

gameinformer





The Elder Scrolls V

SKYRIM



REBORN
11.11.11

WWW.ELDERSCROLLS.COM



Bethesda

DRIVE IT OR PLAY IT?



Don't play with fire. Xbox 360™ console and accessories sold separately. Xbox 360 is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corporation. PlayStation is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All rights reserved. ©2011 Hyundai Motor America.

Of course the Veloster is a blast to drive. And since you can plug in and play your Xbox 360® on its 7-inch touchscreen, it's even fun when parked. YouTube.com/VELOSTER. **Engineered for whatever.**

It Sure Can't Hurt To Ask



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

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

It's our November issue, which means that if I want to get in my wish list of goodies in time for the holidays, I better do it now. I could be selfish and request that Audi R8 V10 I'd like in the old present pile, but I've decided I'd rather give to everyone and make some requests that I would like to see happen in the video games industry.

First on the list, console price cuts. Nothing gets more people playing console games like making the cost of entry cheaper. Sony dropped the price of the PS3 to \$249, which is a great start, but we all know the magic number is \$199, so let's go Sony and Microsoft – let the masses get in on HD gaming.

Next up is new intellectual property (or IP). We all love the established giant franchises that dominate the market, but they were all new IP once, and the industry can always use new blood and new perspectives. The big sequels make the world go round, but we need new ideas to keep our fingers busy year round.

I love first-person shooters as much as the next guy, but I would really love to see some other genres get a little more love (and yes, I realize that consumers need to do their part and be more adventurous to make this happen). Elder Scrolls is one of the few RPGs hitting it out of the park these days on consoles, and its success shows that people are willing to pay for great experiences in different genres. All you have to do is be committed to making great product.

And finally, one selfish request: I want my 2D Metroid in HD and Half-Life 3. The wait for these two games is killing me.

Enjoy the insane amount of games that are out this month, and the issue.

Cheers,



» 56

Transformers: Fall of Cybertron

This successor to War for Cybertron refines the single-player experience, giving each robotic changeling unique abilities like Optimus Prime's devastating airstrike. A wealth of new characters join the robotic war, including the return of Grimlock and his mighty Dinobots.

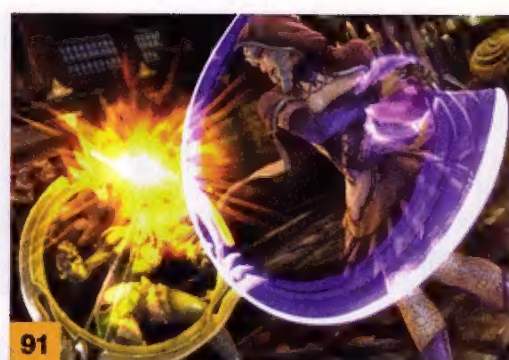
by **Matt Miller**



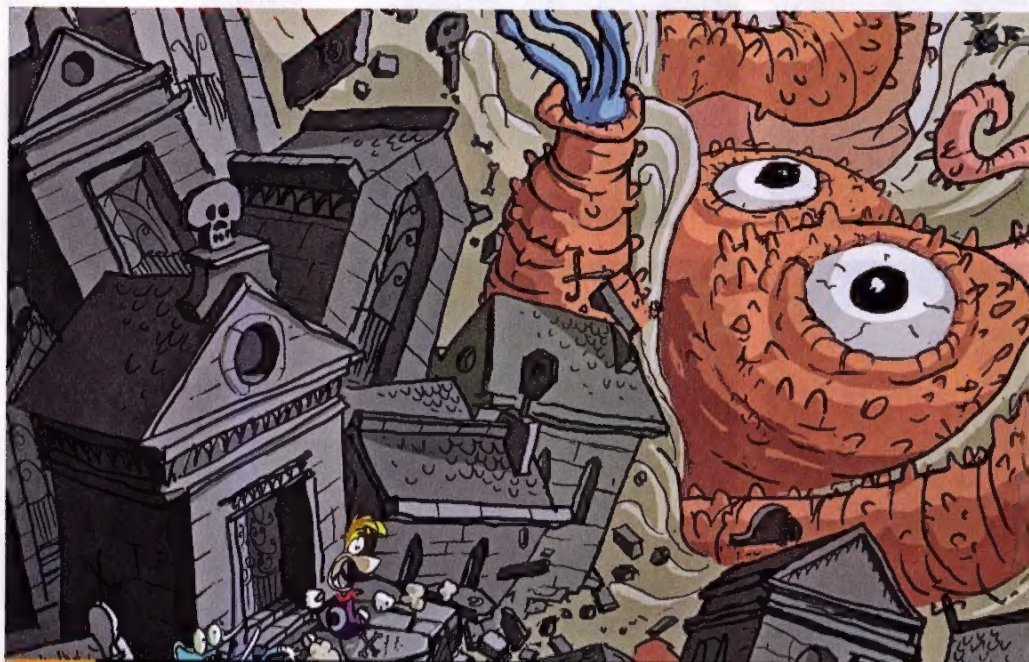
16



90



91



40

Ubisoft 25th Anniversary



104



76

Assassin's Creed Revelations



70

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

regulars

» 8 Feedback

We question the importance of backward compatibility, laugh at how terrible the *Super Mario Bros.* movie was, and learn a thing or two about *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*.

» 16 Connect

The growing presence of mobile games is undeniable, and this month we share our top 20. We also celebrate some significant video game anniversaries and explore the best beat 'em ups to bloody your knuckles.

» 74 Previews

We check back in on Ezio's most recent high-flying exploits in *Assassin's Creed Revelations*, commit vehicular homicide in *Twisted Metal*, and control hellish minions on the Vita's *Army Corps of Hell*.

» 96 Reviews

Expectations for *Batman: Arkham City* are sky-high. But are they high enough?
by Andrew Reiner

» 116 Game Over

Don't know your *Matrix* from your *Energon*? Get up to speed with our *Transformers Primer*.
by Matt Miller



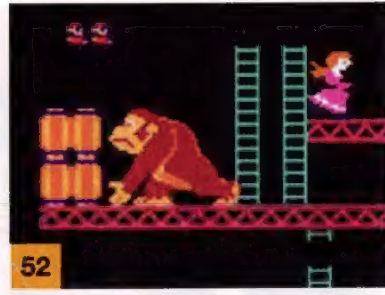
36 Interview: Richard Brown



99



107 Gears of War 3



52



80



110



57



106 Driver: San Francisco



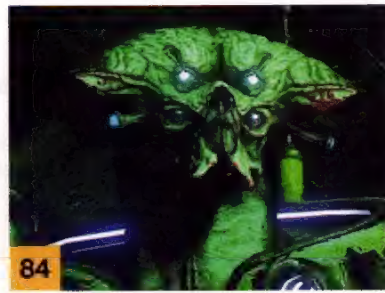
111



103



82 Twisted Metal



84



54 Origin Chronos Custom PC

games index

Army Corps of Hell	88
Assassin's Creed Revelations	76
Asura's Wrath	90
Batman: Arkham City	98
Burnout Crash	106
Dance Central 2	110
Dark Souls	101
Dead Rising 2: Off the Record	100
Driver: San Francisco	106
Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, The	70
F1 2011	112
FIFA 12	104
Final Fantasy: Type-0	91
Gears of War 3	107
Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning	80
Max Payne 3	85
NBA 2K12	102
Prey 2	84
Pro Evolution Soccer 2012	104
Rage	99
Renegade Ops	105
Resident Evil 4	103
Resident Evil: Code Veronica X	103
Rise of Nightmares	111
Rock of Ages	112
Sesame Street: Once Upon a Monster	111
Soulcalibur V	78
SSX	87
Tetris Axis	112
Tropico 4	112
Twisted Metal	82
Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings, The	86
WWE 12	89

NEW

**Q: WHERE'S
THE BEEF?**

A:

Dave's
**HOT 'N
JUICY**
CHEESEBURGERS

HERE'S THE BEEF.™

We've gone back to the grill to make our classic cheeseburgers thicker, hotter and juicier than ever. They're 100% North American beef. And, we've added new premium toppings and a buttered, toasted bun. The way it should be.



This month in Feedback, we address Borderlands 2 local co-op concerns, question the importance of backwards compatibility, reflect on the disaster that is the *Super Mario Bros.* movie, and get a lesson on the badassery of *My Little Ponies: Friendship is Magic*. Say what?



The Things We Do For Love

It has been a long time since this 41-year-old man jumped up and down with excitement in the middle of the street, but that is exactly what I did when I pulled the newest issue of Game Informer out of the mailbox and saw the dead psycho on the cover. I didn't have to open the magazine to know what was inside, and your coverage of Borderlands 2 did not disappoint. Thanks for a great magazine and helping this old fart retain some of his youth.

Richard K. Smith
Starke, FL

When I saw the familiar cartoon-like art of Borderlands on your cover, I was ecstatic. I grabbed it from my mail stack as fast as I could and flew upstairs to read it. I was getting to the best part of the article on Borderlands 2 when my brother saw me with the magazine. My brother is sort of a weirdo and since he paid for the subscription he would only let me read it under one condition: I had to let him sit on me for an hour. Like I said, he's weird, but I just want you to know how dedicated I am to Game Informer.

Shealtiel Mulder
via email

We've heard from some dedicated readers over the years, but the kind of punishment you're willing to endure to read our magazine has left us both impressed and disturbed. Congratulations?

If It Ain't Broke

After reading the cover story on Borderlands 2, I was extremely distressed when I read that Gearbox is "fixing" the cumbersome split-screen support. If I am reading the article correctly, they are removing split-screen to be just like all the other games that sacrifice fun for particle effects and shiny lighting. Are they really removing one of the things that made Borderlands so awesome?

Jeff Wart
via email

We received a few letters from worried couch co-op fans regarding Gearbox's plans to fix split-screen support. Rest assured the studio isn't scrapping local two-player co-op altogether, but merely improving UI and performance issues present in the first game. The fixes won't stop your friend from hogging all the loot, mind you, but that's what arm punches are for!



Contact Us

feedback@gameinformer.com



ADRIAN PETERSON

TOUCHDOWNS: 54 | VICTIMS: 1,435

The Missing Cid:

Many readers wrote in to ask why our Know Your Cids quiz from issue 221 was missing Cid Kramer from FF XIII. Those readers passed the test.

Short Answers to Readers' Burning Questions

"Do you know what games are for the Vita?"

Yes.

"Do I have to play the other Elder Scroll games to play Skyrim?"

Nope.

"If I give you a lifetime supply of roast beef and horseradish sandwiches, can I have a free subscription for a year?"

Yes, actually.

Worst News Tip of the Month:

"How to get games on the computer to play."



I Pledge Allegiance...

I was a lifelong Halo fan, but now I'm totally disappointed in their franchise. And now I find myself playing Call of Duty a lot more. I feel like I am betraying Bungie, the Halo Nation, and myself. What do you think?

Michael Webb
Atlanta, GA

The misplaced loyalty players develop for game franchises and companies never ceases to amaze us. You have no reason to feel guilty if a game doesn't hold your attention, especially after putting down \$60 to play it. If Bungie's final Halo outing didn't do it for you, maybe 343 will change your mind (see page 28 for more details), but either way you're buying a product, not showing unconditional devotion.

PorchStation 3

My parents force me to keep my PlayStation 3 outside on our porch because the only other TV is in their bedroom and they don't want me and my friends in there. This porch has extreme glare, is ridiculously hot (I live in California), and is too far from our router. Also, I have allergies, and playing in the hot sun and the Santa Ana wind has made me sick twice but my parents don't seem to care. Apparently me buying a TV and putting it in my room would "lower my IQ," studies say. This is total B.S., right? Should I be taking this?

Harry Kidd
via email

The degree of how much B.S. you should be taking from your parents is directly proportional to your age and how dependent you are on their resources. Our guess is yes, you should be taking it.

Nobody's Perfect

I just wanted to say how much I agree with the Opinion article that games should have more consequences for failing objectives (Managing Your Mistakes, issue 221). It's been my opinion for years that games need to create repercussions for a player's mistakes instead of telling them to do it again until they're perfect. Like the author writes, how many protagonists in other forms of media are perfect? Failures should not rewind the world but shape it. Mistakes should not lead to repeating a choice, but create new choices. That would allow players to feel attached to the world by understanding that what they do matters.

Jordan Stone
via email

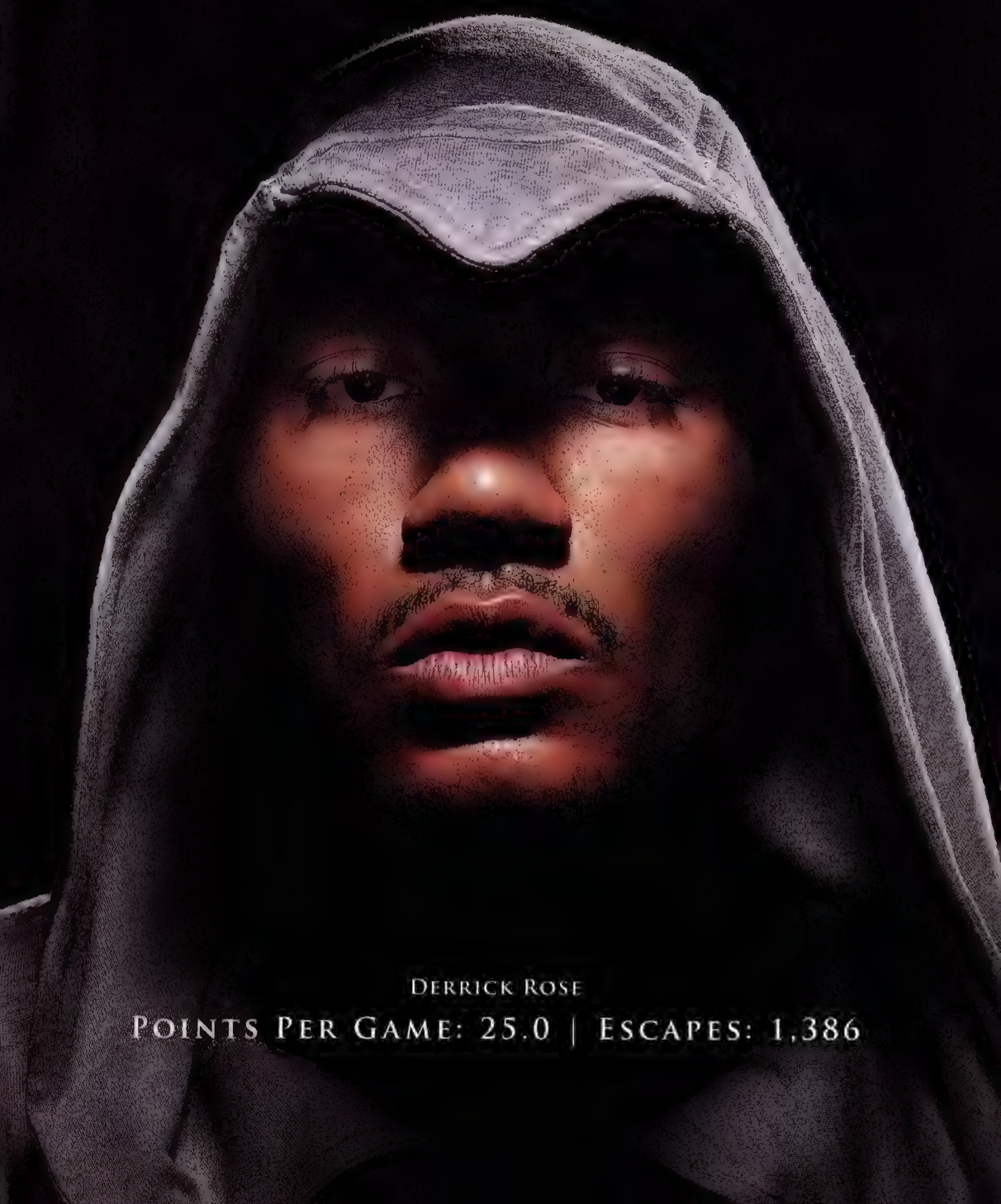
Thanks a lot for the article Managing Your Mistakes. However, the biggest flaw of the article is also its biggest strength: It was written from the viewpoint of someone who values story in a video game. Compared to things like graphics and gameplay, both developers and players don't always necessarily view a good story as being all that important. So if the author truly wants more gameplay possibilities like those found in L.A. Noire and Heavy Rain, we must show with our pocketbooks that these are the kind of stories we want to see in games in the future.

Christian Sharp
via email

(Left) The QuakeCon 2011 Skyrim demo was so good that it caused Stevi Robbins to go into labor – though she and her fiancé Chaz Tine refused to leave until it was over. Behold, the newest gamer in the family: Atari. (Center) Adam, Bryan, Jeff Cork, and Phil enjoy some fine German beverages at a famous Cologne brewery with 90 percent of the Joe Danger development team. (Right) Tim met an unexpected celebrity during his trip to Japan – KFC's Colonel Sanders. We didn't have the heart to tell him it was just a statue.



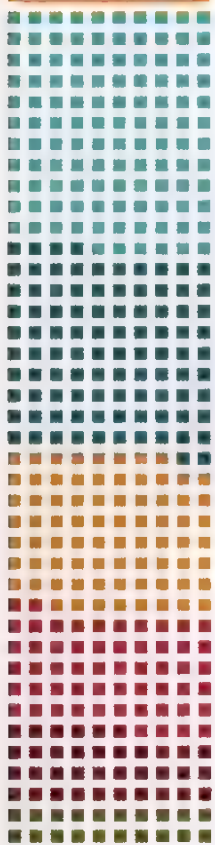
CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY



DERRICK ROSE

POINTS PER GAME: 25.0 | ESCAPES: 1,386

On Your Mind



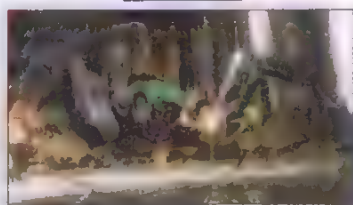
- **Borderlands 2 Excitement 26%**
- **Know Your Cids Omission (See Sidebar) 24%**
- **Mario's Film Folly Praise/Comiserations 17%**
- **Favorite Power-Up Responses 15%**
- **Managing Your Mistakes Opinion Love 11%**
- **Utter Gibberish 7%**

Let It Go

What is the deal with companies removing backwards compatibility to save cost? First, Sony removed PS2 compatibility from the PS3, and now Nintendo is saying there will be no GameCube compatibility for the Wii U. Am I wrong in my understanding that it's all the same hardware and all game companies need to do is include a few lines of code to have the backwards compatibility? It seems like a minimal cost for something that would significantly boost sales.

Gabriel Babbitt
Orlando, FL

Yes, Gabriel, you're very wrong. Supporting a previous console's entire library of games is a massive undertaking, requiring extra hardware (as in the case of PS2 games on the PS3) or software (as in the case of the Xbox 360) to emulate the functions of the older system. Expecting the Wii U to support GameCube games is like expecting your MP3 player to support 8-track tapes; when two products are so drastically different, you can't expect an old piece of technology to be supported indefinitely. Hopefully you'll be too busy with games for the new hardware to revisit a previous generation's titles, but if you really want to play your old games, hold onto the system they were made for.



Mari-Oh-No

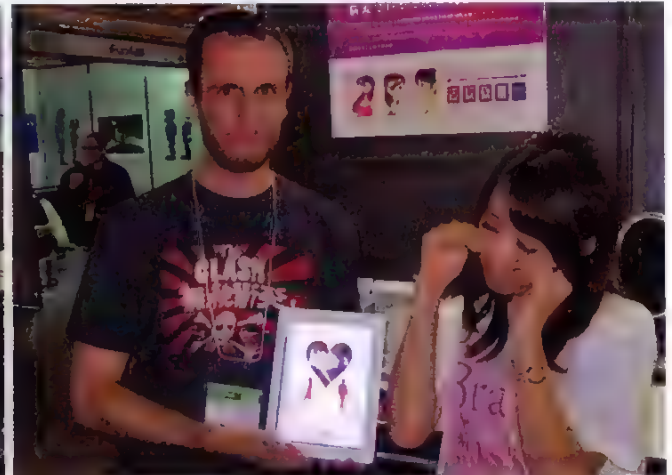
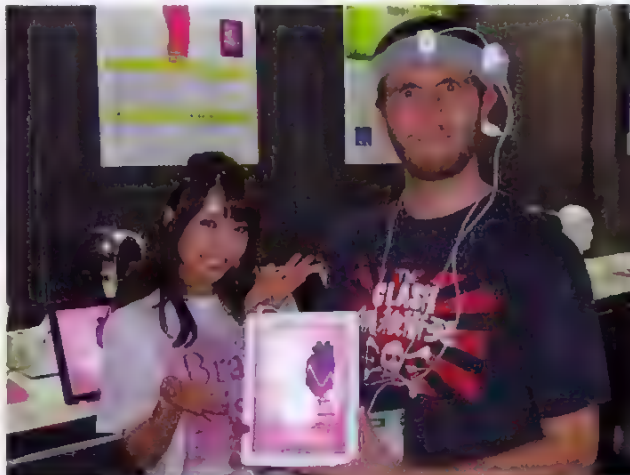
Let Mario Bros. Future do a story about Hollywood making a great movie opportunity by totally screwing up the Super Mario Bros. production (Mario's Film Folly, issue 22). Do you think Nintendo will ever let another one of their mascots be made into a movie? I know I would love to see a Legend of Zelda movie, granted that the same idiots that made the SMB movie don't have anything to do with it!

Michael Benningfield
Dallas, TX

Considering how abysmal Mario's cinematic outing was, we wouldn't hold our breath for the day Nintendo relinquishes control over another one of its characters to Hollywood. Given how traumatizing a live action version of Tingle could be, it's probably for the better.

continued from page 10

(Left) Dan's inability to speak Japanese got him into a few predicaments during this year's Tokyo Game Show. **(Right)** Based on this Japanese girl's reaction, we're guessing a broken heart symbol means the opposite of what it does in America.



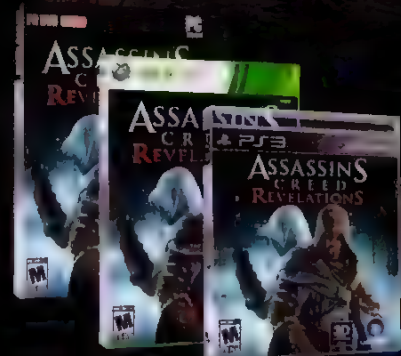
continued on page 14

ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS

LEAVE YOUR LEGACY

NOVEMBER 15

#LEAVEYOURLEGACY



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MATURE 17+
M
Blood
Language
Mild Sexual Themes
Violence

PC
DVD-ROM
SOFTWARE



PS3
PlayStation 3



XBOX 360

XBOX LIVE



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“Keepin’ It Real” Tip Of The Month:

“Bacon has run its course as ‘the best thing ever.’”

Unsolicited Advice:

“You should hire ninja assassins for your writers.”

Who says we don't already?

Question Of The Month:

How do you plan on paying for this season's flood of high profile games?

Power-Ups To The People

In issue 221, we asked gamers to name their favorite video game power-ups. Mario's invincibility star was the most common reply, but readers had plenty of responses highlighting other games and abilities.

My favorite is Dog Mode from the 1995 game Rise of the Triad: Dark Wars. It was a unique take on God Mode, where you were invincible and killed with one hit, but you had the first-person view of a dog's snout and his paw slashed out when attacking.

Stephen Williamson

My answer has to be Quake III: Arena's Quad Damage. There's just something about hearing “Quad Damage” and knowing you're about to waste a few people – or you're going to end up splattered against the wall if you come around the wrong corner.

David Strate

In Half Life 2, when the game gives your gravity gun a super strength upgrade, it becomes the most destructive and fun weapon in video game history. Who doesn't want to throw electrocuted alien soldiers at other not-yet-electrocuted alien soldiers?

Alex Rubin

I would say the classic star from Mario. Why? Not because it grants invincibility, but because it makes you flash like colorful rave lights and music starts playing off your freaking body!

Brady Smith



Who Are You Calling Frilly?

As a 20-year-old guy, I was deeply disturbed when you referred to My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic as “frilly” in issue 220's Timeline. I think I missed that part of the memo. Was that in between when the just-over-thirty evil goddess bent on shredding the world in equestrian sight and when Rainbow Dash not only broke the sound barrier, but pulled a star that would leave any modern fighter jet in a smoldering pile of debris? Maybe it was around the time when they were finally able to launch the cutie-mare manifesto. I mean, these girls are so badass that Fluttershy has successfully brought down a cockatrice with the detail of a high-level assassin that made anything it looks like a horse? Naturally, she just stood it down until it submitted to her will. I will let your comment slide this time, but be warned, another mistake like this will not be tolerated.

Angelo
Fountainstown, RI

Settle down, brozy. The fact that your terrifying equine friends have racked up an epic list of conquests doesn't make them any less frilly. Similarly, the fact that the cartoon sounds generally outstanding doesn't make it any less embarrassing for you to be defending the honor of a My Little Pony cartoon in a national magazine.

continued from page 12

(Left) We have no idea what Ben is doing in this picture, or why his pants are wet. (Center) Luckily, Ben composed himself before meeting BioShock Infinite voice actors Troy Baker and Courtnee Draper, along with Irrational Games' Ken Levine. (Right) Here's hoping the ending of Gears of War 3 lives up to GI reader Steve Loose's expectations, because lasering off that tattoo would be mighty painful. (Far Right) Ever wonder what happens when Ben Reeves and Ben Hanson are left alone together? Night seesaw riding, that's what..

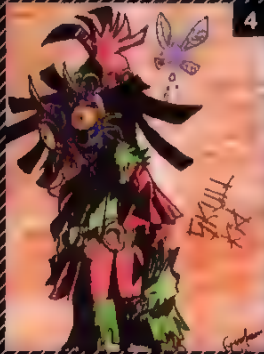




Luigi's Mansion

WINNER 1 Naomi Gumbs
 With a sequel arriving this year, Luigi suits up for round 2. **2 Nik Small** We're no eyebrow-grooming experts, but we're pretty sure "connected to your nose" isn't considered a good look for them. **3 Allyson Beale** A gang of Yoshi's party after successfully riding themselves of Baby Mario. **4 Graham Bryan** Skull Kid waits patiently for Tael to deliver news of a 3DS Majora's Mask.

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



WINNER



This month's winner will receive a copy of Assassin's Creed: Revelations on the system of their choosing.

Send to:
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 Reader Art Contest
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 3rd Floor
 Mpls, MN 55401

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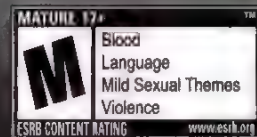


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Into the Great Unknown

Questions Surround Nintendo As It Enters A Critical Phase

Editorial by Matthew Kato

Nintendo held a 3DS press conference before the Tokyo Game Show to try to boost the handheld's outlook, but it wasn't until afterward that the company unveiled the Expansion Slide Pad. Although the peripheral, which adds a second analog stick to the handheld, wasn't the focus of the company's presentation, it has arguably created more of a stir than anything at the press conference – and not in a good way. Was this an attempt to redeem a handheld whose main draw – glasses-free 3D – hadn't driven big sales? Are the rumors that Nintendo will release another version of the 3DS with the second analog stick included true?

Consumers' confusion over the peripheral only exacerbated the feeling that even after Nintendo's price cut of the system, an attractive slate of upcoming games, and now expanded functionality due to the possibility of a second analog stick, the handheld remains on uncertain ground. But the questions surrounding Nintendo don't just stem from the introduction of a new peripheral. Since the tremendous success of the Wii, Nintendo has entered an unpredictable time in its history. After amassing a larger number of fans through both the Wii and its handhelds, the company faces a challenge in carrying them forward with the Wii U, 3DS, and beyond.



NOTABLES

- 19 tokyo game show 2011
- 26 a shocking performance: an interview with the bioshock infinite cast
- 26 taking over halo
- 36 pro gaming comes of age
- 40 ubisoft uncensored
- 50 2D mobile games you should be playing
- 56 opinion: leave me alone: the changing world of single-player



The 3DS is a handheld console that can play 3D games. It has two screens, one on top and one on bottom. The top screen is larger and shows the game in 3D. The bottom screen is smaller and shows the game in 2D. The console has two analog sticks, a D-pad, and several buttons. It also has a camera and a microphone. The 3DS is available in several colors, including black, blue, and red.

Price Cuts & Peripherals

On July 28, Nintendo announced it was cutting the price of the 3DS from its launch price of \$249.99 to \$169.99 – just five months after the handheld was released in the U.S. The move sparked a drop in the company's stock price, a pay cut for Nintendo president and CEO Satoru Iwata and other executives, and the creation of the 3DS Ambassador program (which gives out free downloadable games to early adopters) in order to try to recoup goodwill from those who'd already bought the system.

Nintendo's move could have been spurred by a study in Japan by Goo Research that showed the unit's price was consumers' number one barrier to entry. While sales numbers have increased after the price drop, the Expansion peripheral could suggest larger concerns regarding the system. 3D functionality was ostensibly the *raison d'être* of the system, and the early sales struggle of the 3DS and the confession of the need for more functionality from the system points to 3D not being as big a draw as Nintendo expected. This kind of identity crisis can't help with consumers who are already unsure about what the handheld has to offer.

French website O1net.com – which correctly called information about the 3DS Slide Peripheral and Wii U before they were officially announced – has reported that Nintendo also plans to release a newly configured 3DS that permanently includes the second analog.

Hopefully this new version of the 3DS sells for the current \$169.99 price, or consumers' price concerns may return. However, Nintendo is already losing money on each handheld sold, and adding a second analog stick likely won't help the situation.

"It's ugly and it's just not an elegant solution," says Billy Pidgeon, senior analyst at M2 Research, of the peripheral. "It is problematic if you're going to add another analog stick to the basic configuration. It's quite likely they'll have to drop the price again on the current configuration because, when you see an upgraded version coming out, it does tend to soften the market for the previous version."

Until then, Nintendo is pleased with the effects of the price drop. According to the company using NPD sales data, 185,000 units were sold in a 19-day period after the price drop officially went into effect – a 260 percent increase from a similar period in July. This sounds impressive. However, if Nintendo's own figures regarding the number of units it's shipped is any indication of demand for the 3DS, even if you double the number of handhelds shipped out in April through June of this year to accommodate for the price cut, it still wouldn't equal the number of DS Lites being shipped out to stores in America. Only time will tell if the 3DS sustains this pace and saves it from being a failure.



“The Wii U Is Not Going To Sell Like The Wii”

Whether the 3DS can retain its new customers remains to be seen. Nintendo will experience a similar transition when the Wii U comes out sometime in 2012. The Wii has sold phenomenally, but hardware and software numbers have trailed off from their peak a few years ago while competitors Microsoft and Sony got stronger. Bringing over the Wii crowd to the new system could be a challenge, as the Wii hasn't done a great job in retaining its audience through quality software. “They failed to exploit that larger market by training those new gamers in the value of new software and getting them to buy more regularly,” explains senior analyst Pidgeon. “They didn't stick with it.”

Pidgeon also feels that some of the low-quality software on the Wii created comparisons with much lower-priced mobile and free-to-play experiences. Nintendo's Iwata has dismissed the possibility of the company diving into the mobile gaming or freemium markets, but he's also put forth the challenge that Nintendo has to create content that is worth paying for.

Nintendo has started down this path with the Wii U through the promise of better third-party support and involvement of Western developers from the get-go. The Wii U's feature-packed controller, HD graphics, and interoperability between the controller's screen and the TV certainly give developers lots of possibilities. Iwata and Nintendo are also pledging an up-to-date online structure for the platform.

All this costs money. Nintendo hasn't revealed how much the Wii U will cost, and that is an important detail. The Wii was helped by the fact that it was cheaper than the Xbox 360 and PS3, but it's very possible the Wii U will be closer to or even higher than the current prices of those systems. Although the technology packed into

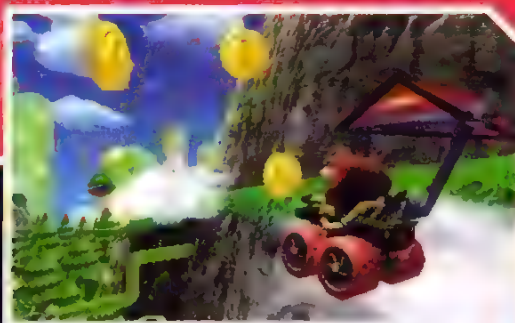
the Wii U may well warrant the platform's price, it could be too much for Wii fans who liked the system because it hit that sweet spot of accessibility in price and functionality. Despite the similarity of the two console's names, the high-tech dual screen interoperability of the Wii U's controller (and the fact that currently you can only use one of those controllers with the console at a time) is a far cry from the simplicity of Wii Sports, for example. Nintendo must also adequately differentiate the system from the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 in ways that consumers find exciting, as well as future-proof it from those systems' inevitable successors in the next few years.

Whether it's the Wii U or the next systems from Microsoft and Sony, Pidgeon believes that none of the new platforms will sell as fast as the previous consoles because the environment is different than it was five years ago, emphasizing the fact that people are buying fewer games but enjoying them longer. “The Wii U is not going to sell like the Wii,” he says. Even though Pidgeon thinks console sales will be slower going for everybody, Nintendo isn't helping itself by wasting its Wii audience, as he previously explained.

If Pidgeon's prediction that the Wii U won't sell as fast as the Wii comes true, what will Nintendo's reaction be? Will the company drop the price of it as fast as it did with the 3DS? Nintendo's Iwata fears that consumers might have that perception and that it may prevent people from buying the Wii U. But whose fault is that? Although the 3DS price cut has spurred sales, Nintendo has started down a path that there is no going back from. With a reactionary 3DS price cut and a home console that's arguably coming out too early, Nintendo is betting that a lot goes right so that it all doesn't go wrong. ♦



Super Mario Bros. 3
Nintendo Game Boy Advance



The Quality is Consistent

While the 3DS has a reputation for being a compelling software platform, it's not the only one. The Wii U is expected to have a similar reputation, but it's not clear how long it will last.

Game	Platform	Year	Score
Super Mario Galaxy	Wii	2007	9.2
Super Mario Galaxy 2	Wii	2010	9.1
Super Mario Bros. 3	Game Boy Advance	2000	9.0
Super Mario Bros.	Game Boy	1985	8.9
Super Mario Bros. 2	Game Boy	1987	8.8
Super Mario Bros. 3	Game Boy	1988	8.7
Super Mario Bros. 3	Game Boy Advance	2000	8.6
Super Mario Bros. 3	Game Boy Advance	2000	8.5
Super Mario Bros. 3	Game Boy Advance	2000	8.4
Super Mario Bros. 3	Game Boy Advance	2000	8.3
Super Mario Bros. 3	Game Boy Advance	2000	8.2
Super Mario Bros. 3	Game Boy Advance	2000	8.1
Super Mario Bros. 3	Game Boy Advance	2000	8.0

While the 3DS has a reputation for being a compelling software platform, it's not the only one. The Wii U is expected to have a similar reputation, but it's not clear how long it will last.



BioWare has thankfully put Star Wars: The Old Republic fans out of their misery by announcing a December 20 release date for the MMORPG.

Balancing the bad Blizzard news (see below) are the good tidings that Valve has pushed up the release date of Dota 2. The company wants the title to come out as soon as possible instead of putting the game in beta for a year or more. "[The] original plan was dumb," said Valve on the Dota 2 official blog.



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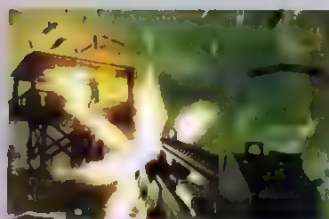
the Good

Quotable

...Publishers are getting the living crap kicked out of them by Microsoft.

Rob Dyer

Sony senior vice president of publisher relations opines about Microsoft's Xbox 360 policies, including the company's reported rule to deny games that came out on PS3 first or have less content.

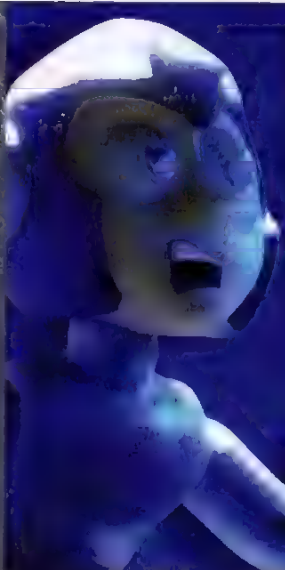


Another month brings more studio closures. This time Codemasters' Bodycount studio (game shown) has been shut down, as well as EA's Visceral satellite in Melbourne, Australia. Elsewhere in Australia, L.A. Noire developer Team Bondi has entered administration, which means its assets are being sold off and they are looking for a buyer.



the Bad

Blizzard makes the decision to put out Diablo III in early 2012 instead of late 2011. The company was hoping it could get the game out this year, but according to CEO Mike Morhime, they "grudgingly" decided to push the title. At least the open beta will now accommodate more users.



As if Capcom fans weren't mad enough at the company for axing Mega Man Universe and Mega Man Legends 3, they will probably be even more angry to hear that the company has refused Keiji Inafune's offer to help Capcom finish the now-cancelled Legends 3 via Inafune's new company, Concept. "I wanted to leave Capcom to recharge my energy, and support Capcom from there," said Inafune, "but it seems they don't allow it."

and the Ugly

Electronic Arts and Sony are leading a new wave of re-vamped user agreements seemingly designed to make it harder, but not impossible, to participate in a class-action lawsuit against the companies.





BIG BOOTHS SMALL IMPACT

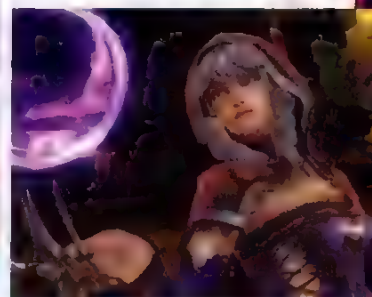
by Sean Pappert

Longtime readers of this magazine have probably sensed a running theme around this time each fall – the Tokyo Game Show is quickly losing relevance. Once a massive convention on the level of E3, each year seems to bring fewer major announcements or new content for upcoming titles. If you're just looking at the

numbers, the show is as big (if not bigger) than ever; a TGS press release states that this year set a new attendance record of 222,668 visitors. Despite the impressive numbers, gaming journalists on the show floor expressed a unanimous sense of disappointment over the games on display.



More Notes From The Show



News out of the show may have been sparse, but that doesn't mean press conferences were completely barren. Here are a few of the noteworthy items coming out of TGS.

- Final Fantasy X will be the next title to get a high-definition makeover. While no release date was announced, development of Final Fantasy X HD is said to be "well under way."
- Despite the lack of a Nintendo booth on the show floor, the already-notorious circle pad attachment was shown at the Capcom booth. The bulky add-on is compatible with Monster Hunter and Metal Gear Solid Snake Eater 3D (among others), and will release for approximately \$20 USD. No U.S. release date has been set.

- Metal Gear Solid: HD Collection will see a Vita release, and Konami's "transferring" feature is likely to be included.
- Surprising those who expected a holiday 2012 release or later, Soulcalibur V (above) was announced as a Q1 2012 title. It will also include a special guest character that will be unveiled at an upcoming event.
- New colors were unveiled for PS3 and PSP. The former will be released in Japan in red and blue, while the latter will have a new black/red combination. A U.S. release was not announced.

ATTENDEES LINED UP at kiosks for big-name titles like Skyrim, Uncharted 3, Rage, and Battlefield 3, but discovered old GamesCom and PAX builds once they reached the front of the line. Big names like Microsoft had table scraps when it came to new content, limited to a new Dance Central 2 song and another (very rough) Kinect Star Wars demo.

The theme of old demos was one that ran throughout the show floor, especially for games popular with western audiences. At E3, American gamers and media are used to tons of floor space dedicated to shooters like Battlefield, Call of Duty, and BioShock Infinite. These games were either absent from TGS or occupied very little space, while displays for Japan-friendly titles like Monster Hunter and Final Fantasy Theatrhythm took up significant real estate.

Even with an air of disappointment hovering over the show, some titles managed to impress. Our hands-on time with Soulcalibur V left us thinking it might be the best entry since the Dreamcast original (read the preview on page 78) and the PlayStation Vita continued to make a positive impression. Regarding the latter, Sony announced that the portable will hit Japanese shelves on December 17 of this year. Alongside the system at launch will be 26 games, including the highly anticipated Uncharted: Golden Abyss.

Members of the American press may have wished for more Western titles on the floor, but the Japanese public didn't seem to mind when they arrived en masse on the

public days. Gamers cosplayed as their favorite Monster Hunter, Final Fantasy, and anime characters as they posed in the concourse between the main halls. Lines on the show floor were long, but the public seemed eager to get an early hands-on experience with the various titles.

From a news perspective, Tokyo Game Show 2011 had little impact on the titles American gamers look forward to. However, it seemed like a success when you look at the attendance and the enthusiasm displayed by the public. While members of the media may not have many blockbuster announcements to write about, Japanese gamers surely seemed to enjoy themselves while getting a rare chance to experience the convention atmosphere.

If the show hopes to remain relevant outside of Japan, however, it could benefit by following the lead of conventions like E3 and GamesCom and embracing titles developed outside of their country. Western audiences may not go crazy over IPs like Yakuza and Monster Hunter, but non-Japanese shows still manage to squeeze in news about them. It's obvious that Western publishers have little faith in the Japanese market's interest in their games, considering most of these titles were in small booths in low-traffic areas of the show floor. Japan's lack of interest in Western games is having a huge effect on the TGS experience, and if things continue in this fashion, the show is at risk of becoming an insular event. ♦

The Broadening Role of Downloadable Games

I continue to be astounded by the growth and ubiquity of downloadable games. Glance back just a few years, and the concept of something like Xbox Live Arcade was completely foreign to the gaming audience. Now hardly a week goes by that we're not covering some fascinating new indie project, a great classic re-release, or a franchise offshoot that explores some new gameplay dynamic. The downloadable game scene has become a hotbed of experimentation and creativity. Lower costs and shorter development times make these titles appealing to big publishers, and small independent teams can make phenomenal games that shine in their own space away from the big triple-A titles releases. I'm hoping this rich mix of game titles maintains itself as we start to talk about next-gen consoles over the coming years. I'd love to see a downloadable market emerge with room for everything from \$1-\$2 experiments to \$40 new franchises. by [unreadable]



(continued on page 24)

"A REVOLUTION IN MUSIC GAMES"
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ANYONE CAN PLAY GUITAR



Rocksmith
AUTHENTIC GUITAR GAMES

AVAILABLE ON MOST MAJOR PLATFORMS
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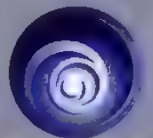


PLUG IN ANY REAL GUITAR* AND THE GAMEPLAY WILL ADAPT TO YOUR SKILL LEVEL, WHETHER YOU'RE AN EXPERIENCED MUSICIAN, OR HAVE NEVER PLAYED A GUITAR IN YOUR LIFE. CHOOSE FROM OVER 50 SONGS IN DIFFERENT STYLES. MASTER NEW TALENTS WITH FUN MINI-GAMES. DEVELOP REAL SKILLS WHILE PLAYING REAL MUSIC. ALL WITH AN HONEST-TO-GOODNESS GUITAR.

TEEN
T Lyrics
Mild Cartoon Violence
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Music Downloads Not Rated by the ESRB

XBOX 360. XBOX LIVE

SEE IT IN ACTION AT ROCKSMITH.COM



UBISOFT



(continued from page 22)

Crysis
PlayStation Network (PS3), Xbox Live Arcade

Crysis is a perfect example of a title looking for a second chance on the downloadable circuit. Since its release in 2007, I've always felt bad that more people didn't get a chance to try it. Here is one of the most innovative and beautiful first-person shooters in years, and only dedicated PC players with powerful machines got to see it. At long last, and after a sequel has already released in the series, the acclaimed first game is finally making its way to consoles as a downloadable title for XBLA and PSN. Developer Crytek is retouching the original single-player game with new lighting and other visual effects before releasing the port for \$20 on October 4. Beyond cosmetic features, the developer is also tweaking combat balance and controls for your state-of-the-art Nanosuit. For players who never had a PC beefy enough to handle the game, Crysis tells the story of a group of soldiers sent to investigate a strange

island in the South China Sea. What begins as a conflict against North Korean military forces unfolds into a greater danger – an alien force that is slowly transforming the island. Crysis' original release was accompanied by near-universal critical acclaim, hailing its tight gunplay, open approach to encounters, and breathtaking visuals. If you never got a chance to play it, you should undoubtedly consider this new port.

Few games so consistently have GI editors coming back to play month after month like Pinball FX 2. The excellent pinball simulator has already seen a wealth of DLC in the form of new tables, and that precedent is continuing through the rest of this year. While Zen clued us in about several cool new levels on the way, we're most excited by **Epic Quest**, a brand new table that dramatically changes the style of play. Specifically, Epic Quest is a role-playing game wrapped into the traditional pinball gameplay. Players control Max, a gallant

knight out to kill monsters, score some loot, and rescue princesses. As you play, Max will run into encounters – usually monsters that he'll have to fight with a combination of shields, swords, axes, and spells that are cast by hitting designated targets on the table. Win the fight, and you'll gain XP towards your next level. The really cool bit? Your gear and level carry over after a Game Over. Start a new game and you can pick up where you left off in Max's race to get ever stronger. Loot has three categories (yellow, blue, and purple epics, naturally), and your level will determine your rank from Minor Knight all the way up to Epic Hero. Leveling maxes out at 100, so it sounds like Zen is aiming for a lot of replay value. As if Pinball FX 2 wasn't already enough of a time sink, Epic Quest has me scared about my time management skills, especially since it releases in the middle of the busy November game season.



Epic Quest
PlayStation Network (PS3), Xbox Live Arcade



Monaco
PC, Console (TBA)

I've been keeping my eye on **Monaco** for some time now. The game's been busy gathering up awards for over a year, including the coveted Seumus McNally Grand Prize at 2010's Independent Games Festival. The game is finally inching a little closer to an actual release on PC and at least one undisclosed console sometime in 2012, and I'm extremely excited to play the final product. Monaco plays as a heist game in the style of *Ocean's 11*. Each of up to four cooperative players picks between eight classes, and your task in the heist is tied to your unique abilities. The Hacker can deal with computers, but the Gentleman can disguise himself and others on the team. The Redhead distracts and seduces guards as the Locksmith gets past that well-protected door. The seemingly primitive pixelated graphics hide a brilliant and suspenseful design that has players attempting to skulk through dimly lit hallways, divert guards, and infiltrate heavily protected facilities. Randomly generated features change levels upon repeated plays, so you never know what might go wrong in your quest to steal the loot and get out without being discovered. Plus, the game includes everything from a single-player campaign to co-op available online or on the same screen. There's even a level editor. Monaco doesn't have a release date yet, but it's definitely one to keep an eye on during the post-holiday lull in a few months.

I don't know what to make of **PixelJunk 4am**. The project, previously titled PixelJunk

Lifelike, appears to be less a game and more of an interactive musical experience. The name is drawn from the dance club scene, in which the late night hours tends to scale back from wild energy to mesmerizing trance beats. 4am takes that unique style of music, and gives players the ability to create and manipulate the sound using the PlayStation Move controller. Flip in one direction, and a synth track starts up. Tap a button to hear a low frequency filter kick in. It's questionable how much utility the game will have for regular players, but the innovative title could be a hit at parties. The combination of dance-like moves and music creation won't be for everyone, but I'm intrigued enough to want to try out more of the game myself.

