portable outings have been in 2D, but Nintendo is shooting for the full three dimensions this time around. The new entry is being developed by the Super Mario Galaxy team, and combines elements of the Wii titles, Super Mario Bros. 3, and New Super Mario Bros. to deliver one of the most promising 3DS games yet.

The circle pad allows players to control Mario in a manner similar to Galaxy; you can wall jump, perform long leaps, and explore every nook of the world. The gameplay feels solid, but depth perception becomes tricky when 3D visual effects collide with the fixed camera. A neat trick Super Mario 3DS plays on your eyes involves a series of cardboard Goomba cutouts followed by a real one, lulling you into a sense of familiarity then throwing a curveball. If one franchise is sure to utilize the system's 3D in novel ways, it's Super Mario.

Unlike other 3D Mario games, you won't be collecting red coins or searching for stars to progress. Super Mario 3DS is structured more like New Super Mario Bros., complete with hidden star coins, a checkpoint, and a flagpole marking the end of the stage. Teleportation bricks string sections of the stage together, like Galaxy's star launchers. The more linear flow of the levels suits the game better than I thought it would, and after finishing a level, I was ready to dive back in and root around for any star coins I missed.

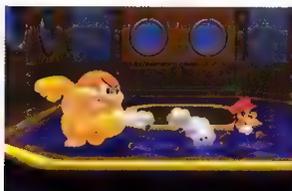
Super Mario 3DS marks the return of Mario's classic Tanooki suit. Snagging a leaf transforms Mario into a raccoon, granting him a spinning tail attack and the ability to float. Like the classic 2D Mario games, if Mario takes damage he'll lose his suit. Suffer another hit and he'll shrink, indicating he has one more knock left in him before kicking the bucket. Playing a 3D Mario game with this

traditional health system just feels right.

The demo I played had Mario leaping through a collection of familiar worlds. One bright green stage tasks the plumber with crossing unfolding platforms while dodging Goombas. Another takes him underground in a faux-2D stage reminiscent of LittleBigPlanet's layered planes, complete with piranha plants that spit ink at the screen. Finally, the hero battles his way through a series of airships, scored with the ominous music from Super Mario 3. The gauntlet of flying tanks concludes in a boss fight with Boom Boom, who whirls around until he gets dizzy.

Every inch of Super Mario 3DS feels like a genuine Mario experience. Controlling Nintendo's mascot with the circle pad takes some getting used to, especially if you intend on using the 3D effect frequently, but I have no doubts that the end product will please fans. » **Tom Tuner**

» **Title:** Mario 3DS
 » **Style:** Platforming
 » **Publisher:** Nintendo
 » **Developer:** Nintendo
 » **Release:** Winter





Asura's Wrath

Who has six arms and throws giants into space?

» Platform: PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 » Style: 1-Player Action
» Publisher: Capcom » Developer: CyberConnect2 » Release: 2012

Tight, flashy combat unites with insane feats of bravado in this stylish tale of a man seeking vengeance. Asura can pummel foes with his fists, unleash a barrage of energy projectiles, and channel his rage to perform outrageous acts.

The E3 2011 demo played out like the final boss battle of many games, with Asura's enemy growing larger with each phase of the fight. The gameplay also evolved along with the fight; Asura sprints towards the huge missile-firing antagonist, chases him through a field while throwing back heat-seeking warheads, and even-

tually tosses the behemoth into space. Instead of doing something reasonable like dying, the bad guy grows even larger, showing his finger through the atmosphere towards Asura like a raging comet. Asura grows four extra arms, intercepts the daunting digit, punches the crap out of it, and destroys his enemy in a flash of glory.

While still early in development, Asura is emerging as a potential successor to the likes of Dante and Bayonetta. The playable demo may have been heavy with quicktime events and light on true battles, but the brief taste did not disappoint. » **Tom Turi**

Ghost Recon: Future Soldier

The Ghosts return from hiatus

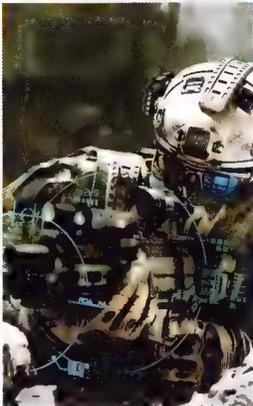
» Platform: PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC » Style: 1 to 4-Player Shooter (16-Player Online)
» Publisher: Ubisoft » Developer: Ubisoft Paris » Release: 2012

Since we last saw Future Soldier a year ago, Ubisoft pushed back the release date into 2012 as the developer honed the gameplay. So how is it coming along?

Future Soldier feels like a departure from the tactics-heavy Advanced Warfare games. Your AI soldiers are largely autonomous, and the increased battle awareness lets you focus on the task at hand rather than babysitting. Even with the improvements, I'm still most interested in playing the campaign in four-player co-op.

The competitive multiplayer pits the Ghosts versus the Bodark, the Russian equivalent to the elite U.S. unit. Both groups have unique weapons and armor that you earn by leveling up. Once you find a weapon you like, you can spend XP and choose from over 50 attachments to customize it to your liking.

If you're itching to get your hands on Future Soldier, dig in for a long wait. Ubisoft says the multiplayer beta isn't starting until early 2012. » **Matt Bertz**



This new anomorph type uses its head like a battering ram. Taking it on from the front seems like a yesteryear, dude.



Wii U

Even though footage from *Alien: Colonial Marines* was shown during Nintendo's E3 press conference, don't take that to mean that a Wii U version is inevitable. "We're investigating it as a platform and seeing how it could work," says Gearbox co-founder and chief creative officer Brian Martel. "Obviously there are questions about where it's going to come in on specs and those kinds of things. We're just making sure the game can be what it needs to be. If it can, great."

That's not to say that Gearbox is down on the platform, however. Martel says that he does see some exciting ways to implement the system's unique touchscreen, including as a Marine's motion tracker or for welding and hacking minigames. "And that's just scratching the surface. It's a really cool system, no doubt. I think [Nintendo] is finally maybe going to get that hardcore audience it wants."

Aliens: Colonial Marines

Gearbox's shooter could be more than just another bug hunt

We've been tracking *Aliens: Colonial Marines* since our March 2008 cover story, even as the pings from Sega and Gearbox have grown increasingly faint. That changed during E3, when Gearbox CEO and co-founder Randy Pitchford showed off the game in a demo behind closed doors.

In an interview after the presentation, the studio's co-founder and chief creative officer Brian Martel sounded contrite about the gap in information on the shooter. "Maybe we were talking about it a little earlier than we should have," he told us. Regardless, the game is certainly looking to be worth the wait.

Colonial Marines is set months after the events of *Aliens*, and it marks a return to LV-426. The nuke that lit up the planet's surface at the end of the film didn't exactly eradicate the xenomorphic threat. If anything, the fact that the creatures are alive and seemingly thriving should point to just how dangerous they really are.

We see some of that threat in action, as a squad of Marines crash lands on the planet's

surface. Despite the nuclear blast, many key areas from the film remain intact. In addition to providing a familiar setting, Gearbox says it will fill in some of the story's gaps. "What happened to Hudson when he got pulled down through the floor?" Martel teases. "Did he turn into a xeno?" Martel says that it's critical that players see the aftermath of what happened to characters like Hudson and Vasquez, as well as tie up a few mysteries. "How did those eggs get on the ship in *Alien 3*? We don't remember the queen running off and doing some of that," he adds.

