



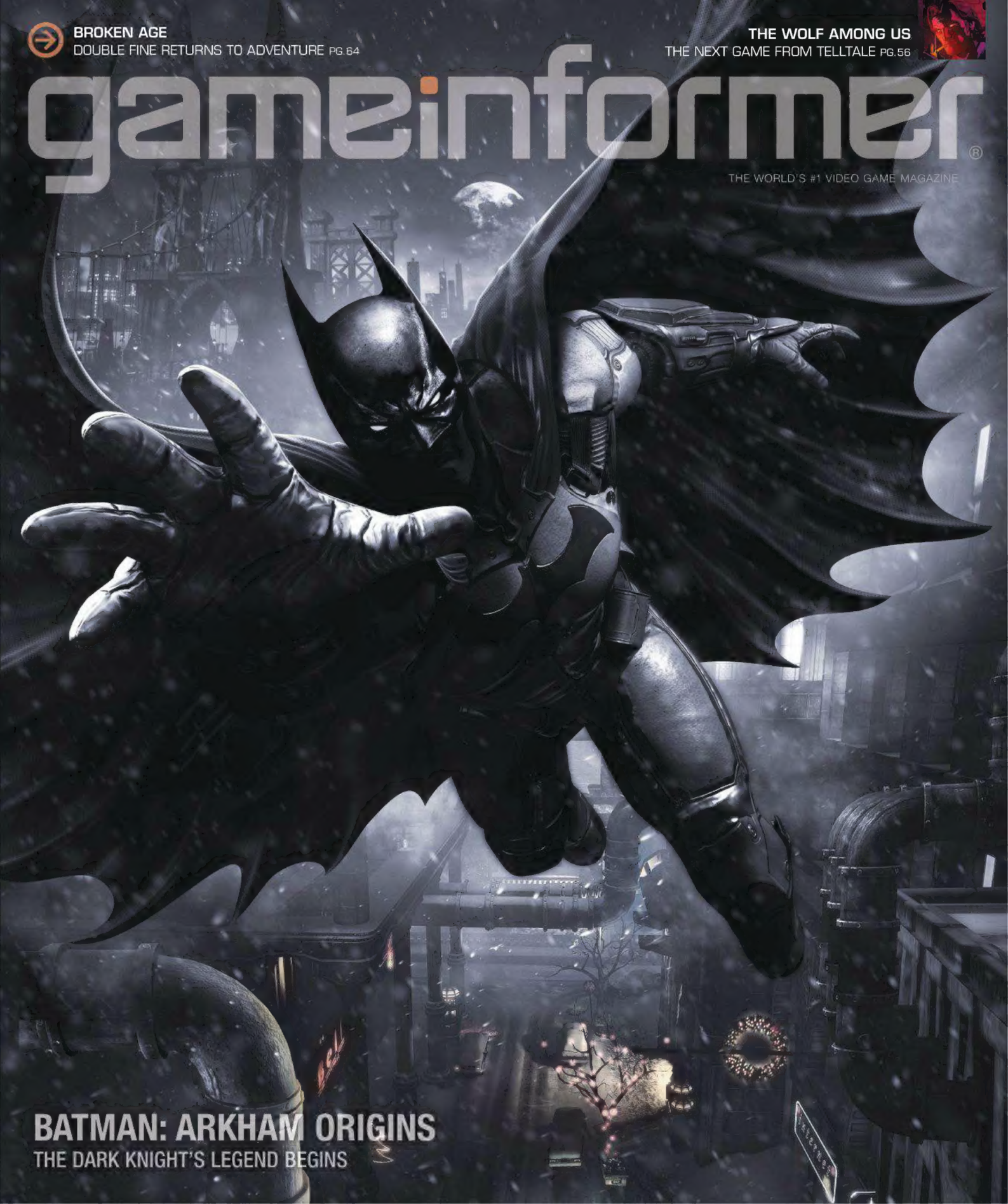
**BROKEN AGE**  
DOUBLE FINE RETURNS TO ADVENTURE PG. 64

**THE WOLF AMONG US**  
THE NEXT GAME FROM TELLTALE PG. 56



# gameinformer®

THE WORLD'S #1 VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE



**BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS**  
THE DARK KNIGHT'S LEGEND BEGINS

# We made the best Civic even better.

Introducing a funner, smarter, techier Honda Civic. Funner, with Pandora® compatibility.<sup>1</sup> Smarter, with a customizable multi-informational display and SMS texting functionality.<sup>2</sup> Techier, with standard features like *Bluetooth*,<sup>3</sup> USB integration<sup>4</sup> and rearview camera. Basically, it's everything...er.

CIVIC



<sup>1</sup>Pandora, the Pandora logo, and the Pandora trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of Pandora Media, Inc. Used with permission. Compatible with select smartphones. See: [www.pandora.com/everywhere/mobile](http://www.pandora.com/everywhere/mobile). Not all devices compatible with USB connection. Your wireless carrier's rate plans apply. <sup>2</sup>Compatible with select phones with *Bluetooth*. Your wireless carrier's rate plans apply. State or local laws may limit use of texting feature. Only use texting feature when conditions allow you to do so safely. <sup>3</sup>The



er'



er



Bluetooth® word mark and logos are owned by the Bluetooth SIG, Inc., and any use of such marks by Honda Motor Co., Ltd., is under license. 4The USB Audio Interface is used for direct connection to and control of some current digital audio players and other USB devices that contain MP3, WMA or AAC music files. Some USB devices with security software and digital rights-protected files may not work. Please see your Honda dealer for details. EX-L model shown. ©2013 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.

## McNamara Internet Item Guilt Syndrome



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

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

I can distinctly remember my reaction when I first heard about people spending real money on virtual goods. My mind flashed and my mouth uttered the words, "That is one of the stupidest things I have ever heard of – these people are morons."

For many of you, I can imagine your reaction was very similar to my own. For others, there is an entire generation that was born into a world where real money for virtual goods is just how things work.

This scares me.

As an old-school gamer, I was slowly but surely introduced to the practice. In the early days of massively multiplayer games, farmers would offer gold for cash. Second Life removed the middleman and just went with straight goods and services for cash, and now we have entire game economies built around the premise.

What's interesting to me is the psychological game at play here. When I play a free game and like it, I feel guilty that I am playing a game for free and the developer deserves my support (read: money) for what they have created and the entertainment value I am getting from their product.

The guilt drives me to buy something: a box of gems, camouflage, or a virtual weapon. The moment I purchase my new item, I am proud of myself for supporting the developer and sometimes even sit and admire my new virtual item in all its glory. "Do I look good in that spiked helmet or what?"

Then the real magic happens. Now I start to feel a different kind of guilt. I just spent five dollars on a virtual hat that I will never wear and never truly own. In a couple months when I never play this game again, I will look back at it as wasted dollars on something I didn't really need.

I call this M.I.I.G.S. – McNamara Internet Item Guilt Syndrome (feel free to use it). It's a horrible disease and one that is actively exploited by game designs. What's worse is that I'm starting to become comfortable with the affliction. I have bought completely worthless vanity items in first-person shooters. Just so the idiocy of that statement doesn't escape you, in a first-person shooter game – where you can't see the items you purchased – I bought new gear so I wouldn't look like a noob to other players. These impulsive buying decisions lead to... you guessed it...more M.I.I.G.S.

It's a brave new world out there, and you can expect even more microtransactions and virtual goods as gaming moves forward. And, in my case, more guilt. Even with all my anxieties from virtual goods, I still can't stop myself from loving gaming in all its incarnations, but let's hope the tricks of removing a fool from his money are tools that developers use responsibly.

Cheers,

# 0513

contents

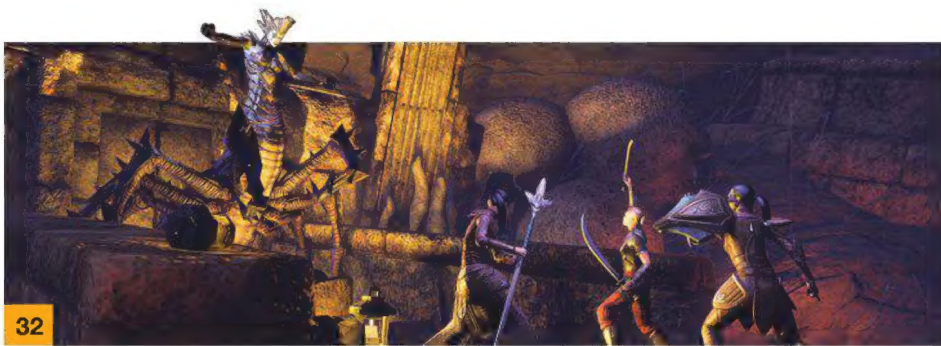


# » 40

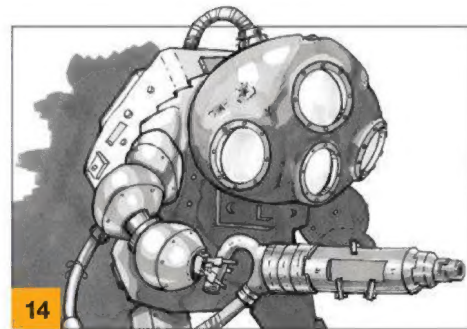
## Batman: Arkham Origins

Taking place on a dark Christmas Eve years before the events of Arkham Asylum, the next Batman title showcases a younger Bruce still trying to figure out his role as Gotham City's Dark Knight. See what new studio Warner Bros. Games Montreal has in store for the Arkham franchise.

by Bryan Vore



32



14



75



83

BioShock Infinite

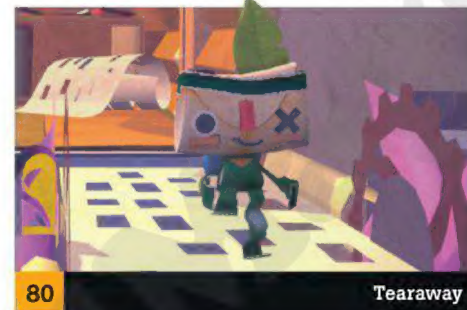


22

The Red Flags of Modern Gaming



38



80

Tearaway

## regulars

### » 6 Feedback

This month readers celebrate the hard work of video game writers, applaud us for not forgetting about Sly Cooper, demand to play as the bad guy, and request that the new Sam Fisher be a different person.

### » 12 Connect

We discuss the SimCity launch debacle, take a look at BioShock Infinite developer Irrational Games' relationship with its characters, meet up with Steve Wozniak, celebrate Rock Band, and tell you how to spot a game that cares more about money than game design.

### » 70 Previews

Find out everything we know about the PS4 titles Killzone: Shadow Fall and Infamous: Second Son. We also take a look at the new Saints Row (now with superpowers!) and Media Molecule's upcoming Vita title, Tearaway.

### » 82 Reviews

We put BioShock Infinite and Gears of War: Judgment through their paces to see if they live up to their predecessors. We also offer our final SimCity thoughts, play the new Starcraft II expansion, and explore Luigi's new mansions.

### » 100 Game Over

Before making a name for himself as the creator of Mega Man and working with games like Resident Evil and Dead Rising, Keiji Inafune worked on Street Fighter. It was his first game, and it would become a series that Inafune would make sure Capcom never tosses aside.



92 Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon



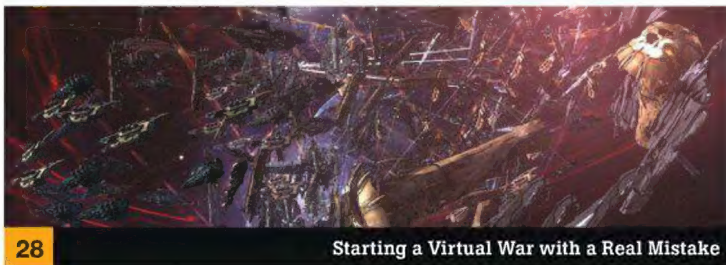
90



64



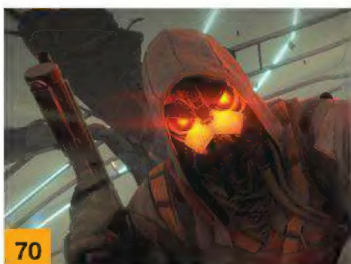
81 Muramasa Rebirth



28 Starting a Virtual War with a Real Mistake



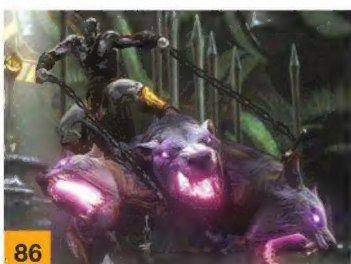
34



70



56 The Wolf Among Us



86

## games index

Anomaly 2	31
Batman: Arkham Origins	40
Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate	52
BioShock Infinite	83
Breach & Clear	81
Broken Age	64
Dollar Dash	94
Elder Scrolls Online, The	32
Etrian Odyssey IV	93
Fuse	72
Gears of War: Judgment	88
God of War: Ascension	86
Impire	94
Infamous: Second Son	74
Killzone: Shadow Fall	70
Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon	92
Mew-Genics	30
MLB 13: The Show	87
MLB 2K13	94
Muramasa Rebirth	81
NCAA Football 14	76
Need for Speed: Most Wanted U	94
Path of Exile	79
Payday 2	77
Phantom Breaker: Battle Grounds	94
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Gates to Infinity	91
Saints Row IV	75
Sanctum 2	31
SimCity	90
Sniper Elite: Nazi Zombie Army	94
StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm	89
Tearaway	80
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 14	91
Valley Without Wind 2, A	94
Wildstar	78
Wolf Among Us, The	56
Year Walk	94



is saving your digital life  
just the beginning?

# absolutely™

Save  
Digital  
Storage



Share  
Personal Cloud  
Storage



Stream  
HD  
Routers



Enjoy  
Media  
Players



wd.com

Western Digital, WD, and the WD logo are registered trademarks of Western Digital Technologies, Inc., in the U.S. and other countries. Absolutely is a trademark of Western Digital Technologies, Inc. Other marks may be mentioned herein that belong to other companies. Product specifications subject to change without notice. Picture shown may vary from actual product. ©2013 WD, a Western Digital company. All rights reserved.



**T**his month in Feedback, readers dream of being a super villain, lament an Aliens game gone wrong, cry foul over a voice-acting switcheroo, and question the purpose of not one, but two different ratings systems.

## The Write Stuff

Thanks so much for your article on video game writers (The Writers' Room, issue 239). I've been working professionally as a writer for over 13 years, and I'm constantly telling folks (especially my non-gaming friends) that some of the best storytelling and writing happening today is in video games. I really appreciated the behind-the-scenes look into the evolution of storytelling in games, and I'm more excited than ever to see where things go in the future!

**Jeremy D. Wells**  
Austin, TX

I really enjoyed your article on video game storytelling. It was truly interesting to find out how the writing process works with games, and the fact that people still look down on this industry boggles the mind. There is a great deal of talent present in the gaming world, and it's worth respecting the people who devote so much of their time to something which is only starting to be recognized as an art form.

**Scott Smith**  
Nederland, TX

**Video game storytelling has certainly come a long way since the industry's early years, and the next generation of consoles will only continue to provide developers with more ways to tell compelling stories. For more on how video game storytelling has evolved over the years, watch The Writers' Room Editor Discussion on Gameinformer.com.**

## Game Over, Man!

My dream of being an ultimate badass has been crushed. Countless years of development with a beloved franchise and we're cursed with the creation of Aliens: Colonial Marines. Really? Why didn't someone tell Gearbox and TimeGate Studios to "Get away from her, you b----!?" This is truly painful. The letdown is so heavy that I say we take off and nuke the entire site from orbit. It's the only way to be sure.

**Ron Kerbow**  
via email

entry from Sanzaru Games will attract more players to the franchise.

**Connor Tripp**  
via email

**We were delighted to find out that sneaking around as our favorite raccoon thief is still as fun as we remembered. Hopefully other gamers agree, because the industry could use a few more lighthearted, family-friendly alternatives to the standard, violence-driven action game.**

**You're not the only one disappointed with how Aliens: Colonial Marines turned out, Rob, but you did use the most movie quotes in your rebuke of the game, so you have our respect. Here's hoping someday a developer can finally deliver the Aliens game that fans deserve.**

## Thieves Like Us

I appreciate all of the coverage you gave Sly Cooper: Thieves In Time over the past year. I have been a longtime fan of the Sly Cooper series, pickpocketing guards and climbing ropes throughout my childhood. I could not be happier with the 9 out of 10 the game received last month! I really think Sly Cooper is an underappreciated game series, and hopefully the new



## Contact Us

feedback@gameinformer.com



## The Scales Of Justice

For too long, games have been subjected to a 10-point scale. People go crazy for 9s and 10s, are okay with 8s, and forget almost anything 7 and under. Why do we need scores? It's like a shackle that holds back games and keeps people from playing them. If you look at the other big mediums (movies, music, books) they focus on the criticism. They focus on analyzing the work and explaining to the reader whether it's worthy of engagement or not. Gaming publications and gamers need to move past the scale and focus on analyzing gaming experiences rather than getting hung up on a score. Who cares what Dead Space 3 got? Let's talk about whether the developers crafted an enjoyable experience or not.

**Husain Sumra**  
via email

You're not entirely wrong, Husain – the text of a review is more important than the score. However, a review score still has value; it provides a clear idea of the reviewer's overall enjoyment of the video game. That's why the other mediums you mentioned also have review scales, whether they're based on numbers, stars, or thumbs. That gamers seem especially prone to fixating on scores and forgetting that reviews are one person's opinion is a legitimate problem, but not one that's going to be fixed by dropping the review scale.



## Say Goodnight to the Bad Guy



Why don't more games put you in the role of the villain? Being the bad guy, building a criminal empire from the ground up, and killing good guys sounds just as exciting as being the good guy. Becoming someone's evil arch nemesis sounds appealing to me. Developers: Let me rain darkness over all, please.

**Karl Marszalowicz**  
via email

Your attraction to being evil is kind of creeping us out, but you might be on to something. Rarely do we get the chance to be a full-fledged villain. However, if you really want to be taken seriously as an evil mastermind someday, you'll probably need to stop saying "please" so much.

## Searching for Sam Fisher

After reading your Splinter Cell: Blacklist preview in issue 239, I'm kind of upset that Michael Ironside is not voicing Sam Fisher; they could've had Sam in a desk job, briefing you on missions instead of changing the voice of the character and keeping the name. I understand that they needed a younger actor who could run and jump around, but just create a new character. I feel as if they did Michael Ironside wrong; I grew up with his voice being Sam.

**Rachael McMillan**  
via email

We would've been okay with Ubisoft swapping Sam Fisher for a new protagonist in Blacklist. However, that's an easy call for us to make – our jobs aren't riding on the question of whether or not players would buy a Splinter Cell game that doesn't star Sam Fisher. If Fisher's younger look still upsets you, just do what we do and pretend he has that Benjamin Button disease.

## Short Answers to Readers' Burning Questions:

"Which friend of Sonic's is your favorite?"

The dumb one with all the tails.

"Salve, è vero che GTA V esce a Settembre?"

Si, è vero.

"Do you guys celebrate Boxing Day?"

Not since Tyson bit that guy's ear off.

## Worst News Tip of the Month:

"I make a new E.Mail"

## Quantified!

More readers said they'd buy a PS4 to play a remake of Final Fantasy VII than a new Final Fantasy.

## Question of the Month:

Do you prefer indie games or triple-A blockbusters, and why?

gi spy



**(Left)** iam8bit's Jon Gibson (front), Nike's Hayden Walling, gNET's Shelby Hill, and fortyseven communications' Sibel Sunar were ready to party at this year's D.I.C.E. **(Right)** Also in attendance: Nintendo's Marc Franklin, GTTV's Geoff Keighley, and Foundation 9's Tom Russo.

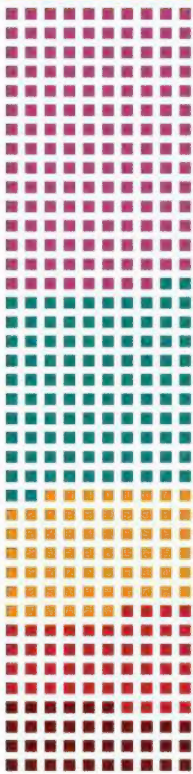
CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

GI SPY

continued on page 8

feedback 7

## On Your Mind



- 37% Next-Gen Dream Games
- 26% Fans of The Writers' Room
- 16% Sly Cooper Love
- 8% Aliens: Colonial Marines Gripes
- 6% Rayman Legends Delay Rage

## Simply Irresistible

In issue 239, we asked readers what game would make them buy a next-gen console. Much to our surprise, *Kingdom Hearts 3* won in a landslide. Here are some of the responses.

Kingdom Hearts definitely would make me buy a new system. It's the reason I got my PS2, Gameboy Advance, and my DS in the first place. I only bought a PS3 because I assumed KH 3 would be out by now.

**David Bazile**

If Valve had Half-Life 3 or Half-Life 2: Episode 3 in the Steam Box's launch lineup, I would definitely buy one.

**Seth Lamoreaux**

I wouldn't hesitate for a second to buy a next-gen console if a new game in the Red Dead series was released for it.

**Damien Cowger**

The next Fallout would make me buy a next-gen console.

**Sidney Reese**

Call me a dreamer, but my choice is clear: Shenmue 3.

**Jon Leza**



## The Ratings Game

I want to ask what are your thoughts on ESRB ratings? I am 15 years old and can only play select M-rated games. I think the Mature rating is too broad. It covers both games like Grand Theft Auto and games like Halo. The M rating should be split into degrees of intensity, so when a new Call of Duty comes out and I talk to my dad, he doesn't psychologically jump to the worst M-rated game he can think of. It's interesting to think that one letter on the box cover is such a turn-off for parents. Even with rating terms on the back like "Blood and Gore," "Strong Violence," and "Language," you can't really tell what's in the game.

**Jacob Rork**  
via email

We're guessing your displeasure with the ESRB stems from your inability to play more M-rated games, but having extra information is never a bad thing. While the sparse descriptions on game boxes can be vague, the ESRB website has detailed breakdowns of every title's content. Directing your dad toward them probably won't change his mind about which games you can play, but at least he'll be more informed the next time he shoots you down.

(Left) Ben Reeves, Ben Hanson, and Bryan Vore posed with some of the Thief team during their trip to Eidos Montreal. (Right) While in Montreal, our trio also harassed Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak in the lobby of their hotel. Leave Woz alone!



GI SPY

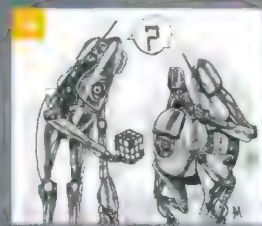
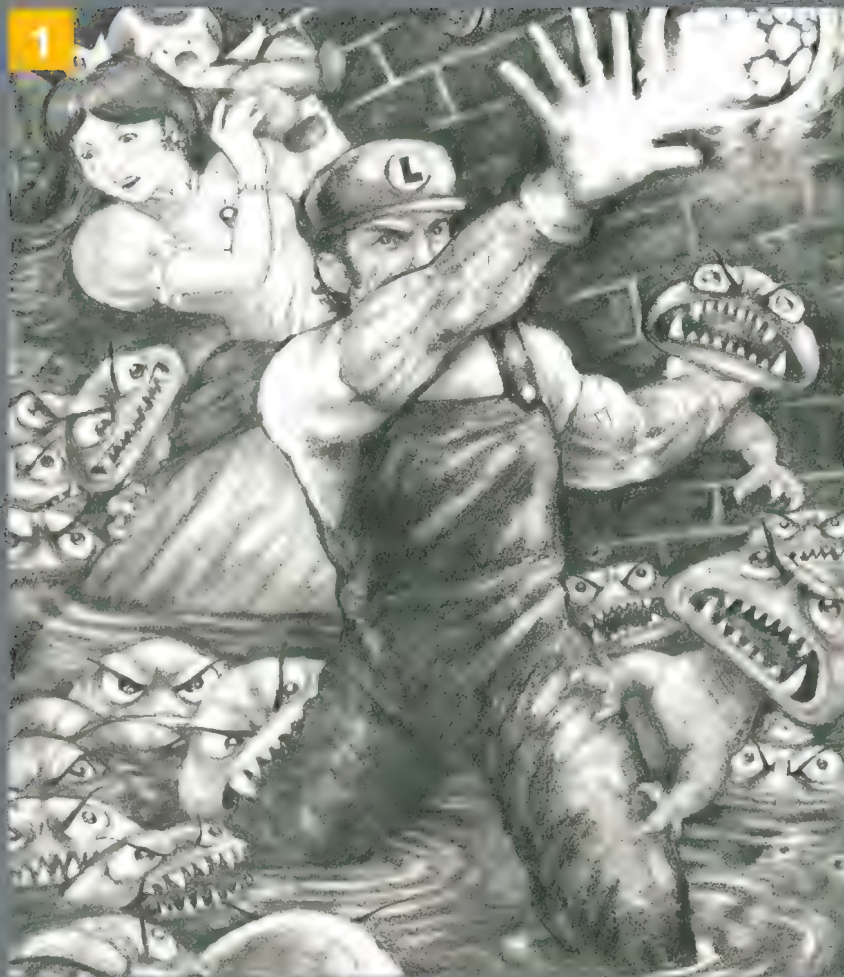
continued on page 10



ANYONE CAN RECOGNIZE DESPAIR. MARINES STEP IN TO FIGHT IT.



[MARINES.COM](http://MARINES.COM)



**WINNERS**

**1 Patrick Waugh**

*Let's hope Nintendo never jumps on the "gritty reboot" bandwagon.*

**2 Elizabeth Santana**

*When did Ganon decide it would look cool to embed a rupee in his forehead?*

**3 Betsy Zeeryp**

*We're hoping that there isn't an elaborate fan fiction revolving around this image.*

**4 Sandra Martinez**

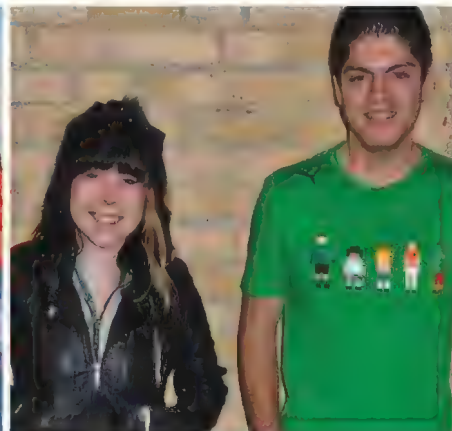
*You can't solve everything with portals, guys.*

Submit your art for a chance to win our monthly prize. Please include your name and return address. Entries become the property of Game Informer and cannot be returned. Send to: Game Informer Reader Art Contest | 724 First Street North, 3rd Floor | Mpls, MN 55401 or Email to: ReaderArt@gameinformer.com

**3-SPY**

continued from page 8

**(Left)** While checking out Thief, Bryan got to try out Garrett's new bow. Why do developers keep trusting GI editors with weapons? **(Center)** We don't deliver Game Informer to Antarctica, so Siri Gossman brought her own copies while assisting scientists at the South Pole. **(Right)** Meet Game Informer's newest interns: Kayla Herrera and Louis Garcia. Thanks for all your hard work!





gameinformer.com

explore our unique  
online lineup...



**Test Chamber** Game Informer staff fires up the latest releases in this weekly video show that will tell you everything you need to know about the most current titles.

**The Game Informer Show** The GI staff discusses the biggest news and hottest releases in this weekly podcast. New episodes every Thursday.

**Replay** Relive fond (and not so fond) moments from the past as the GI staff replays classic games in this weekly video series.

**Cover Story Hubs** Learn more about our current and past Game Informer cover stories in this centralized location for video features and interviews, previews, and more.

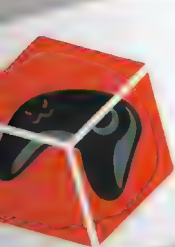
**Gamer Culture** From fan art to humorous videos, Game Informer highlights the entertaining by-products of video game culture.

**Spoiled** GI editors watch and discuss the endings to the industry's most talked-about titles in this video series.

**Impulse** Your one-stop destination for news, previews, and reviews of downloadable video games.

**Super Replay** An expanded version of Saturday's Replay show, Super Replay has GI editors adding colorful commentary while playing the entirety of a classic game.

**Features** Check out daily content from the GI editors covering your favorite games and dissecting the industry with unique insights.



TEST CHAMBER



## NOTABLES

- 14 creating a connection:  
ken levine on irrational games'  
most memorable characters
- 20 for the fun of the game:  
how steve wozniak's breakout  
defined apple's future
- 25 top ten batman games
- 29 afterwords: tomb raider
- 34 interview: deep silver's  
geoff mulligan
- 38 opinion: can you take it  
with you?





# DISASTER STRIKES!

The launch of SimCity and the specter of DRM

by Matthew Kato

**S**imCity fans have been waiting a decade for Maxis to release its next game in the franchise, but few foresaw how much strife the launch of the venerable franchise would cause publisher Electronic Arts and developer Maxis. The companies may have solved SimCity's launch-window server problems, but the larger question surrounding Maxis' decision to require players to have an online connection still remains.

SimCity's U.S. launch was plagued with problems due to the high demand on EA's servers as people attempted to play and/or buy the game from the company's Origin downloadable service. Because SimCity requires an Internet connection with EA's servers, the overload and network outages wreaked havoc on the user experience. Players were prevented from joining servers, suffered through problems with the game's tutorial, struggled to get games to load or save, and encountered several crashes and glitches in gameplay elements like road construction.

EA responded by adding servers, upgrading others, patching the game, and temporarily disabling some non-critical features, but almost a week after its release even Maxis general manager Lucy Bradshaw was not ready to give the game the "all-clear."

The damage had already been done. Apart from the large number of gamers who were soured by their early experience with the game, Amazon temporarily suspended digital sale of the game, and those who had bought the game digitally from EA directly could not get a refund. Instead, EA offered a free PC title from its downloadable catalog to those who had purchased the game.

Despite the company's contrition and the disastrous launch, EA and Maxis remain unbowed in their stance that SimCity requires an online connection. Maxis claims it designed it that way from a gameplay and technical standpoint in order to share information about users' cities with others. Since there is no dedicated offline single-player mode (nor plans to offer one), your saves are stored on the servers. Although you can play offline, you are booted out after a half-hour or so. SimCity serves as yet another illustration of the offputting dangers of "always-on" Internet requirements in games.

Activision Blizzard's release of *Diablo III* last year, which also requires an online connection for its digital rights management (DRM), suffered similar problems due to demand. Ubisoft has also come under fire for its use of DRM to fight piracy. The company used it in multiple *Assassin's Creed* titles, among others, and gamers were not happy when their single-player experience and saves were compromised because of a dropped connection or problems with Ubisoft's servers. Eventually, the company announced it was dropping its always-on DRM and that it would only require a one-time online activation.

Piracy is no small matter for publishers and developers, but neither is the goodwill of the game-buying public. DRM often solves one problem while creating others. Apart from the annoyances of having to rely on an online infrastructure that is not completely reliable even if you're playing a single-player mode, there is also the larger question of what gamers actually own — both now and in the future — when they buy a game. What happens if EA decides to shut down the SimCity servers or if the company closes its doors?

Always-on gaming is a buzzword surrounding the new home consoles, and it may indeed be the future of games, but titles like SimCity currently represent the bumps in the road in getting there. You may have thought you just wanted to buy a game and play it, but it's apparently not that simple. ♦



# CONN





# CREATING A ECTION

THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER WITH IRRATIONAL GAMES, COMPANY CO-FOUNDER KEN LEVINE HAS CRAFTED SOME OF VIDEO GAMES' MORE MEMORABLE CHARACTERS, NOTABLE FOR THEIR EMOTIONAL RESONANCE AS WELL AS VISUAL STYLE. WE TALKED TO LEVINE ABOUT IRRATIONAL'S MOST FAMOUS CREATIONS, THE PROCESS IT TOOK TO BRING THEM TO LIFE, AND HOW THEY EVOLVED ALONG THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS.

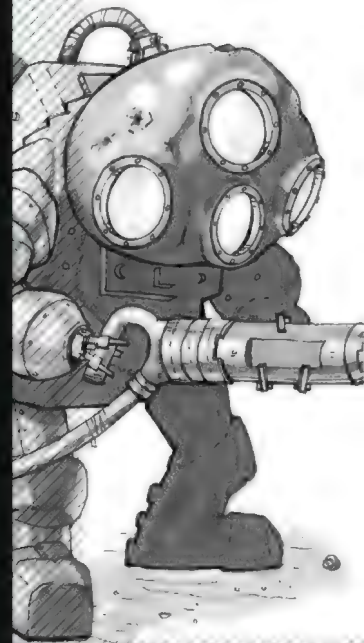
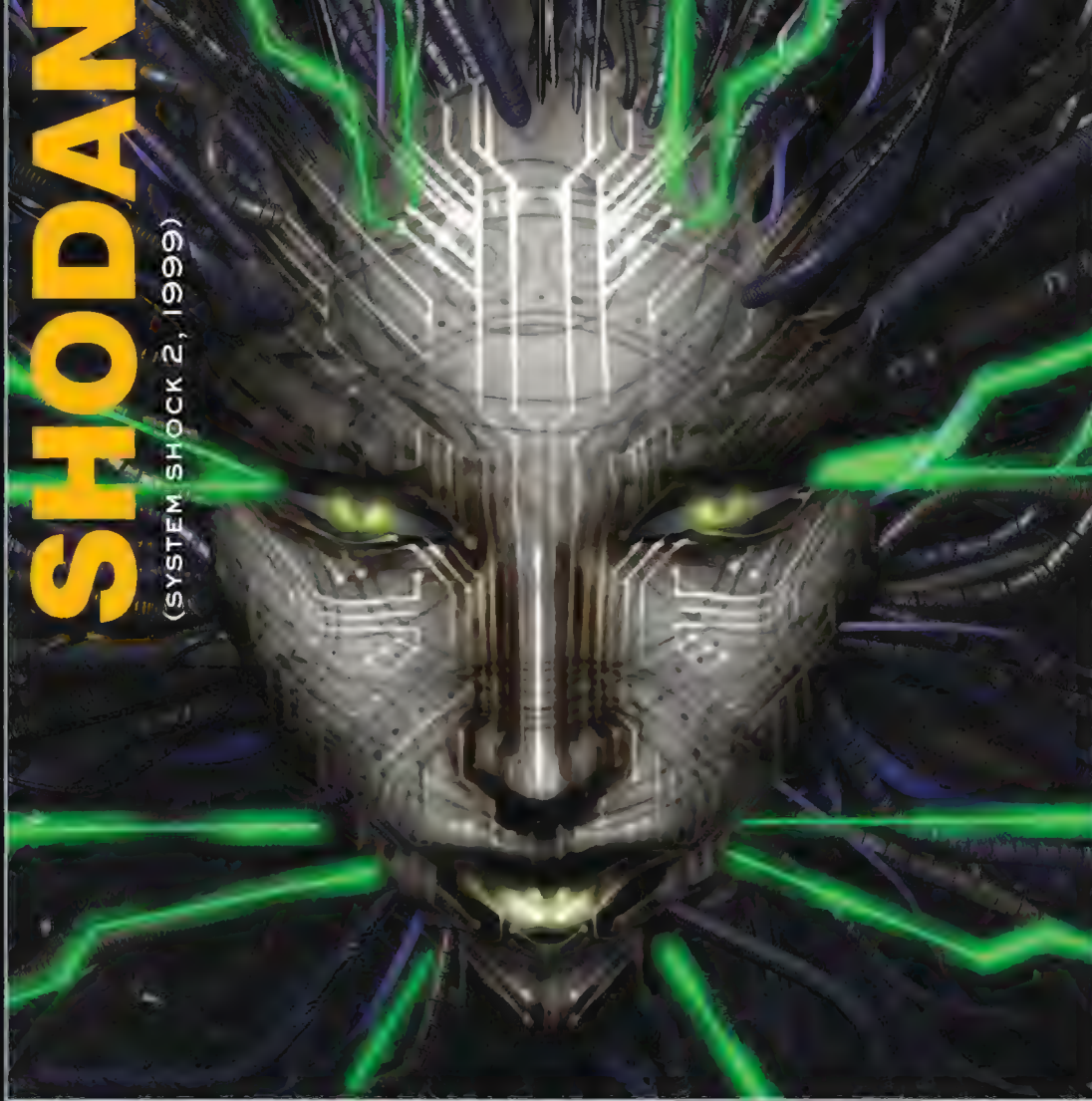
**W**ITH CHARACTERS LIKE SHODAN from System Shock 2, the big daddies in BioShock, and Elizabeth in BioShock Infinite, Irrational Games has no shortage of memorable characters in its game library. For Ken Levine, these characters may be different from each other, but they share important similarities born from a shared purpose that Levine describes as a "continuum of trying to bring gamers in to making them active in the narrative and not observers of the narrative."

Each of these characters fits into that philosophy by engaging the player both physically and emotionally to pull them into the experience, whether that's through the "rudimentary" relationship between the player and SHODAN in System Shock 2, as Levine describes it, or via the more participatory and reciprocal one between BioShock Infinite's protagonist Booker DeWitt and Elizabeth. This specific vision is evident when Levine talks about the developmental evolution of each of them.

BY MATTHEW KATO

# SHODAN

(SYSTEM SHOCK 2, 1999)

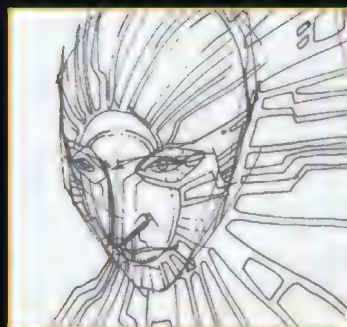
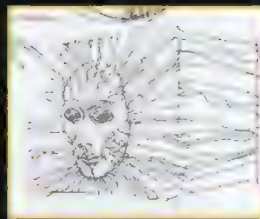


**L**OOKING GLASS' ORIGINAL SYSTEM SHOCK featured a cyberpunk setting run by a sentient, malevolent AI named SHODAN. Irrational took the reins for the follow-up, helping cement SHODAN's place as one of the more memorable villains in video game history. "The reason I think that relationship worked – that sort of frenemy relationship worked, was because she interacted with you, she encouraged you, she berated you, she punished you when you went against her will, she rewarded you when you did things that she wanted you to do," Levine says. "As rudimentary as it was, you actually felt a connection."

Although SHODAN takes the form of a woman, in reality it's a sexless AI construct. Still, Levine says that SHODAN being female was fundamental to him. "What's funny is that when I started on that game, I asked people on the team – I always thought she was female," he says. "A lot of people on the team thought she was

male, because if you look on the box of the first game, it's really unclear what she is. Even the voice, it's so processed. I always thought of her as female – I was really drawn to her as a female. I don't know why; you just sort of have a writer's instinct."

We can only imagine how this might have come further into play if there had been a System Shock 3, but only Levine and a few others know how SHODAN would have evolved. "I had a whole pitch document that I made, and it just wasn't happening at the time," Levine says. "I had a really strong idea, and it's kind of heartbreaking."



# ELIZABETH

(BIOSHOCK INFINITE, 2013)

**T**HE BIG DADDIES went through numerous iterations during development, but their hulking physical presence was always a key component of their characteristics. Levine says that the team wasn't sure if they'd speak like humans, but they soon agreed that the eerie whale-like bellow would be one of the calling cards. Other elements – like the big daddies' trademark drill – were likewise born through the revisionary process before becoming iconic.

"The drill originally was a real mining drill that was actually a rounded surface with a bunch of small spheres in it instead of a big, scary cone shape," Levine says. "I actually got into some debates with some of our artists with it. I said, 'I want it to be this big cone thing,' and so they were actually making fun of me with it. They would draw ice cream cones on his hands and pass them back and forth to each other. I thought it had to look threatening from a distance."