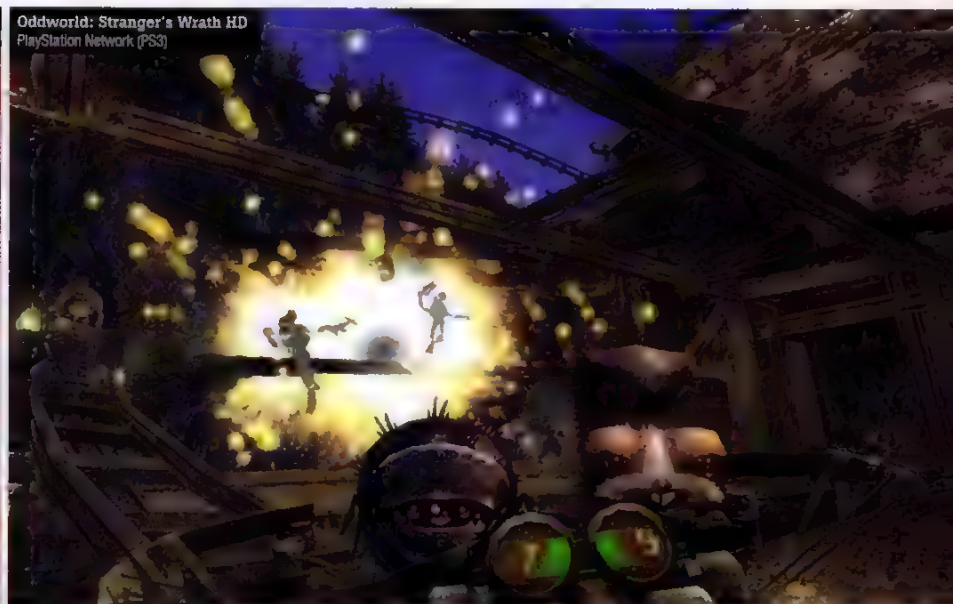
I was a big fan of DrinkBox Studios' first game, **Tales From Space: About A Blob**. The PlayStation 3 exclusive was a charming puzzle/platformer about an alien blob that slowly grows in size from a lab experiment to an international threat. The same team is now hard at work on a new downloadable game, one of the first announced for PlayStation Vita. *Tales from Space: Mutant Blobs Attack* iterates on the platforming action of its predecessor, but adds a number of new elements into the mix. This time, you play a grumpy and ill-tempered blob that is out to eat everything in its path, from the environs of a frat house to a sprawling city. In addition to traditional thumb-stick controls, the team at DrinkBox is integrating touchscreen options to enact powers during gameplay. I've

seen some early glimpses of the game in action, and the puzzles seem to have the same unique physics dynamic that made the first game so fun, albeit in brand new levels. It's good to know that Vita is already getting some strong independent developers behind it. Titles like *Mutant Blobs Attack* are just the sort of thing the system will need to draw in dedicated gamers.

I think it's awesome that we're about to receive an HD remake of **Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath HD**. I loved the *Oddworld* games without exception, so I'm stoked about seeing one of the games running at 60 frames per second. For those who never played the original, *Stranger's Wrath* is an action game that combines third-person navigation with first-person shooting. You play Stranger, a bounty hunter with a big secret who spends much of the game rounding up outlaws. He uses a variety of weird "live ammunition" in the form of insects and other creatures that can be shot from his crossbow. After a long wait, it looks like the gorgeous remake is on track for release this fall on PSN. Developer Just Add Water claims to have visually updated all 80-plus characters in the game, and much of the environmental textures and geometry. The team has also modernized the user interface and added in a number of easter eggs and unlockable extras. I can't wait to replay this great game, even if it is one of the lesser-known installments in the *Oddworld* universe. ♦



PixelJunk 4am
PlayStation Network (PS3)



Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath HD
PlayStation Network (PS3)



Tales from Space: Mutant Blobs Attack
PlayStation Network (Vita)



Looking for more info on downloadable and independent games? Head over to gameinformer.com/impulse for previews, reviews, and more about the best in the downloadable game scene. For more downloadable game goodness in this issue, you can read our reviews of *Resident Evil: Code Veronica X* and *Resident Evil 4* on p. 103, *Renegade Ops* on p. 105, and *Burnout Crash* on p. 106, plus check out our score for *Rock of Ages* on p. 112.

A Shocking Performance

An interview with the *BioShock* Infinite cast

Most of the time, the recording sessions for *BioShock Infinite* were done in a phone conference booth in New York, so I was never physically present with the actors, but I did direct them. This time around, the three of us were in a hot little closet-sized room together. We might try something different, fail, talk about it, then I'd go off and write a few lines before coming back to try it again. Being able to do all that in real time was very powerful, and it allowed me to collaborate in a way that I couldn't physically collaborate with my actors before.

Ken, during the panel, you talked about how you weren't present during the recording sessions for the first *BioShock*. How was your experience different this time around?

LEVINE For *BioShock*, I was on a phone conference call to the recording booth in New York, so I was never physically present with the actors, but I did direct them. This time around, the three of us were in a hot little closet-sized room together. We might try something different, fail, talk about it, then I'd go off and write a few lines before coming back to try it again. Being able to do all that in real time was very powerful, and it allowed me to collaborate in a way that I couldn't physically collaborate with my actors before.

What drew you to these two actors in particular?

LEVINE You know, it's weird, but you already hear the character's voice in your head, so actors have to inhabit a character that you've already written. With Troy I was very drawn to what I first heard. I thought that it was a voice that I could sit and listen to for 10 hours. That's a very basic thing for a game. You can't really hire Gilbert Gottfried to be your main voice



Ken Levine

actor. There is a tenor and a tone and a quality of the voice that's important, but it's also important how an actor inhabits the dialogue and how they inhabit the character. I think that Courtnee has a tiny bit of roughness to her voice, and I really liked that. It's not just a sing-songy voice. It seemed like her emo-

tions were very accessible to her, which was very important.

Courtnee, during the panel, you mentioned that you were just about to give up voice acting and go into law school when you got offered the part for *BioShock Infinite*.

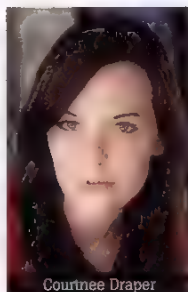
DRAPER Yeah, I'm in law school right now. I just started like a week ago. That's what I was doing all day yesterday, because I knew I wouldn't be able to do much studying at the convention. I woke up at 6:00 A.M. this morning so I could do some criminal law before PAX.

LEVINE She was actually being accused. She was standing trial.

DRAPER [Laughs] Actually when I got offered this job, I had already taken the LSAT and I had

already applied to school, but then I booked this and Ken and the producers and I had some discussion about what that meant. "What was going to be my focus?" But this project had quickly become near and dear to my heart, and I was so excited about it, and excited to be a part of something that was groundbreaking. I didn't want to lose that opportunity. But that means that right now I'm straddling both worlds.

Troy, since players will be looking through Booker's eyes the whole time, it seems like you might be at a disadvantage trying to convey emotion without the benefit of facial animation or gestures. What did you do to help players associate with Booker and understand his thought process?



Courtnee Draper

BAKER One of the phrases that Ken has kind of drilled into me was "drain the swamp." Whatever it is that you think you're doing that's interesting you need to pull that out. And that's really hard, because a lot of the time you want to put something interesting in, but oftentimes a scene is more inter-

esting when you boil it down to its essence. It's interesting, but almost across the board, my first take is my best. If it's flawed, it doesn't matter. Even if I stumble, my first take is usually my best, because I haven't had time to think about it.

Did you guys ever go into a scene thinking one thing, and then record it and end up somewhere else?

LEVINE When you write a character like Andrew Ryan you're always writing a speech, because Andrew Ryan always speaks like

he's giving a speech. Certain characters are like that, but Booker and Elizabeth are a lot more honest and true to the moment. Players need to feel like they are a character mixed up in all this, so I had to write much more concisely. The whole horse exchange [from the E3 demo] - we had to get that whole scene across in like 12



Troy Baker

seconds of dialogue.

BAKER We rewrote that scene like six times.

LEVINE I just kept writing different things, because I didn't know which one was going to sound right, so I think I actually wrote like fifteen different versions of that. Sometimes we'd record it angry, but then we'd take it into the game, and I'd be, "Oh my gosh, Booker just sounds like an a-----."

We did a second round with that scene, because we had to find the right tone where he was upset and scared and freaked out. Iteration is what the whole recording process is about. ♦

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Thankfully, Forza Mot things auto. Free of cong It's an entirely new car ex



WHERE DREAMS ARE DRIVEN



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XBOX 360

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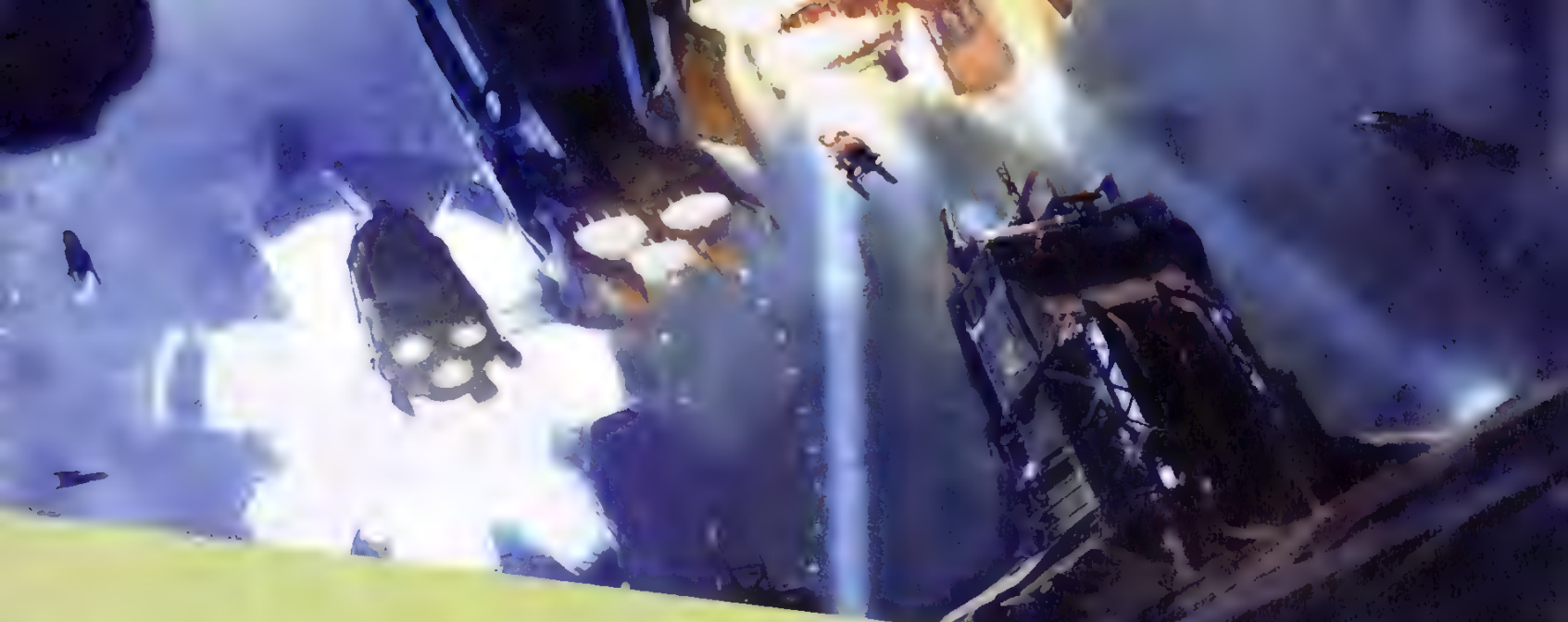
From left to right: Frank O'Connor (Halo franchise development director), Kiki Wolfkill (executive producer of Halo 4), Josh Holmes (studio creative director, Halo 4), and Bonnie Ross (general manager, 343 Industries)



er Halo

343 Industries talks building a top-class team to take up the mantle on one of gaming's most treasured franchises

On October 1, 2007, word began to leak that the developer synonymous with Halo, Bungie Studios, split off from Microsoft. A few days later, the two companies confirmed the news, with Bungie gaining its independence back and Microsoft retaining the rights to Halo. Quelling fans' immediate fears, a major condition of the deal included Bungie creating two more Halo titles, which eventually became Halo 3: ODST and Halo: Reach. Meanwhile, Microsoft announced the creation of a new division. 343 Industries would handle all things Halo: licensing, publishing, and most importantly, include an internal development studio. Since then, 343 has released Halo Waypoint, which ties together the community site with an Xbox Live app, and overseen the creation of animated collection *Halo Legends*. The fruits of its gaming labor weren't clear until this year's E3: a remake of Halo 1 from third-party developers and the long-awaited Halo 4, created solely by the new internal team at 343. Now that 343 can finally talk about what it's working on, we spoke to key members of the team about building a studio from scratch, creating Halo 4, why they decided to make Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary, and what it's like to take on Halo and all the fan expectations that come with it. by Bryan Vore



Halo 4

What's your approach to the story in Halo 4?

JOSH HOLMES (studio creative director, creative director of Halo 4): We approach the story in layers or channels in terms of, "What is the most critical path thing that everybody needs to understand?" Then underneath that starting to layer additional information on the narrative side to really support the experience and give those players who care deeply about the story the ability to explore further and learn more.

And for Chief specifically it's been a really interesting exploration for us because we know that we want to bring forward more of a sense of, "Who is this character?" in a way that you have never really seen in a game specifically. I think there's a lot more development of Chief or John within the books and the comics. It was really interesting to think about how we can start to surface more of that in the game, but at the same time maintain that really precious balance between that and, "I'm the player. I need to have a sense of ownership over what I'm doing."

Do you find any difficulties creating drama or tension when Master Chief has near-Superman levels of invulnerability?

HOLMES: I think it's interesting to think about what would it mean for Chief to experience failure. It's something that he's definitely had to deal with in his past, but it's never really come forth within the games. It is a challenge when you're dealing with a character who is so perfect in so many ways, but then beneath every surface of perfection there's got to be idiosyncrasies and the things that make each of us tick, and those are the things that I think are so interesting to me personally.

KIKI WOLFKILL (executive producer, Halo 4): I think that's the hard balance: How do we give him some extra layers of interest without making the player feel like he's been diminished in any way?

HOLMES: A lot of that comes from putting him in situations where he needs to make tough choices where the solution isn't always obvious. That really helps express more about who the character is depending on the choice that he makes.

Is the Halo 4 engine based on existing Halo tech or is it all new?

WOLFKILL: It's different from Anniversary. We...I almost revealed the codename for a second.... [laughs] This is an engine based

on some of the past Halo tech for sure. But it's also something this team has been working on to sort of optimize it for what we're doing. It's a completely internal piece of technology, but it is based on a lot of the Halo foundational tech.

Will classic musical themes from Marty O'Donnell's score return, or will audio director Sotaro "Tajeen" Tojima (Metal Gear Solid 4) take the music in new directions?

HOLMES: I think there's a really important legacy there in Halo with the music. There are a lot of classic themes that fans have come to know and love and expect from Halo. At the same time we're really embarking on a new journey and we're exploring new places that you've never seen in Halo before. For that reason there are going to be new themes that are established that really tie into that experience.

WOLFKILL: Tajeen has a huge amount of respect for Marty and his music, so I don't think there's any desire on his part to say, "Oh, that's done. Now we move forward." He definitely cares very much about bringing some of that forward.

Are there any traditional Halo elements you'd like to tweak?

HOLMES: It's been this really great kind of exploration for us where we've wrestled with, "What are the things that we carry forward? What are the things that we maintain to keep that amazing Halo feel while at the same time exploring [something] new?" But there was always amongst our team a real desire to stay true to what the core of Halo

gameplay is so that when you pick up the controller when you play the game for the first time there's no doubt in your mind that, yes, this is absolutely Halo. It feels like Halo. It plays like Halo. It's different. It's new. It's fresh. But it has that familiarity that I think people will expect from a Halo game.

A lot of people imagine this huge rivalry between 343 and Bungie. What's that relationship like in real life?

WOLFKILL: We're all part of the Seattle game development community. There are good friends in both studios and I think that will always be there. I think there will always be, because we're game studios, healthy competition between studios. But that's good, right? We look at it as it helps make us better – and it allows mutual friends at the bar to snipe at each other.

HOLMES: We've partnered together for such a long time that it has made the whole process easier. But it's always hard for someone when you're – I'm looking at it from Bungie's perspective – for 10 years they built this incredible universe and this incredible experience and for them moving on to their next great thing is always going to be a little bit bittersweet. It's natural for people to try to read something into that, but we've always found common ground around our love for the universe and our respect and devotion to the fans. So many of us came here to work on Halo based on a love for that universe so we have a tremendous amount of respect for Bungie.

343 Industries

How did 343 first come to be?

BONNIE ROSS (general manager, 343) When I was first offered the job by Shane [Kim], I wasn't sure where we could take the franchise creatively, since the previous games had been such groundbreaking, genre-defining experiences. I also wasn't sure what the scope of 343 Industries would entail, but I took two weeks to go and read the rest of the books. I'd read *Fall of Reach*. And then I essentially mapped a timeline out of all the fiction like first contact, John's abduction, the Spartan II program, and essentially kind of geeked out and fell in love with the universe and realized that 1, 2, and 3 were just the beginning. I went back to Shane and said I'd take it over under two conditions. One, that we got to build an internal studio and two, that everything would be under 343 – consumer products, licensing, books – because I felt like it was pretty important to have that cohesive story. During the process of looking at that timeline and wanting to bound the universe is when Frank contacted me and essentially said that would be his dream to really formally define that sandbox.

Frank came over and he's been instrumental in pretty much laying the foundation over the last two and a half years. We basically started amassing a team of what is now 200. I think

that it's been pretty challenging to get the level of talent that we wanted, especially in the beginning when we couldn't say we were working on Halo 4.

FRANK HOLMES (Halo franchise development director) I was at Bungie at the time and we were a few months into our singlehood. The contracts were still being ironed out and we were still kind of in a spin-off phase. Probably like a lot of people in the studio, I was curious and interested to see what kind of people were going to be taking over the reins of this franchise after we let it go, reluctantly in my case. I met Bonnie and the team, and a small core group of people, many of whom are still closely involved with or are in the studio right now. I realized that this was a team who wasn't here to take over our business, they were here to embrace a universe and immerse themselves in it every bit as much as we were. This was a team whose single focus and passion and career interest was Halo specifically. And we'll see how that works out when we launch Halo 4, but it's a pretty unique thing to get 200 world-class developers in orbit around this one single idea that they're all crazy passionate about.

So was there a big ceremonial passing of the Halo bible from Bungie to 343?

SS I'm incredibly passionate about the universe, but it's a pretty daunting task to take over such an amazing franchise, and I wanted to be the right steward. So we hired this company called Starlight Runner that, at the time, was one of the only trans-media companies. I was looking for someone that understood multiple mediums. And the first task

was getting the bible made. We had 10 years of Halo assets. Both Bungie and we had access to that, but what I didn't have access to was the hearts and minds of the creators. So Starlight Runner came in and did a ton of interviews with Bungie including Frank to hopefully give us that base and that bible. The outward-facing results of that bible was the *DK Halo Encyclopedia* and then internally we have, like notebook after notebook of...

CONNOR ... an intractable, dry nightmare of dates. It's not fun. And what Starlight Runner was able to do was turn really dry pages and pages of documentation into something that you could quickly look at no matter what your discipline is and what your interest in the Halo universe is. There's a lot of outward-looking thinking in there. What is Halo 5 going to be about? What's the last story we ever tell? There's some stuff in there that would be hair-raising for some fans.

How was it arranged that 343 would handle the story of Master Chief and Bungie would take on ODST and Reach?

CONNOR Microsoft's always very respectful of its first-hand, third-party developers and at no point does it ever come in and say, "You've got to tell a Chief story," or, "Don't do the Chief. We're holding it for this." I mean it just doesn't work like that. ODST was

an organic side-story – a pretty strong tradition of the *gaiden*-type story. Obviously, because that was happening in parallel with development on Reach and the ending of Halo 3, it was deliberately designed to be this sort of offshoot story. Reach, on the other hand, was definitely going to be Bungie's last Halo game, and they knew that. So what they didn't want to do is start a trilogy or start an arc that required that someone else finish it, or that they couldn't finish in a timely fashion themselves, so they wanted to do something that was foundational that set up the universe. That's why it takes a prequel form is because what it does is literally introduce the Master Chief in its climax.

How do you go about the monumental task of taking over one of the biggest franchises in gaming?

ROSS Everyone on the team is incredibly passionate about not letting the fans down. And we know we need to think about what is true to Halo, but we also need to take it forward and fans want to take it forward. It's one of the reasons why we started out with a trilogy versus just saying, "Hey, let's try and move one step at a time." We're here to make sure the next 10 years are as fulfilling as the first.

CONNOR Everyone in that room came here to work on Halo. And you can't even say that about an original team or a team that's creating a new franchise. But we also have hindsight, right? And we had time to plan and perspective to plan from. The Bungie team was always rolling on their next project and doing amazing work, but they never had the chance to sit back and look at it and say, "What do we do next?" It was always work, work, work. There are some slight advantages that we get. But you're right. It's a huge challenge and nobody takes it lightly.

(continued on page 32)

343 Industries Studio Timeline

Oct. 1, 2007
Microsoft relinquishes full ownership of Bungie Studios

Dec. 9, 2007
343 Industries is formed by general manager Bonnie Ross

Spring 2008
Halo franchise development director Frank O'Connor and Halo 4 executive producer Kiki Wolfkill join 343

Spring 2009
Studio creative director and Halo 4 creative director Josh Holmes joins 343

Sept. 22, 2009
Halo 3: ODST launches

Nov. 5, 2009
Halo Waypoint launches

Early 2010
Pre-production begins on Halo 4

Feb. 16, 2010
Halo Legends releases

Mid-2010
Production begins on Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary

Sept. 14, 2010
Halo: Reach launches

Jan. 3, 2011
343 moves into its new studio

June 6, 2011
Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary and Halo 4 announced at E3

Aug. 26 – 28, 2011
Halo Fest at PAX Prime

Nov. 16, 2011
Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary launches

Holiday 2012
Halo 4 launches

Halo 4 executive producer Kiki Wolfkill says the concept art on these pages is meant to "spark mystery and speculation."

(continued from page 31)

High Profile Departure

Shortly after we visited 343 Industries, gaming site Kotaku ran a story detailing the departure of Ryan Payton, narrative designer of Halo 4. Payton, who rose to prominence at Kojima Productions before working on Halo 4 for over a year, said he "wasn't creatively excited about the project anymore." He said he enjoyed his time at 343, but, "The Halo I wanted to build was fundamentally different and I don't think I had built enough credibility to see such a crazy endeavor through." Microsoft released a statement saying, "Ryan has been a great friend and colleague during his tenure at 343 Industries and we appreciate his contributions to the team. We wish Ryan the best in his new game development venture." Microsoft also added that Payton's slot had been filled by Armando Troisi, lead cinematic designer on Mass Effect 2.

At Halo Fest you revealed that the new Reclaimer Trilogy will shed light on the Forerunners. How did you decide to explore this?

O'CONNOR: I always thought about the Forerunners as a combination between ancient Egypt and Easter Island, where it's this enigma. If you think about Egypt in particular, there was a point in human history that isn't so long ago, I mean, the end of the 19th century/beginning of the 20th century, where we literally had no idea who or what the ancient Egyptians were. In fact, until they found the Rosetta Stone, all of the hieroglyphs were completely ambiguous. Now they can be read fairly trivially. It's not like the ancient Egyptian culture became less interesting once we found out what was going on. What it did was open up a whole new universe of mysteries about their culture.

[With the Forerunners] it was this huge untapped well of fiction for us where we had the unusual step of having to go very far back in time, roughly 100,000 years for canonical purposes, but make very human connections. We worked with Greg Bear to start that process [with The Forerunner Saga] and his second book [*Halo: Primordium*] is due on my desk at the end of the week.

How did you decide to remake Halo 1?

ROSS: That was a really hard decision. When we started the studio, that was one of the number one fan requests. I initially said no because I thought that was almost sacrilegious to touch the quintessential, best game of the franchise so far. Then we started thinking about what we were going to do for the 10-year celebration. We decided to move forward, but the entire studio was really apprehensive about us messing it up, like that's not the right first thing for 343 to do. We have a green light process for things moving from prototype, and at that time [we saw] the button to switch between old and new [graphics]. When we saw it we were like, "Okay, this is cool."

O'CONNOR: Weirdly the only thing we didn't have to worry about in the entire process was, "Will the campaign be fun?" So then the challenge became one of "What do we do to add to this experience?" We had to do something that celebrated what people liked about it and what people wanted added to it. There are things like achievements and skulls and all those kinds of things, but I think the hardest part of the process was figuring out what to do with multiplayer.

Yeah, there are a lot of people calling for the original multiplayer engine.

O'CONNOR: The original Halo CE multiplayer engine is awesome. We get it. We wish we could have done that, too, but it's very antiquated technologically. It was kind of a freebee spinoff of the campaign effort in the first place. It only worked on the system link and didn't have a networking model as a result. To recreate that experience accurately would have been a tremendous amount of effort, two or three years of grafting on a modern networking model. We had to make a decision to get it done in a timely fashion. And also fundamentally we didn't want to say to the Reach fans "Oh, we're going to interrupt your experience and decimate your population and ecosystem because we have a new but old thing."

So we eventually made the decision to make the multiplayer run in the Reach engine and have them talk to each other pretty much seamlessly, but also knowing that there was going to be a lot of fuss about us not using the original Halo CE engine and there's a lot of demand for that. We made a decision that we could build a title update for the Reach code that would be able to add a lot of the classic behaviors and gameplay features, including the Halo pistol, and sort of give us the ability to, through matchmaking, create very pure classic experiences than can live side by side with the conventional Reach gameplay. People at Halo Fest tried the title update, tried the new maps, and seemed to be really happy with where it's headed.

When you look at the Halo release schedule, by 2012 there will have been at least a game a year for four solid years. Is Halo becoming a yearly franchise?

ROSS: It wasn't set up to be an annual cadence. Sometimes products slip. Halo Wars and Reach weren't exactly timed at where they originally started out.

O'CONNOR: Those are actually pretty happy experiences. I think that was a good cadence for those products and they all were pretty successful. You have to have something every year, whether it's a map pack or a game or an experience because there's demand for it. We aren't deliberately setting up to create an annual factory. It's just going to be a case of "What are our production schedules like? What is demand like? And what are the things that we're naturally fitting into that?"

We've got Halo Anniversary this year, Halo 4 in 2012. It seems like a possibility that a Halo 2 remake would fit in the following year and then Halo 5.

O'CONNOR: Sure, it's a possibility but right now there are no plans to remake Halo 2, for example, so it would fall down there already. But coming out of Halo Fest and coming out of Anniversary people are like, "When am I getting Halo 2?" We have to take that seriously as a company so we're looking at it. We just don't know if it makes sense. Halo Anniversary

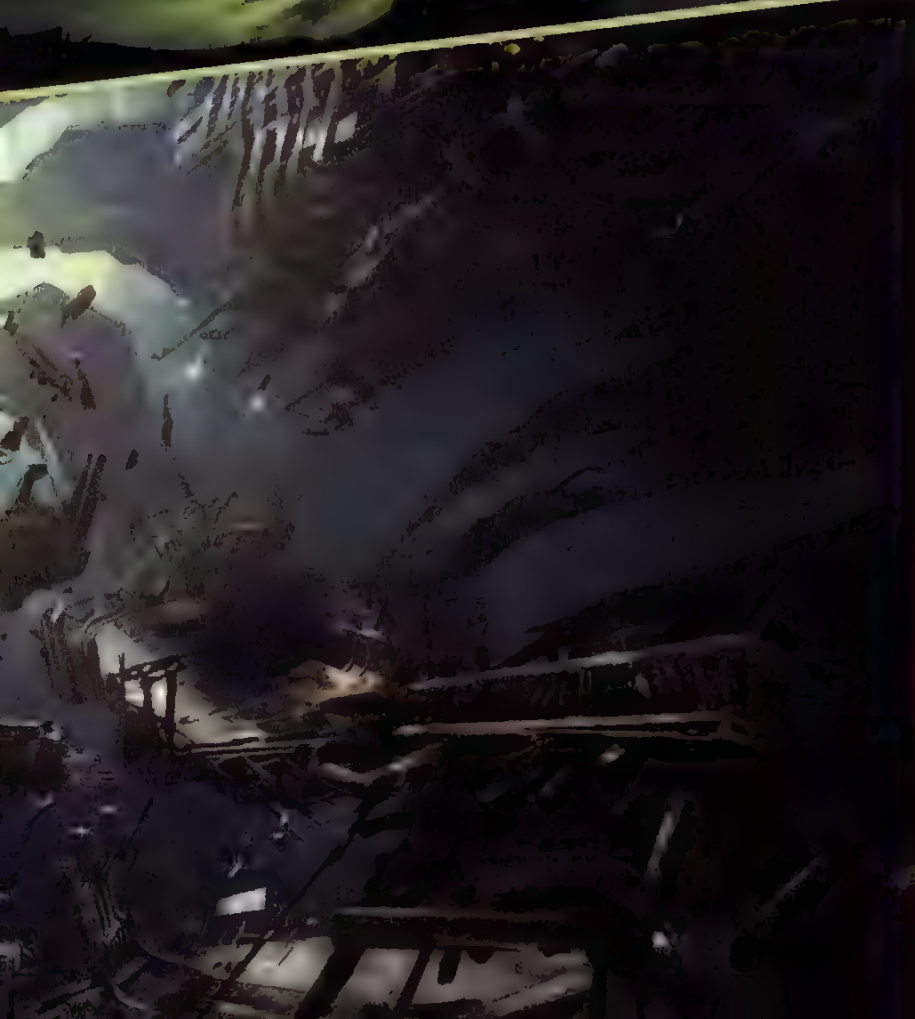
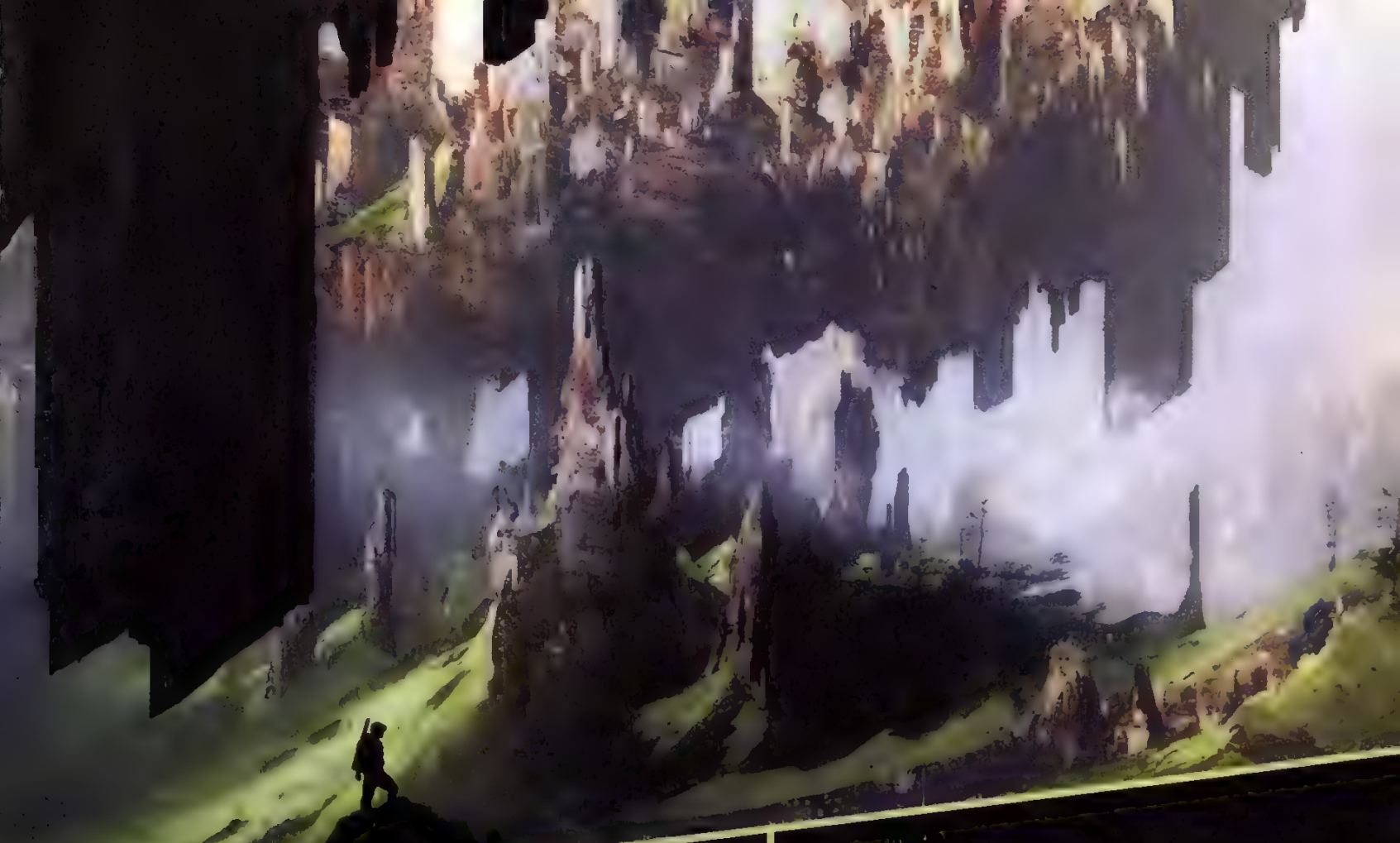
was celebrating ten years and it was a really specific beat. Halo 2, sure, there's demand for it, but we have to figure out if it's natural. You know, there's a Halo 2 map in Halo Anniversary. The maps were picked based on whether they'd been on the 360, whether they worked with Reach. We didn't sort of monolithically take bad maps from Halo 1 and put them in there just for the sake of it. There was a very careful selection process.

You spoke in a Halo Fest panel about canning certain cool features because they didn't fit with Halo. How do you make the call on new additions to Halo gameplay?

O'CONNOR: Sometimes things like that are really cool unto themselves, but they don't feel exactly like a part of the flow of a traditional Halo game. But the balance point there is what do you do to add to that? What do you do to evolve and layer on new features so that the game is going forward, not just resting on its laurels? We have done some new stuff and there will be some things that will even be controversial because everything you do in Halo is controversial. But we feel that they're definitely natural fits, and as we go through playtesting people can't live without some of the things that we have added. ☺



When 343 was starting to work with Starlight Runner on the Halo Bible, one issue did arise. "Bonnie likes to point out that, at the time, *Avatar* looked like it was going to be a train wreck," 343's Frank O'Connor recalls. "So in their publicity they're like, 'Can we say we're working with you guys?' And we're like, 'You can if you don't mention *Avatar*.'"



The Forerunner Saga

343's Frank O'Connor points fans looking for more on the world of Halo 4 to The Forerunner Saga trilogy of books written by Greg Bear. The first book, *Halo: Cryptum*, is out now and *Halo: Primordium* (cover art below) will release in January. Both books contain Halo 4 concept art on the covers. The new hidden video terminals in Halo Anniversary will also reference these books and Halo 4.





Castle Crashers

The Behemoth showed that decades of beat 'em up fandom and raw design and art talent can resurrect a long-dormant genre singlehandedly. The 2008 Xbox Live Arcade release (2010 on PSN) became one of the best-selling titles on the service, and it still gets awesome DLC updates all these years later. Up to four valiant knights can team up to rescue their princesses, all the while leveling up, buying new weapons, and recruiting helpful pets.

Final Fight

This 1989 arcade game from Capcom is a stone cold masterpiece. Final Fight's gorgeous sprites seemed enormous at the time. So much in this genre is about character and this had it in spades: pro wrestler-turned-shirtless mayor Mike Haggar, crooked cop Edi. E, and the whole freaking Andore family. Tight mechanics and sweet moves like the pile driver sealed the deal.



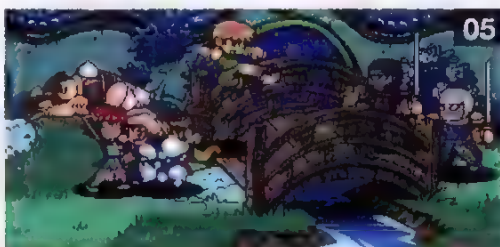
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

Is it possible that any franchise is more perfectly suited to this genre? All four turtles can be played at once, they all have unique weapons, and an army of palette-swapped robotic foot soldiers is built into the fiction along with sweet bosses like Shredder and Krang. Plus, who could forget slicing open a hydrant to blast away fools?



Double Dragon

Technos Japan followed its own urban brawler, Renegade, with the groundbreaking ballad of Billy and Jimmy Lee in 1987. So many staples started here: co-op, full scrolling levels, taking weapons from beaten enemies. It also has one of the most memorable openings (Marian's gut punch) and endings (the brothers' turn on each other) in gaming history.



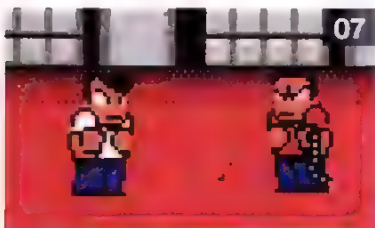
Scott Pilgrim vs. the World

Whoever arranged the deal for this video game-infused indie comic to become a brawler is a genius. Scott Pilgrim and three pals take on waves of thugs on their way to defeat Ramona's seven evil exes, who are perfectly suited as boss characters. Rising star artist and animator Paul Anderson took the River City Ransom inspiration [see entry 7 on this list] and blew it out to a staggering degree.



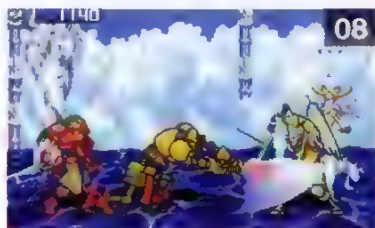
Golden Axe

Yet another classic brawler released in 1989, Golden Axe yanked the genre out of grimy city streets and into an imaginative fantasy setting. A dwarf, amazon, and barbarian named Ax Battler (who defied his parents' wishes and chose a sword instead) each had their own powerful magic and could fight from the back of a dragon.



River City Ransom

This Technos Japan gem has the distinction of being created specifically for the NES rather than the arcade. Gamers loved the distinct squat characters and exaggerated expressions, the wacky shops where you could buy all kinds of crazy food upgrades, and the running dialogue from enemy characters along the bottom of the screen. Barf!



Guardian Heroes

Treasure's phenomenal brawler only released on Sega's ailing Saturn console when it landed in 1996 and for this reason has remained a cult game while others on this list have moved on to fame and glory. That all changes this fall when Guardian Heroes receives an XBLA re-release. Now everyone can enjoy the vastly branching paths and creative three-plane battlefields.



The Simpsons Arcade Game

Licensing issues will probably block this from ever getting a proper re-release (who knows; X-Men finally made it), but the Simpson family's romp through Springfield just plain ruled. Konami perfectly captured the cartoon art style, sprinkled in recognizable landmarks and cameos from minor characters, and integrated team-up attacks.



Batman Returns

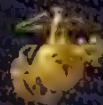
Do not get the excellent SNES version of Batman Returns confused with the 50 other crappy versions for other consoles. This was the best Batman game until Arkham Asylum came around, featuring a killer Danny Elfman soundtrack, a great combat system (you could smash two guys' faces together!), and exquisitely gothic backgrounds.

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interview



photo: Richard Brown

Sucker Punch Joins the Sony Family

After having success with both the Sly Cooper and Infamous franchises, Sucker Punch Productions has grown into one of the PlayStation's most important developers. Appropriately, the studio recently announced that it had been acquired by Sony, becoming a part of the company's impressive stable of developers. We recently spoke to Sucker Punch co-founder **Brian Fleming** about the studio's past, present, and future.

interview by **Matt Helgeson**

How did you come up with the concept of Sly Cooper? The idea of adding the jewel heist and light stealth to a 3D platformer was pretty unique.

We talked about the different ways we could imagine a 3D platformer working. A lot of times they got pretty wacky – “Our main character is an armadillo and he's collecting jello blobs.” We wanted to have something that made sense at a core level. So we thought about the main character being a thief, which motivated the traversal, traps, and collection aspects. We wondered why no one had done it before. We were trying to design the character and we'd had a raccoon as a villain in [Sucker Punch's previous game – Ed.] *Rocket: Robot on Wheels*. I remember our art director at the time having this vision of a raccoon putting on a thief mask – that joke of a masked animal putting on a mask was the idea.

Back on the PS2, Sony had Sucker Punch, Naughty Dog, and Insomniac all working on big triple-A platformers. Now, you've all moved on to more adult-oriented franchises. Do you think that era of the platformer is over and does that bother you?

I think there are a lot of games that are like that, they just aren't on console – they're on your phone. But as far as console games, this business is an evolving business and things constantly change. If you want to rest on your laurels, it's horrible. But if that's what you love about this business like we do, it's the best thing ever. Each generation brings new opportunities and challenges and brings things in a new direction. Input devices have been revolutionary as of late – whether that's *Guitar Hero* or motion control or balance boards, there's all kinds of innovation going on. To me, every time the market leaps forward it disrupts everything. I think that's one of the great things about this business.

Sly is coming back in Thieves in Time, and you're handing it off to Sanzaru, which did the Sly Collection. Was that your decision or Sony's?

We're excited, but we're at arm's length with that title. Those guys are making great progress and we're happy that they love that IP as much as we do. Sony could not have found a better team to go tackle that. But the realities

of being a one-game studio, which we take a great deal of pride in because it allows us to focus, means that we're going to have to have those moments where we let someone else take over something that we worked on. You have to be all right with that. Every decision has a consequence, and that happens to be a consequence of this.

Was it hard on an emotional level to let go of your baby?

I think it's the opposite. You're optimistic that someone else is going to keep the flame burning. My children are now old enough that I can play the Sly Collection with them, and we're anticipating the next game. We get to be fans for a little while, and that's fun too.

More recently, you've been focused on Infamous. I'm curious about the origin of that project. It's essentially a superhero tale, but one that exists outside of any comic book universe or IP. Not many people attempt that.

The truth is that most all video games are about superheroes. *Crash* and *Sly* are superheroes in a weird way. But we explicitly wanted to try to see if we could make a better superhero game starting as a video game than you could make if you took a comic superhero and ported it to a video game. The thing that resonated with us was that the powers given to Aquaman or whoever were designed with a narrative and an ensemble cast in mind. We're making a video game, so we care a lot about how the powers play and feel and how movement works. It was a neat opportunity for us to define a power-set and a universe that was a video game first.... Without being a jerk about it, the iconically bad series of Superman games – the problem wasn't that the people who worked on them were bad, it was that the IP didn't work well as a video game. The way to fix it isn't to make a better Superman game, it's to design an IP that works well as a superhero game.

Moving towards the development of Infamous 2, what were some of the biggest changes you wanted to make or biggest improvements you wanted to make?

The thing that was the most pressing for us was to take a game, which we thought was pretty good mechanically, and do a better job of presenting it. It was our storytelling, our visuals, and the emotional experience the player goes through – how do we improve those aspects of the game? How do we reach the

presentation quality and the epic feel and the scale of the bosses – the things you see in a modern superhero movie. We felt we fell short of that in the first game and we wanted to reach for it in the second.

One of the big surprises with Infamous 2 was the user-created content feature you added to the game. Not many third-person action games have done that. Had you been paying attention to what had been going on with LittleBigPlanet?

Certainly the proximity to the *LittleBigPlanet* guys and *ModNation* at Sony made it something we would consider. But I think what made the decision for us was exactly what you said – nobody had done this. It seemed like it was doable, and it made a lot of sense. We make missions and stick them in the city, why can't customers do it? For us, it made sense. We made a little TV commercial for how we would imagine the user-generated content feature would be [marketed]. We made a pretend Kevin Butler ad, actually. We showed it to the product development guys at Sony, and their reaction – especially from Shohei Yoshida, the president of worldwide studios – was “You guys are crazy if you don't do this, it's a good idea.” So it helped to have his vote of confidence. I think it worked out really well. We'll be at 100,000 missions fairly soon.

You've now been officially acquired by Sony, and are a part of their worldwide studios. How long was that in the works?

Things like that don't happen overnight, but it's not like it's been in the works for five years. I'd say we've worked hard over the past five months, trying to see if everyone thought it was the right thing to do, and doing all the work that led to it. We've probably been seriously talking for about a year.

Was this your idea or Sony's idea?

It was a little bit of both. At various times, either side was the one that was carrying the ball on it. From both of our standpoints, we wanted to continue to work together. This was a way to give everyone confidence that that was going to happen for a long time. It makes it easier for us to make bigger, riskier investments. It makes it easy for them to have confidence that we're working hard and our interests are fully aligned – there's nothing that separates us. We like that. It's been that way for almost two full generations, and I think we felt like it was worth putting a ring on it. [Laughs].



CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1980

PAPER MONEY

Using money from his paper route, Fleming buys an Apple II computer and begins teaching himself to program

1985

CALIFORNIA LOVE

In the summer following high school, Fleming gets his first gig in video games, programming the Apple II version of Epyx's *California Games*

1985

MUDD CLUB

Fleming begins his higher education at Harvey Mudd College, pursuing a degree in physics

1989

THE GREAT NORTHWEST

Fleming relocates to the Seattle area and takes a job at Microsoft as a program manager

1995

TIME WITH A GENIUS

Fleming spends 15 months as Bill Gates' personal technical advisor, conducting research and attending meetings and brainstorming sessions with the legendary founder of Microsoft

1997

A NEW START

Along with some colleagues from Microsoft, Fleming leaves to start Sucker Punch Productions, a new video game studio

1999

ROCKET

Sucker Punch releases *Rocket Robot on Wheels*, a well-done platformer for the N64

2002

THE THIEF

Sucker Punch releases *Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus*, an engaging platformer. The game spawns two successful sequels on PlayStation 2

2009

DARKER WATERS

Abandoning *Sly*, Sucker Punch releases *Infamous*, a dark and amazing superhero tale for the PlayStation 3

2011

STELLAR SEQUEL

Infamous 2 is released, earning praise for its gameplay, story, and content creation tools

Pro Gaming Comes of



“**A** beer in one hand and shouting at the TV, I finally understand football,” declares StarCraft II design director Dustin Browder. The “Barcraft” phenomenon Browder is gushing about, where gamers take over a sports bar and put StarCraft II streams on the establishment’s high-def displays, has accelerated its spread across the United States since being covered in *The Wall Street Journal*. Valve gave away a million dollars to a Dota 2 team for winning a tournament of a game that isn’t even out yet. Riot Games

announced a five million dollar total purse for the second season of League of Legends. Professional gaming is no longer some weird Korean activity, incomprehensible to Western audiences. The future of pro-level competitive gaming has finally arrived.

Professional gaming has been around for years, but the last 12 months have seen explosive growth for e-sports worldwide. “We’ve seen this really good year where things have clicked and the global audience has responded to those efforts,” says Major League Gaming CEO Sundance DiGiovanni. StarCraft II and League of Legends have come on to complement the strong first-person shooter stable that has formed the traditional backbone of Western e-sports. Social media has ceased being a buzzword and become

part of everyday life on the Web. The journey is finally paying off.

It seems obvious now, but stepping out of the shadow of broadcast TV for the wide-open world of the Internet was a major win for e-sports. “The numbers that we produce online, any traditional media person, anybody who breaks down the demographics we’re trying to reach...when they see what our viewership patterns are on the internet, any feelings of inadequacy immediately go out the window,” DiGiovanni says.

Browder is more succinct in his view of pro gaming’s relationship with media. “For a long time, we were dependent on television to get this stuff out. If a television station didn’t think we were cool enough, they wouldn’t pick us up, and then we were left in the dark,” he says. “Now we’ve got our own TV and it’s called the Internet, and we can watch it whenever we want.”

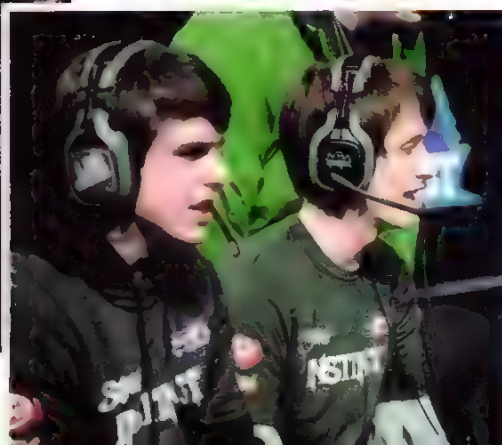
MLG set records this year for

concurrent online stream viewers (138,000 at the Raleigh Pro Circuit in August) and live in-person spectators (20,000 at the Anaheim Pro Circuit in July). For his part, Browder recommends attending a pro event if you ever have the opportunity. “It was absolutely amazing to sit there [at the Anaheim event] in a crowd of thousands watching StarCraft II and at the same time watching people play Halo, watching people play Call of Duty. Just amazing to watch all of these fans coming, all to stare at a screen, all to watch these high-caliber players throw down. It was a total blast,” he says.