Gearbox sees *Colonial Marines* as a sequel to *Aliens*, and that extends to the gameplay. The feeling of being hunted is there, but this is a game about taking on swarms of xenomorphs, rather than tracking a single stowaway. The squad moves with ruthless efficiency, reinforcing choke points with automated turrets and moving as a team, but even they prove to be no match for their horrifying enemy. Fortunately, players work together in groups of four to help even the odds.

After a standoff inside an operations center, the squad retreats to another area. While outside, we spy a new variation of xenomorph in the rainy gloom. The bull-headed mutation sounds like a particularly nasty foe. "You can't take him on head on," Martel says. "Most of the weapons won't work on him, so you have to find a new way. That's really great in co-op, and it makes you think a little bit more in single-player—or run in single-player." Gearbox is working closely with Fox to expand the roster of enemies, so you won't be facing the same hunter types we've all seen before.

As Pitchford points out, *Aliens* has been tremendously influential to video games. A faithful extension of the film has been a long time coming, and it's looking as though *Colonial Marines* could be what fans have been waiting for. If the team can keep encounters fresh throughout an entire campaign, this could be an infestation worth rooting for. **Jeff Cork**

The hunters look as though they were torn from the movies.

» **Platform**
Xbox 360 • PlayStation 3

» **Style**
1 or 2-Player Shooter
(4-Player online)

» **Publisher**
Sega

» **Developer**
Gearbox Software

» **Release**
Spring 2012



The squad reinforces its defenses during tense "Take a Stand" moments.



Game over, man.



photophile



PS3 • 360 • Vita • PC

Street Fighter X Tekken

The Street Fighter and Tekken universes collide in another fighting game from Capcom. Players can choose to use the control layouts from either series in this 2D crossover. Similar to *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*, you will call on your partners to execute tag super combos in the heat of battle. Bob, Kazuya, and Julia joining forces to beat Ryu into the dirt? Yes please.



PS3

Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time

Sanzaru, the development team that gave Sly the HD treatment in *The Sly Collection*, is taking the reins from Sucker Punch to deliver the stealthy racoon's latest adventure. With a visual flair that harkens back to Sly's glory days and the usual mix of solid platforming and stealth, we expect another memorable journey when Sony releases *Thieves in Time* next year.



PS3 • 360 • PC

Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine

Developer Relic Entertainment is giving Games Workshop's popular Warhammer 40,000 universe a summer blockbuster makeover with its third-person action title being published by THQ. Despite the generic name, Space Marine's stylized gore and expert blending of melee combat and third-person shooting should grab the attention of gamers when it releases on September 6.

PS3 • 360

Ninja Gaiden 3

A running theme in this sequel is Ryu Hayabasa facing the consequences of his countless murders – a burden that manifests as his cursed arm. Team Ninja hasn't revealed the story details that led to his arm's unsightly appearance, but we do know: It unleashes a gigantic ultimate attack when it's glowing red. You'll surely see a lot more red than that when Ninja Gaiden 3 releases next year through publisher Tecmo Koel.



PS3 • 360 • Wii • PC • DS

The Adventures of Tintin: The Game

Timed to release at the same time as the Tintin movie this winter, Ubisoft's video game adaptation promises to provide a family-friendly way to live the Tintin dream. Beating up thugs, flying airplanes, and riding in a motorcycle sidecar appear to be the highlights of the action, and players can switch characters and use unique abilities to overcome various obstacles.

PS3 • 360 • PC

Top Gun: Hard Lock

One of the seminal '80s movies is getting a fresh game adaptation thanks to 505 Games. The typical behind-the-jet action is zoomed in closer, letting you focus your attention on tearing your rivals to shreds. You won't be flying alongside Iceman and Maverick, but you can interact with those iconic pilots during flashback sequences set during your early days at the Navy's Top Gun Academy. Get ready to enter the danger zone next spring.





PS3 • 360 • PC

Lord of the Rings: The War in the North

Warner Bros. says that the recently revealed giant eagles are essentially members of the fellowship in the War in the North, and we're glad they're on our side. The creatures can be called in like living airstrikes, tearing apart small and large foes alike. Even when the eagles aren't around, your party does a great job of taking care of themselves, so sharpen your weapons for the game's August release.



PS3 • 360 • Wii • PC • PSP • DS • Vita • 3DS

LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7

You didn't think LEGO Harry Potter would end after years 4-4 now, did you? TT Games and Warner Bros. Interactive are back with the concluding chapters of the brick-filled adventure. The game continues the tradition of keeping the outscapes whimsical, despite the more mature source material. The game ships later this year, giving you plenty of time to wrangle up a co-op buddy.



PS3 • 360 • Wii • PC

Skylanders: Spyro's Adventures

Skylanders: Spyro's Adventures' basic concept is ingenious: You take one of 32 toy figurines based on Spyro characters, set it on a "portal" base that's tied to your console, and the toy instantly appears in your game. Then, during gameplay, you take that character through light action/RPG and puzzle gameplay segments that build up XP that saves to the toy. Later on, you and a friend can duel your toys in PvP combat, a la Pokémon Stadium. It's an interesting concept, and seems perfect for the kids market.



3DS

Star Fox 64 3D

Not everything is exactly how you remember it in the remake of the N64 classic. You can use the gyroscope and accelerometer to pilot your ship by tilting the 3DS, and your HUD is displayed on the touchscreen along with the faces of Peppy, Falco, and Slippy. In multiplayer those faces are replaced with pictures of your opponents so you can see their reactions when you knock them out of the sky. Get your wings September 11.



3DS

Kid Icarus Uprising

Kid Icarus: Uprising was one of the biggest surprises at last year's E3, answering the pleas of fans that have been waiting for series hero Pit to return to gaming outside of Super Smash Bros. This year, the game was playable on the show floor, displaying some of the best 3D visuals on the system to date and a control scheme that could take some getting used to. Also playable at the show was the game's newly announced three-on-three multiplayer. It will be interesting to see if this game can live up to the 3DS crowd's expectations.

REVIEWS

gameinformer
GAME OF THE MONTH

106 Shadows of the Damned

We didn't know what to expect when Suda 51 and Shinji Mikami announced a collaborative project, but we had a feeling it would be unique. *Shadows of the Damned* not only delivers Suda's trademark weirdness, but it features the rock-solid gameplay associated with Mikami's action titles. The result is a delightfully odd trip through Hell.

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	Flawed. 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	Bad. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions 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 redeeming 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 derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	1	Mr. Cabbage.

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.

Shadows of the Damned

This gloriously thrilling ride to the depths of Hell plays like heaven!