The big daddies' relationship with the little sisters is what defines the essence of these characters the most, but even this crucial bond wasn't always as we know it. Originally, the little sisters were more like insects, but the team eventually changed them to be something



the player could empathize with. Before the team settled on the vulnerable but disturbing little girls with glowing eyes, Irrational had entertained a concept of the little sisters where they were dogs with no hind legs in a wheelchair-like apparatus. Levine says the team never let the person who came up with the design live it down.

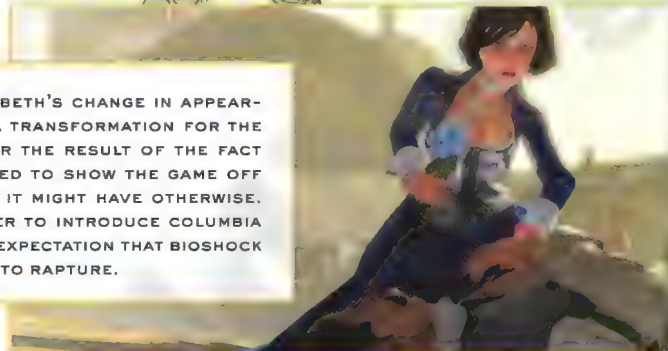


# BIG DADDIES

(BIOSHOCK, 2007)



LEVINE SAYS THAT ELIZABETH'S CHANGE IN APPEARANCE WASN'T PART OF A TRANSFORMATION FOR THE CHARACTER, BUT RATHER THE RESULT OF THE FACT THAT IRRATIONAL DECIDED TO SHOW THE GAME OFF EARLIER THAN PERHAPS IT MIGHT HAVE OTHERWISE. THIS WAS DONE IN ORDER TO INTRODUCE COLUMBIA AND NIP IN THE BUD ANY EXPECTATION THAT BIOSHOCK INFINITE WOULD RETURN TO RAPTURE.



**I**RRATIONAL WENT THROUGH more than 100 visualizations of Elizabeth, including an early version of the character that was released with the game's debut on our cover back in 2010. "Finally it was to the point where [it was like,] 'Okay, that's the one,'" Levine says.

The most important evolution Elizabeth went through was going from a divisive character to a more relatable one. "I wrote a version of her that was very young and very naïve – super young and super naïve – and everybody hated her," Levine says. "It was heartbreaking for me because I did all this work, and recorded the actor and animated it. I remember I showed it to the director of marketing's husband, who's a friend of mine, and he says, 'I f---ing hate her.'

"Sometimes it's very small changes you make to the work that changes people's perceptions. All of a sudden, people thought very different of her. We spent a lot of time thinking about what makes people like people; what makes people dislike people."

In the end, achieving a bond with Elizabeth was important for the game as well as adhering to Levine and Irrational's overall philosophy. "I started thinking that Elizabeth in a lot of ways is the inheritor of the Big Daddy/Little Sister mantle... because her goal in the game is to make an emotional connection with the player. But instead of one they just observe like they did in BioShock, they are a participant in that emotional connection."



# A Game of Chance

## The Risk vs. Reward

It's the final play of a Madden football game, and you're driving for the winning score against an opponent online. Suddenly a box in the lower-right hand corner of your screen pops up with blinking text. "Think you have what it takes? Put your money where your mouth is. \$10 says you can't score!" It sounds implausible, but a situation like this might be just around the corner. Game companies are closely watching the legal landscape in the U.S. with the hopes that video game gambling becomes a reality in all 50 states. If it does, the stakes for your average multiplayer match, and even the structure of games themselves, might change forever.

According to the Casual Games Association's year-end 2012 social casino gaming report, by 2015 the revenue generated by social casino games like Slotomania or Zynga's Texas HoldEm Poker will leap from an estimated \$500 million in 2012 to over a billion in the U.S. alone. While many gamers don't play these kinds of casino games, the possible legalization of online or video game-based real-money gambling could open up a lucrative revenue stream for publishers and developers.

Currently, betting real money in online games or on the performance of someone other than yourself in a contest is prohibited in the U.S. on the federal level. This is why the social casino games on Facebook are free to play (although you can certainly spend money on them for virtual chips, upgrades, store items, etc.). The payouts are not for real money and are kept within the game's virtual ecosystem. This also restricts real-money competition sites like Virgin Gaming from allowing players to bet on the performance of someone else.

Despite these current roadblocks, the tide is turning. The Justice Department's 2011 interpretation of the Wire Act of 1961 opened up online wagering for everything except sports betting, and wide criticisms of the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act of 2006 (UIGEA) are expected to influence the legalization of online betting on the federal level.

"What everybody considers to be the holy grail of online gambling in the U.S. would be federal regulation that says, 'Yes, you can do this on an interstate basis,'" says Mark Methenitis, attorney and editor-in-chief of video game law blog Law of the Game. If this were to happen, the federal government would have to step in because of its jurisdiction over interstate commerce to manage what is currently occurring only on a state-by-state basis.

Doug Walker, a professor of economics who studies gambling at the College of Charlestown in South Carolina, thinks this grand scenario will happen soon. "It's inevitable that this spreads pretty quickly,"

he told MercuryNews.com. Delaware, Nevada, and New Jersey have already legalized online gambling in some form for its citizens, and other states are exploring their options – particularly as a way to generate taxes and revenue for the local economy.

While the wait continues for the federal government to legalize online gambling, game publishers are already working along the sidelines in preparation. Zynga has filed for a gaming license in Nevada. If granted the license, the company could start an online gaming gambling operation in the state (only with Nevada citizens). Zynga has also entered into an agreement with Bwin.party gambling via games like FarmVille in the U.K., which the company sees as precursors for the day when online gambling is legal in the U.S. "The broader U.S. market is an opportunity that's further out on the horizon based on legislative developments, but we are preparing for a regulated market," said Barry Cottle, chief revenue officer, in a statement during Zynga's filing for the Nevada license.

Virgin Gaming – which currently hosts player-versus-player contests for real money and free-to-enter tournaments with prizes and pay components for games like Madden NFL 13, NBA 2K13, and Battlefield 3 – has been running its legal wagering operation since 2010. Six million games have been played through its site, with more than \$23 million in winnings changing hands between players. The company plans to move



by Matthew Kato

# of Video Game Gambling

into Xbox Live and mobile later this year, and perhaps even partner with traditional gambling companies if the laws change.

Much of the revenue hoopla involving legal online gambling in the U.S. centers around the billions made by online poker sites and other casino-based games before the UIGEA was passed in 2006, but it's easy to imagine any game in almost any genre integrating gameplay mechanics that allow players to bet money on their performance. Companies like Electronic Arts, Activision, Ubisoft, et al. could make lots of money through a multitude of wagering opportunities at any moment in a game. In this light, it appears inevitable that online gambling in video games is the next revenue frontier. As a sign of the changing climate, at this year's Game Developer's Conference four breakout sessions are planned on the topic of video game gambling ranging from its legality, video-game gambling as an e-sport (featuring Virgin Gaming executive vice president Wim Stocks), and more.

## THE TURN

Making money through gambling may be alluring, but it won't be easy. Legalization on the federal level would mean that the U.S. government assumes the role of regulator, resulting in reams of red tape through licenses, documentation, posting of winning chances and payouts, etc. Anti-gambling groups concerned about addiction and the moral issues of gambling will likely raise objections – a stigma that could prove damaging for video games in particular given that the hobby already has its share of detractors.

For gamers and developers, other possible problems come to mind. Games could be irrevocably changed, from the mechanics of how you play them to the minute-to-minute experience for the player. Integrating gambling could turn off consumers as well as irk game designers whose creative vision might be compromised by the appetite for revenue. If player attitudes toward free-to-play games and microtransactions such as in *Dead Space 3* are anything to go by, the reception to these clear cash grabs could be mixed.

Security is another topic facing the viability of gambling in games – especially in this day and age when personal information is not always safe from hackers. Monitoring, processing, and verifying matches and money transactions would require companies to build strong technological infrastructures with top-notch security. Building this could be

costly, and publishers could pass the responsibility off to third-party companies. However, as industry analyst Michael Pachter explained on the business-oriented Tech M&A podcast, this would mean a company would have to cede the lucrative direct relationship with customers to a middle man.

Questions of infrastructure and implementation could haunt console makers like Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo as well, who traditionally demand a measure of control over the experiences on their systems. This is especially true when it comes to transactions that involve money. "It would be a much harder nut to crack because obviously Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo are exerting a lot more control," Methinitis says. "It's much easier to put something on a PC, mobile phone, tablet, or whatever. Even though Apple controls the iOS ecosystem, if something was legal, I can't see them shutting down those apps on a matter of principle. On the other hand, I could very easily see Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo saying as a matter of principle, 'We're not allowing gambling in our ecosystem.'"

Both the console makers and gamers would also be affected by the veracity of the gaming experience. How do you reconcile the impact that differing Internet connection speeds could have on the result? What about game bug exploits or the use of hacks for an unfair advantage?

"If you're playing Halo multiplayer, a large majority of it is skill, but things like where you spawn in the middle of a match are chance," Methinitis says. While he thinks that video games could be seen in the same light as poker – a mix of skill and chance – it's easy to see how the necessary reconciliation of current state and federal laws, and any wording and interpretation of them, could put video games in an unforeseen legal position. The complicated relationship currently between the Wire Act and the UIGEA is an illustration of this. "You see how this gets to be a little more complicated in discussion depending on the different state regulations," Methinitis says. "At a federal level the UIGEA kind of ruins everything because it's so poorly drafted."

In the end, battling red tape, security problems, and even developers' creative boundaries might not amount to much of a battle at all. When asked whether a company like Zynga would withdraw from the push to incorporate real-money gambling into its products or soldier on, Methinitis says, "I think it's probably the latter. There's an awful lot of money to be had in this." ♦



# FOR THE Fun OF THE Game

HOW STEVE WOZNIAK'S BREAKOUT DEFINED APPLE'S FUTURE

interview by Ben Hanson

**T**he co-founder of Apple Computer shares the story behind developing the Atari arcade classic Breakout, how the Apple II was built from the ground up for gaming, and why Steve Jobs dismissed the potential of games.

**Could you start out talking about your earliest memories with games?**

I played a lot of games. Some summers, I would sit there constantly playing all the games of solitaire that I could. [I] loved playing games; I had a very happy life, a very joking life. I later came to a philosophy that your life is all about happiness – that's how you judge it. It's not how successful you are, and how many yachts you own and that kind of stuff; it's how much you smiled. Even today, I get so tired from hours of email, I just have to [take a] break and play a few card games online and play my Tetris on the Game Boy.

**Could you talk about your experience programming games?**

I never thought about developing games. I knew that I was a really incredible digital designer, but I didn't think digital design was about games. I thought it was about computers and logic games. In sixth grade I built a machine with 100 little rules, and every rule was a logic game. I pounded nails into wood and I connected transistors, resistors, diodes, and power supplies, and I built 100 little rules that played tic-tac-toe without losing. Then I saw a real arcade game, and that was Pong. I said, "Oh, my gosh, I know how TVs work. I know all their signals for drawing lines and drawing frames and putting dots on the screen." So I built a little device with 28 little

\$1 chips, and I built my own Pong.

Then, Steve Jobs actually took my Pong game down to Atari. He didn't have anything to do with the design of it, but they thought he did, and they hired him. But he couldn't ever really do the engineering design. I'm sorry; he could do a little. He could modify a few pieces or put a sound chip in to make sounds for a game. He worked on the night shift all alone so I could go down and visit and see the new Atari games. I love playing the games as well as designing them, and I designed Breakout for Atari.

**Where did the design for Breakout come from?**

Steve Jobs said that it was Nolan Bushnell's idea. He wanted a one-player Pong game. Steve described how it had to have bricks and all that. Now, it could be that Steve had actually thought up the design and sold it to Nolan Bushnell because [Steve] was very specific: the score had to be at the bottom. It was a real fun project. I'd already done Pong, so it's really just an extension of [that] game.

**Did Atari hire you after that?**

Well, Steve Jobs came to me and he said that Atari wanted me to design this [game], and I had only four days to do it. They had hired me, even though I didn't have a college degree, and I thought I was the greatest designer. But

four days? I didn't think I could do it.

I went four days with no sleep. Steve and I both got mononucleosis, the sleeping sickness, and we delivered a working Breakout game. That was obviously a big classic. Supposedly, the Atari engineers couldn't understand my design. It was just so beautiful and advanced, but they couldn't get it. I never got to talk to them. I don't know if they knew that I did it. They paid Steve Jobs, and then he paid me half the money, supposedly.

#### Wasn't there some debate about that?

Yeah, there's some debate. So it's a tiny thing. It's only one thing in life, but he did tell me that we would get paid 700 bucks, then he wrote me a check for 350 dollars, and he got paid thousands. So, whatever. But he should have told me differently because we were such close friends. The fun of doing it overrides anything like that. Who cares about money? Well, I do care about friendship and honesty.

#### While you were working on Breakout, were you brainstorming other ideas for games? Did it inspire any passion in you to create something new?

I was so tired in and out of sleep, but that makes your mind creative. I was out on the [Atari] factory floor, and they had one huge game that four players would play with their own little cars. There was this idea that they were going to use microprocessors, but they weren't using them in games yet. Games were not yet software, and that triggered my mind: microprocessors can actually program games.

There was a [color] TV set on the factory floor. They only used black and white TVs for their games, and this TV set wasn't playing a game, but it had a dot going from left to right and right to left. As it moved, it was changing colors. I'm just sitting there thinking: color. It was hypnotizing, like a psychedelic light show at a concert. An idea popped in my head: a little way to put out a digital signal with ones and zeroes...my god, I have 16 different colors. There had never been a book that talked about color digitally. It wasn't allowed. It wasn't done. But I designed every single thing in the Apple II [to make] it possible. One little \$1 chip could generate color instead of a \$1,000 color-generation board – right out of the computer memory to the display. [That] was another trick I thought of that had never been done.

This stuff had never, ever been thought of for a home computer that was affordable. But I just determined that my computer had to be a game machine. I called my BASIC [a programming language – Ed.] "Game BASIC." You could go back on every note I ever wrote; I called it Game BASIC. My whole idea was, if you write a language that can play games, it can do all the things computers do, like financial stuff. I don't know what companies use computers for; I only know what I like to use them for, and it's games.

I knew that I had a machine with a microprocessor that could do a million things a second, move those bits around on the screen and make things move and play games and all. I thought, "I wonder, with my slow BASIC, can I write a game that's playable?" Breakout. I'd done Breakout for Atari. I knew Breakout. I built paddle hardware into the Apple II deliberately for the game of Breakout. I wanted everything in there. I put in a speaker with sound so I could have beeps like games need. So, a lot of the Apple II was designed to be a

game machine as well as a computer. That is the way to get it to people, to get people to start buying these machines.

I called Steve Jobs over to my apartment, and we sat down on the floor next to the cables snaking into my TV that had the back off of it so I could get wires inside, and I showed him how I could change the colors of things, change the shape of the paddle, and change the speed of the ball with an easy BASIC command. He and I looked at each other – we were both kind of shaking, because we knew that the world of games was never going to be the same. Now [games] were software. Until then, there weren't software games in the arcades. Now that animated games were going to be software – oh my god. And [the fact] that a fifth grader could program in BASIC and make games like Breakout? This was going to be a new world; we saw it right then.

#### I know Steve Jobs wasn't a big fan of games. Do you have any insight into why that would be?

The funny thing is, I think he actually loved his time at Atari, but I think he found that he was not a designer or an engineer. He's not technical and he doesn't want anything technical to show in computers. We had this guy Dana Redington. He did the first high-res game with some little spaceships going by and you'd point your gun at them and shoot them down. We called it Star Wars at first, but we had to change the name eventually. He did this great game, and Steve thought it was really lousy. I admired his work so much, and yet he got dismissed by Steve.

In later times – and I don't know why – Steve didn't seem to have that light sense of humor that you should have. He became, I think, very serious and businesslike because his goal was to run a company. He wanted to look professional in the business magazines.

Eventually when he came back to Apple, Easter eggs were disallowed. Easter eggs! These fun little things that programmers put in that, if you know the special code, you pop up a picture, or a little game – maybe a game of Breakout. So much fun, and not allowed in Apple at all. You get fired if you try something like that now.

When I knew him in high school he was just as fun as anyone else, but he was really looking for serious ways of the world, too. It's really funny, because games involve so much creativity. Somebody thought of some clever things that really give enjoyment to other people, so Steve should've appreciated the creative people that were doing games.

#### There are rumors that the console manufacturers are scared of Apple in the gaming industry right now, especially if Apple moves into the living room and fully connects the Apple TV or whatever it may be to the television set. I wonder if you have any thoughts on that potential future, and if you'd like to see it.

I don't watch the gaming industry like you guys do, and I was not really aware of that concern. Obviously the iPhone and iPad became the hot mobile machines of all time. Everywhere you go, you see kids playing those machines now rather than the Game Boy.

Apple might be a big player in games someday. Companies always want to grow. Right now, you're limited with the sort of products we can define: the phones, the tablets, and

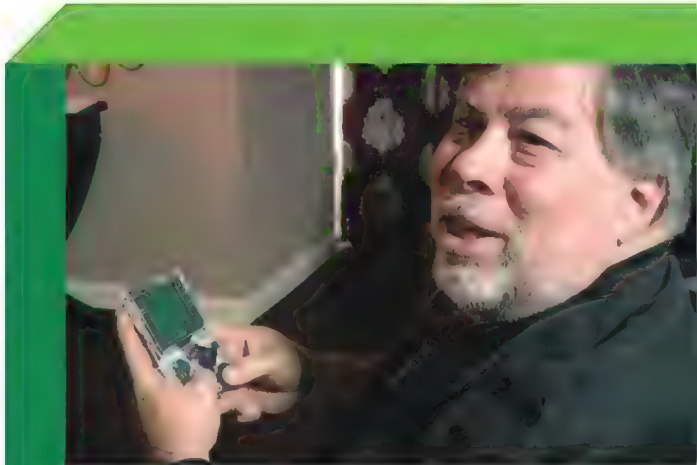
the computers. Where's the growth area? Of course they're talking about a watch, wearable computing and we're talking about Apple TV and cars. Would a game machine make sense? Well, I think Apple would say, "The iPad is our game machine." Our televisions might run all of the iOS software, and therefore instantly it would run tens of thousands of games. I think that would be more likely to expect from Apple.

#### Are there any games that have come out recently that have stood out for you?

A lot of people have spoken of games, and what they say about them catches my attention, [but] I don't memorize them because I am so short on time these days, constantly traveling.

I'm going to program some games of my own again. I'm going to go back 40 years in my life and I'm going to use the Raspberry Pi [a recently released micro-computer] and actually teach myself Linux and programming on it. If they aren't games, they'll be little robots at least. It will be my own little dinky thing that has no value compared to today's modern games that have hundreds of developers working on them – just for fun. ♦

Check out [www.gameinformer.com/mag](http://www.gameinformer.com/mag) to watch a video interview with Steve Wozniak and see him dominate at a game of Tetris

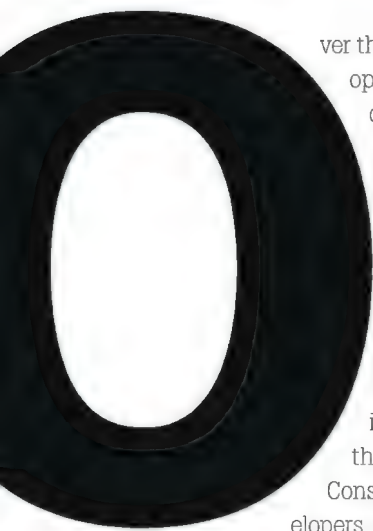


The final hardware for Wozniak's Apple II, complete with paddles to play Breakout

The

# Red Flags

## of Modern Gaming



Over the past few years, the number of gaming options on social networks and mobile devices has exploded, dwarfing those of current-gen consoles. With this endless new variety comes a shift in monetization methods, from traditional one-time purchases to freemium games and microtransactions.

While there are plenty of quality mobile and free-to-play titles on the market, some developers place a higher importance on maximizing revenue than delivering a good game experience.

Console and PC gamers routinely take developers and publishers to task for any money-making ploy that interferes with gameplay, but what if the free game you just downloaded is your first introduction to the medium?

The following is a list of eight red flags of modern gaming. While these warning signs are not a guarantee that you're about to get fleeced, if you recognize more than one of these characteristics, you should think critically about how much time and money you're willing to spend on the game.

Console and PC gamers should also take note: Many of these aspects have already started to invade our favorite platforms, and will continue playing a larger role in our gaming experiences as next-gen systems embrace alternate monetization models.



**4 Pics 1 Word (LOTUM GmbH)** — This simple guessing game charges players real money for hints, giving the developer a monetary incentive for including intentionally vague puzzles



**Farmville 2 (Zynga)** — The Farmville series locks its most popular items behind a second currency, which players can't earn as easily



by Jeff Marchisavvi

### Your Progress is Time-Gated

For many free-to-play games, "time is money" is more than a maxim – it's a core design principle. Whether you're waiting to harvest a crop in a simulation game, revive a party member in an RPG, or play another round in a match-three game, some developers introduce arbitrary time barriers in hopes that you'll pay money to bypass them. Sure, you could wait 15 hours for the next floor in your digital high-rise to be completed – but why not throw down a couple of nickels and dimes for instant gratification? While patient gamers may not mind the inconvenience, there's no good design reason for regulating the player's enjoyment in this way.

### You Need Friends to Be Competitive

Playing games with friends is great, but some free-to-play titles approach multiplayer with the elegance of a chain letter. Haranguing friends to join your digital mafia family/magic guild/etc. isn't just annoying – it's the video game equivalent of a Ponzi scheme. Signing up friends should never be a core gameplay mechanic or a requirement for success. If every user review for the game you're considering ends with "Hey add me plz: Gamedood666," you're probably better off finding something else to play.

### The Game Has More Than One Currency

Lots of developers blur the line of microtransactions by selling players a virtual currency that can also be earned by just playing the game. The balancing of this economy determines its fairness to the player, but if the game has more than one currency, watch out. Oftentimes, developers lock the most desirable items and upgrades behind a second currency, which is a lot harder – or sometimes impossible – to earn through gameplay. If the alternate currency is some combination of the developer's name and "bucks" or "coins," there's a good chance you'll be pressured to pay up the more you play.

### The In-Game Shop is Its Own Separate Entity

Another indicator of how a game handles microtransactions is the pervasiveness of the in-game shop. Is it accessed solely when purchasing new items inside of the game, or is it featured in a prominent spot on the main menu screen before you even begin playing? The more the virtual store stands as its own separate entity, the greater the chance that trading real money for digital goods is a considerable, if not vital, component of the game.

### One-Use Items Cost Real Money

We don't fault a developer for giving players the option to quickly unlock a new weapon/character/card pack/etc. with real money, but selling one-use items is a sign that they don't just want you to pay for the game – they want you to keep paying for the game. If a game sells one-use items, keep an eye out for difficulty spikes; a developer that's unscrupulous enough to sell temporary boosts for real money is also likely willing to balance the game in a way that requires buying said improvements.

### Help Costs Money

Many developers rely on microtransactions to make a profit, but what if your game doesn't contain peripheral elements that can be sold piecemeal? We've noticed a disturbing new trend in puzzle games: Developers charging money to provide players with hints. This practice contradicts good game design; the more confusing or vague a given puzzle is, the more money a developer can potentially make from it. To capitalize on your orchestrated confusion even further, some games don't give you the option to skip troublesome puzzles. If a game ever leaves you with no recourse other than to pay money for being stumped, just stop playing. In-game help isn't something that should be ransomed.

### The Game Rewards You For Promoting It

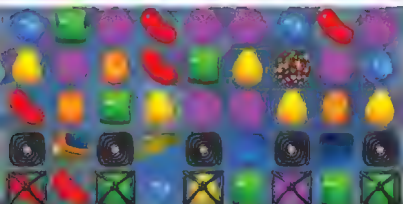
Free-to-play developers rely mainly on word of mouth to lift their games above the sea of other mobile offerings. While we don't mind when a game asks if we'd like to write a user review or "Like" it on Facebook, offering in-game incentives for such endorsements is a shady practice. These virtual quid pro quos are easily ignored, but unless you're working in the marketing department it's not your job to advertise for the developer. Plying compliant players with virtual items or currency only muddies the reception of the game – was its popularity earned or paid for?

### The Game is on a Top Grossing List

No shortage of manipulative games exists on the mobile market, a problem for which both Apple and Google are partly to blame. One of the main ways the App Store and Google Play direct players toward content is with a list of the Top Grossing Games on their respective platforms. This ranking isn't based on user reviews or number of downloads, but rather how much money a game makes via its price and in-game purchases. While good games periodically make the list, the titles at the top of the ranking tend to be the ones that most aggressively exploit the above techniques to make money, regardless of how it affects gameplay. ❖



**Swing Shot (Com2uS)** – Despite its fun mix of action and turn-based strategy, Swing Shot bogs players down with microtransactions, many of which only provide temporary improvements



**Candy Crush Saga (King.com)** – You can only play a limited number of rounds of Candy Crush Saga in a day. Once you reach the limit, you either have to pay for more turns, request more turns from friends, or wait for the clock to recharge



**Rage of Bahamut (Cygames)** – This fantasy-themed card game is popular for a reason; like a Ponzi scheme, players need to recruit more and more people to be successful



**Final Fantasy: All the Bravest (Square Enix)** – Despite a \$3.99 price tag for the main game, All the Bravest sells the majority of its content via microtransactions. Players must spend over \$50 in total to see everything the mobile game has to offer

**The Good**

## TIMESPLITTERS REWIND

is coming, thanks to a group of hardcore fans. Crytek – owner of the IP since it acquired original series' developer Free Radical – has given the group permission to make the game with CryEngine 3. The free PC game draws on the first three TimeSplitters games but it's also a new experience centered on the franchise's multiplayer and challenge modes. A demo is planned for this December, with the actual game hopefully shortly thereafter.



**The Bad**

## ELECTRONIC ARTS

CEO (2007-2013) John Riccitiello has resigned his position with the company. Larry Probst, the company's current executive chairman, will take over Riccitiello's post until a replacement is named. Riccitiello guided the company through some pivotal times, including the emergence of mobile gaming, microtransactions, ballooning game budgets, and the transition to the upcoming new home consoles.



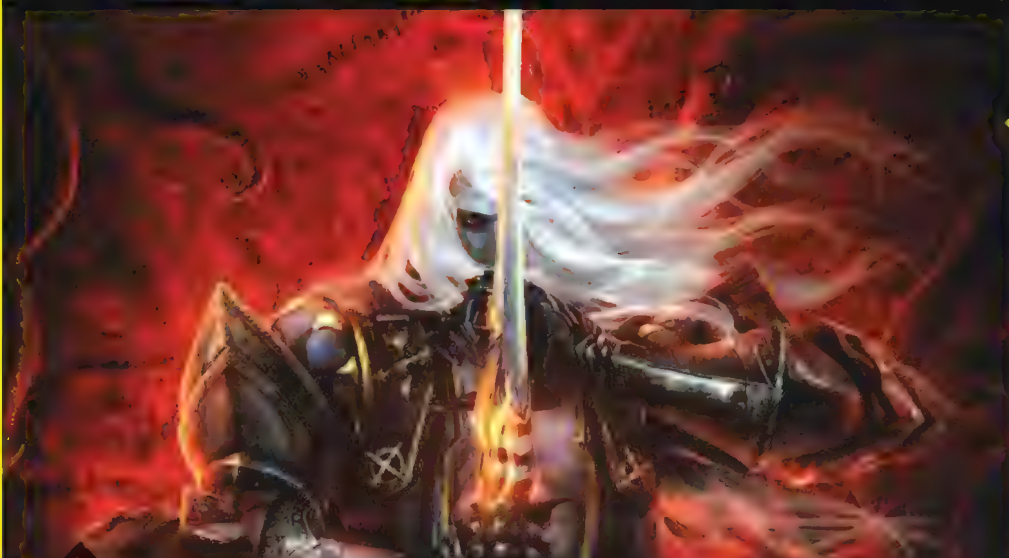
**Quotable**

"I think typically at the start of a cycle you've seen the pricing raise to \$69 for a core piece of software and then over the life of those it's drifted down to the introduction price, typically now around \$59."



– EA CFO **Blake Jorgensen** at the Morgan Stanley Technology, Media, and Telecom Conference

**The Ugly**



## THE Wii U

may have a third-party problem. Recently Yves Guillemot, CEO of Ubisoft, told MCV, "We think Wii U is a great machine. But it just has to sell more." Elsewhere, Castlevania: Lords of Shadow 2 [shown] developer Mercury Steam says it can't afford to pay a development team to port the game over to the system. Crysis 3 makers Crytek had the game up and running on the system, but it won't be released because of "a lack of business support between Nintendo and EA," according to a *Venture Beat* interview with Crytek CEO Cevat Yerli.

# Tomb Raider

The long-awaited Tomb Raider reboot has finally released to critical acclaim. We spoke with studio head **Darrell Gallagher** about the puzzles, the multiplayer, and the much talked-about death scenes.

**Lara experiences some extreme death sequences, and some people have called them excessive. Was there a point in development that you ever felt like they were going too far, and you had to scale them back?**

We were very sensitive to every choice that was made, every death that was shown. It wasn't like we just threw things at the wall to see what stuck. We really planned it out and spent all the time and effort trying to shape and mold this experience into one that we felt was going to support our goals. More importantly, we didn't want to compromise. We felt that we were giving a particular flavor to this game, which was one that was very fight-to-the-finish – it was kill or be killed survival-adventure. We wanted to deliver on that in full, and part of it is seeing the consequences of not achieving what you are supposed to achieve in these life-or-death moments. We felt like we didn't want to pull back on that – we wanted to deliver something that was memorable. Part of it being memorable is showing the dark side as well as the light side and having those two, not ending up in the gray.

**Where does Crystal Dynamics fall on holding true to old elements of the lore, like Lara's relationship to her father?**

We had that conversation and it was debated a lot. We really felt that we wanted to actually make a clean cut between the past and the future. There should be enough DNA that we carry across, but we didn't want to be bound by what happened in the past, so that was a conscious decision. When she ends up finishing this game, it's not like she ends up at the beginning of Tomb Raider 1, back from 1996. It really is a separate start, a separate branch with its own beginning and we will see where it goes from here, but we don't feel like the two parallels of the past and the present have to join up. Obviously there will have to be dotted lines to them in some way – the same character, the same franchise – but it's not something we felt that we had to hold on to.

**The new game has more focus on shooting and action**

**than previous entries, compared to their bigger focus on puzzles. Why did the team go that direction?**

First, I don't think we were intending to retrace Tomb Raider 1; we felt like we had to do something different and in doing that we felt more compelled by the journey she was on and being this survival adventure. That led us down the path of it being more exterior and focused on survival action and problem solving. It's very tough to do a game that is solely based on puzzles because one person's difficult puzzle is another person's easy puzzle. The way Tomb Raider games were structured in the past, all of the puzzles were all on that core path and therefore balancing was very difficult to do because of catering to many different tastes in puzzles. Some people love spending an hour in one spot figuring out how to get past the puzzle. Other people hate spending an hour in one spot because they have two hours to play the game before they have to go do something else. So, we actually changed the structure in Guardian of Light, for the same reasons, and that was actually the template used in many ways for this game, because we felt like it worked. Even though there are puzzles along the core story path, they're not necessarily the spend-an-hour-solving-them type. We wanted to make sure that the player who wants to spend longer playing through puzzles, that they were there through more optional secondary tombs, which helped to expand the game world and made it more non-linear, which we felt helped exploration. It was really trying to balance the different needs and pace of individuals and give choice.

**Multiplayer met with mixed reviews from fans and critics. Can you speak to your thoughts about how that turned out, and how much involvement Crystal Dynamics had in that part of the process?**

Obviously we're pleased that we were able to do multiplayer for the first time in Tomb Raider in terms of PvP. I think handing off the reigns to a sister studio in Montreal was also great because it was something that allowed us to focus on single-player.



There was collaboration between the two studios and we both worked on the same game, but it did allow us to focus where we needed to, and them to focus where they needed to, which is on the multiplayer.

From that perspective we're very, very pleased with how that went. I think one of the goals early on with this reboot was really to be bold, and actually experiment with the franchise rather than stay to the tried-and-tested formula. Without that attitude from the studio and the support from Square, we would never have had Guardian of Light, and we would never have had this reboot, because all of those choices were big choices. I would like to think that we can continue to experiment with the franchise moving forward, and it may not be 100 percent the right decisions for the choices we make, but I think the willingness to take on new challenges is important.


Obviously, there's commentary on each one of those choices that we make, including multiplayer, whether that's positive or negative for people. That's something we do listen to and we will look at when we sort of settle back in and say, "Where do we go next?" I think it's important that we try these things and I think that we made a fun multiplayer component our first time out, and we're proud of that. We're very happy with how it turned out.

**What is your take on the character regarding where she is at the end of this game? Where do you want to see her evolve in future installments?**

I think the most important thing for me is she's a character that isn't fully formed. That was something that we set out to do from the beginning with this game, that she was sort of in the in-between state. Certainly she starts out very naive and ill equipped to go on this adventure, but she ends up in a place where she's changed by the experience. I think moving forward I'd like to see the ripples from this adventure continue through her inner psyche and her character. What would that do to a person? I think that's a good question. I don't think they'd be easily forgotten, what she's just been through, which was a horrific and difficult circumstance, so I'd expect to see the ripples from this adventure continue through the character moving forward. I think the ability to keep her from becoming what we tried to move away from is important, which is a completely Teflon superhero. That was one of the things we tried to break the mold on this time around. I think this sort of grey area of not quite being the Tomb Raider that we knew from back in the day, but continuing to evolve, and the scars of what she's been through being represented in her character – that's an interesting place to start. ♦

# Rock Band,

by Jeff Cork



After more than 280 weeks and 4,000 songs, Harmonix is shutting down its weekly support of Rock Band. Here's a tribute to their pioneering work.

# Unplugged

**Harmonix ended its downloadable content streak** with the release of Don McLean's classic tune "American Pie." Be careful not to misinterpret the significance of the sing-along favorite's refrain. "This'll be the day that I die" sounds a bit ominous, but the mood at the studio is more celebratory than grim. "We view it more as hitting the pause button as anything else," says CEO Alex Rigopoulos.

Looking at it now, the idea of a steady flow of post-release music makes an awful lot of sense. Who wouldn't want to stock their own jukebox with a collection of favorite tunes, after all? Harmonix liked the idea from the start, too, but technological hurdles proved difficult.

"In the very beginning, when we were working on the first Guitar Hero actually, at that point it was part of our long-range vision and plan for where we might take this stuff," Rigopoulos recalls. "But at that point, we

were on the PlayStation 2, where it wasn't really feasible. So a lot of our excitement about this started when the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 were on the horizon, because those were going to be the first consoles that would enable this kind of commerce."

Getting there would prove to be a multi-faceted challenge.

First, Harmonix had to obtain the rights to all the songs it wanted to add to the game. The studio had experience negotiating those

contracts through developing the first Guitar Hero games, but it wasn't anything approaching the scale of Rock Band's ambitions. "Licensing 4,000 songs is no small undertaking, either from us or for the music partners that we worked

with," Rigopoulos says. "They weren't really accustomed to accommodating the sheer volume of licensing requests for video game purposes that we were asking of them."

Once the ink was signed, there was the critically important task of acquiring the original recordings. Unlike Guitar Hero, which used cover songs by the talented musicians at Wave Group Sound, Harmonix wanted to use master recordings whenever possible with Rock Band. Consider the logistics behind doing this



## Rock Band Hall of Fame

One band holds an especially geeky distinction in the world of music games. The Toadies' song "Possum Kingdom" was one of four original recordings available in Harmonix's *Guitar Hero II* – the first to include master recordings – that made it to Rock Band's library. (The other three? Jane's Addiction's "Stop," My Chemical Romance's "Dead!" and Primus' "John the Fisherman.")

Toadies' guitarist Clark Vogeler says he was a rabid *Guitar Hero* fan and learned from a developer blog that "Possum Kingdom" was originally going to be in the game, but it was dropped in favor of Pantera's "Cowboys from Hell." Vogeler emailed around until he got in touch with someone at Harmonix, who was able to work with the band's label and get the song into the sequel.

"I was just over the moon to have a Toadies song in what I thought was the coolest game ever," Vogeler says. "When it came out, it was kind of surprising because it's almost more difficult to play in *Guitar Hero* than it is actually on a real guitar, and my buddies could beat me."

The song was added to Rock Band in December 2012. Vogeler says the group continues to reap the rewards of his gaming fanaticism. "Years later, we still get people coming up to us – young kids – who say that they'd never heard of us before until hearing that song in the game, so I think all in all it ended up doing good things for the band."

*Toadies' guitarist Clark Vogeler was a Guitar Hero superfan from day one. He was behind the camera of The Best Guitar Hero Video Ever clip, which racked up more than 3 million views on YouTube. A slice of pizza playing Helmet on a double-necked controller? Internet stardom!*

for the series' 4,000-plus song library.

"With younger artists who grew up in the video game generation it was often like, 'Of course, this makes total sense, I have no problem whatsoever sending you my multitracks from my album,'" Rigopoulos says. "In some cases, where we were dealing with artists of a different generation, maybe big artists from the '70s and whatnot, the idea of sending out their multitracks to a game development studio – for really understandable reasons – was just far more forbidding. So there was more of a courtship process that had to go into persuading some of the more classic artists to get involved."

Sometimes work turned into a treasure hunt of sorts. "[T]here were studio engineering resources that we had to go back often for analog multitracks from back in the '70s, digging up tapes from dusty closets," Rigopoulos says.

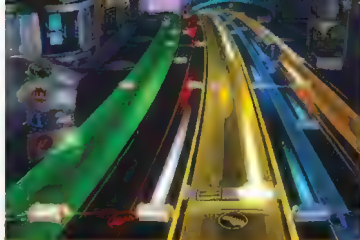
After the rights (and recordings) were secured, a small army at Harmonix worked to convert those songs into a simplified, yet satisfying, tablature. "I'm not sure that team gets the credit they deserve for making that a priority," says Harmonix chief creative officer Greg LoPiccolo. "It's one thing to hit a quality bar. It's another to maintain it for over five years and just have it be utterly consistent across that timespan. That was something that I was always hugely impressed by and super-proud of."

### THE STREAK

Even when everything was seemingly lined up, the streak of weekly content nearly ended a couple times due to various circumstances. "We've probably had a couple of instances where some last-minute snafu threatened to derail the streak, but we usually had a little bit of inventory and pad to work with in terms of stuff that we could shuffle around," says Chris Rigopoulos, Harmonix's VP of music and strategy.

"It was really important to us to maintain the streak because it was a promise we made to consumers, and we really felt that our fans were more like the fans of a band, where there's a dialogue and community around it and less like the fans of a consumer product," says John Drake, director of communications and brand management. "Oh, I love my Oreck vacuum, but if I don't get my Oreck vacuum bags on the first of the month and they come out on the third of the month, I'm not going to buy a different vacuum cleaner. For us it's a lot more like we promised you that we'd be there every Tuesday to hang out at the local bar, and if we're not there and you don't know that, that's going to be a big deal to you."

Drake says there were instances where a miscommunication could happen days before a track was scheduled to be released – a nightmare when time is so precious and console manufacturers, who have their own submission guidelines, were factored in.



### Rock Band Blitz

In August 2012, Harmonix released *Rock Band Blitz*. The downloadable game included 25 new songs and also allowed users to tap into their existing Rock Band libraries. Unlike Rock Band's party-friendly experience, *Blitz* was a single-player game through and through. In many ways, the lane-changing gameplay was a callback to the studio's earlier music games *Frequency* and *Amplitude*, which the PSP version *Rock Band: Unplugged* also drew upon for inspiration.

### SCHOOL OF ROCK BAND

The very nature of Rock Band changed the way Harmonix had to look at and select prospective songs. Guitar Hero focused on a singular instrument, so the decisions naturally gravitated toward tracks with memorable guitar riffs. LoPiccolo says Harmonix picked their favorite artists for the most part, and then they started getting feedback from fans saying the game introduced them to bands such as *Helmet* and *Boston*. It dawned on the team that their song selections were laying musical foundations for some younger players.