This would all be old news in South Korea, of course. Pro StarCraft leagues have been running in that country for years, and the 2010 prize pool for the top league hit roughly \$500,000 – which doesn’t include any separate tournaments or events that Korean pros compete in. Blizzard’s 2007

“Now we’ve got our own TV and it’s called the Internet, and we can watch it whenever we want.”

– StarCraft II design director Dustin Browder



Millions of dollars and international recognition are bringing e-sports out of its niche

by Adam Biessener

age

Worldwide Invitational packed two enormous Olympic stadiums with over 60,000 fans. Top players have a level of celebrity in their home country unheard of anywhere else in the world.

Browder sees Korea as the tip of the spear, and a big reason for the popularity wave hitting Western markets now. "There was a core group of very passionate e-sports watchers here in the United States and Europe that I don't think existed [until] Korea exported it to the rest of the world," he says. "The minute that StarCraft II hit, these guys were obviously ready."

This has been a great year for e-sports so far, and drawing in well over 100,000 viewers for a live stream over the Internet is a great accomplishment, but it still has plenty of room to grow. Browder would like to see developers and publishers make more investment in the phenomenon. "It's very easy to make a game with very flashy graphics that looks really great in screenshots. It's very hard to make a game that looks good but still is clear enough to watch live," he says. "If I had something I could stand on and shout, I would tell

our brothers that are making first-person shooters they need to get on this."

E-sports have made huge gains in presentation and popularity, but DiGiovanni sees things just getting better. League of Legends is a massively popular competitive title that is still hitting its pro gaming stride, and "[MLG hasn't] really executed with Riot yet," he

admits. Gears of War, Battlefield, and Modern Warfare all have high-profile sequels out to keep e-sports riding high in the coming months as well. Expect to hear plenty more about pro gaming in the near future – none of these trends show any sign of reversing. "I've never seen such fertile ground," DiGiovanni says. ♦

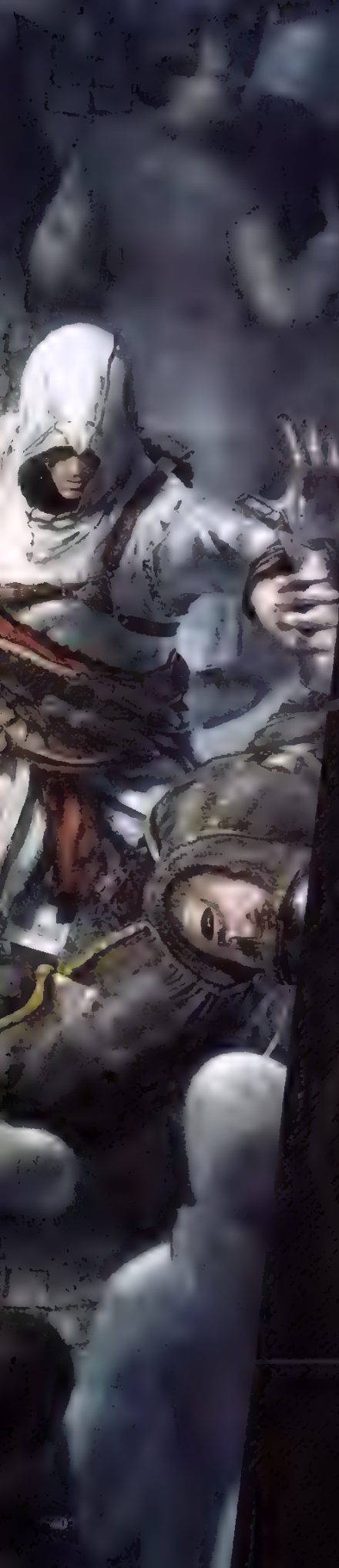


GOING PRO

Becoming a professional gamer is like embarking on any other career. To get anywhere, you have to put in the time. Hone your skills, practice against tough competition, climb those ladders and leaderboards. Aside from that obvious advice, Major League Gaming CEO Sundance DiGiovanni has a few choice pieces of advice.

"Each game has its own subculture and its own meta-culture for how talent is discovered," DiGiovanni says. Go to popular forums for your game, find out what the community respects, and work toward that. Once your name is out there as an active part of the community and you have the in-game skills to hang with the top players, you can try to break into the networks of elite players that nearly always form at the top. Maybe you can become a current pro's "practice newb," someone he or she plays against to improve their own skills in friendly matches. If you can make it into games against known talent, you can start bucking up even farther. After all, DiGiovanni's last bit of wisdom is undeniable: "The way to get noticed is to beat somebody meaningful."

The other side of pro gaming talent is on the commentating side. Anyone who has listened to Day[9], Atoxis, Tasteless, or any other professional shoutcaster call a StarCraft match knows the difference a good caster can make. Here again, practice is the key to getting good enough to get a gig. As a former caster himself, DiGiovanni advises proceeding with caution. Record a match and play it back for yourself at first, he says. "Don't have the first thing you do go out to anyone who wants to watch it or critique it, because people are mean, and they'll say things that may make you just quit." Once you're more comfortable on the mic, start promoting yourself within existing communities and on YouTube or wherever else.



Ubisoft

UNCENSORED

The history of Ubisoft as told
by the people who wrote it

by Matt Bertz

Over the course of the last two and a half decades, Ubisoft has grown from a meager distributor finding its footing in the gray market to a publishing powerhouse responsible for some of the most popular franchises in video games. In celebration of its 25th anniversary, we spoke with its key power brokers about the triumphs and challenges it has encountered along the way to becoming the third biggest interactive entertainment publisher in the world.

BEGINNINGS

Growing up in a small village in the north-western French province of Brittany, the five Guillemot brothers are exposed to business at an early age by their parents, who own a farming company. Each year, the brothers are expected to pitch in with the family business, rotating between various jobs like delivery, shipping, and accounting. After attending university and getting the entrepreneurial bug, the brothers decide to rejoin the family business and diversify its approach.

Yves Guillemot: We were working with farmers so the margins were very tight. The business my parents had was actually declining and so we had to find new businesses, so my older brother Claude started with CD audio. That was a new revolution. Then they started to sell computers to farmers. After that they created a shop that sold all sorts of things for farmers on top of normal chemicals and parts. In this shop we started to sell video games because they were part of the things that could be supplied. We had 20 machines in stock and probably 100 copies of software.

When he went to the U.K., my brother Claude realized that he was buying from his [French] supplier at two times the cost it was sold in the U.K. to the public. So that's where he said, "Maybe there's a business here." It was just at the beginning of the Amstrad [a popular European gaming PC - ed.], and so in 1984 we started a mail-order company.

Cecile Cornet: I know that when they started to think about the business their mother was helping with the accounts and she said to her sons, "Do your business, but there is one condition - do it together and with equal shares." I think her advice was very important for them.

Christine Burgess-Quémard: It was really the beginning. The quality of the games was so different than what we can see now. I'm not sure people can imagine if they haven't lived through that - what a game looked like in those days. It was being led by the U.K., but there were starting to be a few publishers in France, as well. That was the time of Infogrames and a few more.

YG: There was a specific business - you had to have the right game. As the mail orders started to grow fast, we went from mail order to selling to retailers that were anxious to get product at a reasonable price. When my brother discovered the difference in price, he started to import the games so we were selling them at 50 percent of the price the other suppliers were selling it to customers. So that's how Ubisoft was created in 1986. We said, "Okay, we really have to see how

we can create those games, because we know how to buy them. We know what is working, as we love to create and play those games, so we should organize ourselves to create them."

CBQ: We had a few bunches of kids who came along who were working at their desk or their bedroom or in their garage on some game ideas. They came and presented the games to us, and we decided to take the risk and see where it would lead us.

Rather than recruit developers to their Paris office with the rest of the operations, the Guillemot brothers decided to lure them with the promise of working in a unique environment - a gorgeous chateau in Brittany. Led by brothers Gérard and Michel Guillemot, here a small group of developers started working on the first internal Ubisoft projects.

CBQ: This was very much a marketing thing really, and we also thought it would be great to have a place where we could actually look all of our developers together so that they could develop games and finish them. It was not always easy when you have a bunch of 18- or 19-year olds to realize that when you start a game and you start talking to the press about it and you start investing into it, you have to deliver. So the first aim was to make sure that everybody was under the same roof so we could have everybody contained in a way.

Michel Ancel: I was around 14 or 15 when I started to program. It was 1987 or '88, and a lot of people were talking about the ozone layer problem in the stratosphere, so I did a funny animation with the molecules of the ozone and the oxygen, and you had the bad CFC bullying and breaking the oxygen. It was like a short animated movie. I sent this project to Ubisoft because they were doing a contest in a magazine that would let you win a computer. I won nothing, but I got a phone call from Ubisoft. I was surprised because the magazine was not directly connected to Ubisoft. They asked me to come to Paris. I was quite young. I took the train alone from Montpellier to Paris. Their office was in a suburb of Paris - a lot of graffiti tagging and dirt - I got lost in the subway. It was horrible. I don't understand how my parents let me go alone [Laughs]. Since I was eight or nine my parents let me do whatever I wanted. This is good and bad [Laughs].

I found the Ubisoft office after hours and hours of looking. It was a small apartment with a lot

of people speaking different languages. I was really impressed. I arrived, and spoke with Christine. It was about 6 o'clock in the afternoon and the amazing thing was after a while she received a phone call from someone in Brittany, which is like 300 or 400 kilometers to the west, and they asked me to go there. I took the train and arrived in the total countryside with cows and farmers, and there was a nice taxi - a kind of limousine - waiting for me at the train station. It was like in a movie. Then, after an hour in the countryside, we arrived at a castle. I didn't really know what they wanted me to do because all I did was send my ozone project. Here I met one of the Guillemot brothers - Gérard.

While I was doing that ozone animation I was making games too - programming, doing the animation, the graphics, the music. I was really making games for my friends. The game



From left to right: Claude, Michel, Yves, Gérard, and Christian Guillemot with their parents Yvette and Marcel

I showed them [Brain Blaster] is now on the Internet - I found it because there are guys trying to preserve old games with emulators. So Gérard wanted me to finish that game for them. It took me about six months to finish the game, which I did at home, and they did a surprising thing and sent me the first Game Boy in France. Before it was released officially, they sent me the console. Because the game was a mix of action and puzzle genres, they wanted me to think about something for the Game Boy. I then had to figure out how the console worked, which was very interesting because it was like being introduced to the Japanese culture of making games really early - 60 frames per second, looking at Mario, etc. But I didn't have the development kit, so I moved to Brittany with my family and that's when I started to work on the Game Boy. I did some work on the Star Wars adaptation. We also had the Super Nintendo development kit and tried to think about game concepts.

It was really the beginning of Ubisoft as a developer. They were trying to be really close to Nintendo and Sega. In some ways it was quite surprising because most of the developers were developing for the Amiga or Apple.

YG: We couldn't keep the castle for more than 18 months or two years because it was too complex. It was difficult to heat during the winter. We had one guy whose cost to heat his room was \$1,000 per month. So we said okay, maybe we should come back to something more conventional.



Ubisoft set up its first development studio in the Chateau de la Grée de Callac in Brittany, France

THE ORAL HISTORIANS

Yves Guillemot
Founder, CEO

Christine Burgess-Quémard
Executive Director
of Worldwide Studios

Serge Hascoot
Editorial Executive
Director

Michel Ancel
Creator of Rayman and
Beyond Good & Evil

Alain Corra
Executive Director
of EMEA Territories

Xavier Poix
Managing Director
of French Studios

Cecile Cornet
Director of International
HR & Communications

Yannis Mallat
CEO, Ubisoft Montreal
and Ubisoft Toronto

RAYMAN: A STAR IS BORN

Abandoning the chateau in Brittany, Ubisoft concentrated its development talent back in the Paris metro area. Not everyone was happy with the relocation.

Michel Ancel: I was not really comfortable in Paris. My family was not able to move there because it was very expensive. I was really young, and I had nobody. If you move to Paris without money it's horrible because you are in a bad apartment, and you don't have money so you can't go to the good part of the city, so you're just walking. I decided to leave because at the same time it was really the beginning, and Ubisoft didn't exactly know what to do. It was their first experience managing a developer, and for them it was quite complex to organize, and we were really few – we had like five [developers]. I went back to Montpellier after half of a year.

At this point it was the beginning of 3D, so I was doing some 3D art and things like that, but it was not my real passion. I really wanted to make games, so I started working on Rayman in 2D doing animations and the character controls.

“Ubisoft put a lot of money into Rayman, and it was the time of 3D so we were like, ‘Okay, we're making a 2D game. How are we going to sell it?’”

I think it's a good part of the company culture – the feeling that you can live your own experience and come back if your ideas are still good.

Serge Hascoet: I don't have a good memory, but this I remember well. We had a meeting with Gérard Guillemot, Yves Guillemot, Michel Guillemot, and myself, plus Michel Ancel and

Frédéric Houde – the two who created the [Rayman] concept. It was a picture of a big, giant trombone and you had to imagine the player inside. It was a totally strange design, and I felt that it could be a cool place to play with the wind and all that kind of stuff. Michel had already worked on the animation system alone in his corner for six or so months, and the fluidity of the animation was great. Nothing else was close to that in the industry at that time. We liked it, but it was not a game yet – it was R&D – but I liked it. I said to Yves, Gérard, and Michel that we have to do this game.

MA: There was one very important person at Ubisoft – he's now the CEO of Gameloft – Michel Guillemot. He's an incredible guy who works in the shadows, and he's a visionary. He really understands how to make games internally and he created the model to get all these young developers on track. He understood what they wanted to do and helped make them more professional. When we worked on Rayman I was quite young, but he gave us a lot of responsibility to design and create.

We were supposed to do the game on the Super Nintendo CD system, which never came out. We spent some time working on the title but it took so long. Then Michel [Guillemot] took the project and said, “If you want to do this project, we need to bring in a lot of people and a lot of money. We're going to need to organize the project.” That's when everything changed.

YG: Michel, who is a very organized and structured guy, said okay, we are going to do a big part of the work in Paris. Everything that we can automatize will be done in Paris and all the artistic stuff will be done in Montpellier. So we had the best animators, we had lots of very highly talented people here taking the data from Michel and making sure they could fit in the level of quality and depth that the market needed at that time.

MA: We moved to the Atari Jaguar, then we moved to the PlayStation, and the project became bigger and bigger. We went from two developers to over 100 people. During this period it was incredible to have 100 people

working on the game. Only in Japan and the U.S. were there teams that big – in France it was not possible to imagine something like that. Ubisoft put a lot of money into Rayman, and it was the time of 3D so we were like, “Okay, we're making a 2D game. How are we going to sell it?”

YG: We wanted to create a game that came out with the PSX. That was really on purpose – to come with a new machine – because we knew that to beat Japan on platforming games we had no chance but to come on a new machine quicker than them.

Alain Corre: We were looking at all the big Japanese companies with big eyes. You know, the Capcoms, the Namcos, the Konamis, and so on. We were very impressed by what they were doing. But we said, “With this one, maybe we have something. This is the first time we have a product that could bring us to the next level.”

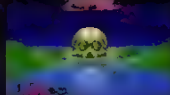
YG: There were only nine games available on the PSX when we shipped Rayman in 1995, so customers didn't have much choice but to try this one. The press had to test this one, so they could really look at the depths of the game and the quality. [If we had shipped it] one year later, it wouldn't have been as big a success, because there would have been too many games. The sales at first were very good per country, but the game was expensive because we wanted to do better than the Japanese. It took us probably 18 months before the game was profitable, but it continued, continued, continued, and became immensely profitable with time.

Christine Burgess Quémar: We all felt that Ubisoft became recognized when we launched Rayman. That was first game that really mattered and made us a publisher.

In the ensuing years, Rayman, Rayman 2: The Great Escape, and Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc combined to sell over 20 million copies, making Michel Ancel's creation the first legitimate hit series in Ubisoft history. The success empowered the company to go public in 1996 to raise more capital for its internal development endeavors.

1984

Led by brother Claude, the Guillemot brothers start a mail-order service for video games in France.



1986

Encouraged by their success in the mail-order business, the Guillemot brothers form Ubisoft and release the company's first game, Zombi, which draws inspiration from George A. Romero's Dawn of the Dead.

BREACHING NORTH AMERICA

The IPO raised \$80 million in cash, which Ubisoft leveraged in expanding its worldwide footprint, opening up branches in China, Canada, Spain, Italy, and Morocco. With new studios up and running, the publisher needed new intellectual properties that appealed more to North American sensibilities to broaden its penetration in the burgeoning market.

Yves Guillemot: We were opening all these studios in Montreal and China – and one in Japan to make sure that we could get the dev kits at the same time as the Japanese because Europeans and Americans always had a six-month delay. So we had a few studios, but afterward it was extremely difficult to grow, because it was difficult to create new brands each time. When [other publishers] have been there for four or five years and they're well trained and they have brands, it's more difficult [to break into the market].

Alain Corre: We were known in France, in Europe, less in America, because we didn't have an American-centric franchise. So we had to find a way to get into this huge market, which is, today, the biggest global market.

YG: We had a very good opportunity in '99 when the Internet arrived in Europe. We saw the opportunity to take advantage of it. At the time we had four brothers working on the company – Christian was in accounting, Michel was taking care of the studios, and Gérard was working with all the project managers. So we said, "Okay, with the Internet we should probably leave one person in Ubisoft on full-time, and have Gérard and Michel create Internet companies." At the end of '99 Gérard started Gameloft. That was the company that was supposed to do free-to-play games. The market was there, but it was very difficult to monetize. So it was in a way a bit too early. In parallel, Michel started a company that made games for phones. Ubisoft sold the rights for its games [to these companies]. By doing that, the share price of Ubisoft multiplied by five. In March 2000 we said, "Okay, the value is high, we should make an increase in capital." So we raised 170 million Euros, and quickly after bought Red Storm.

AC: Tom Clancy allowed us to push ourselves into the U.S. market because it was a big U.S.

brand. It definitely opened gates a lot wider. Yves said if we can do something with this franchise, it has so much potential. And for us at that moment, it was a lot of money based on our revenue. So it was a big bet. But it was a bet worth taking because suddenly we were being recognized as a company that was not only European centric.

Serge Hascoet: At that time we were very action-adventure oriented. We had a racing game called Pod and some Formula One, but we were not that good in other fields. Red Storm was a very good opportunity to change that. We liked a lot of stuff there; they had maybe the best animation system at the time, and it evoked a very strong feeling of being on a tactical team. The gameplay was great. So we thought it would be a great match to work with them to bring what we knew about console games with their knowledge of Tom Clancy, war games, PC, and online.

Working on a shooter was a totally new experience for us. Some people think it's easier to be first person instead of third person. In third-person perspective you have to take care of the camera. But with first-person games you have to make it very responsive, very accurate, and very precise. It takes a completely different set of skills.

YG: The team at Red Storm was one of the best multiplayer creators at that time on PC, which was a very developed world. When we saw Microsoft coming with their console with multiplayer, we said, "We have one of the top two or three teams on multiplayer, we should work with Red Storm to do a console version."

AC: In 2001 when the original Xbox came, nobody wanted to develop for it. Yves decided that it was important, because the technology was there. It was better than the previous console, and he wanted to bet on this one. With Ghost Recon, we decided to embrace Xbox Live. We were the only one with Halo to be on Xbox Live in a big way.

YG: What we have seen in the past in the industry is very often the innovations come first on PC, and we can bring them to consoles after and make them easier to access. Like voice on

console multiplayer – it took time to come, but it really became strong when you could speak because you had no keyboard on the console. A big part of the multiplayer experience was chatting at the same time.

It's funny because until the end, most of the people were not convinced this would be the best multiplayer experience. Everybody believed Epic, who had Unreal Tournament, would do a lot better. But because of Red Storm's experience managing customers, managing latency, and managing servers, they came with a game and an experience that was actually very good and better than most of the other games.

In successive years, a young Ubisoft Montreal studio collaborated with Red Storm to create Ghost Recon and Rainbow Six 3, two titles that took advantage of console connectivity to deliver destination multiplayer experiences that consistently ranked near the top of the charts with Halo 2. Moving from the Xbox, GameCube, and PlayStation 2 to the next-gen consoles, sales kept going strong with Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter and Rainbow Six Vegas. To date the Rainbow Six and Ghost Recon franchises have sold 23 million and 18 million units, respectively.



1991

Ubisoft expands its distribution reach to the U.K, Germany, and the United States.

1992

The company opens its first in-house production studios in France and Romania.

1995

Michel Ancel delivers Rayman on the PlayStation. The stylish platformer becomes Ubisoft's first major hit.

1996

Ubisoft becomes a publicly traded company.

1997

The company opens Ubisoft Montreal.

EMERGING FROM THE SHADOWS

While Ubisoft Montreal worked diligently on these shooters, a small in-house research team was developing a wildly different take on the Tom Clancy universe.

Serge Hascoet: The game started in Paris – it was an RTS, and finally we decided together it was not good. Two of the developers went to New York when we started a studio there, and the game went another direction – an action adventure game on a floating island. It was in development for one or two years and nothing was great except some graphics and animation. At the same time New York was too expensive so we asked people to go to Montreal – this was at the same time we bought Red Storm.



We had a meeting with Yves and said, "Okay, this game has some issues, what should we do?" We asked the team to work on a spy game for consoles. Some great guys joined the team like Antoine Dodens, who was a programmer, and he strongly believed that it was possible to do the light and shadow system. Everyone else was against it in the company, but he was right.

Yves Guillemot: We were unsure about the potential of that product and we said, "If we used the Clancy brand on this idea, it could

really help it to perform." We said, "Okay, the only way to beat Metal Gear is to go on the console where it's not, with something a lot better graphically because it's not available on PlayStation." So we said, "Let's give ourselves some competitive advantages so that we have a chance to do something that will be better than the best of the best." That is how we decided to ship on the Xbox alone. We knew that some aspects would be not as good as [Metal Gear], but using the technology of that machine we would be superior in terms of graphical quality. So that is why we said, "We know we won't sell that many because the machine is new and it's not selling huge quantities yet, but it is a way for us to create a brand on a machine that has low competition."

Then we went to Microsoft and we said, "Look at what we're doing for you." We did a survey where we asked consumers, "Would you buy a machine to get this game?" and, "What would you think if you had a Metal Gear-type game on the Xbox?" It showed that game would sell machines like hotcakes. Microsoft has a good marketing team, and they realized quickly that this game could help the console. Then they helped us optimize it on the machine.

Cecile Cornet: I was doing communications at the time, and a few months before Splinter Cell came out Yves told me, "Prepare yourself, because it's going to be big for us." And it was. I was surprised how Yves had anticipated the success.

Splinter Cell was an instant hit, winning a Game Developers Choice Award for excellence in writing and Interactive Achievement Awards for best console game and outstanding achievement in gameplay engineering. Sequels Pandora Tomorrow, Chaos Theory, Double Agent, and Conviction were critically acclaimed as well. To date the franchise has sold over 20 million units.

A PRINCE

A year after Ubisoft acquired Red Storm Entertainment, the publisher absorbed the entertainment division of The Learning Company, which held licenses for several formerly valuable brands like Myst, Chessmaster, and Prince of Persia.

Yves Guillemot: [The acquisition] gave us brands that we could put in Montreal so those guys wouldn't have to create a new brand each time they made a game. These brands that already existed could be strong. For Prince of Persia, it was after Prince of Persia 3D – I don't know if you remember Prince of Persia 3D, but it was not as good as the two first ones.

Alain Corre: The last one was done by The Learning Company. It was really bad, and we knew it because we were distributing their games. So we said, "This one, I think, is buried for a while." The gold in The Learning Company at that time was Myst, so we moved forward with Myst III: Exile and it did extremely well. But at one point, the Montreal studio decided Prince of Persia was a good brand and it could be revived.

Yannis Mallat: I was pushing my boss at the time, Paul Meegan, to get the license. I said, "Paul, I want Prince of Persia," every day. I played it back in the 1990s, I was interested in the challenge, and I knew a bunch of people who would be a perfect fit for the game. Eventually Paul came back to me and said, "Okay, you'll be the one producing the game, so gather your team and stop bitching."

We needed to get back to what Prince of Persia is from a gamer's perspective – the animation, the level design, and the story. We all knew the first Prince of Persia was a one-man project, so we invited Jordan Mechner to the studio early in the process. He was working on scripts for movies and documentaries at the time.

Serge Hascoet: We sat down with Jordan, and we promised to give him a great team to reboot Prince of Persia because the brand wasn't doing well. We had a great team – Yannis Mallat, Patrice Désilets, and nearly 20 great people working with him in the beginning. So many great ideas coming from different people.

2000

Looking to purchase some new brands, Ubisoft acquires Red Storm Entertainment and the Tom Clancy license

2001

Ubisoft acquires Blue Byte Software, which makes the European favorite Settlers, and the entertainment division of The Learning Company, which includes the Price of Persia, Myst, Petz, and Chessmaster licenses.

2001

Ubisoft releases Ghost Recon



ReBORN

YM: Jordan was very responsive to our approach right away, but then it took him a long time for him to fully embark on the game. We were already done with pre-production, the character design, and the main story, but we were struggling with the story at the time. We wanted to go a level deeper into how the gameplay is tied to the story and vice versa. Around then I urged him to come on board full time.

SH: I had some fights with the team. I am very input driven – I like the game to react as soon as you press the button. But *Prince of Persia: Sands of Time* was animation driven. I spent a night with Yannis just speaking about that. It was nearly the only discussion we had during the course of its creation – and I lost [laughs].

YM: It took us time to put the animations into the real-time engine, but first we had to produce animations as moc-caps of what the gameplay would be like. But until you can play it, you can't say if the decision is right or not. I think we convinced him when we were able to build some kind of rhythm into mastering the animation system. He was right – platformers are rhythm driven, and when you manage to get the game playing well then it's quite enjoyable. The challenge was to prove to him that the animation system could be the maestro of that rhythm.

Maybe four or five weeks before E3, I got a phone call from Sony Computer Entertainment telling me that they absolutely wanted *Prince of Persia* in the Sony booth. I managed to contain my enthusiasm, saying, "That's great. Thank you very much," but as soon as I hung up the phone I literally ran into the production floor in the middle of the team and screamed like a madman. I told the team, "We're going to be in the Sony booth and we're going to have five pods!" At the time it was huge because the game was still under the radar. That was a very intense moment that I'll always remember.

AC: We showed it at E3 in 2003, and we didn't know what to expect. We knew it was very beautiful, but we didn't know if it would please a lot of people. And so then we saw the booth was completely crowded. Even our competitors

were playing there. I remember even the boss of EA was playing there and saying, "Gosh, it's good." And we said, "We have created something again."

YM: We prepared our E3 demo very well. We put everything we had into the seven maps that we had for E3 candidates. We went to E3, which was great, but when we went back to the office, I gathered the whole team and we played all of the maps in the game except the E3 maps. Suddenly E3 and all of the celebrations were forgotten. We were just down because of course they were in a disastrous state. We ended up removing a good portion of the game that should have been the belly of the game. So I sat down with Patrice [Désilets, creative director], Jordan, and the team and said, "We just had a great E3 and people are expecting this game and we can't do it, so let's just focus on what's really important." It was a very intense summer, but the engine was stable, and the main character behavior was complete, so it was just a question of rolling out the maps.

But maybe a month before submitting the candidate, a tester found a very nasty pitfall in the game. If you remember, there was no loading in the game. It was the very first game to offer a seamless experience with no loading between maps. For that to happen we had dynamic loading, which is possible when you unload previous parts of the maps to load the upcoming parts. We did this in long corridors, and everything was running perfectly until Marianne LeCouffe decided to see what would happen when you would rewind. It was a nightmare – this was replicable everywhere in the game. There was no way to fix this in the code base so we had to redo all the geometry. This was extremely stressful because the marketing

campaign had already launched and the [release] dates were already locked. We just busted our asses and shipped the game.

AC: We were a bit afraid. But when we saw what they did, we knew they really revived the spirit of *Prince of Persia*.

SH: The wow effect of the game was the animation. There was no competition at that level at that time. The character design was top notch, and the graphics were quite marvelous, too. It was a magical project with magical people.

YM: It took time for the sales to pick up. It was a very busy holiday season, but at the



end of the day I think Ubisoft is right to invest in quality, because an average game would just have collapsed at that time. If you manage to make a good enough game, then even if the first weeks are hard, the sales will pick up. That happened, and that was probably the best experience of my life.

Prince of Persia: Sands of Time solidified Ubisoft Montreal's status as an elite studio, winning eight Interactive Achievement Awards. Two highly successful sequels followed in the subsequent two years, and the series has sold over 17 million units to date.

2002

Gambling with an Xbox exclusive, Ubisoft Montreal delivers a game changer with *Splinter Cell*.

2003

The *Prince of Persia: Sands of Time* releases to widespread critical acclaim. Journalists also embrace its other highly touted title, *Beyond Good & Evil*, but consumers ignore it.

2004

Ubisoft finds another marketable franchise with Crytek's open-world shooter *Far Cry*.

2004

EA purchases 20 percent of Ubisoft shares.



CRITICAL SUCCESS COMMERCIAL FLOP

After finishing Rayman 2, creator Michel Ancel stepped away from the franchise to start a new labor of love, Beyond Good & Evil. The artistically ambitious game combined the cinematic storytelling of a Miyazaki film with gameplay that skillfully blended puzzle solving, exploration, and stealth.

Michel Ancel: I really wanted to make something new – more major – something really different than what we were used to doing. This was very interesting because for this project, Yves Guillemot, the CEO, came to Montpellier and was really behind the project. Unfortunately, it was not so successful, but Yves was really behind us for the whole development, which was incredible because he spent time regularly with us on the project.

It became very evident very early because we went to two E3s with this game, and one I remember there was no applause and nobody to talk to [after a demo]. We saw a lot of people, but nobody was talking about the game. We were like, "Maybe something is wrong." There were so many big titles. People were obsessed with existing franchises and technological games, which is not bad, but for this kind of game with a woman protagonist with a camera where it wasn't really clear what you were going to do in the game – it was bad. So we realized that the game would need time to be appreciated.

Yves Guillemot: Peter Jackson loved it and Michel really showed what he could do to create innovative games. It's a shame that you can do such an innovative game and that people feel that because there is a pig and it's not adapted totally to the audience, you don't sell the volume you expected.

Alain Corre: Progressively, people have learned about it and it is considered one of the best games ever done. We released it recently on the Xbox Live in HD and it did extremely well, but it's too late.

The press widely praised Beyond Good & Evil, but in a jam-packed holiday season featuring the likes of Final Fantasy X-2, Call of Duty, and Ubisoft's own Prince of Persia, the game failed to gain traction with consumers. In 2008, Ubisoft announced a sequel, but the large project has taken a backseat to Rayman Origins.

2005
Ubisoft finds inspiration from Hollywood with the Saving Private Ryan-esque Brothers in Arms series and Michel Ancel's video game adaptation of Peter Jackson's King Kong



2006
While other publishers struggle to gain a foothold on the Wii, Ubisoft Montpellier finds success with Rayman Raving Rabbids



2006
The Tom Clancy license comes back stronger than ever with Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter and Rainbow Six Vegas

The PREDATORY MARKET



From left to right: Christian, Claude, Michel, Yves, and Gérard Guillemot

With development costs rising, in the early 2000s many publishers started looking into consolidating their businesses. Squaresoft merged with Enix in 2003, Sega merged with Sammy in 2004, and in 2007 Electronic Arts lost its spot at the top of the publishing food chain when Vivendi agreed to purchase Activision and formed the new entity Activision Blizzard. Ubisoft was forced into the merger discussions in late 2004 when Electronic Arts announced that it had purchased 20 percent of Ubisoft's shares unbeknownst to the company's executives. This was the largest block of shares outside of the Guillemot family, giving the company adequate leverage to wage a proxy battle and shape Ubisoft's future direction.

Yves Guillemot: One guy from EA called me on a Sunday afternoon, saying "We just bought 20 percent of your company, so we just wanted to tell you that because it is going to be public tomorrow." At that time EA was trying to buy Activision, and they were close to a deal. They had discussions on the last bits and they called Bobby to say, "We bought 20 percent of Ubisoft." What I heard was that somebody from the *Wall Street Journal* heard about that soon after. So EA had to announce because the guys at Activision were upset, saying, "What do you want? Do you want to buy us or what?" They called me and said, "Okay, we bought 20 percent." That was a big shock for us because at the same time they didn't know what they would do with it. We asked what they wanted

to do, and they said, "We don't know yet." So we had discussions with managers and my brothers and different people involved and so we decided to reject the potential offer.

Alain Corre:

Sunday at 9:30
Yves calls. Really?
Sunday at 9:30
is not when Yves normally calls, so I remember it very well. I was at home upstairs in my office, and I said, "Wow. That means that we're succeeding." It was a big shock for us, obviously, and it was very bizarre because we didn't know what would happen.

YG: At that time EA had the reputation of being very business oriented, not caring too much about creative, and so we said, maybe those guys can come with an impressive amount of money, but it would never work with the way they do with their business. Its culture would not fit. They changed afterward. They are becoming better with creators and so on. But at that time they really had a mentality that was very different than ours.

Christine Burgess-Quémond: On one hand it was very flattering because, obviously, a company wanting to get into your capital means that you're doing well. And on the other hand, we've always been extremely proud of our independence and we've always fought fiercely for our independence. And we were determined to keep on fighting.

AC: It was so shocking – a cold shower. Very, very quickly all the employees were vocal about that and said that they didn't want to lose the Ubisoft culture. They didn't want to lose their Ubisoft history and that dynamism that went along with it.

Serge Hascoet: It's not like buying a factory; it's people – creative people. When we broke

the news the first five minutes before our meeting [people were saying] "We are not the same as EA. If they come, I will leave," et cetera.

YG: We looked at everything we could do to try to show the potential resistance. So we went to see anybody we could see to help, so I just had a meeting with one [government] minister in France and it helped a lot.

It really shook the company a lot, and so we became very focused on making no mistakes to make sure that they couldn't find a way to, you know, to get in. It changed the way we were conducting the business to make sure that everything would be profitable for sure and we took fewer risks. It stopped us from buying companies; it didn't help us to expand the way we wanted at that time.

CBQ: There was no real difference to the everyday life at all. It was the initial shock, and then the months went by, and then the years.

AC: It pushed us into the swimming pool. We had to swim by ourselves to a certain extent and perform. And we were not thinking about them. They were there, but we were doing our thing, because we had our road map. Do better and perform better and create better games and have more consumers. That has always been our motto, even during that time. What we put in place helped us grow into the top three [publishers], increasing our market share to be close to 10 percent now.

YG: At first it was the sword of Damocles hanging over our head. For a while we'd have discussions and then no discussions. They were nice people, so it was okay, but you didn't know what could happen. When [current EA CEO] John Riccitiello took over he said, "You know, I'm not going to go after you without your approval. We can discuss things, but don't feel you will be attacked. If we do something it will be done collaboratively."

After six years of owning the stock, EA quietly sold its shares in 2010, freeing Ubisoft from the threat of hostile takeover.

2007
Tapping into the oft-neglected young female market, Ubisoft finds success with its Imagine line of DS games. To date the series has sold over 20 million units



2007
Ubisoft Montreal delivers Assassin's Creed, which becomes an instant hit. The success makes Ubisoft the third biggest publisher in the world



2009
Ubisoft strikes gold on the Wii for a second time with Just Dance. The series has sold 15 million units to date

2010
EA sells its shares of Ubisoft

THE BIRTH OF AN ICON

Moving into the next-generation consoles, Ubisoft was planning on leveraging the new technology to deliver another Prince of Persia sequel. Instead, an assassin was born.

Serge Hascoot: Before the new consoles were announced, we started working on a new engine. It was originally for Prince of Persia, but at one point we saw the potential to create a new IP.

Yannis Mallat: As it probably is with any company, when you're coming off a successful initiative, it gives you the confidence to try something new. That's how we managed to convince Christine and Yves. Serge was already convinced because we were talking regularly.

YM: We worked with historians and Middle Eastern specialists when doing all the research. Patrice, writer Corey May, producer Simon Tremblay, and art director Raphaël Lacoste were thrilled at the prospect of visiting something that actually mattered in terms of shaping today's world. It also happened in a very interesting environment, visually speaking. So it was easy for the team to get absorbed in the work up to the point where we were actually visited by the Aga Kahn movement. The Aga Kahn is the descendant of the prophet Mohammed and of the Ismailis – the very first assassins. That was quite a scary moment actually. They came to the studio, and they wanted to make sure they were being portrayed in the correct way. But the research was the easy part. Where

we had our heads hitting the wall was trying to land all those beautiful fantasies into a working engine. That was not fun.

YG: From the beginning it was open world, with all the problems that come with an open world. It took a long time for us to learn how to do it, but because we had the quality graphics and animations it quickly became a project where we chose to put more resources, more energy, and time. It took four years to do.



SH: We had some influence from a book I was reading called *Alamut*. Patrice Désilets and Yannis loved the book too, and Patrice had some sci-fi concepts he wanted to integrate as well. It was a merger of great ideas.

YM: We tried to take a snapshot of what the game would eventually become through a small pre-rendered movie that showcased the gameplay, the setting, and the character. We ended up with an assassin in a Third Crusade environment climbing a wall and performing stealth assassinations behind guards. Then we added a fight sequence, and had him leaving the city on a horse with a huge open world landscape before him. That was it – everyone was sold. We had no tech at the time but we knew what we were [aiming] for.

Yves Guillemot: The team came with a new set of animation and graphics that showed a huge potential of using new technology to create something outstanding. So we said, "Yeah, it can become an IP in and of itself. Let's work and put enough financial backing to that team so that they can build an engine and really go for it."

YM: This game was only created because the team loved each other. Otherwise it would have collapsed. The reason this game was possible was because those guys had already gone to war together [with Prince of Persia]. There was a mutual respect between, for example, the lead engineer and the lead level designer that makes up for the fact that both guys didn't always have the answer for the other's question. In any other team, this would have turned into chaos. But because it was that team, it worked.

AC: When I first saw Assassin's Creed, I thought, "We did it again. After Prince of Persia and Splinter Cell, that's another jewel." We were very lucky that we came at the moment when maybe there were not that many new franchises. We profited by filling that empty space.

YM: Since Splinter Cell, Assassin's Creed was the first game to really rally everyone at Ubisoft from marketing and PR to production and editorial – it was a rallying event for the company and that felt good. Everyone was behind it and moving in the same direction.

"This game was only created because the team loved each other. Otherwise, it would have collapsed."



BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

AC: Some journalists were not impressed about the quality of the game – they were saying that sometimes it moved slowly and so on. But I think the spirit behind it and the gameplay was so unique, so fresh, that a lot of consumers loved it. The word of mouth spread, and I think it gained some new categories of people that were not playing before.

YM: A lot of people love it, but a lot of people hated it, which gave us a very precise road map in terms of what to do next. The fact that the game was generating so much noise – positive or negative – was a tremendous help for us. The feedback was this extra core team member always with us in every meeting reminding us what the game was lacking, and how the game would be greater with this and that. It was helpful.

Two years later, Ubisoft Montreal released Assassin's Creed II, a sequel that corrected many of the shortcomings the public found with the first title and also made the bold move of shelving original protagonist Altair in favor of Desmond's Italian ancestor Ezio.

YM: The introduction of Ezio was a hot topic for quite some time. It's the kind of topic that you have to compartmentalize to create an argument. When you decide to just talk about that point by removing it from the whole, then of course we can argue. But when you look at the whole series, then it's not an issue. When some folks got their hands on the new playable build with Venice and the new setting, then it was okay that Altair was just part of the brand and not the icon.

After Assassin's Creed II, Ubisoft Montreal lost one of the key contributors to the franchise when creative director Patrice Désilets left the studio.

SH: I made a mistake of not being as close to him as I should have been at this time. Maybe he had something to speak about, but now it's all water under the bridge. I'm sad he left, but it's life. You know, Spielberg and Lucas don't work that much together anymore, and it's part of life. I think it was time for him to go somewhere else to see if the grass is greener.

YM: Patrice's departure was a surprise. We're all sad, but it helped us test the fact that we believe in our people to take over new challenges. We managed to prove that the strength of the franchise and the team does not rely on one individual, as good as he could be.

In just four years since its release, Assassin's Creed has become the most popular franchise in Ubisoft history, racking up over 30 million units sold. Even after Désilets' departure, the series has continued to court success with last year's Brotherhood and the promising 2011 entry Revelations.

In 25 years, Ubisoft has grown from a scrappy regional distributor to the third biggest video game publisher, with 26 studios worldwide. But with the emerging free-to-play, mobile gaming, social gaming, and cloud distribution markets challenging the traditional triple-A game publishing structure, the industry landscape will look quite different in the next 25 years. Always willing to explore new possibilities, Ubisoft's leadership group feels good about its future prospects. One thing that won't change as the industry grows is Ubisoft's dedication to its core franchises.



Cécile Cornet:

It's interesting. The industry is moving – we need to have both pretty big teams on our high production titles because it takes a lot of people to do them, and we also need smaller, agile teams on the new platforms and online. Those are the discussions we have on a daily basis.

Xavier Polz: Ubisoft is very flexible – I think it's one of our strengths. We can switch directions very fast – you've seen that in the past. It's one of the reasons we always move quickly to launch games on new consoles. We can expand in the casual market once we look internally and find the talent to do it and add some quality to the market. Now our challenge is to focus more on the online and to stay on this roll of very high-end, demanding games that we're good at with Assassin's and Ghost Recon. I think there will be some huge surprises as well with our other brands.

Michel Ancel: I think the Ubisoft culture reflects the people who run the company. The fact that they trust so much in people is something that is still there. It could appear naïve, sometimes, because so many people believe you have to master more, control more, to be more militaristic. But they still understand that something interesting could come from not having full control. You look at Just Dance for example, it's not something that has been done with a special target and a special organization for success. They did it because it was fun to do it. They really didn't expect all the success.

Alain Corre: Our goal is to be bigger than the number three publisher, but I think that you don't need that many huge games to reach that point. If you consider Activision, for example, they are working on two legs – World of Warcraft and Call of Duty. Today we have an Assassin's Creed franchise, which we have at a certain level. Now if we can manage to go on creating products innovative enough that can seduce the consumers that today we know are huge numbers, then everything is possible. The Assassin's franchise

today is at 7, 8 million and Call of Duty is 20, 25 million, so the gap between the two is huge. It's three times. They didn't come to that level instantly, but it shows that it's possible.

Christine Burgess-Quémar: We've always invested heavily into our franchises, so we need to keep looking at all these high-end games

because I strongly believe that there are still going to be some fans for those games. Making high-end games is still something we know how to do. We also made the move into casual games quite a few years ago, and now we're obviously looking at all the free-to-play games and online games, Facebook games and so on. These are completely new areas with different types of games, so these last couple of years we've really learned a lot.

What's very new to us is that we used to address mainly males between 10- and 45-years old, but now we've learned, with the casual market, there are also some girls out there waiting to play video games. And then we're learning that there's also female 20-45 year olds who also like playing on Facebook. So we're adapting.

Yves Guillemot: It's really part of the life of the company to learn as much from your mistakes as from your successes. It's because we have mistakes that we can continue to perform. In the last few years we saw that we have to focus more on less products because we were coming to the end of the console cycle. The level of quality is increasing quickly so we changed the way we were doing things so that we could come faster. You know, Assassin's Creed is done by four or five studios today. We had to change the organization so we could bring enough energy to each of the games so we could increase speed of release without lowering the experience.

When you come to the problem of being connected or not connected to an experience, we really learned a lot in asking customers to be connected. What we discovered is how much more we could give them. Yes, we were not very fast at changing our approach when some customers complained, but we discovered that if all the customers are connected, you can totally change your vision of the creation of the game. Now we are working in lots of new ways to bring a lot more possibilities to gamers on the multiplayer side, but also on the single player side. You don't want to force people to do what they don't want to do, but you want to use the capacity that you have in being connected and so playing together and communicating while you play and do things together. I'm a big fan of meta games and the power of the group to achieve things and to have big rewards, not only to three or four for five, but millions of people achieving something together. I think we are in front of a revolution there. ♦

20

Mobile Games You Should Be Playing

by Jeff Marchiafava

Like it or not, mobile games are a growing and economically important part of the industry. While hardcore gamers may dismiss mobile offerings as shallow experiences designed for a casual crowd, open-minded players have found plenty of reasons to spend portions of their gaming schedule on their phones or tablets. Here is our list of twenty mobile games that are worth your time and money.

Contre Jour Mokus

Contre Jour's short levels based on environmental manipulation provide plenty of entertaining puzzles, but its Limbo-esque art style and moving soundtrack bring a new level of sophistication to mobile games.

Play if you like: LocoRoco, World of Goo, Cut the Rope

Superbrothers: Sword and Sworcery EP

This quirky take on the old-school adventure genre captivates players with its unique art style and moody, electronic soundtrack. Sword and Sworcery has a few interesting gameplay mechanics, but the main draw is exploring its memorable world.

Play if you like: The Legend of Zelda, King's Quest

UniWar IslaGround

UniWar may not have the depth of a full-fledged turn-based strategy game, but with three races, 32 maps, and 8-player asynchronous multiplayer, there's plenty of content to enjoy. The single-player campaign does a good job of teaching you the unique features of each unit, but online play is where UniWar shines.

Play if you like: Advance Wars, Civilization

Pocket Academy Kairosoft

If you enjoyed Kairosoft's cutesy management sim Game Dev Story, you'll know what to expect from its school-themed offering. Pocket Academy has would-be headmasters building the school of their dreams, though that won't get you out of trouble if your teacher catches you playing it during class.

Play if you like: Game Dev Story, The Sims

Jetpack Joyride HalfBrick Studios

Jetpack Joyride marries the challenge of a classic arcade game with a fun leveling system and plenty of unlockables to make players feel like they're always building towards something exciting, even when they crash and burn.

Play if you like: Joe Danger, Pac-Man Championship Edition

Tetris EA Mobile Montreal

There's no shortage of Tetris clones available on smart phones, but this official offering from EA takes the cake with touch-screen controls that rival playing with a controller. It might not make you a Tetris Grand Master but, for button-less mobiles, it doesn't get any better than this.

Play if you like: Tetris

Blast Monkeys Yobanji

Developer Yobanji can't stop making new (and free) levels for its addictive puzzle game. A steady flow of new mechanics keeps the monkey-launching gameplay fresh, and if you're not inherently entertained by blasting a monkey out of a cannon, there's something wrong with you.

Play if you like: Angry Birds, Peggle

Hanging with Friends Zynga With Friends

Building on the success of Words with Friends, Zynga's latest word-based multiplayer puzzler doesn't require you to have a bookworm's vocabulary — you just have to know what kind of words your stupid friend would spell from a limited pool of letters.

Play if you like: Words with Friends, Hangman

Zenonia Series Gamevil

If you pine for the 16-bit RPGs of the SNES/Genesis era, Gamevil's Zenonia series is your dream come true. Each installment in the trilogy provides a full-scale action RPG adventure complete with different playable characters, unique skill trees, and myriad customization options.

Play if you like: The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past, Secret of Mana

League of Evil Ravenous Games

Fans of Super Meat Boy will dig League of Evil's 8-bit pixel art, catchy chiptune music, and tough-as-nails platforming. Thankfully, the on-screen control scheme performs surprisingly well, which is important considering how many sadistic levels Ravenous Games packs into the title.

Play if you like: Super Meat Boy, N+



Battleheart

Mikamobile
Don't let its cartoony art style fool you: Battleheart's RTS-lite fights require some serious skill. Elegant touch-screen controls make controlling your party of four adventurers a breeze, while RPG elements like a leveling system, skill trees, and upgradeable equipment give Battleheart some much-needed depth.

Play if you like: Warcraft, Castle Crashers

Spy Mouse

EA Firemint
This top-down puzzler from the makers of Flight Control charms gamers with its Hanna Barbera-style graphics, while plenty of gameplay twists keep the tongue-in-cheek stealth action from getting old.