9.25

PS3

Concept

Suda51's wackiness mixed together with Shinji Mikami's expertly designed monster shooting

Graphics

One of the more colorful Unreal Engine 3 games

Sound

Silent Hill sound designer Akira Yamaoka crafted an incredibly weird, but endlessly interesting soundtrack that's aided by playful voice acting

Playability

Suda51's most approachable game, with a control scheme that fans of third-person shooters should get used to immediately

Entertainment

As long as you can get behind the juvenile sense of humor, *Shadows of the Damned* is a road trip to Hell well worth taking

Replay Value

Moderately Low



gameformer

GAME OF THE MONTH

gameformer

GOLD

Style 1-Player Action Publisher Electronic Arts Developer Grasshopper Manufacture Release June 21 ESRB M

Shadows of the Damned is not shy about its inspirations. Early in the game protagonist Garcia Hotspur proclaims that he and his traveling skull companion Johnson are making "our very own road movie." Like the grindhouse films that it pays homage to, *Shadows of the Damned* is vulgar, violent, over-the-top, and way more fun than it should be. This is *Resident Evil 4* rewritten by a 12-year-old obsessed with d--- jokes. As it turns out, that's a good thing.

In the opening moments of *Shadows of the Damned*, Garcia's apartment is invaded by demonic forces that drag away his girlfriend, Paula. The tattoo-covered hero swears vengeance and jumps through a portal to Hell. Garcia's journey takes him through multiple colorful regions of the underworld, from a Mexican marketplace to a racy red light district.

Throughout the eight-hour adventure, Garcia and his buddy trade boneheaded one-liners that would have had me groaning if they weren't

presented with such straight-faced glee. Despite being the hero, Garcia is a dimwit who chuckles at his own horrible jokes and stumbles into enemy traps constantly. Plenty of games with dumb writing use self-awareness as an excuse, but *Shadows of the Damned* isn't just aware of its stupidity, it embraces immaturity with an abandon that I can't help but respect. It doesn't seem like Grasshopper considered any situation too outrageous or any line of dialogue too goofy to include.

Grasshopper Manufacture scored a major victory by getting help from *Resident Evil* mastermind Shinji Mikami. Unlike previous Suda51-developed games, polished, rarely frustrating gameplay backs up the off-the-wall insanity. Mikami's classic, over-the-shoulder third-person shooter style is present, but now you can move at the same time. Whether you're fighting a giant Frankenstein creature with a huge spotlight on its head or a tiny demon wearing spike-covered armor that rolls toward you as a ball, Garcia has enough grace and speed to survive any situation.

Despite his bravado, this demon hunter doesn't spend all his time shooting up the legions of Hell. Each level contains a handful of interesting puzzles, most of which involve manipulating light and dark. If a room is enveloped in shadow, Garcia's health will slowly drain until he leaves that region or fills the room with light by shooting a goat head. Other brain-teasers involve moving platforms around a room to form paths and hunting down keys in the form of brains that you feed to demon babies. It only takes a couple of minutes to solve these problems, but enough of them are spread throughout the game to provide a change of pace when you tire of shooting.

Both the puzzles and the combat are aided by an ever-growing arsenal of new weapons and tools. For example, halfway through the game, Garcia receives the ability to place light mines with his pistol. In combat, he can stick mines on an enemy and then shoot them for an explosion that damages both the unlucky demon and any surrounding baddies. In exploration, the mines can be detonated on certain walls and rocks to discover hidden areas. Each upgrade provides some similarly inventive new approaches to combat and tactics for dealing with the oversized boss encounters.

The only major flaws in *Shadows of the Damned* come in a few frustrating late-game scenarios where you're put in arena fights against an absurd number of opponents, and a handful of chase sequences where Garcia is instantly killed if caught by a pursuer. I was also saddened to discover that there's no new game-plus option. Given the huge number of upgrades, I wanted to restart the game as a powered-up badass on a higher difficulty.

Shadows of the Damned is unapologetically adolescent, but instead of trying to be cutely ironic and wink at players, the humor comes off as genuine, playful, and fun. Even if you don't find the idea of a sniper rifle called "the Big Boner" funny, you should still enjoy the solidly designed shooting and bit of thought required to play the game. Grasshopper has finally come into its own, and I hope it carries this momentum (and Mikami) forward to whatever project is next. - Phil Kollar

Check out Renee and Phil's commentary on the first 20 minutes of *Shadows of the Damned* at gameformer.com/con/mvag



F.E.A.R. 3

John Carpenter's on board, but where are the scares?



7.75

PS3 • 360 • PC

» Concept

Continue the twisted story of Alma and her offspring

» Graphics

No one will mistake this for the Frostbite 2 engine, but the graphics conjure an appropriate level of grimness

» Sound

Day 1 uses spooky sound effects to amplify the eerie mood, but the voice acting is still over the top

» Playability

The controls and combat are the strength of the experience

» Entertainment

If you're looking for frights or a lengthy single-player campaign, look elsewhere. If you're looking for a unique multiplayer experience, F.E.A.R. 3 delivers

» Replay Value

Moderately High

When big names like film director John Carpenter (*The Thing*, *Halloween*) and comic book writer Steve Niles (*30 Days of Night*) attach themselves to a project, it's not unreasonable to expect a certain degree of terror. After Warner Bros. announced the two were collaborating with Day 1 Studios to develop F.E.A.R. 3, I anticipated a game that would re-embrace the dedication to scaring the bejesus out of players that many, including myself, felt was lost in the action-heavy sequel.

F.E.A.R. 3 features many of the integral pieces necessary to deliver frights—haunting sound effects, an arresting atmosphere, and foreboding environments—yet too often the game recycles old techniques that proved scary in 2005 but do little to raise my blood pressure now. Alma's apparition has strolled across my path so many times at this point she's more of an annoying pest than a fearsome poltergeist.

The uninspired story does even less to make the hairs stand up on the back of your neck. At the end of Project Origin, protagonist Michael Becket somehow impregnated the demented psychic. Now estranged brothers Point Man and Paxton Fettel have reunited, and Fettel wants the family to attend the birth of their new sibling. Before they start buying Hallmark cards, however, the brothers have some issues to work out. The primary gripe? Point Man murdered his bro in the first game.

This uneasy alliance sets the stage for the campaign, a five-hour experience best played in co-op. One user plays as Point Man, a weapons expert who can momentarily slow down

time during battle. The other controls Fettel, the infinitely more interesting apparition who can suspend enemies in the air, shock them to death from afar, and inhabit enemy bodies for a short time to use their weapons. It's a shame the abilities aren't more balanced, because Fettel's unique skills make him the clear-cut preference.

F.E.A.R. 3's campaign is short on terror, but the satisfying action keeps it from being a complete loss. The enemies are more aggressive than typical shooters; opposing soldiers constantly try to flank you in open spaces, the dog-like scavengers attack in packs, and cultists rush at you like hordes of brain-dead zombies. The few mech encounters are particularly menacing. These hulking machines proved surprisingly agile, making their way into areas I thought were safe.

Some levels are so poorly designed it's hard to tell where you're supposed to go next, but many have a memorable atmosphere. As you move through the quarantined city's abandoned prisons, desolate suburbs, and ruined commercial districts, the bleakness of the circumstance is palpable. My favorite locations were an abandoned bulk retail outlet, where a crazed group of freaks spring from behind walls of glowing HDTVs, and the creepy suburban neighborhood, which featured candlelit homes defaced with demonic ramblings scribbled in blood on white walls.