At that point, song selection took on an even greater focus. "They're not going to have heard very much of all these bands, and it was our responsibility and our privilege to put together tracklists that had some of our stylistic biases in there – but we had a responsibility to represent the entire spectrum of rock and roll," LoPiccolo says.

He likens it to the music-history blackboard in the Jack Black film *School of Rock*. "That was up on the wall here," LoPiccolo says. "That was the attitude. 'OK, we need some hair metal, we need some late '70s punk, we need some Grateful Dead – we're not all into the Grateful Dead, but they need to be in the game at some point.' So we had this list, and there was always the one white whale U2/Led Zeppelin bands that were hard to get, many of which we did get over the years."

"That was one of the most fun aspects of it – just sitting around and arguing over who got to be in the game, and who didn't get to be in the game. As the list filled out, I think we kind of tamped down our attitude, and now that it was more of a success and a lot of the stuff that we really felt strongly about was out there. Then it was like now you can get Nickelback and various things that not everybody thinks are awesome, but people like those songs. That's where we ended up. It's also not our job to tell people what they like. If people are into a specific type of music, we should put it in the game so that they can enjoy it."

For many fans of games and music, that sense of enjoyment has lasted for more than five years straight, and there's no reason for it to end as long as there are a few willing participants, some plastic instruments, and a beverage or three.

"It became synonymous with fun," Drake says, looking back on it all. "That was a really exciting place to be. 'This is a game I'm making, and it really makes everyone happy.'"

### What's Next?

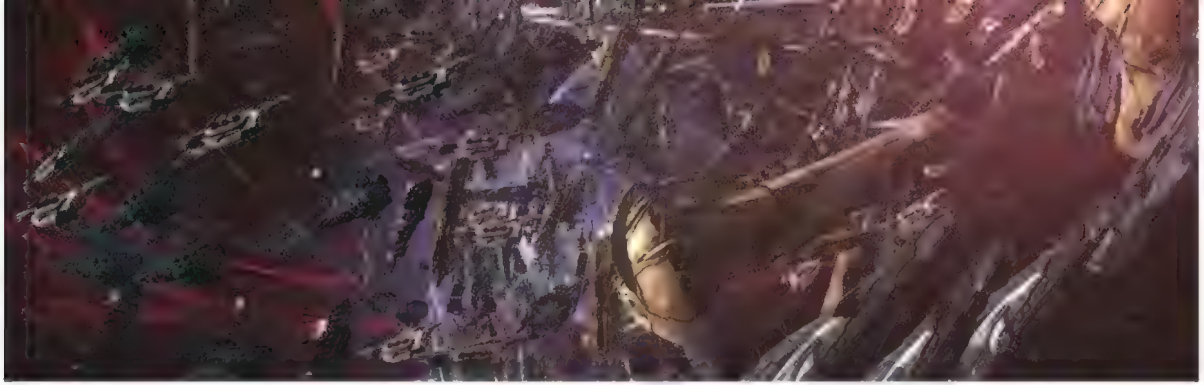
Rock Band DLC is on hiatus, but don't think the band is breaking up for good. "This franchise is very much a part of us, and the fabric of the studio," says CEO Alex Rigopoulos. "While we don't have any active title releases in development right now, it's never far from our thoughts, and you can be sure that this franchise will be back, guns blazing, at some point in the future when the time is right."

What about our downloaded songs? One of Rock Band's most welcomed features was how the vast majority of DLC was compatible across each release. Are fans out of luck when the next generation hits? "Certainly, it would be our ambition if and when we migrate Rock Band to the eighth-generation consoles, it would be our ambition to carry forward players' entitlements and their music libraries to the next generation," Rigopoulos says. "That investment that players have made over the years in those libraries is something that we would want to take great pains to protect as we carry Rock Band into the future."

### Whisper, Harmonix Team?

Rock Band groupies may remember an announcement that didn't seem to go anywhere. Back at E3 2007, Harmonix announced that it was forming a Rock Band music advisory board, chaired by E Street Band guitarist Steven Van Zandt. After that initial announcement, nothing ever seemed to have come from it.

According to Harmonix director of communications and brand management John Drake, it was largely a way to add gravitas to the team's song-selection process. "It's not like they were flying here to a summit once a month and having a conference call," Drake says. "It was, I think, meant to be a largely symbolic thing that then became implied to be a real practical working session. All of those people are cool people who have actually crossed paths with our catalog in one way or another throughout the course of Rock Band history, but none of them are continuing to consult on Rock Band, nor have we tried to engage with them in a long time."



## Starting a Virtual War With a Real Mistake

In January, a war erupted in Eve Online involving more than 2,800 players, the third-largest conflict in the game's virtual universe to date. What should have been a minor battle exploded into a massive war because of one player's small mistake.

Allen Dillon is a veteran player who has been playing

Eve Online since 2008. He goes by the username DaBigRedBoat and uses a two-monitor setup to play. A quick moment of confusion between the two screens caused him to send the wrong ship to the right location. To learn what happened after this mistake, we spoke with Dillon.

by Kyle Hilliard

### **Eve is a complicated game. Can you describe what happened in layman's terms?**

There are hundreds of thousands of people that play the game. In that situation, there was a group of people we were trying to kill, so think about World of Warcraft or something where you are trying to hunt someone down. We were waiting to pounce on them, so to speak, and when we did, it escalated, and escalated, and escalated, and it ended up being one of the largest fights in Eve. What started as a simple small fight with a couple hundred people escalated to 2,800 people pretty quickly.

### **What happened at the beginning of the battle?**

At the start there was a group of pirates fighting another group. In Eve they have what's called faction warfare, and you have to choose a faction to be. A lot of pirates tend to join the faction warfare because it is a lot more fun for them to do whatever it is they want to do. They have the Caldari State versus the Gallente Federation, and I was trying to help Caldari State. I got invited to assist them, and so when we saw a chance to kill a capital ship, which are some of the biggest ships in the game worth the most, we logged in our own capital ships and dropped on them.

When we dropped on them, instead of jumping one of my capital ships, which is called a super carrier, I jumped my titan, which is the largest ship in the game. When I jumped back there were a bunch of enemies – well they are actually friends of ours, but we fight them in the game. They logged in with all their capital ships and dropped in on me and it kept escalating. We kept throwing in more dudes, they kept throwing in more dudes.

### **Moving your titan ship was an accident, right?**

I meant to move my Nyx, because what happens in Eve is they jump from system to system. It's like entering a new realm in comparable games. Capital ships have the ability to jump multiple distances instead of gate by gate by gate one at a time. They go 30 to 40 jumps real easily. And so, instead of jumping my super carrier, I was looking at the wrong monitor and jumped my titan. That's what started the whole thing.

A misconception about the battle: with the titan you can do a thing called a titan bridge, where instead of you jumping somewhere, you can move a group of people or "Fleet" through a bridge that is made by the titan. It opens a portal that sends people through, 254 of them. A lot of

people believe that I hit jump, which means I moved my titan, instead of bridging. In a lot of cases, that's how titans get killed – if they accidentally jump into a bad guy instead of moving their whole fleet. In my case, I was just looking at two clients on two different monitors that had the same module, and just said, "Oh, jump," and didn't even realize that it was my titan, so it was too late.

### **Did you have an oh s--- moment?**

No, I laughed to be honest with you, at first. It was kind of an "oh s---!" at first, but then I laughed and thought, "Oh, that's not good."

### **What was the aftermath?**

They ended up winning. At the end of the day, they ended up getting more capital ships and more numbers than we could deal with. We could have kept fighting, but the eventual call came of, "Hey, let's get out of here!" So we got as many out as we could. We ended up losing my titan, another titan, and then one died later. He crashed. His client crashed and he couldn't get back in because there were so many people. And so, six hours later he died somewhere else.

### **You lost your titan ship? How much was that ship worth?**

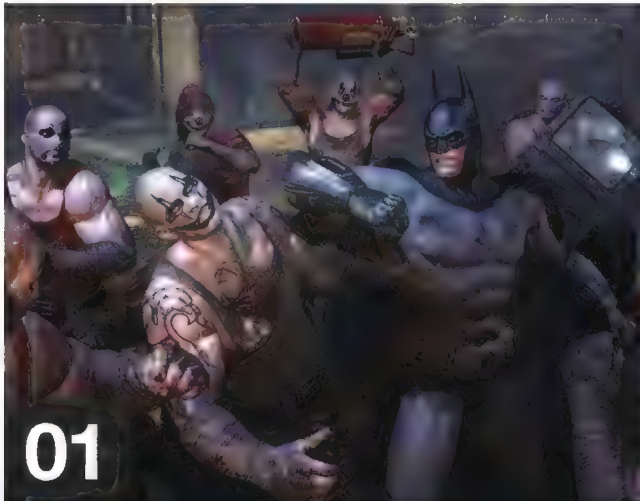
Yes. In Eve it was worth 80,000,000,000 ISK. In real-life money, that comes out to about \$2,000. Me, personally, I lost 100,000,000,000 (roughly \$3,000 in real-world conversion) ISK worth of stuff. I lost two ships that were worth a lot of money. But, things like that happen in the game.

### **How do you feel about the whole thing? Losing your ships, etc.?**

I thought it was fun. It kind of was a bad feeling, because you're losing someone else's stuff in the process, but it was probably the most fun a lot of my friends had had with the game in awhile. It had gotten a bit stagnant. Everyone was just looking at each other wondering, "Hey, I wonder what's coming next." And so it created a lot of conflict in the game.

### **Even after all this, will you still be playing?**

Oh yeah. I lost my super carrier, it was the third time I lost it, so it happens. It's not something you want to happen all the time, but the way a lot of our players in our group play, because we're part of somethingawful.com, a lot of what our guys do is they fly what you can afford to lose. I've got plenty of ISK in game, so for me it's just fly a big expensive ship, and if I lose it, I lose it. ♦



01

## Batman: Arkham City

(Wii U, PS3, 360, PC)

Batman: Arkham Asylum set a high bar, but Arkham City jumped over it then grappled onto the largest building in Gotham and kept swinging. Arkham City's puzzle-filled open world, diverse mission structure, and rich combat system made this not only the best Batman game to date, but also the best licensed video game, period.



02

### Batman: Arkham Asylum - (PS3, 360, PC)

By 2009, Batman had gone through a string of terrible licensed games, and many fans had given up hope that the interactive medium could do the Caped Crusader justice. Then Rocksteady showed up and saved the day. Arkham Asylum's thrilling action, flawless pacing, and Metroid-like level design made this an unforgettable experience.



03

### Lego Batman 2: DC Super Heroes - (Wii U, PS3, 360, Wii)

Like Arkham City, Lego Batman 2 took its predecessors' formula and expanded on it. Lego Batman 2 featured more characters, a larger, more cohesive hub world, and a humorous voice cast that kept us laughing until the closing credits.



04

### Adventures of Batman & Robin - (SNES)

Loosely based on the Warner Bros. animated series from the '90s, Batman busted criminal skulls using batarangs, a grapple gun, and other gadgets while platforming through amusement parks, museums, and Gotham's rooftops. This title was released back when Konami was at the top of its 2D platforming game, and it shows.



05

### Gotham City Impostors - (PS3, 360, PC)

Batman hates guns and often works alone, so a multiplayer-only, first-person shooter that doesn't even star the Dark Knight sounds like a terrible idea. However, Gotham City Impostors' fast-paced action, polished controls, and Team Fortress-like antics made it an entertaining experience that was hard to deny.



06

### Batman Returns - (SNES)

In the early '90s, the sidescrolling beat 'em up was one of the most popular genres on store shelves, so Konami's decision to ape Final Fight with its adaptation of the 1992 Tim Burton film worked brilliantly. Players punched through seven scenes from the movie and even got to drive the Batmobile through Gotham City's streets.



07

### Lego Batman: The Videogame

(PS3, 360, Wii)

TT Games' Lego-based characters and enemies are unsurprisingly charming, and Batman's variety of tools and outfits add some light puzzle elements to an experience that every member of the family can enjoy.

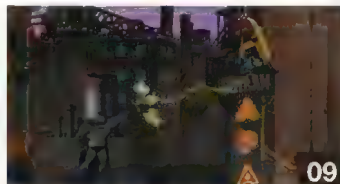


08

### Adventures of Batman & Robin

(Genesis)

This Sega game might share a title with Konami's SNES release, but the two games have little else in common. Where the SNES version was a tight, single-player action/platformer, the Genesis version is a balls-out two-player game where Batman and Robin unleashed an unlimited number of batarangs at waves of enemies.



09

### Batman: The Brave and the Bold - (Wii)

This 2D beat 'em up features the same animation and voicework as the eponymous cartoon series. Each level is presented as if it were a real episode. Batman teams up several different super-heroes including Green Arrow, Blue Beetle, and Aquaman. Wayforward's action may have been repetitive, but it captured a charm akin to Batman's Lego titles.



10

### Revenge of Shinobi - (Genesis)

Revenge of Shinobi isn't technically a Batman game, but it does feature one of the coolest cameos in gaming. After making pincushions of the kung-fu gangs in Chinatown, Shinobi star Joe Musashi faces off against a foe who looks suspiciously like Marvel's Spider-Man. Halfway through this boss battle, Spider-Man morphs into the Dark Knight himself.

# THE MAKERS OF **SUPER MEAT BOY** PULL BACK THE CURTAIN ON **...CATS**



by Matt Miller

**T**hose who enjoyed the craziness of Super Meat Boy won't be surprised that Team Meat has moved on to something even more unusual than its bloody beef hero. **Mew-Genics** may increase the indie developer's reputation for unusual subject matter, but it is also a dramatic departure in gameplay and tone. Where Super Meat Boy offered high-speed platforming dominated by challenging traversal and grisly death sequences, Mew-Genics puts players in the role of a crazy old cat lady as she shepherds her felines to success in racing, pageantry, and fighting through a selective breeding program of experimentation and mutation.

Mew-Genics has a number of interlocking game systems that allow various interactions with the many cats. The central hub is your house, where you oversee your felines,

care for them, breed them, and witness their interactions with one another. One situation that could arise involves crossbreeding a cat with a raccoon wandering through your back yard. The initial pairing proves disastrous, as the raccoon attacks the cat sent to romance it. For the second attempt you drug the raccoon first, and let a new cat try his luck. The result is a crazy raccoon/cat hybrid that can then be integrated into the rest of the population.

Games of Mew-Genics are meant to be finite, lasting for a period of days until one of several fail conditions ends the game. If the house gets too dirty, the game ends because it's hazardous to live there. If too many cats die, animal control shows up and shuts things down. If the cats don't breed enough, you (as the cat lady) get sad and the game ends. Over time and multiple games, you learn how to successfully balance all the tasks involved in raising your cats and ensuring their prosperity.

That success is determined in one of three central contests. Cat racing in the sewers is run by the questionably sane Frank, who believes he's racing cats, but actually only owns rats. A second option lets you send your more aggressive animals into a cat-fighting competition. Finally, your prettiest creations make their way to the cat pageant. Here, your cats compete in a series of events proving their poise and beauty. You want these cats to be calm and non-aggressive, and not prone to mounting other cats or defecating in random locations. Judges evaluate them on their physical qualities, like their giant eyelashes or overblown silicon lips.

No matter which contest type draws your attention, other game systems deepen the experience. Missions regularly pop up to offer a focus to your cat adventures. The Team Meat guys described one mission in which Sewer Frank wants you to acquire a 300-day old poop. That's a pretty tall order in a single playthrough, but smart gamers can use the cryo cube in the house to save the smelly item between multiple games, thereby ensuring mission completion.

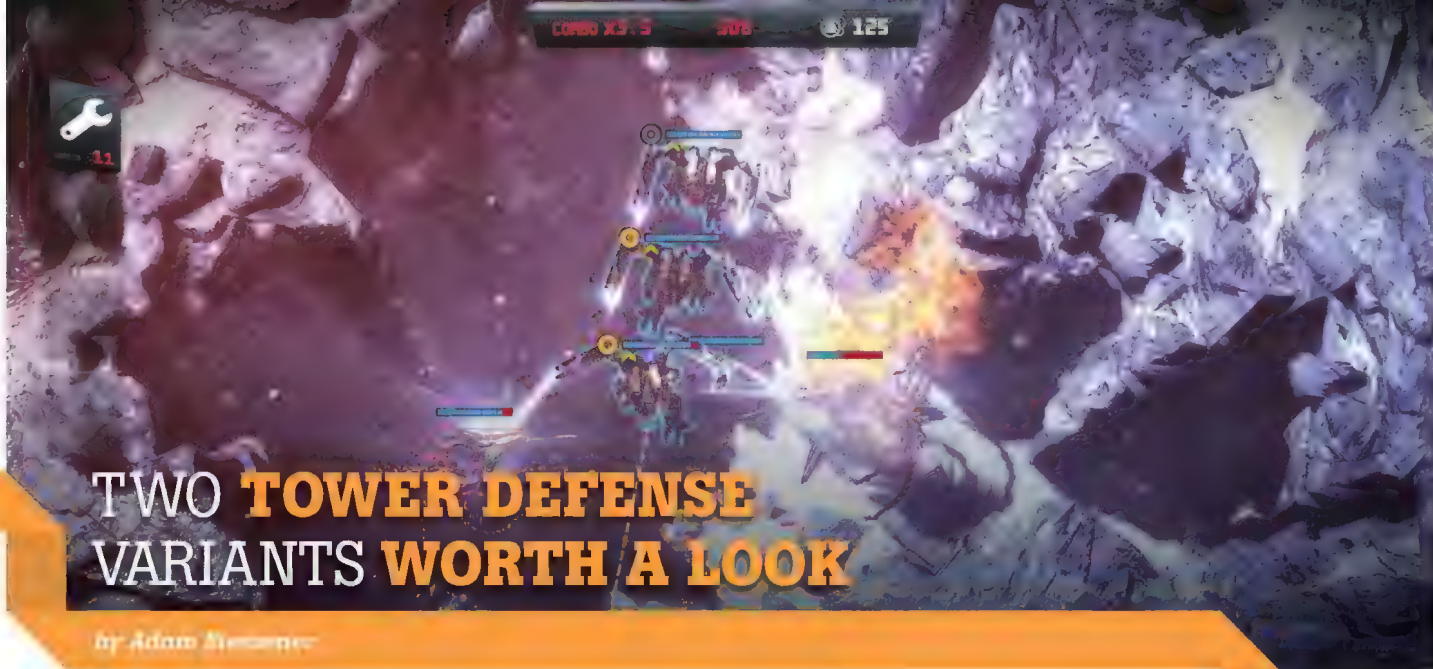
Players also have access to an in-game mail system that offers new missions and coupons to spend at in-game stores, which helps keep you solvent as you care for the household. Another game system is the trinket tray, which offers small items that change or bend the rules of the game, like making your cats more aggressive or further broadening customization options.

A full-on soundtrack created by the musical group Ridiculous accompanies your antics in Mew-Genics. The musical duo has crafted an original soundtrack of mostly sung music all about cats. Songs reflect various situations in the game, from sad elegies to triumphant celebration. Styles run the gamut from 1930s-era big band to smooth lounge music.

Mew-Genics is on its way to Steam, iOS, and Android within the painfully nebulous time frame of "sometime in 2013." I'd have more doubts about the unusual premise were it not for the brilliant design and gameplay on display in Team Meat's previous effort. Though I can't believe I'm saying it, I can't wait to live the life of that weird cat-collecting woman who used to live down the hall. ♦







## TWO TOWER DEFENSE VARIANTS WORTH A LOOK

by Adam Mesinger

### Anomaly 2

**W**e recently reviewed 11bit Studios' PC/mobile follow-up *Anomaly: Korea*, a new set of levels that shared most of its units and gameplay with the original *Anomaly: Warzone Earth* (you can read the review online). The busy Polish studio has already announced a full sequel, and *Anomaly 2* shakes things up a bit more than *Korea*. Alternate modes for units, new mechanics, and a different setting are all improvements based on the early playable build 11bit sent over.

The transformation mechanic is a perfect fit for *Anomaly*'s tower-offense gameplay. Instead of watching my units crawl along the

tower-infested path I've picked and occasionally firing off powers in support of my convoy, I now find myself interacting with the world directly much more often by ordering my vehicles between their traditional and mech forms. Each has strengths and weaknesses, and using both forms effectively is key to completing levels and achieving high rankings. The mechanic also injects much-needed variety into the strategy of selecting your unit mix, as the greater diversity of capabilities opens new strategic doors.

Route planning takes a step forward in *Anomaly 2* as well. Not only do the alternate vehicle modes support new approaches to

enemy layouts, but the new heat mechanic encourages constant engagement by improving damage output as units fire. The basic chaingun jeeps in the early game take a while to warm up, but their firepower at maximum heat is an order of magnitude greater than with cold barrels. Each unit has its own characteristics with this new mechanic as well, which reinforces *Anomaly 2*'s newfound variety in choosing your convoy loadout even more.

PC is currently the only announced platform for *Anomaly 2*, but the studio's track record makes iOS and Android phone/tablet releases all but certain later this year.

*Looking for more information on downloadable and independent games? Visit [gameinformer.com/impulse](http://gameinformer.com/impulse) for regular updates, reviews, and previews. For more in this issue, check out our first look at Telltale's new episodic game, *The Wolf Among Us* (p. 56), and Double Fine's adventure game, *Broken Age* (p. 64). In addition, don't miss our previews of *Payday 2* (p. 77) and *Path of Exile* (p. 79), and our scores for *Phantom Breaker: Battle Grounds*, *Dollar Dash*, *A Valley Without Wind 2*, *Impire*, and *Year Walk* on p. 94.*

### Sanctum 2

**I** spent an enjoyable afternoon playing alongside the developers of another downloadable PC tower defense variant this month as well: *Sanctum 2*, a sci-fi defense shooter with equal parts emplaced defenses and handheld laser cannons. Think *Orcs Must Die* in space, and you're on the right track.

The sequel to a student project that eventually released digitally, *Sanctum 2* is a more polished and fleshed-out take on the concept. Limited mazing lets you determine the enemies' paths to some extent, and a

wide variety of towers, from autocannons to mine dispensers and far-future bug zappers, lets you craft unique strategies for each wave. An extensive persistent upgrade metagame allows significant specialization in both tower-building and personal firepower. Hammering enemies' glowing red weak spots is as crucial as constructing a clever maze.

I am impressed with the web of counters the developers have built for *Sanctum 2*. No one strategy is perfectly sound, as there's always a new bug ready to shrug off an attack type,

frustrate direct-fire weapons, fly over mazes, or throw some other wild card into the mix. The emphasis on hitting weak spots makes a solid connection crucial, though – don't play with allies across the Atlantic like I did, because network lag is far more damaging to the experience than in a looser design like *Orcs Must Die 2*.

I've seen enough positives out of this not-so-little indie project to keep an eye on it as it nears a release later this year, and I urge anyone with a similar interest in the subgenre to do the same.



massive

# The Elder Scrolls Online

The developers at Zenimax Online Studios have promised an MMORPG that satisfies fans of the genre and Elder Scrolls aficionados. The team's pitch is a world stuffed full of content to explore, a combat system closer to an action game than a traditional MMO, and a de-emphasis on number crunching in favor of more organic character builds and interactions. Four hours with an early build of the game bore out the studio's claims for the most part, with some caveats.

by Adam Biessener

**D**ropped into the starter zone for Bretons, Orcs, and Redguards without the benefit of the tutorial that Zenimax Online is still working on, my Breton templar quickly begins carving a heroic swath through mudcrabs and wolves in his aimless meanderings across the pirate haven of Stros M'kai. The main story thread involves a heist to acquire proof of a pirate lord's continued preying on Breton traders in violation of the Daggerfall Covenant, but in true Elder Scrolls fashion, I take a sharp left turn off the boat in search of

whatever lies over the next hill.

Whoever leaves these chests stuffed with goodies scattered around Tamriel, I'm in their debt. The simple lockpicking minigame has just enough challenge to be a nice break from combat and exploration, and the loot often proves superior to the quest rewards I occasionally haul in. One-off quests appear on my radar as I draw near their starting points, and I have a grand time delving into Dwemer ruins, rescuing mad adventurers from themselves, and ending a goblin threat by assassinating their king.

One particular quest deserves mention: an exploration mission found by digging out an unmarked chest from under a wrecked ship. A note with cryptic instructions for buried treasure awaits inside. Its riddles demand some thought, since this special type of quest has no minimap pointers. I didn't finish it - I was on a clock, and I wanted to see the next zone - but I love how the quest log tracks your progress through the series of clues without giving anything more away.

Stros M'kai's finale dishes out a pleasant surprise: Several of the people I helped with their sidequests show up to aid me by giving me shortcuts around the pirate lord's defenses. One procures a servant disguise, another seduces his way into possession of a key to the lockbox, and a third provides me with an experimental Dwemer-powered stun gun. I would have been able to complete the heist

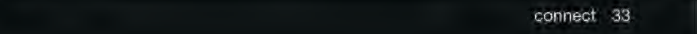
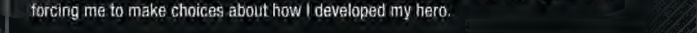
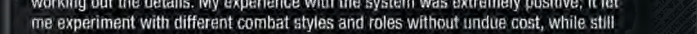
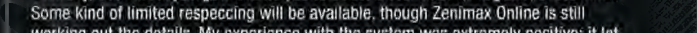
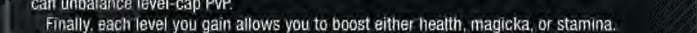
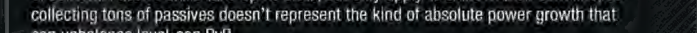
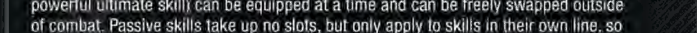
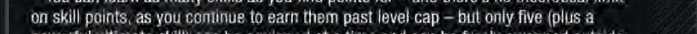
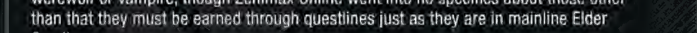
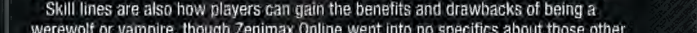
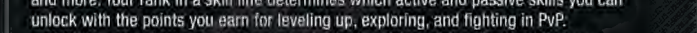
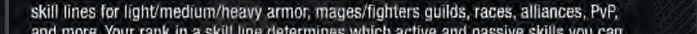
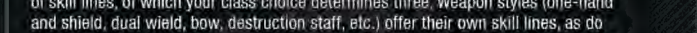
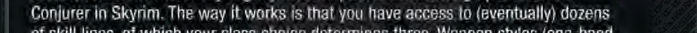
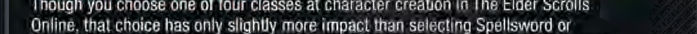
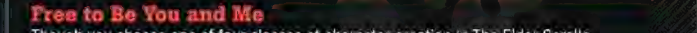
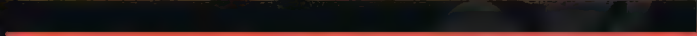
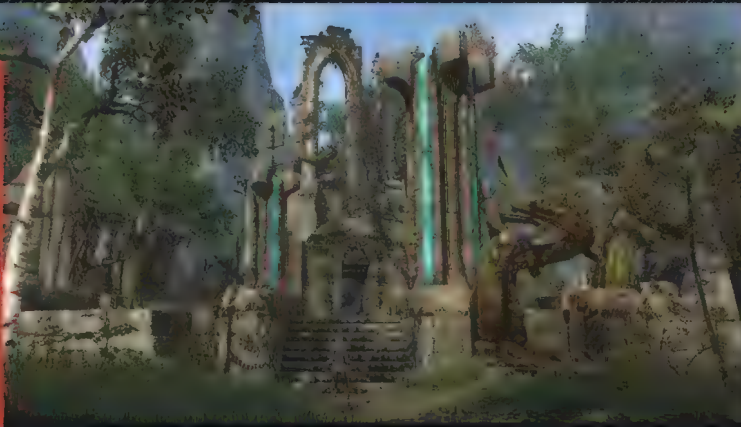
without their assistance, but it's a wonderful nod in a genre that struggles with recognizing players' heroic deeds.

The interaction with these notable NPCs continues in the following zone, the Orc island of Betnikh. They show up to comment on and help me with a few storylines there, and I was gratified to see generic mercenaries tied to other players fulfilling the same tasks. Look how much cooler my experience is because I took the time to befriend these named characters! The change of scenery from Stros M'kai to Betnikh is welcome, trading scorched scrubland for lush forests. Experiencing the island's tragic history firsthand is one of the better solo adventures I've had in an MMO.

Throughout my four hours of play, I never once was asked to kill ten rats, collect twelve bear tongues, or find sixteen scattered relics. Every quest has a decent-to-good story attached to it, and every objective would feel right at home in Skyrim or Oblivion. I hope Zenimax Online can maintain this quality and variety throughout the game, because the questing I undertook in Elder Scrolls Online is a cut above any designer-scripted solo adventuring I've done in similar MMORPGs.

As much as I appreciate the chests and hidden quests in the wilderness, Elder Scrolls Online is unquestionably a more directed experience than the mainline single-player RPGs offer. Much like in a traditional fantasy MMO, Stros M'kai and Betnikh have clear





storylines that weave through a defined path with some sidequests to distract you along the way. Experience levels mark milestones in your journey, defining which areas and quests you can meaningfully interact with. I don't personally have a huge problem with the structure; questlines in mainline Elder Scrolls games do much the same with less emphasis on mini-map pins and geographical regions.

The interface is minimal in the extreme, keeping all the numbers under the hood and presenting health, magicka, and stamina as simple bars and displaying them only when below full – just like in Skyrim. A single stat determines the power of a weapon or armor of a piece of apparel, though magical equipment at higher levels obviously complicates things. Skills tell you how much damage they do when you're browsing them in the level-up interface, but the numbers are hidden in combat.

The action is as close to traditional Elder Scrolls combat as I can imagine an MMORPG being, given the realities of playing online. The mouse drives everything; it's always bound to your avatar's facing, left-click attacks with your weapon, and right-click blocks. The holy trinity of blocking, dodging, and interrupts – all accomplished by spending stamina – is the foundation on which the entire design rests, and it works beautifully. Power attacks are brutal, but stun the user if the strike is blocked. Charged-up or channeled spells ignore normal and power attacks, but can be interrupted with a bash activated by left-clicking while holding block. Directed or ground-targeted attacks generally ignore blocks, but can be dodged/rolled out of with a double-tap of a movement key. Skills are powerful and require significant

chunks of your stamina or magicka bar to use. I found myself using one to three skills per encounter while the vast majority of my actions were basic attacks/blocks/dodges/bashes. The end result feels great, and lies closer to Skyrim than World of Warcraft.

As enamored as I am with Elder Scrolls Online's combat in general, it's still an MMO. Collision and timing are necessarily much looser than in Skyrim and similar games. ESO lacks the intimate brutality of Skyrim's melees, though the newly unveiled first-person view narrows the gap significantly at the expense of tactical awareness. I can't vouch for its long-term appeal, as the encounters in the newbie zones are purposely easy to overcome, and I only saw a tiny fraction of the huge variety of skills in the game.

There's much more to an MMO than the newbie zones, storytelling approach, and basic combat that I experienced firsthand. The team at Zenimax Online is saying all the right things about supporting different playstyles, encouraging players to play together rather than remaining solo throughout the whole game, and the many other elements that go into a successful MMO. The crafting system seems interesting, and progression looks to be a good foundation for open-ended character building (see sidebar). The open-world persistent PvP warfare in Cyrodill has huge potential; I can see a long and healthy lifespan of alliance-versus-alliance siege warfare across a zone nearly the size of The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion. For now, I'm reassured that my first hands-on playtime supported the team's claims about combat, questing, and storytelling as much as four hours in an MMORPG can. ♦

### Free to Be You and Me

Though you choose one of four classes at character creation in The Elder Scrolls Online, that choice has only slightly more impact than selecting Spellsworn or Conjurer in Skyrim. The way it works is that you have access to (eventually) dozens of skill lines, of which your class choice determines three. Weapon styles (one-hand and shield, dual wield, bow, destruction staff, etc.) offer their own skill lines, as do skill lines for light/medium/heavy armor, mages/fighters guilds, races, alliances, PvP, and more. Your rank in a skill line determines which active and passive skills you can unlock with the points you earn for leveling up, exploring, and fighting in PvP.

Skill lines are also how players can gain the benefits and drawbacks of being a werewolf or vampire, though Zenimax Online went into no specifics about those other than that they must be earned through questlines just as they are in mainline Elder Scrolls games.

You can learn as many skills as you find points for – and there's no theoretical limit on skill points, as you continue to earn them past level cap – but only five (plus a powerful ultimate skill) can be equipped at a time and can be freely swapped outside of combat. Passive skills take up no slots, but only apply to skills in their own line, so collecting tons of passives doesn't represent the kind of absolute power growth that can unbalance level-cap PvP.

Finally, each level you gain allows you to boost either health, magicka, or stamina. Some kind of limited respeccing will be available, though Zenimax Online is still working out the details. My experience with the system was extremely positive; it let me experiment with different combat styles and roles without undue cost, while still forcing me to make choices about how I developed my hero.

# interview



photo: Jason Henry

# Deep Silver's Careful Growth

The explosive success of Dead Island put publisher Deep Silver on the map in North America, and the company is now expanding with the recent acquisitions of THQ's Saints Row and Metro franchises. We spoke with Deep Silver COO Geoff Mulligan on his vision for the company's future.

interview by Matt Helgeson

**You've worked at many video game companies, both new and very established. When Koch Media started Deep Silver in America, you were given a blank slate. What was your vision for Deep Silver as a publisher in America?**

I'd been fortunate enough to work for both private and public companies, both big and small. I'd seen small companies become big companies. I flew to my interview process, went over to Germany and reviewed the product line and told them what I thought would work and wouldn't work in North America. They were quite surprised with what I thought would work compared to what they thought would work. I thought, "Well, I'll never get this job." Luckily, they took a chance and said, "Go for it."

I'll give you one of my favorite quotes: "You have to remember that nobody ever started a big company; everyone starts small." I'd joined big and small companies. More importantly, I've seen small companies become big companies. The difference is how you get there, how long it takes you, and what path you take to become a big company. That's what separates the good companies from the bad companies and the successful ones from the ones that collapse.

**It's been a big period of growth for Deep Silver. A lot of that was spurred by the success of Dead Island. How surprised were you by that game's breakout success?**

We thought it would be a very good title. Did any of us predict the kind of runaway success that we've had – three million here, five million worldwide? I don't think in anybody's wildest imagination would it have gone that far. Luck had a lot to do with it, and some genius marketing – marketing events that larger companies wouldn't try. We're a small, guerilla tactics company. People say, "Oh, you acquired Volition and Metro, you're going to be a triple-A publisher!" What separates us from a triple-A publisher is that I don't really have a desire to be a triple-A publisher. I actually think we're much better than the Activisions, EAs, and Ubisofts of the world. People say, "What do you mean? They are valued at three billion dollars." I say the difference is that we make money. [Laughs] That's what it's all about. Now, with the acquisition of Metro and Saints Row, it allows us to, again, go from strength to strength. But do I want to hire 500 people and build a world headquarters? That's not what we do – nor is it what we need to do.

**In terms of the game industry, what are the negative effects of companies being public?**  
Being public puts a phenomenal financial

burden on a company to make your quarterly numbers. You have an obligation to your shareholders to give them a reasonable return on their investment. Your life is dedicated to giving your shareholders value for money and their investment. When you're private, you don't have to do that. You don't have to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars just filing and being compliant with the SEC. You're under so much more scrutiny at every single level of the business than when you're privately held. If I had my druthers and was growing a company, would I take it public? Absolutely not – not in this environment.

**What was attractive to you about bringing on two triple-A quality franchises like Saints Row and Metro?**

Both fit well into our portfolio and into our comfort zone. From a marketing, distribution, and PR perspective, they're the kind of products that we can handle, in the sense that the way we market Dead Island and the manner in which we market Saints Row and Metro will be remarkably similar. Our marketing and games appeal to the core gamer. Granted, through our marketing efforts we've gotten to a much wider audience with Dead Island. Saints Row already has that wide audience. It's five million units and a huge online community as well – as does Metro. I think Metro was about 625,000 sold on Steam with the last Metro. It's right in our sweet spot.

**Many times, when a studio like Volition gets acquired, people cringe and wait for the other shoe to drop. Are you comfortable with the size, management, and culture at Volition? Do you see ways that they need to change to fit in better with Deep Silver?**

Dan Cermak, who runs it there, and has for 18 years, has [created] a very strong corporate culture. From what I have here in North America, the blend has been wonderfully painless. It's been great working with them thus far. To your question, are they the right size? I think it's the right size, right place, and right time. It wasn't like, "If you want the IP, you have to buy the studio then do what you want with it." We wanted the IP and we wanted the people.

**THQ was cited as an example of the struggles of the "middle-class" publisher in video games. How can Deep Silver negotiate that middle ground between a small, niche publisher and a mega-publisher like EA?**

First of all, your phrase "middle-class publisher" – I think you're a software publisher, first and foremost. I firmly believe that you do not need a giant organization anymore. That's what's killing so many publishers. The moment you don't have a giant, triple-A hit, your overhead absolutely eats you alive. What do you do if this big, triple-A game didn't hit? You've got to ship another one very quickly and hope that one does. You keep doubling

down, hoping one of these is going to help you recover in a given year or a quarter. I wouldn't consider us a middle-class publisher at all; we're a publisher that, in a difficult and rapidly evolving marketplace, uses guerilla tactics. We move quickly and we don't have a public board of directors to answer to. We like what we do and have fun. That's important! You go to some of these companies – you probably have good friends at some of these companies. You go hang out with them, and they are miserable or they are frightened. I think our people are having a really good time. One [thing] I've heard lately was, "There are no more B and C titles, there are just triple-As that didn't make it."

**Koch has said it wants to aggressively expand in the mobile market. What role will Deep Silver play in that strategy?**

I think that this generation of teens or 20-somethings have all grown up with mobile devices. Our strategy is that we will continue to expand into the mobile market. Do we want to be a pioneer? Pioneers get stuck with the arrows. That's age old – whether you rolled over from an Atari system to a Nintendo or a Nintendo to a Genesis or into a GameCube. Does Deep Silver have the desire to be the first company out on the PS4? Absolutely not. That's not what we do. Let the pioneers; let your triple-A public companies do that, because they almost have to.

**What about other models like free-to-play? There is speculation that the next generation of home consoles might be more open to that model. Is that something you're looking at?**

It is. Free-to-play is wonderful, but sooner or later you have to make some money on it. If you monetize it, what kind of overhead would you like to have? I don't know if you're familiar, but back this past December we bought a minority stake in Infernum in Germany. They are a successful MMO company. So, rather than jump in and buy the whole thing in an area that we're not familiar or comfortable with, we ease in and learn a business. So, our investment in Infernum is our first meaningful move into that space.

**Do you have next-gen plans or Wii U plans?**

Not Wii U. With other companies, I've been very successful with Nintendo. With Wii U, the Nintendo market right now and their audience is not who we reach best. It's not something we're entertaining in the near or foreseeable future.

**PlayStation 4 and the next Xbox are coming soon. What is your strategy for those platforms?**

I would safely say that you'll see us there, but not on the first day. It's the same reason: the pioneer versus the settler.... Being there on the first day, that's for the big guys. ☺

## CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

**1974**  
**ELECTRONIC EYE**  
After a brief career as a charter pilot, Mulligan enters the electronics business working for Ampex's broadcast TV division

**1981**  
**THE FIRST INDIE**  
Mulligan becomes one of the first employees of Activision, the first independent game publisher in history. He helps introduce products like Pitfall! to market on the Atari VCS

**1991**  
**GOING ALONE**  
Departing Atari, Mulligan forms his own company, Arena Entertainment, which specializes in bringing Japanese Genesis games to the U.S.