Play if you like: Flight Control, Pac-Man

DrawRace 2

RedLynx
RedLynx knows how to come up with interesting twists on the racing genre, having created the punishingly difficult Trials HD and the strategy-focused DrawRace. DrawRace 2 updates its predecessor's formula with 3D graphics, a real-time turbo button, and different racing types.

Play if you like: Super Off Road, Line Rider

Age of Zombies

HalfBrick Studios
This twin stick shooter from HalfBrick contains everything we've come to expect from the studio: smooth gameplay, frantic arcade action, and a screwball sense of humor. Also: zombie dinosaurs.

Play if you like: Dead Nation, Smash TV

Anomaly: Warzone Earth

11bit Studios
A bizarre take on the tower defense genre, Anomaly: Warzone Earth tasks the player with infiltrating the defenses of an invading alien force that has set up camp in cities around the world. The deft balance between puzzle and strategy will appeal to RTS fans, while the impressive graphics and constant explosions will appease action-oriented gamers.

Play if you like: Plants vs. Zombies, Toy Soldiers

Groove Coaster

Tato
Groove Coaster takes the tap-to-the-beat formula of the rhythm genre and changes it up with retro visuals, an eclectic techno soundtrack, and a winding beat path that lives up to the game's title. Gameplay rarely requires more than tapping in time with the music, but as an experiment in synesthesia, Groove Coaster is worth checking out.

Play if you like: Frequency, Elite Beat Agents

Infini Field

ForzeField Studios
This twin-stick shooter is clearly derivative of Bizarre Creations' popular XBLA title, but its wealth of game modes, power-ups, and a full-length campaign allow Infini Field to stand on its own. An HD version is available on iPad, which sports a competitive multiplayer mode.

Play if you like: Geometry Wars

Shift

Handmark
Puzzle fans will enjoy Shift's simple yet mind-bending shifting mechanic, which has them constantly flipping between light and shadow worlds to make it to each level's exit. The platforming is primitive, but the countless puzzles will continue to test your spatial reasoning skills. A sequel is currently available on iOS.

Play if you like: Lost in Shadow, Portal

Shadow Cities

Grey Area
Best described as a GPS-based MMO, Shadow Cities splits players into rival factions to fight for control over real-world locations. You level up and learn new magic spells by fighting spirits in your area, and aid your team by capturing points of interest set up at popular locations in your city.

Play if you like: Dungeons & Dragons, Google Maps

Canabalt

Semi Secret Software
What this one-button action game lacks in depth it more than makes up for in style. Thanks to its pulsing soundtrack and stylish visuals, Canabalt feels like an 8-bit translation of a movie chase sequence — one you can't afford to blink during.

Play if you like: Bit.Trip Runner

Hall of Famers

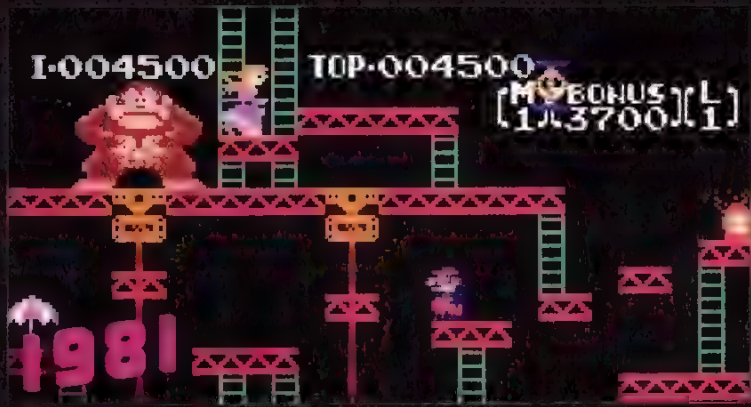


Wondering how we could possibly omit your favorite disgruntled birds or candy-chomping monster from the list? Simple: unless your phone is made out of wood, you've probably already played these classics, and don't need us to tell you how great they are. Here's a quick shout out to some of the most popular mobile games of all time

- Angry Birds (pictured)
- Infinity Blade
- Game Dev Story
- Words With Friends
- Cut The Rope
- Plants vs. Zombies
- Peggle
- Fruit Ninja
- Doodle Jump
- Flight Control

Documenting The Classics

We reflect on this year's plentiful video game anniversaries *by Tim Tur*



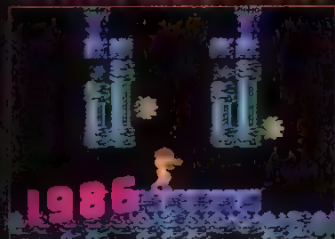
Donkey Kong – 30th Anniversary

Before Shigeru Miyamoto stunned gamers with Super Mario and Zelda, he partnered with an angry ape to steal their quarters. Since its arcade debut, Donkey Kong has propelled a humble carpenter into a highly successful plumbing career, scored the titular simian his own popular platforming series, and become the focus of the popular documentary, *The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters*.



The Legend of Zelda – 25th Anniversary

Last issue we gave you 22 pages worth of reasons to be thankful the Zelda series is still trucking after 25 years. Link has given us high-quality games, mastered the 2D and 3D space, and has held onto the heart containers of gamers young and old for over two decades.



Metroid – 25th Anniversary

With the exception of her recent folly, Metroid: Other M, Samus has enjoyed a sterling reputation for the last 25 years. The armored bounty hunter may have defied all reason by making the unprecedented leap into 3D with Metroid Prime, but fans are still begging for a new 2D console entry.



Castlevania – 25th Anniversary

This who's who of Halloween monsters has evolved dramatically since its mid-eighties release in Japan. First it was an action-platformer, then it was an exploration-focused Metroid-alike, and finally it's morphed into a triple-A third-person action title. There have been ups (a bevy of amazing portable titles), and there have been downs (almost any 3D entry), but Castlevania has flowed through our veins for decades.



Street Fighter II – 20th Anniversary

Capcom sparked the fighting game frenzy with the arcade release of Street Fighter II. The fighting genre, originally pronounced dead in the late '90s, has become the definition of a digital phoenix. Two decades later we're in the midst of a full-fledged fighting game renaissance.



Sonic – 20th Anniversary

Sega's aging icon has polarized fans of his marvelous 2D escapades and defenders of his dubious 3D mishaps. Though not every title is a hit, the manic mascot still keeps cruising along. Now Sega is trying to unite those groups of fans with the 2D/3D action of Sonic Generations.



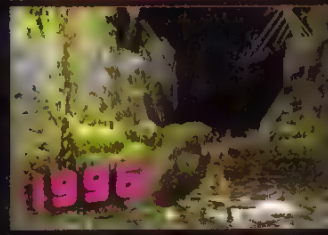
Pokémon – 15th Anniversary

It's been 15 years since U.S. gamers first heard word of a quirky Japanese Game Boy title about raising and battling monsters. Nobody could have predicted the typhoon of merchandise, cartoons, games, and prepubescent fans that would follow.



Resident Evil – 15th Anniversary

Who could have guessed that a terrifying skulk through a zombie-infested mansion would evolve into a premier action series years down the road? During its time in the spotlight, the RE series has delivered scares, white-knuckle action, high-grossing films, and hilariously awful voice overs.



Tomb Raider – 15th Anniversary

Since Lara's 1996 debut, we've seen a steady increase of video game characters sporting two X chromosomes. The curvy treasure hunter helped define the early PlayStation experience and is already on her second makeover.



Diablo – 15th Anniversary

Few games can secure such a rabid fan base with so few entries. Diablo III is among the most-anticipated games of all time, and impatient fans are still booting up Diablo II to stave off their cavernous hunger.



Grand Theft Auto III – 10th Anniversary

Though it's not the first GTA, this title blew the minds of gamers and blasted open the doors for open world games. The controversy Rockstar stirred with this violent joyride has faded to memory, but the obligatory release of GTA V is at the forefront of every gamers' mind.



Halo – 10th Anniversary

Bungie set the standard for first-person shooter console interfaces with Master Chief's debut. The series quickly became synonymous with quality shooting action. After a decade, and five amazing entries, the original developer has moved on and a new studio is juggling Halo 4.

Ultima – 30th Anniversary, 1981
Castle Wolfenstein – 30th Anniversary, 1981
Frogger – 30th Anniversary, 1981
Ms. Pac-Man – 30th Anniversary, 1981
Civilization – 20th Anniversary, 1991
Crash Bandicoot – 15th Anniversary, 1996
Devil May Cry – 10th Anniversary, 2001



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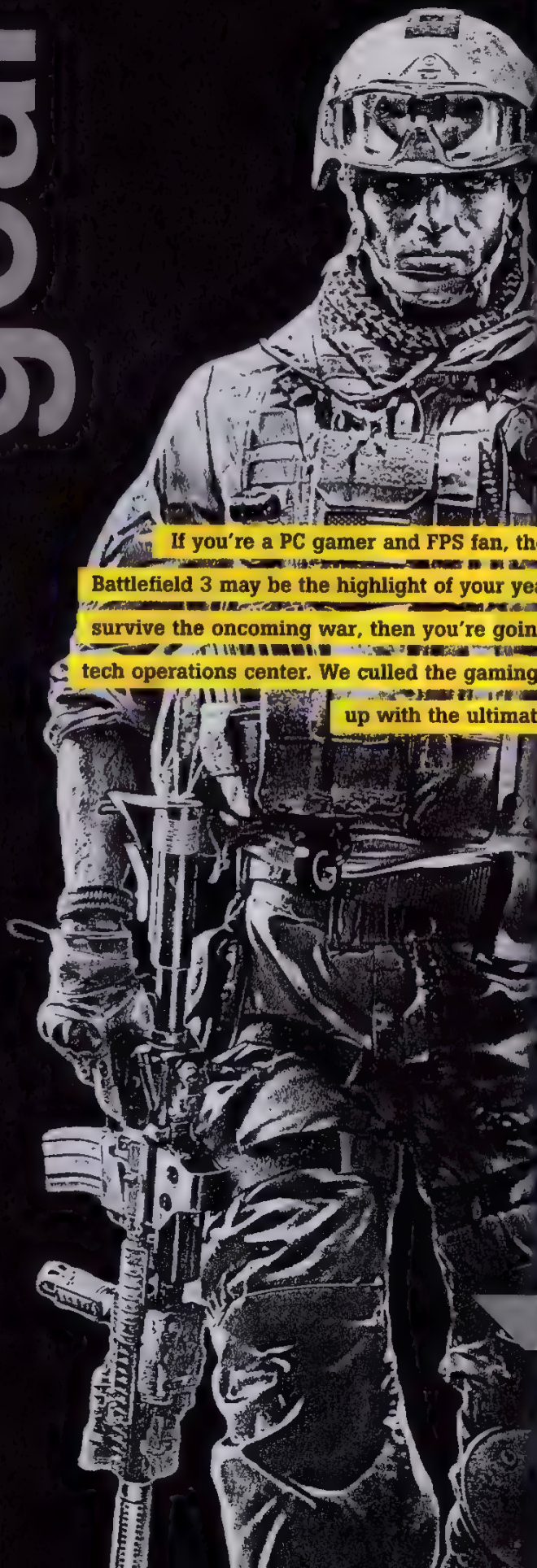
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SLIDEGHAMMER
GAMES

ACTIVISION

gear



If you're a PC gamer and FPS fan, then the release of Battlefield 3 may be the highlight of your year. If you want to survive the oncoming war, then you're going to need a high tech operations center. We culled the gaming market to come up with the ultimate shooter set-up.

YOUR BATTLEFIELD 3 SUPPORT SQUAD

Origin Chronos Custom PC

Origin's Chronos tower stands proud and imposing like the monolith from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Origin's sleek machine is powerful enough to attack demanding PC shooters with the force of a U.S. Marines regiment.

Our build came packed with an overclocked Intel Core i7 2600K quad-core processor and dual 1536MB GDDR5 Nvidia GTX 580 graphics cards. We ran both *Crysis 2* and *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* at their highest settings, and like a seasoned veteran, the Chronos never flinched. Even after putting the system through its paces, the machine's liquid cooling unit remained so quiet that the PC hummed no louder than a purring kitten.

The Chronos is smartly designed. We love the system's tall square look, and you won't have to worry about knocking over all the figures on your desk trying to plug in a new keyboard because all of the Chronos' ports are located at the top of the machine. If you want something less imposing you can choose from a variety of case styles, and for an extra \$99, have your own artwork (such as the Battlefield 3 image pictured) etched into the side of the machine. You can build a cheaper PC, but few have the Chronos' style.

SUPERB

\$2,999 (Starting at \$1,062)
originpc.com

By Dan Barrett





1 Samsung 27" SyncMaster T27A950D

This TV/monitor combo has an ultra-sleek design that is almost as sexy as Battlefield's rendering engine. Movies and games look great on the Samsung's screen thanks to its wide spectrum of colors, deep blacks, and 3ms response time. The monitor's 3D support is middling, but the unit's built-in speakers produce a powerful, clear sound. Given the variety of audio and video ports, we were surprised that it lacks a video DVI port, so you may need an HDMI to DVI cable (sold separately) if you want to use this with your PC. The SyncMaster's built-in TV tuner, streaming internet, and HDMI support also make this a great display for consoles.

VERY GOOD **★★★★★**

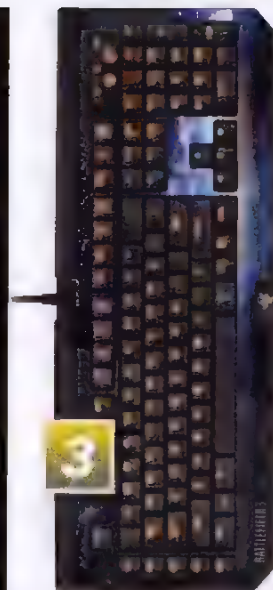
\$799
samsung.com

2 Logitech Optical Gaming Mouse G500

Logitech's G5 series of gaming mice have always felt comfortable in our hands, and the G500 is no exception. The ridiculously high 5,700 DPI optical tracking and hair trigger buttons make this the ideal tool for PC snipers. The media buttons occasionally feel like they're crowding out your thumb, but the G500's onboard memory lets you program and store functions for the 10 customizable buttons and dual-mode scroll wheel, helping it cater to any play style.

VERY GOOD **★★★★★**

\$69.99
logitech.com



3 Razer BlackWidow Ultimate Battlefield 3 Collector's Edition

We love the sleek black design of Razer's BlackWidow keyboard, and the system's five levels of backlighting only add to its mystique, but its custom Battlefield 3 artwork really seals the deal. The mechanical keys are highly responsive, producing a satisfying click when punched. One of the keyboard's highlights is Razer's streamlined, two-button macro system, which lets you record a limitless number of macros on the fly without taking a break from the action. Razer's BlackWidow is a pricy beast, but it will weather you through any gaming storm.

VERY GOOD **★★★★★**

\$139
store.razerzone.com

4 Creative Sound Blaster Tactic3D Omega Wireless

Creative's Tactic3D Omega shuts out the rest of the world and pulls you onto the battlefield. We love the cushy ear cups, but the tension between the cans might prove to be a little tight for bigger heads. We got great pickup from the unit's detachable noise-canceling microphone, and never heard any wireless feedback out of its powerful speakers. If you want to switch from 64-player to 24-player battles, this wireless headset works great for PlayStation 3, but you'll need a converter cable (sold separately) to wire this up to your Xbox 360 via HDMI. Tactic3D Omega might nuke your bank account, but you'd be hard pressed to find a more fully featured headset.

VERY GOOD **★★★★★**

\$199
creative.com



GEARS OF WAR 3 THE SOUNDTRACK

Epic and sweeping, Gears of War 3's musical score is more emotional than its cast. Whether you're invading the Locust's underground caverns or driving to grandma's house, these grand orchestra themes will have you pumped for battle when you get there.

\$12.95
sunthing.com

MORNING GLORIES VOLUME 2 by Nick Spencer & Joe Eisma

Six brilliant students enroll in Morning Glory Academy, one of the nation's most prestigious prep schools, only to discover that the school is hiding deadly secrets. Filled with enough mysteries to intrigue a *Lost* fan, this series is hard to put down.

\$12.99
imagecomics.com

NEVERWINTER CAMPAIGN SETTING: A 4TH EDITION DUNGEONS & DRAGONS SUPPLEMENT

Dig deep and explore the intrigue-laden city of Neverwinter, long a site of video game adventures, now fully realized for the tabletop game. Discover the reborn city in the wake of a titanic cataclysm, and choose a side in the brewing conflict for control of the region.

\$39.95
wizards.com

THE PEOPLE VS. GEORGE LUCAS

George Lucas has left an impressive cultural legacy, but it's not the exact legacy his fans want. This documentary explores the love-hate relationship between Star Wars' creator and its millions of impassioned, demanding fans.

\$27.98
peoplevsgeorge.com

Leave Me Alone

The Changing World of Single-Player

by Joe Juba, Senior Associate Editor, Game Informer

If you want to start a fight with a hardcore gamer, proclaim the impending death of single-player games. To many of us, that statement is interpreted as an attack on the most hallowed icons of the industry. Heroes like Mario, Kratos, Commander Shepard, and Ezio built their fame on the foundation of single-player adventures. If that style of play were to go out of style, it would spell the death of many of our favorite franchises. No gamer wants to live in that world.

As unpleasant as the prospect may be, the evidence is hard to ignore. Many of this generation's best-selling titles have major multiplayer components, encompassing options across the competitive and cooperative spectrum. One of the most popular video games of all time, *World of Warcraft*, is an MMO. Even traditionally single-player series like *Final Fantasy*, *Zelda*, and *Metal Gear* have experimented with multiplayer in order to tap into a broader audience. Publishers and developers clearly think that online games figure prominently into the industry's future.

Does that spell doom for single-player gaming? No. You needn't fear the possibility of being forced to play rounds of capture the flag because all single-player alternatives have dried up. Your favorite series are probably safe; the next *Assassin's Creed* isn't going to be a *Battlefield* knock-off, and *Metroid* isn't turning into an MMO anytime soon. Those breeds of multiplayer have coexisted with solo campaigns for years; they provide a segregated type of gameplay that stands apart from normal one-player titles. The real change is coming on a different front.

A few months back at Gamescom, industry luminary Mark Cerny told panel attendees, "I believe the traditional single-player game experience will be gone in three years... A game without the presence of other players in it - you go out three or five years, I believe that is unthinkable given how connected we're becoming." Valve's Gabe Newell has expressed similar thoughts regarding how the studio will approach future titles - and that *Portal 2* may have the company's last isolated single-

player campaign. Those may sound like grim predictions, but Cerny and Newell aren't saying that carefully authored, focused interactive entertainment is dead. It's just transforming.

Services like Xbox Live and PSN have made social interaction a growing part of the gaming scene, and the rise of Facebook and Twitter means gamers are more connected to each other than ever. You can broadcast your achievements and trophies out over social media and chat with your friends. Even when you're playing a single-player game, you aren't necessarily alone.

Follow these trends a few years into the future, and a new world of single-player opens up - one where you aren't strictly playing with or against other players, but in their presence. You don't even have to look far ahead, since many games have already started implementing this concept. In *Fable II*, other players appear as orbs that you can see, hear, and trade with, even though they don't have the power to change your world. After dying in *Demon's Souls*, players leave a blood puddle and a (possibly misleading) note, which adds some human unpredictability to the otherwise mechanical RPG genre. In the upcoming PSN title *Journey*, other players drift in and out of your trek across a desert - but without text or voice chat, you communicate solely with your in-game actions.

Those examples, though just scratching the surface, illustrate a key point: The definition of "single-player" is already changing. Most of the backlash related to Cerny's and Newell's statements on the subject spring from the fact that people want to keep playing awesome games (see: *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, *BioShock*, *L.A. Noire*, etc.) that only strive to provide great solo content. That kind of game still has a place in the future. The terminology being used is what's scary, because the only alternative to "single-player" in the minds of many gamers is "multiplayer." The important thing is to realize that it isn't a one-or-the-other scenario. Is *Infamous 2* a multiplayer game because you can participate in user-generated missions? Is *Pinball FX 2* a multiplayer game because you can challenge your friends' high scores? In the coming years, our single-player games will be augmented with features like these, not replaced wholesale by generic deathmatches.

The current state of single-player isn't inherently flawed, and it provides some of the best entertainment in gaming. For those who would rather keep things the way they are, the new online facets of gameplay won't be mandatory (for a while, at least). You should still be able to disconnect your console from the Internet and play in true isolation - something I often choose to do. However, I am admittedly nervous about what happens if/when games take that freedom away and require players to be online.

Even though I gravitate toward solo campaigns myself, I have to acknowledge that when I started playing video games, it wasn't a solitary exercise. I went to arcades and crowded around the popular cabinets, and passed controllers around when playing with neighborhood kids. I cheered when I saw strangers beat *M. Bison*, and groaned when *Bald Bull* knocked out my friends. Gaming was equal parts playing and community, and companies are looking for ways to recapture that sensation. The incursion of online functionality into traditionally single-player games will continue, shaping the world of gaming into a less sequestered activity. The stories won't be less compelling, and the worlds won't be less developed. We'll still have role-playing, platforming, and stealth games - and the ability to play by ourselves in carefully crafted adventures. We'll just be better equipped to share our experiences.

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





23



01
Uncharted 3:
Drake's Deception



04



11
The Elder
Scrolls V:
Skyrim



13
Super Mario 3D Land



15
Assassin's Creed:
Revelations



20
The Legend of Zelda:
Skyward Sword



18



08
Call of Duty:
Modern Warfare 3



06

November

01 New Releases

- Blackwater (360)
- Generator Rex (PS3, 360, Wii, 3DS, DS)
- Cabela's Survival: Shadows of Katmai (PS3, 360)
- Doctor Lautrec and the Forgotten Knights (3DS)
- End of Nations (PC)
- Family Game Night 4: The Game Show Edition (PS3, 360, Wii)
- Generator Rex (PS3, 360, Wii, 3DS, DS)
- Get Up and Dance (PS3, Wii)
- GoldenEye 007: Reloaded (PS3, 360)
- James Noir's Hollywood Crimes (3DS)
- LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7 (PS3, 360, Wii, PSP, 3DS, DS, PC)
- The Lord of the Rings: War in the North (PS3, 360, PC)
- Monopoly Collection (Wii)
- NASCAR Unleashed (PS3, 360, Wii, 3DS)
- NCIS (PS3, 360, Wii)
- Oregon Trail (Wii, 3DS)
- Pac-Man Party (3DS)
- Puss in Boots (PS3, 360, Wii, DS)
- Raving Rabbids: Alive & Kicking (360)
- Santa Claus is Comin' to Town (Wii, DS)
- Sonic Generations (PS3, 360)
- Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception (PS3)
- Zhu Zhu Babies (DS)

03 The Game Informer Show

Every Thursday, Matt Helgeson and the Game Informer crew break down the most important news and hottest games in our weekly podcast. This month the Game Informer Show

is bringing special edition podcasts for The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3, and Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception.

04 Hollywood's Lump of Coal

Every year, Hollywood brings us a new Christmas comedy. Remember *Fred Claus*, *Jingle All the Way*, and *The Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause*? This year's festive film is *Harold and Kumar's 3D Christmas*—a movie we're all going to see just for Neil Patrick Harris. Seriously, think about it: If you remove NPH from the equation, what's left? Lame pot jokes and cheesy 3D effects. Doogie 4 life!

08 New Releases

- Big League Sports (360)
- Black Eyed Peas Experience (Wii)
- Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3 (PS3, 360, PC)
- Cave Story 3D (3DS)
- Deepak Chopra (360, Wii)
- Jaws: Ultimate Predator (Wii, 3DS, DS)
- Happy Feet Two (PS3, 360, Wii, 3DS, DS)
- Lalaloopsy (DS)
- Metal Gear Solid HD Collection (PS3, 360)
- Michael Jackson: The Experience (3DS)
- Outdoor Unleashed Alaska (3DS)
- SpongeBob SquarePants: Roadtrip (360, DS)
- Your Shape Fitness Evolved 2012 (360)

09 Comics' Most Surprising Title

We never thought we'd hear comic fans rave about an Animal Man comic book again, but the new series in DC's rebooted universe has become the talk of the comic book world. Scribe Jeff Lemire is proving to be the king of cliffhangers.

11 The Day Dragons Died

Today marks the release of *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* for PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC. We recommend spending a few days beforehand developing a plan that lets your family, loved ones, and coworkers know that you will be taking a sabbatical from life for the next month to play this game.

13 Mario Returns!

The Nintendo 3DS has been in dire need of quality software, and today it lands the game everyone was hoping would have been available at launch. *Super Mario 3D Land* is finally here. Hopefully it lives up to the hype!

15 New Releases

- Ace Combat: Assault Horizon Legacy (3DS)
- Alvin & the Chipmunks Chipwrecked (360, Wii)
- Assassin's Creed: Revelations (PS3, 360, PC)
- Combat Wings: The Great Battles of WWII (360)

- Dynasty Warriors 7: Xtreme Legends (PS3)
- Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary (360)
- Jurassic Park (360)
- Kinect Disneyland Adventures (360)
- Mario & Sonic at the 2012 London Olympic Games (Wii)
- Marvel Super Hero Squad: Comic Combat (PS3, 360, Wii)
- Need for Speed: The Run (PS3, 360, Wii, 3DS, PC)
- Nickelodeon Dance (360)
- Rayman Origins (PS3, 360, Wii)
- Saints Row: The Third (PS3, 360, PC)
- Shinobi (3DS)
- Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3 (PS3, 360)
- Victorious: Time to Shine (360)

18 Married With Sparkling Vampires: Part 1

Following in the footsteps of the last Harry Potter film, the latest Twilight movie, *Breaking Dawn*, is divided into two parts. The difference: Harry Potter was worth it. Moan all you want, Twilight fans. As soon as Bella chose Edward over Jacob, we just checked out of the series. Have you seen Jacob's abs? Bella, what is wrong with you?

20 The Holiday Madness Ends With A Bang

The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword hits store shelves today, and marks the end of one of video games' most crowded holiday release

schedules. Shigeru Miyamoto has stated that this is one of the biggest Zelda titles yet, offering between 50 and 100 hours of gameplay.

22 New Releases

- Nano Assault (3DS)
- Tekken Hybrid (PS3)
- WWE 12 (PS3, 360, Wii)
- WWE All-Stars (3DS)

23 Menomena! Do doo do do!

Over 10 years have passed since *The Muppets'* last theatrical appearance. They've been gone far too long, but today they return in *The Muppets*. The film starring Jason Segel (*Forgetting Sarah Marshall*) and Amy Adams (*Enchanted*) promises to reunite Kermit and company with old fans and introduce them to a new generation. Pépe will hopefully not be in this film. Or if he is, we hope Staller and Waldorf throw this annoying non-Jim Henson character off the balcony.



transformers: fall of cybertron

TILL ALL ARE



by Matt Miller

The Transformers have a splintered fan base.

Some enthusiasts got their first taste of science fiction storytelling and giant warring robots from the vibrant '80s cartoon. Others recall an over 25-year history of comics brimming over with detailed characters, heroic sacrifice, and complex plotlines. Few forget that first transforming toy they received at a birthday party or holiday – an action figure and a puzzle in one pack-

age. More recently, a broader audience encountered the bombastic explosions and larger-than-life battles of the mythology through the live-action films. And an even larger group might once have enjoyed some aspect of the franchise, only to move on to other

movies, games, and television series as adults. High Moon Studios hopes to bring those fractured groups together, and draw back into the fold those who might have outgrown the toys and cartoons. What's the plan? Build a rich, character-driven story. Sharpen the gameplay with varied and dynamic action. And establish, once and for all, a definitive sci-fi continuity that will carry the Transformers brand into the future.

» **Platform**

PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**

1-Player Action
(Multiplayer TBA)

» **Publisher**

Activision

» **Developer**

High Moon Studios

» **Release**

Fall 2012

This isn't High Moon Studios' first time at bat. 2010's *War for Cybertron* managed what many fans thought they'd never see: a genuinely exciting action game that respected the long history of the brand while beginning a new realization of the original generation of characters. Despite generally positive reviews, the game found only modest commercial success. But a chord had been struck, if only High Moon could capitalize on the opportunity. The team went back to the drawing board, and examined each and every criticism that had been pushed their way. For all the praise the game received, a few notable critiques emerged: Too repetitive, too little variety, generic levels, limited AI, lackluster storytelling.



Fall of Cybertron is built around providing a broad variety of gameplay experiences, from hand-painted Transformers action-packed shooting, careful stealth sequences, and melee combat.

Rather than rail against the complaints, High Moon saw a chance to excel. "We've taken some of the pieces from *War for Cybertron* that weren't received well, and turned those into the strengths of the new game," explains game director Matt Tieger. "The gameplay is driven by the variety of experiences. What you do is always changing in inventive and interesting ways. The AI system has been completely rewritten from the ground up. The core shooting and action is completely new – ten thousand little things that add up to a really great experience. And, of course, using transformation in all the elements of the game where we can put it in."

Tieger sits in a dimly lit room at High Moon's California office. The walls are crammed with colorful posters of Transformers character art. Transformers toys stand meticulously posed on every other desk, some hand-painted by team members. In one corner, the original '80s cartoon plays in the background as source material for designers. It's clear after only a few minutes in the studio just how enthusiastic the team is about the long path of storytelling the franchise has already tread.

That excitement is the driving force behind another feature that is getting a total overhaul in *Fall of Cybertron* – story. "We have changed the way we tell story. I felt like we had a really good story on *War for Cybertron* that we executed okay on," Tieger confesses. "What I feel on this new game is that we have a superb story that we are executing superbly on."

Fall of Cybertron picks up right where *War for Cybertron* left off, but it isn't a sequel in the traditional sense. Instead, *Fall of Cybertron* delivers a fresh jumping-on point for gamers, a new storyline that traces the final days of the Transformers on their home planet and their subsequent exodus into outer space. Instead of two separate stories, *Fall of Cybertron* tells a single unified campaign from beginning to end. "It's one single, interwoven experience," Tieger says. "As we really thought about it, we realized that in the previous game there was an Autobot story and a Decepticon story. This game is a story about Cybertron."

A classic three-act structure unfolds over the course of the game, beginning and ending with Autobot-centric levels and with an extensive Decepticon-focused section in the middle. "It is a story about

an official canon

Fall of Cybertron is part of a new initiative to codify and begin anew with the Transformers fiction. Over the course of numerous cartoons, comics, toy lines, and movies, Transformers had become a mess of continuities and concepts. Moving forward, Hasbro wants to bring meaning to the chaos. While *Fall of Cybertron* draws deep from the well of old stories and characters, it's part of a new and definitive approach to the characters and their universe for the coming years. Consequently, the events depicted in *Fall of Cybertron* and its predecessor occur in the same universe as the related novels and episodes of *Transformers: Prime*, the CG cartoon currently airing its first season. This is the new official canon of the Transformers. "The nature of the Transformers brand is about change," explains Hasbro's Aaron Archer, the man in charge of guiding the creative vision of the Transformers brand. "We've reinvented the brand every couple of years for almost 28 years now. The core messages had been lost along the way. We wanted to tell a new version of the story. The games tell the opening parts of that tale."



Every character has a unique special ability that sets them apart. Like Jazz's grapple to deploy a grappling hook to zip across the environment.

feeling lost?

Fall of Cybertron is being developed as a perfect introduction to the sci-fi tale of the robots in disguise. It tells the story of the beginning of the Transformers' journey into outer space that will one day bring them to Earth. But if you've been out of the loop since your childhood days of watching the cartoon, or you've never followed Transformers at all, flip over to the last page of this issue for our Transformers primer and get the basics on the surprisingly deep fiction.



What is Megatron's role in the story? And why has his model changed so dramatically? The answer is key to the game's story.

the death of their homeworld of Cybertron, and the situations that puts these characters in," Tieger continues. "I think you can't help but have that be an even darker story than we did in the last one. Let's be honest - Transformers don't curse, they don't use drugs, they don't talk about sex, so it's not dark like that. But I think we can go to a grimmer place than the last game."

Along the way, you'll navigate a broad array of characters and gameplay styles, each designed to offer an experience tailor-made for that individual. The team had half a dozen distinct demos to show us, each starring a familiar character.

As promised, each character feels different from the last, providing the much-needed variety that was lacking in High Moon's previous game. Optimus Prime's desperate stand against the Decepticons bristles with high-octane shooting sequences, punctuated by the Autobot leader's ability to call down devastating artillery strikes on the field of battle. Cliffjumper's sortie into enemy territory has all the hallmarks of a classic stealth game, as he approaches under cloak of invisibility to bring down his enemies before they know he's there. Jazz's grappling hook sends him careening between platforms with ease, maneuvering into place to snipe distant Decepticons. Vortex's helicopter assault on a strategic enemy bridge shows off the massive

scope of the game's new levels, and exhibits his brutal head-on approach to shattering Autobot soldiers. Later, Vortex joins with his four brothers to form Bruticus and, in a level sure to delight anyone with a pulse, the massive combined robot is playable as he lays waste to the good guys. Last but not least, High Moon fought tooth and nail to return Grimlock and the Dinobots to the official Transformers fiction; with energo-sword and shield in hand, Grimlock stampedes his way through a melee-driven frenzy of battle until his rage transforms him into the roaring robotic Tyrannosaurus Rex that fans know and love. "We've embraced the characters from a personality and a gameplay point of view," Tieger explains as he shows us each varied level. "Each character has their own unique and tactical way that they approach combat."

the fall

The story of Fall of Cybertron opens at its own conclusion. The heroic Autobots have successfully launched their transport into space as they flee their home planet of Cybertron. Unfortunately, Megatron and the Decepticons pursue them into space aboard their powerful warship Nemesis. The Decepticons quickly overtake the less powerful ship and in a titanic clash of ship-to-ship combat, they come alongside and board the Autobot Ark. Within the Ark, players take control of their first character: Bumblebee. The trusted scout moves through the ship, and players learn the basics of movement and combat as Bumblebee stands with his brother Autobots in a desperate defense. The ship's bridge is overtaken, and the battle turns even more chaotic. Optimus Prime's back is turned as Megatron raises his devastating weapon to fire. Bumblebee leaps in the path of the shot, and is flung to the ground, the light fading from his eyes. Is he dead? The answer is unclear as the game fades back into the bulk of its story - a flashback to the final days of conflict on the surface of the planet.





Players of War for Cybertron will immediately notice one thing that all these sequences lack. In pursuit of a better story and a tailored gameplay experience, Fall of Cybertron's campaign is a single-player affair from beginning to end. Tieger is refreshingly honest about the reasoning behind the decision to drop cooperative play. "I love co-op. It was not an easy decision to make, by any stretch, but I think it was the right one. With that many characters in the co-op experience, it tends to homogenize all the experiences that we can provide to you, so that everything can be at a consistent level," Tieger says. "And we felt like we couldn't express the characters the way that we wanted to. On top of that, it's a colossal effort to have a co-op experience work with AI buddies that run with you the whole time." Instead, the significant effort that went into creating dedicated partner AI in War for Cybertron has been refocused on a far more involved and devious enemy intelligence.

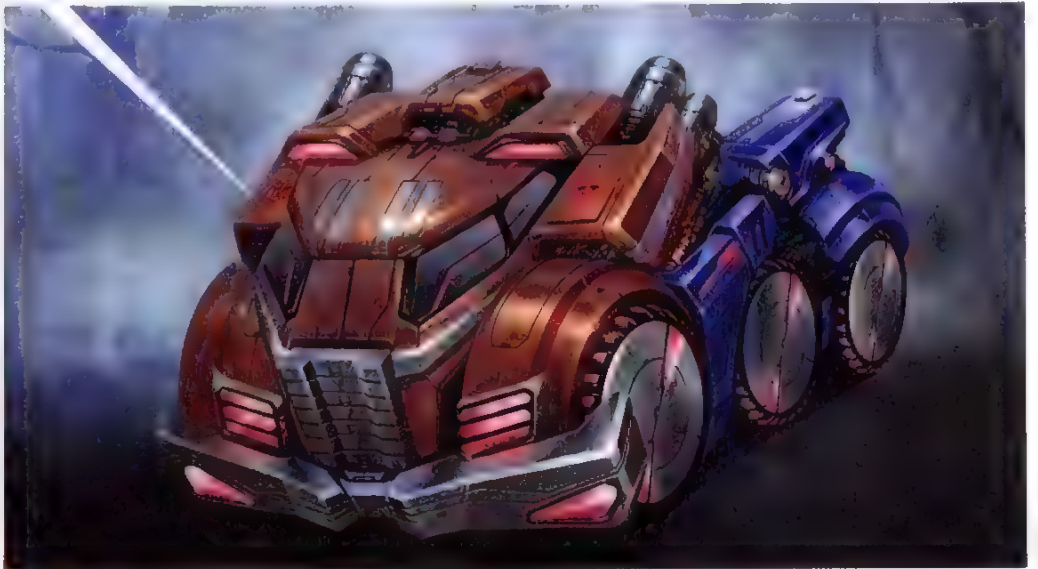
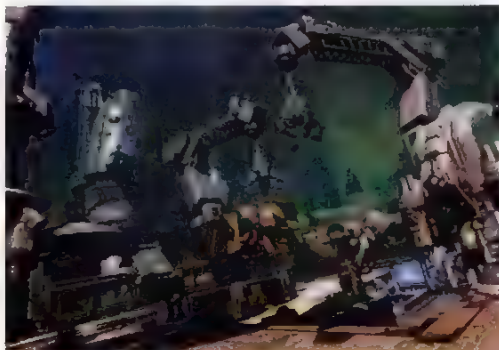
For all the new and varied play options, Fall of Cybertron requires a robust artificial intelligence system. "The AI system needed an overhaul," Tieger tells us. "We have

some pretty unique challenges when it comes to AI systems. For instance, the way that AI systems generally work is that they assess the situation and then react, which is fine if the player is moving at a base foot speed, or maybe even a run. But when I can transform and fly half a kilometer away in the time it's taken the AI to process and commit to an action, the things you have to adjust for are pretty radical."

While they were relentless and dangerous, enemies in War for Cybertron mostly addressed the problem of transformation by following a straightforward charge and shoot approach to combat. The enemies in High Moon's new

game are more nuanced. Individual enemy types are built to challenge particular characters, and they exhibit unique transformations that can telegraph their actions to observant players. Decepticon guardians in Cliffjumper's level shift between three visible transformations and AI routines. On patrol, they follow set paths within a given area. Give them a reason to be alarmed, and sensors slide into place for investigation mode, including the ability to knock out Autobot cloaking systems with a targeted beam. If Cliffjumper is uncovered, guardians shift into battle mode; guns start firing, and a new layer of armor pops into place

continued on page 64





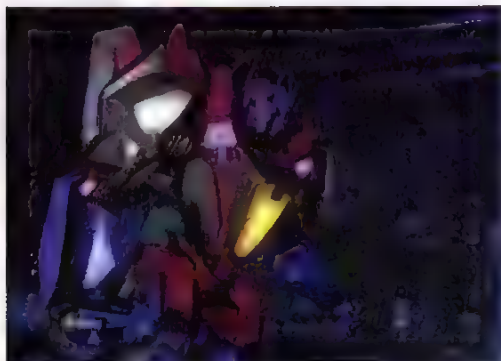
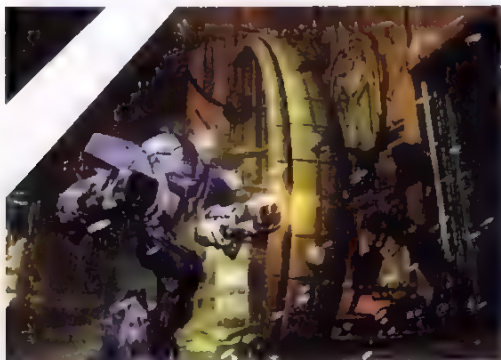
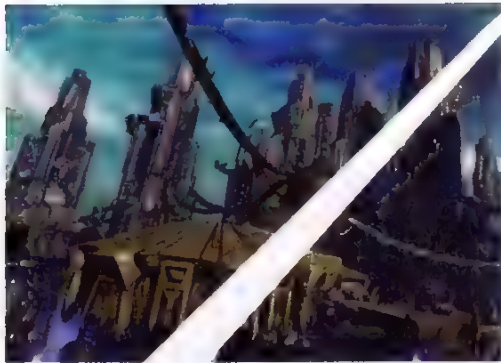
rousing the sleeping giant

Optimus Prime's level capitalizes on his roles both as a gallant leader and a force to be reckoned with on the battlefield. The last safe haven of Autobot City has been breached, and the plan to launch into space aboard the newly built Ark spacecraft is threatened. Prime heads to the frontline, rifle in hand, to help stem the tide. Whether in robot or vehicle form, Optimus Prime appears bulkier and more powerful than we last saw him in *War for Cybertron* – new armor plating bristles along his form, and even his transformation looks warlike and aggressive. Blasting Decepticon troopers as he goes, Prime pauses occasionally to call down a fiery artillery strike that decimates whole squads of enemies. He eventually reactivates a devastating cyber cannon, and proceeds to lay waste to enemy tanks and dropships on the vast metallic battlefield far below him, but even this powerful attack won't be enough. Suddenly, the gun stops firing. A strange summoning, perhaps from the Matrix within his chest, draws Optimus Prime away from the battle and into the depths of the city. Long unused doors slide open before him. He emerges into a glowing inner chamber, realizing as he goes that this is more than a simple city. "I ask you, no, I order you to help us in this dire time of need," Optimus Prime commands.

Outside, towering metal walls begin to shift. Chasms open up in the ground, and Decepticons tumble, screaming to their doom. An arm appears, and then a head. A skyscraper-sized robot rises to tower over the landscape. He opens his hand – Optimus Prime looks tiny in his palm. "Metroplex heeds the call of the last Prime," the low booming voice intones, "Awaiting your orders."

"Metroplex is a city that transforms into a big robot," says game director Matt Tieger. "He is somewhere between two and three times the size of Omega Supreme in *War for Cybertron*. He is colossal. It's awesome."

OPTIMUS PRIME



The diabolical Decepticon scientist Shockwave plays an important role in the game as his twisted experiments give rise to the Dinobots

to prevent instant takedowns. On the other side of the war, the Autobot titan is a towering mass of heavy armor and weapons that will release smaller Autobot attackers to halt a player's advance. Unlike the generic enemies and minibosses that were re-skinned for different factions in the last game, most enemies in *Fall of Cybertron* are unique to their faction. Enemies actively seek cover. They track your movements across the map. They pay attention to your last known location. In short, the enemies fight smarter.

Players will have a brand new weapon system at their disposal to challenge these potent and dangerous foes. Each character will start out with a signature weapon that matches their style of play, but these can be traded out at any time, and other weapons can be added into the mix. Fully equipped, you can carry a primary weapon, a secondary

weapon, one piece of defensive equipment, one piece of offensive equipment, and a set of grenades.

"One of the big adds in this game is a weapon system where players can purchase upgrades that significantly enhance their tactical options," Tieger says. "I'm not talking two percent more accuracy here, I am talking about meaningful upgrades that are worth the investment." While journeying across Cybertron, you'll encounter Teletran terminals -- part of a huge, planet-wide computer network. Cash in the energon you've gathered from defeating enemies, and you'll be able to purchase significant upgrades to any element of your armory. Each weapon has three major upgrades available, dramatically increasing damage, accuracy, clip size, and the like. Unlock all three and you'll open up the chance to buy a fourth and final upgrade, a special ability that exponentially expands the utility of the gun. Switch between weapons in Teletran, and you'll see a handy display that tracks damage, range, accuracy,

scouting ahead

Cliffjumper moves silently between the darkened shadows in the metallic landscape. He and his friend Jazz are on a special mission for Prime -- find one of the Autobots' greatest warriors, Grimlock, who has gone missing. In the wake of Optimus Prime's huge-scale showdown against the Decepticons, Cliffjumper's quiet sneaking is totally different. In place of an artillery strike, a tap of the right bumper turns Cliffjumper invisible. Ahead, an enemy guardian stalks through the dimly lit passageways, patrolling for danger. With his bright red color scheme cloaked into invisibility, Cliffjumper leaps up onto the back of the much larger robot and dispatches him with a flourish. Up ahead somewhere lies Jazz, potentially badly hurt after a section of the decaying landscape collapsed around him. Cliffjumper hurries forward, and doesn't notice the second guardian that patrols nearby. The towering robot transforms into battle mode and begins to fire. Stealth is no longer an option, and Cliffjumper draws his weapons and prepares for a drawn out fight against the powerful Decepticon.

CLIFFJUMPER





something to grab on to

Some time after his apparent demise beneath a mountain of rubble, Jazz has passed with Cliffjumper even deeper into dangerous territory. The calculating mad scientist, Shockwave, has sent his minions out, and enemy snipers are hunting Jazz. Two can play that game. Ahead, an array of platforms might seem to halt forward progress, but Jazz draws out his grappling hook and sends a tractor beam to a distant ledge. He zooms across the distance in an instant, and immediately sets his sights on one of the Decepticons in pursuit. Their transformations make these enemies look like spiders that hang from the wall as beams from their single eye hone in on a target. Jazz has already dropped one with his rifle and grappled to the next platform before the rest can even track his location.

Jazz plays as a fast-moving warrior whose potent combat skills are enhanced by remarkable mobility. Unlike his friend Cliffjumper's deliberate pace, Jazz is all about speed and diving in headfirst. His grapple special ability sends him hurtling about the level at a pace that takes a moment to adjust to. Through a neat feat of programming, Jazz's grappling hook automatically shows the nearest connection point to your center crosshair at all times. Press the button, and you will always zip to a new location. The sense of momentum is exhilarating, especially coupled with the cool animation work that accompanies Jazz's transformation into a speeding Cybertronian car.

JAZZ



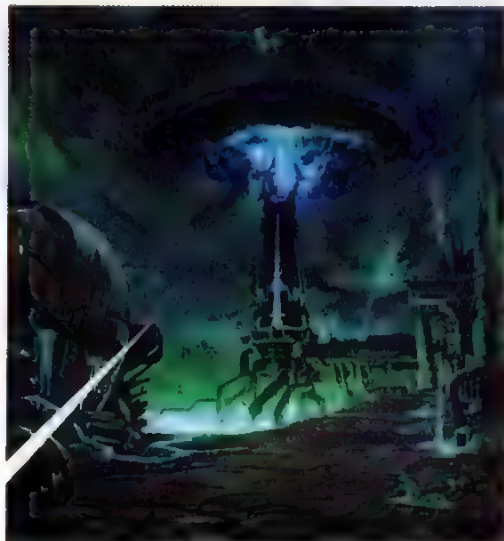
rate of fire, and ammo capacity. The new system makes weapon management far more engrossing than in *War for Cybertron*. Players develop a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each weapon. Once they find something they like, players can maximize its capabilities through upgrades.

Beyond an engaging upgrade mechanic, *High Moon* has gone to great pains to make every weapon surprising and distinct. Megatron carries a riot cannon, a profoundly dangerous gun that when fully upgraded sends out a mini nuke at the end of every clip. Optimus Prime's Pathblaster rifle can be powered up to shoot through walls. Other weapons are equally dramatic. The Gear Shredder shoots out spinning circular blades to dismember enemy robots,

ricocheting off walls with a grating twang. The Scatter Blaster is an automatic shotgun that lights enemies aflame. The Energon Harvester inflicts less damage but heals its user with each hit. The Tech Volt Emitter sends out a continuous laser beam, and upgrades to automatically dissipate and destroy incoming rockets with tiny shots of its own. The arsenal in *Fall of Cybertron* is creative and unusual, filled with opportunities to experiment and establish a style all your own.

In addition to upgraded weaponry, *High Moon* has focused the combat and navigation experience in more subtle ways. Every character now has access to both sprinting and a quick dash/dodge maneuver, making fire-fights feel faster and the character more agile. The third-

person camera is panned closer to the character, giving both a better view of the intricate character models, and a more intense and close-up seat to the action. The segmented health system of *War for Cybertron* has disappeared, replaced with a more traditional recharging health meter. A button press now switches which side of the screen your character appears, and their weapon changes hands, so it's always easy to look out around corners to fire. Finally, transformation into vehicle form is even more important than it was before; the improved AI makes movement around the battlefield essential as enemy combatants seek to flank and attack, and players will be wise to mix the speed of one form with the destructive capability of the other. "The experience of pulling the trigger, transforming, and using abilities is all extremely tight and responsive. No system was sacred; we polished, demolished, and rebuilt anything that was holding back the moment-to-moment gameplay," Tiegler tells us.