While playing through the campaign, each player racks up points for completing specific challenges. Though the game never tells you outright, these scores determine which ending you see. If Point Man has a higher score, he

becomes the dominant character in the conclusion. If Fettel wins, his decisions drive the finale. It would have been nice to know beforehand, because it may have encouraged more backstabbing and point hoarding during my playthrough, during which Reiner and I often shared the wealth.

The campaign may lack suspense, but the multiplayer delivers it in bulk. Day 1 Studios deserves credit for forgoing the deathmatch/team deathmatch/capture the flag multiplayer mode holy trinity in favor of more colorful choices. The star mode is F—ing Run, a speed trial that tasks four players with pressing through enemies at a breakneck speed while avoiding the Wall of Death chasing them from behind. Contractions is another winner—a frantic spin-off of Call of Duty's Zombie mode where you must scavenge for supplies in between waves of enemies. The last two modes, which revolve around possessing enemy bodies, are also a welcome change of pace. A universal ranking accrues points for your campaign and multiplayer exploits, but without a system of unlocks or rewards I wonder how long players will stick around.

In many ways, the F.E.A.R. story feels like it has run its course. Like most long-running horror series, the scares that thrilled us years ago no longer do the trick, and as I learn more about Alma's family, the less interested I become in trudging forward. However, if you hardly pay attention to narratives and are looking for a fun multiplayer experience, F.E.A.R. 3 is worth checking out. • **Matt Bertz**

Catherine

This temptress broke my heart

7

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**

An interactive anime meets Q*bert-inspired block puzzles in an exploration of one tortured man's psychology

» **Graphics**

The Atus style translates beautifully to HD, especially in the gorgeous animated sequences

» **Sound**

An off-the-wall soundtrack and solid voice acting help sell the game's creepy narrative

» **Playability**

As the puzzles become increasingly abstract, prepare for controller-crushing rage and boredom

» **Replay Value**

The fascinating story that's unlike any other video game ever released can't make up for the gameplay frustrations

» **Replay Value**
Moderate



Style 1 or 2-Player Puzzle Publisher Atlus Developer Atlus Release July 26 ESRB M

Let me tell you about this girl I met at the bar the other night. Just stunning, totally gorgeous, you know? And unique. She does things I've never seen another girl do. She's deep, too. She makes me think about relationships and commitment and all these topics I don't normally tackle in my line of work. Sounds like a girl worth falling in love with, right? But despite all of these assets, Catherine is a killer. She'll wreck you if you let her.

Catherine (the game) has more in common with main character Vincent than its namesake. It's divided from within, torn between two loves. On one hand, Catherine immerses players in drawn-out anime cutscenes that reveal a middle-aged man stuck in a dramatic

love triangle. Heady subject matter and tough questions abound, shaping players' experience around a scale that measures their personality between law (living what society considers a regular life) and chaos (living based on personal whims and desires).

These lengthy narrative sequences are broken up by "Nightmare" levels where Vincent has to push blocks around in order to climb up an endless tower. As you first learn the strange rules of this fast-paced, arcade gameplay, these portions seem inoffensive, though not particularly engaging. But with each new night that passes, Vincent is forced to confront more difficult and lengthier puzzles.

Frustration and frequent deaths await as you desperately claw your way toward the next group of cutscenes and non-dream gameplay.

Finally figuring out how to survive a horrific boss encounter after 20-some deaths never grants you a sense of accomplishment, only relief at the temporary reprieve. The dialogue and character development are less fun when tinged with the dreadful knowledge that more block puzzles are in your future.

My fleeting happy memories of Catherine will always be poisoned by soul-crushing thoughts of what could

have been. In its first in-house-developed HD release, Atlus has crafted something rare and wonderful, a video game that is about so much more than killing people. But the potential impact of this experience is weakened considerably by the block puzzles, segments so shamelessly gamey and out-of-place in the narrative that they include a score tally and reward medals based on your performance.

Sadly, even the story of Catherine doesn't pay off entirely. While I was fully wrapped up in the trials of Vincent and his handful of friends, the game's "morality scale" is mostly affected via simple two-choice questions that are asked at the end of every puzzle area — thoughtful queries such as, "Does life begin or end at marriage?" These inquiries provide plenty of food for thought, but it's strange that the plot (which features eight different endings) is determined by these questions rather than by in-game decisions Vincent makes.

The result of answering Catherine's queries truthfully — my reward for conquering every one of the game's devious puzzles — was one of the worst possible endings. Maybe Vincent's choices corresponded accurately to my personality, but it was a bummer receiving a bad ending and knowing that I'd have to replay the 12-15 hour game to see something better. Like a relationship that's going nowhere, Catherine has a few bright spots that will make you want to hold on, but it never quite gives back as much as you put into it. » **Phil Kollar**

Watch Reiner and Phil compare some of Catherine's early challenges at www.gameinformer.com/mag



Duke Nukem Forever

12 years in the making

Style 1-Player Shooter Publisher 2K Games Developer Gearbox Software/Triptych Studios/3D Realms Release June 14 ESRB M

6.75

In Duke Nukem Forever's introductory sequence, I drained my weasel, grabbed poop out of a toilet and threw it into the face of an EDF soldier, drew a giant p---s on a dry erase board, and engaged in sexual relations with twins. These actions are juvenile and unnecessary but, in the eyes of someone who loves *South Park* and is easily amused by crude humor, exactly what I was hoping to get from a new Duke Nukem game.

With development stretching back over 12 years to a time when PC gamers were first introduced to Half-Life and Unreal and console players were realizing that first-person shooters had a bright future on their favorite machines, Duke Nukem Forever doesn't look dated. Sure, the texture work on Duke's middle finger could look sharper, and the strippers' robotic animations make me wonder if these women have ever danced before, but the game occasionally spits out a lumbering boss waltzing over or an environmental explosion that dazzles the eyes with large-scale physics-based carnage.

The game's design also appears to be based exclusively off of modern FPS blueprints. Duke has regenerating health (yet at one point he mocks Master Chief), and surprise surprise, he can only wield two weapons at a time (just like Chief). Moreover, many enemy encounters are scripted events, timely checkpoints are scattered liberally throughout stages, and game play variety is offered through vehicle and rail gun sequences.

The most dated part of this experience is Duke himself. He still looks exactly like Dolph Lundgren, and although he makes it apparent that he follows today's celebrity news and has seen *Team America*, his dialogue mostly harks back to classic '80s and '90s films like *Robocop* and *Army of Darkness*. He's equally amused by pop culture references and his private parts, which I learned far too much about.

Duke's selection of weapons mostly consists of his bag of tricks from the mid '90s. He can freeze or shrink enemies and crush them with his boot (which is worth a chuckle every time). When he gets into a bind he can eat steroids (complete with crazed Jose Canseco vision) or summon a holographic version of himself to confuse his dim-witted pig cop foes. Most of his other weapons fall into the standard FPS mold (shotguns, rocket launchers, machine guns, etc.). The gunplay feels decent, and the weapons are tailored nicely to most enemy encounters, creating unique, balanced fights that are occasionally transformed into laughably bad circus acts due to AI pathing issues and unintelligent tactics.