**1992**  
**ACQUISITION**  
After the death of key Arena investor Robert Maxwell, Acclaim purchases Arena and uses it as a publishing label

**1993**  
**RATINGS & THE BIG SHOW**  
As a founding board member of the Interactive Digital Software Association (now Entertainment Software Association), Mulligan helps institute the ESRB ratings and assists in planning the first E3

**2001**  
**EASTERN PROMISES**  
Mulligan leaves the ailing Acclaim to run Konami's American division, overseeing properties like Metal Gear and Dance Dance Revolution

**2007**  
**ON THE TRACK**  
Leaving Konami, Mulligan helps set up another stateside division, this time for UK publisher Codemasters

**2009**  
**SILVER MEDAL**  
After being approached by Koch Media, Mulligan is hired to set up the company as a U.S. publisher under the Deep Silver name. The company soon scores a massive hit with Dead Island



# GOOGLE PIXEL CHROMEBOOK

**W**hen a small Internet startup named Google first launched its search engine back in 1998, no one imagined that 15 years later that same company would be mapping the entire planet, designing self-driving cars, or researching computerized glasses that augment reality. As one of Google's many forays into new markets, the Google Pixel Chromebook is the search giant's first laptop made without a manufacturing partner. The Pixel is a creative take on an existing product, but it also lacks a few key laptop features.

If you walk through life with your head in the cloud then you'll have no trouble adapting to a Chrome OS-based Chromebook. These laptops are designed to operate almost entirely in the cloud. Google Docs replaces Microsoft Office. Spotify replaces iTunes. Pixel replaces Photoshop. Google offers 1TB of cloud storage to all Pixel owners, which helps make up for the paltry 32GB hard drive. It's increasingly easier to live your digital life solely on the web, but there is still something inherently uncomfortable about dropping \$1,299 on a laptop with a hard drive smaller than some smartphones.

The Pixel houses a dual-core 1.8GHz Intel Core i5 processor, but since it only has an integrated graphics solution you won't be running demanding games like *Crysis 3* or *Battlefield 3* on this machine. On the other hand, I found a surprising number of great – and often free – browser-based titles to while away the hours, like *Kingdom Rush*, *Bastion*, *Plants Vs. Zombies*, *Don't Starve*, and *Need for Speed World*.

While the Pixel isn't the gamer's dream, it is a stunning looking, extremely lightweight, and maintenance-free portal to the Internet. The system has a seamless metal finish, its backlit keys produce a satisfying click, and the trackpad has a comfortable grip.

The Pixel's 12.85-inch, 2560x1700-pixel touch display steals the show. I was worried that the 3:2 aspect ratio would turn me off, but the Pixel's more vertical-friendly screen is ideal for browsing the web and reading articles, and with a resolution nearly as dense as Apple's iPad, photos and video look fantastic. The screen's touch functionality is a nice novelty, and it's fun to reach up and touch a link from time to time, but for most apps it's still easier to just use a mouse.

With a steep price tag and a lack of serious gaming power, the Pixel isn't for everyone. The lack of HDMI support is disappointing, and the system's five-hour battery is unimpressive, but if Google fixes those issues it might end up with an inviting status symbol that would make people forget they ever had a hard drive.

AVERAGE

\$1,299 (Wi-Fi only) \$1,499 (4G LTE) | [google.com/chromebook/pixel](http://google.com/chromebook/pixel)

## 1 Wii Controller Pro U

Interworks Unlimited's Controller Pro U touts itself as the "ultimate game controller," which is quite an oversell. The main draw is that this controller works with both the Wii and Wii U, substituting for either the Wii Motion Plus remote or Classic Controller. The face and shoulder buttons and analog sticks are responsive, but the poor d-pad performance is a deal-breaker. Pressing any direction can result in a mixed bag of nearby inputs that makes control inconsistent and frustrating. Another knock against the controller is it can't be used as a substitute for the Pro Controller so it won't work with games like *Darksiders 2* and *Batman: Arkham City*. The 30-plus hour battery life is impressive, but gamers looking for a classic game controller or an all-in-one Wii controller should look elsewhere.

LIMITED APPEAL ■■■■■

\$39.99 | [interworks-usa.com](http://interworks-usa.com)



## 2 Star Wars X-Wing Miniatures Game and Millennium Falcon Expansion Pack

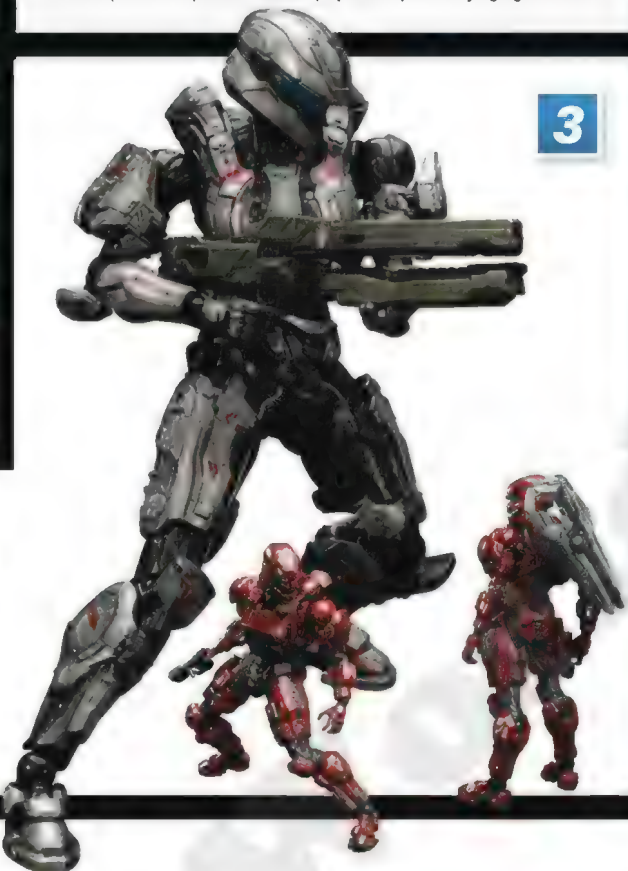
Playable on any flat surface, X-Wing delivers a fast and straightforward ruleset to engage in strategic, competitive dogfights using detailed miniature replicas of the iconic Star Wars ships. An innovative approach to turn order keeps your maneuvers secret from your opponent until they've committed to their move, assuring a tense game of guessing your enemy's next play. Eight expansions bring new ships into the mix, along with a wide array of pilot cards that change the way each vehicle plays. The coolest add-on is the recent Millennium Falcon, which creates new rules for large ships and turret guns, and doubles as a gorgeous knick-knack for your desk.

\$39.95 (Core Game) \$14.95-\$29.95 (Expansions) | [fantasyflightgames.com](http://fantasyflightgames.com)

## 3 Play Arts Kai Halo 4 Spartan Figures

Square Enix's Play Arts Kai line of action figures are so meticulously detailed that they might bleed...except Spartans don't bleed. The newest line from the company covers figures from 343 Studio's Halo 4. Each figure stands about nine inches tall and features several points of articulation. This series includes Spartan Sarah Palmer from Halo 4's Spartan Ops mode as well as some dude in red Spartan armor. We wanted the blue guy!

\$70.00 Each | [halowaypointstore.com](http://halowaypointstore.com)



### HECK BY ZANDER CANNON

Game Informer freelance artist Zander Cannon draws and writes this sometimes funny, often profound story about faded hometown hero Hector "Heck" Hammarskjöld. After inheriting his father's house, he finds a portal to the underworld buried in the basement.

\$19.95  
[topshelfcomix.com](http://topshelfcomix.com)

### NOS4A2: A NOVEL BY JOE HILL

Charles Manx kidnaps children in his 1938 Rolls-Royce Wraith and then takes them on a ride through an alternate dimension shaped by his own twisted imagination. However, when Charlie picks up the wrong girl, he faces off against a magic just as powerful as his own.

\$28.99  
[harcercollins.com](http://harcercollins.com)

### VADER'S LITTLE PRINCESS

This is the hilarious follow-up to the breakout bestseller "Darth Vader and Son." Now the Sith Lord must face the trials, joys, and mood swings of raising a sweet young daughter who is slowly growing into a rebellious teenager.

\$14.95  
[chroniclebooks.com](http://chroniclebooks.com)

### VEEP: THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

Julia Louis-Dreyfus stars in this sidesplitting HBO series about the whirlwind day-to-day life of the Vice President who must put out political fires while juggling a demanding private life.

\$49.99  
[store.hbo.com](http://store.hbo.com)

## Can You Take It With You?



by Jeff Cork, senior associate editor, Game Informer

# I

've been here before. Next-gen hardware is on the horizon, and my current-gen systems are already starting to look like antiques. I'm not at the point where I'm unplugging anything yet, but let's just say I've been eyeballing possible storage space for when the inevitable day comes. Which leads to the question: Which of my games are coming with me?

I've amassed a nice collection of PS3 and Xbox 360 games over the past few years, and it's looking as though they're going to have to sit the next gen out for at least a while. Thanks to a variety of factors, not the least of which was compatible hardware architecture, we've lately been able to enjoy backward compatibility with our new consoles. It hasn't been perfect; unless you sprung for the 60 GB model of the PS3 way back when, you can't plop a PS2 game in your system and walk down memory lane. The Xbox 360's emulated Xbox support was a bizarre mess of random selections, but it was there.

I can take or leave backward compatibility as we traditionally know it. I don't mind not being able to eject a disc from an old machine and play it on whatever's new and shiny. At this point, I'm used to clearing a path for the latest and greatest. If I'm feeling nostalgic, I'll swap a few cords around and play games on their original hardware.

When you shift away from physical media, however, things get tricky. I didn't care about porting my original Xbox's ID onto the 360; it was just a glorified user name at that point. Since then, I've cultivated several console identities over the years, building rosters of online friends and amassing stockpiles of achievements and trophies. Now I'm invested. I don't want to leave all of that behind.

Just as importantly, I don't want to lose all of the games I've downloaded throughout the years. Unlike traditional, physical media, downloads don't exist anywhere but on my console and on some servers. If Sony or Microsoft decides to pull the plug on those older games, I can't dig in my closet and find replacements. Unless they're still on my legacy consoles,

those soon-to-be classics are gone forever.

No easy answers to this quandary exist. Digitally distributed games aren't magically easier to port over to next-generation hardware than their disc-based counterparts, and developers who take the effort to do so should be rewarded for their work. However, would I like the next generation to recognize my previously downloaded games and provide, at the very least, a substantial discount? You'd better believe it.

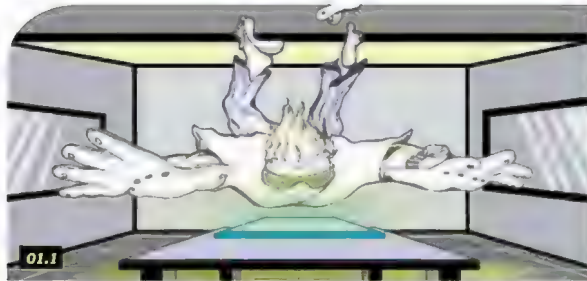
Sony has stated that PS3 games won't work out of the box on PS4, thanks to the hardware's break from the Cell-based processor. The company has expressed interest in letting players stream older games via its cloud-based streaming service Gaikai, but specifics are in short supply. Downloaded games are associated with specific PSN accounts, which could make reconnecting users with those older titles possible when (or, more accurately, if) they are emulated or streamed from the cloud.

Gaming is growing increasingly complicated, and I'm interested to see how Microsoft and Sony decide to handle these issues. One thing is certain — players will make their voices heard if they feel as though they're not being treated fairly. ♦

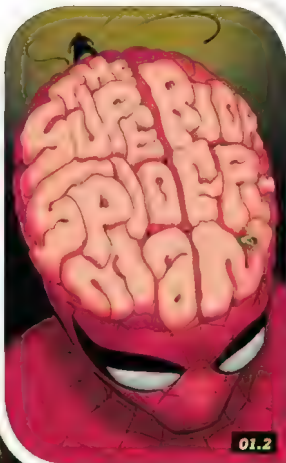
*The views and opinions expressed on this page are strictly those of the author and not necessarily those of Game Informer or its staff.*

■ ■ ■  
If you work in the industry and would like to share your opinion, contact senior features editor Matt Helgeson at [matt@gameinformer.com](mailto:matt@gameinformer.com).





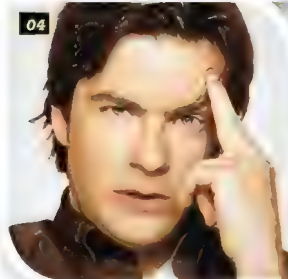
01.1



01.2



02  
Might & Magic  
Heroes VI: Shades  
of Darkness



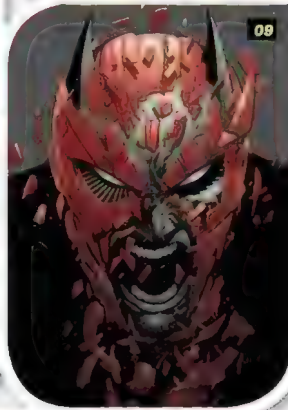
04



03



17



09



14  
Metro: Last Light



21  
Resident Evil: Revelations



22



21  
Fuse

## May

### 01.1 Two Days of Neuro Gaming

If you saw *The Lawnmower Man* and said to yourself that you would love to be a part of that terrifying world, you're in luck! The NeuroGaming Conference & Expo starts today in San Francisco, and runs through the weekend. Panels include "Feeling Human – Emotional Gaming Platforms," "Think, Think, Think – Cognitive Gaming Platforms," and "NeuroGaming Brain Health." Who knows, some of these technologies may make it into the games we play in the future.

### 01.2 Marvel Aims to Anger Fans

The release of *Superior Spider-Man #9* brings a strange solicitation from Marvel: "The hottest comic in comics comes to a turning point that will get you angrier than you were after *Amazing Spider-Man #700!*" This implies Marvel is cooking up a crazier idea than Doctor Octopus living in Peter Parker's brain. We can't wait to see what it is!

### 02 New Releases

› *Might & Magic Heroes VI: Shades of Darkness* (PC)

### 03 From Slugs to Oranges

After saving the world from a space-slug invasion in *The Avengers*, Tony Stark takes on the Mandarin in today's theatrical release, *Iron Man 3*. We don't want to question how exciting this film is going to be, but battling an old Ben Kingsley – who is named after an orange – sounds like a walk in the park for a guy who can shoot rockets out of his fingertips.

### 04 The Bluths are Back!

After being canceled by Fox in 2006, *Arrested Development* returns today with a fourth season airing exclusively on Netflix. All 14 of this season's episodes are available today. Call in sick to work. Get out of house chores. You need to set aside the entire day to watch this show!

### 09 Death Leads to Madness

Bruce Wayne is having a hard time coping with the death of his son. Madness is sinking in. What does this mean for the future of Batman? You'll want to read all of the Bat-books, including today's *Batman & Robin* release, to find out.

### 14 New Releases

› *Metro: Last Light* (PS3, 360, PC)

### 17 Star Trek to Star Wars

The war between Trekkies (obnoxious Star Trek fans) and Warsies (people who pretend they like the prequel movies) is about to take a dramatic turn since J.J. Abrams is leaving behind the *Enterprise* to travel to a galaxy far, far away. Sci-fi fans can go see *Star Trek: Into Darkness* today. Everyone else should avoid the theater like a plague, as it will be filled with nerds screaming at each other in made-up languages.

### 21 New Releases

› *Resident Evil: Revelations* (Wii U, PS3, 360, PC)  
› *Sniper: Elite V2* (Wii U)

### 22 American McGee Enters Comics

Akaneiro: Demon Hunters, the Kickstarter game created by American McGee and his team at Spicy Horse, is being adapted into a Dark Horse comic book. This story re-visions Red Riding Hood in Japanese folklore and is penned by Justin Aclin. The first issue hits shelves today.

### 24 A Furious Hangover

Today theatergoers will finally realize Paul Walker and Bradley Cooper are the same person with the releases of *Fast & Furious 6* and *The Hangover: Part III*. Pauley Walcoo (his birth name) has been fooling us for years with his brilliant performances as the hot shirtless guy in *Into the Blue* and the guy who had diarrhea in *Wedding Crashers*. Your cover is blown, dude.

### 28 New Releases

› *Fuse* (PS3, 360)  
› *Grid 2* (PS3, 360, PC)

A dramatic, low-key photograph of Batman in his iconic suit, standing in a dark prison cell. He is positioned in the center-right of the frame, looking towards the left. The background is dark, with a barred window in the lower center showing a warm, orange glow from a light source outside. The overall mood is somber and mysterious.

## BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS

» PLATFORM

Wii U • PlayStation 3  
Xbox 360 • PC

» STYLE

1-Player Action

» PUBLISHER

Warner Bros. Interactive  
Entertainment

» DEVELOPER

Warner Bros. Games Montreal

» RELEASE

Fall

# HUNTING THE BAT

**B**atman: Arkham Asylum and Arkham City are not only the best licensed games of all time, but among the best games of this generation. Smartly, Warner Bros. has granted developer Rocksteady plenty of time between projects to get it right instead of forcing regular entries. As great as this is for the final product, a torrent of pent-up fan demand grows ever stronger the further we get from Arkham City's fall 2011 release. To alleviate this, the publisher granted a new Arkham project to its freshly minted studio, Warner Bros. Games Montreal.

Batman: Arkham Origins is set one Christmas Eve early in the Dark Knight's career, years before the time period of the previous two games. This choice is very much inspired by growing-pain tales in comics *Batman: Year One* and *Legends of the Dark Knight*. Up until now, Batman has enjoyed great success against street thugs and organized crime. Tonight, all of that changes.

by Bryan Vore

# M

Mob boss Black Mask has offered a fortune for Batman's head, and top assassins and supervillians spanning the entire DC Comics universe swarm Gotham cash in on the kill. Cops on the take from the mob join the manhunt as well to exterminate this mysterious hero who has cost everyone on the wrong side of the law both money and pride. By Christmas morning, Batman must outsmart the highly motivated assassins, solve the mystery of why Black Mask wants him dead, and prove to what good cops are left on the GCPD that he's on their side. To quote *Year One*, "He's out to clean up a city that likes being dirty."





## ORIGIN OF ORIGINS

Warner Bros. Montreal became an official studio in 2010. Martin Carrier, formerly of Ubisoft, had been campaigning to start a new studio in Montreal, and Warner Bros. eventually gave the green light. Carrier took on the role of studio head and started building a team by plucking experienced talent from local studios like Ubisoft, EA GAMES, and Electronic Arts. The studio started on kid-friendly projects like Looney Tunes Scooby-doo Cartoon Universe and Lego Legends of Chima, but given the impressive pedigree of the team Warner felt comfortable giving them the keys to the hot rod – the next game in

the so-called Arkham series.

"Trying to start a studio from scratch and then to be offered a franchise of this magnitude is pretty numbing," Carrier says.

Before going full steam ahead on Arkham Origins, the studio cut its teeth working on Batman: Arkham City Armored Edition on Wii U. Reid Schneider, executive producer at the studio, explains that taking it on had two key benefits. "It enabled us to familiarize ourselves with the Rocksteady codebase, which has done some amazing things with Unreal 3," he says. "It was also an opportunity to have the game be a launch title for the Wii U system. So there was some strategic benefit for us in addition to learning what Rocksteady had done."

Once Warner granted the studio the high-profile franchise, Carrier needed to find the right person to have the

creative vision. Eric Holmes was on the short list. Holmes had the understanding of comic books necessary for the role, with experience writing the *Transformers: Megatron Origin* miniseries for IDW and having served as the lead designer of *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*. Another point of expertise that made Holmes an ideal candidate was he worked at Epic Games, the company that built the Unreal Engine used in the Arkham series. Several at Warner Bros. knew Holmes personally and professionally, and the studio put on a full-court press to recruit him for the creative director position. Before long, he was packing his bags for Canada.



Black Mask doesn't mind getting his hands, and immaculate white suit, dirty when someone needs torturing



"This is a dream project in many ways," Holmes says. "There are a couple of IPs I would tear my teeth out to work on, and this is one of them. We are huge fans of what's been done with the franchise beforehand, and to reach out and add to that in a meaningful way I think is a great opportunity."

Though Rocksteady offered guidance in the technical realm, answering questions about mechanics and the engine, when it came to story details and new features Rocksteady wanted WB Montreal to make Arkham Origins its own.

"Rocksteady is excited to see WB Games Montreal developing the prequel to the Batman Arkham franchise," says Sefton Hill, the game director on both previous Arkham games. "We are confident this talented team will craft a fantastic experience, bringing the origins of the Arkhamverse to life."

Warner Bros.' decision to do a prequel story offers the team a chance to carve a unique territory should Rocksteady choose to move the Arkham timeline ahead in the future (Rocksteady's current project is tightly under wraps). Going with a younger Batman also offers powerful story possibilities.

"It gives us the opportunity to refresh things a bit," Holmes says. "Refresh characters, refresh ideas, refresh the dynamic between Batman and other characters, and refresh the world, too. Batman hasn't become that character we know and are very familiar with. The other games, Arkham Asylum and Arkham City, I would say are roughly between issue 500 and 600 in continuity. All the characters really know each other. There's not a lot they've got to learn from each other. But by going here we want to look at those opportunities for those characters to learn about how they come together and what they mean to one another."



The fighting arena on Penguin's ship, *Final Offer*

## THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

Our live demo is set about an hour into the game. Batman perches above Jezebel Plaza watching a not-so-subtle arms deal go down. A snowstorm blankets Gotham, which is decked out with Christmas lights and decorations. In any normal city, late night on Christmas Eve would be a peaceful, joyous time. But here, Black Mask's assassins have stirred up the local thugs, resulting in more rampant crime than usual.

WB Montreal enjoys playing the grimness of the events against a cheery holiday backdrop. This unique look is only part of the changes made to the same environment used in *Arkham City*. Old Gotham hadn't been made into an urban prison yet, so there are no towering walls keeping villains in check, and many citizens still call the district home. The most noticeable example on display is the Amusement Mile, which has yet to be flooded.

Batman's scoping the deal to find out why Black Mask is sending a string of killers after him tonight. Nothing happens in this city without the Penguin hearing about it. As the city's biggest arms dealer, he sends his lieutenants out to make deals with whichever gangs are in need. Batman figures busting up this party is the best way to track down the boss.

He swoops down to the streets and pounds one enemy after another using the freeflow combat we all

know and love. "If it's not broken, don't fix it," says senior producer Ben Mattes. "We don't want to invest a ton of energy into maybe improving that but maybe breaking it. But we definitely have introduced elements to combat that... add new layers, new opportunities, and new tactics." We got to play the demo after the presentation and can vouch for its similarity to the *Arkham* games. Though we didn't see any examples in action, Warner says new enemy types will force Batman to use different maneuvers than previous games.

Once he's beaten all of the customers, Batman strides toward Penguin's cowering goon and kicks him through the decorative throne he was previously conducting business from (a mall Santa was likely bouncing little children on his knee here just hours before).

"Where is the Penguin?" Batman demands as he lifts the thug by the neck.

"I don't know. I swear," he pleads. Batman's rough strategy goes a little too far as he chokes the guy out.

"Damn," he curses.

The team wants to make it clear to the player that *Arkham Origins'* Batman is not quite as finely honed as he is in the previous games. "This guy makes mistakes," Holmes says. "He's not walking through doorways and trapping his cape in them, but he makes awesome mistakes by pushing things too far. These are things that he learns from as he goes through the story. He doesn't make the same mistake twice."



## INTRODUCING BLACK MASK

Most everyone knows supervillains like Joker, Penguin, Two-Face, and Scarecrow, but casual fans may not be familiar with the chief antagonist in *Arkham Origins*.

"We realize that Black Mask is not necessarily as prominent in people's minds as some other classic Batman villains," admits creative director Eric Holmes. "We need to explain why he's really cool, and make him felt in the game. It's not something people bring a lot of baggage to when you see the Black Mask, so we have to do the work to make him scary."

Hardcore comic fans know Black Mask as a brutal and sadistic leader whose real name is Roman Sionis (first appearance in *Batman* #386, 1985). When his wealthy parents died, Roman took over their Janus Cosmetics company and proceeded to run it into the ground. He eventually moved to a life of crime and started to wear a black skull mask carved from the dark wood of his father's coffin.

In *Arkham Origins*, Black Mask is the primary drug dealer in Gotham and he personally gets off on torturing his victims. Black Mask is formidable in a fair fight, so he's not going to get tossed around by Batman like the Penguin. His gang members all wear black skull masks, including several new undisclosed enemy types that will change the way Batman fights.





"Batman's suit [is] not something that was made in a factory by a bunch of guys designing the whole thing as one piece for him," says creative director Eric Holmes. "He's taken pieces of tech either he's invented, he's fabricated or things from the Wayne facilities, and he has made this costume out of these pieces."

"Wake up," Batman yells. The cutscene comes into focus and we see our hero dangling the man upside down over the plaza. The suspect unwisely asks to be let go and Batman obliges. A rope around his leg snaps taut, sending the enemy slamming into the face of a clock tower. Batman reels him in as the man begs and pleads, offering to tell him anything. "Too late. I already have what I need," Batman replies before dropping him once again, this time without a rope. He plummets through the branches of a lushly decorated Christmas tree, cursing his attacker from the ground once he realizes he's survived. Batman's scan of the man's phone pinpoints Penguin's base of operations, a ship docked at the northeast coast.

The port isn't close, so he summons the Batwing for a ride. The sleek black aircraft speeds into view and offers a motorcycle-like seat and handlebars just below the cockpit. Batman grapples up to the vehicle and takes a seat. The mechanism lifts him inside and the craft zips away to the selected coordinates. Players don't pilot the Batwing directly, but it does figure into story sequences and provides a universe-appropriate form of fast travel.

The docks are crawling with members of Penguin's gang, several of which carry long-range rifles. Using a standard assortment of glides, ledge takedowns, and sleeper holds, Batman approaches the Penguin's ship, *Final Offer*, without catching a bullet. He fights off a group on the deck and enters through the main door.

The ship may be rusty and decrepit, but the Penguin

has spruced it up with a casino, fighting pit, and sales floor loaded with weapons, munitions – even a tank. Since he's offshore, the Penguin uses a legal loophole to sell these prohibited goods to the criminals of Gotham. The game walks players through the entire ship, but our demo skips ahead to the final area.

During this sequence, we see the traditional predator mode in action. Batman can swing from perch to perch, glide kick, string guys upside-down, and do everything else players could do in the earlier games. Batman also brings a brand-new gadget along for the mission. The remote claw functions similarly to the grappler in *Just Cause 2*. Batman targets two objects and fires out a claw. This hooks into the first object and launches another claw and rope to the second object. Once both are locked in, they pull the two objects together. Batman can use this to knock enemies together, slam heavy objects into foes, or string objects or people up under a perch. If you want to take out a big group all at once, string up an explosive barrel under a perch, lure enemies over with a sonic batarang, and then cut the rope with a normal batarang, dropping the explosive on all of their heads.

After clearing the room and smashing some security panels, Batman makes his way into the back office. Peering through the cracked doorway, he sees Penguin and his gang convincing a tied-up Alberto Falcone that his mob family should get out of the weapons business (comic fans will remember him from *Batman: The Long Halloween*). After striking Falcone and blowing cigar

smoke in his face, Penguin charges up an electrified cattle prod.

"Now you best listen, Falcone, 'cause this is the last time I'll ask. What are you gonna tell your father?" Penguin asks.

"That we're getting out of the weapons business," Falcone pleads. "I promise! I'll make him do it!"

Not satisfied, Penguin laughs and jabs the prod forward. A batarang out of nowhere knocks the weapon out of his hand, and Batman bursts into the room for another melee battle. After a few face kicks and arm breaks, Penguin is the only one left standing. Batman starts the interrogation off by lifting the little man over his head and smashing him into a mirror on the wall. He picks Penguin up by the neck, bashes him in the face, and demands information on Black Mask's assassin plot. The bird man gives up some intel on a murder at Lacey Towers, but before Batman can get the full story a grapple claw grips his ankle and drags him out of the room. Batman reaches for a doorframe along the way, but his arm is stomped by a mysterious figure. He loses his grip and ends up suspended upside-down from the rafters.

DC Comics' top assassin, Deathstroke, circles the vulnerable bat with a sword drawn. "It appears the game is over before it even begins," he says while slashing toward his prey. Batman blocks and disarms the killer, using the sword to quickly cut himself free. He twists midair, landing on his feet. "I'm not playing games, Slade," he warns.





The northern island is a past version of the environment from Arkham City, while the southern island is completely new



## INTRODUCING DEATHSTROKE

Many superheroes are set for Batman's home in Arkham Origins, but the only villain to return from Montreal is willing to reveal all his past. It's also the most well-known one in the DC universe: Deathstroke (first appearance *New Teen Titans* [vol. 1] #2, 1981). The team likes to think of him as the anti-Batman. He's physically and mentally enhanced and is always one step ahead of his opponents. His real name is Slade Wilson and, in the comics at least, he's missing an eye due to tragic circumstances. In combat, Deathstroke uses a staff that shoots energy beams, swords, various grenades, and the remote claw that Batman eventually confiscates for his own use (for demo purposes we saw Batman use it before encountering Deathstroke).

"Deathstroke's never really sitting on the beach hanging out," says senior producer Ben Maffei. "He's always going from job to job. There's a level of almost Boba Fett-ness to his stuff. It's weathered. He goes from gunfight to gunfight. He's an older veteran character who's been around for a long time. He doesn't really care about how he looks. He cares about getting the job done."

## WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE

Based off Penguin's tip, Batman makes his way to Lacey Towers after what we assume is a boss battle with Deathstroke. The cops say it's a double homicide, with one of the victims being Black Mask. Batman, of course, is highly skeptical. Our next live demo shows off several of the new tricks added to our hero's crime-solving arsenal.

"We really loved what was done in the other games and wanted to see if there was something else that we could do with that," Holmes says. "We wanted to tell a story within the detective environment. There's so much good detective TV on right now. One of the things that got us excited recently is the *Sherlock* program from BBC. It's very visual and there's a lot of character built into those particular scenes. We wondered what we could do to combine some of these things."

Inside the apartment, Black Mask's girlfriend is strung up on a chandelier, and his assumed body is laying face up across the room. Batman fires up his first-person detective vision and gets to work.

"The bullet that ended the female victim's life was fired from a revolver," he recites to himself. "Ballistics analysis indicates a low angle of trajectory. The shooter could have been someone of Penguin's height, but the pattern and the gunpowder residue suggests the bullet was actually fired by someone lying on the ground."

Drawn-out bullet paths and human holograms act out Batman's theories as he scans points of interest. Tracing the bullet trajectory back to the shot that killed Black Mask, Batman finds a broken desk and grooves from a chair digging into the floor. DNA found at the scene doesn't match either of the victims. This combination of evidence leads Batman to believe that a third party attacked the murderer.

His visor, powered by the Batcomputer back in

the cave, runs simulations of this person sneaking in through the patio door, getting spotted by the shooter, and tackling the shooter through the desk before he can fire his weapon. Players can watch this sequence as much as they like from whatever angle they prefer, in slow motion or with pausing and scrubbing. The key is to look for small clues and highlight them to progress the investigation. For example, the reason the shooter is tipped off is that the attacker accidentally stepped on some broken glass on the way in.

This particular mystery plays out through the entire game. Batman will investigate, leave to get some questions answered, inspect the scene again with new information, and so on. When it's fully solved, Batman will unravel one of the biggest mysteries of the game and

players will see a video rundown of the case narrated by Batman. Several other cases large and small are peppered throughout Gotham and are intended to offer players a break from constantly beating guys up.

"The last 360 game I shipped was *Prototype*, and one of the things I remember joking about in the latter days was, 'This game would be more fun if we had flower picking in it as an offset to all the incredible amounts of bloody violence,'" Holmes says. "I made that joke partially to be ridiculous and then I realized actually that's totally true. This game would be a lot better if there was something to offset that and be a different pace. For [Arkham Origins] it's another note to hit. It's a bit more thoughtful. It's a bit slow. It's a got a nice 'aha' moment at the end with a visual payoff."



In the comics, Black Mask's gang is called the False Pacers

## A LARGER GOTHAM

While the game demo takes place in the Old Gotham district, this is only half of the game world. An entirely new area exists just across a bridge, called New Gotham. Old Gotham is crummy and rundown, while New Gotham is classier and contains much taller skyscrapers. This new zone effectively doubles the size of the game world of Arkham City, hopefully without stretching it too thin.

"We all really responded very strongly to what Sefton [Hill, of Rocksteady] once said, which is that Arkham City is the densest open-world game out there," Mattes says. "That definitely holds true. We're not interested in making a big sprawling city where you run for blocks before you find someone to fight. We want to maintain that density where around every corner and on every rooftop there's always something interesting, both visually and gameplay-wise."

The key to accessing much of the content packed into the streets of Gotham is systematically dismantling the hacked tower network. These towers emit a jamming signal that prevents the Batwing from flying into the area (no fast travel) and halts Batman's sensors from placing points of interest on his map. Similar to the towers in *Far Cry 3*, it's in your best interest to take care of all of these. But rather than doing the same task over and over, these hacked towers require all of Batman's navigation, puzzle solving, and combat skills. Some

are quick to polish off, while others contain roadblocks where you must return later with the proper upgrade.

While Batman's cruising the city, he may notice many dynamic events the team is dubbing "Crime in Progress." Examples include saving some cops from a large group of thugs or rescuing a snitch from being tossed off a roof. These activities offer Batman a chance for experience point bonuses. Since you're helping contain crime, doing these side quests also contributes to the GCPD's understanding and appreciation of Batman. At the beginning of the game they don't know who you are or whose side you're on, but that all changes depending on how much you pursue these optional missions.

"By the end of the game when you've completed a requisite number of these we have this wonderful fantasy of the GCPD finally having a better picture of who you actually are," Mattes says. "It just plays out in a really cool little way."

The Most Wanted system gives players a chance to go after villains outside of the core assassin storyline as well. "There are other characters with other agendas who are doing things because Gotham's a city filled with unusual characters," Holmes says. "We don't want to just bang the drum of the assassins all day."

These optional side missions can be tackled once you discover them, and many offer an upgrade as compensation. Batman's butler, Alfred, may notice that he had a tough time in that situation and offer him a new gadget that addresses that specific problem.



## INTRODUCING BRANDEN

Comic fans will recognize GCPD SWAT team leader Branden from his appearance in *Batman: Year One*. Like all Arkham characters, he's been updated and modernized since his '80s commando outfit with kooky blue boots. In the game, he works for the corrupt Commissioner Loeb (A younger Jim Gordon is a cop on the force at this point), performing whatever dirty deeds need doing to keep their criminal activities covered up. Instead of protecting the streets, Branden and his team are actively hunting down Batman, hoping to kill him and seal the body in the highest building as a warning.

That's not GCPD. *Executive Director: I'm Batman 1991*. *Thomas Wayne I got around this city beating up cops and these guys do their best in force Batman's hand. When Batman's headlined into a corner against the GCPD guys, he will retreat with ease.*

A look at New Gotham



## TRAINING BETTER BATMEN

The Dark Knight system is a little more behind the scenes, yet equally important. "I enjoyed [Arkham Asylum and Arkham City] hugely, but when I finished them I played the challenge maps and really learned how to play the game because the mechanics are so deep," Holmes recalls. "We wanted to find a way to work that for more players, show them more depth, bring them to see that value of the mechanics that are already there."

The Dark Knight system offers a lengthy string of tasks that slowly escalate in difficulty over the course of the game. Warner wants to avoid boring tutorials, yet still manage to train more players to be masters of predator and combat systems. Completing a certain number of takedowns or silent takedowns grants XP rewards or unlocks a specific upgrade related to the activity category you're completing.

While the Dark Knight system trains you in the same way the challenge mode traditionally did, it doesn't replace it. The team stayed vague, but offered a hint about what they are doing with this mode.

"We will have them in one form, and we want to make them more meaningful," Holmes says. "I can't talk about the narrative component of challenge, but we do want to give XP within those challenges now, too." Will Batman train himself in some kind of Batcave simulator accessible from the main game? We'll have to wait to find out.

## KEEPING SECRETS

"Arkham Origins gave us a lot to chew on for this first look, but we still have many unanswered questions.

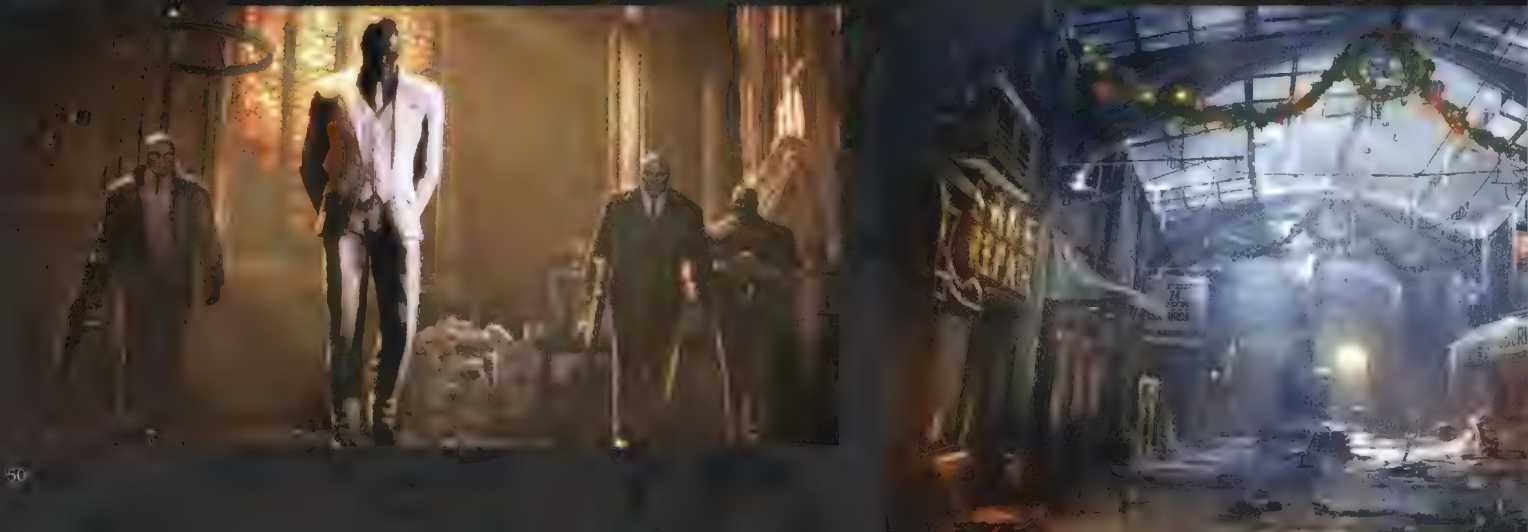
Throughout the summer we may hear about more villains, new gadgets, and new fighting moves. We also hope to get an up-close glimpse of New Gotham. Warner can't reveal some of these, but the team vows that there will be plenty of secrets they never address to give players some surprises when they boot up the game.

"We put together a story that will hopefully shock and delight people," Mattes says. "It's got twists. It's got things in it that [people] won't see coming. We're going to fight tooth and nail to defend those secrets and make sure that when the game hits, people get to experience them the way we worked so hard to create. We're going to be teasing surprises until the day the game is literally in people's hands. And then we'll say, 'Ah, there's a couple more things.' That's really exciting." ♦

Visit [gameinformer.com/arkhamorigins](http://gameinformer.com/arkhamorigins) for video interviews with the development team, a deeper dive on Black Mask, the full chat with DC's Geoff Johns, and much more.



Combat is familiar to anyone who's played an Arkham game





## GEOFF JOHNS TALKS ARKHAM

As chief creative officer of DC Entertainment, Geoff Johns handles the company's properties across a variety of multimedia formats. We spoke to him recently about his work on *Batman: Arkham Origins*.