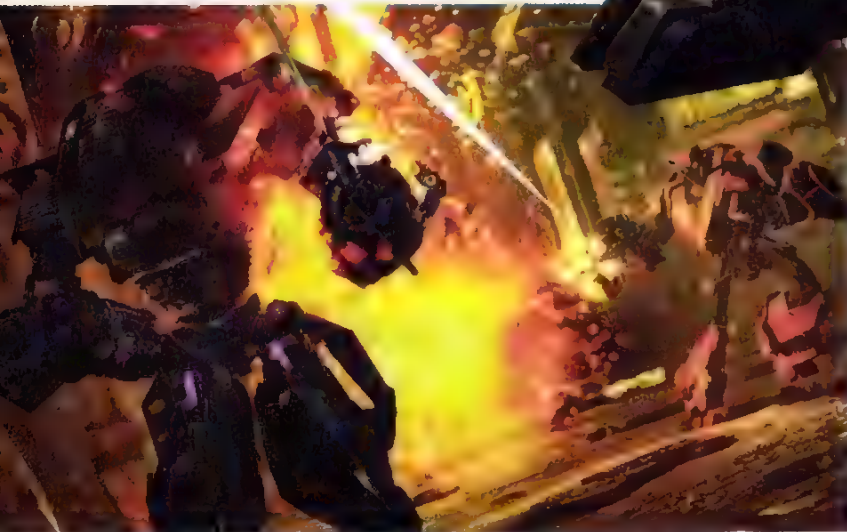


special operations

Even some Transformers fans may not immediately recognize the name of Vortex until they put him in context of the five-robot team with whom he fights. As one fifth of the Combaticons, Vortex is part of the Decepticon special ops – the dangerous and feared troopers that Megatron turns to when a job has to get done. By this point in the story, the Autobots are transporting a new supply of energon back to the Ark; the hulking ground transport carries the lifeline for the Autobots' survival. Vortex is going to collapse the bridge that will bring them home.

Whirring helicopter blades spin over his alternate form as he observes the gigantic bridge in front of him. His teammate Brawl can bring down the supports, but only if Vortex flies in under enemy fire and drops the armor on those pillars. His helicopter blades fold back behind him as jet engines take over and he rockets into action. Vortex turns into a one-robot wrecking crew. From the air, Vortex rains down fire on the hapless Autobots. Every time he lands, he deploys his special ability to send out a concussive blast of force, scattering enemy foes. At one point, he sets down atop an Autobot tank and plants a demolition charge on the unfortunate robot before transforming and flying away as the explosion begins. Beyond the fun of rocketing around the open area around the bridge, the level shows off the remarkable potential size of environments in the new game.

VORTEX



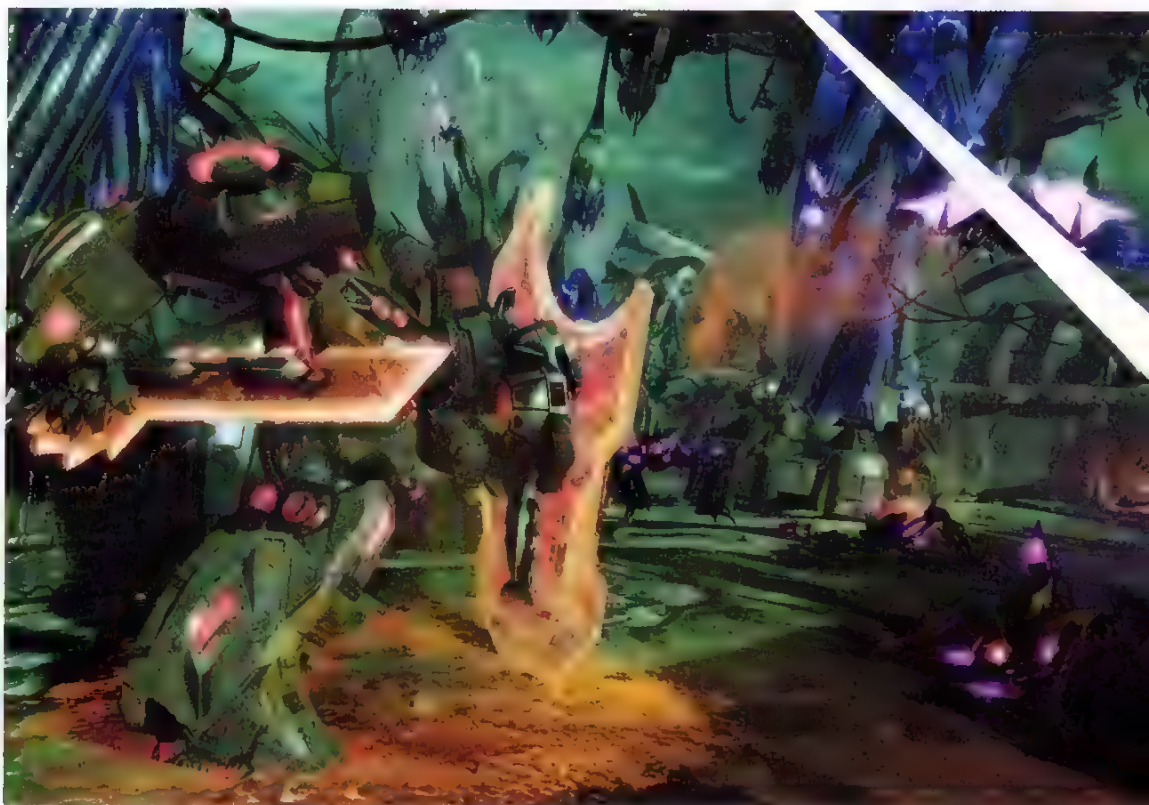
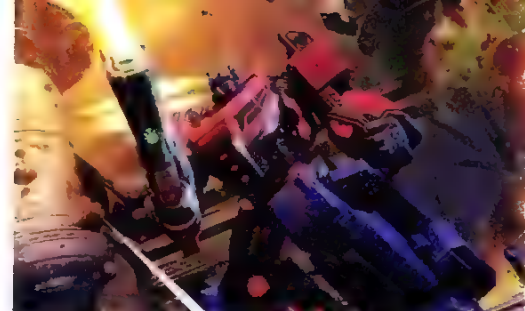
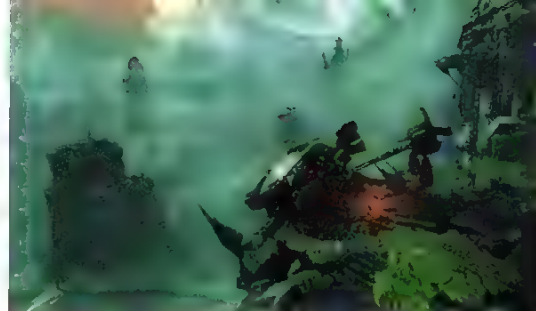
Gigantic levels offer plenty of opportunities to explore and complete them, as shown by Starscream's fight high above Cybertron.

The intense battles will play out across a diverse, vibrant backdrop. High Moon has taken on the challenge of a world made entirely of metal, and is actively seeking ways to keep the visual palette and environment choices compelling. Dedicated artists have researched the appearance of dozens of synthetic materials and metals with a focus on making distinctions between surfaces like bright bronze, glistening silver, plastic-like red, and crumbling rust. The environments reveal the results of their effort. Everything on screen pops more than it did in *War for Cybertron*, and enemies and allies alike stand out more clearly against the backgrounds.

The visual variety of the game also derives from exploration of some brand new areas of Cybertron. The Autobot's capital city of Iacon now lies in ruins, and a snow of soot and ash blankets the ground. "In *War for Cybertron*, we approached Iacon almost like an ancient Greece or Rome – really epic in scale, with all these heroic shapes," Tiegler describes. "At this point, that civilization has totally fallen." Far beyond that civilization, players will venture into the Sea of Rust. This vast, dry desert is filled with ancient ruins and the fallen corpses of magnificent and massive Cybertronians from a lost age. Their hulking bodies will act as everything from roads and ramps to protection from attack. Rust storms

blow across the desert, scouring anything in their path.

Elsewhere, the Insecticon creatures that once roamed the underground of Cybertron have arrived to take over the surface. These nearly mindless creatures surfaced after the Core shut down in the last game. The Decepticon mad scientist Shockwave has altered many of them, making them even more dangerous; they've devoured metal and reshaped landscapes into strange hives of pointed spires, pulsing pods, and sloping bridges. Taken together, *Fall of Cybertron*'s landscapes maintain a sharp metallic sheen, but also establish a more organic quality of interesting shapes and designs.



The strategies you'll use against enemies will change based on the scale of your character. Insecticons are a huge and monstrous threat to Jolt. But whole swarms are only a nuisance to a larger robot like Grimlock.

wholesale destruction

If you don't understand what's cool about a giant combining robot, we're not sure how to help you. At long last, a Transformers game will fulfill fan fantasies by not only including a combiner robot, but letting you play as him as well. The five Decepticon Combaticons will eventually run into odds that might overwhelm them individually, but those same foes stand little chance against their combined might as Bruticus. In an extended transformation sequence, the five individuals merge together into a towering and nearly indestructible figure.

Atop the hulking Autobot transport, Bruticus lumbers into battle as the Autobots throw waves of enemies his way. Like water against a wall, they break against the combined might of the feared robot. A searing blue fire beam pours out from Bruticus' right hand flamethrower to incinerate all in its path. On Bruticus' left hand, Vortex's helicopter blades have transformed into a spinning shield that blocks incoming attacks or slices down into enemy troopers who come too close. Occasionally, Bruticus unleashes his special ability, and a sonic pain shock wave reverberates outward. Bruticus is one of the most lethal forces in Transformers fiction, and players will get to feel that power firsthand.

BRUTICUS

the tortured warrior

While there are plenty of compelling story elements surrounding Fall of Cybertron, few characters or situations have as much potential as the reintroduction of Grimlock and his Dinobots into the Transformers canon.

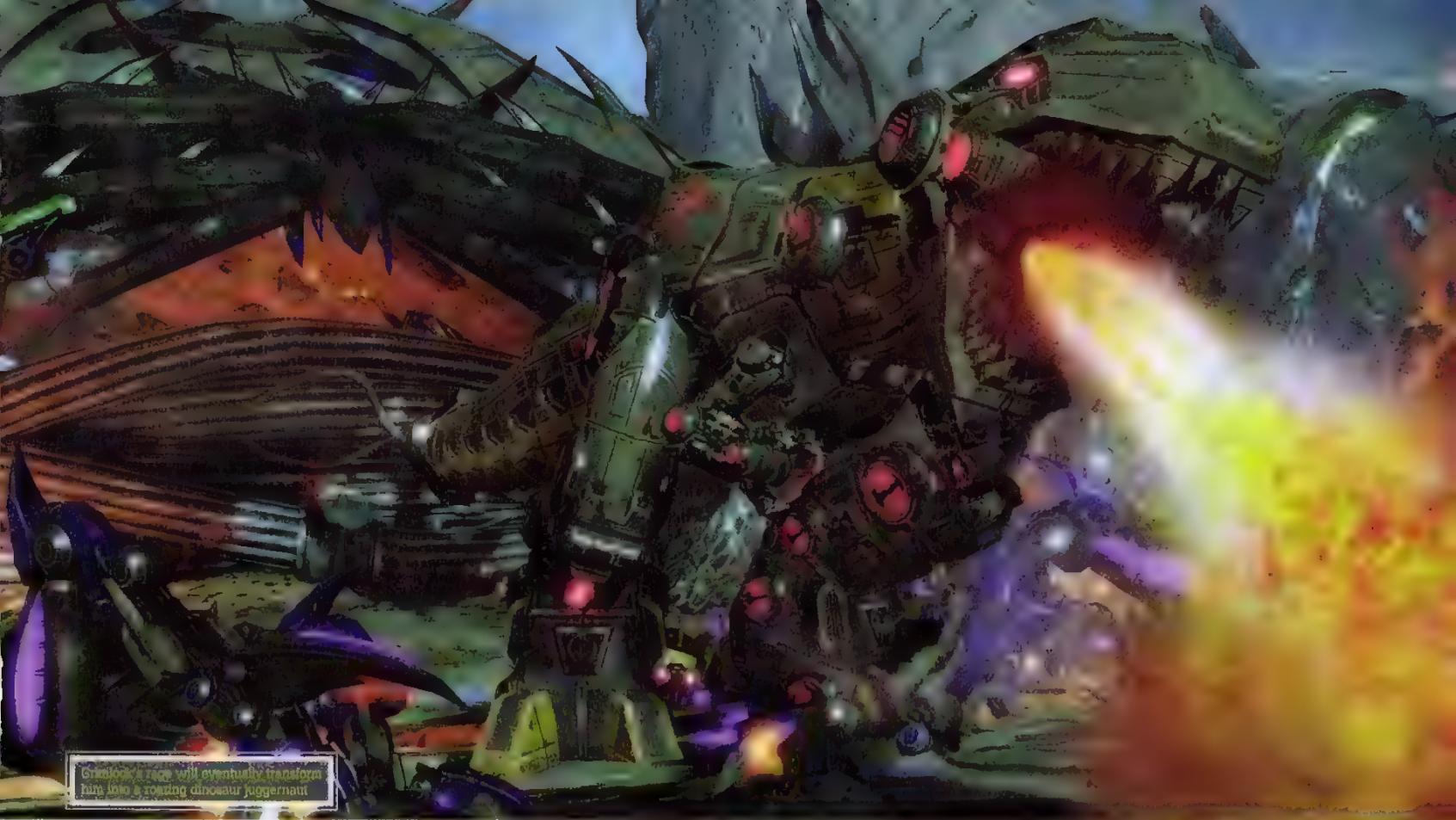
Grimlock is one of the most dangerous warriors in the Autobot faction, with power that rivals even Optimus Prime and Megatron. But that doesn't mean he agrees with all his leader's decisions. Disgusted with Prime's decision to abandon their home planet, Grimlock abandons his post and disappears. His powerful strike force is lost, along with all the good they could do on the battlefield.

His fate is a gruesome one. The calculating scientist Shockwave captures the Autobot warrior and his crew, and experiments on them using data gathered from a far off planet called Earth – a world still in its infancy, populated by hulking reptilian beasts. With plans to turn them into insanely powerful slave warriors, Shockwave alters Grimlock and his fellow soldiers to match these powerful forms, in some cases sacrificing higher functioning for brute power. In Grimlock's case, his speech processing has suffered the worst, masking his keen intellect behind an idiot's words.

Starscream discovers Grimlock chained within Shockwave's lair, and decides to recruit him. The Autobot instead uses the opportunity to escape, brutalizing Starscream in the process, and heading off in search of his companions. As he tears through Shockwave's minions, he wields a massive sword and shield. His style of gameplay is dramatically different from playable characters elsewhere in the game. If he wants a ranged weapon, it comes by picking up an enemy robot and flinging it. Grimlock is also the only character that can't transform at will; each enemy he kills fuels his rage, until at last Shockwave's full alterations take over. Grimlock's hulking metallic body begins to shift and twist, and a roaring Tyrannosaurus Rex emerges. The beast breathes fire at Shockwave's swarming insecticon minions. He bites one of them clean in half. His tail and feet smash any creature that comes near. Grimlock has become part of what Shockwave desired – an unstoppable engine of destruction – but he's not under anyone's control.

GRIMLOCK





Grumlock's race will eventually transform him into a roaring dinosaur juggernaut

While High Moon had lots of great content to show us regarding the game's campaign, the team is remaining largely silent about another feature that made War for Cybertron stand out. Multiplayer will return in Fall of Cybertron, and game director Matt Tieger knows how much fans enjoyed both the competitive matches and the cooperative Escalation modes of the last game.

While he wouldn't share exactly what has advanced about multiplayer gameplay, he did share that the number-

one most requested feature from fans is returning with a huge overhaul. "We really blew out customization, in a way that I think will have people spending hours in the UI screen building Transformers. Everyone I've shown it to that's a Transformers fan has a jaw-dropping experience." Character creation is now central to multiplayer. Four distinct character types can each have six unique body parts, from head to feet, altered between half a dozen options. Each body part affects features like speed,

shielding, vehicle armor, and ability regeneration, so you can customize the type of character you want to play. New parts unlock as you level up through the multiplayer game. That customizability extends to weapon and ability selection, so one character might be your ultimate sniper, and another the bruiser who wades out into the fray. Pick colors. Pick a voice. Save up to three characters in each of the four classes. This is a chance for longtime fans to finally create their own Transformers, and the available options and variety assure that you'll see plenty of variation on the field of battle.

Transformers: Fall of Cybertron is chock full of nods to fans and wish fulfillment for players who've loved Transformers for years. However, the new game is building a framework that is aiming much higher. Matt Tieger and his team genuinely believe in the storytelling and gameplay opportunities of the franchise and that, when approached correctly, the Transformers can stand toe to toe with any big science fiction opus.

"To be honest, the people who haven't played War for Cybertron are the people I'm most interested in," Tieger says. "Transformers games don't have the best history of quality product, and on the last game we aimed to start changing that perception. I think for a lot of people we did. We've built on everything we learned in War for Cybertron when making Fall of Cybertron." The results of that process of iteration are evident. High Moon's new game shines with creative energy and a shared enthusiasm for the subject material. Fans can rest easy knowing that their favorite franchise is in good hands, no matter where and when they first fell for the Transformers. Perhaps more importantly, if our experience viewing the game is any indication, the wider gaming community has an action game more than worth its attention. The Transformers franchise, once purely the province of toys and cartoons, is ready to step up its game. ♦



Here, a playable Starscream taunts and reveals Grumlock and eventually kills him. The Starscream kills Grumlock, and you take control of Grumlock and become the dinosaur juggernaut. Grumlock eventually kills Starscream, turning him into a pompous Starscream to a very angry Grumlock.

If you're excited about Fall of Cybertron, we've got a lot more of additional articles, videos, and more that go in depth on every aspect of the game. Head over to www.transformers.com/transformers to get started.

The Elder Scrolls V

SKYRIM™

AN EXTENDED HANDS-ON WITH BETHESDA'S LATEST ADVENTURE

Skyrim is the story of a mortal imbued with ancestral draconic powers used to fulfill a prophecy and oppose the dragon god Anduil. Everyone who plays through Skyrim will see that tale unfold, regardless of the choices they make. This central arc provides a narrative framework, but the Elder Scrolls series built its massive following on the spaces between the key plot points. The freedom to explore a vast world, interact with its inhabitants, and undertake countless quests is what defines the unique experiences for thousands of Elder Scrolls fans, and Skyrim is no different. Which guilds do you join? Which skills do you develop? When you first emerge from captivity, in which direction do you start walking? I visited Bethesda Game Studios to play over three hours of Skyrim and answer those questions for myself, setting the main story aside and focusing on the areas that will distinguish each player's runthrough.



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

» **Style**
1-Player Role-Playing

» **Publisher**
Bethesda Softworks

» **Developer**
Bethesda Game Studios

» **Release**
November 11

BY JOE JUBA



By taking perks in the Enchanting skill, you can increase the time before your magic weapons need recharging



Dragons aren't roaming the world at the beginning of Skyrim. You need to make some story progress before you see them



This Dark Elf has cooler gear than Seymour, but their faces are similar



CHARACTER CREATION

I need a hero before I can do anything. When I enter Skyrim's character creator, I already have an idea of the avatar I want to make; the thieves and assassins were my two favorite groups in Oblivion, and a Dark Elf's sneaking aptitude will come in handy for those pursuits. With the race chosen, I spend some time looking at the preset male and female faces, change a few hair styles and colors, then check out the beard options, and decide that I'm satisfied.

My time with the game is limited, and I don't want to burn through it by tweaking every wrinkle and speck of dirt on my Dark Elf's face. If you want to do that, the options are available – you have all of the nose-shaping and eye-adjusting tools you could want at your disposal.

Without exception, all 10 of the races (the same ones from Oblivion and Morrowind) look much better. They have shed the slightly cartoonish quality from the last game, looking more realistic and less prone to extreme ugliness. An increase in customization options adds a grittier, more battle-worn vibe to the characters; choosing your scars, war paint, and dirt coverage all make your hero stand out. The only part of the process

that leaves me disappointed is selecting a name. The races all have distinct naming conventions, but since Skyrim won't auto-generate an option appropriate for your race, you're stuck making one yourself. I enter in "Seymour" and start my quest.

FREEDOM

If you've played previous Elder Scrolls games, you can probably guess that Skyrim begins with your character as a prisoner and escaping. I don't get to see this introductory sequence, since the team at Bethesda is keeping those events a secret for now. Instead, I take control just as Seymour is ready to move through a mountain passage and enter the world of Skyrim – the Oblivion analogue of leaving the sewers.

Once I step out, I'm immediately struck by the vast possibilities. I have no active quests and no plot to guide me – just a huge map that shows me the nearest settlements. Even though Skyrim has a fast-travel option, you can only visit places you've discovered. Unlike Oblivion, none of the locations are unlocked from the start, so Seymour starts walking. His first few minutes in the world are mundane: He wanders around in the wilderness, randomly swinging his sword and

jumping as I familiarize myself with the controls. I try zooming out to third-person view, and am surprised to see that the animations seem natural and fluid.

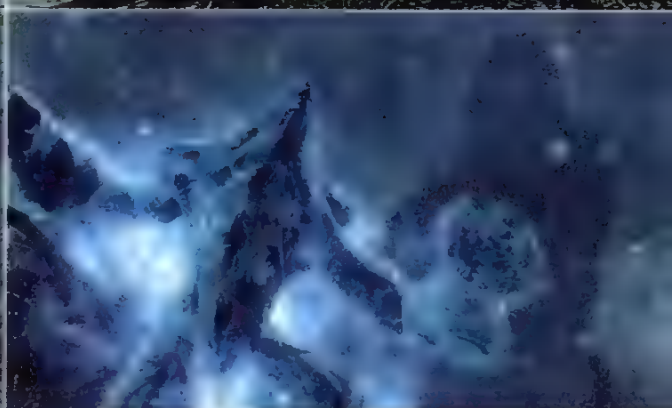
Just when I have the hang of things, a wolf comes up behind Seymour, and the hero turns around in time to block the attack. I don't have enough time in this first fight to form a full opinion of how combat feels, since the wolf just takes a few sword swings before going down. Seymour still relishes the victory, and as a would-be assassin, decides to send a message to any other lupine assailants. He picks up the corpse of the wolf and drops it into the nearby river, but it doesn't sink to the bottom. Instead, the water carries the body away, spinning and moving with the current.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Seymour's message isn't much of a deterrent. Several more wolves attack as he explores, but they do so in groups. Unlike the lone wolf, the pairs charge and split off to flank Seymour. These tactics are unexpected, but not enough to overcome a sword and shield; carefully blocking the incoming lunges and striking back quickly wins the fights, but it helps that the wolves appear to be exceptionally weak enemies. Seymour doesn't have



Behold the fearsome beast that helped me reach level two



I didn't get to experiment in-depth with crafting, but you can make your own potions in addition to improving and creating weapons and armor

to put up with them much longer, since he soon comes within sight of a major city: Whiterun.

Outside, a group of warriors are fighting a giant in a scripted battle. The scrappy humanoids look like they could use some help, but the beast falls before Seymour has a chance to nock his arrow. He strikes up a conversation as the victors are savoring their win. One of them is relieved that the threat is vanquished, "No thanks to you," she adds. Seymour explains that he "tried his best," but good intentions don't seem to go far with these folks. They are members of the Companions, mercenaries who make their living in battle – Skyrim's version of the Fighters Guild. They imply that Seymour might be able to join their ranks, but he has his sights on the Dark Brotherhood instead. In hopes of attracting the right sort of attention, he attempts to assassinate the nearest Companion. The entire group swarms him and he is dead within seconds.

After reloading, I decide to pick easier prey. A poor farmer named Nimriel is working out in the field, and Seymour takes her out with a single arrow. In Oblivion, that would have been enough to attract the Dark Brotherhood's attention...but I don't know how

entrance to the group works in Skyrim. Seymour steals a horse, then encounters a woman on the road outside Whiterun, where she's being questioned by some soldiers. They say they're looking for a particular Redguard woman, though she doesn't seem to meet the criteria. After the guards wander off, Seymour attacks the woman (hey, maybe the Dark Brotherhood requires two sacrifices?). The soldiers must have heard her cry for help, because they return and start slashing. Surprisingly, the stolen horse joins the fray, coming to Seymour's aid. It draws the enemies' attacks long enough to create an opportunity to escape. I decide to make a break for Whiterun, killing a single mudcrab along the way to get the last sliver of experience needed to hit level two. Before I have the chance to apply my new level, Seymour steps into Whiterun and is instantly arrested by a guard for several counts of murder and assault. He doesn't have enough money to pay the fine, so he gets thrown into Dragonsreach dungeon.

BEHIND BARS

Being in prison gives me a moment to explore what it means to be a level two character. I open up the menu

(which is more intuitive to navigate in this entry) to learn that every level you pass in Skyrim gives you two bonuses. The first is a boost to one of your three main attributes – health, magicka, or stamina. The second is a perk, which is a special ability you can allocate in any of your skills (like blocking, one-handed weapons, conjuration, etc.). Each skill has an entire progression tree shaped like a constellation, not just a linear path with set payoffs.

The Sneak constellation begins with the Stealth perk, which makes characters 20 percent harder to detect when sneaking. You can invest up to five points in that perk for stacking bonuses, but you should also explore the other abilities that branch off from it. For example, Backstab makes sneak attacks with one-handed weapons deal six times normal damage. Later down the constellation, you get the coolest abilities, like Assassin's Blade (15x damage multiplier to sneak attacks with a dagger) and Shadow Worn (disappear from enemy sight mid-combat). Since you earn a new perk every level, growing more powerful isn't a slow process.

A side effect of this approach is that your character can carve out a few specialties early. Since Skyrim



I wasn't able to see this myself, but it seems to be the entrance to the Dark Brotherhood's sanctuary



Daedric shrines return in Skyrim, and reward players with particularly useful treasure

doesn't have defined classes, the skills you use the most are what determine your experience. The distinction between major and minor skills is gone; all skills count toward leveling up, so all of your efforts contribute to improving your character.

I learn this as Seymour patiently sits in his cell. After surveying the options, I improve my health and select Stealth as my first perk. Then Seymour tries and fails to break out of jail with the single lockpick he smuggled in. Apparently I don't have the hang of the new lock-picking mechanic yet. All that's left is to go to sleep on the ratty cot and serve the sentence.

FREEDOM, TAKE TWO

I hope that the Dark Brotherhood has had time to send a courier to Seymour after his latest stint in prison, but no such luck. No one greets Seymour upon his release, so he strikes out and explores the city of Whiterun. A popular topic of conversation around town is the feud between two factions, the Battle-Born and the Stormcloaks. It has affected one family in particular; an old warrior named Avulstein Gray-Mane explains that his brother Thorald is missing, and he suspects it has something to do with his support of the Stormcloaks.

Seymour agrees to solve the mystery for Avulstein. The Battle-Born have a headquarters in town, so he sneaks up to the front door and finally manages to successfully pick a lock (that would have been handy in Dragonsreach). However, he doesn't get a warm reception inside. A sentry approaches and asks Seymour if he is loyal to the Battle-Born or the Stormcloaks. "Battle-Born!" he lies. The sentry's disposition immediately changes to be friendly and accommodating.

In Oblivion, an NPC's attitude towards you was a numerical value that you could raise through a speech minigame. In Skyrim, the way you are perceived is integrated more smoothly into the world. Because he claimed allegiance to the Battle-Born, Seymour is trusted in their hideout. He can walk around freely, and grab basic items (and even small amounts of gold) from the tables and dressers without the act being considered stealing. He can even wander into the secret room where the group is hiding a letter that reveals Thorald Gray-Mane was abducted and is being held in a fortress called Northwatch Keep.

SIDETRACKED

On his way back to tell Avulstein what he's learned, Seymour stops near the local Inn and tavern, The Bannercloth. Outside, a drunkard named Brenuin asks a favor: Go inside and steal a bottle of rare Argonian ale. Tasks like these appear in a different area of your character's quest log. Missions like finding

Thorald Gray-Mane are full quests, while simple errands and fetch requests show up as miscellaneous tasks. You can still track these miscellaneous duties in the same way, and some of them may blossom into quests upon completion. Others, like this favor for Brenuin, are just brief distractions.

Seymour finds the Argonian ale in the kitchen of The Bannercloth. He avoids the gaze of a Redguard serving woman, but once the deed is done, he starts chatting with her. It turns out that she's the woman those soldiers were looking for outside, and she needs help...but Seymour doesn't have time to deal with that at the moment. Instead, he walks over to the bar and asks about the latest gossip, and learns that a young boy in the town of Windhelm is trying to contact the Dark Brotherhood. Now that sounds like a promising lead! Sorry, Redguard lady. You can deal with your own problem.

Brenuin gives up a healing potion in exchange for the Argonian ale, and then Seymour tells Avulstein Gray-Mane about his brother. Avulstein proposes that the two of them assault Northwatch Keep together to free Thorald, but Seymour's info about the Dark Brotherhood is too tempting to ignore. He tells Avulstein to chill out in Whiterun, and that he'll find some way to free Thorald without resorting to violence. It's a pretty convincing blow-off, and Avulstein agrees.

THE FALSE BROTHERHOOD

Seymour hasn't been to Windhelm yet, so it isn't available for fast-travel, but that doesn't mean he needs to spend his time trekking through the wilderness. All of the major cities are linked by a carriage system, so he pays to take a direct route from Whiterun to Windhelm. Once there, he seeks the Aretino residence, where the boy named Aventus is reportedly trying to contact the Dark Brotherhood. As soon as Seymour enters, he hears a young voice intone: "Sweet Mother, Sweet Mother, send your child unto me, for the sins of the unworthy must be baptized in blood and fear." When Seymour gets close enough, Aventus stops chanting and says with delight "Now that you're here, you can accept my contract!"

The short version is this: Aventus escaped from Honorhall Orphanage, where he was sent after his mother died. The woman in charge of Honorhall, sardonically referred to as "Grelod the Kind," is a horrible person. She beats the children and refuses to allow their adoption. Aventus wants her killed, and believes that Seymour is an agent of the Dark Brotherhood sent to carry out this task. Who am I to say no to a kid?

The job goes off without a hitch. Seymour goes to Honorhall in the city of Riften, watches as Grelod

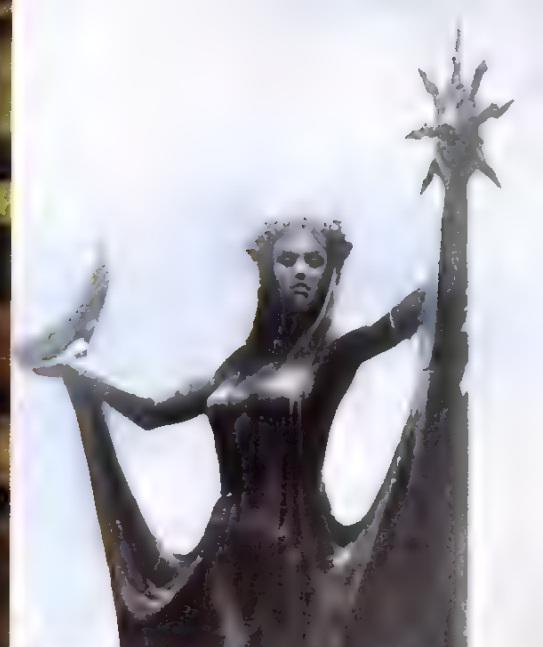


threatens and berates the children, then waits until she's alone in her chamber. She notices him, but remains defiant. She thinks he doesn't have the guts to let the arrow fly, but she's wrong. In a hilarious moment of pure dark comedy, all of the children laugh and cheer when they learn what has befallen their tormentor. One even says "We love you, Dark Brotherhood!" Aventus is particularly grateful when Seymour brings him the news. Maybe now the Dark Brotherhood will notice Seymour's potential.

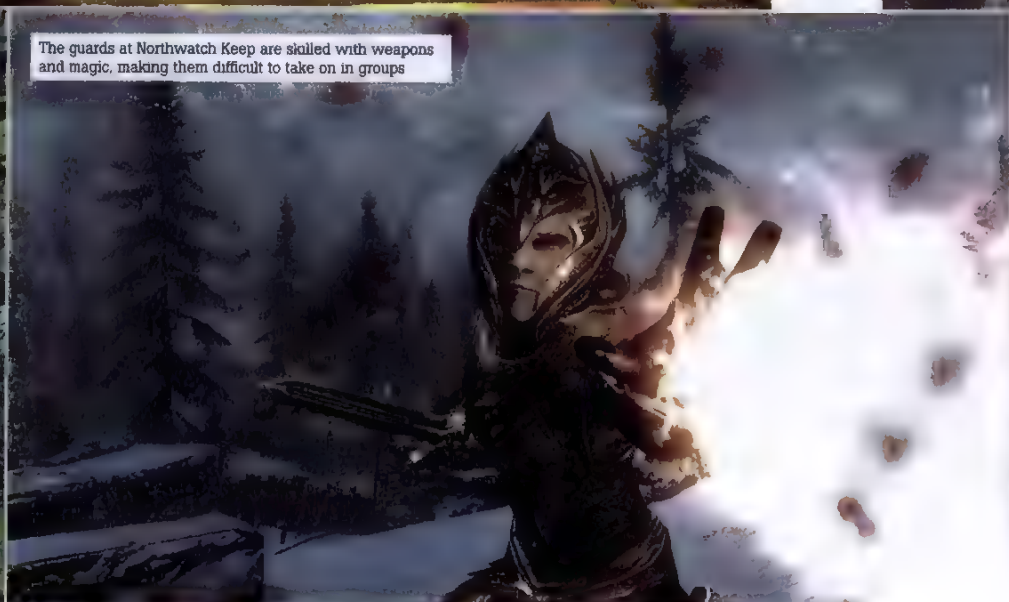
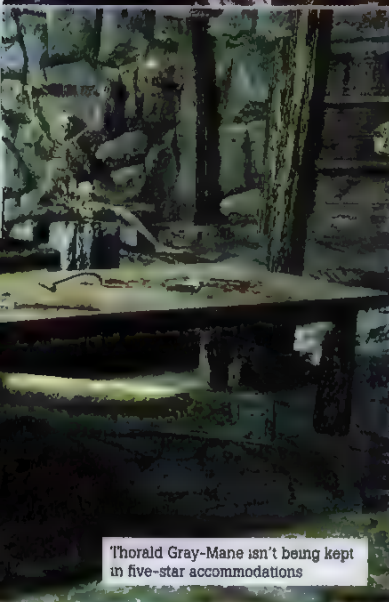
KILLING TIME

Rather than sit around waiting to see if anything happens as a result of the assassination, I decide to finally look into this Thorald Gray-Mane business. Northwatch Keep isn't close to any major location I've unlocked, so Seymour spends some time climbing snow-covered mountains in order to reach the secluded compound. He addresses the guard at the door, who impolitely tells him to get lost and denies any knowledge of Thorald. Seymour walks into Northwatch Keep anyway - I'm hoping to find someone to negotiate with. Unfortunately, no one at Northwatch feels like talking; as soon as Seymour crosses the threshold, multiple armed guards and spellcasters assault him, putting him down after a brief struggle.

Talking isn't an option, and it's clear Seymour has to fight. At this point, I'm wishing that he had brought



Attracting the attention of a shadowy assassin order is more difficult than you'd think



The guards at Northwatch Keep are skilled with weapons and magic, making them difficult to take on in groups

Thorald Gray-Mane isn't being kept in five-star accommodations

Avulstein along for support. He tries rushing the Keep in hopes of finding Thorald before the guards' attacks bring him down. It doesn't work. He tries picking the guards off one by one, but they all swarm him anyway.

All of this time spent fighting gives me a much better sense of how combat has been refined for Skyrim. Your character's swings feel like they have more weight behind them when compared to Oblivion, and the number of options for your equipment has grown thanks to the flexible dual-hand approach. You equip a wide variety of weapons, spells, and shields in several useful combinations. A shield and sword is a classic loadout, but what about two daggers? Or a shield and a heal spell? Or a fire spell in each hand? I focus on weapons instead of magic in my time controlling Seymour, but the options are impressive and the overall mechanics feel solid.

Despite my practice in battle, Seymour is clearly outnumbered and outclassed in his endeavor. Retreat is still an option, but it's a lame one considering the time and effort it took to reach Northwatch. Instead, I open up the options menu and bump the difficulty down to its lowest setting, "novice." Switching difficulties doesn't change the loot you receive or how quickly you level — it only modifies the challenge of combat. Suddenly, bad odds turn into great ones as Seymour hacks his way through the outer guards, into the fortress, and all the way down to the chamber where Thorald Grey-Mane

is being held. The Northwatch soldiers don't stand a chance. It may not be a tough assault anymore, but it is a satisfying one. Plus, Seymour gets a sweet set of elven armor from his slain foes and levels up a few more times.

THE INEVITABLE INVITATION

Thorald decides to remain in hiding to preserve the safety of his family, but once back in Whiterun, Seymour tells his mother Fralia Gray-Mane that her son is safe. As soon as Seymour delivers the good news (and receives an electric sword as a reward), a courier approaches with a mysterious note. It displays a black hand along with two simple words: "We know." The Dark Brotherhood has finally answered.

Here's the disappointing part: What happens next is the only part of my playthrough that I won't explain in detail. Fans of the Dark Brotherhood in Oblivion probably know what to do after receiving the note, but the events take a twisted and entertaining turn that I don't want to spoil. However, I will say that if you love the dark humor and grim duties that surround the order, you won't be disappointed with what Skyrim has in store. The team at Bethesda obviously took note of the Dark Brotherhood's popularity in Oblivion, and are tailoring the quest line to deliver even more of what fans loved.

After the events, the next phase of the quest, entitled

"With Friends Like These," points Seymour toward his goal from the beginning: The Dark Brotherhood's sanctuary. Sadly, it also coincides with the impending end of my hands-on time with Skyrim. I won't be able to reach the sanctuary in time, so I use my last few minutes to scamper up a nearby mountain, guiding Seymour through obscure rocky paths in the falling snow. Hidden away in a clearing near the summit is a shrine to the Daedra Azura, and a nearby priestess gives Seymour a quest he won't have time to finish, saying "Azura has seen your coming, traveler. You have been chosen to be her champion." Before I can learn the full details (or see the awesome treasure these Daedric quests traditionally provide), I must set Seymour and my controller aside.

I spent several hours in this sprawling new world, and it feels like I barely scratched the surface. Much of my time was spent pursuing a single guild, and I didn't even get to their home base. I passed up countless other quests acquired by talking to NPCs and overhearing conversations. Imagining the amount of content that must be waiting in the other three guilds, not to mention the main storyline and incidental quests, brings my anticipation up to a fever pitch. Bethesda defined the current generation of open-world RPGs with Oblivion, and if my time with the newest Elder Scrolls installment is any indication, Skyrim will capture the same sense of amazement and possibility. ◊

Assassin's Creed Revelations

Ezio's final adventure begins

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

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

» **Publisher**
Ubisoft

» **Developer**
Ubisoft Montreal

» **Release**
November 15

We were lucky enough to get an early glimpse of Assassin's Creed Revelations several months ago for our cover story, but there have been few opportunities to play the game in the interim. We remedied that situation this month by playing a near-final version of the massive single-player campaign in advance of its release.

Several hours with the game was enough to reassure us that Revelations should be one of the most intriguing games of the 2011 holiday season. Those who enjoyed Brotherhood have a lot to look forward to – almost all the new systems that players enjoyed last time around remain in place, from the chain kill combo option in combat to the assassin recruitment system.

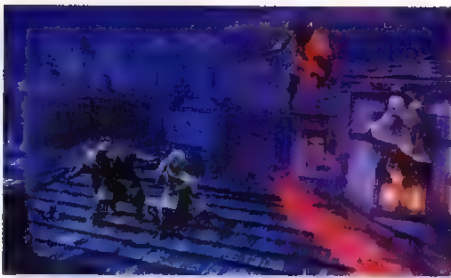
On top of those familiar mechanics, Ubisoft has made some cool new additions. One of the major upgrades to Ezio's gear is the hookblade. The unusual weapon helps the most in traversal sequences. By tapping a button after a leap, the hookblade swings out and grabs distant objects

that might otherwise be out of reach, or catapults Ezio across wide gaps as he swings from a hanging pot. The device also plays into combat for grabs and flip maneuvers, though we had a harder time using it in this context.

The other major advancement in gear brings with it a deep customization component. Bomb crafting now lets Ezio create a wide array of new tools to bring into the field. Bomb components are found throughout the world, and offer more incentive to ferret out hidden chests and other treasures. Gather enough parts, and you can

head to a crafting station, where you're given the option to create lethal, tactical, or diversionary bombs. No matter your choice, you'll then choose a combination of features to compose your destructive package. Pick a shell – one might explode immediately, another activates like a perimeter mine. Pick a gunpowder type to determine the size and strength of the effect. Pick an effect to determine how you'll use the explosive; one might release smoke, while another could scatter a field of caltrops to halt pursuit. You'll can carry three different bomb





types into battle, and it's easy to change your selections at stations throughout the city of Constantinople.

Beyond changes to your arsenal, Revelations also puts a focus on Ezio's role as a mentor and general within the Assassin order. Assassin/Templar battles unfold across the city, and Ezio can participate in an attempt to turn the tide. That participation makes use of a brand new mechanic akin to a traditional tower defense formula. Ezio stands on a rooftop and designates locations for his troops to set up. Each Assassin soldier has different skills, from a crossbowman's ability to halt troops to a rifleman's armor-piercing capability. We only played the tutorial of this new mode, so it remains to be seen if the unusual addition will emerge as a compelling feature.

For long time fans of the series, one of the coolest elements of the game will be the ability to go back and play as Altair. The starring protagonist of the first Assassin's Creed returns in several special sequences that trace important moments of his life. Ezio encounters some unusual discs during his journey in Constantinople that enable to him to relive Altair's memories, much as Desmond has relived both Altair's and Ezio's lives. The sequence we

Ezio looks markedly older in the new game.



played revealed Altair at the age of 63, returning to Masyaf after a long absence to find one of his sons has been executed. The subsequent events take a shocking turn, and reveal that Altair's life had plenty of dramatic twists after the close of the first game.

A few hours with Assassin's Creed Revelations barely scratched the surface of the large and impressive game. Revelations' core gameplay remains mostly untouched, but the new features on display and the intriguing story assure that the game will feel distinct from its predecessors. The wait is a short one now – Ezio's long adventure will reach a conclusion on November 15.

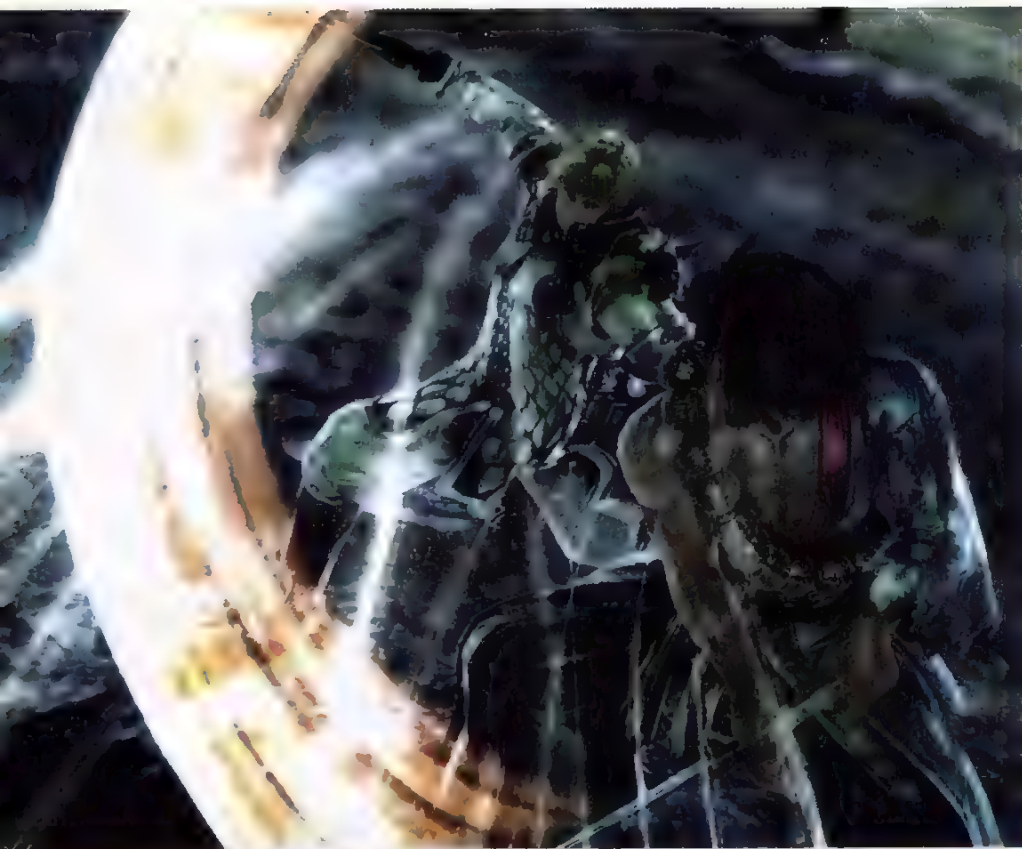
» **Matt Miller**

Altair returns after his starring role.



The Assassin/Templar war plays out in a tower defense-style mechanic.



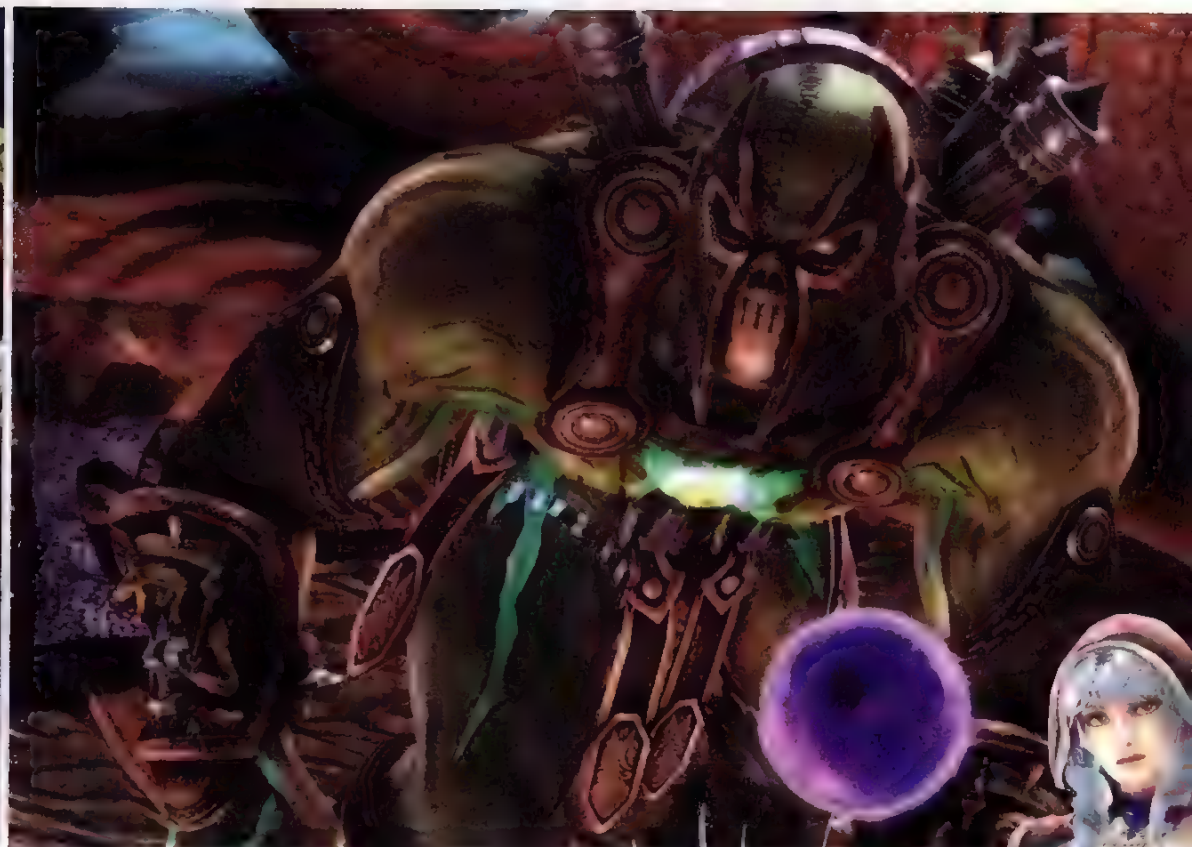


Viola's claw isn't the only weapon in her arsenal.