Duke starts with a bang (I'll never forget my time with the toilets), but quickly ditches its immature antics and descends into a talispin of questionable puzzle design, uninspired vehicle sections, and mundane level architecture. The three to four hours following the introductory sequence are a rough ride. The game's unbearable load times (roughly 30 seconds to a minute every time you die or load a new area) seem so much longer during this stretch.

The game picks up again at the The Mighty Foot level, a sprawling wild west setting that Duke navigates in a monster truck. From this stage on, it stays largely entertaining – not solely because of Duke's sophomoric attitude, but respectable level designs that offer variety and a few killer set piece moments. I could have done without the swimming, and some of the puzzles along the way seemed to be inserted just to slow me down. Duke even goes as far to say, "I hate valve puzzles" during a minute-long valve-turning sequence. Always trust the words of your game character, developers.

If you've been following Duke's development all these years, the campaign is worth a look. I found it to be an interesting game to analyze and dissect, questioning what may have been created 12 years ago by 3D Realms and what was created today by Gearbox Software and Triptych Studios. Nothing about it is truly remarkable or to the scale of other genre heavyweights, but it is a fun run when it fires on all cylinders.

Duke's multiplayer didn't get much buzz leading up to release, but it isn't a small, tacked on "we have multiplayer" offering. Experience points earned in battle are tied to a deep leveling system that rewards the player with new cosmetic gear, as well as items that can be displayed in a posh apartment. At level 30, a bronze babe is added. At level 12, pixelated paintings line the walls. At level 42, a working air hockey table can be played. Although a handy Game

Finder option is available (complete with ping rates), the long load times found in single player are just as bad when trying to join matches or enter the apartment.

With tiny maps, every match offers fast-paced action, even if you are in an objective-based boot (like babe stealing). I got a big kick out of using the shrink ray on other players, but the hit detection for any firearm is incredibly hard to read. I found myself spraying bullets in a panic just to hit a foe. As much as I'd like to see Duke's apartment fully furnished, the questionable gunplay is a deal breaker for me. I won't be spending any more time with it.

And with that said, I probably won't spend any more time with the game period. I'm glad Gearbox stepped up and finished this game, but after hearing about it for 12 years, I have no desire to relive any of it again. I'm now satisfied in my knowledge of what Duke Nukem Forever is and ready to never talk about it again. Welcome back, Duke. I hope your next game (which is teased after the credits) goes off without a hitch. — Andrew Reiner



» Concept
A walking, talking embodiment of '80s and '90s action movie chéchs that spent over a decade in development hell

» Graphics
Despite spending 12 years in development, the visuals are competent in 2011

» Sound
Duke spits out a steady stream of politically incorrect one-liners and movie quotes, usually set against squealing guitars

» Playability
The action hits a major lull after the opening sequence, but rights itself and makes good use of the solid, yet unremarkable gunplay

» Entertainment
Duke made me laugh, and though the campaign suffers from lulls, the action was engaging enough to keep me going

» Replay Value
Moderate

NCAA Football 12

At the top of its game?

9

Concept

NCAA bolsters its game by giving Dynasty and Road to Glory modes a backbone by making coaches more prominent in both

Graphics

The new lighting system is noticeable while you're playing as well as in replays. The 3D grass, however, is largely irrelevant

Sound

It sounds weird, but I miss third booth man Lee Corso. The booth sounds dull with just Kirk Herbstreit and Brad Nessler, and there are still comments that seem out of place

Playability

The improved tackling and catches fix those legacy issues, but the game doesn't feel dramatically different

Entertainment

Despite the variety of improvements, the most exciting new feature is the ability to create custom conferences and mess around with the BCS bowl tie-ins

Replay Value
High



generations
GOLD

Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (2-Player Online) Publisher EA Sports Developer EA Tiburon Release July 12 ESRB B

The year after a championship can be tricky. You may be the team to beat, but you still have a long road ahead of you as you try to recapture that magic. Last year, EA came out with a great college football product that captured the feeling of the sport. NCAA 12 builds upon NCAA 11 with a list of improvements, but how much better is it?

Going into this review, I was most interested in NCAA 12's promise to fix the magnet tackles and catches from years past. For the most part, developer EA Tiburon succeeded, yet the game feels much like it always has. The new tackling button doesn't create unrealistic whiffs, nor does the catch button facilitate unbelievable grabs. You won't see wide receivers slide across the field towards the ball or tackle animations engage too soon. True multi-defender gang tackles don't occur, either, although they look better than they did last year because multiple defenders can throw their weight around to change the trajectory of the runner.

The franchise's improvements, however, are balanced by an ongoing problem – the AI's lack of ball awareness. While I'm glad that receivers don't magically shoot forward to make catches, there are times when the opposite happens – the ball sails by them and they don't even put their hands up to catch it. The AI's ball awareness improves as you move away from the default difficulty, but even then you'll see the occasional defender letting the ball carrier run by without attempting a tackle or an AI QB make some glaringly bad throwing choices. At least defenders are more aggressive, moving fluidly in their zones, jumping passes, and providing tighter coverage in general.

NCAA's gameplay wrestles with the constant process of improving the past, and I think Dynasty Mode's new Coaching Carousel reveals a need to update the series' recruiting component. The Coaching Carousel lists goal-based expectations that influence your coaching prestige and keep you gainfully employed. This

provides more structure to Dynasty mode, but it didn't change how I went about my business. Recruiting was renovated just last year, but I wish the points you get for talking to recruits were more spread out and distinct (right now you can get a similar amount of points for seemingly disparate answers) and that recruiting encompassed the physical and mental traits of players instead of just discovering whether they like the campus weight room. Improving recruiting could take the coaching experience to the next level.

Road to Glory's additions are more numerous than the Dynasty changes, but stop short of being a full overhaul. Earning coach's trust through your play and working your way up the depth chart isn't hard, and I have mixed feelings about the mode. It's fun to upgrade your player and unlock the ability to call audibles, but that's all stuff that I wish I had from the beginning.

NCAA 12 is better than NCAA 11, and yet I feel like we've come to the point in the series' lifecycle where the changes – while all worthwhile – are getting harder to notice.

Perhaps that's because of all the hard work has already been done. Consider the game's online dynasties, which are already full-featured enough that one of its main new additions – being able to sim ahead a week from your computer – is an optional pay-to-play feature. When things are going this good, it seems insane to ask for an overhaul of some core features like recruiting. But as they always say in football, you've got to fight for every yard. **Matthew Kato**





Ms. Splosion Man

Platforming excellence not for the easily frustrated

gameformer
SILVER

Style 1 to 4-Player Platforming (4-Player Online) **Publisher** Microsoft Game Studios
Developer Twisted Pixel **Release** July 13 **ESRB** T

8.75

Twisted Pixel's best game to date takes a fun concept and makes it better. Splosion Man was entertaining, but limited in scope. Its sequel draws inspiration from the platforming greats and emerges as a bigger, funnier, more ambitious title. The developer has also crafted a unique and hilarious new protagonist. Like a Looney Tunes character come to life, Ms. Splosion Man is a brilliant parody of teenage girl stereotypes. Like those great classic cartoon characters. Your willingness to play along with the joke will determine whether the game works for you as it did for me.