**Did you ever do any facets of your job in a workshop?**

I've been writing comics for a long time now - over 10 years - mostly for DC Comics. I've written for games, TV, and film. I work at DC Entertainment in a role where I am still a writer by trade, but I work with Warner Bros. and all the divisions like Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, theatrical, television, and consumer products on anything DC. I guess I'm kind of an evangelist and liaison from the comic books to all the media stuff. That includes games. I'm a huge gamer.

**Did you drive any of the discussions on *Arkham Origins*?**

We talked about what would be interesting to explore, what story they wanted to tell. It was all character-based at first. You would see characters roll back like Penguin, what they looked like, what their relationships were, and how that would eventually evolve into the *Arkham* games.

**How did it feel to see them from afar?**

The day-to-day is really trying to support them and let them tell what their vision is. With all my friends that love comic books it's just the same type of thing - "Wouldn't this be cool?" It was an absolute pleasure. We're constantly talking about things that are either story-driven, character-driven, or game-driven. It changes all the time.

**How would you compare your *game* take on the origin of Batman in *Earth One* versus what *WB Montreal* is doing?**

It's really different. In *Batman: Earth One*, the first time you see [Batman] he tries to make a jump off a rooftop and can't make it. This is really beta Batman. It's Batman before he's good. The *Batman in Origins* still kicks ass and he's learning kind of trial by fire. The [Origins] story is further along. He's very confident in what he's doing. It's called *Arkham Origins*, and it really is the introduction of what *Arkham* means. *Arkham* evokes a sense of insanity and chaos embodied in the twisted minds and colorful villains of the *Batman* universe. That had to start somewhere. This is really more about Batman's initiation into that insane world, where my book's more about Batman as a vigilante and really deciding which path to go down.

# COMING FULL CIRCLE

## BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS BLACKGATE

**PLATFORM**

Vita • 3DS

**STYLE**

1-Player Action

**PUBLISHER**

Warner Bros. Interactive  
Entertainment

**DEVELOPER**

Armature

**RELEASE**

Fall



by Matt Miller



Handheld licensed games are frequently of poor quality, having rarely received the budget or development talent required to succeed. The Arkham games have proven licensed properties can excel when handled with care by a devoted developer on console, but can a handheld installment do the same? We have reason to hope that **Blackgate** can buck the trend. What makes us so confident?



Detective mode allows Batman to see enemy sight lines and other details in the environment

Armature may not be a household name, but one game series from its founders is well known to dedicated gamers. The studio is led by Mark Pacini, Todd Keller, and Jack Matthew, all of whom left lead roles at Retro Studios to found this new venture. While at Retro, they created all three Metroid Prime games, which revolutionized the gear-gated exploration genre, frequently called Metroidvania, and made the structure work in a first-person shooter.

"We broke out from Nintendo, started our own thing five years ago, and we had established a relationship with Warner Bros.," says Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate game director Mark Pacini. "They came to us with this opportunity – they were looking to make a 2.5D-style Arkham game that was in the Metroidvania flavor and they thought we'd be a good pairing to it since we were really familiar with that style of game. We'd made three of them, and we were huge fans. I'm personally a huge fan of the Arkham franchise, so it just seemed like a really good fit."

Blackgate is set some time after the end of Arkham Origins. Batman fans will recognize the name; Blackgate Penitentiary is the Gotham City prison used to house sane criminals, and Arkham Asylum handles more unpredictable cases like the Joker. Blackgate has only been referenced in the Arkham universe, so it remains to be seen how it plays into the storyline, as well as its connection to the better-known asylum. Its isolated island locale is the primary setting for this new handheld game. A prisoner uprising has occurred, and after an intro level in Gotham, Batman heads to Blackgate to resolve the riot, echoing a similar structure found in 2009's Arkham Asylum game. As Batman explores, the storytelling unravels through fully voiced 2D animatics, and we begin to see how Blackgate's troubles tie into the wider Arkham universe fiction.

The game adopts the popular Metroid design structure; Batman moves through a sidescrolling game world, acquiring new gear, fighting foes, and exploring the many interconnected passages and secrets of the prison. Unlike the console Arkham games, the focus for Batman isn't on leveling up abilities, but instead stays true to the subgenre's formula – all of Batman's improvements as he explores come through gear pickups and upgrades. "The reason we did it that way is

to give the player more of a sense of collection," Pacini says. "It was a design decision, because if you go on an XP system and you unlock an ability based on experience, you might not have necessarily traveled to that place and gotten something."

Remarkably, it's one of very few concessions the team has made away from the formula established in the other Arkham games. While Blackgate is played mostly along a 2D plane, Armature takes full advantage of the visual three-dimensionality of their environments, allowing Batman to explore, fight, and interact with the foreground and background. Batman can grapple up to gargoyles on a background balcony, letting a crowd of armed inmates pass by while he remains in the shadows. The same holds true in combat. Batman can have

enemies coming at him from all angles; a press of the analog stick sends him leaping into the foreground or background to tackle a designated foe.

As a result, combat plays out similarly to the fights in the console Batman games. The freeflow system of button taps to attack, counter, and use gear like the batarang all remains in place, giving the fights a dynamic feel unlike most sidescrollers. "We had to build from the ground up," Pacini says. "We made it so that Batman is still moving right to left, but the enemies have depths to them; they can be in the foreground or the background. All of the freeflow system will still apply, but it's just scoped for the handheld." We saw several fights that had Batman moving effortlessly between planes before sliding back into place in the central path





to continue moving left or right through the level.

Batman's familiar Arkham gear is also on display. The batarang can stun enemies or hit distant objects. The line launcher allows for crossing wide gaps. A new variation on the explosive gel lets Batman shoot it from a launcher onto spots around the screen, enabling fun takedowns like dropping a chandelier on enemies from above. Each item opens up new avenues of exploration throughout Blackgate, and many more gadgets have yet to be revealed.

The same philosophy extends to the predator encounters. "We wanted to stay true to what was cool about previous games in their predator modes, which is kind of luring people around and picking them off one by one," Pacini says. "Because you can't look around in 2.5D, we had to add a few more layers of feedback to the player. So, for example, you can see the sightlines of the enemies, which immediately allows you to say whether you are seen or not by enemies." Once the player gets the lay of a room, he or she has access to a number of familiar techniques to defeat his foes or at least send them running scared. "We have the same sort of vantage points, floor grates, silent takedowns, glide kicks, weapon use, and breakable walls – a lot of the same complementary things that were in the console game, you'll be able to play in this game," Pacini says.

Blackgate Penitentiary is split up into various sections that can all be accessed as soon as you figure out a way inside. One genre tradition you won't see is a save room; Armature plans to include a modern checkpoint system to keep players invested in the flow between action and discovery, and also allow players to manually save whenever they want. In addition, Pacini promises that resourceful players can tackle the game's bosses in any order – presuming they figure out paths to get where they want to go. "We don't want you to break the game, but if you can exploit it in a certain way that we haven't thought of, that's awesome," Pacini says. "So it's conceivable that players will have abilities that don't necessarily jibe that great with the boss. We've taken some cues from other games where if you have a particular item against a boss, you'll just rip them a new one, but we don't tell you what that item is."

In addition to combat and exploration, Armature is also bringing over the detective mode concept from the other Arkham games. Tap a button, and the screen



Many familiar devices from earlier Arkham games play key roles in the new Metroid-style handheld title

fades into a digitized overlay with detailed info for the player to peruse. Green enemies indicate they haven't seen you yet, while red shows they're onto your location. A reticle can be moved around the screen to focus Batman's attention, often uncovering secrets that would otherwise remain hidden. Using detective mode, players can uncover clues and analyze dangerous situations – no revelation for those who have played the previous Arkham games. The demo we saw proves the system transfers smoothly into a 2D environment. That sentiment extends to all the game's systems; while rooted in the 2D Metroid and Castlevania game style that fans cherish, the unmistakable DNA of an Arkham game weaves through every mechanic.

Nothing we saw of Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate

made us think it was a side project or hastily thrown together licensed title. Instead, the senior leadership team at Armature offers a fascinating glimpse into the cyclical nature of game development. It's hard to imagine that the developers at Rocksteady Studios, and now at WB Montreal, didn't look at Metroid Prime for inspiration when crafting this new vision for Batman. Now, that expertise circles back, and fans will have the opportunity to see several of the Metroid Prime game creators now working at Armature take a swing at the caped crusader. That's reason enough to break out your handheld. ♦

For a month's worth of updates on all things Arkham Origins, head to [gameinformer.com/arkhamorigins](http://gameinformer.com/arkhamorigins)



The game is built to encourage exploration, and some locales can't be breached until you have the correct item



*The*  
**Wolf Among Us**



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

» **STYLE:**  
1-Player Adventure

» **PUBLISHER:**  
Telltale Games

» **DEVELOPER:**  
Telltale Games

» **RELEASE:**  
Summer

*by Kimberley Wallace*

## TELLTALE IS BACK AGAIN TO TORMENT WITH TOUGH CHOICES

**C**oming off *The Walking Dead*, its most successful and widely acclaimed graphic adventure to date, Telltale Games has finally found its stride. While previous titles like *Tales of Monkey Island* and *Back to the Future* only found niche audiences, *The Walking Dead* brought Telltale's episodic storytelling into the mainstream. Though it was light on gameplay, it lured in gamers with its interactive narrative, gripping its audience emotionally by giving them power over the story and allowing them to forge bonds with the characters. What do you do for an encore after creating such a captivating formula? You build on it, of course.



**T**elltale is ready for this challenge with a new project: *The Wolf Among Us*, based on Bill Willingham's *Fables* comic book series from Vertigo. In Willingham's world, classic fairytales collide with reality. Every character is real, but lives in a separate world. Once an evil entity named the Adversary threatens their homelands, they flee to a place he would never look: our world. They hide among us with their powers intact, living an everyday existence, hoping to keep their secret under wraps. These famed characters also have a darker edge than the stories we've heard about them. Happy endings? Forget it. Prince Charming is a womanizing cheater, and Cinderella uses her good looks to exploit information as a spy.

Willingham's dark interpretations have won him much fanfare, as the *Fables* series has topped the comic charts and won numerous Eisner awards. Imagining our favorite fairytales in a new light is a trend that is dominating popular culture right now. It breathes into our entertainment channels from movies like *Snow White and the Huntsman*, *Jack the Giant Killer*, *Mirror Mirror*, and *Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters* to TV shows like *Once Upon A Time* and *Grimm*. Much

like picking up *The Walking Dead* license right before the TV show started getting popular, Telltale is striking while the iron is just as hot with *Fables*. The company acquired the license at the same time as *The Walking Dead*, mainly because both series were dominating the bestseller lists for comics. Telltale focused on *The Walking Dead* first, but now it's finally showing us the seedy side to the fables we've all grown up with.

When we discuss *The Wolf Among Us* with Telltale, the excitement and confidence about the new project is palpable. "The *Walking Dead* has been getting a lot of attention; now it's *Fables*' turn to shine," says CTO and president Kevin Bruner. "Everything just feels right about it for our next game."

#### MAKING FABLES SPRING TO LIFE

**A**s Telltale has learned firsthand, there's more to success than just acquiring licenses. The pressure is always on to do justice to longtime fans' favorite franchises, and Telltale has always taken that very seriously. To start the project on the right foot, Telltale asked for input from not only Willingham, but also DC Comics.

"From day one, we shared the story seeds, the look, and the character design with the folks at DC and with [Willingham]," Bruner says. "Everybody's contributing to the process, so it's a really healthy, good relationship."

Telltale's love of the comics drew them to *Fables*, so a lot of care is going into the project. "We have the luxury at Telltale [to] pick and choose our projects based on things we really love and that we're fans of, and that we really think we can make an enormously kick-ass game out of it," Bruner says.

Telltale prepped for *The Wolf Among Us* with as much precision as possible. Lead writer Pierre Shorette absorbed himself with the comics and lore as soon as he was on the project, going as far as making James Jean's illustrated covers for *Fables* the wallpaper for every device he had. Shorette wanted to make sure he knew the personalities



of the characters to a tee, which meant going back to the original source material: the fables themselves. Shorette's goal was to create a story that felt like it was written by one of the comic's writers. "I think that *Fables* fans will be happy and think that we are filling in some of the gaps and opportunities opened up by the comic," Shorette says.

**THE WOLF EARNS HIS SPOT**

**A**s in the comics, Fabletown is a community in New York where the characters, who call themselves "Fables," keep their true identities hidden after being cast from their original homes by the Adversary. Those who can't hide in plain sight are found on the Farm, a location in upstate New York that repels any non-Fables. In the Fables universe, things happen without rhyme or reason – prepare to suspend your disbelief. Don't be surprised if a pig tries to bum a cigarette off you or if a normal-looking sheriff transforms into a vicious wolf before your eyes.

The Wolf Among Us is a prequel to the comic books focused on a time when Ichabod Crane ruled as deputy mayor. It follows the headstrong sheriff of Fabletown, Bigby Wolf, formerly known as the Big Bad Wolf, as he embarks on a murder investigation.

Telltale chose to create a prequel to benefit both

newcomers and longtime fans. Everything should line up to the first page of volume one of the comics, answering questions about how characters got to their respective positions and giving deeper insight into their motivations. "It's a way for new fans to get into the story, but it's also a way for longtime *Fables* fans to be able to look at that first issue in a slightly different way," says lead designer Ryan Kaufman.

Telltale gravitated toward Bigby as the main character because of how he commands situations, his cool demeanor, and the fact that he has a checkered past. After all, in the *Homelands*, he was the Big Bad Wolf who hunted many of the Fables. Having those lingering doubts from other characters and having Bigby working through that seemed like an intriguing plot device.

But don't just think it's all about a murder. Since the Fables live in secrecy, the other conflict is the looming danger of any of the Fables losing their cover. "As sort of a background threat, we felt like that was a really interesting place to be," Kaufman says. "You can move through your world and have your adventure solving these murders and stuff, but there's always this threat that someone's going to notice you, see something they shouldn't see. From a story and gameplay perspective, that's a great thing to be engaged in and people are going to find an interesting and dangerous world to work in."

*(CONTINUED ON PG 62)*

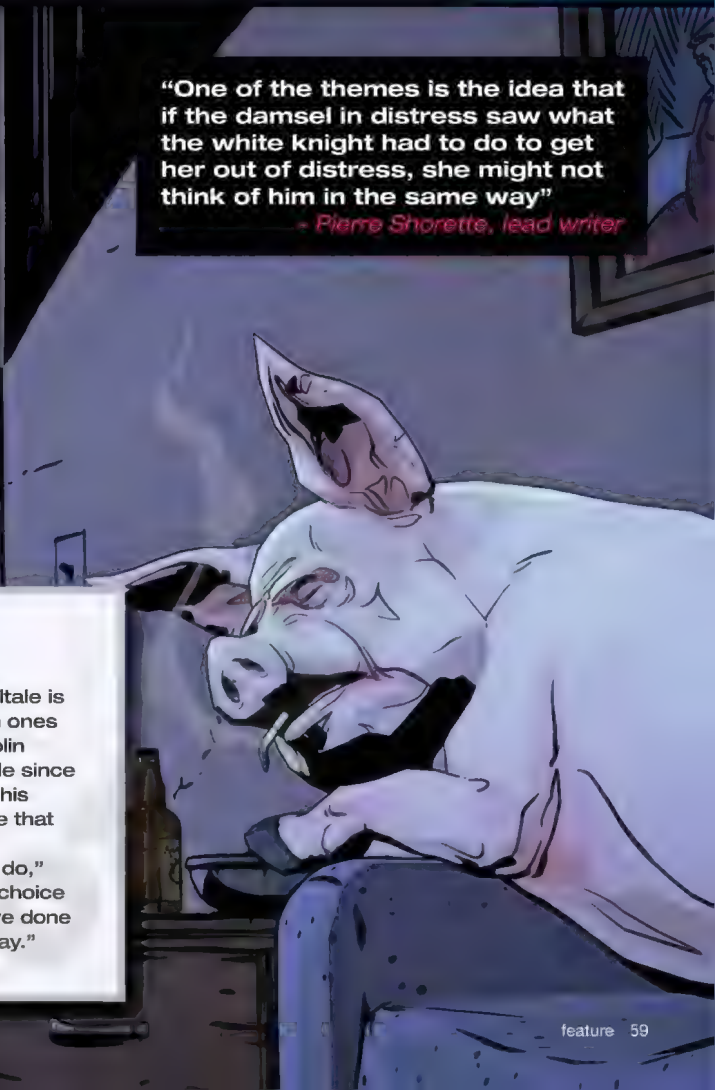


**"One of the themes is the idea that if the damsel in distress saw what the white knight had to do to get her out of distress, she might not think of him in the same way"**  
*- Pierre Shorette, lead writer*

**Colin the Pig Tests Your Conscience**

During his journey, Bigby bumps into various side characters. Telltale is creating new characters for the prequel while also expanding on ones who didn't get much limelight in the comics, like Mr. Toad and Colin (one of the three little pigs). Colin has an especially expanded role since he constantly challenges Bigby with his decisions and questions his morality. "Colin's the only character who can tell Bigby to his face that he's being a monster," says lead designer Ryan Kaufman.

"A lot of times in the game, Colin calls out what you the player do," adds CTO and president Kevin Bruner. "If you choose to make a choice one way, Colin is a character who can tell you that you should have done it the other way or what it would have meant to do it the other way."



# THE CAST 101

Curious about the characters you'll encounter in the first episode? Here's an introduction to some of the cast.



## *Bigby Wolf*

The renowned Big Bad Wolf, known for tormenting pigs and girls in red hoods, is trying to put those dark days behind him. Since he's reformed, Bigby has taken on human form and acts as Fabletown's sheriff. The people of Fabletown are slow to trust him. Though Bigby is determined to show that's he's truly changed, some of his basic instincts are hard to deny.

## *Snow White*

Snow White has a long record of betrayals and regrets - very unlike the classic fairytale version of the character. Her mother gave her up to an aunt who tried to kill her, the dwarves mistreated her, and Prince Charming saved her only to cheat on Snow. By the time she was named assistant to deputy mayor, Ms. White has become a cold workaholic, channeling all social interactions through her political station. Snow has given up waiting for her "prince" to come, but deep down inside she's still the innocent girl whom the queen's assassin couldn't force himself to murder.



## *Colin*

One of the three little pigs, Colin was the one who built his house out of straw. Now, he lives on The Farm with his two other pig cousins. Bored by the country, Colin takes every opportunity to sneak into the big city despite the fact that discovery and capture would mean big trouble for him. He's a professional mooch who knows just who to approach to maximize his time between internments at the Farm.



## *Ichabod Crane*

Hailing from the haunted town of Sleepy Hollow, Ichabod Crane has been deputy mayor of Fabletown for nearly 115 years. Crane is a bundle of nerves who takes his job very seriously. The pressure might be getting to Crane, and cracks are starting to appear in his fastidious facade. He is duplicitous, authoritarian, cowardly, and always hiding something.



## *Beauty & Beast*

Having moved on from the enchanted castle where they met, Beauty and Beast now live in a modest studio above one of the Fabletown storefronts. No longer waited on by a phalanx of servants, Beauty is dependent on her husband, who works two and a half jobs in order to maintain any glimmer of the storied life they shared once upon a time. They have the longest marriage of any of the Fables, a record not held simply out of habit or mistake. Beauty can come off as shrill and entitled, but these qualities are dwarfed by her genuine love and concern for her husband, Beast.



## *Mr. Toad*

Mr. Toad is the superintendent for a defunct tenement on the edge of Fabletown. He's a three-and-a-half-foot frog who speaks with an English accent. Toad is required by Fabletown law to keep his family and himself in human form or risk forced confinement to the Farm. He also hasn't put his wild carjacking streak behind him.



## *Bufkin*

Bufkin is a talking, winged monkey from the land of Oz. He now serves as Fabletown's librarian. A hard worker, but prone to mischief, Bufkin often buries himself in reading when he's not scheming to steal the mayor's booze. When something goes wrong he assumes he'll receive the lion's share of the blame. He's everyone's favorite scapegoat and he knows it, which is probably what makes him so eager to please.



## THE BIGBY/SNOW WHITE DYNAMIC

Telltale is pushing one big relationship that constantly tests the player's allegiances: Snow White and Bigby. *Fables* fans know these two have always had an interesting dynamic and plenty of sexual tension. For this prequel, you finally get to see how Bigby develops his feelings for Snow and why he can't tell her how he feels. "[Bigby's] relationship with her and how they build that relationship is a key part of the first episode and throughout the season," Kaufman says. "A lot of the things that Bigby is confronted with during the game is challenging to his relationship with Snow," Bruner adds.

During the adventure, players are put in situations where they have to decide whether or not to betray Snow's trust. Sometimes the decisions are as bold as not gathering a compelling piece of information because it could damage your relationship with Snow. "One of the themes is the idea that if the damsel in distress saw what the white knight had to do to get her out of distress, she might not think of him in the same way," Shorette says. "The mere attempts at helping her sometimes, and how far you take it, will dictate how she looks at you, and that puts you in conflict with keeping her safe."

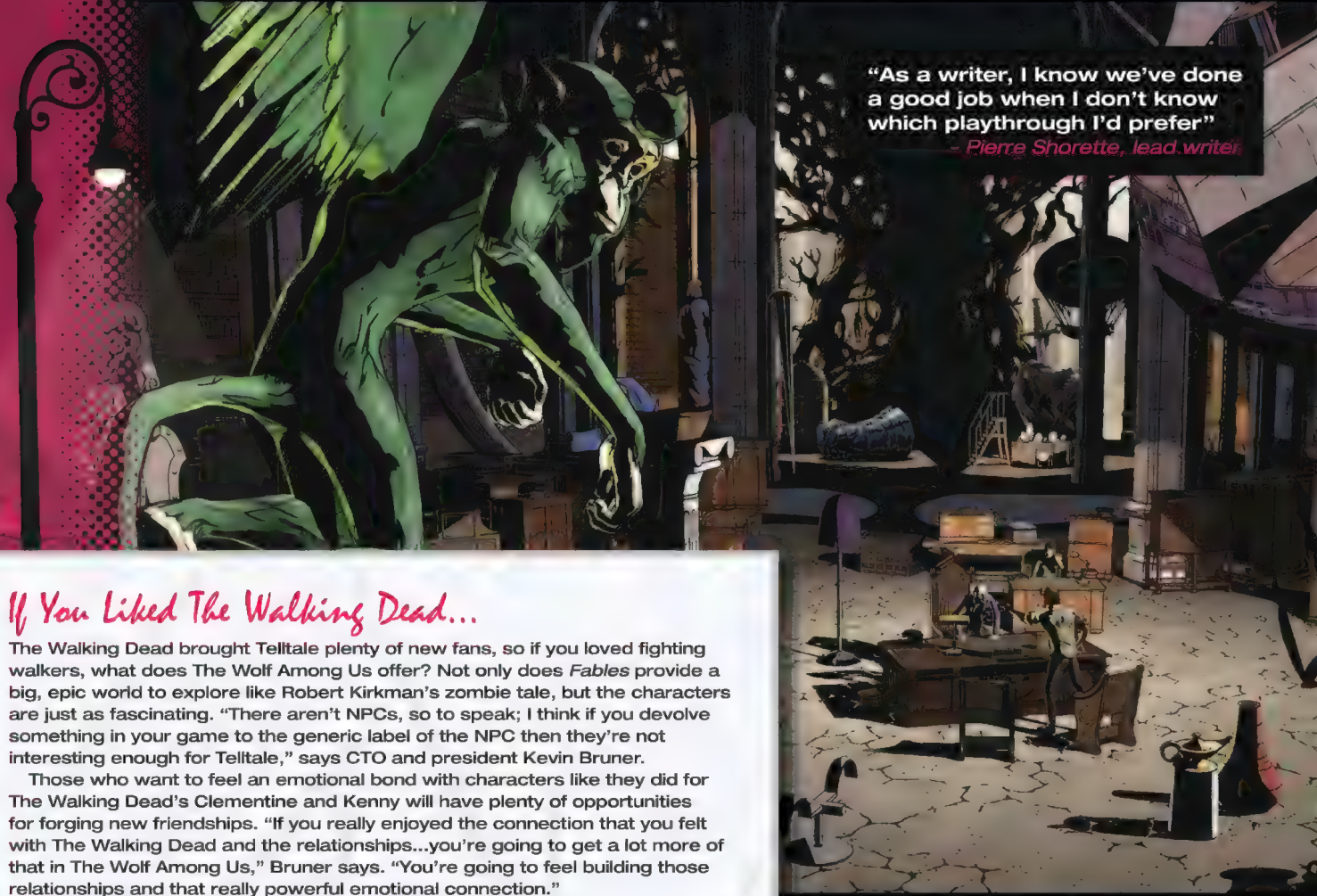
Snow also shows a different, more sheltered side in *The Wolf Among Us*. In episode one, she makes the rounds

with Bigby during the investigation and learns more about the community, and it's an eye-opening experience for her. "She kind of sees things she didn't realize was going on, and you see her perspective change," Kaufman says. As the first arc progresses, this realization leads to conflict with deputy mayor Ihabod Crane. It even extends to you as Bigby, as you must decide whether or not to interject when Crane mistreats Snow.

## THE EVOLUTION OF CHOICE

Choice and consequence is at the center of *The Wolf Among Us*. Telltale monitored data from *The Walking Dead* to discover what choices ended up being most meaningful. "We like that 50/50 divide when we look at stats," Bruner says. "If everyone goes down one direction, then it really wasn't that interesting of a choice."

Making choice matter in so many different ways has been one of the biggest challenges during development. "Sometimes it's a lot of work to make all the possibilities interesting...you get to a point where one really interesting thing could happen and one really lame thing could happen and you just have to cut that," Bruner says. "If we were making a movie, that one interesting line would just rock, but we're not making a movie. We're making an interactive experience, and if we can't



"As a writer, I know we've done a good job when I don't know which playthrough I'd prefer"

— Pierre Shorette, lead writer

## If You Liked *The Walking Dead*...

*The Walking Dead* brought Telltale of new fans, so if you loved fighting walkers, what does *The Wolf Among Us* offer? Not only does *Fables* provide a big, epic world to explore like Robert Kirkman's zombie tale, but the characters are just as fascinating. "There aren't NPCs, so to speak; I think if you devolve something in your game to the generic label of the NPC then they're not interesting enough for Telltale," says CTO and president Kevin Bruner.

Those who want to feel an emotional bond with characters like they did for *The Walking Dead*'s Clementine and Kenny will have plenty of opportunities for forging new friendships. "If you really enjoyed the connection that you felt with *The Walking Dead* and the relationships...you're going to get a lot more of that in *The Wolf Among Us*," Bruner says. "You're going to feel building those relationships and that really powerful emotional connection."



make all paths lead to an interesting place then it's not a good interactive story."

This philosophy is helping Telltale craft interesting decisions into the game. A huge obstacle that they want to give players is balancing Bigby's role as sheriff against his personal relationships with other Fables. "[You're] bending the rules and interpreting the rules as the sheriff," Bruner says. "[It's] a really interesting thing to do because everyone in Fabletown has an agenda... you get to interpret other Fables' motivations and how far you let them push the rules."

He also warns that bending the rules for one character may damage your relationship with another. Your interactions also may vary greatly depending on your choices, which gives the player an added incentive to play through the story multiple times to see the different outcomes. Shorette gives an example of not realizing a character was lying to you in one playthrough, only to discover in another playthrough that they were deceitful. "As a writer, I know we've done a good job when I don't know which playthrough I'd prefer," Shorette says. "I think the replayability and seeing the different manifestations of these scenes as you play through multiple times is going to be really rewarding for players."

To further drive replayability, *The Wolf Among Us*

gives you the choice of when you go to certain locations in the story, which allows players the chance to see the story unfold in completely different ways. Two events will happen at the same time, and the timeline of the other event continues no matter what you choose to experience. Once you show up to the event you put off, it's happening under a different set of circumstances. "To experience [the story] from a lot of different perspectives [and] to see what's happening everywhere, all the time, you're going to have to play the game multiple times, which is something we didn't do in *The Walking Dead*," Bruner says.

Telltale also learned from *The Walking Dead* that time pressure is an asset for choice. Not only will time play a factor in location choice, expect to choose between helping a character in peril in one location versus gathering fleeting evidence in another. It also factors into gameplay. Telltale gave the example of a chase sequence from the game and having different, timed options pop up.

#### YOUR VERY OWN FABLES STORY

Even if you're a hardcore *Fables* fan who thinks you know what's coming, prepare for Telltale to surprise you. "We do a lot of clever storytelling moves that will leave *Fables* fans wondering what the hell is going on," Kaufman says. "Knowing how it all turns out [is] a weird advantage sometimes, [but it will leave you thinking], 'how do we get there?'"

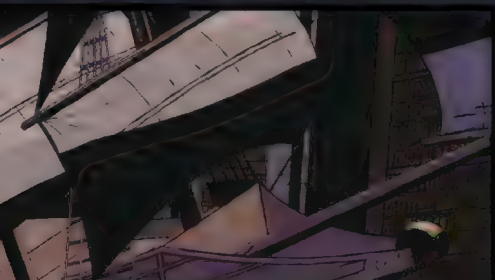
Whether you are a fan or newcomer, there's something alluring about creating your own story in the *Fables* universe. Telltale is striving to once again emotionally hook you by sweeping you up in a deep story, letting you build relationships and get attached to characters. Bruner finds it most rewarding when players look at the story and say, "Wow, this is really my story, I was challenged by it, and really feel like I own it." How will you play your wolf? ♡

## Getting Action Right: Fight Like a Wolf

*The Walking Dead* received its share of criticism for not having the best action sequences. *The Wolf Among Us* hopes to change that with high-action, cinematic fight sequences. You're Bigby! Did you really expect to never put up your dukes? "Having a character with powers like Bigby's is like having something on a silver platter. It's amazing for gameplay," says lead designer Ryan Kaufman. "He's really strong, he has this wolf sense going on, he's very fast, and he's tough."

But don't expect to walk around throwing punches at anyone you please. The fights are narratively motivated, similar to those in *The Walking Dead*, but give players more control. "Bigby is a fighter and he's a badass, and so the fight sequences will be much more player-driven... and way more over the top," Kaufman says. Players are tasked with decisions in the middle of the action that provide more control over the fight's outcome. Because Bigby's a Fable, he can take more punches in quick-time fight sequences than Lee Everett ever could in *The Walking Dead*. "One of the awesome things about *Fables* is that [they're] hard to kill, so that means we can have really slam-bang cool fights that are fun, visceral, get adrenaline flowing... and then we get that coupled with the consequences," Kaufman adds.

If you take a lot of punches, it affects in Bigby's appearance, and characters in the world could point out that you got roughed up. Kaufman also gives the example of getting ultra-violent in the street and having someone notice. "We give the player a lot of opportunities to...have fights and to intimidate people, but that comes at a cost," he says. "The cost is those personal relationships with Snow and other people. We feel like that's an interesting dilemma to give the player: How far will you go to solve the problems of the people that you love, and will they still love you if you do that?"





 **BROKEN AGE** 

Double Fine Breaks Tradition  
with a Modern Adventure



**W**hether or not you've played Double Fine games like *Psychonauts* and *Brütal Legend*, you've probably heard of the company's outrageously successful Kickstarter campaign. Last year Double Fine shattered its crowd-funding goal of \$400,000 by raising an unprecedented \$3.3 million of publisher-free money from fans over the course of a month. Double Fine received the cash on good faith that it would deliver a classic, 2D adventure game like the ones the company's founder, Tim Schafer, worked on at LucasArts in the '90s. Games like *The Secret of Monkey Island* and *Day of the Tentacle*.

Up until now, the only public glimpses of *Broken Age* have been reserved for backers of the project. A

documentary team, 2 Player Productions, has helped Double Fine maintain transparency on the project via episodic updates. Team members also post exclusive content like concept art or production schedules in special forums. The game's groundbreaking path through development has lent a unique significance to the project. The gaming public has seemingly latched the potential success of the entire crowd-funding model to the game, and Double Fine's reputation rests on what it does with the fan-generated funding.

Now the developer is ready to show the game off and give gamers something tangible to hang their adventuring hopes on. I visited the Double Fine studio in San Francisco to play *Broken Age* and chat with Schafer and producer Greg Rice.

- **PLATFORMS**  
PC • Mac • Linux  
iOS • Android
- **TITLE**  
1-Player Adventure
- **PUBLISHER**  
Double Fine  
Productions
- **DEVELOPER**  
Double Fine  
Productions
- **RELEASE**  
TBA

by Tim Turi



## TAKES THE CAKE

At the start of the game, players choose whether they want to play as Space Boy or Sacrifice Girl (these are placeholder names; Double Fine hasn't nailed down the characters' names). Both are teenagers trying to break out of the questionable everyday routines that have been forced upon them. Space Boy's tale starts on a spaceship where daily tasks are coordinated by a coddling AI, and Sacrifice Girl's story begins in a beautiful village that hosts a grisly ritual. Players can switch between the two characters' separate stories on the fly.

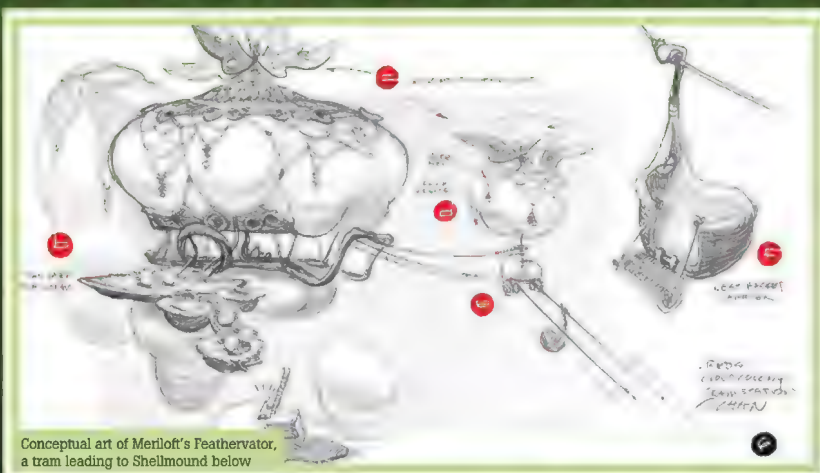
Sacrifice Girl wakes up on a hillside to her sister calling her back to her hometown of Sugar Bunting. A surprise party is waiting for Sacrifice Girl when she arrives back home. She has been selected for the Maidens Feast, which sounds pleasant enough at first. Everyone is vague regarding what the celebration entails, but they assure her that being selected is a major honor. Sacrifice Girl is fitted with a beautiful dress, which attendants begin lathering with cake frosting. Being decorated may not be direct cause for alarm in a town of confectioners, but then she's plopped into a gigantic, ball gown-shaped cake. The Maidens Feast is actually a ritual sacrifice to the gigantic beast Mog Chothra, and Sacrifice Girl is the main course.

Broken Age's heroine doesn't fit the mold of your typical video game damsel, so I asked Schafer where her inspiration comes from. "One strong influence is [Hayao] Miyazaki's movies, like *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*

or *Kiki's Delivery Service*," he says. "They have strong, young, female characters [who are] very resilient and resourceful. It's not a big deal like in *Brave*. Even in the trailer for *Brave* she's like 'I want my freedom!' and she's fighting against all these things. In Miyazaki movies it's more understated. She's not making a big deal out of it. She's just a strong, independent-minded girl."

Naturally, *Sacrifice Girl* questions why Sugar Bunting goes through such great pains to appease Mog Chothra year after year instead

of fighting back. Her radical inquiries don't win over any allies, so she takes matters into her own hands. From here, players explore the saccharine village, talk to its denizens, and solve a series of puzzles leading up to a confrontation with Mog Chothra. I won't spoil what happens, but eventually *Sacrifice Girl* rides off into the sky on the back of a big, friendly bird named Jesse. The day is brighter for our leading lady, but she may have doomed her hometown with the monster's terrible vengeance by breaking tradition.



Conceptual art of Meriloft's Featherator, a tram leading to Shellmound below

# HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

My hands-on time with the PC version of *Broken Age* begins after Jesse drops Sacrifice Girl off on a beautiful settlement among the clouds. The painterly, pastel world of Meriloft is filled with nests, eggs, and the people that tend to them. Jesse settles into a large nest nearby, but she's agitated because somehow during the rescue flight she lost her own egg. A quaint shop is set up near the top of the cloud where a young girl cobbles specialized footwear. A guidepost sits in the center of the cloud, with signs that read Tree, Tram, and Elder pointing in different directions. I click toward two characters standing beneath the sign and Sacrifice Girl trots across the clouds' surface, kicking up fluff. Dillydallying too long on the cloud makes her sink, so for now I deliberately walk between solid platforms.

One of the colonists introduces himself as W'iter. These cloud-dwelling people appreciate lightness in all forms, even when it comes to the letters in their names. Sacrifice Girl shocks W'iter and Ch't with the tale of her defiance against Mog Choetra. Meriloft has a Maidens Feast of their own, and they can't comprehend why anyone would harm the hungry creature.

Navigating through these conversation options feels identical to chatting up the humorous NPCs of Schafer's past games. Players choose from a selection of questions and answers on the screen to uncover hints or obtain useful items. The deeper you dive in conversation, the more enjoyable talking with the quirky characters becomes.

"Dialogue trees are always one of those things in adventure games where I wonder if it should be done a different way," Schafer says. "People have done this in all kinds of different ways, but I want this game to have the elements that were promised to the Kickstarter backers."

After chatting with W'iter and Ch't, Sacrifice Girl learns she must discover the location of the monster's next sacrifice, infiltrate that feast as the chosen maiden, and find a weapon to fight him with. As in classic adventure games like *The Secret of Monkey Island* or *Full Throttle*, players can tackle this to-do list in any order. But first we need to figure out

how to walk across clouds without sinking.

Sacrifice Girl visits the cobbler's shop north of the sign and begins chatting her up. After a brief conversation, she accidentally causes the shoemaker to drop her cobbling knife.

Guilt-stricken, Sacrifice Girl hands over one of her few inventory items: a frosting knife. In traditional adventure-game fashion, she gets something in exchange for her kindness. An oversized pair of feathery cloud shoes falls into my inventory. They're too big for our heroine, but the cobbler promises when Sacrifice Girl hits 40 she'll appreciate a comfortable pair of shoes.

The people of Meriloft have a symbiotic relationship with the local bird population. Not only do they look after their avian friends' eggs, they also theme their own Maidens Feast after them with ornate bird cages (literally cages shaped like birds). Sacrifice Girl encounters a maiden who wasn't plucked from one of the festive cages littered around

the sacrificial territory. The would-be offering has a backward case of Stockholm syndrome – being passed over for the ritual has shaken her confidence. Since the dejected damsel won't need them, she offers her pink cloud shoes to Sacrifice Girl – a perfect match. Now she can carry around larger objects on her head – like the big, golden eggs scattered around the area – without immediately dropping through the clouds. But don't worry if you do, because helpful patrol birds automatically interrupt your fall.

Of all the elements of older adventure games that haven't aged well, dying and getting irreversibly stuck top the list. Players won't have to worry about either in *Broken Age*. Unlike *Maniac Mansion* or *Sierra's King's Quest* titles, progress won't be halted by unexpected fatalities or players painting themselves into corners. *Double Fine* wants your wit and curiosity to be the only things standing between you and success.

This Meriloft priest asks Sacrifice Girl for an offering before revealing Mog Choetra's weakness



## DELIVERING ON A KICKSTARTER PROMISE

Developing a game solely with crowd-funded money is a new proposition in the video game industry. Pioneering comes with its own discoveries and difficulties, which *Double Fine* and 2 Player Productions are capturing in a documentary series. Episode 7 of that series reveals that the developer is on course to overspend on the game's \$3.3 million budget raised via Kickstarter.