Sheffield looks to be a focal point of the story once again.





Soulcalibur V

Project Soul's long-running fighter impresses at TGS

Soulcalibur has been one of the most consistent fighting series on the market throughout the years, with no entry in the core series ever scoring below an 8.5 in this magazine. While the series has never made any major missteps, some new mechanics (critical finishes and the soul gauge) in the last entry rubbed some fans the wrong way. With Soulcalibur V, developer Project Soul has removed the offending features, added some new ones, and introduced many new characters to the ever-growing roster.

Set 17 years after Soulcalibur IV, this sequel features a cast consisting half of returning characters and half all-new fighters. Many of the new characters we've seen thus far have ties to longtime series mainstays, such as Taki's student Natsu and Sophitia's children Patroklos and Pyrrha. Natsu attacks with Taki's trademark lightning-quick kicks and jumps, but she also has the ability to teleport and create shadow clones. Taki fans should feel instantly comfortable with the new ninja, and the fact that she deals more damage than her mentor makes her even more formidable.

Fans of Sophitia will recognize the general attack style of her children, but Patroklos and Pyrrha feature subtle moveset changes that hardcore fans will appreciate. New character Z.W.E.I. wields a cross-like sword, but it's not the only weapon in his arsenal. Some of his attacks cause a werewolf to appear and deal damage to his opponent, but little else is known about the character at this point.

Newly announced at TGS is the mysterious Viola, who utilizes both a claw and a crystal ball

in combat. Attacking with the claw is confined to close-quarters melee, but her magic orb can be used in more strategic and unique ways. It can be placed anywhere on the battlefield, and will function as a land mine of sorts if an enemy nears it. However, she can also summon the orb back at any point, dealing damage to any character that stands in its path. More than a glorified land mine, it's also used in throws and other attacks.

The second and fourth entries in the series featured guest stars from other games and pop culture universes, including Link, Spawn, Yoda, and Darth Vader. Soulcalibur V will be no different, but Namco is being tight-lipped about any cameos. At its pre-TGS event, Namco hinted at a certain guest character being a bombshell that will be revealed at a special event dedicated to the unveiling. It should be interesting to see who shows up on the roster, as the series' previous guests have all been huge names.

I had the chance to play several matches at TGS, and the combat is as smooth as ever. Performing my favorite strategies as Mitsurugi and Siegfried felt natural, and the new characters feature a great assortment of attacks. The mechanics that IV introduced to a luke-warm response are now gone, and the new critical edge system will be both accessible to casual fans and deadly in the hands of the hardcore crowd.

Critical edge attacks are similar to Street Fighter IV's ultra attacks in how you access them and how they're performed. A meter will fill up as the rounds progress, and your critical edge is ready once completely full. The input for pulling them off is similar to many Street Fighter ultras,

which is two quarter-circles forward, followed by a simultaneous press of three buttons (or one A+B+K hotkey). This motion should be familiar to SF IV fans (it's Ryu's ultra, along with numerous others), but the difference between critical edges and ultras is that every critical edge uses the same input. Because of this, players won't have to pause and check out the command list if they forget which motion their character's critical edge requires. Unlike the critical finish moves from Soulcalibur IV, these aren't canned animation sequences. If your opponent is quick enough, they can block or evade these devastating attacks.

When it released in 1999 for the Dreamcast, the original Soul Calibur turned heads with its jaw-dropping visuals. The series has maintained its high level of visual quality throughout, but V is looking to be the best yet by a long shot. Rather than the standard motion capture work they've done in the past, Project Soul has collaborated with animation team Cyber Connect 2. Fighters are more detailed than ever, featuring gorgeous character models and more expressive faces.

Whenever a fighting game sequel is announced, fans hope that it's more than a rehash with some new characters and stages. Soulcalibur V is certainly adding many more characters and stages, but it's the refined gameplay that has me most excited. Each round that I played reminded me more and more of the first Soulcalibur, which I consider to be the perfect fighting game. If it features some robust single-player modes, the return of eight-on-eight team battles, and a solid online experience, it could be the best series entry since the original. » Dan Ryckert

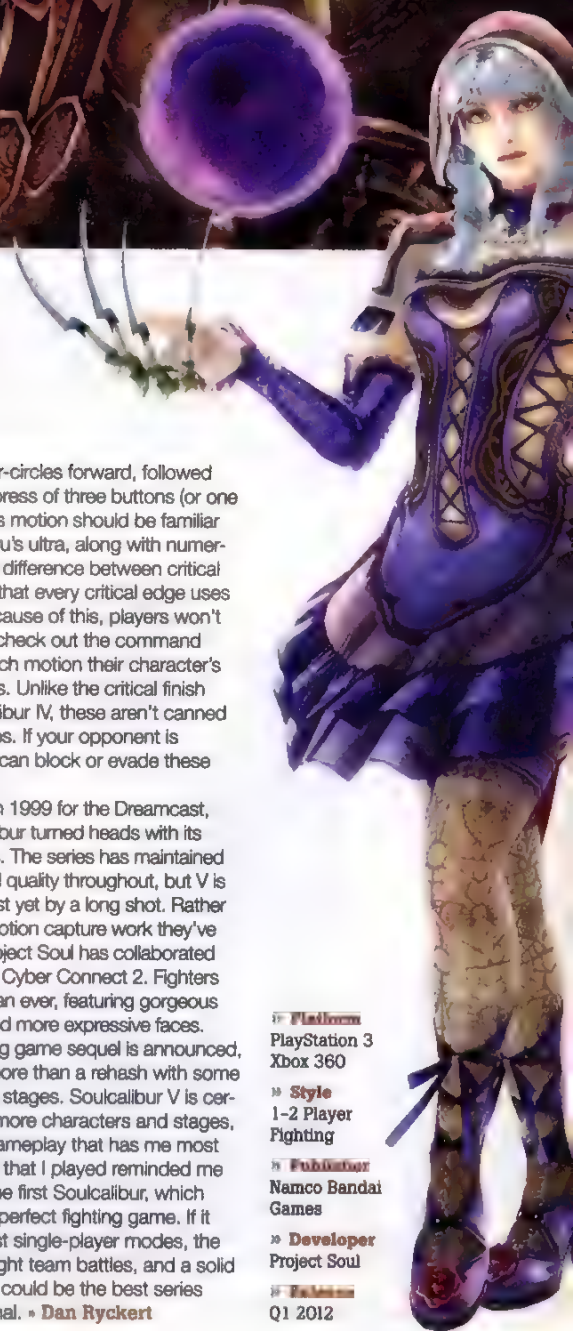
» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1-2 Player
Fighting

» **Publisher**
Namco Bandai
Games

» **Developer**
Project Soul

» **Estimate**
Q1 2012





Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning

Diving in to see if Reckoning has depth to match its flash

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

» **Style**
1-Player Role-Playing

» **Publisher**
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**
Big Huge Games/
38 Studios

» **Release**
February 7

I've seen and played Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning several times now, but these brief demos have had one serious limitation. While I've witnessed enough to be convinced that the core action/RPG gameplay is solid and fun, I haven't had a chance to see just how big Reckoning's supposedly massive open world is. This month, I played through the game's first several hours, so I can happily report that when it comes to delivering a huge world full of things to do, Reckoning is the real deal.

As has previously been detailed, Reckoning begins with my created character waking up in a pile of corpses. In the tutorial, I explore the Well of Souls, a mix of technology and magic

put together by the gnome scientist Fomorous Hugues. While Hugues has managed to bring me back from the dead—his first success—the facility has also come under attack from the Tuatha, a rogue branch of a race of magical creatures that has been waging a years-long war against the mortal races.

While tutorials are often boring enough to make even the most wide-eyed gamer yawn, especially in mechanic-heavy RPGs, Reckoning's kept my attention. The half-hour-long dungeon moves at a quick pace, introducing a wider variety of weapons and magic than some entire games contain. It feels like a drill sergeant barking out orders as fast as you can accomplish them:

"Here's a sword, and here's how basic melee combat works. Got it? Alright, now here's a bow, and here's how to do ranged combat. Okay, now here's how you perform stealth kills."

Part of the reason this fun, varied tutorial exists is Reckoning's refreshing lack of an arbitrary class choice as the game begins. My character starts with full access to magic, melee, and stealth skill trees, allowing me to create a focused or hybrid hero. The tutorial doesn't give me time to get bored with any one of these potential styles and provides a wide enough overview of the many options offered that you should have a good idea what you want to stick with by the time you leave the dungeon.

If you're anything like me, you may have trouble settling on one type of combat. Big Huge Games lead designer Ian Frazier laughs as he watches me play, noting that I'm working my way through every single major weapon type in the game. Whether swinging a giant greatsword, smacking down enemies with a hammer, or using the mage's awesome chakram to slice foes from a distance, I'm having a blast figuring out the quirks and strengths of every weapon I came across.

At the end of the tutorial dungeon, I finally meet Fomorous Hugues, but our introduction is cut short. He is astounded that his experiments with the Well of Souls have finally paid off, but he demands that I escape: "Whatever you do, don't die." With that final ominous warning, Hugues rushes back into the depths of the Well, distracting the Tuatha so that I can get away.

I leave the dark blues and purples of this tutorial dungeon and enter a lush green forest known as Dalentarh. The gorgeous, bright colors once again stand out as something that sets Reckoning apart from most dark open-world RPGs.

Heading down the path in front of me—this section is still linear—I stumble upon Agarth, a man that Hugues told me to find. Agarth is a fateweaver, a special type of character in the world of Amalur who can read the weaves of fate and see any individual's future.

In Amalur, every person is tied to a fate that





they cannot break away from. This would make for a pretty boring game, but Agarth informs me that for some reason he cannot see my fate. Being resurrected by Hugues has apparently severed my connection to this all-knowing force, which means that unlike everyone else in the world, I'm able to affect the outcome of the future.

Agarth gives me a new objective to head toward if I want to continue down the main quest line, but any good open-world RPG involves hours of being distracted from the primary mission. As I head down the road, the path gradually opens up. I enter the first town in the game, Gorhart Village, and I notice a number of exclamation points popping up on my mini-map. I have a good feeling about this.

Within five minutes of entering town, I'm inundated with sidequests. A Fae has been attacked, and a villager requests my help in figuring out how to heal her. A man named Egan has gone missing from the nearby chapel. A captain of the Warsworn – the first of six factions in the game – asks me to hunt down two Red Legion bandits if I'm interested in joining this group of warriors.

I decide to look for Egan first. Father Dynwel tells me that this young man went out to collect firewood and never returned. The area around Gorhart Village is wide open, allowing me to run in any direction. It seems like each area of Reckoning will be like this, with narrower paths funneling you between zones. Any quest that you mark as active provides a clear mark on your mini-map letting you know where to go to continue. I discover plenty of distractions along the way, though.

I have put several skill points into the "detect hidden" ability, which means that I can see hidden treasure caches under rock piles or in hollow logs. I also wander upon several roaming bands of boggarts, kobolds, and sprites that I fight off. I even see one group of boggarts fighting with a giant bear. The bear easily kills the small, wooden enemies, and then I rush in to finish the creature off.

Eventually I make my way to the objective marker and discover a sturdy-looking man with an axe nearby, but he introduces himself as "Casmaran the Eternal." I prod him a bit further using my persuasion ability. Casmaran reveals that he is in fact Egan, but he does not want to return to the chapel. He has cut a deal with a group of Fae he met in the forest. If he retrieves an ancient artifact for them, they will teach

him to be a powerful mage – thus, Casmaran the Eternal.

Egan asks my help in retrieving the artifact. Curious to see how this sketchy scenario plays out, I agree, and he leads me to a dungeon. Although the world itself is open, all of the dungeons I've seen stick to a fairly straight path, branching only for dead ends or treasure. I breeze through this decrepit temple alongside Egan, taking out some monsters along the way and finally discovering the goal: a crown that is equippable.

In addition to being an open-world, narrative-driven RPG, Reckoning is also very much a loot game, so I know what it means when I see this item's name written in purple font. It's a rare item, far better than anything else I've received so far, and I'd much rather keep it than allow Egan to give it to these Fae. Nonetheless, I decide to see the quest through to its end.

I follow Egan to the Fae location, but I find something quite different from the immortal creatures he described. A group of Dokkalfar – or dark elf – bandits have fooled the Impressionable young man. As it turns out, I get the best of both worlds: completing the quest by killing these bandits and keeping the artifact to run around with until I find something better to equip.

Egan returns to Gorhart Village with me. Running this quest for the Father at the chapel has opened up the church grounds, which in turn gives me access to five or six new quests. In my remaining couple of hours with the game, I run the first couple of quests for the Warsworn faction, help a wolf who's been turned into a human regain his true form, discover a plague-infested town, and move forward in the main story.

Each quest I tackle lasts a good 30 to 40 minutes, and while many focus on combat, there's a lot of variety, such as looking for clues to a murder mystery and tracking down a teleporting well. If these first few hours are any indication, Reckoning is going to be an absolutely massive game on a level comparable to the biggest RPGs of this generation.

Despite being a new franchise coming from a studio that's unproven in the realm of RPGs, Reckoning continues to surprise me as a game that seems to have it all. From the addictive mix of questing and loot-gathering to the intriguing story to the fleshed-out and gigantic world it all takes place in, there's enough here for people to get lost for weeks, if not months. My return trip to Amalur in February can't come soon enough. > **Phil Kollar**





Twisted Metal

An interview with David Jaffe

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3

» **Style**
1 to 4-Player Action
(16-player Online)

» **Publisher**
Sony Computer
Entertainment

» **Developer**
Eat Sleep Play

» **Release**
February 12

Twisted Metal's early 2012 release date has us squealing with excitement like hot tires on asphalt. During this year's annual Penny Arcade Expo we raced through a new level of the game while experimenting with a new mode called Team Hunted. Twisted Metal creator David Jaffe rode shotgun and explained all of the game's ins and outs. » **Ben Reeves**

This is a new level for the game. What's the concept behind this arena?

I think the best Twisted Metal levels are the ones that you can relate to, ones that are in your own backyard [or] that you might see driving around your neighborhood. Thrills and Chills is inspired by our love for theme parks. It's probably our biggest level in the game. We have a haunted castle. We have a giant roller coaster in here. You can fight on the tracks and take your vehicle for a spin around the loop. There are caves and a pirate cove. We even have some mascot characters running around in costumes. They're fun

to run over and kill. We're really trying to place players in a pristine suburban world and let them go a little crazy. This is probably one of my favorite levels that we've ever done in the history of the series.

We're also playing a new mode called Hunted. What's the hook here?

In Team Hunted one of the players on your team is chosen as the Hunted, and the rest of the team has to protect them. The only way that your team scores points is when the Hunted kills someone, so your team wants to protect him and keep him alive. The trick is to work with your team to soften up the other targets so that he can go in and get the killer shot.

What are some ways a team can work together?

We've always looked at our vehicles as characters from a fighting game, so there are pros and cons to every vehicle. If you feel like you haven't

been chosen as the Hunted in a while, you might want to choose a vehicle that's better at darting around and taking kills, versus a support vehicle. For example, Junkyard Dog is a great support vehicle, because he can launch a taxicab that detonates and heals everyone on your team within that area. So he's a great choice for supporting the hunted, but might be tricky to use if you are the Hunted.

What other kinds of special support vehicles are in the game?

There are transport vehicles. If you see your hunter getting wailed on, you can fly in with a helicopter and drop a magnet to pick him up and take him out of harm's way, but your team only has about two or three helicopters throughout the whole level, so you want to work with your team to make sure you are using them at the right time. Juggernaut is this giant semi truck that other cars like Nightrider and Spy Hunter can drive into a man its guns. You can also use



Nuke is a multiplayer mode in which players try to capture their opponent's flag and feed them to a wood chipper. It's Bat Sleep Play's version of capture the flag.

mode where we spawn an endless stream of AI for you – and we've had that since *Twisted Metal 2* back in 1996. We haven't sexed it up in this one, and we haven't built arenas specifically for it, because so much of our effort has gone into building these fighters and making sure they play well off each other. I'd love to do our take on Horde mode someday, but right now that's not what we're about.

You have been making Twisted Metal titles for a long time, but it kind of stands alone as a unique kind of game. Why don't you think there are more car combat games out there?

I think that a lot of people are thinking that they don't need to make this kind of game anymore, because I can get my character in *Battlefield 3* into a tank, and then have him jump in a plane, and then have him walk around on foot, so why would I limit anyone to one vehicle? I totally understand that position. But we're going for something different. It's conceptually a vehicle combat game. It's conceptually inspired by *The Road Warrior* or *Fast and the Furious*, but at its heart, this is less about driving and more about shooting and fighting. The ability to fly is not something that I want to give every player. It's kind of like *Team Fortress*. It's more of a class-based experience. I think everyone else is thinking, "F--- it! Let's give them everything." That's why I think we don't have a lot of copycats.

How did you guys settle on a Valentine's Day release?



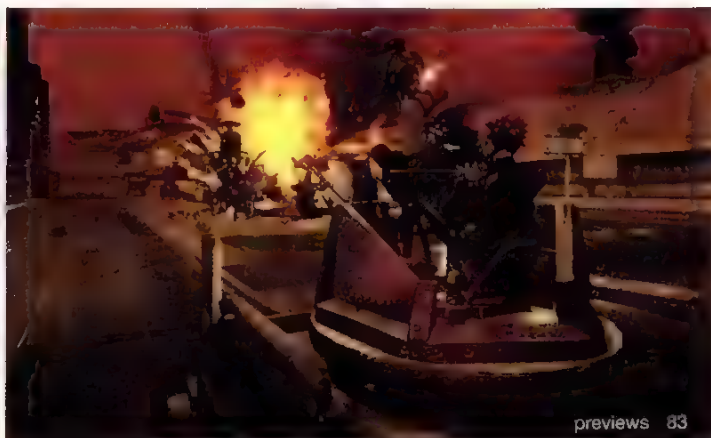
It made sense strategically, but it also made sense conceptually. It's clearly a romantic game. It's the kind of game where you want to play with your girlfriend and blow her up in local split-screen before taking her out to dinner. I'm kind of joking, but I'm not, because split-screen is a big deal for us. I love that this game brings people together. Plus I love the fact that on Valentine's Day there are going to be a whole slew of couples playing *Twisted Metal* together, and then nine and a half months later we'll have a whole slew of *Twisted Metal* babies. Basically, I'm building a master race built around car-combat fans. ♡

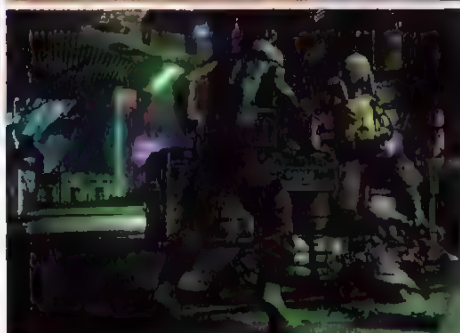
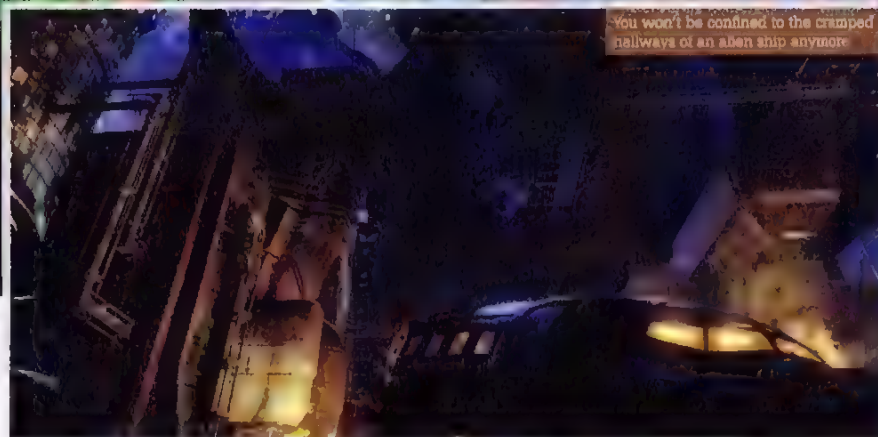
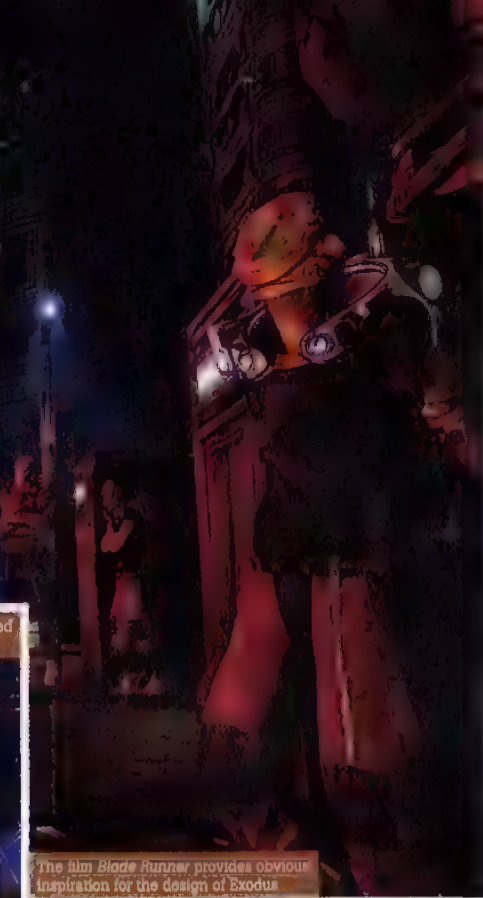
Juggernaut to transport your buddies across the levels. The cast is so varied that it really is conducive to team play. If you have a clan or a group of buddies that you play really well with, you are going to be able to decimate in this mode.

Modes like Gears of War's Horde seem to be the big thing in multiplayer these days. Did you guys look at those game types while working on this Twisted Metal?

Well you know we have endurance mode – it's not as sexy or dressed up, but it's basically a

Twisted Metal has an unlockable progression system where players will be able to...





Prey 2

Prey is back, but not as you would expect

» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1-Player Shooter

» **Publisher**
Bethesda Softworks

» **Developer**
Human Head Studios

» **Release**
2012

As a quick refresher, here is what you need to know about Prey 2: It's still a first person shooter and it still takes place in the universe established in the original game. Everything else is a radical departure. Tommy from the original Prey is in the sequel, but not as a playable character. You won't be making your way down claustrophobic hallways jumping through portals, walking on ceilings, or spirit walking in the land of the dead, but you will be shooting at aliens.

In Prey 2 you are Killian Samuels, an air force marshal who was abducted aboard the mysterious alien spheres from Prey at the same time as Tommy. The game takes place an undisclosed time after the abductions, and Samuels has acclimated himself to the alien culture and made a name for himself as a bounty hunter while trying to regain his memory. From there, you begin exploring the open alien world of Exodus, acquiring bounties, and playing with all kinds of alien gadgets and weapons.

Samuels has more in common with Batman than he does with Tommy when it comes to his arsenal. Along with standard weapons like pistols and sniper rifles, Samuels has access to tons of gadgets like suit-enhanced fists for bounty punching and jet powered boots for traversal. He also has a scanning visor used to locate and scan targets in large crowds and for locking onto

enemies for weapons like shoulder-mounted missiles. No secondary fire modes or swappable ammo types are available on any of the weapons, but only because of the diverse set of guns and gadgets that Samuels wields. For example, there isn't incendiary shotgun ammo, but there is a shotgun type that shoots flaming bullets.

Given the variety of bounties that need capturing, Samuels will need as many firepower options as he can get. Each enemy has different abilities – some can teleport, others drop mines or have a badass weapon of their own, and the higher-priced bounties may even have a posse you need to dispose of before making the capture. With these targets roaming the public, you need to be smart about when to attack. If you open fire and accidentally kill several innocents, your reputation will take a hit and people will cower in your presence in fear of becoming your next collateral victim.

In between missions, we advise stopping to soak in the gorgeous environments made possible by a heavily modified id Tech 4 engine. To drive the "alien noir" mood of this otherworldly setting home, developer Human Head Studios has hired composers Mark Morgan (Fallout, Planescape: Torment) and Jason Graves (Dead Space) to write the musical score. Players can visit this brooding sci-fi setting sometime in 2012. » Kyle Hilliard





Max Payne 3

Rockstar's noir icon lives on

Information on Max Payne 3 has been difficult to come by since our cover story in issue 195. Recently, Rockstar lifted the veil of secrecy surrounding the title a bit and – most importantly – confirmed that the game is very much alive, and will be released in March of next year. For fans of the series, that's great news. For those on the fence, perhaps these gorgeous new screenshots will help pique your interest in the most underrated of Rockstar's major franchises.

So what do we know about Max Payne 3? Given the game's long absence from the public eye, not a whole lot more than we did when we published the cover story. However, Rockstar recently posted a new trailer of the game that gives some insight into the events that helped create this newer, much older looking Max Payne.

After an unexplained chain of events take Max down to Sao Paulo, Brazil, he begins working "security detail" (read: hired goon) for some of the more unsavory elements of Brazilian society.

His envoy into this world is Raul Passos, who Max knows from his days as a New York cop. Along with some footage of shakedowns and gunplay, Max's narration reveals that he is once again caught up in "all hell breaking loose around another girl I'd been trying to protect." The girl in question has been kidnapped by one of Sao Paulo's criminal organizations the Comando Sombra.

As for Max himself, it looks like his journey has not been kind. In the early part of the trailer, our antihero seems beset with alcohol problems but appears to pull himself out of the stupor to go rescue the girl who's earned his trust. A head-shaving sequence seems to be symbolic of his transformation into a killing machine in search of vengeance.

Interestingly, in the screenshots we've seen, there appear to be three distinct versions of Max in the game. One is a younger version with hair (similar to his look in the previous two games), the second is an older version with hair and a beard, and the third is the haggard, shorn

version of Max that has been in most of the game's marketing. Does the younger-looking version of Max indicate that at least part of the game consists of flashbacks that take place closer to the timeframe of Max 1 and 2? We suspect so.

The other thing that's clear from the clip is that the series' signature "Bullet Time" slow-motion gunplay mechanics are well in place – and we wouldn't have it any other way. If anything, the gunfights look even better with destructible environments and NaturalMotion animations. As always, Max Payne is traveling down a dark, twisted road. As he says himself in the trailer, "It wasn't pretty, but I guess none of what was about to happen was gonna be."

In one final surprise twist, Rockstar revealed that it's adding a multiplayer mode to Max Payne 3. Very little is known about how multiplayer will work in this traditionally narrative-focused franchise, but Rockstar promises maps that change dynamically and some unique form of progression for players. » **Matt Helgeson**

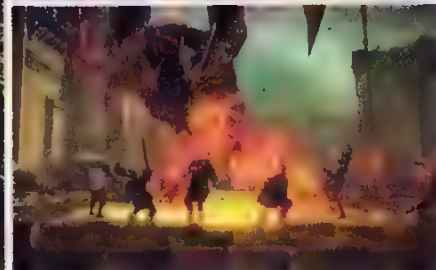
» **Platform**
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360 • PC

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

» **Publisher**
Rockstar Games

» **Developer**
Rockstar Studios

» **Release**
March 2012



The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings

The seminal PC RPG is console-bound

» **Platform**
Xbox 360

» **Style**
1-Player Role-Playing

» **Publisher**
CDProjekt

» **Developer**
CDProjekt RED

» **Release**
2012

The Witcher 2 is one of the best RPGs I've played this generation. If you missed the train when it barreled through the PC gaming world in May, you can hop on without a \$150 graphics card when The Witcher 2 comes out on Xbox 360 later this year.

You can learn all about The Witcher 2 through any number of avenues, considering the PC version has been around for months. Suffice it to say that it's a top-shelf RPG that stands alongside the best work coming out of BioWare or Bethesda. The dark, violent world is amazingly detailed, and players have a shocking amount of control over the story's direction. The combat is both tactically interesting and viscerally satisfying, and outstanding voice work on the well-written dialogue brings the enormous cast of characters to life. The Witcher 2 has it all, especially after a few patches that smoothed out some initial interface and difficulty issues.

The 360 version isn't so much an adaptation or a port as it is the exact same game slightly optimized on the technical and interface end to run on the console. All of the content from the original release, including the DLC up to 360 launch day and the humongous 2.0 patch that adds a whole new difficulty mode, will be on the disc. CDProjekt hasn't said anything about its plans for bringing further DLC out on 360 – the company has a hard-line stance about not charging for DLC – but 360 players will get everything PC gamers have access to at the moment. The Witcher 2 comes out on Xbox.

Provided CDProjekt puts in the work to make the extensive menu system play nicely with a controller, The Witcher 2 shouldn't have any playability issues. The game was clearly designed with controllers in mind, and combat plays wonderfully on a gamepad.

Before seeing it running on 360, I was concerned that console gamers would have to sit through frequent loading screens as they navigate the large environments. I am happy to be wrong. I saw the developers play through a significant section of the game with no loading screens, and they assure me that the 360 won't load any more than the PC does – which is very little.

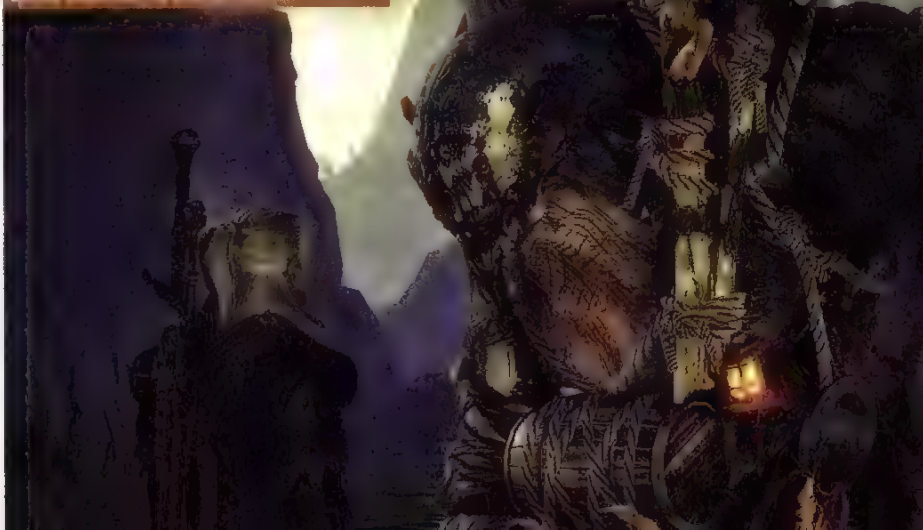
The graphics will undoubtedly take a hit from what a high-end PC is capable of putting out, but this will be a fine-looking game on console

nonetheless. The alpha build I saw running didn't have all the bells and whistles my expensive rig renders, but it did put to rest any concern that The Witcher 2 would have to make drastic sacrifices to run reasonably on 360. The Xbox 360 build the developers showed at Gamescom this year looked as good as any RPG I can think of, and had a steady framerate to match.

The bottom line is that The Witcher 2 is a game that deserves its massive fanbase and the heaps of critical praise it has received. The console version should be a faithful translation of one of my favorite games in recent years. I can't recommend it any more highly to any and all Xbox 360 owners. » **Adam Biessener**

Read GI's full *Witcher 2* PC review at gameinformer.com

The *Enchanted* DLC is one of the many post-release additions on the game's disc



SSX

The best parts of *Need For Speed's* Autolog hit the slopes.

I'm a long-time SSX fan going back to the original release on PlayStation 2, so I was excited to get my hands on EA's series revival at Gamescom. As it turns out, the publisher isn't just rehashing the awesome tricks and tracks of past games, though; SSX will also feature a completely revamped and impressive suite of multiplayer options.

SSX implements an always-on feature called RiderNet that is heavily inspired by *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit's* much-loved Autolog. Essentially, even when you play solo, you'll be connected to EA's servers so you can upload your score and time data and challenge your friends to beat it. When you replay a track, you can play against a ghost of your best run as well as a ghost of any friend who has challenged you through RiderNet.

This asynchronous multiplayer seems like a great solution to constantly pushing a sense of community and competition even when you're playing by yourself. When you turn on SSX, the game will automatically point you toward friends who are dominating you on specific tracks, allowing you to immediately jump in. The game will also offer bonus rewards for taking on and conquering these challenges.

If you're currently ahead of your friends on a course, you'll win money every time they challenge your lead and lose, even when you're offline. It's entirely possible for you to log on one day and discover you've earned thousands of dollars in in-game currency because your friend tried to take on your time or score over

and over again without success. The in-game currency can then be used to purchase thousands of snowboards, outfits, and other items that will in turn improve your chances of setting even higher scores.

Beyond the asynchronous multiplayer, SSX also has a slightly more traditional Global Events mode, but the team wanted to get rid of the need for lobbies and waiting around. To accomplish this, EA Canada essentially created a persistent, constantly active tournament that players can drop into at any time. All 150 to 180 drops in the game will have events associated with them that you can enter at any time.

The game's servers can support an unlimited number of players on any track in Global Events mode, although it will limit the number that you see to something manageable. SSX will smartly choose to populate tracks with your friends first and then with strangers who are in the area.

Finally, if you'd rather play online with friends alone, you have the option to create custom online events at any time. You can set these events to completely open, friends-only, or visible to friends-of-friends as well.

RiderNet will also be fully active via the SSX website as well as iPhone apps, Twitter, and Facebook. While away from your console, you'll be able to log in, see what your friends have been up to, and queue up tracks and challenges to take on as soon as you get home.

EA seems to be going all out in creating the most robust and interesting online experience possible around SSX. I've always loved the over-the-top tricks of the series, but I never thought I'd view online as an essential element. RiderNet has convinced me, and I can't wait to take on my friends when SSX launches in January. **» Phil Kollar**

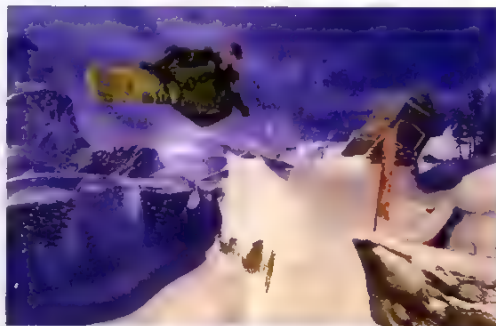
» Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

» Style
1-Player Sports
(Multiplayer TBA)

» Publisher
EA Sports

» Developer
EA Canada

» Release
January





Heavy metal influence comes out of this Vita title.

Army Corps of Hell

Vita's devilish little surprise

- » Platform Vita
- » Genre 1-Player Strategy (2 to 4-Player Local)
- » Publisher Square Enix
- » Developer Entersphere
- » Release TBA

When the Vita was first revealed to have two analog sticks, most gamers immediately marveled at the portable possibilities for shooters. Japanese developer Entersphere has different plans for the twin joy-sticks. This quirky, heavy metal romp through hell tasks players with commanding an army of goblins in order to reclaim a fallen king's lost power and seek revenge on the gods.

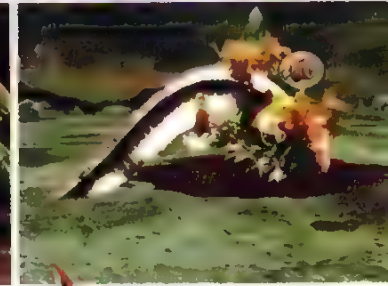
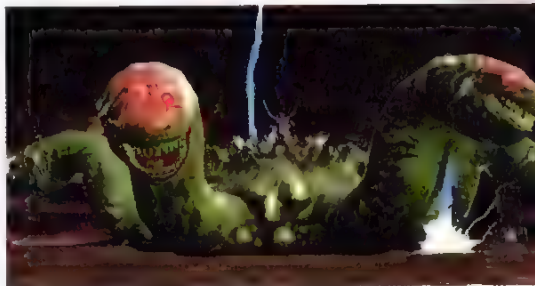
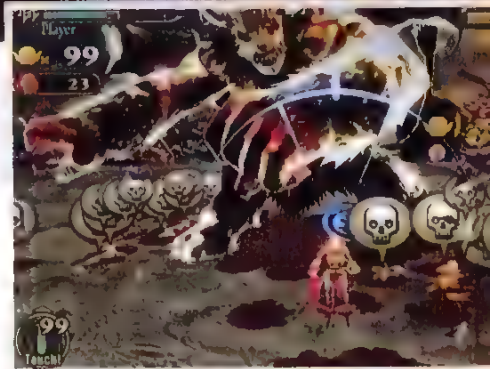
Flinging frenzied goblins at various hell beasts is tough work, so mastery of both analog sticks is required. Players control the demonic undead king with the left stick while aiming his goblin army 360 degrees with the right stick. A press of the right trigger launches the miniature evil-doers. Watching a steady stream of minions engulf an enemy like ants on an ice cream cone is a treat. Pressing the left trigger tightens the goblins around the protagonist in a defensive phalanx. Like a demonic marching band, selecting the spear formation causes the goblins to gather into the form of an arrow that can be launched at bad guys for big damage. A broad fireball attack levels out the goblin army's arsenal. Strafing around enemies while tossing your pawns into battle feels great with the Vita's ergonomic control layout.

When an enemy falls, you can send your goblins out to devour the corpse, scoring you some loot. The resources you gather are used to upgrade your weapons and craft items, though that functionality wasn't available in the demo I played. Instruments like a flute, drum, and guitar are among the items you can craft. Using a health potion launches a touch-based rhythm minigame. The better you perform the more health your goblins regain. Even though I underperformed on the drums using the Vita's rear touchpad, I still recovered enough life to carry on.

Speaking of instruments, the soundtrack to Army Corps of Hell exclusively features heavy metal bands local to developer Entersphere's

studio in Shinjuku, Japan. This fits the game's demonic tone perfectly, and is an aural treat for metal heads. Less brutal gamers might end up substituting their own soundtrack.

My time playing Army Corps of Hell ended with an intense boss fight against a giant minotaur. As I circled the beast and targeted his weak spots, I realized how quickly I had grasped the game's core mechanics. My 10 or so minutes with the Vita launch title left me feeling like I had played it before. Just ask the fallen boss; he'll attest to the game's fluid learning curve. I can't wait to check out more features like four-player multiplayer and item crafting as we creep closer to the Vita's December 17 Japanese launch. Cross your fingers the game stirs enough buzz to see a western release. » **Tim Turi**



The Oilmar Connection

During my time with the Army Corps of Hell demo, a Square Enix representative revealed that a key developer from Nintendo now works for Entersphere, and has a lot to do with this quirky Vita title's design. When I pointed out the similarities between the goblins and Nintendo's iconic Pikmin, all I got in response was a coy "no comment." I'll leave it up to you to decide if the connection is reality or fantasy.





WWE '12

THQ tweaks controls and creation for its WWE reboot

Wrestling games have historically belonged in two distinct camps: one for gamers with a passing interest in the wrestling industry (or none at all), and one that caters towards hardcore wrestling fans. THQ's popular WWF and WCW games on Nintendo 64 belonged in the former category, as did this year's All Stars. Hardcore wrestling fans, on the other hand, enjoy the authenticity and attention to detail that the Smackdown vs. Raw series provided. With WWE '12, THQ is attempting to bridge the gap by providing nuanced gameplay and Raw-caliber production values with a control scheme that's accessible to any gamer.

Smackdown vs. Raw became so complex that the last two entries featured a training gym with a massive checklist of moves and scenarios to learn. WWE '12 streamlines the controls with a layout that reminds me of a deeper version of the old Nintendo 64 scheme. The A button initiates all grapples, and another press along with a direction on the analog stick performs one of four moves. Each grapple position features four standard moves, and you can switch between

positions by using the right stick. If the grapple is initiated while your opponent is groggy, you'll perform a stronger move.

Previous WWE games have featured HUD layouts of your opponent's body, showcasing which areas are most damaged. While it was easy to tell which part of the body was the most hurt, performing moves targeted at that section wasn't quite as simple. With the new limb targeting system, you can easily isolate a specific area of the body to wear down. Holding the RB button once in a grapple will bring up a similar HUD layout, with a face button dedicated to each area. Pressing the button corresponding to the head will perform the appropriate attack from your superstar's moveset. If you want to nullify Daniel Bryan's LaBell Lock finisher, you can beat on his arms. If Sin Cara or Evan Bourne are running circles around you, you can easily attack their legs to hinder their speed.

Finishers are always coveted attacks, but many wrestling games feature momentum meters that deplete if the attack isn't pulled off in time. WWE '12 has replaced this with a meter that only grows, and you're able to bank finishers if you don't feel like using it right when it's available. Some superstars with high charisma can hold more finishers than others, given they have the required rating.

Getting an opponent into the correct position for a finishing move is a frequent frustration in wrestling games, and the new wake-up taunts

make things significantly easier. If you're playing as Randy Orton and you have a finisher ready to go, you can press up on the d-pad to activate the taunt as an opponent is on the ground. The Apex Predator will fall to the ground and perform his signature stomping taunt, and it will trigger the standing animation for your opponent. Once they're up, they're in the perfect position to be on the receiving end of a thunderous RKO.

Visually, WWE '12 looks more like a WWE television product than any wrestling game before it. THQ has studied WWE's production style, and incorporated it into the game based on what's happening in the ring. Camera angles that wrestling fans are used to seeing on episodes of Raw or Smackdown are used, and little elements like the mini-Titantrons will appeal to detail-minded WWE viewers.

As in all THQ wrestling games, players will have access to a wide variety of creation tools. You can still create your own superstars and storylines, but WWE '12 is adding the ability to create arenas and custom entrance videos. Arenas can be pieced together from a wide variety of graphics and logos, which I discovered while creating my ring apron consisting of a cow pattern on one side, bricks on the other, and old-school WCW PPV logos pasted everywhere else. Even elements like the ring barricades, turnbuckles, and announcer tables can be tweaked to your liking. For your created superstars, you can now create your own custom entrance video

instead of being confined to the Titantrons for existing wrestlers.

In recent years, WWE Smackdown vs. Raw has suffered a bit from a Madden complex. Gameplay was solid, wrestling fans were happy, but the annual entries were mostly roster updates with a few new bells and whistles. WWE '12 isn't looking like a complete overhaul of the core mechanics, but the new control scheme should shake things up a bit. If the Road To Wrestlemania and WWE Universe modes return in solid form, this could potentially be one of the best WWE games this generation. » Dan Ryckert

- » **Platform**
Playstation 3
Xbox 360 • Wii
- » **Style**
1 to 4-Player Fighting
- » **Publisher**
THQ
- » **Developer**
Yuke's Yokohama
- » **Release**
November 22



Undertaker may have only stepped into the ring once this year, but he's back full-time in WWE '12



Asura's Wrath

Capcom's moon shot continues to impress

Platform
PlayStation 3
Xbox 360

Style
1-Player Action

Publisher
Capcom

Developer
Capcom

Release
2012

Every so often an action game comes along that's so outrageous that nobody thinks it can be outdone. First it was *Devil May Cry*, then it was *Bayonetta*, and now there is *Asura's Wrath*. Capcom's hybrid of ancient Japanese history, sci-fi tech, and heavily shaded art gives *Asura's Wrath* a distinctive look and feel. The graphics may be gorgeous, but the absurd chaos is the real star here.

The Tokyo Game Show 2011 showing of *Asura's Wrath* begins with the titular hero exchanging words with a bearded, scarred foe named Augus on the surface of the moon. All you need to know is that Asura is a former deity

stripped of his power who must save his daughter by conquering fellow gods like Augus. Asura interrupts his challenger's torrential tirade with a flying fist to the face, and the battle begins.

Combat initially involves dodging Augus' bull rush advances and firing energy projectiles from a safe distance. The game's intuitive lock-on system lets you effortlessly pepper the bad guy with quick bursts of fire before leaping to safety. It's tough to squeeze in even a few light blows without the boss counterattacking, so you have to make your hits count. Thankfully, when Asura's rage meter fills you can deliver enough enhanced melee damage to stagger Augus, triggering a frenzied quicktime battle.

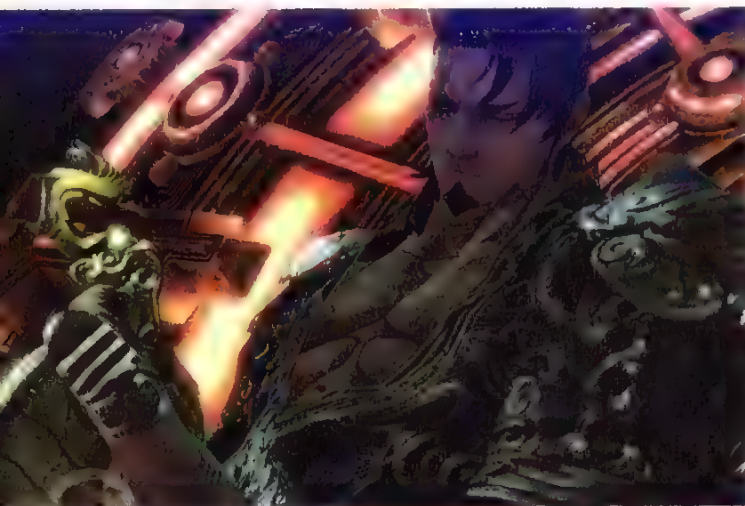
The two rivals exchange a rapid volley of punches, with each strike negated like a fistfight from *The Matrix* (if Neo had six arms). Keeping up with the frenzied button mashing and quick analog stick flicks is tough work, but eventually Asura slips a blow past Augus' defenses and sends him flying. No more Mr. Nice Guy. Augus reveals his intimidating samurai sword and explains to Asura how he loves using it more than he loves sex.

Combat resumes, but this time Augus uses his blade to send beams of energy flying towards Asura. The hero must evade these vertical and horizontal hazards while continuing his previous tactics. After rebuilding his rage meter, Asura is once again able to assault Augus. The two Herculean adversaries exchange hits until Augus sneaks in a thrust of his samurai sword. Asura uses all six palms to catch the sword and halt the blade's path towards his chest. Augus'

weapon magically begins to grow longer and longer. Lunar dust kicks up around Asura's feet as he tries to hold his ground. The blade expands too quickly for Asura, and his feet lift from the moon's surface. Realizing what's about to happen is a marvelous thing.

The Earth moves into view behind Asura as Augus leaps into space with the protagonist still clutching the end of his weapon. As the two fly from the surface of the moon, it becomes clear that Augus wants to impale Asura into their home planet with his 300,000 mile-long blade. The villain continues to shout taunts as several of Asura's arms burn off upon reentering the atmosphere. The camera cuts to a satellite's view to showcase a tremendous impact that looks like something from a disaster movie. Augus plunges thousands of miles worth of folded steel through the hero's chest into the Earth's crust below. As Augus comes ever closer to sinking the hilt of his blade into Asura's heart, the player cranks on an analog stick to rally the strength to deliver one last punch. The demo ends just as Asura's fist greets the meteoric madman's face.