I wouldn't worry too much about story in Ms. Splosion Man — another science experiment gone wrong creates a feminine version of the exploding protagonist, and she runs amok, blowing herself up again and again to navigate the dangerous world before her. As she runs, she'll tiptoe like a ballerina and prance like a pony, spouting her favorite lines from Britney Spears, Madonna, and *Dirty Dancing*.

Though the control mechanics are as simple as one button press (Sploof), the platforming challenges are anything but easy. In a lengthy 50-level single-player campaign, the game continually throws new devices and environmental hazards your way. Exploding barrels that fling you into the background of a level, saddles that rocket you across the sky, giant tentacled bosses — plenty of diversity keeps you on your toes, even if the background environments could use more variation.

With one or more buddies along for the ride, you can enjoy the equally excellent but wholly different multiplayer campaign, which demands careful timing and smart cooperative play to progress. In either campaign, you'll move between levels in a convenient overworld map. There, you'll head to special levels unlocked through secret stage exits, and even visit a mall of unlockable content filled with movies, art, and extra game options.

Ms. Splosion Man is at its best when the pace is frantic and unstoppable, just like its manic heroine. Large chunks of the game do just that, keeping the action fast and just challenging enough. At other times, the game stalls out due to tedious and overly precise platforming sequences and infuriating checkpoint placement. Doing the same 30-second sequence 12 times over just to get to the section you keep missing halts the relentless pacing. The normally amusing voiceover turns grating, and the fun level design becomes stale. The frustration is made worse by the character's small size on the screen and the way she's often obscured by the crazy action. Luckily, a handy in-game cheat lets you skip past checkpoints when you've had enough.

Even when I was annoyed by Twisted Pixel's latest game, I remained impressed with the grand scope and well-realized vision the team manages to convey, from the smallest motion of the characters to the breadth of design ideas and levels. Though the silly humor and high challenge curve could scare some players off, everyone should try one of the best downloadable games this year. » **Matt Müller**

Concept

Explodes your way through 100 challenging platforming levels using a hyper-maniac parody of femininity

Graphics

Fantastic animation brings the characters to life

Sound

This girl's constant prattling voiceover will either have you laughing out loud or muting the dialogue

Playability

Building on only one core mechanic (sploofing), the basics of control are easy to master, but controlling that explosive movement is another thing entirely

Entertainment

Outstanding design in both single and multiplayer, but things get difficult fast

Replay Value

Moderately High

Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon

The EDF emerges victorious again

Style 1 or 2-Player Action (6-Player Online) **Publisher** D3
Publisher Vicious Cycle **Release** July 5 **ESRB** T

8

Concept

Earth is being invaded by giant bugs and robots, and you need to shoot 'em

Graphics

I only ran into slowdown a couple of times, which is impressive considering all of the explosions, lasers, and spider guts on the screen

Sound

The best line of dialogue is still "EDF! EDF!"

Playability

Additions like an active reload and a run button help this entry clear the lowest bar of expectation for modern shooters

Entertainment

If you want subtlety and depth, look somewhere else. If you want to mindlessly kill a bunch of aliens, welcome to the EDF

Replay Value

Moderately High

Earth Defense Force 2017 had clumsy animation, bizarre physics, and chintzy-looking 2D power-ups... but it didn't become a cult hit because of its technical execution. It became a cult hit because it provided absurd B-movie popcorn action that you could enjoy with your friends. Though Insect Armageddon faces a different set of shortcomings, it nails the important stuff.

The team at Vicious Cycle successfully taps into the core of the EDF experience without simply imitating its predecessor. Taking control of the three-man Lightning squad (your two teammates can either be co-op partners or bots), you kill an invading army of bugs, robots, and spaceships. The simple, point-and-shoot approach doesn't leave much room for tactical depth, but it creates a consistently fun and frantic battlefield. Whether you're using impractical weapons like the Air Tortoise or tearing things up in the (much improved) vehicles, the emphasis on trigger-happy chaos is a blast.

Adding variety to the experience are four classes with unique special abilities and access to different weapon categories. The basic gameplay remains the same, but each class has a slightly different angle. Like the jet armor's mobility and the tactical armor's turrets. Gaining levels in each class opens up more powerful weapons, and adds a sense of progression and reward that was missing the last time around. Being able to advance alongside your buddies in three-player online co-op (two-player split screen locally) just adds to the fun, though I wish the six-player survival mode also contributed to advancing your classes.

Unfortunately, your ability to reach the highest levels and see the best gear is based solely on replaying old stages. Grinding through the same missions to eke out some extra XP is expected, and when you're done, you're supposed to crank the difficulty up a notch and do it all over again to reach higher levels. I can't imagine why Insect Armageddon made improvements in other areas only to leave this repetitive structure intact, especially since there are only 15 missions comprised of a limited handful of objectives (expect to activate a lot of self-destruct devices on EDF landers). Other frustrations, like the lack of checkpoints and no experience gain unless you finish a level, mean that Lightning squad's attempts to save Earth occasionally do more damage to your patience than the invading aliens.

Insect Armageddon lacks the clueless earnestness of the last entry and carries over some dated concepts, but it fully captures the same breed of unapologetic run-and-gun action. Ultimately, that's what kept me playing EDF 2017 for dozens of hours, and that's why I've got dozens more in front of me with Insect Armageddon. » **Joe Juba**



Cars 2

Avalanche's latest is a license worth driving

7.75

PS3 • 360 • DS

Style 1 to 4-Player Racing Publisher Disney Interactive Studios Developer Avalanche Software Release June 21 ESRB E10+

» **Concept**
Put more than 20 characters from Pixar's popular series through their paces in a variety of racing missions

» **Graphics**
The characters look great, and Avalanche captured everything from the way they look to how they zip around the tracks. The environments are varied, but aren't quite up to that level

» **Sound**
A nice selection of tunes, and characters have a decent reservoir of sound bites to draw from

» **Playability**
It's accessible enough for young players, while offering a few advanced moves for the pros

» **Entertainment**
Avalanche proves that its Toy Story 3 game was no fluke; Cars 2 is a solid companion piece to the movie and a must-play for Lightning McQueen superfans

» **Replay Value**
Moderate

Many consider Cars to be one of Pixar's weakest efforts, but that hasn't stopped tykes from enjoying it with a fandom approaching fanatical levels. It's also a merchandiser's dream, as demonstrated by the aisles of cars, playsets, and clothing available in stores. As a parent of a couple of young boys, I know the appeal all too well. I've also seen the quality of Cars-based games slowly decline over the years. If you, too, have felt as if the license is running on an empty tank, take heart. Cars 2 restores that wonderful new-car smell to the franchise.

Rather than emulate the spy-caper events of the sequel, new developer Avalanche wisely chose to use it as a springboard instead. This kart racer provides the series' characters with a variety of C.H.R.O.M.E. training missions as they build up their spy resumes. It's the slimmest of possible storylines, but it beats being constrained by a screenplay that doesn't support hours of gameplay. The on-track action is appropriately fast-paced. After all, Lightning McQueen didn't garner his reputation by snoozing at his wheel. The game also gives minor players like Luigi and Guido a chance to show off their skills on the track. It's a training exercise after all, so what does it matter if a forklift leads a pack of professional racers?