*Broken Age* was originally planned to be completed in April, but according to the documentary the schedule has been extended until September. The costs of a lengthened development have forced *Double Fine* to search for more money. *Double Fine* still welcomes supporters that missed

the Kickstarter deadline, but in the documentary Isa Stamos, director of product development, affirms that the studio either has to dramatically increase funding or reduce the scope of the game. In Episode 8, *Double Fine*'s vice president of business development, Justin Bailey, reveals that profits from the release of *Brutal Legend* for PC will almost entirely feed into *Broken Age*.

Despite the desire to stick within the confines of the Kickstarter money, *Double Fine* is facing the reality many developers face in the middle of production. Facing setbacks and asking publishers for more time or money is common in the video game industry,

but possibly going over budget with loads of crowd-funded money is new territory.

"I think that it's also important to keep in mind that there are other impacts besides just funding the game," says producer Greg Rice in the documentary. "If we now go get a publisher for this game, it like suddenly voids everything we've said about the project and everything we're trying to do."

"Ultimately, the number one decider on the schedule is when we feel like we have a game that we're proud of," Rice says.

Schafer echoes that sentiment. "Most of the backers I think would be unanimous in saying they want a

great game," Schafer says. "They're trusting me to use the judgment of how much to cut that still makes it a great game, and they don't want us to cut more than that."

Rice also says that budgets are dynamic, meaning *Double Fine* hasn't technically run out of Kickstarter money yet. "Budgets are live documents," Rice says. "They're our best guess at what the expenses on a game's development will look like, but as the game's design ferments and the realities of production unfold, we constantly re-evaluate things and adjust. It's a process that's really common to game production and one we're not unfamiliar with."



# NAVIGATING A PUZZLING SITUATION

With a suitable pair of cloud shoes on Sacrifice Girl's feet, I'm prepared to explore Meriloft. I head back to the central area and visit the other branching paths.

Double Fine is making a rich, beautiful world it wants players to take time exploring, but the developer respects your time. While backtracking used to be an accepted way to explore expansive game worlds, it has become a dirty word in modern game development.

"There's always backtracking in adventure games, but ever since Full Throttle we've done that thing where you can double click on a door to get across a room really fast," Schafer says. "If you make it that you can get across the world really fast after you find out what to do with that golden egg and you get there quick, that's when I think it's okay to backtrack."

This feature comes in handy when trying to piece together one of Meriloft's many puzzles. Writing about Double Fine's clever puzzles is tricky without giving them all away, but I'll give you the gist. I scoured the misty world for valuables to offer a deity, which earned me a meeting with an enlightened priest who has an idea for how to harm Mog Choetra. I put one of Isaac Newton's laws to work via another

too-generous offering on a rickety altar, granting me access to a forest below with trees that produce tasty sap. I also gained access to Jesse's lost egg by intentionally plummeting through the clouds a few times and exploring the roots of a big fruit tree growing into Meriloft.

One of my favorite puzzles – and also one of the simplest – involves a retractable ladder, a high ledge, and the oversized cloud shoes. The accessibility of Broken Age's gameplay became apparent while solving this puzzle early on. In the PC version, dragging the cursor to the bottom of the screen causes the inventory to pop up. From here, you can try dragging the ladder towards the ledge. A subtle glow indicates that the ledge is interactive. Sacrifice Girl props up the ladder and starts climbing, but she and it both fall through the clouds. Let's try that again. Opening up my inventory once more, I drag the big cloud shoes onto the ladder, which combine to create a new item. I drag the stylish new ladder onto the ledge, and she begins climbing again. The additional footwear prevents the ladder from sinking through the clouds. Once on the ledge, Sacrifice Girl gains access to a tram that leads to the city of Shellmound, where the next Maidens Feast takes place.

Playing on a tablet is slightly different. Players still tap and drag objects the same way, but scanning the environment for interactive objects is changing. Double Fine is experimenting with a mechanic where players glide their finger across the screen on the hunt for points of interest. The protagonist would then chase after the cursor in this mode. This solution sounds feasible, but Double Fine is still discussing its implementation. I can confirm, however, that the game looks great on the iPad's high-resolution display.

Some adventure game fans may balk at how Broken Age simplifies interaction, but Schafer reminds us that the genre began reducing extraneous options years ago. "We used to have words on the bottom of the screen, then we replaced them with icons," Schafer says. "Then Full Throttle was full-screen, and you'd pick your verbs with this kind of verb-wheel. Then with Grim Fandango you could pick up and examine an object. But more and more with modern adventure games, like Machinarium, there's a general interact-with-object command."

Don't think the streamlined interaction means you can breeze through all the puzzles. Double Fine is still debating whether to incorporate a built-in clue system. "That's one of the things I liked about Tim's old games," Rice says. "The writing is so good that you want to listen to it all and hear what they're saying. It should be giving you the hints there."

The Meriloft section of the game isn't finished yet, but at this point in development Schafer's writing does a great job of steering you in the right direction while coaxing out a smile. Sacrifice Girl's story continues past this point as she explores other locales on her quest to stop Mog Choetra. While she's busy kicking convention in the face, another soul is experiencing his own rite of passage.

## A PIONEER OF POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURE GAMES DEPARTS

Ron Gilbert, creator of Maniac Mansion and The Cave, recently left Double Fine. We asked producer Greg Rice how that might affect the game.

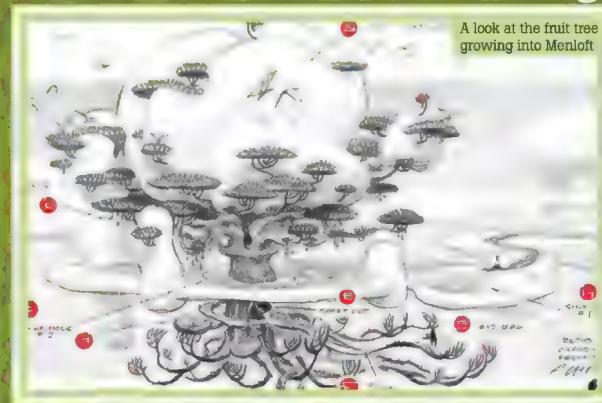
"We're sad to see Ron go, but it won't change much on Broken Age," Rice says. "Ron wasn't working directly on the game, just acting as advisor/consultant/old wise man. He's promised to still make time to play the game and give us feedback when we ask, so the game will still benefit from that."

Turn to page 96 to read more about Gilbert and the creation of Maniac Mansion.





The maternal AI prepares Space Boy's breakfast



A look at the fruit tree growing into Menloft

## POD BAY BORES

The other side of Broken Age's story involves a young boy (called Space Boy for now) alone on a spaceship. A motherly AI watches over him, automates his day-to-day necessities, and plans distracting kiddie tasks to give him a sense of accomplishment. The ship even has a fake, Fisher Price-style control console designed to give him the illusion of piloting through space. Though the AI is oblivious, Space Boy has outgrown the childish trappings, which shows plainly on his disinterested face.

Schafer cites sci-fi stories like *Moon*, *Solaris*, and others as inspiration for Space Boy's isolated existence. "I love stories about people alone on spaceships," Schafer says. "It's just a weird fantasy of mine. Just like the computer taking care of everything or automated systems. Like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, or *Sunshine*."

The early bits of Space Boy's story involve enacting this nursery school rigmarole and

experiencing the life he's lived for years.

The AI, who refers to Space Boy as Captain Sweetie, arranges a series of themed adventures that were probably thrilling when he was eight. One such trip takes us to Spike Canyon, a cartoonish mountainside where a runaway train is speeding a group of Space Boy's screaming stuffed animal friends to certain doom. The player must somehow make a giant sleeping mountain stick out its tongue as a bridge. Other pretend crises include an avalanche in Ice Cream Valley or a distress signal from the vessel *Friendship Circle*, where we see the aftermath of a "hug attack." Hidden among one of Space Boy's juvenile tasks is an opportunity to hack the ship's controls and break free of the cycle.

Given the parallel nature of the Space Boy and Sacrifice Girl's coming-of-age storylines, we believe their paths will cross in the end. When asked for confirmation, Schafer coyly says that they might.

"By saying that they might and being cagey about it, I'm kind of saying they do," he says. "So maybe they don't. No. They don't. How about that? What I've always said is they're trying to navigate the space between them. It's a little vague."

No matter how the pair's stories play out, Broken Age is shaping up to deliver more than just a new, old-school adventure game. The slice of the game Double Fine showed me is still early in development, but the seeds for something special are there. The placeholder dialogue recorded by the staff made me chuckle - a testament to Schafer's writing. The aesthetic style is already stunning without the final touches, and looks sharp in high definition. Double Fine still has work to do, but if Broken Age stays the course we're all in for a treat.

For an in-depth interview with Greg Rice and Tim Schafer, visit [gameinformer.com/mag](http://gameinformer.com/mag).





# Killzone: Shadow Fall

Peace through firepower

- » **Platform**  
PlayStation 4
- » **Style**  
1-Player Shooter  
(Multiplayer TBD)
- » **Publisher**  
Sony Computer  
Entertainment
- » **Developer**  
Guerrilla Games
- » **Release**  
Holiday

**T**hirty years have passed after the events of Killzone 3, and things aren't looking good. A fragile peace is threatened moment by moment as two factions prepare strikes and retaliatory attacks against one another. Can you stop it?

Your character in Killzone: Shadow Fall is a shadow marshal, an agent who works to keep the peace in a divided Vekta City. Two factions live there, the Helghast and the Vektans, and tensions are high and rising. The marshal's routine inspection is torn apart by a surprise attack, put on by cloaked Helghast units.

From there, players must navigate through the chaos in the immediate aftermath. Once, idyllic plazas are reduced to smoking rubble, and walls are blasted open. Taking cover, the marshal changes his weapon between two modes; in one second, he's taking out enemies in its traditional burst-fire battle rifle mode. A quick palm slam snaps the optic viewfinder into place, at which point the weapon is more like a sniper rifle.

Regardless, it's not good enough to take down a bulky thug who has allies pinned

down from his higher vantage point. The marshal slips around the side of the building and climbs up unseen. It provides a perfect spot for an infiltration, which begins with a jump from a ledge into a downward melee kill, followed by a Far Cry 3-style knife chain kill. Moments later, the marshal chases down a fleeing helicarrier, grabbing onto a rope seconds before it slips away. A speedy chase through the skyline follows, with the marshal alternating focus between climbing up the rope and not getting opened like a piñata against a building.

The most impressive moments are the fly-by views of the massive Vekta city and its beautiful waterfalls – sections where the player is basically a passenger in on-rails segments. On foot, the action doesn't look appreciably better or more interesting than the traditional Killzone experience. A tarp may ripple realistically in the wind, and smoke billows more naturally, but most players will be too busy sliding into cover and chucking grenades to appreciate those kinds of incremental upgrades. » **Jeff Cork**







This guy isn't one of the good guys  
I'm the one holding the gun, that is





# Fuse

Cooperative combination gunplay

» **Platform**  
PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360

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

» **Publisher**  
Electronic Arts

» **Developer**  
Insomniac Games

» **Release**  
April 30

In 2011, Insomniac revealed its first multi-console release. The game began its life as *Overstrike*, a four-player cooperative shooter with a comical art style and tone. Since then, the developer has changed the game's name to *Fuse*, transformed the art style to make it more realistic, and done away with humor in favor of a grittier mood. Our latest look at the game revealed more of the story, showcased the impressive cooperative combo-driven gunplay, and shed light on each character's personality.

Our hands-off demo begins at the start of the second mission. After a brief *Call of Duty*-esque mission briefing with fancy computer graphics and map overlays, we find that the *Overstrike 9* team has been captured and taken to an underwater facility outside of China by a group called Raven. They are stripped of the powerful *Fuse* weapons they found during the first mission and thrown in jail. The four are placed in individual solitary cells, and an older man enters Naya's cell to speak with her. She identifies him as her father. He tells Naya that he wishes they could have continued to work

together as a team, to which she curtly replies, "We stopped being a team when you joined a group of psychopaths." Right before he leaves, he quietly deposits a key to the cell into her hands. Maybe this psychopath sympathizer is their man on the inside?

After Naya frees the rest of her strike team, they begin to make their way out of the underwater facility. Without weapons, the best course of action is to quietly travel in the vents and stay low behind cover, performing context-sensitive silent kills on unsuspecting guards when the chance arises. Of the four or five stealth kills performed, I never saw the same animation twice. After finding some traditional guns and taking out some more Raven soldiers, they reach their *Fuse*-powered guns, and the real fighting begins.

When playing *Fuse* by yourself, bots take over your three cooperative partners. You can switch between the cast as often or as infrequently as you want, sticking with one character the whole game or switching between the characters to set up impressive chains of events using each of the *Overstrike 9* team's

character-specific weapons.

There is rarely a lull in the action once the bullets start whizzing. In the demo, the bot AI showcased some intelligence. Their priority is to save you when you're down, and they use their character-specific arsenal when applicable. Without any direction from the player, Dalton throws up his mag shield to provide movable cover and Isabelle places beacons that replenish health as long as you're standing near them.

*Fuse*'s prime directive is teamwork, and one of the ways it does this is by encouraging weapon combinations. For instance, if you take cover behind Dalton's mag shield with another character, you receive damage bonuses for your bullets. Isabelle's shattergun crystallizes enemies, making them immobile, and Jacob's arc shot does a fine job of shattering them. Naya's warp rifle creates black holes, which can be placed side by side and set off like explosive dominoes by other players. The best way to combine these weapons is playing with living, breathing humans, but the bots do an admirable



job of using their powers as well.

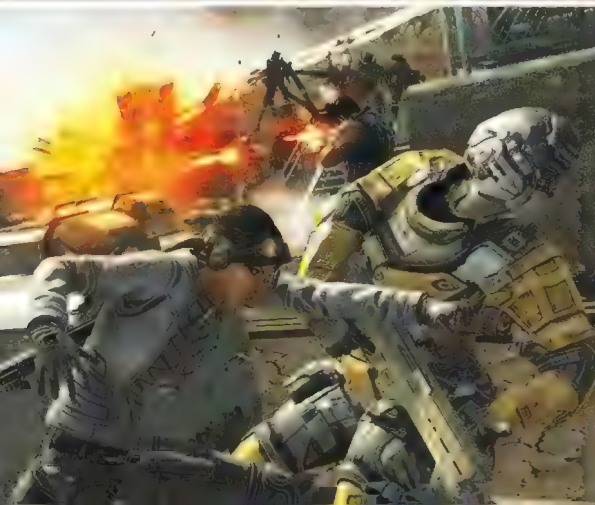
The Fuse skill tree should look familiar to anyone who has played *Borderlands* or RPGs with a comparable leveling system. "We want every skill point to be meaningful," says Insomniac CEO Ted Price. This means you won't see minor upgrades that, for instance, add incremental bonus percentages to your weapon damage. Insomniac wants every upgrade to change how you approach gunfights.

When *Overstrike 9* moves into a room with a domed glass ceiling looking out into the ocean, the villainous Doctor Sovlenko makes an appearance. Sovlenko tells Dalton that his former romantic interest and current Raven captain Mei Lin Mao feels as though he betrayed her. Dalton replies, "She feels betrayed? I'm the one that got shot!" These dialogue snippets show that *Fuse* hasn't entirely lost its comedic edge. Later in the demo, while embroiled in a firefight, Dalton shouts to Naya that they need to figure out where to go, to which she angrily replies, "Do you want me to shoot, or stop and break out a f----- map?!" Dalton quickly replies,

"Shoot! Definitely shoot!"

When the banter dries up, Sovlenko injects the Fuse substance into his neck with a syringe and summons a Leadfoot bipedal mech. The mech can warp around the level, which means the team needs to constantly jump from cover to cover. Once the mech is destroyed, its powerful chain gun is left behind. The player switches to Naya, grabs the gun, and begins decimating everyone and everything in sight while walking down the hallway. After making their way through a few more rooms of enemies, the team boards a train and the demo ends.

*Fuse* has changed a lot since we first saw it, but the humorous banter between the *Overstrike 9* team shows that the game has retained some of the endearing humor from the early teaser trailer. The cooperative combat is fast; this is the kind of shooter where you won't be staying in one place for very long. Price says *Fuse* asks what happens when humans get access to a mysterious and powerful substance. Price answers his own question saying, "All hell breaks loose." » **Kyle Hilliard**



# Infamous: Second Son

Sucker Punch's paranoid PlayStation 4 adventure

» **Platform**  
PlayStation 4

» **Style**  
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**  
Sony Computer  
Entertainment

» **Developer**  
Sucker Punch  
Productions

» **Release**  
TBA

One of the highlights of Sony's recent announcement of the PlayStation 4 was a dramatic trailer for the surprise new sequel to Sucker Punch Productions' infamous series, *Second Son*. The game turned heads with impressive graphics and a premise that calls into question some very real issues of personal freedom and privacy in America.

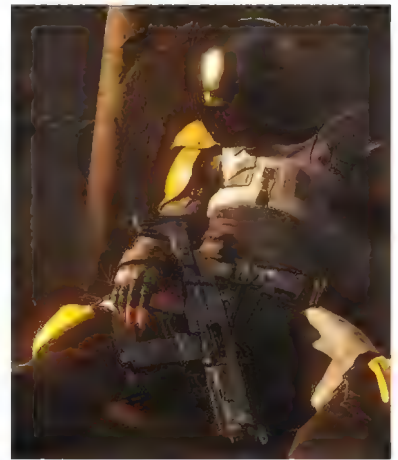
*Second Son* takes *Infamous*' blend of super-human powers and open-world exploration west to Seattle (the first real-life city used in the series). Seattle has always been known as a hotbed of counterculture and left-wing protest — many readers will remember the violent clashes between police and protesters in Seattle during the World Trade Organization riots of 1999. Sucker Punch uses this history of discord to weave a tale that has a paranoid, conspiratorial view of the United States.

The game is set seven years after the events of *Infamous 2*. Following the devastation that Cole McGrath caused in Empire City and New Marais, the government has instituted a crackdown on freedom and personal liberty through the Department of Unified Protection. The DUP patrols the streets seeking to root out "bioterrorists" (the label placed on people with mutant abilities like Cole McGrath). If the armed forces don't spot you, it's likely that the vast network of surveillance cameras placed around the city will. It's a grim view of the future, recasting Seattle as a more scenic, less science-fiction version of *Half-Life 2*'s City 17.

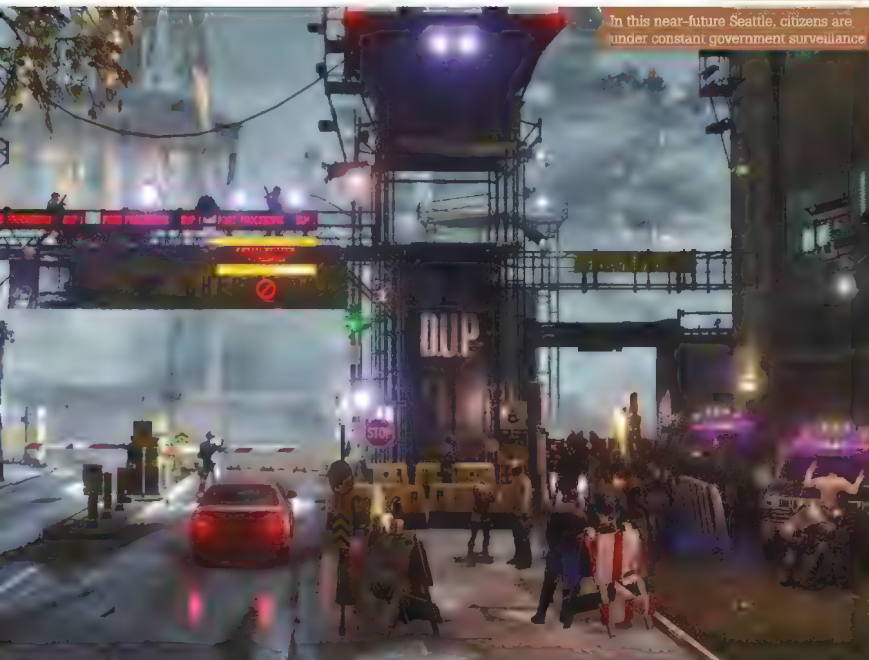
As the name suggests, *Second Son* features a new protagonist, 24-year-old Delsin Rowe, a disaffected, underachieving young man. Fate intervenes when Delsin comes across a fiery bus crash and rushes in to help save the passengers from the flames. During the incident,

Delsin discovers that he has the power to disappear into and manipulate smoke in strange ways. He's immediately tagged as a bioterrorist by the DUP, who fear that he could be the next Cole McGrath. Naturally, Delsin doesn't take this lying down and uses his new power to take the fight to the DUP.

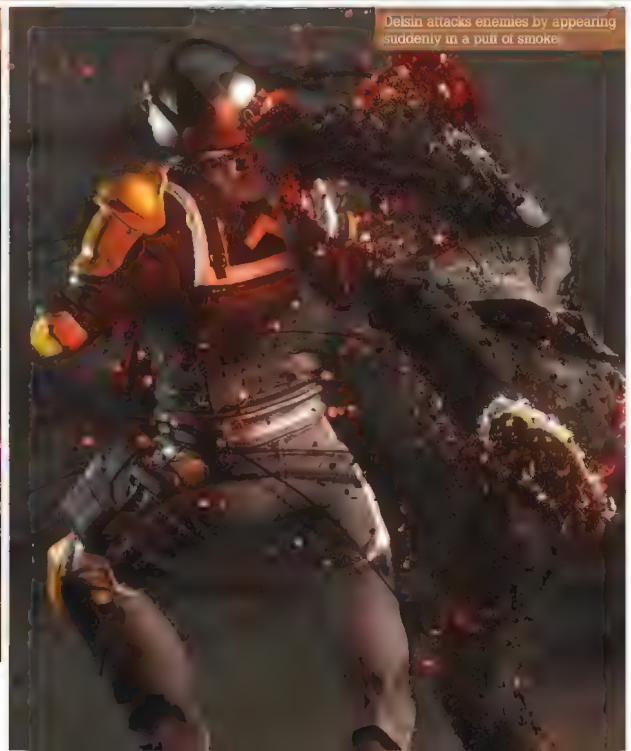
In the trailer, we get a sense of Delsin's powers. As DUP operatives watch an array of security camera monitors, a sudden onscreen explosion sends the room into a flurry of activity. Suddenly, Delsin begins striking DUP operatives in a flash, appearing and disappearing in quick clouds of black smoke. After decimating the forces that were stalking him, he generates a massive fireball and sends it hurtling towards an armored vehicle. Finally, he strolls up to a downed DUP guard, grabs his helmet, and speaks directly into the built-in camera: "You are not in control." » **Matt Helgeson**



Here we see an altered version of the Seattle Space Needle.



In this near-future Seattle, citizens are under constant government surveillance.



Delsin attacks enemies by appearing suddenly in a puff of smoke.

# Saints Row IV

Take the presidency, save the world



Less than two years after the Third Street Saints conquered the city of Steelport, they're returning with an even loftier goal: taking the White House. Your player character from the previous games has been elected President of the United States, aliens have invaded Earth, and it's up to you and your gang's newly acquired superpowers to save the world.

In a minute-long teaser trailer, several glimpses are shown of these superpowers in action. Among them are the ability to leap ridiculous distances, perform attacks similar

to *Infamous's* thunder drop, use telekinesis, fly and/or glide through the air, and run like the Flash. The game takes place in a computer simulation of Steelport, so these powers will likely be explained via a *Matrix*-like plot device. Considering this is *Saints Row*, fans likely wouldn't mind even if nothing is explained.

The trailer also had some flashes of mechs, *Desperado*-style guitar guns, censored male genitalia, a gun that makes a cop's head seemingly inflate, dancing hot dogs, monster trucks, and plenty of strikes to the groin. At one point, a giant can of Saints Flow energy drink attacks

the city like *Godzilla*.

Originally intended as the Enter the Dominatrix DLC for the previous game, Volition says that its concepts have been blown out to justify a full sequel. The studio is obviously intent on taking this series in an even crazier direction than the decidedly wacky *Saints Row: The Third*. If the trailer is to be believed, this will be a "climactic chapter" of the open-world franchise. Whether that proves to be true or not, fans of over-the-top action will get at least one more run with the boys in purple this August. » **Dan Ryckert**

» **Platforms**  
PlayStation 3  
Xbox 360

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

» **Publisher**  
Deep Silver

» **Developer**  
Volition

» **Release**  
August 20



to a variety of superpowers



a computer simulation of Steelport

# NCAA Football 14

The return of the college game



» **Platform**  
PlayStation 3  
Xbox 360

» **Style**  
1 to 4-Player Sports  
(2-Player Online)

» **Publisher**  
EA Sports

» **Developer**  
EA Tiburon

» **Release**  
July

Like a defense adapting to some new offensive scheme that's giving them fits, the development team at EA Tiburon needs to be nimble in reading and reacting to what fans want while implementing the team's overall vision for the franchise. In the case of NCAA 14, these two interests intersect.

Last year's game could have implemented Madden NFL 13's Infinity physics engine, but given the tight deadline the game would have been under if it had, the team chose against it. That's a good thing, because the engine's debut in Madden – which had more development time – was less than stellar. Now NCAA aims to clean up the engine's unintentional ragdoll-like floppiness and bugs, as well as make good on its original intent and expand on the physics for more than just tackles. Stiff arms, truck-stick tackles, and leg hits

are a few examples of the kinds of physical interactions that should occur with more force in NCAA 14.

EA Tiburon has added more subtle movements as well, such as a differentiation between when a player accelerates for that short speed burst when hitting the hole or gaining the edge on a sweep as opposed to reaching their top-end speed out in the open. Players also exhibit contextual awareness to avoid their teammates. Runners no longer run in place or up the backs of their linemen but instead nimbly navigate traffic. Likewise, linebackers attacking the line of scrimmage try to not get caught up in the wash so as to make the tackle.

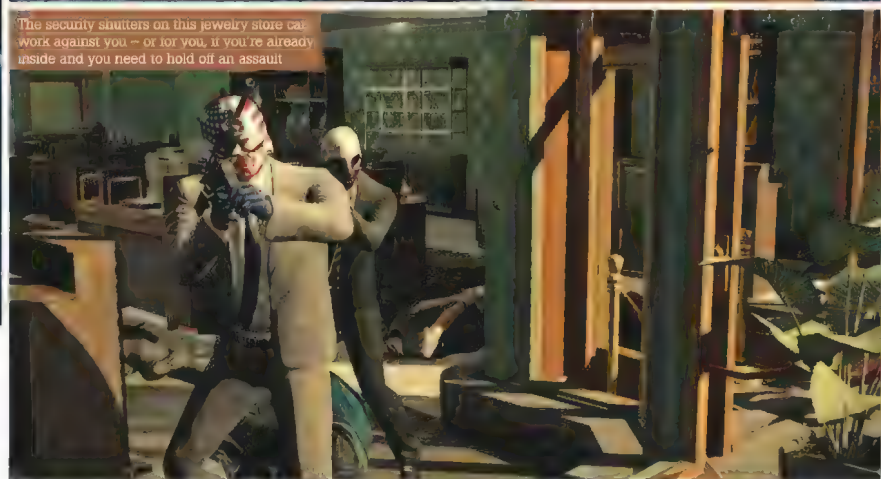
NCAA 14 also leans on its AI with the 20-or-so new option pitches. The developer wants to make this fundamental part of college football better. Integral to this – and

beneficial to the game as a whole – is the revamped blocking logic for linemen, who now prioritize their targets in different blocking schemes as well as engage them on the second level. On the other side of the ball, EA Tiburon says defensive-pathing logic and routes to the ball carrier are also better. In order to help players with the option, before the snap the game will show you what defensive players you have to read for that particular play. This may sound like an oversimplification of the option, but remember: It's one thing to gameplan; it's another to execute.

The series' ode to the college game continues in its presentation, but perhaps not in the way you might think. Feeling that last year's pre-game cutscenes and overall presentation package had become too bloated and possibly tiresome for the player, EA Tiburon has overhauled almost everything. The old ESPN 3D user interface is gone, and an overall philosophy of simplicity and speed now reigns. While there are actually more cutscenes and new ways to present stats (including a halftime show and new commentary revolving around your last drives), the time it takes to show them and get back to the action (as well as navigate the menus in general) is shorter. The team wants players to feel like they shouldn't have to push past the presentation aspects that would otherwise give them the college atmosphere they crave.

Stay tuned for more info on NCAA 14's vaunted Dynasty mode and other new additions in the coming months as we count-down to kickoff.» **Matthew Kato**





# Payday 2

## Setting up a bigger heist

The student project turned digital release, *Payday: The Heist*, brought the Left 4 Dead co-op shooting formula to the world of cops and robbers in 2011. This follow-up addresses criticisms of the first game, expands the content to include shorter playtimes, and channels more of the heist vibe with more stealthy options.

*Payday 2*'s gameplay is still deeply rooted in cooperatively shooting through waves of dynamically spawned cops in partially randomized levels. The four player classes are more differentiated in the sequel, though, giving players an expanded arsenal of approaches. Masterminds can strap explosive vests to hostages before surrendering them to the police, breaking a standoff with cold-blooded mayhem. Ghosts silently cut through windows and disable alarm equipment without anyone the wiser. Technicians deploy sentry guns for additional firepower and drill safes silently and quickly. Enforcers raise all kinds of hell, using special melee weapons for one-hit kills and

anchoring the team in any firefight. An array of passive upgrades augment each class, and skills from multiple professions can be mixed and matched within an RPG-like skill tree system.

These powerful abilities must be earned. The vastly expanded metagame in *Payday 2* fleshes out persistent skill unlocks and incorporates a *Diablo*-like item system. Completing a heist not only gets you cash, but also a "payday" – a randomly generated item that could be anything from a new mask to a custom machine-gun grip with special properties. In-game money is good for unlocking *Payday 2*'s basic spread of weaponry, but fitting your weapon with the best custom black-market augmentations is a matter of taking on the toughest missions and getting a little luck here and there.

Roughly 20 times as many missions as the original's handful range from one-day affairs with single segments to complex six-day heists that more closely resemble the first game's

lengthy levels. Players select their target from the bevy of missions constantly cycling through the city-map frontend in real time. The difficulty of the missions the system presents to you is dependent on your experience level, though you are free to join a friend in a higher-level stage if you think you can hack it. This neat interface is certainly more engaging than a traditional server browser or matchmaking queue, though waiting for a specific mission you're in the mood for could be frustrating.

The original game was markedly superior on PC, and Windows remains the lead platform for the sequel. However, Overkill assures us that the larger budget, bigger development team, and additional development time will allow for the kinds of console customizations the first game sorely lacked. Forgetting how dramatically *Halo* changed the console first-person shooter landscape is easy until you try playing something without the subtle auto-aim and other changes that make gamepad shooting more pleasant. Overkill is aware that it can't skimp on those under-the-hood mechanics for the top-tier console experience it hopes to create.

The hands-off *Payday 2* demo showcased a lot of positive changes that I appreciate as a fan of the subgenre and of the first game. Little things like being able to use a precious cable tie to temporarily secure a door present interesting tactical options, and one creative mission I saw had players scrambling to unload bags of cocaine from a van after being pulled over by a heavily armed police force. The best-case scenario of *Payday 2* being an improvement along the lines of *Orca Must Die 2* or *Torchlight II* is definitely within Overkill's reach. » **Adam Biessener**

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

» **Style**  
1-Player Shooter  
(4-Player Online)

» **Publisher**  
505 Games

» **Developer**  
Overkill Software

» **Release**  
Summer





# Wildstar

Carving out a piece of the world

» **Platform**  
PC

» **Style**  
Massively Multiplayer  
Online Role-Playing Game

» **Publisher**  
NCsoft

» **Developer**  
Carbine Studios

» **Release**  
2013

Korean MMO giant NCsoft hopes to expand its stable of quality Western-developed MMORPGs beyond ArenaNet's Guild Wars franchise, and Wildstar is its next big-money bet. The art style and hotbar-based interface immediately recall World of Warcraft, but Carbine Studios is building some interesting architecture underneath that familiar sci-fi/fantasy skin. The extensive player housing system is a perfect example.

Upon socking away the necessary funds to purchase your own floating rock, your island in the sky becomes your personal playground. Like housing in games like Rift, you can customize its look and layout to an impressive extent. Hundreds of decorative items can be found in your adventures, and each can be placed, resized, and rotated to create the

perfect home base for your hero. Objects have collision, so you can do crazy things like the internal test where a Carbine artist installed a second story made entirely of bookcases. Some play special effects, like the haunted windows that flash as if caught in a thunderstorm or lit by a passing train.

More importantly, some housing props have gameplay effects. A powerful ancient statue that dispenses long-term buffs makes your pad the perfect gathering place for a raid. Collecting seeds in the world lets you grow them in a garden plot and harvest rare crafting materials. A wishing well gives a shot at a rare item once per day. Every once in a while, a hedge maze spawns a speedy little critter that you can chase down for an achievement.

Carbine promises a wide variety of these props, spanning just-for-fun things like the gravity-defying jump pad to raid-relevant items like buff statues.

Carbine also announced a feature called Warplots, but didn't go into details on this player-versus-player system. If the huge doom cannon the studio spawned into a test-server housing plot is any indication, though, Wildstar players can look forward to late-game PvP that involves the housing they've spent hours upon hours customizing.

Wildstar may look familiar, and it has taken several showings to convince me that it's worth paying attention to, but the game keeps looking better as it nears its release later this year. Though the combat is hotbar-based like a traditional MMORPG, the constant use of ground-targeted effects that function like League of Legends' skillshots makes all the difference. Every battle I've seen in recent hands-off demos has demanded more manual evasion and reaction to the enemy's tactics than the old model of standing in place and running through skill rotations until one health bar or another runs out. MMORPGs of this scale are impossible to get a true handle on without dozens of hours spent in-game, but Carbine's promises of driving players to socialize and play together are as encouraging as the systems the studio has already shown off so far. » Adam Biessener



Hundreds of items can be placed, rotated, and scaled to set your house up just the way you like



# Path of Exile

Embracing the grind

This free-to-play indie PC game stakes its claim for your loot-grinding time with a skill tree beyond anything attempted within the hack n' slash action/RPG subgenre to date. Character class is just a starting point for a hero's open-ended development in Path of Exile. Between the immense passive skill tree and an inventive method for equipping and improving active skills, your avatar's development is in your hands to an unprecedented degree.

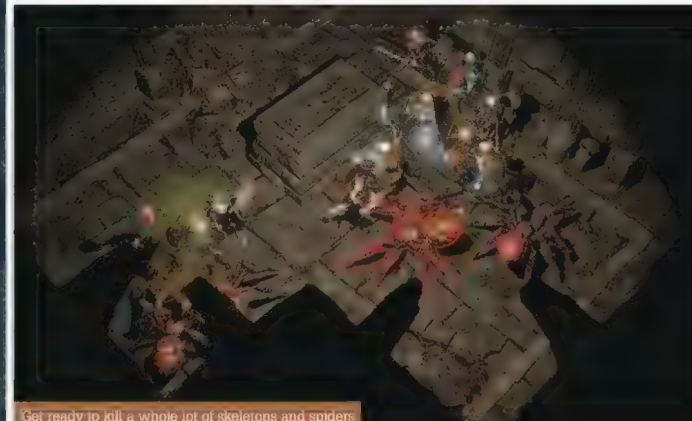
Path of Exile's gameplay is ripped straight from the Diablo playbook. Enemies swarm players from all sides, only to be torn apart by explosive skills assigned to mouse clicks and single keystrokes. The isometric view quickly fills up with bloodstains, body parts, and randomly generated loot. Mini-bosses and elite monster packs spawn with random combinations of abilities, and story-related encounters pose specific challenges with set

foes. The drip of experience slowly fills the omnipresent XP bar, and the first time you level up reveals Path of Exile's true depth.

The passive skill tree is reminiscent of Final Fantasy X's sphere grid, but without the lock nodes. Every level grants a single point, and all directions are open. The bonuses acquired here are varied and powerful. Minor nodes along a path grant increases like eight percent increased fire damage or 10 percent additional minion health, while powerful signature bonuses unlock significant effects like across-the-board resistances or huge boosts to base attributes. The most dramatic changes are reserved for special nodes along the edge of the tree that you can't reach until level 30 or so. These can seriously alter your playstyle with changes like permanently giving up the chance to critically hit in exchange for never missing again. Moving points once they're assigned

is possible but hideously expensive, so having an idea of what you want out of your hero is recommended.

Active skills are acquired through the loot system. Much like Final Fantasy VII's materia system, skill gems are slotted into equipment and level up on their own as you slay your way across the world. Separate modifier gems alter the skills they're linked with, adding bonus damage



Get ready to kill a whole lot of skeletons and spiders.

The skill tree doesn't fit on a single screen, even at the widest zoom level.



or other effects for the price of increased mana costs. The system allows for huge diversity in builds, and the available sockets in an item are often its most important feature – especially since modifier gems can be tied to multiple skills. A fully linked six-slot chestpiece, for instance, could massively boost your power by allowing your three best abilities to all be modified by the three best support gems you can find.

The story of Path of Exile, like most similar games, is present but not anything worth slowing down your rate of loot and XP acquisition to try and follow. Evil empires will never tire of dumping their unwanted prisoners of limitless potential on unexplored shores, just as overthrowing nefarious regimes after attaining godlike power through arduous adventures will never get old.

Many hours spent in the Path of Exile open beta left me impressed by the skill system but disappointed in the gameplay itself. Enemies have little variety, with very few twists on either running in to attack or staying at range to shoot. Massive difficulty spikes, particularly with story bosses, are maddening. Combat was slow and tedious at times on my trip to level 30, as the skills lack the explosive punch of Diablo III or Torchlight II and the generic enemies fail to liven things up. Despite those concerns, Path of Exile is still in beta and I've been impressed at the rate and the quality of the changes the development team has been making in the frequent patches. The foundation is solid for Grinding Gear Games to build something special on if they can continue making improvements in the coming months. » Adam Biessener

» **Platform**  
PC

» **Style**  
1-Player Action/  
Role-Playing  
(4-Player Online)

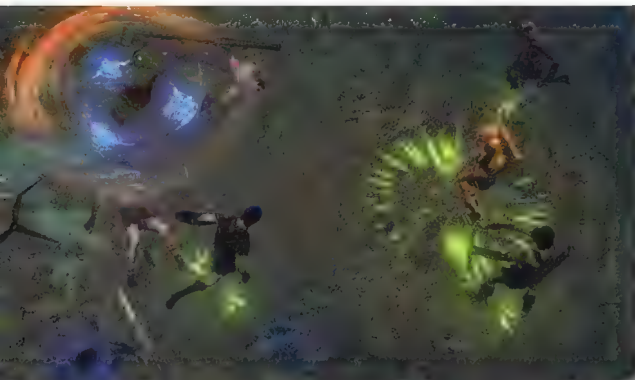
» **Publisher**  
Grinding Gear Games

» **Developer**  
Grinding Gear Games

» **Release**  
TBA

## As Free as it Gets

Path of Exile is free to play, with cosmetic items like non-combat pets and alternate skill animations available for real-money purchase from the developers. No gameplay-affecting items are for sale at the present time. Solo play is supported, but as a server-based game you're always connected to Grinding Gear Games' servers and will get booted out if your connection fails or their servers are down for patches or fixes. However, I've had very few problems logging in or playing Path of Exile to date, aside from brief windows early on in the open beta when the team was still adding servers to cope with demand.





# Tearaway

Hands on with Media Molecule's ingenious papercraft platformer

» **Platform**

Vita

» **Style**

1-Player Action/Platforming

» **Publisher**

Sony Computer Entertainment

» **Developer**

Media Molecule

» **Release**

2013

**T**earaway grew out of the Media Molecule team's "game jam" brainstorming sessions. As they went through idea after idea, they began to notice the reams of papers and sketches scattered over their tables. Suddenly it clicked: Why not make a game where the whole world is made of paper? This idea resonated with the team to the point where it invited an expert in pop-up books to give a lecture at the studio, helping crystallize the ideas for Tearaway's virtual paper-world.