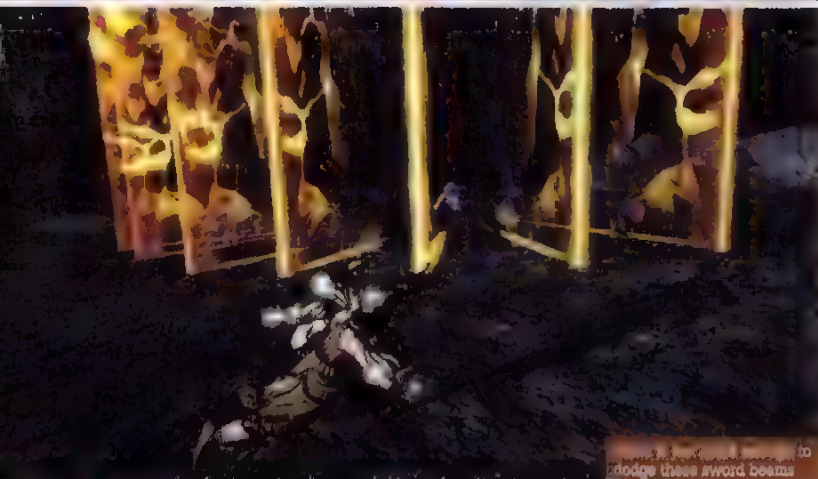
To say *Asura's Wrath* is over-the-top is a gross understatement. In the year following its reveal at TGS 2010, Capcom has shown us more insane action per minute than some games contain in their finales. We've yet to witness the game's futuristic locations or play as his brother-in-law, Yasha [see sidebar], but based on our time with *Asura's Wrath* so far we're confident the rest of the game will be just as deliciously ludicrous. » Tim Turi



Asura's Brother-in-Law Joins the Insanity

Before you start envisioning Asura battling alongside the new playable character, you should know that Yasha despises him. Asura married Yasha's sister, who was murdered during the assassination of the emperor. Yasha blames Asura for his sibling's tragic death. It's uncertain whether the quicker, more agile character will forgive Asura and join forces with him.





Final Fantasy: Type-0

A bloody intro and dynamic gameplay revive the PSP

Formerly named Final Fantasy Agito XIII, Final Fantasy: Type-0 was originally announced at E3 2006 as a Japan-only mobile game. Since then it's not only dropped the Agito name, but moved over to a handheld in its twilight, the PSP. Based on my time with the Tokyo Game Show 2011 build I can say the game's introduction is shocking, the gameplay is solid, and the presentation is impressive.

The lengthy intro cinematic depicts a knight in his last moments fighting alongside his loyal chocobo. The two struggle bitterly as an evil militia besieges the city they defend. In a tragic turn of events, the two are fatally wounded. The amount of blood and violence in these touching moments is surprising for a Final Fantasy title. The scene ends with the dying soldier weeping as he lays his head down on the bloodied feathers of his dead companion.

The gameplay is a sharp contrast to the moving introduction. The roster packs a whopping 14 characters, most of which are themed after playing cards. I controlled Nine, Queen, and Ace, three students from the Peristerium School of Magic. Every classmate sports unique abilities and weapons, three of which can be swapped between during the real-time battles. Nine wields a spear, Queen carries a sword, Ace tosses energized cards Gambit-style, and all sport some type of magic.

Combat itself reminds me of Final Fantasy VII: Crisis Core. Players lock onto enemies, cast magic from afar, and move up close to deal melee damage as numbers tick away above enemies' heads. When you're finished killing, fallen soldiers can be absorbed as health to restore your party. Working through a war-torn city while switching characters was a good time, but unfortunately a gigantic flaming bird wiped out my entire party and brought the good times to an end.

I didn't get a great sense for Type-0's story because the entire preview version was in Japanese. Despite this, I'm feeling very optimistic about the game. Hot-swapping between characters could rectify the repetition I felt held back FF VII: Crisis Core. Type-0 releases this month in Japan. Let's hope it gains enough attention to see a Stateside release. » Tim Turi

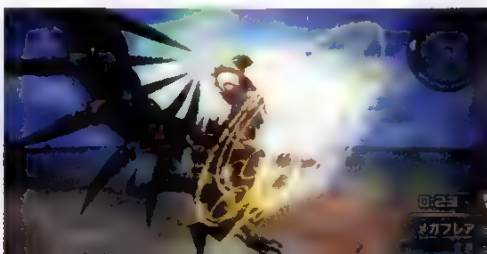
» Platform
PSP

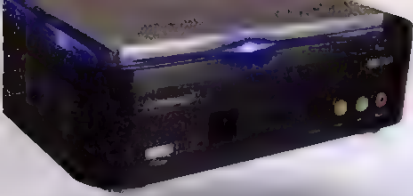
» Style
1-Player Role-Playing
(Multiplayer TBA)

» Publisher
Square Enix

» Developer
Square Enix

» Release
TBA





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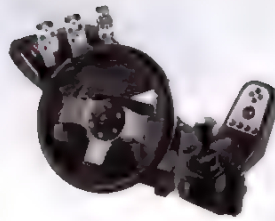
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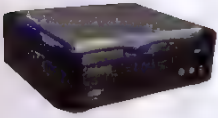
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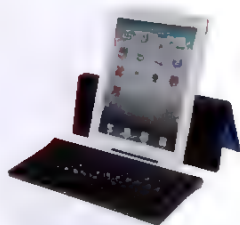
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reviews



gameinformer **GAME OF THE MONTH**

98 Batman: Arkham City

Rocksteady Studios must have been training with Batman during its downtime, because the studio came back to this sequel stronger than ever before. Arkham City is a hard game to put down thanks to its chilling character moments, rich open world, and diversity of stealth, action, and puzzle gameplay. Turn to page 98 to find out why Batman: Arkham City is a leading contender for Game of the Year.

SCORING

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 insufficient 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	I am the table.

AWARDS

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



SOMEWHERE IN THERE
**THERE'S A
MAN IN THERE**

★ *Old Spice* ★

SMELL BETTER THAN
YOURSELF

Batman: Arkham City

The best licensed video game ever made

10

GAME OF THE MONTH PLATINUM

Style 1-Player Action Publisher Warner Bros. Interactive
Developer Rocksteady Studios Release October 18 ESRB T

PS3 • 360 • PC

» Concept

The Dark Knight soars in this ambitious follow-up to Rocksteady's surprising blockbuster, *Batman: Arkham Asylum*

» Graphics

Gotham City is lavishly detailed with dark hues and soaring architecture. Most of the central story missions take place indoors in environments that are just as striking. The museum is particularly impressive

» Sound

Mark Hamill and Kevin Conroy could do this in their sleep at this point, but their work couldn't be better. The glut of enemy chatter makes Gotham come alive. The score intensifies the action and complements the mood perfectly

» Playability

Combat is as fluid as ever, and Batman's new maneuverability in the open world is handled exceptionally well. Catwoman is another fully playable character that performs as admirably as the star

» Entertainment

This is the best use of a license in the industry's history. The wealth of amazing content is daunting

» Replay Value

High

Gotham City's skyline glows warmly, showing decades of progress and prosperity in each of its majestic towers. On this night, this impressive view is obstructed by the massive concrete walls of Arkham City, Gotham's new home for its lunatics and murderers. Behind these barriers, a section of the city has been transformed into a prison with no rules. The inmates govern themselves. Anarchy reigns in the streets as they vie for territory control. The city's historic landmarks are altered to bear the signature of the villains controlling them. The Penguin nests in the museum. The Joker's maniacal laugh echoes across the docks. No sane person would dare enter this dangerous penitentiary. For Batman and the gamer controlling him, however, Arkham City is the ultimate hunting grounds and a place where one of gaming's most remarkable adventures unfolds.

Within this sprawling world, developer Rocksteady Studios has crafted a monster of a sequel, expanding on the size and scope of every facet presented in the series' first entry, *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. A bombshell of a plot twist is revealed in the introductory moments: Hugo Strange knows that Bruce Wayne is Batman. From this point on, exceptional writing leads the way through a mystery-laden plot that races along with fantastic character-based moments. The story reminds me of one of my favorite Batman comic book series: 1993's year-long, villain-infested epic, *Knightfall*. Both the game's and comic's story follow the Arkham Asylum's inmates running amok in the streets of Gotham and the physical toll it takes on the Caped Crusader. This tale bounces between villains, and Rocksteady does a tremendous job of linking all of their arcs together.

I thought that *Arkham Asylum* accurately depicted Batman as a character, brilliantly playing off of his ability to shift from combatant to detective to predator. After playing this sequel, I can now tell you that Rocksteady only showed us the tip of his pointy ears. A large piece of Batman's personality is his link to Gotham. Most of his most iconic images show him leaping off of a rooftop or descending with his cape outstretched toward heavily armed thugs. Players now have the ability to experience Batman as Gotham City's guardian and the creature that most enemies fear is lurking in the shadows. A beautifully designed gliding mechanic, which allows the player to swoop down and then extend the cape to slow his descent or use the velocity to rocket back up into the sky, makes city navigation a breeze, and it's just as graceful and exciting as the popular web swinging



in many of the Spider-Man games. The thrill of gliding undetected and descending like a hawk onto its prey is an immensely satisfying action that often gives way to the game's expanded combat tactics.

Detailing exactly how the combat has changed would reveal villains and spoil sections of the game, but I can say that the base tactics are identical to the last game and the new elements that are added allow Batman to approach different enemy types in new ways and also stun or down foes with a larger arsenal of moves. Batman can counter the attacks of three enemies at once – an acrobatic technique that involves a boot to the face and smashing the remaining foes' heads together – and turns most combat opportunities into an agile, adrenaline-filled ass-kicking.

Some battles are best won through stealth. Enemies are quicker on the trigger now and can also throw pesky landmines into the environment. Detective Vision isn't required nearly as often this time around, but is just as fun to use. In addition to his base set of moves, Batman can now use environmental objects to electrocute foes, an act that is hilarious and effective.

The biggest difference between *Arkham Asylum* and *Arkham City*'s gameplay is the structure of the world. *Arkham Asylum* is a linear game with *Metroid*-esque backtracking and secret-finding. *Arkham City* is an open world littered with missions and events. When the game begins, Batman stands on a rooftop facing his objective. It's at this point players can veer off of the critical path and explore to their heart's content. The side content offers more gameplay than the critical path and is spread across a variety of different avenues ranging from standard side missions to tasks that specific villains want fulfilled. The Riddler is also up to his old tricks, offering a whopping 440 different challenges,

some of which can actually kill Batman. All of the side content is nicely designed, giving players plenty of reason to invest significant time. At one point I had six side missions to complete, five canisters to blow up, a political prisoner screaming for help, an unknown masked vigilante watching me from a distant rooftop, a major villain initiating a deadly game through a ringing cell phone, and a handful of Riddler challenges staring me in the face. When I completed the game, I was told that I only went through 42 percent of the content. At this point, I also unlocked new game plus, a mode that gives the player all of the weapons and upgrades he or she ended with and offers a more difficult challenge through altered enemy types.

Did I mention that Catwoman is a fully playable character? Her arc intertwines with Batman's, but only accounts for roughly five to ten percent of the story. The switch between these two playable characters is often handled after a cliff-hanger moment, almost imitating the end of a comic book. Catwoman features her own move set; she uses her whip and claws to navigate Gotham in a different way (which isn't quite as enthralling as Batman's means, but is still fun), and Rocksteady also made sure that players would spend time exploring with her through hidden Catwoman-only Riddler challenges.

The size of the game is daunting. I still have a ways to go to reach 100 percent, but I wouldn't be surprised if I have invested over 60 hours so far. Throw in the new game plus and a dizzying number of combat challenges for both Batman and his feline friend and this game could be one of the biggest and most enjoyable time sinks of the year.

Arkham City not only lives up to the standards set by *Arkham Asylum*, it bests its predecessor in every way and stands tall as one of Batman's greatest moments. » **Andrew Reiner**

Rage

The father of FPS returns triumphant



Style 1 or 2-Player Action (4-Player Online) Publisher Bethesda Softworks Developer id Software Release October 4 ESRB M

The name id Software rings of nostalgia. Franchises like Wolfenstein, Doom, and Quake laid the groundwork for the first-person shooter genre, and I can still see their designs influencing many of today's new releases. Despite the studio's pedigree, it hasn't developed an FPS title since 2004's *Doom 3*. The genre has changed significantly in the years that have followed. Franchises like *Half-Life* and *Call of Duty* are the genre's trendsetters. Now, id Software makes its long-awaited FPS return with a new franchise called *Rage*. Can the father of the FPS reemerge as the powerhouse it once was, or will it be playing catch-up to the genre's latest trends? The answer is a little of both.

At this year's QuakeCon expo, John Carmack, id co-founder and *Rage*'s lead programmer, revealed he had been working on this new title for the better part of six years. The lengthy gestation period has produced one of the most technically sound shooters to date. *Rage* roars at a constant 60 frames per second, offers sophisticated gunplay, and lights up the screen with an incredible level of graphical detail. The game continually wowed me with its technology and small touches, such as every NPC having unique animations scripted to each word they utter, and an enemy being smart enough to recognize that the quickest path to the player's location isn't a winding path, but rather cutting the distance by jumping over fences.

The lengthy development cycle could also be responsible for the game's most disappointing component: the story. After a gorgeous introductory cinematic which shows an enormous asteroid crashing to Earth in the year 2029, producing a post-apocalyptic wasteland, players are introduced to their avatar in this world, a silent protagonist who ends up being the whipping boy of every person with a problem that needs fixing. He's the perfect accomplice

to an uneventful narrative that slogs along with all the excitement of a dehydrated person slowly shuffling his feet in the wasteland's sands. Just when it seems this story might produce a meaty plot thread, the game ends unexpectedly with no major confrontation or sense of victory leading up to it. The best comparison I can think of is if *Star Wars* ended with Obi-Wan lowering the Death Star's tractor beam. Roll credits.

While most people will likely rave about *Rage*'s technology, this game's most impressive component is its gunplay. This is largely due to the game's fearless foes. Like *Left 4 Dead*'s bloodthirsty zombies, the mutated hostiles of the wastes sprint toward the player. They crawl out of the woodwork, scamper along walls, and create a sense of absolute terror. I can't overstate how impressive this game's animation system is. Shooting a mutant in the side might make it slam into a wall, but its legs never stop moving. It drags itself along, eyes glued to yours, and fights to regain balance to continue its rapid pace. Interestingly, the player is not equipped for close quarters melees. In fact, the rifle butt and punch attacks rank among the weakest I've seen in a current-gen FPS. The challenge posed to the player is to put them down quickly, or pray that every close range shotgun blast hits a large chunk of flesh. Most of the major battles unfolded with me panicking, firing off shots with a furious intensity, and escaping with the feeling that I had accomplished a miraculous feat.

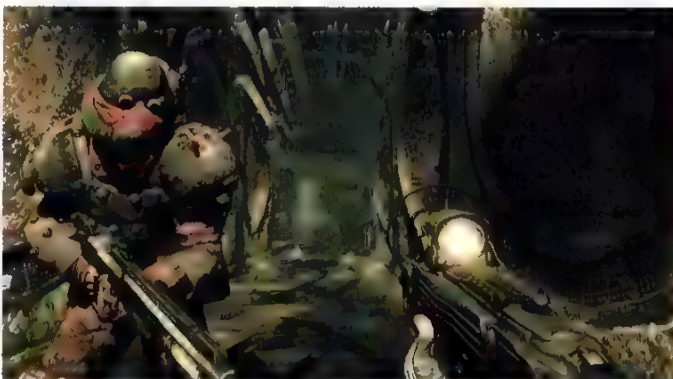
There's a nice selection of close- and long-

range weapons, and while id's patented BFG makes an appearance in the form of special ammunition, this arsenal's most trusted killer is oddly a boomerang called the wingstick – one of the most satisfying weapons in any FPS. The wingstick is designed with the specific goal of lopping off heads. Watching a mutant in a full-on sprint lose his noggin and collapse to the ground just as the wingstick flies back into your hand is a supremely satisfying spectacle.

Rage isn't a standard level-to-level shooter. At any point in the game, players have the opportunity to freely explore a moderately sized open world. Outside of illustrating how the asteroid affected the world and how mankind has adapted to it, this vast playing space's primary function is to shuttle players from a hub city to a mission marker. The means of travel is a vehicle tricked out with weapons galore. Bandits in vehicles of their own will try to derail your quest, but even on the highest difficulty setting they pose little challenge. As much fun as it is to blow these adversaries away with rockets, the vehicular component, which includes races, is an entertaining distraction and nothing more.

A slew of other diversionary minigames, such as an awesome collectible card game, are included into the hub cities. However, the most satisfying side activity is looting, which makes the lack of content in the overworld more disappointing. Every item that flashes in the environment – be it gas cans or bandages – can be picked up and stored in a limitless inventory. At first, these items may seem completely random, but as the game progresses and new weapon and item blueprints are obtained, they can be combined for on-the-go crafting. Turrets, remote control cars, healing items, grenades, and other handy devices can be created from anywhere, even in the heat of battle.

Rage's story and overworld design feel dated, but its heart-pounding gunplay is a nice change of pace in a market filled with "follow me" and pop-and-fire shooters. While light RPG elements are present, this is mainly a game for players who love challenging combat experiences. » **Andrew Reiner**



9

PS3 • 360 • PC

» Concept

A wild romp through a post-apocalyptic wasteland that features gripping gunplay and satisfying looting

» Graphics

The id Tech 5 engine provides amazing visuals presented at a fluid 60 frames per second

» Sound

The soundtrack is appropriately moody and the impressive voice acting fits the colorful personalities

» Playability

Rage's shooter component shines and offers an experience unlike any other FPS on the market. The driving sections are no more than optional diversions

» Entertainment

id's return is worth the wait and stands out in the crowded FPS market

» Replay Value

Moderately High

Multiplayer

Rage's gunplay seems like a perfect fit for classic id-style deathmatching, but the only multiplayer options offered are four-player vehicular combat and two-player co-op challenges. The co-op levels are sections stripped from the campaign and outfitted with new enemy formations. They're a blast to play, but they can be completed in a few hours total. The vehicular warfare doesn't offer a large number of maps, and as nicely crafted as the controls are, grows old quickly. While the completist in me wanted to reach rank 20, my interest was fully tapped around rank 10.

Dead Rising 2: Off the Record

Anything Chuck can do, Frank can do better

9.5

PS3 • 360 • PC

» Concept

Take the bulk of last year's *Dead Rising 2* and add a "what-if" twist starring the original *Dead Rising*'s Frank West

» Graphics

Textures look gnarly up close, but the sight of thousands of onscreen zombies still impresses

» Sound

As before, the music is appropriate if unremarkable. Sound effects are a high point, deftly accompanying meaty impacts and gruesome splatters

» Playability

Frank's photography skills add another layer to the already deep gameplay

» Entertainment

Much of the story is the same as before, but the inclusion of a sandbox mode keeps the game fresh

» Replay Value

High



Style 1-Player Action (2-Player Online) Publisher Capcom Developer Capcom Vancouver Release September 24th ESRB M

Dead Rising 2 introduced the world to Chuck Greene, a former motocross champion who faced unspeakable danger for the sake of his young daughter. Unlike Frank West, the hero from the first game, Chuck wasn't armed with a camera. Instead, he brought a healthy dose of weapon-crafting ingenuity to the zombie-lined streets of Fortune City. Chuck was a great character, but fans missed Frank. In *Dead Rising 2: Off the Record*, players get a chance to see how the events from *Dead Rising 2* would have played out if the photojournalist had been there. As it turns out, this old dog has a few new tricks.

Even though he's been down on his luck in the intervening years between *Dead Rising 1* and *2*, Frank is still an avid photographer. As he navigates through the slightly modified storyline, Frank gets a chance to capture the conspiracy on film. The mechanic from the first game is

largely the same, though players can fire away without having to worry about their camera's battery life. Chuck doesn't have a corner on the duct-tape market; Frank can also construct the hybrid weapons that made *Dead Rising 2* special, including some diabolically clever new gizmos.

Other additions keep the game fresh for fans as well as appealing to green players. There are a few new psychopaths to battle, including some familiar faces and references that superfans will get a kick out of. There's also an entirely new area to explore: the space-age Uranus Zone. This amusement park is filled with loads of environmental kills and minigames, and fits in nicely with Fortune City's overall theme of tacky overstimulation.

For *Off the Record*, Capcom Vancouver stripped away the second game's *Terror is Reality* mode. This multiplayer-only feature was a great idea in theory, but it was plagued by long queue times and a host of performance issues. The main appeal of this mode — being able to earn cash and transfer it to your campaign's progress — is still in the game, only in a much more appealing package.

Sandbox mode is back in *Dead Rising*, and it's available from the start. Each of the game's three save slots tracks progress in both the story and the sandbox. When you load a save, you can choose to either forge ahead in the campaign or kill time (and a few thousand zombies) in *Off the Record*'s free-form counterpart.

Dead Rising veterans should have a basic idea of what to expect here. Unlike the mission-driven storyline, there aren't any objectives to complete in the sandbox mode. Instead, players are free to

explore Fortune City at their own pace. Capcom has also added challenges to the sandbox, which provide a welcome series of goals. These optional tasks unlock as players slaughter more and more of the undead, and players who meet the set requirements can score some cold, hard cash. These challenges include the expected kill-fests, in which Frank has to tear through as many zombies as time allows, but also provide some surprises. You may have to round up as many "massagers" as possible before the clock runs out, or show off your parkour skills by quickly reaching an out-of-the-way spot. Players can join in their friends' game as well, with player two assuming the role of Chuck (complete with camera), as opposed to a clone of Frank.

Progress transfers seamlessly between these two modes, addressing one of the nagging issues some players have had with the *Dead Rising* series. Previously, it was possible to find yourself woefully underpowered if you didn't level up enough between missions. At that point, you were essentially forced to start the story over again from scratch, with the consolation prize of retaining your character's progress. Now, with sandbox mode, you can just slip over to the open-world playground, paint the floor with zombie blood for a few hours, and then continue the campaign with your newly buffed West.

The inclusion of the sandbox mode makes *Dead Rising 2: Off the Record* more than just a retreat with slightly modified cutscenes. By itself, it's an incentive for *Dead Rising 2* players to pick it up. If you haven't gotten around to playing the sequel yet, this is definitely the version to get. — Jeff Gork



Dark Souls

Dead as a doornail



gameinformer
SILVER

Style 1 to 4-Player Action/RPG Publisher Namco Bandai Developer From Software Release October 4 ESRB M

Back when I reviewed *Demon's Souls* in 2009, I argued that the excellent PS3 exclusive got too much hype for its difficulty when it had so many more other stand-out elements: atmospheric levels, rewarding combat, and wildly unique multiplayer. *Dark Souls*, the spiritual successor to *Demon's Souls*, still has all of these features, but developer From Software has latched on to the idea of difficulty and honed it to an art form. *Dark Souls* is without a doubt the hardest game I have ever played; that is its blessing, and that is its curse.

Some frustration in *Dark Souls* arises from how this generation's games have conditioned us. Gamers are used to handholding tutorials that walk you through every aspect of a game's mechanics. *Dark Souls* doesn't waste time explaining things. You encounter the first boss within 10 minutes of starting the game. He's huge. He wields a giant club that can take away half of your health bar or more in a single swing – and this isn't one of those battles you're supposed to lose. After a quick detour, you're fully expected to defeat this monster as one of your first acts in this deadly world.

Strange new concepts such as humanity (a resource that allows you to revert from undead form back to human) and kindling (an act that gets you more health flasks at your current checkpoint) could use more explanation, but this is the kind of stuff that the *Dark Souls* community

will love toying with and figuring out over the next few months.

The overall lack of direction the game gives you is harder to forgive. The world laid out in *Dark Souls* is absolutely massive but, beyond cryptic hints from a handful of scattered NPCs, you're not told where to go. Exploration is a key part of the game but, with a world this huge, you're bound to hit multiple points where you feel like you've explored everything open to you and don't know where to go next. Sometimes the correct path ahead is unnecessarily obscure, requiring you to drop down a cliff or walk across a narrow ledge that doesn't look passable. Without the help of a guide or consulting Internet forums, it's likely that you'll spend hours searching through old areas before you discover that the way forward was hidden in plain sight.

Once you figure out where you're going, though, *Dark Souls* can be stunning, rewarding experience. I spent a full day playing through the death-trap-filled *Sen's Fortress* level over and over again, but it wasn't frustrating at all. With each attempt, I discovered a new secret or devised a strategy that would afford me another scrap of progress. By the end of the day, I had the whole of this level – easily one of the most devious ever designed – memorized. Now I can practically run through it blindfolded. It's a wonderful feeling showing off this sadistic setting to friends and coworkers and having them marvel at my abilities, which are based entirely

in perseverance and smart play rather than twitch skills.

But for every few areas that distill what was amazing about *Demon's Souls* down into its purest and most brilliant form, there is one that takes things a step too far. The *Tomb of the Giants* is a pitch-black catacomb full of giant skeletons that forces you to trade your shield for a lantern if you want to see your hazardous surroundings. The beautiful castles of *Anor Londo* require balancing across precariously thin walkways while avoiding arrow bolts from multiple angles. The majority of the game is spent in much less frustrating areas, but there are a handful that break the golden rule that made *Demon's Souls* so good: every death, however painful, was always fair.

Despite my complaints, I can't help but feel a rush of adrenaline just thinking about *Dark Souls*. I spent around 60 hours playing it over the last month and died nearly 100 times while doing so. I screamed, I cursed, and I threw down my controller in defeat more times than I'm proud of. I can't wait to get back in and do it all over again. *Dark Souls* probably won't be the biggest or best game released this year, but I'm already sure it's the one I'm going to spend the most time playing. — **Phil Kollar**

Want to watch Reiner and Phil tackle the absurdly challenging *Sen's Fortress* level? Check out gameinformer.com/mag to see it for yourself

8.75

PS3 • 360

Concept

Take the legendary difficulty of *Demon's Souls*, add some quirky new features, and set it in a giant open world

Graphics

Beautiful and varied locations are slightly less awesome thanks to occasional frame-rate drops on both platforms

Sound

Pitch-perfect sound design – from the clang of magic hitting metal to epic boss music that adds to the tension

Playability

Dark Souls' methodical pace of combat feels great the longer you play, but sketchy platforming sections and some brutally unfair areas mar the overall experience

Replay Value

Believe it or not, the difficulty is actually higher than *Demon's Souls*, but so is the sense of accomplishment for overcoming this game's trials

Replay Value

High

Taking the death and destruction online

Demon's Souls had a unique online system where you could invite other players, in the form of Blue Phantoms, to help you, but you also had to watch out for invasions from players in the form of Black Phantoms. These multiplayer options have carried over to *Dark Souls*, but the game also introduces some strange new systems.

Throughout the game, players will encounter NPCs that allow them to join different covenants. Choosing a covenant helps determine who you face off against in PvP. Covenants also open up the possibility of affecting someone else's game without directly warping into it, such as dropping an item that summons monsters into other players' games.

Multiplayer access was limited during my time with the review build, so I wasn't able to see the full implementation of covenants. Like the Blue and Black Phantoms, this system seems like it will set *Dark Souls* apart from the competition and give it a singular feeling that will make it entertaining for months to come.



NBA 2K12

Visual Concepts soars to new heights with the best basketball sim ever

9.5

PS3 • 360

» Concept

Mitigate the NBA lockout by collecting over 30 of the most memorable teams in league history

» Graphics

The best broadcast-style presentation and player models in sports games

» Sound

The best play-by-play and color commentary ever recorded in sports games

» Playability

The subtle tweaks to the control scheme increase the responsiveness, and 2K included a new training mode so everyone can optimize their abilities

» Entertainment

Whether you're an NBA die-hard or just a casual fan, this is the best sports game on the market

» Replay Value

High



Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (10-Player Online) Publisher 2K Sports Developer Visual Concepts Release October 4 ESRB E

With the NBA heading for a long and ugly lockout, the public's appetite for a basketball video game is tough to gauge. But if you skip NBA 2K12 this year because you're upset about being unable to watch LeBron and Kobe in real life, you'd be doing yourself a disservice. Like a dream team on which all the right pieces fall into place, this year's edition elevates its game to new heights.

The centerpiece of 2K12's banner year is the revamped broadcast presentation. Steve Kerr joins previous commentators Kevin Harlan and Clark Kellogg to deliver the most convincing booth commentary in video game history. This trio breaks down team matchups, discusses roster moves, talks about player streaks, and even has several anecdotes on hand about the players and coaches. Most impressively, the audio programming is smart enough to interrupt a discussion when a noteworthy play unfolds on the court and then return to the topic at hand. Coupled with the TNT-quality stat wipes and camera angles, this is the best sports presentation I've ever seen.

The moment-to-moment basketball play is equally polished. Visual Concepts didn't bring any game-changing additions, but instead tightened the already strong gameplay to make the controls more responsive. Player collisions look more natural, it's easier to string together a sequence of impressive dribbling and shooting moves, the post game feels more organic, and the deep player-centric playcalling system ensures that teams attack the basket like they would in real life. The only issues I have with the gameplay are the boundary awareness

(which is a slave to the animation system), the pick and roll system (which I found tougher to execute), and that opposing teams tend to make an inordinately high percentage of their shots. You may need to tweak the sliders to get more realistic results.

The best-in-class Association mode has no problems making its shots, either. With an informative scouting system, convincing player management that has you juggling personalities as well as talent, and a robust free agency system, you won't find a better franchise mode in sports games. The trade logic could use reworking (so many teams tried to acquire my star players that I wish there was a way to deem them untouchable), and AI-controlled teams tend to carry imbalanced rosters filled with too many guards, but these are niggling complaints about an otherwise stellar mode. Best of all? You can play this fully featured mode online with friends, too.

As good as Association is, I spent more time with the drastically improved My Player mode. Last year's version turned me off because you started with less talent than a junior varsity bench warmer, but for 2K12 Visual Concepts ditched the Development League purgatory to start you in the pros, bumped your starting rating into the 60s, and fine-tuned the performance grader to make it less punishing. With pre-draft interviews, player endorsements, post-game press conferences, and contract negotiations, My Player is just as adept off the court as it is when you're raining down threes. The player progression moves slightly slower, but if you're performing well you can crack the starting lineup sooner than later. I just wish the player abilities

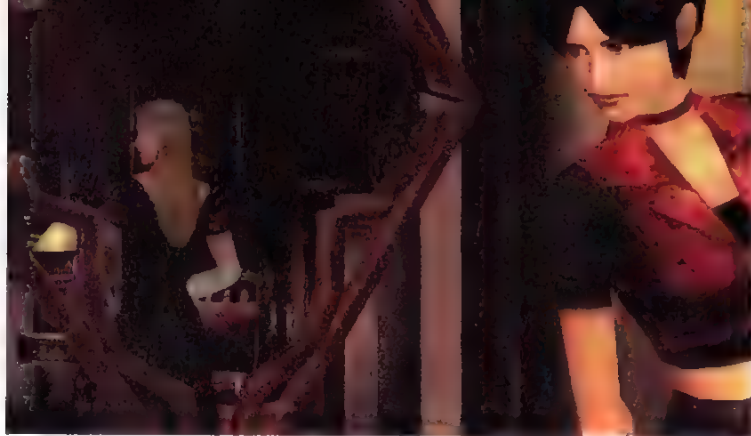
and signature animations cost less XP so you could tailor your star to your play style earlier in his career.

If you're less concerned with the modern-day action, head for the NBA's Greatest mode, which replaces last year's popular Jordan Challenge. Visual Concepts went to great lengths to honor the careers of 15 of the league's best players, creating era-specific presentation packages and asking the commentators to wax nostalgic about the stars of NBA's past. Not only did I have a great time controlling the likes of Magic Johnson, Dr. J, and Bill Russell, I also learned a lot of interesting facts about players I never had the chance to watch in person. The only misstep 2K made is in locking you from using these great teams online without ponying up some extra cash.

In fact, Visual Concepts' entire approach to online (outside of the impressive Association mode) clanks off the rim. You can play one-off matches, participate in Virgin-sponsored tournaments, or team up with five other players for a scrimmage, but not including a robust team competition infrastructure like NHL 12's EASHL is a lost opportunity for a game where individual skill matters.

Online shortcomings and the lack of including last year's rookie class on the rosters until the lockout lifts aside (thanks for that dumb rule, NBA), you won't find a better franchise mode, single-player mode, historical mode, or presentation package anywhere else. NBA 2K12 isn't just the best basketball game; it's the most complete sports sim I've ever played. This is the new benchmark. **» Matt Bertz**





Resident Evil Code: Veronica X

A fresh look for an old nightmare



Style 1-Player Action/Adventure
Publisher Capcom **Developer** Capcom
Release September 27 **ESRR** M

8.5

Concept

Polish away a classic horror title's age without scuffing the horror

Graphics

The CG sequences are gramy, but the wounds on the zombies' faces are vividly gory

Sound

Every moan, gunshot, and line of terrible voice acting sounds just as it did in the original version

Playability

Tank controls, harsh difficulty, and a clunky inventory will consternate all but true Resident Evil vets

Entertainment

Dodging zombies and solving puzzles overcomes old school frustrations of conserving ammo and dealing with ink ribbons

Replay Value

Moderate

The dangers and mysteries of Rockfort Island punished me across multiple playthroughs of the original Resident Evil Code: Veronica for Dreamcast and PlayStation 2. I still consider it the most difficult entry in the series. Claire and Chris Redfield's journey across several Umbrella installations has received a makeover, and returning to the grueling game is a treat for classic survival horror fans.

The story is as convoluted as any Resident Evil game starring a cross-dressing aristocrat and a Leonardo DiCaprio look-alike could be. If you missed out on Code: Veronica, this game could plug in some very interesting missing pieces. Lots of file-reading and campy voice-acting holds back the experience a bit. This isn't a high point in the franchise's twisting plot, but it's not unbearable. If you never replayed Code: Veronica X after the original Code: Veronica, now is the perfect opportunity to check out the bonus Wesker scenes Capcom added to the game.

The main appeal of this rerelease is the graphical upgrade, and it doesn't disappoint. While the 12-year-old CG sequences are grainy by today's standards, the rest of the experience benefits from the high-definition enhancement. Cleaned-up textures and character models look good, even if the animations are as stiff as the notorious tank controls.

Speaking of which, battling the biohazards of Code: Veronica isn't any more intuitive with a modern controller. The rigid gameplay is tough to re-familiarize yourself with even if you've played the game before, and will be a bear if you've never played a classic RE. The imposing enemies, sparse ammo and health, and limited saves don't make reacquainting with the antiquated controls any easier. Still, the handicapped gameplay results in plenty of thrills and thick tension if you've got the stomach for it.



I love the sense of accomplishment that comes with completing a challenging classic survival horror game. This HD version of Resident Evil Code: Veronica X rewards players armed with patience, resourcefulness, and plenty of ink ribbons with a harrowing but memorable trek through the series' heyday. If you've got the grit, try downloading this affordable piece of Capcom history on PSN for PS3 and Games on Demand for 360. **» Tim Turi**

Resident Evil 4

This series' savior gets the makeover it deserves



Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Capcom
Developer Capcom **Release**
September 20 **ESRR** M

9.5

At this point Resident Evil 4 shouldn't need an introduction. The 2005 title's perfect pacing and spot-on gunplay not only reinvigorated the struggling survival horror series, it set a new standard for third-person shooters. Leon S. Kennedy's quest to rescue the President's daughter from a cult of infected freaks has cemented itself on countless top 20 lists. Whether you overlooked this gem or are itching to stomp out the Las Plagas once again, Resident Evil 4 in HD is a beautiful thing.

Not much has changed gameplay-wise between Resident Evil 4 and 5, so core fans won't have much trouble returning to the creepy Spanish village. Leon's tank-like movements aren't the most intuitive, but pegging foes in the legs and taking potshots at their vulnerable heads is still a rewarding process. The variety of firearms isn't overwhelming, but each has unique characteristics and are still fun to upgrade. I was shocked by how much I still enjoy Resident Evil 4's puzzle-like inventory system. You get to know your gear pretty well when you have to shove it all in a single attaché case.

The thrill of Resident Evil 4's gonzo moments lives on in full force thanks to updated visuals. Conquering a mutated sea creature on a tiny wooden boat still gets the blood pumping, especially without the fuzzy haze of last-gen graphics. It's still terrifying to flee from frenzied mobs only to be greeted head-on (or should I say head-off?) by a chainsaw-wielding maniac. Though the textures and character models are much sharper than previous versions, some may find the lack of detail and muted colors dull.

The updated visuals aren't mind-blowing, but they present the best way to return to this already stellar game.

If you somehow missed out on Resident Evil 4 when it turned heads on the GameCube, this is the perfect time to give it a download and see what all the fuss is about. You can find it on PSN for PS3 and Games on Demand on 360s, at a wallet-friendly price. **» Tim Turi**



Concept

Make one of the most beloved horror games of all time look beautiful again

Graphics

A fresh coat of paint makes returning to this classic even more rewarding

Sound

Enemies shout Spanish taunts as they approach from behind, and bullets lodge in your foes with sickening splats. This is still some of the best sound design ever

Playability

The tank-like controls hold back Resident Evil 4 from playing as fluidly as every other shooter, but that's half the fun for thrill-seeking gamers

Entertainment

This game combines the action of a roller coaster ride with the scares of a haunted house

Replay Value

Moderately High



FIFA 12

A beautiful strike

9



Style 1 to 7-Player Sports (PS3) 1 to 4 (360) (22-Player Online)
Publisher EA Sports Developer EA Canada
Release September 27 ESRB E

» Concept

FIFA 12 has changes on both the micro and macro levels, and is an improved experience

» Graphics

The new physics engine produces some cool results, and player faces look really good

» Subversion

There are two broadcast teams you can choose from (Martin Tyler and Alan Smith or Clive Tyldesley and Andy Townsend) for any match. It's also cool to hear commentary about transfer speculation for players

» Playability

The control dribbling button (left bumper) and new defensive option to shadow players (hold down A/X) make a big difference

» Replay Value

Noticeable gameplay improvements and a deeper career mode make this the best FIFA title in years

» Replay Value

Moderately High

EA's soccer series has been getting better each year, and FIFA 12 takes another tangible step forward. Last year's game had a bare career mode and titles before that only produced incremental changes, but FIFA 12 delivers satisfying results in both its gameplay and career mode.

A few simple additions significantly improve FIFA 12's already agile and adaptable controls. My favorite is the precision dribbling. This new tactic lets you control the ball with small steps and buy yourself precious seconds in order to hold the ball and turn a defender, pass the ball, or get off a shot. On defense, you can shadow the ball carrier so you're still marking them without getting outright beaten. Even though FIFA 12 gives defenders new tools like this and more clogging of passing lanes, you've got to be careful because the AI will abuse you if you're out of place or careless.

Going up against ball carriers is a different experience thanks to the new physics engine. The outcome of a challenge is less predictable, as it's easier to maintain possession while being jostled or tackled. Sometimes it still feels like the possession of loose balls is predetermined and the aerial game is largely the same, but in general gameplay feels more natural.

EA Canada boasts of improvements to FIFA's AI, but it's still hit or miss. The game is now more aggressive in unleashing shots from space outside the box, but there's not a lot of creativity in AI attacks. The AI can still be marginalized along the sides of the field, and its attacks predominately materialize only in the latter fourth of the pitch via build-up play. Thus, most teams play the same, although individual players' skills stand out in one-on-one encounters.

Finding the right individuals for those matchups is fun with the revamped manager options in career mode. Meaningful back-and-forth transfer negotiations make you weigh every offer and count your pennies, a youth system lets you scout and sign players from around the globe, each player has his own morale status that affects their ratings, and weekly form and career progression for players necessitates careful lineup management.

Additions, but also stasis, appear elsewhere in the game. New online mini-seasons for head-to-head matchups like the NHL franchise (with promotion and relegation) and the all-inclusive EA Sports Football Club status tracker are balanced by the Ultimate team and Be a Player modes being largely the same (including the lack of international call-ups).

However, these issues are overshadowed by the larger fact that this game has progressed in key areas. It may not have that lethal finisher, but FIFA 12 is a top-flight club in fine form. **» Matthew Kato**



Pro Evolution Soccer 2012

9



Style 1 to 7-Player Sports (PS3) 1 to 4 (360) (8-Player Online)
Publisher Konami Developer Konami
Release September 27 ESRB E

» Concept

The Master League has been given a presentation update, but the real results are in the gameplay additions on the field

» Graphics

You'll notice the Master League cutscenes and appreciate the info they give

» Sound

There's isn't much that's notable about the commentary

» Playability

Using the off-the-ball controls while you're playing can be daunting. However, it can produce some awesome results. Also, some shots on goal can be strangely floaty

» Replay Value

This still isn't a series for the faint of heart, but there are some great new features if you care to look

» Replay Value

Moderately High

Pro Evolution Soccer has always done it the hard way. The franchise is known for its complex controls, minutia of player attributes, and the fact that it has fewer licensed teams and players than rival FIFA. Regardless, I love the series because it allows me to create beautiful soccer seemingly out of thin air. PES 2012 is no different – warts and all.

Nothing typifies the series' hard-won philosophy more than the new off-the-ball controls that let you prompt teammates to make offensive runs while you have the ball. You can either pick which player you want to make a run with the flick of a right analog stick (similar to FIFA's "Make a Run" button), or you can actually control an off-the-ball player directly (it's like controlling a WR while you're the QB). These controls can be difficult to execute, but the sublime moments of offensive brilliance they can create are awesome. They are especially useful on set pieces.

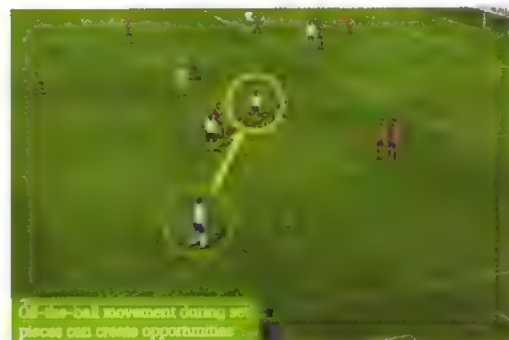
You also get a boost from your AI teammates, even if you aren't controlling them. They generally do a good job of cutting out opponents' passes on defense and making offensive runs on their own. AI teams vary their attacks from each other, particularly in their effective use of the long ball to dissect your back line. Defenders will get caught gawking at the ball and the player selection isn't great, but I can overlook these issues in light of the overall quality of the play.

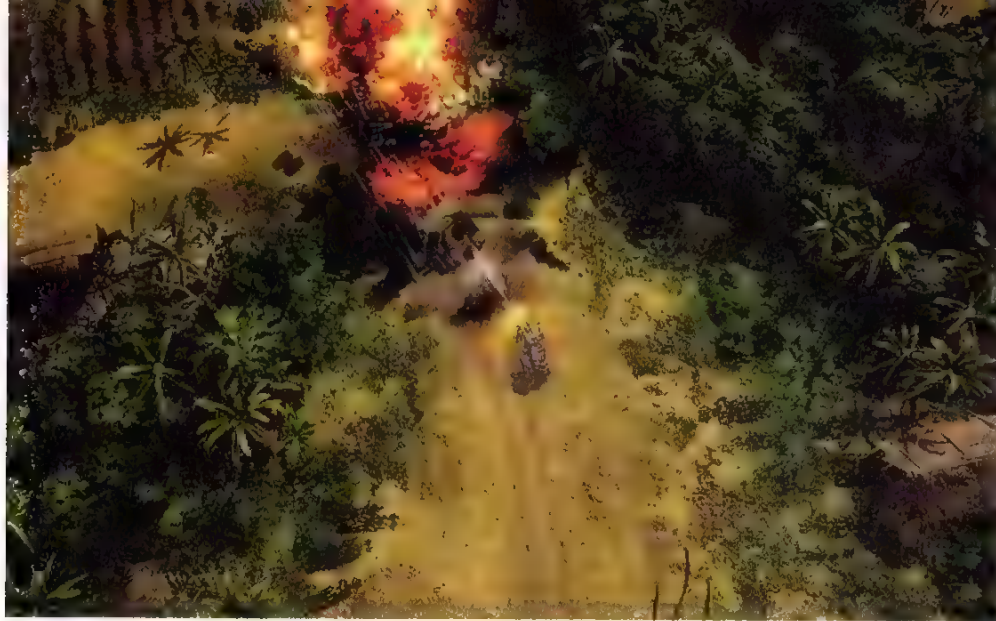
The umbrella Football Life mode now houses the Master League career mode, Become a Legend individual player mode, and the dry, boardroom-based Club

Boss mode. Konami breathed new life into these modes with cutscenes that try to keep you on task and even discuss strategy. Try as The Football Life might, though, some depth is naturally lost by the lack of team/player licenses. This cuts down the number of divisions available, and it also doesn't help that you aren't offered contracts by other teams. I also wish

player info and strategy were better presented, as the career modes still lack an allure to match their substance.

This year's PES title won't change anyone's mind about the series. It hasn't gotten any less complex, but it also hasn't lost any of its brilliance. In that sense, its success is all its own. **» Matthew Kato**





Renegade Ops

Team Avalanche embraces the heights of destruction

Style 1 or 2-Player Action (4-Player Online) **Publisher** Sega
Developer Avalanche Studios **Release** September 13 **ESRB** T

8.25

Explosions are fun. Sure, many reasons exist to recommend Renegade Ops thanks to its strong vehicular combat, enjoyable cooperative play, and upgrade mechanic. But if you drill down to what makes the game worth playing, you just can't deny the joy of seeing buildings, tanks, trees, boats, helicopters – pretty much anything – shatter apart in a flurry of fire and debris.

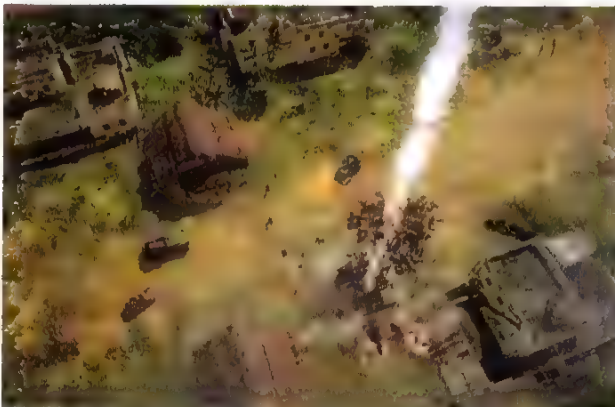
As the team behind the open-world destruction fests that are the Just Cause games, Avalanche Studios has some experience blowing stuff up. The developer carries that expertise over into the downloadable world with Renegade Ops, delivering a satisfying action game that plays like a G.I. Joe toy battle come to life. You control one of four renegade soldiers pushing past the stuffy boundaries of politics to bring down a genocidal terrorist madman and the teeming hordes of soldiers he has somehow gathered. The story is machismo-laden and silly, but thankfully self-aware of its own bombastic nature. From the opening cinematic to the ridiculous closing deus ex machina, the solution to every problem has one of two answers: punch it or blow it up.

The top-down vehicular combat is fast and easy to navigate. Taking a page from Halo's warthog controls, your armored attack van slips and slides around the field with the benefit of exaggerated physics modeling. Twin stick controls make it easy to zoom around while spewing an endless stream of machine gun bullets into the bad guys. Levels are extremely large, and you can traverse quickly between battlefields with unlimited turbo at your disposal. Players also juggle secondary weapons like rocket launchers or onboard rail guns, and each character has special signature abilities like heavy shields or an

EMP burst. Characters and their vehicles are well balanced against each other, but they're also not especially distinct.

Your abilities scale up over time through a standard, but functional, leveling system. The best way to level up faster? You guessed it – more explosions. Specifically, players get bonus score multipliers for stringing together destructive events in rapid succession. The system rewards moving fast and taking no prisoners, so it's a great way for the developers to encourage a frenetic pace.

Renegade Ops is something of a one-trick pony, and the endless high-octane action loses its potency after a few hours, especially when playing alone. It's ultimately a small complaint about a game that knows what it is and isn't afraid to go all in on the concept. Plus, any tedium can be alleviated by teaming up with a friend in split-screen co-op, or up to four players online. If you're looking for some good, old-fashioned devastation, you could do a lot worse than spending time as a renegade. » **Matt Miller**



» Concept

Blast your way through jungles and enemy bases on a destruction-fueled assault against a terrorist madman

» Graphics

Excellent explosion and weapon effects highlight the detailed game world

» Sound

Do you like the sound of continuous machine gun fire?