The game follows a standard progression format. You earn spy points for placing well in the events, and from there you unlock more challenges and tiers of increasing difficulty. The events thankfully include more than simple races. I enjoyed the survivor mode in particular, where you have to pick up batteries scattered across a track to maintain a constantly depleting shield. When it's gone, Professor Z's raygun zaps you and it's game over. Some other high points include a hunter mode, where you battle drones in an arena, and attack mode, where you earn time by blasting rival cars into scrap.

You should recognize many of the game's weapons from other kart racers, since Cars 2 liberally pilfers from the genre. The game includes missiles, oil slicks, a super weapon that shrinks enemies, and a little radio-controlled car that may as well turn into a red turtle shell and call it a day. I'm not complaining too loudly about the arsenal, though; there's a reason why certain attack types have persevered in the genre. The same goes for the boost mechanic, in which players earn nitro by snaking along the track or picking up cans of fuel.

The levels take you through a variety of iconic areas, but they ultimately lack the wow factor that other games in the genre offer. At the end of the day, however, Cars 2 is a satisfying kart racing game with a reserve tank of charm. If multiplayer is your thing, the entire game can be played via a four-way split screen. If you have younger gamers in your household, chances are you'll have a few eager challengers in no time flat. » **Jeff Cork**



Trenched

Tower defense meets shooter in another strange Double Fine production

7.5

360

Style 1-Player Action (4-Player Online) Publisher Microsoft Game Studios Developer Double Fine Productions Release June 22 ESRB T

» **Concept**
The world is under attack from monstrous TV tubes. Only your mobile trench can save the day

» **Graphics**
Steeped in a WWII propaganda style, the presentation is fun even if the gameplay environments are a little generic

» **Sound**
Some excellent voice acting as you get sick of the repetitive gun noises

» **Playability**
The basic controls are well mapped, but it's hard to get used to the ever-changing array of weapons

» **Entertainment**
Weird and action-packed, even if things never feel balanced enough to match the best tower defense games

» **Replay Value**
Moderate

Double Fine Productions has spent the last year trying on various hats. Each of its recent games has branched in a new direction. Trenched is no exception. Mixing a standard tower defense formula with an unusual and imaginative twist on the mechanized shooter, Trenched manages to eke out a lot of charm and humor. The gameplay is pretty solid as well, with constant action and a lengthy campaign. It's that same length that starts to reveal the title's repetitive nature, and later levels expose some questionable balance decisions.

The game's name comes from a twist on the familiar mech idea. You pilot a mobile trench – a walking tank crewed by a sandbag trench that manages (somehow) to keep your pilot protected from all damage. Your trench can be equipped with unreasonable weaponry in order to fight the growing threat of robotic TV machines out to enslave mankind. As you hammer these dastardly foes with your machine guns and flak, you can designate points on the battlefield to drop turret emplacements to aid in the fight.

The battles come fast and heavy – almost to a fault. With so little time to set up your emplacements and collect scrap (money), you always feel like you're behind before the waves even start crashing in. There are a huge variety of weapons, emplacements, and trench loadouts to choose between – a growing list of customization awaits after every mission. It's a very cool feature, but it's easy to get lost in all the weapons. Even with recommended weapon types for each battle, I still found myself out of my depth more than once because of poor choices during loadout.

Nearly every fight comes down to the need to defend a particular location from destruction. It can get old, even if the intensity never lets up. Unless you grind through battles repeatedly, expect more than a few mission failures. Many battles are balanced to be very challenging, which adds to the frustration.

While single player can be a slog through some missions, the game is helped tremendously by a fun four-player online cooperative mode. The addition of other trenches on the battlefield helps to even the odds, and the added flexibility of weapons makes a big difference.

A lack of variety notwithstanding, Trenched is an action-packed and amusing variation on the tower defense paradigm. If you're open to some mission replays and a little grinding, Double Fine's latest effort could be worth a look. » **Matt Miller**





Taking on this beast is a nightmare without a partner

Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D

These guns for hire are worth the expense

Style 1-Player Action (2-Player Local or Online) **Publisher** Capcom
Developer Capcom **Release** June 28 **ESRB** M

8

The Resident Evil series has a long history of rewarding players with awesome unlockables like infinite rocket launchers and new costumes. Arguably, the best of these bonuses is Resident Evil 4's The Mercenaries mode. Players took on the role of favorites like Wesker and Hunk, mowing down enemies in succession with preset artillery while racing the clock. Resident Evil 5 enhanced the addictive formula with two-player co-op and even more levels and characters. Like one of the series' mutant abominations, the swollen appendage that is The Mercenaries has finally detached and morphed into a standalone experience for the 3DS, and it's retained almost every ounce of fun.

Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D plays like a greatest hits of the RE 4 and 5's modes, with new features like objective-based missions and a cool perks system. The cast is packed with familiar faces like Chris Redfield and Jill Valentine, each with well-balanced weapon loadouts. It's easy to fall in love with Hunk's devastating melee attacks or Krauser's infinite arrows, but the fun comes from trying all the characters. Unlocking upgradable skills like handgun proficiency, increased health recovery, and combo meter extenders makes outfitting each character a deeper, more rewarding experience.

Unfortunately, the meat of The Mercenaries' score-based, kill-count-focused gameplay is buried beneath about an hour of tutorials disguised as missions. These elementary tasks are okay for newcomers, but everyone else will want to cut to the chase. These tepid stages are eradicated from your memory when the annoying disembodied guide takes a backseat to the wild action. Familiar levels like RE 4's Spanish village and RE 5's African market are packed with hordes of infected residents, crazy chainsaw guys, and hulking executioners. Taking on these bloodthirsty bad guys is still a blast, whether you

prefer to wildly spray bullets or blow out kneecaps and deliver melee finishers. Playing with a partner via the 3DS' wireless or internet connectivity doubles the fun. Watching Barry Burton boot an enemy to the ground followed by Hunk's surgical three bullet finisher is a treat.

Playing Mercenaries on the 3DS is a smooth experience. You can switch weapons and reload with a quick tap on the touchscreen – a more fluid mechanic than a console controller's d-pad. Traditionalists can still aim in third-person, but the default setting pulls the camera into a first-person view when you ready your weapon. Gunning down Umbrella's mutants in first-person makes the smaller screen a non-issue. Moving while shooting has been added, but I wouldn't call the slowly strafing with your gun locked in one direction a huge advancement – I hardly used it and experienced no added trouble beating the game.

One annoying recurring visual hiccup holds back The Mercenaries 3D from being a true representation of its console counterparts. The game appears to conserve the 3DS's processing power by deprioritizing the animations of distant enemies, allowing bad guys in the player's face to move naturally. This results in persistently jittered, claymation-esque movements that would make the director of *The Ring* cringe. Considering that most of the action in The Mercenaries is close quarters, this doesn't end up impacting gameplay too dramatically, but it's less than ideal.

Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D delivers a fleshed out, faithful, yet slightly flawed version of the gripping bonus mode. Imperfections aside, playing The Mercenaries 3D with a friend is the most thrilling handheld co-op experience I've ever had. Fans and 3DS-owners looking for a shot of pure portable action with a rewarding progression system should definitely check it out. » **Tim Turi**

3DS

» Concept

A handheld, fleshed-out version of Resident Evil 4's addicting bonus game

» Graphics

At a glance this could be confused for the console version of Resident Evil 5, but some jerky animations mar the beauty

» Sound

Heart-pumping music, trash-talking bad guys, and gun shots will fill your ears

» Playability

Using the touchscreen to quickly select items is a dream come true

» Entertainment

Like RE 5 this one is better with a friend, but besting your own scores is still a riot

» Replay Value

Moderate

The 3D Effect

Many 3DS games' in-your-face 3D effects make my eyes hurt after a few minutes, but not The Mercenaries 3D. I played the game with 3D on full blast for a healthy chunk of my play time. Gunning down Majnis is intense business, however, and moving around the 3DS while playing becomes an ocular issue in the heat of battle

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8.75 | L.A. Noire

Platform PS3 • 360 Release May 17 ESRB M Issue July '11

At its best, L.A. Noire is one of the most vivid, gripping game experiences I've had. At its worst, it can be plain boring. As in much noir fiction, the truth lies in the gray area between those two extremes. — Matt Helgeson

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Torchlight	8.5	May-11
Trois Evolution	4.5	Jan-11
Two Worlds II	7.75	Mar-11
Venba	5.5	Mar-11
WWE All Stars	7.5	May-11
Yr's Revenge	7.5	Apr-11
Yostar 2	6	Apr-11
You Don't Know Jack	8	Feb-11

Wii

Batystyning Mama	3	Jan-11
Bit Trip Flux	8.25	May-11

the score

8 | Magic: The Gathering – Duels of the Planeswalkers 2012

Platform PS3 • 360 • PC Release June 15 ESRB T

If there were more decks and cards, and an online league structure to compete in, this could have been a gem. As it is, it's a solid but limited digital adaptation of the dominant tabletop game of our generation. — Adam Biessener

7.75 | Super Street Fighter IV: Arcade Edition

Platform PS3 • 360 Release June 28 ESRB T

Capcom repeats its Street Fighter II strategy of winging every last cent it can out of SFIV. Arcade Edition only offers two very Akuma-like new fighters (Evil Ryu and Oni) and the similar Yun and Yang brothers. New replay options are also available for online play, enforcing the feeling that this update is strictly for hardcore players. — Dan Ryckert

8.25 | The Adventures of Shuggy

Platform 360 Release June 15 ESRB E

This solid entry in the "difficult platformer" genre (Super Meat Boy, N+) stands out from the crowd thanks to its out-of-season Halloween theme. A constant flow of new challenges is the game's greatest strength, but not every mode is as good as the last. — Bryan Vore

6.5 | Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters

Platform PS3 • 360 Release June 14 ESRB T

Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters makes good use of the Green Lantern license, yet struggles to deliver an intense combat experience. It ends up feeling like an excruciatingly long game, despite it offering only six to seven hours of gameplay. — Andrew Reiner

7.5 | Transformers: Dark of the Moon

Platform PS3 • 360 Release June 14 ESRB T

Transformers: Dark of the Moon is one of the better movie games of recent years. For fans, it tells a prequel tale to the new film, setting the stage for many of the characters and plot points that will show up. Sadly, being great compared to some recent abysmal licensed projects does not necessarily make it excellent compared to everything else. — Matt Miller

8.75 infamous 2

Platform PS3 Release June 7 ESRB T Issue July 11

The more I played *infamous 2*, the more I found myself disengaged with the story, and enjoying the experience solely for its amazing open-world superhero fights. — Andrew Reiner



Conduit 2	6	Jun-11	Divinity II: Flames of Vengeance	7.75	Jan-11
Create	5	Jan-11	Dungeon Siege III	8	Jul-11
de Blob 2	8	Apr-11	Dungeons	7	Apr-11
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Some Coom	7	Jan-11	Yar's Revenge	7.5	Apr-11
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Tron: Evolution Battle Grids	6	Jan-11			
You Don't Know Jack	8	Feb-11			

PC

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			Radiant Historia	8.75	Mar-11

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E3 The Developer's Perspective

by Jeff Marchiafava

We've spent most of the issue discussing our favorite sights at this year's E3, but what's it like for the men and women showing off their games? Here are the impressions of some of the talented developers attending this year's conference.

"I had a chance to watch a Modern Warfare 3 demo, which was really exciting. It appears to be so realistic, and it has been produced in such a short turnaround that it's really amazing. It looks really good."

+ Yoshinori Kitase, producer, Square Enix

"This isn't lip service, OK? But I really liked Saints Row by THQ. It really looks cool. The silliness of it all looks crazy, and I love it. I loved the trailer, too. There's a guy in the elevator who's smoking a cigarette. He's walking with two girls, and he hands off his cigarette and kills the guy. Then he gets his cigarette back. I love that guy. I love the way he is. I think I'm gonna try to be like him someday."

+ Tomonobu Itagaki, chief technical officer, Valhalla Game Studios

"My best of E3 would have to start with Rayman Origins, which is slap-your-mother-gorgeous though, at the time of printing. I have not yet slapped your mother. Other notables: BioShock Infinite for its sheer insanity, the announcement of a new Smash Bros. game for Wii U, and any game that did not mention the word "trilogy."

+ Mike Neumann, creative director, Gearbox Software

"Honestly, the thing I was most excited about from the show was a tiny part of the Microsoft media briefing that was only on screen for a split second. It was during the segment about the new 360 dashboard where they showed the new



games page with XBLA featured prominently on the front. It's easy for amazing downloadable games like Clash of Heroes, Spelunky, and Bastion to get lost in the current setup. Hopefully this will give indie a bit more exposure."

+ Greg Rice, producer, Double Fine

"I was pleasantly surprised by the Wii U. The potential of this console is awesome, and I can't wait to develop future titles for it. In terms of games, I've always been a big fan of the Assassin's Creed series, and I was very impressed by the CG sequence showing an older Ezio fighting a desperate battle, as well as the in-game demo with him jumping from boat to boat through the fire - can't wait to play it!"

+ Dee Brown, studio head, Beenox

"The lineup of games for this fall and holiday season is just sick. It's crazy; I don't think I've seen such an impressive lineup, ever. Looks like very little sleep for me this fall and winter. I also love how Nintendo continues to do its own thing. I suspect they quite enjoy all the head scratching they cause."

+ Greg Donovan, senior producer, Volition, Inc.

"Aside from being insanely busy, this was the best E3 we've ever had... It's not every day that you can demo your games to Steven Spielberg or Casper Van Dien. I didn't get to see much on the floor, but I saw the Wii U and it looks to be every bit the stroke of genius that I thought it would be, as long as they follow through with a strong first-party launch title. I also think Microsoft continues to play

their cards right with Xbox Live and Kinect."

+ Mike Wilford, chief executive officer, Twisted Pixel

"A real highlight for me at the show was during the Microsoft media briefing. We had just finished our stage demo, which seemed to go over well, and we were hanging out in the green room backstage with Ice-T. Being the social media freaks we all are, we saw that the Body Count reunion and Gears of War 3 song announcement caused 'Body Count' to trend worldwide on Twitter! While it felt like we were just addressing the press [during the presentation], it was pretty clear with all the TV and web coverage that it had reached a lot of people."

+ Rod Fergusson, executive producer, Epic Games

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