Seeing the results of this experiment is exciting indeed. In some ways, Tearaway is a traditional 3D platformer, with widgets (bits of paper) to collect, environments to explore, and challenging platforming segments.

The paper aesthetic informs every element of the game. As you walk, you see paper sections of the ground lightly depress. You can even tweak main character Iota (or his female counterpart Atoi) by making new facial features like eyes and mouths with an in-game scissor editing tool and paper you collect. Think of it as a highly advanced version of the popular Mr. Potato Head toys. It's important to note that every object in the environment is made with the in-game design editor that Media

Molecule uses, which means that every object or device has to "work" just as if it were constructed out of real paper – no magic floating platforms here.

The first demo we see shows the basics of movement and exploration. In each level, Iota is tasked with delivering a letter, and must avoid folklore-inspired enemies like the giant Wendigo to do so. He can use things he finds in the environment, like giant traps and balls that attract the Wendigo. Some places in the environment are coated with glue, allowing Iota to traverse up and down walls in 3D space.

I take control of Iota in the more involving second level, which takes place in a top-secret accordion R&D facility (Media Molecule's offbeat humor is well intact). At the outset, Iota gets an accordion, which can suck in and blow out air. As the level progresses this is used in interesting ways, as Iota uses wind to manipulate pinwheels attached to everything from moving platforms to a puzzle involving electric circuits.

Though it's more complex than LittleBigPlanet's 2D levels, Media Molecule has a good handle on the basics of 3D platforming. While there's still some polishing to be done, Iota's movement feels fluid and the camera –

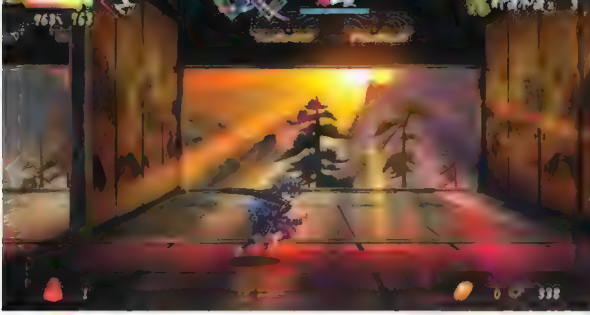
the bane of the genre – seems to keep a good view of the action.

While much of Tearaway falls in line with the traditions of the genre, the team is still experimenting with ideas that could make this one of the most intriguing platformers we've seen in years. During my time with the game, I catch glimpses of how the paper theme can be used to turn convention on its head. At the end of the R&D level, as I deliver Iota's letter, I become confused as to how to leave. As it turns out, I need to turn my accordion at a nearby painting, blow out some air, and "unfold" the painting like a pop-up book to reveal an entirely new area. This can also be done in the reverse, when Iota folds up a portion of the world to make an impassable gap easier to jump.

The game also makes unique use of the Vita's hardware capabilities. At certain points, Iota stands on glowing portals that grant control over the world to the player through the touchscreen. At one point, I stand on a platform and use my finger to peel down layers of a paper wall blocking my progress. In another demo, I actually poke my finger through the fabric of the world with the back touchscreen, moving it around to send enemies flying about. A realistic digital simulacrum of my fingertip appears in the game, and the Vita's camera is used to show a small border of the actual room I am in around the hole's opening. These are just a couple of ways that Media Molecule is using the Vita's capabilities to break the fourth wall between the audience and game.

While we still have much to learn about Tearaway, I came away from the demo impressed. The papercraft world is visually striking and allows Media Molecule to play with the player's expectations in unique ways. At the least, it feels like a very well-made 3D platformer, but I think Tearaway will rise or fall on the inventive ways that Media Molecule conceives to create the paper world and uses for the Vita's unique hardware functions. » **Matt Helgeson**





# Muramasa Rebirth

Vanillaware's demon blade returns

**M**uramasa might look familiar, but you haven't jumped back in time to 2009. This colorful 2D action game is coming out again, this time for Vita. With crisp HD visuals and a brand-new translation, the new version gives fans of the original a reason to revisit the tale of Kisuke and Momohime. We talked to producer Yoshifumi Hashimoto to get some answers about the resurrection of the game and its future. » **Joe Juba**

## What made you decide that now is the right time to bring Muramasa back?

When we were contemplating what we could do with the PS Vita, we thought that maybe its OLED screen would allow the vivid colors often used in Japanese games to truly come alive...Once we saw how vibrantly those colors were being displayed, we decided to

give Muramasa another go and proceeded with the development of the game.

## What kind of gameplay improvements will we see?

While the main game is more or less the same, there are a few differences. One is that jump is now mapped to a button as opposed to having to push up on the analog stick. Another is that, because of the differences between the Japanese and U.S. versions of the game, you can change what actions (attack, move, etc.) are assigned to each button through the options menu.

## Why select the Vita as the platform for the game, versus services like Xbox Live or PSN?

If we were to re-release the game, we wanted to do so in a completely different setting

where the vividness of the colors could be seen much more clearly. Also, we wanted the game on a handheld device and not another home console so that players can pick up and play the game more casually when they have time.

## What can you tell us about the game's DLC?

The DLC is a collection of short stories, each with a brand-new protagonist. The stories tell the tales of a nekomata, farmer, ninja, and a demon girl, respectively, and will be released periodically. These chapters will also make their way to the States as well. While Momohime and Kisuke use swords in battle, each of these new protagonists has their own unique approach to combat. I hope you're looking forward to seeing them in action for yourselves.

» **Platform**  
Vita

» **Style**  
1-Player Action

» **Publisher**  
Aksys Games

» **Developer**  
Vanillaware

» **Release**  
2013

# Breach & Clear

Portable and tactical

**A**s evidenced by the recent success of XCOM: Enemy Unknown and Fire Emblem: Awakening, turn-based tactical titles are seeing a resurgence in popularity. Despite this, we haven't seen many successful attempts at the genre on tablets, a platform that's seemingly ideal for these games. Mighty Rabbit Studios is hoping to change that with Breach & Clear, an upcoming mobile and tablet title that mixes turn-based strategy with tactical action.

Calling Breach & Clear turn-based is only partially accurate, however. While the action

takes place in eight-second rounds and you can plan your moves in between, both your soldiers and the enemy combatants move at the same time. After assigning your orders to your group of four, you watch them bust down doors, sweep rooms for enemies, and engage any enemy AI that returns fire. The vision-cone system adds an extra layer to the strategy, allowing you to point your soldier's gaze in any direction at any point on your path.

Free to play, Breach & Clear plans to earn its cash with eventual premium stages, squads, and weapons. Players can also purchase

mercenary packs for their characters, which cause them to invade other players' games and earn cash throughout a 24-hour window. While the game has real-cash purchases, the development team is quick to point out that all abilities, equipment, and weapon attachments can be earned via in-game accomplishments.

Mighty Rabbit Studios plans additional features like Facebook integration and multiplayer of some fashion (which is undecided at this point). You can try Breach & Clear's tactical action when it releases on iOS and Android later this year. » **Dan Ryckert**

» **Platform**  
iOS • Android

» **Style**  
1-Player Strategy

» **Publisher**  
Gun Media

» **Developer**  
Mighty Rabbit Studios

» **Release**  
2013



# reviews



gameinformer  
**GAME OF THE MONTH**

## 83 BioShock Infinite

A city in the sky, a man with a debt, and a woman with mysterious powers. Irrational Games uses these seemingly simple components to craft a complex and enthralling tale that lives up to the legacy of the original BioShock. From the wondrous setting to the entertaining combat, everything about the experience comes together into a polished and rewarding adventure that stands among the best of this generation.

### THE SCORING SYSTEM

<b>10</b>	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.	<b>5</b>	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.
<b>9</b>	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.	<b>4</b>	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.
<b>8</b>	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.	<b>3</b>	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.
<b>7</b>	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.	<b>2</b>	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
<b>6</b>	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	<b>1</b>	Always online. Another way of telling you're not allowed to play the game you just bought.

### AWARDS

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

# BioShock Infinite

Enjoying the view from above



gameinformer  
**GAME OF THE MONTH**

gameinformer  
**PLATINUM**

Style 1-Player Shooter **Publisher** 2K Games **Developer** Irrational Games **Release** March 26 **ESRB** M

In *BioShock Infinite*, players must be comfortable with the concept of parallel realities. What appears to be a peaceful street could be a war-torn battleground in a different version of the world. A person can be alive in one place, dead in another. Male here, female there – or never even born at all. As hero Booker DeWitt confronted these truths through the abilities of his companion, Elizabeth, I toyed with the same ideas in my own mind. If just a few things had happened differently, how would my life change? Could I be smarter? Richer? Happier? No matter how many parallel realities I ponder, I cannot imagine one in which *BioShock Infinite* is not among the best games I've played.

It all begins with Columbia. The floating paradise isn't just Rapture in the sky; it is divided by its own political problems, and driven by its own ideals. The city is beautifully realized, from the early 1900s-era buildings bobbing on the clouds to the zeppelins soaring by. As Booker walks down the streets, he is surrounded by a living Norman Rockwell painting; kids play in the water from a leaking hydrant, people gawk at technological marvels at the local fair, and a general store sits unattended but for a note about the honor system. Life in Columbia seems perfect, but the real fun comes from discovering the ugly side of the city.

Dealing with themes like religion, racism, and xenophobia, Columbia is a richer and more nuanced setting than even Rapture, and the unveiling of the city's culture is masterfully executed. Whether you're looking at a piece of propaganda, listening to an audio log, or participating in a horrifying raffle, almost everything you encounter contributes to your understanding of the floating world. This is one of the ingenious ways *Infinite* blurs the

lines between its component parts; Columbia may be a backdrop for the action, but the setting, narrative, and combat all loop back to reinforce each other.

Booker wanders Columbia alone at first, but once he saves the young woman named Elizabeth from captivity, the adventure begins in earnest. Elizabeth is with Booker for most of the events that follow, and she is among the best AI companions I've ever had. You don't ever need to worry about protecting her, which prevents the experience from feeling like an escort quest. Not only does Elizabeth stay out of harm's way, she actively helps Booker by finding ammo and health, making her a valuable ally in gunfights. She can also open doors to alternate realities called "tears," bringing objects like rocket launchers, automatons, and cover in from other worlds. She can use this ability as often as you want, but can only maintain one object at a time. This means you have a lot of options in any given encounter, but you can still adapt your approach and try new strategies.

Booker's tools in combat are less mysterious. He plows through enemies using firearms, brute force, and creative powers. I picked off foes with my shotgun as they fought off the murder of crows I summoned. I possessed a robotic George Washington and watched him cut down my Columbian aggressors. I jumped on the roller coaster-like skyline, boarded an airship, and jammed my skyhook into a foe's throat. The upgradeable weapons and abilities – augmented by the skylines and Elizabeth's powers – give players plenty of space to develop their own style of play. The encounter design could use more variety (you walk into a lot of wide-open areas full of tears and wait for enemies to pour in),

and the meager penalty for death doesn't keep stakes high unless you're playing on the brutal-but-rewarding 1999 difficulty. Despite those issues, combat on the whole is fun and satisfying.

My favorite aspect of *Infinite* is the one about which I can say the least: story. The build-up is slow, but it works wonderfully thanks to the small ways other elements flow into the narrative. Elizabeth's observations help you get to know her, and when she assists you in battle, it strengthens your connection to her. Opening tears keeps you thinking about the possibilities of other realities. Hearing the Beach Boys' "God Only Knows" being sung in 1912 reminds you that you have a lot of questions that need answers. My only complaint on the narrative front is that the hulking Songbird is under-utilized; for such a cool concept, the beast is relegated to the role of screeching *deus ex machina*. Otherwise, Irrational ties the remaining story threads together to create one of my favorite game endings in years.

Replicating the achievements of the original *BioShock* is a challenging goal (as 2K Marin's sequel demonstrated), but series creator Irrational Games returns with a fresh vision and redefines what the *BioShock* name means. *Infinite* is more than a new setting, story, and characters; those elements are seamlessly integrated with complex themes, a mysterious plot, and entertaining combat to create an amazing experience from beginning to end. Familiar threads run through it – a lighthouse, a strange city, a charismatic antagonist – but they are homages to the past rather than attempts to recycle it. The core of *Infinite* is unlike anything else on land, sea, or air. » **Joe Juba**

# 10

PS3 • 360 • PC

## ■ Concept

A new *BioShock* from the developer of the original, with similarities and differences in all the right places

## ■ Graphics

The splendor of Columbia looks great from a distance, though some textures are pretty rough up close

## » Sound

A fantastic soundtrack sets the tone perfectly, including a handful of anachronistic selections

## ■ Playability

Whether you're shooting mechanical goliaths or jumping from one skyline to another, the controls feel great

## » Entertainment

Exploring Columbia (and fighting its inhabitants) is unforgettable, as is the story driving the events

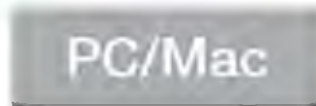
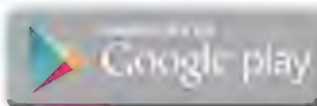
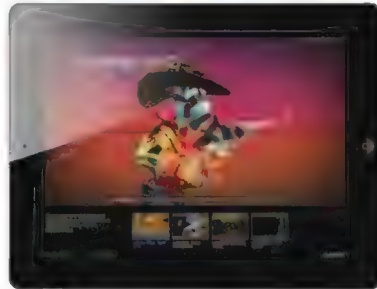
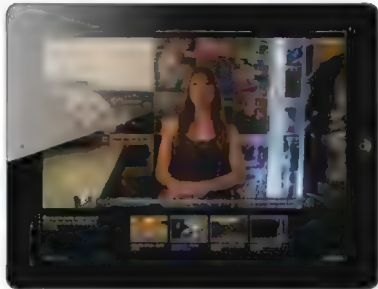
## » Replay Value

Moderately High

## The Edge

I did not notice a drastic difference in performance between the console versions. The PS3 may have a slight edge, but it also has the comically clunky Move controls. The PC iteration certainly has a graphical advantage, but I initially had issues getting the mouse-and-keyboard controls to work properly. If you go the PC route, you may want to stick to the gamepad, which worked fine for me.

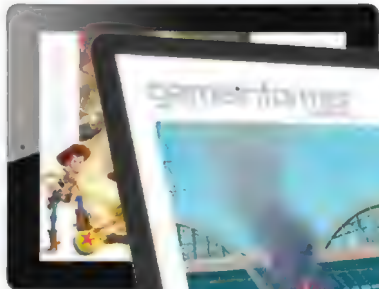
# DON'T JUST READ IT, **EXPERIENCE IT.**



# gameinformer<sup>®</sup>

DIGITAL

- ◆ GameStop PowerUp Rewards Pro members who choose Game Informer Digital get full access to the PC/Mac edition, as well as the iPad app and 10" Android tablet app.
- ◆ Get earlier access to new and expanded content than print subscribers.
- ◆ Watch embedded videos organized by your favorite subjects.
- ◆ Access interactive galleries and links to bonus content.



**SWITCH TO THE MONTHLY DIGITAL EDITION FOR FREE!**

[gameinformer.com/godigitalnow](http://gameinformer.com/godigitalnow)



# God of War: Ascension

Not so Godly anymore

8

Style 1-Player Action (16-Player Online) Publisher Sony Computer Entertainment Developer Santa Monica Studio Release March 12 ESRB M

PS3

## » Concept

A younger, less angry Kratos begins his quest to take down Olympus

## » Graphics

Sony's Santa Monica studio once again demonstrates its mastery of the PS3 hardware. This game is simply gorgeous

## » Sound

All the epic, sweeping music you can handle. Kratos even speaks occasionally instead of shouting

## » Playability

Small but important changes to the battle system make it less fluid than other entries

## » Entertainment

Strives for the spectacle and splendor of God of War III, but the story and combat fall short of greatness

## » Display Value

Moderately High

When I reviewed the original God of War back in 2005, I remember feeling sorry for other action games. Kratos outpaced his peers by such a wide margin that measuring up to his bloody rampage seemed impossible. Other games took cues from God of War, but each new installment raised the bar even higher, putting more distance between Kratos and his rivals. After years of dominance, God of War: Ascension is the series' stumble that could allow the competition to close the gap.

Pinpointing where Ascension goes wrong is difficult, because it has all of the components a God of War title should. Whirling blades? Check. Jaw-dropping boss fights? Check. Story about Kratos' tragic past? Check. The list goes on, but even though Sony's Santa Monica Studio included the key elements, it doesn't mean they are executed up to the series' high standards. In areas where fans expect a new entry to move forward – like narrative and combat – Ascension either stalls or steps backward.

Set 10 years before the first entry, Kratos is on a quest to free himself from the bond of Ares. This puts him at odds with the Furies, creatures charged with enforcing oaths. Series fans know how the story ends: Kratos wins, breaks his bond, and eventually kills Ares. In a prequel, the challenge is to craft a tale that enriches the events that players have already seen – something Ready at Dawn's handheld God of War titles did exceptionally well. Kratos pushing his daughter away in Elysium and battling his brother Deimos helped players see a different side of the character. Ascension offers no such insight. Its main contribution is emphasizing that Kratos misses his family and is sorry that he killed them, which is well-worn material at this point. The result is a story that has players chasing artifacts and fighting bad guys with no investment in the outcome.

Though Kratos lacks the compelling purpose that drove him forward in other entries, he's still full of epic exploits. In terms of spectacle, Ascension holds the same note from God of War III. Towering creatures, massive structures, and brutal deaths punctuate the adventure from beginning to end. They all look great, too, thanks to stellar production values. From Kratos' ashy complexion to enormous mechanical snakes slithering through snowy mountains, I stopped and marveled at the visuals several times. Cinematic camerawork



highlights the action well in most situations. It occasionally zooms out so far that you can't make out what's happening or who's attacking, but you usually have a front-row seat for the carnage.

The essence of battle remains intact, with Kratos dishing out stylish combos and executing mythological terrors through elaborate (and entertaining) timed button-press sequences. If you just watch the action, you would think it's more of the same, but the combat system has undergone some tweaks that change how you play. The removal of superfluous alternate weapons forces you to focus on your blades, which everyone does anyway. Players still have other things to spend red orbs on; blade attacks can be infused with upgradable elemental properties that grant unique abilities. Unfortunately, their most useful elemental powers (the area-clearing magic) are buried at the final upgrade level. The standard attacks look different, but they don't feel distinct in practice, leaving combat feeling less varied than previous entries.

Other combat changes converge to make Ascension fall behind. The revamped rage meter unlocks more powerful moves and allows your elemental augments to generate different orbs, but keeping it charged is too challenging when facing hordes of enemies – which is when you need it the most. The decision to make the parry move (which used to activate automatically with a well-timed block) into a separate input breaks up the natural combo flow. The addition of boring secondary weapons lying on the ground is also disappointing, since they are never as cool or useful as Kratos' standard arsenal. I understand the need to innovate and alter the formula for a new game, but Ascension is different in all of the wrong ways.

Nowhere in the game are the problems more

apparent than during the final hour, when Kratos encounters the Trial of Archimedes. This section is punishingly difficult, thanks more to the shortcomings in combat design than the specific arrangement of enemies you face. I've beaten previous God of War games on the highest difficulty level, but it took me about an hour of constant dying on the normal setting before I could finish the trial. Just when the adventure should be reaching its crescendo, this section tragically poisons the final chapters and replaces any lingering enthusiasm with frustration.

Maybe multiplayer is to blame for the tweaks to the combat. Perhaps Sony was more concerned with crafting a battle system optimized for multiplayer rather than single-player. If so, that goal was achieved. Ascension's multiplayer is a well-tuned experience, and the things that feel clunky in the solo campaign (like the parry and secondary weapons) are natural when you're squaring off against real opponents. Multiplayer also doesn't feel haphazardly shoehorned in; combat is competent, and the leveling system and various weapon and armor unlocks are noble attempts to add longevity. However, the best way to keep people playing would have been interesting modes. Standard deathmatch, capture the flag, and co-op horde options are how you test your skills. All of the modes function fine and provide some thrills, but they don't capture what makes God of War entertaining or remarkable.

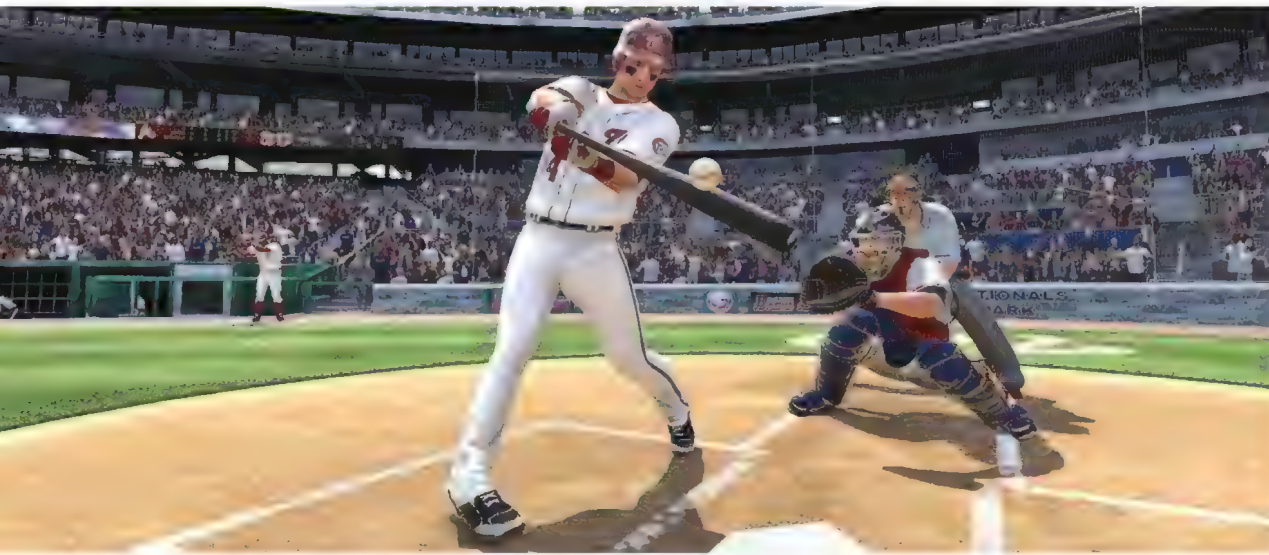
Despite its faults, God of War: Ascension is a good game. The action is fun, the graphics are astounding, and players are pulled from one high-adrenaline moment to the next. But it's also disappointing. Fans are accustomed the rising stakes and escalating scale that make Kratos attain deific heights, but Ascension proves that he is mortal after all. » Joe Juba





# MLB 13: The Show

Spending more time in the batting cage



gameinformer  
SILVER

Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (8-Player Online) Publisher Sony Computer Entertainment  
Developer Sony Computer Entertainment San Diego Release March 5 ESRB E

**M**LB 13: The Show resembles a player who shows up early to a stadium to spend more time in the batting cage. This player isn't redefining his game, but his efforts may lead to improvements in batting average and on-base percentage, and the ability to sit back on a change-up. Likewise, Sony San Diego focused its development efforts on tightening up the nuts and bolts of The Show.

A wider hit-timing window may not fit the bill of a standout feature for an annualized sports game, but this small tweak brings a satisfying crack of the bat. Offenses are more productive both offline and on. How productive? Playing on veteran difficulty, my entire team showed much more plate savvy than I've ever seen in past MLB: The Show iterations. Alfonso Soriano led the league in dingers, RBI, and batting average, and no one else was even close in any category.

Putting good wood on the ball more consistently is satisfying, even if AI managers make questionable bullpen decisions. When a pitcher gets in trouble or relies too much on a pitch that isn't working, it's easy to take him yard. That poor hurler often takes a beating until his pitch count hits 50 to 60. No matter the score, a starter is rarely pulled before the fifth inning – perhaps due to me taking very few pitches. Hardcore fans can achieve more realistic results by messing around with the difficulty settings, but no matter what tweaks are made, expect to put the ball in play more often this year.

The offensive outbursts also spread to online play where the hit window seems even more forgiving. The Show's online component, which experienced crippling lag last season, is a solid performer this year. Latency still occurs in most games, but I rarely ran into extended periods of it like I did last year.

At its worst, I saw a few hiccups in the pitching game and experienced a slight loss in fielding precision.

If you are new to The Show, or have always had trouble at the plate, the hitting window isn't the only change that will help you improve your game. Sony has also implemented a great new beginner mode that starts out with fastballs thrown down the heart of the plate. After gauging how well you are doing, the AI either ranks up or down to include more or less breaking balls. I recommend experienced players jump into this difficulty to experiment with pulling and pushing hits under the new timing window.

The game flow remains incredibly fluid on the field, although there isn't much margin for error on user-thrown balls. Throws that slide out of the meter's green zone (even if they are just kissing yellow) frequently result in the fielder pulling off of the base. Most of the animations (and the timing tied to them) are right on the money. Double plays look fantastic and most of the transitional animations – whether it's a quick turn at second or an outfielder settling under a towering fly – are largely free of glitches or movements that don't sink up with the particular action. Pulse pitching is largely unchanged this season, but the meter is greatly subdued (and batting's horrible sunburst is gone).

All of the traditional modes return, and the only new avenue of play is postseason mode, which delivers direct access to the playoffs. Road to the Show is the most changed of all the modes, boasting a new baserunning system that is much easier to read and use, as well as different camera placements that help in getting your feet under the ball for fielding. The new camera tracking system used for baserunning isn't as useful. This camera perspective doesn't provide a good

look at the stadium or fielders, which makes the trajectory of fly balls difficult to read. If you don't mind the loss of realism, you can tap L2 to get a bird's eye view of the ball in flight. I used this technique for every ball put in play.

Road to the Show games can now be followed through a quick simulation that tracks the outcome of each at bat. If you don't want to watch the simulation, one tap of the button brings you right to your player's next appearance. The lack of commentary during Minor League games is a nice touch that makes Major League games look like larger productions.

Franchise mode includes a number of noteworthy new tweaks, mostly for people who enjoy simulating at least a decade's worth of seasons. First up is a new scouting system that is intuitive, yet perplexing in the talent that is offered. Some of my top prospects were 21 years of age, yet wouldn't be ready for MLB action until 2023. A pitcher who won't make the Majors until he's 31 years old is the top prospect teams are after? The trade logic – which Sony rewrote entirely – fares much better than previous iterations. I couldn't fleece many teams out of top talent, and they didn't try to sell me on too many awful trades. Mid-season free agency activity is minimal. Even facing injuries, teams would call up unprepared minor leaguers instead of signing vets like Brian Wilson. Most players left on the block retire due to a "poor market" or age.

MLB 13: The Show turns the bats loose and finds stability online, but the numbers err more on the side of MLB's juiced era than the pitcher-friendly league we see today. This year's game is about making contact more consistently and shoring up the other aspects of a well-rounded baseball sim. » **Andrew Reiner**

## 8.75

PS3

### » Concept

Hitting is the name of the game this season. With a wider hit-timing window and a new beginner difficulty setting, players can put up huge numbers

### » Graphics

The beautiful presentation captures the spirit of MLB and minor-league games, and pushes a high level of realism in its player models and fielding animations

### » Sound

Fielder and base-coach audio is a nice touch. The commentary team does a nice job of calling out specific little things (like the hill in Houston's center field), but repeats sequences way too often

### » Playability

Pitchers don't serve up meat, but hitting is easier this year. The fielding meter can be unforgiving. Pitching is fantastic, but unchanged from last season

### » Entertainment

A year of minor tweaks leads to more exciting offensive production

### » Replay Value

High

# Gears of War: Judgment

A new beginning, and a fitting end

8.5

Style 1 or 2-Player Shooter (10-Player Online) Publisher Microsoft Studios Developer Epic Games/People Can Fly Release March 19 ESRB M

360

» **Concept**

Take a step back in time with Baird for the campaign, and pit COG vs. Locust in the fantastic new Overrun multiplayer mode

» **Graphics**

Everything looks great, but there's nothing that puts Judgment head and shoulders above its predecessors

» **Sound**

Weapons sound great and dialogue is appropriately ham-fisted

» **Playability**

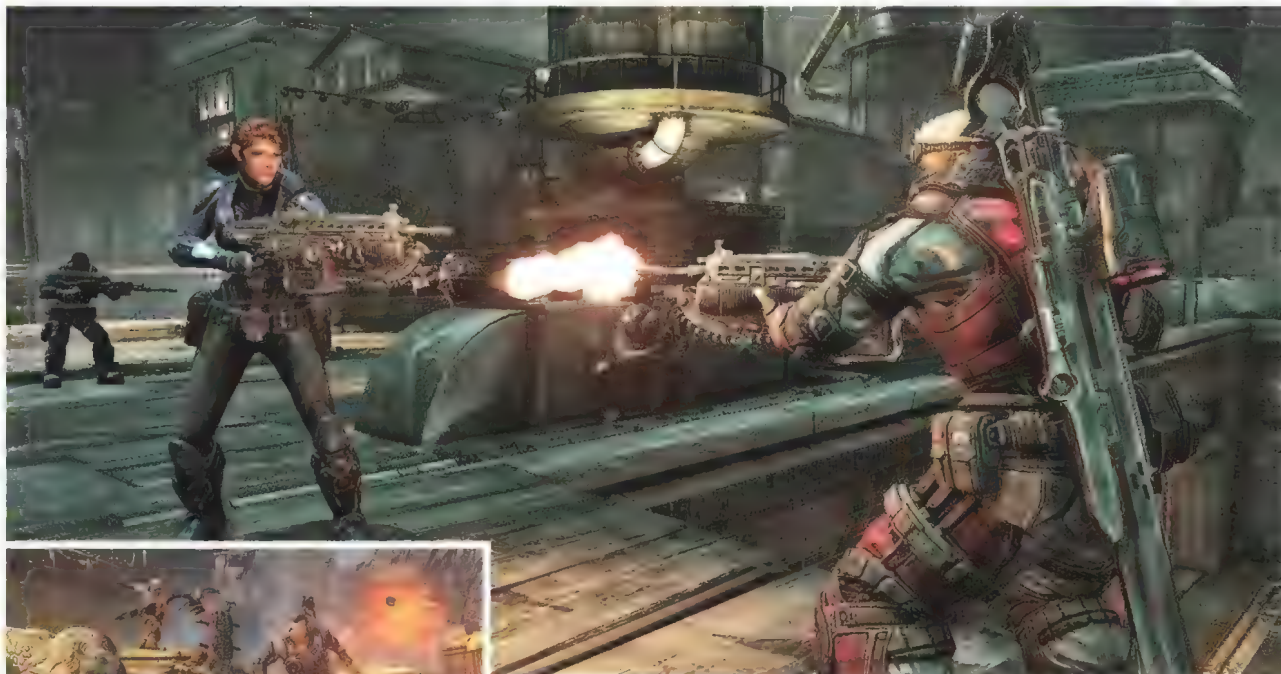
As the fourth entry in a series that's always had good controls, you won't find much to complain about here

» **Entertainment**

A great farewell to the series' run on the Xbox 360

» **Replay Value**

High



Epic's newest installment in the massively successful Gears of War series is surprising in many ways. Baird has stepped up from side character to starring role. The popular Horde mode has essentially been replaced with new multiplayer experiences. No matter how many tweaks Epic made to this prequel, it still manages to unmistakably feel like Gears of War.

A co-op story mode is nothing new to the Gears franchise, but Judgment brings major changes to the campaign experience. Most of the changes are relegated to the gameplay, but the narrative is structured in a new way as well. Instead of telling a linear, straightforward story, the entirety of the campaign is told via flashbacks as Baird and Kilo Squad describe previous events during a military trial.

Gears has never had masterful storytelling, and narrative clearly takes a backseat in Judgment's cooperative campaign. Instead, this entry focuses on the series' greatest strength: loud, violent, intense shootouts. Epic breaks up sections of the campaign into digestible, standalone battles as frequently as possible. Instead of feeling like you're following a story from beginning to end, Judgment instead shuttles you from skirmish to skirmish with nothing to break

up the action. Enemies come in massive waves, and you're rarely given a moment to relax. If you're looking for a game that you can jump into and immediately start ripping enemies to shreds with high-powered weaponry, few games scratch that itch like this one.

While this is satisfying on one level, it comes at the sacrifice of memorable set-piece moments. I have fond memories from the previous games of exploring the innards of a giant Riftworm, riding on the back of Rig 314, running from streetlight to streetlight to avoid Kryll, fighting a Brumak, and being introduced to the Lambent. I enjoyed the more traditional action of Judgment, but looking back, the campaign is a foggy mess of explosions and bullets with no standout moments.

An epilogue chapter named Aftermath unlocks as you progress through the campaign, and it takes place during the timeframe of Gears of War 3. Without the rigid structure of the main campaign, it feels like a more seamless experience and manages to squeeze in some set-piece moments. Even though it only takes about an hour to play it, a few of the scenes reminded me of how much more I enjoy the older format.

The campaign may be more fragmented now, but it does have its advantages. Rating your mission-to-mission performance on a three-star system and offering extra difficult "declassified" modifiers makes the campaign more replayable, and it's easy to jump straight to a section that you want to replay.

As always, the Gears multiplayer suite rivals anything else on the shooter market. Horde and Beast modes are technically gone, but the new marquee Overrun mode takes elements of both and turns it into the best multiplayer experience in the franchise's history. Defending emergence holes and generators as the COG is intense and challenging, and taking control of various Locust creatures is a blast. This mode is unlike any other, and it should keep shooter fans coming back for months.

If you can pry yourself away from Overrun for long enough, the new survival mode's COG vs. AI gameplay conjures a bit of the old Horde spirit. Defending generators against 10 waves of computer-controlled Locust may not match the scale of Horde, but it's a nice inclusion nevertheless. Standard offerings like free for all, team deathmatch, and domination are also available if you're looking for a classic online shooter experience.

Despite its questionable approach to the campaign that abandons huge set-piece moments in favor of smaller skirmishes, Gears of War: Judgment remains a polished, replayable experience. Even if you never touch any future DLC, the game disc has enough content to keep you busy for the better part of 2013. Judgment is likely the final Gears game in this console generation, and the timing couldn't be more fitting. As a franchise whose debut helped establish the Xbox 360's identity, it bids farewell to this generation with an installment that benefits from the iteration and improvement that its predecessors provided. » **Dan Ryckert**

# StarCraft II: Heart of the Swarm

A dip in the dark side



Style 1-Player Strategy (8-Player Online) Publisher Blizzard Entertainment Developer Blizzard Entertainment Release March 12 ESRB T

# 8.75

PC

» **Concept**

Explore the twisted but fascinating zerg, and update the already top-shelf multiplayer

» **Graphics**

Everything is beautiful, from action-packed cinematics to in-game unit animation

» **Sound**

An unusual score mixes traditional orchestral work with guitars and growling sound effects – a perfect fit for the subject matter

» **Playability**

The campaign guides players every step of the way, but making the leap to multiplayer is still daunting

» **Entertainment**

A darker, disturbing vision of the StarCraft universe with plenty of new content to explore

» **Replay Value**

High

As one of the three central factions of the StarCraft universe, the monstrous zerg have always been defined by their focus on evolution and growth. Appropriately, Blizzard makes those traits the centerpiece of the zerg-centric first expansion to StarCraft II. A tightly paced campaign of excellent missions delivers plenty of choices in how players guide the Swarm to victory, even if some of those choices don't seem to matter as much as they could. Meanwhile, an overhaul of the existing multiplayer frontend keeps StarCraft II the game to beat in the real-time strategy world, but casual fans may still have trouble jumping into the deep end.

Sarah Kerrigan has had a rough time of things, what with her forced assimilation into an alien horde and her involvement in subsequent genocide. As Heart of the Swarm opens, things appear to be looking up. More than any previous Blizzard game, Heart of the Swarm keeps the limelight squarely on one conflicted character. Even as things once again take a turn for the worse, this anti-heroine embraces her quest for revenge. That focus steers Heart of the Swarm more toward a role-playing sensibility than the last entry, and grounds the exotic alien story in a familiar presence. The narrative is thoughtfully paced and engaging, broken down into short mini-campaigns on each planet which unfold their own discrete dramas that tie into the whole.

Blizzard had a challenging task in front of them, crafting a cast of relatable characters from a bunch of mandible-sporting monsters. Rather than shy away from the strangeness, the storyline embraces it with memorable alien personalities, like the remorseless Abathur and his twisted experimentations. Kerrigan's tale is great fun, as told through shipboard conversations and gorgeous cinematics, even if her willingness to return to a darker path seems abrupt.

The missions that take her along this path are varied and engaging. Echoing the structure established in Warcraft III, most missions include Kerrigan as a playable hero; her presence turns the tide of battles, and her devastating powers keep players engaged even with smaller combats. A surprising number of missions branch away from the traditional base-establishing expectations into more dungeon crawl-style adventures, which hasn't always been Blizzard's strong suit. However, I was pleasantly surprised by the unique objectives and available units in these side treks. In particular, I love the gradual infestation of a protoss ship, and a great little MOBA homage while piloting the mighty Hyperion.

Between missions and story, Heart of the Swarm embraces the zerg fixation on evolution. Kerrigan levels up as missions pass, often in response to optional mission objectives. New power tiers unlock on a regular basis, with multiple powers at each tier that can be altered between missions. Each zerg



unit also has a flexible upgrade choice, offering options like increased armor or greater range. In addition, each unit gets a dedicated evolution mission, where you choose one of two fixed upgrades that permanently alter the unit's abilities and name, like giving wings to zerglings so they can leap onto cliffs and enemies. I enjoy the incredible variety of units that results from my choices, but the evolution missions themselves are little more than bland tutorials. I rarely felt that my evolutionary decisions profoundly affected subsequent events in the main story; they never figure into mission objectives, and the innovative strategies they bring to the table don't seem to matter in the long term.

The new multiplayer is best understood as an evolution as well, rather than a reinvention. Competitive play remains magnificent for those willing to invest the time to excel. The intricate balance between StarCraft II's units remains unparalleled in the world of online gaming. Several new maps are good additions, as are awesome units that help to change up online strategies, like the zerg swarm host's impressive siege capabilities. While those unit additions are big news for longtime fans, the new strategic options they represent may be lost on amateurs. However, all players can appreciate the under-the-hood changes in the overall structure and organization of multiplayer – a valiant effort by the developers to draw more players from the campaign and into the world-class competitive scene.

The centerpiece of that initiative is a rewarding leveling mechanic. XP is accrued for all sorts of in-game actions, and new levels give you portraits and decals to customize your multiplayer persona. A new training mode helps acquaint novices to the

fundamentals of base and unit prep, though it fails to communicate clearly about how to succeed after those initial steps. Versus AI matches are a fun way to get your feet wet, especially when playing cooperatively with a few buddies. After a few matches, the computer detects your skill level and plays accordingly. Ultimately, all the time in other modes is meant to transition players into true competitive multiplayer, but nothing can prepare you for the cleverness of an actual opponent. Blizzard's matchmaking (now available ranked or unranked) tries to find appropriate opponents, but most players I encountered were wildly above or below my skill level, especially early on.

Part of me wishes that the official multiplayer offering included some more of the campaign's innovations, such as the option to bring heroes into battle, or the cool evolved zerg units – though I can understand the desire not to mess with perfection. Luckily, players wanting to see more experimentation can dive into the massive backlog of fan-created mods in the Arcade; everything from dedicated role-playing games to tower defense variations waits inside, and I applaud Blizzard's support for this robust community of creators.

Heart of the Swarm is billed as an expansion pack, but make no mistake: This entry is as full-featured and rewarding as the base game. While the harder sci-fi edge of the campaign may not be as accessible as the earlier terran storyline, I found myself gradually embracing the darker tones, even when some of the character moments fell flat. Accompanied by the incomparable multiplayer, Heart of the Swarm is a worthy middle act to tide us over until the protoss warp in for the impending conclusion. » **Matt Miller**

# SimCity

Building on unstable ground

## 6.5

Style 1-Player Simulation (16-Player Online) Publisher Electronic Arts Developer Maxis Release March 5 ESRB E10+

PC

### » Concept

Bring SimCity back with an emphasis on specialization and cooperation

### » Graphics

The buildings look great, and impressive art direction gives everything a model train set vibe

### » Sound

Low-key domestic music plays in the background, but you aren't missing anything if you tune it out

### » Playability

The road tool is aggravatingly inconsistent, and navigating certain menus is unintuitive.