» Playability

Vehicles have a satisfying weight, but it takes a while to get used to the way they move

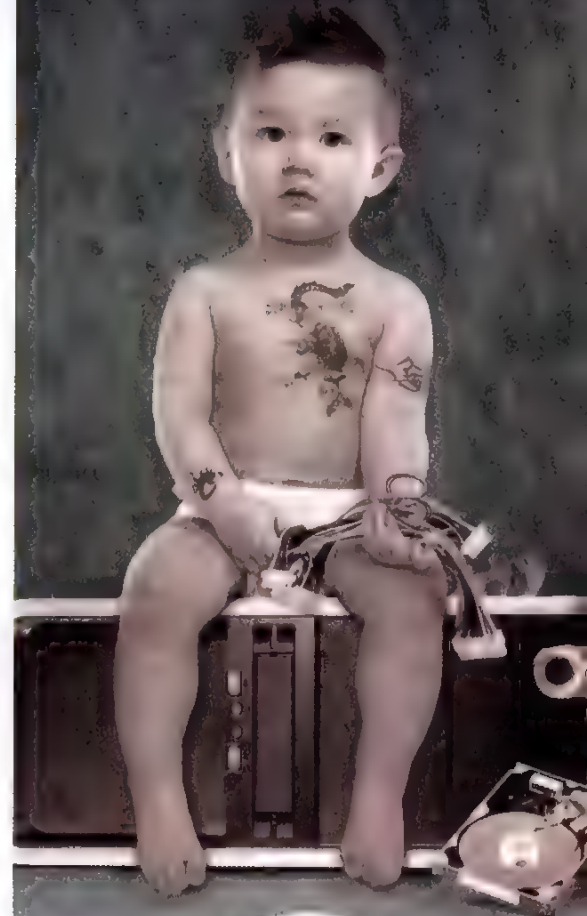
» Entertainment

A well-executed twin-stick shooter that pays homage to the military vehicle games of yesteryear

» Replay Value

Moderately Low

geeked at birth



You may speak the language,
but are you geeked?
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Burnout Crash

Criterion returns to crashing

7.5

Style 1-Player Puzzle **Publisher** Electronic Arts
Developer Criterion Games
Release September 20 **ESRB** E10+

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**
Create a puzzle game based solely on Burnout's long-lost crash mode

» **Graphics**
Crash's top-down view is more Micro Machines than slo-mo twisting metal

» **Sound**
A surprising amount of licensed music trades off with obnoxious voiceovers

» **Playability**
Driving is only two percent of this game. The rest feels more like a puzzle of destruction

» **Criterion's Takeover!**
Once you learn the ropes, challenging friends back and forth on the leaderboards is quite addicting

» **Replay Value**
Moderate

Fines!

Crash also includes Kinect functionality for Xbox 360 owners, but I wouldn't recommend this sloppy option. Hopping and stepping around replace the simple analog stick and button controls with disastrous results.



Autolog helps turn that around by constantly pitting your scores against your friends' in a manner similar to Pinball FX 2. Crash works much better in smaller bursts as you reclaim the leaderboards and accept and offer official challenges. If you've got a lot of friends to compete against, Crash has a good amount of life in it. Otherwise, single-player doesn't take long to dry up. » **Bryan Vore**



Driver: San Francisco

A San Francisco treat

8

Style 1-Player Racing (8-Player Online)
Publisher Ubisoft **Developer** Ubisoft Reflections
Release September 6 **ESRB** T

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**
Move Driver back to San Francisco, and John Tanner out of his body

» **Graphics**
An impressive draw distance makes it easy to anticipate traffic from afar, which is critical in high-speed sequences. Crashes are a bit uninspired, however

» **Sound**
The mix of classic and contemporary funk, blues, and soul does an excellent job of making you feel like you're in a classic cop movie

» **Playability**
Forget Tanner, the Shift mechanic is the star of Driver San Francisco. It fundamentally changes (and usually enhances) every aspect of the game

» **Criterion's Takeover!**
This entry breathes new life into the franchise, and the arcade racing genre as a whole

» **Replay Value**
High

may as well get this out of the way: Driver: San Francisco has one of the dumbest premises in all of gaming. In an industry that brought us barrel-chucking apes, speedy hedgehogs, and the concept of double jumping, that's quite an accomplishment. Once I stopped snickering over the idea of playing as incapacitated cop John Tanner, inexplicably blessed with the power of astral projection, I was completely hooked. Apparently, all it took was a coma to revitalize the Driver series.

Tanner is imbued with this power after getting in a wreck with his nemesis, Jericho. As he lies in stasis in a hospital bed, Tanner finds that he's able to leap out of his body and transfer his consciousness into anyone who's driving in San Francisco. Armed with that superpower, Tanner has to track down Jericho and prevent him from carrying out a massive terrorist attack in the city. Tanner's newfound abilities do more than add an odd bullet point to the back of the game's box. The Shift mechanic fundamentally changes the very nature of the racing game, simultaneously satisfying my need for speed and lust for mayhem.

I've chased down countless felons in racing games, ramming their bumpers and trying to steer them into walls. Shift changes things considerably. Thwarting the bad guys can be as simple as popping out of Tanner and scanning the nearby traffic. As time slows, you select an appropriate vehicle (a fuel tanker heading the opposite direction is always a good choice) and take control of it, slamming into the target vehicle head on.

In some missions, Tanner has to assume the identity of low-level criminals and see how they fit into the larger puzzle. That might mean tailing someone, or impressing a contact with slick driving. I was pleasantly surprised by the amount of variety that Driver: San Francisco delivered. In the span of just a few missions I gave a reality show some prime crash footage, helped protect an armored car from hired goons, and got a discount on driver's ed by scaring the pants off the instructor.

In addition to the main missions, you can undertake dozens of dares, races, and other short tasks. I devoured these like popcorn, and found myself saying, "Only one more," more often than I'd care to admit. Even after beating the game, I went back and started mopping up the various missions that I didn't pass.

Driver: San Francisco is easily the most surprising game I've played this year. I've been a fan of arcade racing games for as long as they've been around, and Ubisoft Reflections shows that there's still plenty of life in the genre — even if it means remotely controlling the action in a hospital gown somewhere. » **Jeff Cork**

Read the unabridged Driver: San Francisco review at gameinformer.com

Gears of War 3

The blockbuster finale millions of fans are craving



gameformer
GOLD

Style 1 to 4-Player Action (Up to 10-Player Online) Publisher Microsoft Studios
Developer Epic Games Release September 20 ESRB M

The credits at the end of Gears of War 3 go on for 14 hours or so. It's easy to see why: Gears 3 is a fantastic idea polished to near perfection by an enormous crew of talented developers and a bottomless budget. If you're not a believer yet this probably won't convert you, but I can't think of anything I wanted in this installment that Epic doesn't deliver on.

The nuts and bolts of the Gears machine are the same innards the franchise has always been built on. The tactical, cover-focused combat demands equal parts strategy and execution and rewards excellence in each. The intensely violent audiovisual presentation puts weight behind every action in the game, selling a real sense of physical space and contact. Gears of War is every bit the triple-A shooter Call of Duty or Halo is, but its slower-paced combat provides a unique and fascinating take on the genre.

I would have been happy with 10 more hours of Gears campaign. Epic hit the 10 hours on the nose, but made it better in every way. Including female Gears helps keep the locker-room machismo to a reasonable level. The few touchy-feely scenes are handled competently. Levels are the same linear series of combat arenas and atmospheric mood pieces, but both aspects are top-notch and the pacing is markedly better than in the earlier games. I can count on my hands the number of times the squad AI annoyed me by jumping into my line of fire or letting a hostile waltz past them to flank me. The encounters provide a constantly shuffling deck of threats that encourage players to experiment with new weapons and tactics. The presentation, of course, is outstanding. Four-player co-op makes it all the sweeter.

The finale is a satisfying, unequivocal end to

the storyline, such as it is. Gears has never had terribly compelling fiction and the entire arc of this final chapter is beyond predictable, but at least it's a coherent story that doesn't need a wiki and a three-month ARG to decipher. I'll never argue with anyone declaring their indifference to Gears' plot, but that's not the reason to play through the campaign. The hilariously over-the-top set piece moments, especially the Silverback sequences where you control a mech suit with unlimited chaingun/rocket ammo, and outstanding combat are all the reason I need to conquer the campaign.

I would have been entirely satisfied with new maps to shake up the outstanding multiplayer from Gears 2. Epic easily takes care of that with classic modes like Team Deathmatch and Gears favorites like Wingman on brilliant, varied maps. The amazing new Beast mode reminiscent of playing the Infected in Left 4 Dead joins Horde mode on the co-op front. Overwhelming the human defenses as the Locust Horde in a series of set piece battles is a wonderful Gears take on being the bad guys. I love the Counter-Strike style economy of earning cash for breaking fortifications and killing humans, then spending that cash to respawn as anything from a Ticker to a Boomer. This new mode is as compelling to me as Horde mode, Call of Duty's Spec Ops or Zombies, or any other innovative co-op mode from the last decade.

Gears 3's smart approach to network play makes it easier than ever to play the modes you want with the people you want, keeping parties together and carrying all of your stats and achievements between co-op, competitive, and campaign play. Online infrastructure is as important as map or weapon design to the long-term

health of a multiplayer community, and Epic nailed it once again here. The lack of persistent power progression may be an issue for people used to Call of Duty's ever-deeper equipment and perk unlocks, but I dig Epic's appearance-only approach. I'm not a big fan of the vast multitude of virtual items like weapon skins on sale through Xbox Live on day one, but if people want to waste their money on horse armor it's not my problem — as long as the cash items are strictly cosmetic. A ton of character models and other vanity items are unlockable through gameplay as well, so you don't have to be a chump like Fenix forever if you don't shell out extra cash.

I would have been content using the same arsenal to mow through the Lambent and Locust forces en route to Fenix's final destination. As it happens, that's pretty much what I did. The only addition to the basic weaponry catalog, the Retro Lancer, is good for the occasional hilarious bayonet charge execution, but the heavy recoil more than offsets its higher damage rating. The Gorgon pistol is a decent close-range sidearm, but I prefer the utility of the standard issue snub pistol. The candy weapon selection is bolstered by a bunch of novelty fare that pales in comparison to the good old Boomshot. Incendiary grenades are fun, but their slow burn effect is functionally too similar to ink grenades for my taste. Nonetheless, it's not like the Gears arsenal was lacking in any area in the last game.

Gears of War 3 doesn't do anything radical, not that anyone expected it to. Only the staunchest Gears haters will find much fault here, though. This is the best execution yet of an idea that spawned one of the biggest modern franchises in all of gaming. What's not to love? » Adam Biessener

9.5

360

» Concept

Make the biggest, most comprehensive, most polished game in a franchise known for all those qualities

» Graphics

Unreal Engine 3 still looks great, and this is the flagship title for the engine that has dominated this console cycle

» Sound

The louder you crank it, the better Gears 3 sounds. This is a game meant for the full audiovisual experience

» Playability

The controls haven't changed, but Epic has gotten better at not making the A button stick you to cover you didn't intend it to

» Court Review

If you like shooters, this is as every bit as good a choice as Call of Duty, Battlefield, or Halo

» Replay Value

High




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Dance Central 2

An iterative sequel to an innovative dance experience

8.25

360

» Concept

The Dance Central series takes only a few shuffles forward, but remains a fun party experience

» Graphics

The game looks largely the same as its prequel. Your dance avatars look stylish (and absurd), and the dance flash cards remain easy to read

» Scenario

The wild collection of dance music from the '80s, '90s, and '00s should please a wide collection of people

» Playability

Dance Central 2 keeps good track of your body posturing, and the improved Break it Down mode makes it easier than ever to learn new moves

» Expert & Advanced

If you have a Kinect, you'll want to keep Dance Central 2 spinning at your next party

» Replay Value

Moderately High



Style 1 or 2-Player Rhythm/Music Publisher Microsoft Developer Harmonix Music Systems Release October 25 ESRB T

Dance games are fairly polarizing. While there is a rabid fanbase that has gone wild for dance games just like Lady Gaga has gone wild with a glue gun, there is a section of the gaming community that would rather deliver a graduation speech in their underwear than get on stage and dance. I'm somewhere in the middle. I have little problem looking like a fool, but I'm also uncoordinated enough that I can trip over my own rock step. When the first Dance Central came out, I was hesitant to test my dexterity. However, three songs into the game, I could feel myself working up a sweat and getting into the groove. Dancers often talk about the physical euphonia they achieve while moving to the beat of a song, and even the uncoordinated among us can sample this thrill through the magic of Dance Central.

It seems like a simple system: Dance Central captures your body motions and delivers feedback on how accurately you match the onscreen prompts. However, it's impressive how this

feedback system helps you to quickly pick up new dance moves. I appreciate Harmonix expanding the Break it Down system, which allowed me to more easily focus on the specific moves I struggled to master. The game's improved voice integration makes it a snap to start up a specific song or pause the game and start rehearsing in Break it Down mode.

From Far East Movement's "Like a G6" to Montell Jordan's "This Is How We Do It" to the embarrassingly fun "Venus" by Bananarama, Dance Central 2 offers up a good mix of party tunes that will only grow with DLC. Fans of the first game will love the fact that you can also import your songs from the first game (for a small fee). A lot of players lost weight playing the first game, but Dance Central's 2's Fitness mode is a clever little addition that allows you to track your calorie burn and create custom playlists to help you shed the pounds.

All of these are solid improvements to the formula, but taken as a whole, I don't feel like this series has made any significant advances. Dance Central 2's Crew Challenge mode lets you dance to win the favor of a few local dance crews, but calling this a campaign mode would be generous. I'm sure most players will just jump to the Dance mode where all of the songs are unlocked, but it's nice to have some kind of progression mode for those players who are



dedicated enough to play through the game's entire set list. Dance Central 2 only provides the thinnest of story conceits and little motivation to complete Crew Challenge mode. Compared to other games in the music genre, like Harmonix's own Rock Band 3, Dance Central has plenty of room to grow in its career mode, story, and character creation – the last of which it lacks entirely.

I haven't had an opportunity to test my new moves at a club yet, but with Dance Central 2's drop-in, drop-out multiplayer, I don't need to leave my house to have a social dance experience. I still think that 90 percent of all dance moves look better when anyone other than me performs them, and that children dance with a wild abandon that few adults are confident enough to muster, but my time with Dance Central 2 has convinced me that even those of us that aren't dance enthusiasts can have fun busting a move if we're willing to give it a shot. — Ben Reeves





Sesame Street: Once Upon A Monster

Everything's A-OK



Style 1 or 2-Player Action
Publisher Warner Bros. Interactive
Developer Double Fine Productions
Release October 11 **ESRB** E

8.5

360

» **Concept**
Teach kids a variety of different lessons with help from Cookie Monster, Elmo, and more

» **Graphics**
The monsters look like they do on TV, with great fur effects and that all-important Muppetey feel

» **Sound**
The voices are straight from the show, and the dialogue is written clearly enough for young players while adding a few winks for parents

» **Playability**
It's a shining example of what Kinect can do, with easy-to-follow motions that translate well to the screen

» **Entertainment**
It's most definitely geared for the little ones, but parents will have a lot of fun playing with their children, too

» **Replay Value**
Moderately High

As someone who makes a living via the written word, this may get me into a bit of hot water: I'm tired of the alphabet. I've just about had it with numbers, too. If you're the parent of a young child, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Just about every age-appropriate video, TV show, and educational game hangs its hat on those two standard lesson plans. Enough already. That's why Warner's *Once Upon A Monster* game seemed like such a revelation when it was announced. First, it was based on the Sesame Street characters that are so revered in my house. Next, it was educational, but with more of a focus on social skills and other often-neglected subjects. The fact that it was being developed by Double Fine Productions was just a delicious extra layer of icing.

Make no mistake: This is a game for young players and their families. Only the most die-hard Achievement hoarders will have the endurance to stick through it if they didn't start off with a love for Sesame Street and its characters. If you're under the game's intended umbrella, however, it's one of the best family focused games ever made.

If you had to distill *Once Upon A Monster* to its essence, it's a series of educational minigames that you play with Kinect-based motions. Reducing it that way would be a mistake, however. Double Fine absolutely nailed what makes Sesame Street what it is, from the Muppets' lovable personalities to how educational content is cleverly masked beneath storylines that kids can relate to. It's all strung together in a series of vignettes that make up larger chapters in the game's virtual storybook.

For instance, the game's first chapter focuses on a long-limbed monster named Marco. When Cookie and Elmo run into him, Marco is sitting on a stump alone, celebrating the saddest birthday party ever. The three fuzzleballs then go out into the world to round up some guests for a proper party. For example, one would-be attendee won't go unless he's wearing the perfect outfit (an opportunity for a quick lesson on colors), another needs help creating music for the shindig, and Grover has gotten sidetracked trying to figure out how to fly. All of these tasks and more are accomplished through intuitive gestures that Kinect recognizes with ease.

Once Upon A Monster is the educational game I've been wanting since I first had kids. It's approachable and easy for them to grasp, while still remaining enough of a game to keep me engaged, too. If you're a parent whose kids already know their ABCs, Double Fine's game is a fantastic way to reinforce often-neglected (but critically important) skills like empathy, responsibility, and friendship. Plus, you can make Grover flap his stringy little blue arms like nobody's business. » **Jeff Cork**



Rise of Nightmares

A dull horror tale meets nightmarish controls

Style 1-Player Action **Publisher** Sega **Developer** Sega
Release September 6 **ESRB** M

5

360

I have to hand it to Sega for being the first to try and make a genuine, full-length action game for Kinect, but perhaps the reason no one else has done it so far is because they tested it out and it didn't work.

Rise of Nightmares follows Josh, who's traveling through Europe on a train with his wife, Kate. Soon enough, monsters kidnap Kate, the train crashes, and you have to make your way through an ominous castle owned by a mad scientist to save her.

You'll be standing upright for the entirety of *Rise of Nightmares*, which lasts six to seven hours. Fatigue becomes a problem, so I recommend grabbing a seat and resting every once in a while. To get around the castle, you have to put one foot forward to walk and twist your shoulders to turn. I got better at this over time, but it never feels natural or precise. Fortunately, Sega has a backup system in place that allows you to automatically walk along a predetermined path to the next objective by holding your arm up.

The combat controls compare favorably to the rest of *Rise of Nightmares*. You pull your hands up like a boxer to target foes and swing at them with whatever hatchet, pipe, or garden tool Josh happens to be holding at the moment. Enemies are mostly reanimated corpses with some metal limbs replacing natural body parts. You can swipe vertically or horizontally and aim at the soft, organic parts to do more damage.

While the combat feels good, the defensive moves are very one-sided. Holding your arms up blocks attacks from all around and makes you nearly invincible. The only time things get rough is if your weapon breaks while you're surrounded by undead. Weapons break constantly, so you're always grabbing something new.

Picking up weapons during a fight is a huge hassle. You have to stop blocking, hold up your arm, hope Kinect recognizes your hand quickly, aim the hand icon at a weapon, and pray the "interact" ring fills up before someone takes a swing at you. The energy blast projectile you get in the latter part of the game helps prevent this situation, since you can blow up groups instantly with one satisfying shot.

Boss fights break up the insert key/walk/hit bad guys gameplay loop, but they're incredibly easy. You can run up and bash them like normal enemies, and any time they perform a special attack you get an onscreen warning (like "Sidestep!") that informs you how to dodge it and a long window in which to perform said action. The final boss actually gave me a workout, however, and almost felt like a *Punch-Out!* fight. More fights like this would have been welcome.

For better or worse, *Rise of Nightmares* doesn't support a standard controller. Even if it did, the game would still be just as bland. Combine this sin with the constant control struggles, and it's tough to recommend this game for even the most desperate Kinect owner. » **Bryan Vore**

» **Concept**
Try and fail to make a core first-person Kinect action title

» **Graphics**
Drab and repetitive environments are mostly empty so you don't get caught on the geometry

» **Sound**
Look forward to a hodgepodge of poorly-done European accents

» **Playability**
Arm swing melee attacks work well enough, but navigating environments is a disaster

» **Entertainment**
Only those curious to see how a non-minigame/dance title plays using Kinect need experiment here. The short answer? It doesn't work

» **Replay Value**
Moderately Low

8.5 | Deus Ex: Human Revolution

Platform PS3 • 360 • PC Release August 23 ESRB M Issue October '11

The problematic gunplay and annoying stealth takedown mechanics keep the game from greatness, but if played a certain way, Human Revolution captures the spirit of its predecessors and can be a blast. Even if it's not a masterpiece, this entry lays the groundwork for a promising future for the series. — Andrew Reiner



PLAYSTATION 3

Alice: Madness Returns	8.75	Jul-11
Bangai-O HD: Missile Fury	7.75	Jul-11
Bionic Commando Rearmed 2	7.25	Apr-11
Blood Drive	4.5	Jan-11
BloodRayne: Betrayal	7	Sep-11
Bodycount	5	Oct-11
Brink	6.75	Jul-11
Bulletstorm	9.25	Apr-11
Call of Juarez: The Cartel	4.5	Sep-11
Captain America: Super Soldier	7.5	Sep-11
Cars 2	7.75	Aug-11
Catherine	7	Aug-11
Chime Super Deluxe	8	May-11
Create	5	Jan-11
Crysis 2	9	May-11
de Blob 2	8	Apr-11
Dead Island	8.5	Oct-11
Dead Space 2	9	Feb-11
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	8.5	Oct-11
Dirt 3	8.75	Jul-11
Disgaea 4: A Promise Unforgotten	9.25	Oct-11
Dragon Age II	8.25	Apr-11

Duke Nukem Forever	6.75	Aug-11
Dungeon Defenders	7.75	Jul-11
Dungeon Siege III	8	Jul-11
Dungeons & Dragons: Daggerdale	6	Jul-11
Dynasty Warriors 7	6	Jun-11
Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon	8	Aug-11
Echochrome II	7.25	Feb-11
El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron	9	Sep-11
F.E.A.R. 3	7.75	Aug-11
Fancy Pants Adventure, The	7.5	Jul-11
Fight Night Champion	9	Apr-11
Fight: Lights Out, The	6.5	Jan-11
God of War: Origins Collection	8.5	Oct-11
Gran Turismo 5	9	Feb-11
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	6.5	Aug-11
Hard Corps: Uprising	9	Feb-11
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2	6.5	Sep-11
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1	5.5	Jan-11

Homefront	7	May-11
Ice & Shadow of the Colossus Collection, The	9.75	Oct-11
Infamous 2	8.75	Jul-11
Killzone 3	9	Apr-11
Knights Contract	7	Apr-11
Kung-Fu Live	6.5	Feb-11
L.A. Noire	8.75	Jul-11
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean	7	Jul-11
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	8.5	May-11
LittleBigPlanet 2	9.5	Feb-11
Madden NFL 12	7.5	Oct-11
Magi: The Gathering - Duels of the Planeswalkers 2012	8	Aug-11
Major League Baseball 2K11	8	May-11
Marvel Pinball	8.5	Jan-11
Marvel Super Hero Squad: The Infinity Gauntlet	6.75	Feb-11
Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds	9.25	Mar-11
Mass Effect 2	9.5	Feb-11
Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes HD	7.75	Jun-11

MindJack	5	Mar-11
MLB 11: The Show	9.25	Apr-11
Mortal Kombat	9.5	Jun-11
MX vs. ATV Alive	7	Jul-11
Nail'd	8	Jan-11
NCAA Football 12	9	Aug-11
NHL 12	8.75	Oct-11
No More Heroes: Heroes' Paradise	7.75	Sep-11
Operation Flashpoint: Red River	6	Jun-11
Outland	9	Jun-11
Pac-Man Championship Edition DX	9	Jan-11
PlayStation Move Heroes	6.5	May-11
Portal 2	9.5	Jun-11
Red Faction: Armageddon	7.25	Jul-11
Resistance 3	7	Oct-11
Rush'n Attack: Ex-Patriot	6	Mar-11
Shadows of the Damned	9.25	Aug-11
Shift 2 Unleashed	8.5	May-11
Shoot, The	6	Jan-11
Slam Bolt Scrappers	7	May-11
SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy Seals	7.75	Jun-11
Spare Parts	8	Mar-11
Splatterhouse	5	Feb-11
Stacking	8.5	Mar-11
Super Street Fighter IV: Arcade Edition	7.75	Aug-11
Swarm	7.25	Apr-11
Tales From Space: About A Blob	8.75	Apr-11
Test Drive Unlimited 2	8.5	Mar-11
Thor: God of Thunder	4.5	Jul-11
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters	9	May-11
Time Crisis: Razing Storm	6.75	Jan-11
Top Spin 4	8.5	May-11
Transformers: Dark of the Moon	7.5	Aug-11
Trinity: Souls of Sill O'll	8	Mar-11
Tron: Evolution	4.5	Jan-11
Two Worlds II	7.75	Mar-11
WWE All Stars	7.5	May-11

Yar's Revenge	7.5	Apr-11
You Don't Know Jack	8	Feb-11

XBOX 360

A World Of Keflings	8.25	Jan-11
Adventures of Shuggy, The	8.25	Aug-11
Alice: Madness Returns	6.75	Jul-11
Bangai-O HD: Missile Fury	7.75	Jul-11
Bastion	9.25	Sep-11
Beyond Good & Evil HD	9.25	Apr-11
Bionic Commando Rearmed 2	7.25	Apr-11
Blood Drive	4.5	Jan-11
BloodRayne: Betrayal	7	Sep-11
Body and Brain Connection	5	Mar-11
Bodycount	5	Oct-11
Brink	6.75	Jul-11
Bulletstorm	9.25	Apr-11
Call of Juarez: The Cartel	4.5	Sep-11
Captain America: Super Soldier	7.5	Sep-11
Carnival Games		
Monkey See, Monkey Do	5	Jun-11
Cars 2	7.75	Aug-11
Catherine	7	Aug-11
Child of Eden	8	Jul-11
Create	5	Jan-11
Crimson Alliance	8.75	Oct-11
Crysis 2	9	May-11
DanceMasters	4	Jan-11
de Blob 2	8	Apr-11
Dead Island	8.5	Oct-11
Dead Rising 2: Case West	8	Feb-11
Dead Space 2	9	Feb-11
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	8.5	Oct-11
Dirt 3	8.75	Jul-11
Dishwasher: Vampire Smile, The	8.5	May-11
Dragon Age II	8.25	Apr-11
Duke Nukem Forever	8.75	Aug-11
Dungeon Defenders	7.75	Jul-11
Dungeon Siege III	8	Jul-11
Dungeons & Dragons: Daggerdale	6	Jul-11
Dynasty Warriors 7	8	Jun-11

8 | Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine

Platform PS3 • 360 • PC Release September 6 ESRB M

Within the first few minutes of play, Titus shows us that the ork regime will likely need a bigger army. Space Marine isn't as much a tale of Titus saving a world as it is a story of ork genocide. — Andrew Reiner

7 | Rock of Ages

Platform PS3 • 360 • PC Release September 7 ESRB E10+

If you're looking for one of those rare games that does humor right, Rock of Ages is a stand-out example. It's a shame that the gameplay didn't quite match up. — Phil Kollar

7 | X-Men Destiny

Platform PS3 • 360 Release September 27 ESRB T

X-Men Destiny has a rewarding premise. Create a brawling-heavy action game starring a brand new mutant in the X-Men universe. Choose his or her powers, and upgrade them over the course of the game. Throw in a little RPG conversation and storytelling, and the option to choose sides in the broiling conflict. If only the battles and mission structure kept pace, there'd be a lot to enjoy. Sadly, those elements feel repetitive and generic, and the whole experience is hamstrung as a result. — Matt Miller

7.75 | Tropico 4

Platform 360 Release September 20 ESRB T

If you're willing to put up with a few technical missteps on top of the generally mediocre interface and presentation in return for a fascinating, deep simulation, you might be surprised at how much you like this city-builder. — Adam Biessener

8 | Tetris Axis

Platform 3DS Release October 2 ESRB E

Hudson Soft returns with the latest update in its Tetris Party series of games. Though several modes like Bombliss have been seen before, new takes like the Bejeweled Blitz-inspired Fever keep things interesting. — Bryan Vore

8.25 | Aliens: Infestation

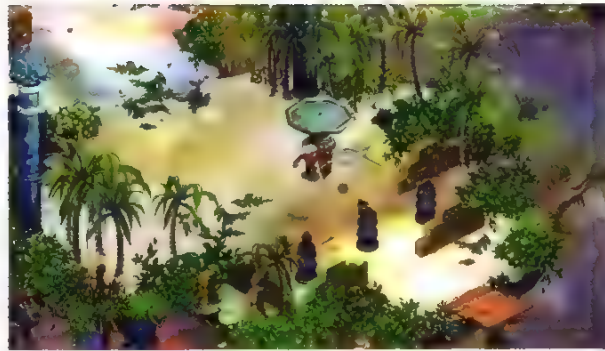
Platform DS Release October 11 ESRB T

Infestation will surprise with its quality. If you're a fan of Metroid, Aliens, or just solid handheld experiences, don't let Infestation become forgotten as the wave of 3DS titles washes over us. — Kyle Hilliard

9.25 | Bastion

Platform 360 Release July 20 ESRB E10+ Issue September '11

The more subtle design elements are what make this game magical – the moments of discovery that peel away the layers of story, the thrill of coming across an abandoned weapon left behind from the old world, and the startling choice that closes the game. The sounds and images stick in your mind after you complete the game just like when you closed the final page on a favorite childhood picture book. – Matt Miller



Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon	8	Aug-11
El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron	9	Sep-11
F.E.A.R. 3	7.75	Aug-11
Faery Legends of Avalon	6	Feb-11
Fancy Pants Adventure, The	7.5	Jul-11
Flight Night Champion	9	Apr-11
From Dust	8.75	Sep-11
Fruit Ninja Kinect	8	Oct-11
Gatling Gears	8	Jul-11
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	6.5	Aug-11
Gunstringer, The	8	Oct-11
Half-Minute Hero: Super Mega Neo Climax	8.25	Sep-11
Hard Corps: Uprising	9	Feb-11
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2	6.5	Sep-11
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1	5.5	Jan-11
Homefront	7	May-11
Illomilo	8.5	Jan-11
Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet	8	Sep-11
Islands of Wakfu	7	Jun-11
Joy Ride	7	Jan-11
Kinect Adventures	7.5	Jan-11
Kinect Sports	6	Jan-11
Kinectimals	8	Jan-11
Knights Contract	7	Apr-11
Kung Fu Panda 2	5	Jul-11
L.A. Noire	8.75	Jul-11
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean	7	Jul-11
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	8.5	May-11
Madden NFL 12	7.5	Oct-11
Magi: The Gathering – Duels of the Planeswalkers 2012	8	Aug-11
Major League Baseball 2K11	6	May-11
Marvel Pinball	8.5	Jan-11
Marvel Super Hero Squad: The Infinity Gauntlet	6.5	Feb-11
Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds	9.25	Mar-11
Michael Jackson: The Experience	7.75	Jun-11
Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes HD	7.75	Jun-11
Mindjack	5	Mar-11
Mortal Kombat	9.5	Jun-11
Ms. Splosion Man	8.75	Aug-11
MX vs. ATV Alive	7	Jul-11
Nail'd	8	Jan-11
NCAA Football 12	9	Aug-11
NHL 12	8.75	Oct-11
Operation Flashpoint: Red River	8	Jun-11
Outland	9	Jun-11
Pac-Man Championship Edition DX	9	Jan-11
Pinball FX 2	9	Jan-11
Portal 2	9.5	Jun-11
Red Faction: Armageddon	7.25	Jul-11
Rush'n Attack: Ex-Patriot	8	Mar-11
Section 8: Prejudice	8	Jun-11
Shadows of the Damned	9.25	Aug-11

Shift 2 Unleashed	8.5	May-11
Spare Parts	6	Mar-11
Splatterhouse	5	Feb-11
Stacking	8.5	Mar-11
Super Street Fighter IV Arcade Edition	7.75	Aug-11
Swarm	7.25	Apr-11
Test Drive Unlimited 2	8.5	Mar-11
Thor: God of Thunder	4.5	Jul-11
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters	9	May-11
Torchlight	8.5	May-11
Transformers: Dark of the Moon	7.5	Aug-11
Trenched	7.5	Aug-11
Tron: Evolution	4.5	Jan-11
Two Worlds II	7.75	Mar-11
UFC Personal Trainer: The Ultimate Fitness System	5	Sep-11
Venetica	5.5	Mar-11
WWE All Stars	7.5	May-11
Yar's Revenge	7.5	Apr-11
Yoostar 2	6	Apr-11
You Don't Know Jack	8	Feb-11

Wii		
Babysitting Mama	8	Jan-11
Bt.Trip Complete	8	Oct-11
Bt.Trip Flux	8.25	May-11
Conduit 2	6	Jun-11
Create	5	Jan-11
de Blob 2	8	Apr-11
Epic Mickey	7.75	Jan-11
Flip's Twisted World	3.5	Jan-11
Ghost Recon	4.5	Jan-11
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean	7	Jul-11
Lost In Shadow	7.5	Feb-11
Mario Sports Mix	4.5	Mar-11
Marvel Super Hero Squad: The Infinity Gauntlet	6.75	Feb-11
Michael Jackson: The Experience	6.5	Jan-11
Sonic Colors	7	Jan-11
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters	8.75	May-11

Tron: Evolution Battle Grids	6	Jan-11
You Don't Know Jack	8	Feb-11

PC		
Atica: Madness Returns	6.75	Jul-11
Anomaly: Warzone Earth	8	Jun-11
Bejeweled	9	Jan-11
Brink	6.75	Jul-11
Bulletstorm	9.25	Apr-11
Call of Juarez: The Cartel	4.5	Sep-11
Create	5	Jan-11
Crysis 2	9	May-11
Darksports	8.5	Jun-11
Dead Space 2	9	Feb-11
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	8.5	Oct-11
Divinity II: Flames of Vengeance	7.75	Jan-11
Duke Nukem Forever	6.75	Aug-11
Dungeon Siege III	8	Jul-11
Dungeons	7	Apr-11
Dungeons of Dredmor	8	Sep-11
F.E.A.R. 3	7.75	Aug-11
Homefront	7	May-11
Magi: The Gathering – Duels of the Planeswalkers 2012	8	Aug-11
Magicka	7.5	Apr-11
Operation Flashpoint: Red River	8	Jun-11
Portal 2	9.5	Jun-11
Section 8: Prajudice	8	Jun-11
Shift 2 Unleashed	8.5	May-11
Sims Medieval, The	7	Jun-11
Total War: Shogun 2	9.5	Apr-11
Two Worlds II	7.75	Mar-11
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II – Retribution	7.75	May-11
Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings, The	9.25	Jul-11
Yar's Revenge	7.5	Apr-11

NINTENDO DS		
Cars 2	7.75	Aug-11
Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker 2	7.5	Oct-11
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation	8.5	Mar-11

Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective	6	Feb-11
Kingdom Hearts: Re:coded	6.75	Feb-11
Kirby Mass Attack	8.5	Oct-11
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	6.5	May-11
Monster Tale	8	Apr-11
Okami	8.75	Mar-11
Plants vs. Zombies	8.25	Feb-11
Pokémon Black/White	8.75	Mar-11
Radiant Historia	8.75	Mar-11
Sonic Colors	8.5	Jan-11

PSP		
3rd Birthday, The	6.75	May-11
Dissidia 012 Final Fantasy	7	Apr-11
Final Fantasy IV: The Complete Collection	8.5	May-11
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	8.5	May-11
Lord of Arcana	7	Mar-11
Patapon 3	6.75	Jun-11
Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together	9	Mar-11
Ys: The Oath in Felghana	8.5	Jan-11

3DS		
Cartoon Network: Punch Time Explosion	4.75	Jul-11
Ghost Recon: Shadow Wars	8.25	May-11
Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D, The	9.25	Jul-11
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	6.5	May-11
Madden NFL 3DS	6	May-11
Nintendogs + Cats	6.5	May-11
Plotwings Resort	7.25	May-11
Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D	8	Aug-11
Ridge Racer 3D	7.25	May-11
Star Fox 64 3D	8.25	Oct-11
Steel Diver	4	May-11
Super Street Fighter IV 3D Edition	9	Apr-11
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell 3D	5	Jun-11

8.5 | Dead Island

Platform PS3 • 360 • PC Release September 6 ESRB M Issue October '11

Rewarding character progression and the vast variety of weapons should appeal to anyone looking for a good time. If you've spent your time planning for the zombie apocalypse, Dead Island is the best option so far to test how long you'd last. – Tim Turi



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In memory of Paul Anderson

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Reflections
on the
Passing

of
**Bill
Kunkel,**

the Father of Game Journalism

by Matt Helgeson

Bill Kunkel died in September from a heart attack at the age of 61. You might not know who he is, but he's one of the reasons you're reading *Game Informer* today. Starting in 1980 with a column in *Video* magazine, Kunkel and his partner Arnie Katz began the very first column that reviewed video games. In 1981, Kunkel and Katz (along with Joyce Worley) founded *Electronic Games*, the first video game consumer magazine. Every gaming magazine and website you read today – including *Game Informer* – descends from the work the trio did in *Electronic Games*.

In the years following *Electronic Games*, Bill Kunkel had a successful and wildly varied career, but always stayed close to his first love, games. As a journalist, he wrote a popular column called "The Game Doctor" that appeared in *EGM* and *Computer Gaming World*. He also wrote for *The New York Times*, served as the editor in chief of *Tips & Tricks* until the publication folded in 2007, and wrote strategy guides for Prima. He also published an entertaining, gonzo memoir of his wild life and times, *Confessions of the Game Doctor*.

Kunkel branched out from writing later in life, working as a game designer on titles like *Batman Returns*, *Bart's Nightmare*, and *The Omicron Conspiracy*, which led to a job teaching game design at the University of Las Vegas. For many years, he worked as an editor at *Running With Scissors*, consulting and writing PR and editorial copy for the controversial *Postal* franchise. A lifelong fan of professional wrestling, he also wrote for *Pro Wrestling Torch* and *Wrestling Perspective*.

To help honor his career, we contacted some people in the industry that were friends, colleagues, or admirers of his work over the years. Here are their tributes to Bill Kunkel. Rest well, Game Doctor.



Arnie Katz

Co-founder of
Electronic Games

Bill Kunkel wasn't just my partner in Katz Kunkel Worley, Inc., for nearly 25 years. He was my closest friend for more than three decades. With a bow of respect to others who have fashioned fine careers in writing and editing, Bill Kunkel was my finest student.

We encountered each other in the Science Fiction Fandom. We traded fanzines and met again at the 1967 World SF Convention. Well, actually, Joyce met Bill and me, but Bill and I didn't see each other there.

Though Bill faded from Fandom after that convention, he stayed in contact enough to find out that Joyce and I got married in April of 1971. About a month later, Bill and his girlfriend Charlene Komar called and then came over for a visit.

The couples clicked immediately. We started visiting regularly and they joined the informal sci-fi club Joyce and I hosted. Bill and Charlene co-edited a fanzine called *Rats!* and Bill also wrote an entertaining personalzine, *Dead Flowers*, named for a Rolling Stones tune. We spent many Saturdays running off our fanzines.

We bonded during those long Saturday afternoons of printing and collating. Yet the single incident that made Bill, Joyce, and I lifelong close friends had nothing to do with science fiction or even Fandom. In light of our subsequent history, it couldn't have been more appropriate.

Bill and Charlene told us they were going to Chicago to visit relatives. We met them in midtown Manhattan, where we ate a meal together at Nathan's in Times Square.

Bill and Charlene headed for the Port Authority Bus Terminal, located along a particularly grungy slice of 8th Avenue between 42nd and 43rd Streets. We walked down to the corner with them. They'd hardly disappeared from sight when Joyce and I slunk off to our guilty secret. We had become regular patrons of a lurid den of iniquity heralded over its entrance by a garish slash of neon that read "Fascination."

It was the kind of place Joyce's mom had warned her against – a Times Square amusement arcade. During the lull between the heyday of pinball and the debut of electronic coin-ops, arcades had sunk to a bottom-of-the-barrel reputation, seedy at best, downright dangerous at worst.

We played mostly target-shooters and skee ball until first Astro Chase and then Pong seized prime locations in Fascination. It didn't take long for Joyce and me to take over the arcade's only Pong machine. Armed with as many quarters as we could afford, we became immersed in a fierce but friendly competition for digital tennis supremacy.



Bill Kunkel (left) pictured with Joyce Worley and Arnie Katz



A noise behind us made me take a quick sidelong glance between volleys. It was Bill and Charlene! They'd run into a problem with the bus schedule, decided the visit would be ridiculously short by the time they caught a bus for Chicago, and went to do indulge their secret vice.

The two couples, already united in Fandom, discovered that we were also comrades

in the still-embryonic brotherhood of electronic gamers. And that, fellow gamers, was a feeling that never died.

Greg Kasavin

Former *GameSpot* editor-in-chief,
writer/designer at Supergiant Games

I never met Bill Kunkel, but his name meant a lot to me for years. It's the first name I recognized while reading gaming magazines as a kid. These days it seems game players are still fighting for the legitimacy of the medium. But to me the legitimacy of the medium was never really in question, because for as long as I can remember there were guys like Bill, who treated the subject with care and their readership with respect. I no longer remember too many specifics from the publications he wrote for, but I definitely remember how excited I felt to get those issues in the mail. I now make games instead of write about them, though I was part of what felt like an entire generation of game writers inspired by Bill's work. My condolences to his family and friends, and may he rest in peace.

Vince Desi

Founder and CEO, *Running With Scissors*

Bill and I met around 1980 and we instantly hit it off. I had just started working as a consultant for Atari and Bill had started *Electronic Games* magazine. Right away, I knew he was a special person. Bill was very professional and an excellent writer. He was honest and genuine. Bill was a creative person, everything from being a writer, a musician, and an artist. But he loved writing and he loved video games. He loved wrestling and he loved mob stories. He was a different kind of guy – very much his own person. He's done everything from writing to designing games.

He was independent. Bill would tell me if something sucked about *Running With*

Scissors or *Postal*. If I had an idea, Bill would just say, "Are you f----- out of your mind?" When he was in Las Vegas he was teaching classes about video game design, and he always had time for everyone. I can't tell you how much richer he made me as

a person and how much he influenced my life. Most people in this industry, you send them an email and you're lucky if you get a response. Bill would reach out to anyone from a kid in 8th grade to someone that's thinking of going to Full Sail. That's an amazing, rare character. How many people do you know in this business that will help you without wanting something from you?

He was a renaissance man in the electronic games industry. I know Bill, if he's listening now, he's laughing and saying, "Vince, give it a break."

Steven L. Kent

Game journalist, author of *The Ultimate History of Videogames* and *The Clone Republic*

In 1993, I had written two game reviews for *The Seattle Times* and was working for the public relations firm of Morse-McFadden when [*Electronic Games* co-founder] Joyce Worley called for a product sample. I talked her into letting me write a review and the next thing you know, I am a protégé of Katz, Kunkel, and Worley.

What you read in a column by the Game Doctor was what you got when you spoke with Bill. He told you what he thought and he didn't hold back, mince words, or leave much to your imagination. As journalists go, Arnie Katz was the Tim Russert of the group – the fair-minded diplomat who gave everyone the same treatment. Joyce Worley was more of the Tom Brokaw bent. Bill was Howard Cosell incarnate. There was color in everything he said and wrote. It made him the most quotable of game journalism's founding trinity. I think it also made him the most beloved by gamers. Arnie and Joyce had parental voices, Bill was your sometimes-nasty bigger brother who said cool things and challenged authority.

I remember when GameWorks began opening its overpriced arcades. I mentioned to Bill how much I liked them. He asked me, "You ever see *Pulp Fiction*? GameWorks is like the milkshake in *Pulp Fiction*. It's a five-dollar milkshake. I don't know whether it's worth five dollars, but it's pretty f----- good."

Dan Amrich

Former writer at *Official Xbox Magazine*, *GamesRadar*, and *GamePro*, Social Media Manager at Activision

When I was growing up, there was no magazine I loved more than *Electronic Games*. It covered everything from arcades and pinballs to home consoles and handheld LED games. I was 10 when it came out; I read each issue literally dozens of times. I no longer have any issues because they all fell apart from overuse.

Other magazines mentioned video games, and I read stuff like *Family Computing* too, but nothing embraced the escapist joy of gaming the way *EG* did. The magazine treated games with respect; to me, that was Bill Kunkel's lasting influence.

He covered fun in a serious way – he knew this stuff mattered on an emotional level but never approached things cynically. At a time when you generally went to a toy store to buy games, *Electronic Games* did not treat games as toys and it did not treat its readers as children. For me, that set the standard.

John Davison

CBS Interactive vice president of programming

When I moved from the U.K. in 1998 to take the reins of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, I didn't really know anyone in the U.S. games media business. I'd not really grown up with the names that many of you know and love here. I knew of Bill by reputation, of course, but I'd never actually met him.

My enduring memory of Bill was that he was one of the very first people to reach

out and say hello once he'd heard there was someone new at *EGM*. While some folks were clearly wary of yet another goddamn Brit invading the American market and interfering with a beloved games magazine, Bill was friendly and welcoming. He picked up the phone, said hello, and wished me luck.

Very classy. I'm sad that we never got to know each other better, but I'll always remember that call.

Harold Goldberg

Game journalist, author of *All Your Base Are Belong To Us: How Fifty Years of Videogames Conquered Pop Culture*

It's often said that Bill Kunkel (along with Arnie Katz) created video game journalism. You don't create something that was already there, and journalism was already there. But Katz and Kunkel, with their thoughtful (and sometimes enjoyably peculiar) riffs on journalism, proved there was a market for writing about games. They turned their dream into a profitable business, one that not only cared about making money, but one that cared about writers as well. That kind of embracing attitude is too often lost on game journalism entrepreneurs today.

Kunkel, with his hard-partying persona and cranky musings, was a true creative spirit, as independent-minded as the rant-ordered Lester Bangs in music journalism, if not as wonderfully wild with his words.

Kunkel's incisive words often rang true with singular passion and been-there-saw-that knowledge, whether in a foreword to someone else's tome or in his own 200-page *Confessions of the Game Doctor*. He was one of the few people who excelled at anything to which he set his mind. He moved into designing games. He wrote stories for comic books. He even was a wrestling announcer. That's either initiative-filled hustle for making a living with one's craft or the sign of a real renaissance man. I prefer to think it's the latter...definitely the latter. ♦

Transformers Primer

Fall of Cybertron hopes to grow the storytelling potential of Transformers into a richer, character-driven science fiction epic. However, new fans could be forgiven if some of the existing jargon remains a mystery. Here's your cheat sheet for the game's universe.

+ Transformer

The sentient robotic lifeforms that exist on Cybertron. The name originates from their ability to alter their own forms for various purposes, including disguise, mobility, speed, flight, or combat. Transformers vary widely in form, size, and capabilities.

+ Cybertron

The home planet of the Transformers is a technological world of metal. The essence of Primus, the creator of the Transformers, is embodied in Cybertron. Long ago, a Cybertronian golden age spread across the galaxy through the use of a technological marvel called the space bridges. Later, a civil war tore the civilization asunder, and the technology of this interstellar transport system was all but lost. Recently, Cybertron's core was contaminated by dark energon, and the entire world has shut down to repair itself.

+ Autobot

A shortened form of "autonomous robots," this faction arose when Orion Pax (later named Optimus Prime) used the concept to challenge the long servitude of his fellow Transformers under a rigid caste system, insisting that all citizens deserved autonomy.

+ Decepticon

A militaristic faction that arose under the leadership of Megatron, a former gladiator turned freedom fighter from the lower castes of Cybertronian society. Originally, the group and its leader used deception to mask their presence to society's leaders. The Decepticons would eventually conquer most of the planet, corrupt Cybertron's core, and necessitate the exodus of Cybertronian society into deep space.

+ Matrix

This powerful artifact was given to Optimus Prime before the core shut down – a fragment of the great planet's spark. Beyond offering great power and wisdom to its bearer, it also holds the key to one day restoring Cybertron to its former glory.

+ Ark

Optimus Prime ordered the creation of this great transport ship that would carry the last of the Autobots into outer space.

+ Nemesis

Megatron's hulking Decepticon warship pursues the Autobots into space.

+ Teletran

This sprawling planet-wide computer system and network holds all the currently known data and history of the Transformers. Optimus Prime plans to take a fragment of Teletran into space aboard the Ark, thus preserving Cybertronian culture.

+ Energon

The energy source and fundamental sustenance for all Transformers, energon flows from the planet's core outward. A sinister equivalent called dark energon was used by Megatron to corrupt Cybertron's core and halt the flow of normal Energon throughout the planet.

+ Earth

This distant organic planet is still populated by dinosaurs when the Transformers abandon their home planet of Cybertron. At some point after their departure from Cybertron, both the Autobots and Decepticons arrive and continue their war on Earth. The many years in between remain a largely untold story.



by Matt Miller

JOURNALISM WITH GUTS

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