Data maps are awesome

### » Entertainment

You can have a lot of fun if you don't care about the finer points of the simulation. But in that case, why are you even playing SimCity?

### » Replay Value

High

When people go on vacation, they occasionally become so attached to their exotic destinations that they want to stay forever. The unfamiliar streets and strange customs promise exciting new experiences far more attractive than the day-to-day drudgery back home. However, popular vacation destinations aren't inherently better – people just don't stay long enough to see the problems. This holds just as true for the digital destination of SimCity as any sunny Caribbean beach.

The first few hours of SimCity are wonderful. The basic premise is the same as ever: As a new mayor, you are charged with creating a thriving town from nothing. You still place residential, commercial, and industrial zones while hoping to hit population milestones, but that isn't your only goal. The big innovation in this reboot is diversity. Players can specialize in different areas, like oil drilling, gambling, or manufacturing, and each path has a different set of goals and rewards. I love how each specialization uses the same city-building fundamentals, but forces players to dive into new mechanics and take alternate paths to success.

As a fan of the series since the original, I am amazed by all of the conveniences and details Maxis worked into the experience. Automatically routing all power, water, and sewage through the roadways is brilliant, since it minimizes the time you spend monkeying with each utility. As my cities grow, I love diving into the data maps to see how various factors respond. These maps show you things like land value, happiness, ground pollution, and they are all clearly (and stylishly) represented. I used to happily stare at the graphics and charts in the previous installments, but the data maps are a much more informative and elegant way to convey information.

I saw all of this as I played a review build of the game on EA's test servers. When I continued to play after the official launch, cracks in the foundation started appearing. Everything



that I initially liked about the game is still intact, but like placing a coal power plant in the middle of a residential block, dark clouds spread and pollute previously pristine areas.

The bigger your city grows, the harder it is to manage. Traffic congests roads during rush hour due to poor AI. No matter how many high-capacity roads you build, cars sit bumper-to-bumper instead of pursuing alternate routes. Critical vehicles like fire trucks and police cars also get caught in the traffic jams, in addition to responding inefficiently to emergencies in general (like sending every fire truck to a single blaze, even if multiple buildings are on fire). These AI and pathing problems also prevent other major features, like casinos and mass transit, from functioning properly. Even though the simulation is responsible for these failings, the alert messages players receive imply that they're the ones doing something wrong.

Given those issues, it may be a blessing that your population is held back by the fact that you don't have a lot of space to work with. Compared to previous installments, the smaller plot size in SimCity is apparently aimed at encouraging players to make multiple cities instead of a single sprawling megalopolis. However, I was cramped for space even when trying to build a city around a single specialization. To make matters worse, the inability to terraform means that you are stuck with the map exactly as it appears. If you just need a little extra space to expand your power plant or place a port, you're out of luck. Individually, these shortcomings might seem like minor details – but in a simulation, the details are everything.

Prior to release, much of the discussion about SimCity revolved around the fact that it has no offline mode; it must remain connected to EA's servers. I'm not going to use SimCity as a weapon to attack the larger concept of

always-online gaming. Regardless of your feelings on that issue, SimCity undoubtedly benefits and suffers in many ways from the constant connectivity.

In its ideal state, SimCity fosters cooperation between players by encouraging cooperation within a region. Pooling resources and sharing services is the surest route to success, and collaborating with your friends is fun. This experience is what the always-online requirement facilitates – in theory. In reality, the first week of launch demonstrated the worst-case scenario: SimCity was effectively unplayable for several days. Maxis disabled certain features to ease the burden, most importantly the "cheetah speed" setting. Without it, your city's growth and income is severely restricted by the slow pace the simulation is forced to maintain. As of this writing, cheetah speed is still not restored.

Even though the servers run better now, I still experience delays ranging from 5 to 45 minutes when trying to share services or gifts with other cities in my region, leading to confusion as to whether or not a problem has actually been resolved. Creating a new city is also a problem in some cases; if you don't already have an Origin friends list populated by people playing the game, your chances of finding a decent region are low. You can't search for available slots by any useful criteria (like types of specialization needed), so any casual player has to wade through a sea of garbage regions.

Given time, Maxis could clear up the problems with SimCity. The studio could deliver consistent server performance, restore cheetah speed, patch the AI, and give players larger cities. But games can't be reviewed based on the product they might become; Electronic Arts and Maxis are charging gamers for this experience right now. At this point in time, it just isn't worth your money. » Joe Juba





# 8.5

PS3 • 360

» **Concept**

Change out Tiger's history lesson for an overview of golf itself, and add more online features

» **Graphics**

The clouds and changes of day (including night golfing) look great

» **Sound**

Jim Nantz's intros for the historic Legends of the Majors challenges are cool to hear

» **Playability**

Changing your swing characteristics is handy even if the physical swing itself doesn't change

» **Entertainment**

Doesn't dramatically change from last year, but it's definitely more fun

» **Replay Value**

High

## Tiger Woods PGA Tour 14

Getting back in the groove

Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (4-Player Online) Publisher EA Sports Developer EA Tiburon Release March 26 ESRB E

I'm glad this year's Tiger game is moving away from the golfer himself, and not because of his image. Last year's Tiger Legacy mode faltered, so in its place Tiger 14 offers the Legends of the Majors mode that lets you play through the history of the sport itself instead of just Tiger's career. It's an effective approach, especially when coupled with a few small changes that tighten the overall experience.

I'm not a golf history buff, but Legends of the Majors mode is a fun way to earn coins that incorporates your Career mode golfer by having them face off against the sport's greats

at certain intervals. The mode also uses era-specific equipment, which isn't as interesting.

This year the all-important coins, which are used to buy stat-boosting pins, are more useful since you can spend them to level up your golfer. Levels grant you attribute points and equipment for a lot less than it takes to buy a pin pack.

The expansion of the online options gives you more ways to earn coins. The Country Clubs format lets you take in more players, who can contribute to the club's status in more ways (including a variety of tournaments and leaderboards). The clubs also feature expanded

voice chat, and a new Club Loyalty Bonus that gives you coins for members playing every day.

The action on the course remains largely the same from last year, except for the new swing arcs. Like changing your club tuning, fiddling with your swing arc has its advantages. This lets you change the flight characteristics of your ball, including your power, control, and how the wind affects your shot.

Even though Tiger 14 has a similar setup as Tiger 13, I had more fun with the newer game because its constituent parts mesh better. For a golfer, getting everything in synch is important. » **Matthew Kato**

## Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Gates to Infinity

Keep it simple, snorlax

Style 1-Player Role-Playing (4-Player local) Publisher Nintendo Developer Spike Chunsoft Release March 24 ESRB E

The Pokémon Mystery Dungeon games have been forgettable (and sometimes terrible) titles, largely because they miss the mark of what makes the core releases so difficult to put down. Gates to Infinity has some overlap with the traditional Pokémon games, like similar combat mechanics, the ability to add Pokémon to your team, and the presence of adorable little pocket monsters everywhere you turn – but these differences still amount to an inferior experience.

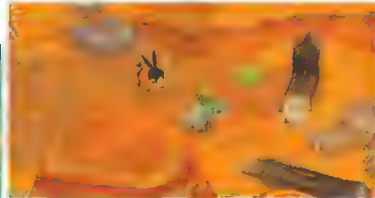
You begin by choosing a Pokémon to control directly, then forming a team of other creatures to delve into randomly generated dungeons. Combat borrows from the core Pokémon games by giving you four attacks, and opportunities to learn new moves and level them up. It's still turn-based, but you don't enter a separate battle screen. Instead, you duke it out as soon as you move next to an enemy. You both select your attacks as things play out, and it leads to a much faster experience. It feels like the traditional combat of Pokémon, but the burst of speed makes it more enjoyable.

The idea behind randomly generated dungeons is an admirable one, but it is one that can be problematic, and Gates to Infinity illustrates why. Instead of creating a sense of discovery every time you enter a dungeon, you

are met with a disappointing sense of déjà vu that permeates every level. Without a calculated and deliberate design, they all end up feeling the same, even when the environmental palettes are swapped.

Outside of the mostly boring dungeon crawling, you have Pokémon Paradise, an area that you own and manage, which can be expanded by spending money and collecting items from missions. Building your own paradise and maintaining it gives a sense of ownership over your neck of the woods, and watching its Pokémon population expand is exciting.

Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Gates to Infinity struggles with its simplicity in regards to dungeon exploration. The levels are never complicated or interesting, and combat offers very few tactical options. Outside of the dungeons however, the game shines with an interesting world, cast of Pokémon characters, and even its sugary-sweet story. » **Kyle Hilliard**



# 6.75

3DS

» **Concept**

Place Pokémon in a world free of humans to explore randomly generated dungeons and build a paradise

» **Graphics**

It's all very adorable and brightly colored – sometimes too much

» **Sound**

The soundtrack surprises with quality offerings, at its best recalling music from The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker

» **Playability**

Grid-based movement and simplistic combat makes everything too easy

» **Entertainment**

Mystery Dungeon is repetitious by design, but worthwhile distractions keep you from nodding off

» **Replay Value**

Moderate

# Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon

Bustin' makes me feel good

## 8.5

Style 1-Player Action (4-Player Online) Publisher Nintendo Developer Next Level Games Release March 24 ESRB E

3DS

» **Concept**  
Luigi returns to the spotlight in a portable adventure filled with laughs, a variety of spooky environments, and intuitive gameplay

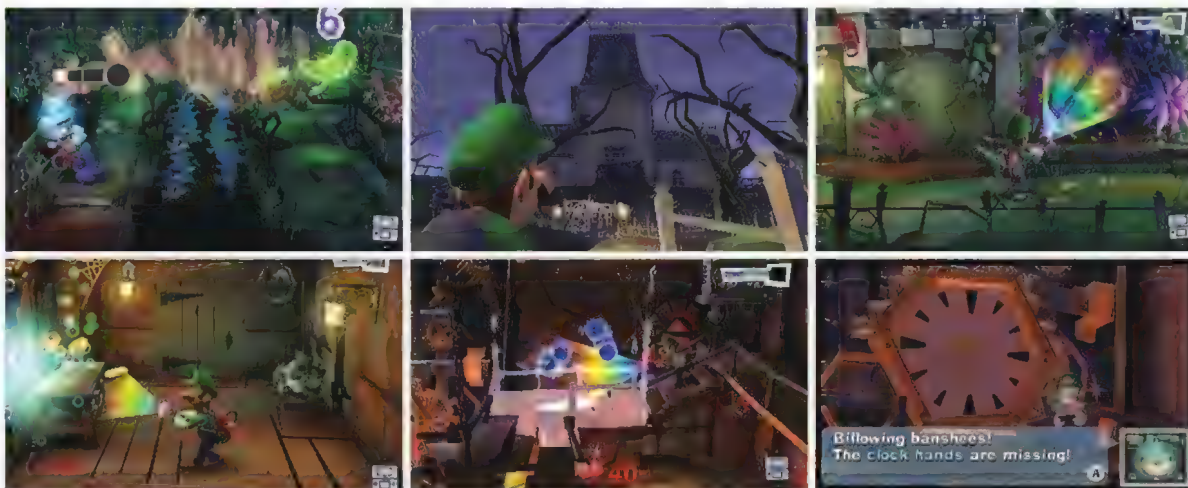
» **Graphics**  
The multicolored specters pop on the 3DS' crisp screens, and Luigi's tentative animations are spot-on

» **Sound**  
Professor E. Gadd prattles on like a lovable Ewok, and Luigi hums along with the catchy soundtrack

» **Playability**  
A clever control scheme compensates for the lack of an extra circle pad, and the ghost-vacuuming gameplay is more dynamic than its predecessor

» **Entertainment**  
A polished, occasionally repetitive Nintendo experience with enough fun puzzles and action to keep you coming back

» **Replay Value**  
Moderately High



The GameCube's 2001 release didn't come with an impressive-sounding launch line-up. Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader looked good, but a game starring Luigi? Nintendo fans were pleasantly surprised by the younger Mario brother's starring debut, and over a decade later, they are being treated to another ghost-hunting Luigi adventure that improves on nearly every feature of the original.

The core of the GameCube title's gameplay remains the same. Players stun ghosts with a flashlight and use the Poltergust 5000 to suck them up. Dark Moon adds a layer of strategy to the flashlight, allowing players to charge up a wide-radius burst. Backing into a corner with a full charge and blasting a group of hidden ghosts is satisfying, and the subsequent vacuum wrangling still requires players to tug against the ghost like a hooked marlin. Luigi's vacuum builds up a powerful charge as he wrestles ghosts, which can be triggered to knock big chunks off their health. Players aim the vacuum and flashlight up and down using the face buttons, which may sound clunky but works well in practice. These tweaks to the controls make busting ghosts snappy and rewarding.

When you're not capturing ghosts, you're solving Dark Moon's diverse mix of engaging environmental puzzles. Most involve using the flashlight or vacuum, but occasionally call for Luigi to shine his black light to reveal hidden doors or items. Oddities like doormats in front of blank walls offer subtle hints, so perceptive players shouldn't hit too many progress road-blocks. My favorite puzzles require tactics like using the vacuum to drag spider webs toward a torch to clear a passage. Sometimes battling ghosts becomes a puzzle in itself, like luring a mummy into an open flame to reveal the ghost beneath. Another requires clever use of the vacuum to clear a room of flashlight-diffusing steam. No single puzzle is groundbreaking,

but the steady drip of "aha!" moments kept me hooked.

The variety of mansions also keeps things fresh. Unlike the first game's singular haunted house, players explore exotic estates with snowy mountain ski lifts, Egyptian tombs, and overgrown greenhouses. Backtracking through familiar rooms is frequently required, but themed rooms and the eccentric Professor E. Gadd's teleporter help prevent environment fatigue. Still, trekking through the same locations across five or so missions in a single mansion gets old.

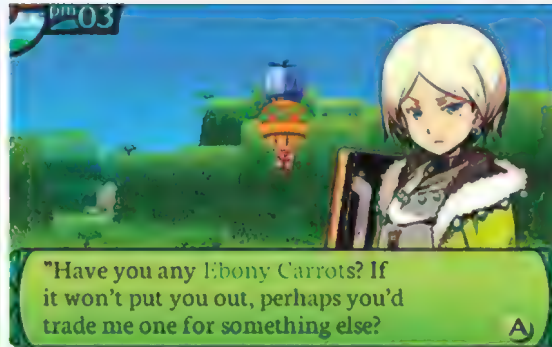
Revisiting previously explored areas isn't the only repetition that holds Luigi's new adventure back. The first time you have to chase down a ghost dog to retrieve a stolen key is endearing, but the mutt's following appearances become predictable. Did you just get a shiny new quest item? Get ready for that dumb dog to steal it. Did E. Gadd mention a Toad assistant? Prepare for another escort mission. Tracking phantom paw prints or launching Toad across a pit can be enjoyable, but the unabashed objective recycling disrupts the flow.

If you do need to take a break from the campaign, a four-player cooperative mode lets players hunt ghosts together. The game modes, playable locally or online, take place in a multi-level ScareScraper. Combining vacuum power with friends to weaken ghosts is a good time, and opens up a layer of strategy. Two players can synchronize flashlight blasts to stun a huge swath of ghosts, and then jointly suck them up. I chuckled at adorable co-op situations, like pulling a vase off a friend's head or tugging the corner of a rug to free someone tangled up in it. Co-op isn't a must-play feature, but it's an entertaining distraction if you love the combat.

Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon is an endearing sequel that refines the original game's formula in the best ways. Even the occasional déjà vu moments can't hold the experience back

entirely. The rich presentation (especially on the 3DS XL) and contained mission structure make it a perfect addition to the 3DS library. Whether you played the GameCube original or not, this Nintendo game is worth a look. » **Tim Turi**





# Etrian Odyssey IV: Legends of the Titan

Testing your will to overcome

Style 1-Player Role-Playing Publisher Atlus  
Developer Atlus Release February 22 ESRB T

Etrian Odyssey is akin to taking a time portal back to when games offered very little direction. It requires patience, a thirst for exploration, and the desire to slowly unravel a mysterious world. As a dungeon crawler in the vein of classics like Wizardry and Might and Magic, the series has thrived by embracing difficulty and old-school mechanics.

In Etrian Odyssey IV, you create a guild to uncover the secrets of the fabled Yggdrasil tree. Don't expect an intricate narrative – the focus is on exploration and leveling. You make your own story as you create a five-member crew. Sadly, they feel like stock pictures – merely instruments in battle – instead of companions.

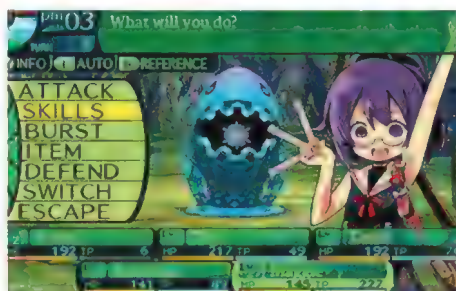
The emotional vacancy of the journey aside, you have vast lands filled with labyrinths and caves to satiate your looting and leveling desires. While in a dungeon, you map out areas using the stylus, a throwback to having a piece of graph paper and a pencil. The generation who grew up with this should feel at home, but others might find the mapping process to be a chore. It takes some getting used to, especially since incorrectly placing a wall or doorway can leave you wandering for hours, looking every which way to find your mistake.

The random battles can be deadly, but with skill and class selection, you're able to play just the way you like. The menu options come straight out of the 1980s. Weapons can be forged with extra traits – like adding poison or vitality – for an extra edge. Etrian Odyssey excels with this customization as well as in how the

majority of its skills, including buffs and debuffs, are extremely useful.

This is important since mini-bosses often block your path, and they are initially deadly to engage. Studying their patterns to avoid them is essential until you can defeat them. While these creatures add tension to exploration, they can also be downright aggravating. These behemoths can enter any battle, as long as they're walking nearby, so even simple battles can often take a turn for the worse. Finally defeating one of these beasts is a rewarding experience – after all, it was only a few short levels ago that they were defeating you with a single blow. Thankfully, an optional casual mode makes it easier for series newcomers to deal with the challenge.

Danger. Intrigue. Beauty. Frustration. During my playtime I felt all of these, but by far the greatest emotion was triumph. Etrian Odyssey IV finally has the polish and accessibility previous entries lacked, but it's hardly perfect. The mandatory slow-moving grind, lack of guidance, and unforgiving nature at times turned me off. But as someone who couldn't embrace the first three games, it's clear Etrian Odyssey IV: Legends of the Titan has jumped leaps and bounds from where the franchise was before. » **Kimberley Wallace**



## 8

### IDS

#### » Concept

Overcome an unforgiving world with your customized five-member party

#### » Graphics

The series looks the best it ever has with sharp, colorful character models and environments, though the 3D effects aren't great

#### » Sound

The orchestral score is a nice change of pace, creating a calmness and beauty as you explore different areas

#### » Playability

Battles are a throwback to old-school RPG mechanics, as is mapping out dungeons. The mapping system has an adjustment period for anyone who didn't grow up in the Wizardry era

#### » Entertainment

With plenty to conquer, Etrian Odyssey IV always gives you something to work for. Your enjoyment depends how much blood, sweat, and tears you like to put into your victories

#### » Replay Value

Moderate



### LEGAL NOTICE

**IF YOU WERE SENT AN UNAUTHORIZED TEXT MESSAGE FROM RED BULL, PLEASE READ THIS NOTICE CAREFULLY AS YOU MAY BE ENTITLED TO A \$110 PAYMENT FROM A CLASS ACTION SETTLEMENT.**

En Español, visitar [www.MillerTextSettlement.com](http://www.MillerTextSettlement.com)

A proposed class action settlement has been reached in a lawsuit over allegedly unsolicited text messages sent to consumers' cell phones by Red Bull promoting its products/events. Your legal rights may be affected whether you act or don't act. Please read this carefully.

#### WHAT IS THE LAWSUIT ABOUT?

The lawsuit claims that, in certain instances, when consumers sent a text message to Red Bull in response to an advertisement/promotion, Red Bull would send future texts without first getting express consent. The lawsuit claims this conduct violated the Telephone Consumer Protection Act. Red Bull denies violating any law, and the Court has not determined who is right. Rather, the parties are settling to avoid the uncertainties/expenses of litigation.

#### HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM A CLASS MEMBER?

You may be a Settlement Class member if you received one or more texts from Red Bull between January 2007 and March 14, 2013 without first providing express consent. The Settlement Class only encompasses "Non-Compliant Campaigns," which are Red Bull advertising campaigns where none of the advertisements promoting the campaign included language on their face indicating that participants would receive future texts. If you are unsure whether you are a Settlement Class member, call the settlement administrator at 1-888-643-2167. Certain individuals, such as Red Bull employees, are excluded.

#### WHAT CAN I GET?

If you are a Settlement Class member, and the Court approves the Settlement, you may be entitled to up to \$110. The Settlement also requires Red Bull to take prospective steps to ensure legal compliance. If the Court approves the Settlement, your claims relating to the allegedly unauthorized text messages at issue will be fully and finally resolved and released. However, you need to timely submit a valid Claim Form to seek payment.

#### HOW DO I SUBMIT A CLAIM?

To qualify for payment, you must timely submit and properly complete a Claim Form, available at [www.MillerTextSettlement.com](http://www.MillerTextSettlement.com). Claim Forms must be signed and postmarked, or submitted online, by **September 25, 2013**.

#### OTHER OPTIONS?

If you do not want to be legally bound by the Settlement, you must exclude yourself by **June 27, 2013**. If you stay in the Settlement, you may object by **June 27, 2013**. To learn how to exclude yourself or object, call the settlement administrator at 1-888-643-2167 or see [www.MillerTextSettlement.com](http://www.MillerTextSettlement.com).

#### WHEN WILL THE COURT CONSIDER THE PROPOSED SETTLEMENT?

A Court hearing on **August 12, 2013** will consider whether to approve the Settlement and a request by Class Counsel for attorneys' fees of not more than \$2 million, plus no more than \$100,000 in costs, and a \$5,000 incentive award for the Class Representative. Class Counsel's fee petition and itemization of actual costs will be posted on the settlement website by no later than June 13, 2013. You are not required to attend the hearing. For details, visit [www.MillerTextSettlement.com](http://www.MillerTextSettlement.com).

#### MORE INFORMATION?

This Notice is only a summary. For details, call the administrator at 1-888-643-2167 or visit [www.MillerTextSettlement.com](http://www.MillerTextSettlement.com).

By Court Order: March 14, 2013

[www.MillerTextSettlement.com](http://www.MillerTextSettlement.com)  
1-888-643-2167

**PLAYSTATION 3**

Aliens: Colonial Marines	4	Apr-13
Anarchy Reigns	7.5	Mar-13
Angry Birds Trilogy	7	Dec-12
Assassin's Creed III	9.5	Dec-12
Call of Duty: Black Ops II	8.5	Jan-13
Cave, The	7.75	Mar-13
Counter-Strike: Global Offensive	8	Nov-12
Crysis 3	8.5	Apr-13
Dead or Alive 5	6	Nov-12
Dead Space 3	9.75	Mar-13
Devil May Cry	9	Feb-13
Dishonored	8.75	Dec-12
Double Dragon Neon	8.25	Nov-12
Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two	5.75	Jan-13
F1 2012	7.75	Nov-12
Family Guy: Back to the Multiverse	4.5	Feb-13
Far Cry 3	9	Jan-13
FIFA 13	8.75	Nov-12

Guardians of Middle-earth	7.5	Feb-13
Hell Yeah! Wrath of the Dead Rabbit	8.5	Dec-12
Hitman: Absolution	8.75	Dec-12
Jet Set Radio	6.5	Nov-12
Karateka	8	Dec-12
Knytt Underground	7.5	Mar-13
Lego The Lord of the Rings	8.5	Jan-13
LittleBigPlanet Karting	8	Dec-12
Meda of Honor: Warfighter	5	Jan-13
Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance	7.75	Apr-13
Mud - FIM Motocross World Championship	6	Apr-13
Mugen Souls	5	Dec-12
NASCAR The Game: Inside Line	7.25	Dec-12
NBA 2K13	8.75	Dec-12
Need For Speed: Most Wanted	9	Dec-12
NHL 13	8	Nov-12

Ni No Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch	7	Feb-13
Persona 4 Arena: Planets Under Attack	7.25	Feb-13
PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale	7.5	Jan-13
Pro Evolution Soccer 2013	8.75	Nov-12
Ratchet & Clank: Full Frontal Assault	7.5	Feb-13
Realms of Ancient War	4	Dec-12
Resident Evil 6	8.75	Nov-12
Retro City Rampage	7	Dec-12
Retro/Grade	8	Nov-12
Rise of the Guardians	6.5	Feb-13
Skylanders Giants	8	Dec-12
Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time	9	Mar-13
Sonic and All-Stars Racing Transformed	8	Jan-13
Tekken Tag Tournament 2	8.5	Nov-12
Tokyo Jungle	7	Nov-12
Tomb Raider	9.25	Apr-13

Unfinished Swan, The	8	Dec-12
Walking Dead Episode 3: Long Road Ahead, The	8.5	Nov-12
Walking Dead Episode 4: Around Every Corner, The	8.25	Dec-12
Walking Dead Episode 5: No Time Left, The	8.5	Jan-13
WWE '13	9	Dec-12
XCOM: Enemy Unknown	9.5	Nov-12

Dead Space 3	9.75	Mar-13
Devil May Cry	9	Feb-13
Dishonored	8.75	Dec-12
Double Dragon Neon	8.25	Nov-12
Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim - Dragonborn, The	8.5	Feb-13
Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two	5.75	Jan-13
F1 2012	7.75	Nov-12
Fable: The Journey	5	Dec-12
Family Guy: Back to the Multiverse	4.5	Feb-13
Far Cry 3	9	Jan-13
FIFA 13	8.75	Nov-12
Forza Horizon	8.5	Dec-12
Gateways	9	Dec-12
Guardians of Middle-earth	7.5	Feb-13
Halo 4	8.25	Dec-12
Hell Yeah! Wrath of the Dead Rabbit	8.5	Dec-12
Hitman: Absolution	8.75	Dec-12

**XBOX 360**

Aliens: Colonial Marines	4	Apr-13
Anarchy Reigns	7.5	Mar-13
Angry Birds Trilogy	7	Dec-12
Assassin's Creed III	9.5	Dec-12
Call of Duty: Black Ops II	8.5	Jan-13
Cave, The	7.75	Mar-13
Counter-Strike: Global Offensive	8	Nov-12
Crysis 3	8.5	Apr-13
Dance Central 3	8.75	Nov-12
Dead or Alive 5	6	Nov-12

the score

**5** | **Impire**

Platform PC Release February 14  
ESRB N/A

As cool as the concept is, gamers interested in building an underground lair and tormenting would-be heroes are still stuck waiting for a worthy successor to 1997's *Dungeon Keeper*.  
— Adam Biessener

**8.75** | **Year Walk**

Platform iOS Release February 21 ESRB N/A

*Year Walk* demands critical thinking and puzzle solving – ideally as you sit in a darkened room, headphones tight to your head, with your attention squarely focused on the game at hand. If you offer that commitment to Simogo's stunning effort, you uncover one of the most original, refined, and artistic games on mobile. — Matt Miller

**6** | **Dollar Dash**

Platform 360 • PC Release March 6  
ESRB E10+

*Dollar Dash* is a simple experience with only three modes. Each level is unique, but the combat feels shallow. Fun can be had in the chaos, making it decent to pick up and play for a few matches, but it lacks lasting appeal. — Kyle Hilliard

**6.75** | **A Valley Without Wind 2**

Platform PC Release February 18 ESRB N/A

I enjoy the strategy portion of *A Valley Without Wind 2*, but that only makes up a fraction of the total game. The mediocre-at-best action segments that take up the majority of players' time are rough enough to sink the overall experience below modern gaming standards. — Adam Biessener

**8** | **Sniper Elite: Nazi Zombie Army**

Platform PC Release February 28 ESRB M

Like *Left 4 Dead* or *Call of Duty* zombies, you're in for a far more enjoyable experience if you play with others. I expected this spinoff of the *Sniper Elite* series to be a quick cash-in of popular themes, but I found myself pleasantly surprised by just how exciting *Nazi Zombie Army* can be. — Dan Ryckert

**8** | **Phantom Breaker: Battle Grounds**

Platform 360 Release February 27 ESRB E10+

It's *Scott Pilgrim* meets *Guardian Heroes* starring a cast of chibi ladies. While the battle mechanics and progression system shine, the uninspired level design and storytelling bring things down. — Bryan Vore

**8.5** | **Need for Speed: Most Wanted**

Platform Wii U Release March 19  
ESRB E10+

This edition of the game has many of the components that made the title successful on the other systems, and more, but the behind-the-wheel experience puts it in second place. — Matthew Kato

**4** | **MLB 2K13**

Platform PS3 • 360 Release March 5 ESRB E

*MLB 2K13* is a great simulation of *Little League*-level baseball. A hard-hit line drive could smack a player in the face, and don't be surprised if you see a fielder grab a ball and then stand there dazed for a few seconds almost as if he's waiting for his father to yell "throw it!" from the stands.  
— Andrew Reiner





www.uat.edu/majors

Jet Set Radio	6.5	Nov-12
Joe Danger 2: The Movie	8.25	Nov-12
Karaoke	8	Dec-12
Lego The Lord of the Rings	8.5	Jan-13
Mark of the Ninja	9	Nov-12
Meda of Honor: Warfighter	5	Jan-13
Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance	7.75	Apr-13
Mud - FIM Motocross World Championship	6	Apr-13
NASCAR The Game: Inside Line	7.25	Dec-12
NBA 2K13	8.75	Dec-12
Need For Speed: Most Wanted	9	Dec-12
NHL 13	8	Nov-12
Omeria: City of Gangsters	6	Apr-13
Pid	6.5	Dec-12
Planets Under Attack	7.25	Feb-13
Pro Evolution Soccer 2013	8.75	Nov-12
Realms of Ancient War	4	Dec-12
Resident Evil 6	8.75	Nov-12
Rise of the Guardians	6.5	Feb-13
Skulls of the Shogun	8.5	Feb-13
Skylanders Giants	8	Dec-12
Sonic and All-Stars Racing Transformed	8	Jan-13
Tekken Tag Tournament 2	8.5	Nov-12
Tomb Raider	9.25	Apr-13
Walking Dead Episode 3: Long Road Ahead, The	8.5	Nov-12
Walking Dead Episode 4: Around Every Corner, The	8.25	Dec-12
Walking Dead Episode 5: No Time Left, The	8.5	Jan-13
WWE '13	9	Dec-12
XCOM: Enemy Unknown	9.5	Nov-12

Little Inferno	8.5	Feb-13
New Super Mario Bros. U	9.25	Jan-13
Nintendo Land	7	Jan-13
Rabbids Land	4	Jan-13
Rise of the Guardians	6.5	Feb-13
Scribblenauts Unlimited	8.25	Jan-13
Transformers: Prime	6.5	Feb-13
ZombiU	5	Jan-13

**Wii**

Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two	5.75	Jan-13
La-Mulana	8.5	Dec-12
Skylanders Giants	8	Dec-12

**PC**

Aliens: Colonial Marines	4	Apr-13
Antichamber	9	Apr-13
Call of Duty: Black Ops II	8.5	Jan-13
Cave, The	7.75	Mar-13
Crysis 3	8.5	Apr-13
Dishonored	8.75	Dec-12
Ementa: Fallen Enchantress	8.25	Jan-13
Far Cry 3	9	Jan-13
FTL: Faster Than Light	8	Dec-12
Hotline Miami	7.75	Jan-13
King's Bounty: Warriors of the North	7.75	Jan-13
Medal of Honor: Warfighter	5	Jan-13
Omeria: City of Gangsters	6	Apr-13
Realms of Ancient War	4	Dec-12
Runner2: Future Legend of Rhythm Alien	9	Apr-13
Torchlight II	9.25	Dec-12
Walking Dead Episode 3: Long Road Ahead, The	8.5	Nov-12
Walking Dead Episode 4: Around Every Corner, The	8.25	Dec-12
Walking Dead Episode 5: No Time Left, The	8.5	Jan-13
XCOM: Enemy Unknown	9.5	Nov-12

**NINTENDO DS**

Pokémon Black & White	7.5	Nov-12
-----------------------	-----	--------

**3DS**

Aero Porter	5	Mar-13
Brain Age: Concentration Training	6	Apr-13
Castlevania: Lords of Shadow - Mirror of Fate	8.5	Apr-13
Code of Princess	7.5	Dec-12
Crashmo	8.5	Feb-13
Crimson Shroud	7.5	Mar-13
Epic Mickey: Power Of Illusion	5	Jan-13
Fire Emblem: Awakening	9	Mar-13
Liberation Maiden	7	Jan-13
Paper Mario: Sticker Star	8.75	Dec-12
Professor Layton and the Miracle Mask	8	Dec-12
Zero Escape: Virtue's Last Reward	8.75	Dec-12

**VITA**

Assassin's Creed III: Liberation	7.75	Jan-13
Call of Duty: Black Ops: Declassified	3	Jan-13
Dokuro	6	Dec-12
Jet Set Radio	6.5	Nov-12
Knytt Underground	7.5	Mar-13
LittleBigPlanet PS Vita	8.75	Nov-12
Persona 4 Golden	8.5	Jan-13
PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale	7.5	Jan-13
Retro City Rampage	7	Dec-12
Sy Cooper: Thieves in Time	9	Mar-13
Zero Escape: Virtue's Last Reward	8.75	Dec-12

**iOS**

Beastie Bay	7.5	Apr-13
Final Fantasy Dimensions	7.5	Nov-12
Hundreds	8	Mar-13
Joe Danger Touch	8.25	Mar-13
Middle Manager of Justice	6	Mar-13



Prepare for a Life of Tech Respect

<b>LEARN</b>	Robotics and Embedded Systems
Game Art and Animation	Strategic Technology Development
Game Design	Technology Product Design
Game Programming	Digital Media
Serious Game and Simulation	Network Engineering
Game Production and Management	Network Security
Advancing Computer Science	Technology Forensics
Artificial Life Programming	Technology Studies
Human-Computer Interaction	Virtual Modeling and Design
Open Source Technologies	Web and Social Media Technologies
Digital Video	
Enterprise Software Development	

Bachelors | Masters | Online | On-Campus | www.uat.edu

Please see www.uat.edu/fastfacts for the latest information about degree program performance.

gameinformer

Volume XXIII • Number 5 • Issue 241

STAFF

**Publisher**  
**Cathy Preston** cathy@gameinformer.com  
 Editor in Chief  
**Andy McNamara** andy@gameinformer.com  
 Execut ve Editor  
**Andrew Reiner** reiner@gameinformer.com  
 Managing Editor  
**Matt Bertz** mattbertz@gameinformer.com  
 Senior Features Editor  
**Matt Heigson** matt@gameinformer.com  
 Digital Editor  
**Bryan Vore** bryan@gameinformer.com  
 Reviews Editor  
**Joe Juba** joe@gameinformer.com  
 Features Editor  
**Matt Miller** miller@gameinformer.com  
 PC Editor  
**Adam Biessener** adam@gameinformer.com  
 Senior Editors  
**Matthew Kato** kato@gameinformer.com  
**Jeff Cork** jeff@gameinformer.com  
**Ben Reeves** ben@gameinformer.com  
 Senior Associate Editors  
**Jeff Marchiafava** jeffm@gameinformer.com  
**Tim Turi** tm@gameinformer.com  
**Dan Ryckert** dan@gameinformer.com  
 Associate Editors  
**Kyle Hillard** kyle@gameinformer.com  
**Kimberley Wallace** kim@gameinformer.com  
 Video Producer  
**Ben Hanson** hanson@gameinformer.com  
 Video Editor  
**Jason Oestreicher** jason@gameinformer.com

**Creative Director**  
**Jeff Akervik** jefakervik@gameinformer.com  
 Senior Graphic Designer  
**Thomas Blustin** tom@gameinformer.com  
 Senior Production Director  
**Curtis Fung** curtis@gameinformer.com  
 Graphic Designers  
**Laleh Azarshin Tobin** laleh@gameinformer.com  
**Jason Pfitzer** jasonpfitzer@gameinformer.com  
 Web Designer/Programmer  
**Margaret Andrews** margaretandrews@gameinformer.com  
 Circulation Services  
**Ted Katzung** ted@gameinformer.com  
 Audience Development Manager  
**Rob Born** rob@gameinformer.com  
 Senior Product Manager  
**Lisa Wagner** lisa@gameinformer.com

**ADVERTISING SALES**  
 Associate Publisher  
**Rob Born** rob@gameinformer.com  
 West Coast Advertising Sales Director  
**Damon Watson** damon@gameinformer.com  
 East Coast Advertising Sales Director  
**Suzanne Lang Middaugh** suzanne@gameinformer.com  
 East Coast Advertising Associate  
**Amy Arnold** amy@gameinformer.com  
 West Coast Advertising Associate  
**Janey Stringer** janey@gameinformer.com  
 Marketing Coordinators  
**Rachel Nimrod** rachel@gameinformer.com  
**Mark Burger** mark@gameinformer.com

CUSTOMER SERVICE

For renewal, address change and Power Up Rewards Pro details: Visit: [www.gameinformer.com](http://www.gameinformer.com)  
 Email: [customerservice@gameinformer.com](mailto:customerservice@gameinformer.com)  
 or send correspondence to:  
**724 North First St., 3rd Floor**  
**Minneapolis, MN 55401 • Attn: CIS Dept**  
 For subscription inquiry ONLY:  
**1 (866) 844-GAME (4263)**

Manufactured and printed in the United States of America. The Editor welcomes company product information for all video games. Such materials should be addressed to: Editor, Game Informer® Magazine, 724 North First St., 3rd Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55401. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned or acknowledged. Copyright in all screenshots contained within this publication are owned by their respective companies. Products named in these pages are trade names, or trademarks, of their respective companies. All rights reserved, reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Game Informer® is a trademark of GameStop. PUBLISHER LIABILITY FOR ERRORS The publisher shall not be liable for slight changes or typographical errors that do not lessen the value of an advertisement. The publisher's liability for other errors or omissions in connection with an advertisement is limited to republication of the advertisement in any subsequent issue or the refund of any monies paid for the advertisement. IDENTIFICATION The advertiser and/or Advertising Agency agrees to defend and indemnify the publisher against any and all liability, loss, or expense arising from claims of libel, unfair competition, unfair trade practices, infringement of trademarks, copyrights, trade names, patents, or proprietary rights or violation of rights of privacy resulting from the publication of the Advertiser's statement.



classic

Remembering

# MANIAC

*A retrospective on  
the adventure game  
that forged the genre*

*by Kimberley Wallace*



# MANSSION

**G**reen and purple tentacles. Microwavable hamsters. A mind-controlling meteor. When Maniac Mansion debuted in 1987 for the Commodore 64 and Apple II, it was unlike anything players had experienced before. Not only did it make a mark with its quirky humor, it helped popularize the point-and-click adventure. It later came to the PC and NES, charming whole new audiences. Creator Ron Gilbert, who recently designed The Cave, sat down to reminisce about the game that launched his career and redefined adventure games.

## Drawing From B-Horror Movies and Life

Dave and friends' quest into a creepy mansion to save his girlfriend from an evil scientist was born from the minds of Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick, who met while working together at Lucasfilm Games. As a programmer, Gilbert ported games from the Atari to the Commodore 64, and Winnick was the sole artist on staff. Gilbert and Winnick bonded over their love for B-horror movies and decided to craft a game in that vein. The influence permeated Maniac Mansion right down to the man-eating plant, eerie dungeon, and ketchup-splattered walls.

The duo also found plenty of influence from their own lives. The mansion is reminiscent of George Lucas' Skywalker Ranch, and even the villainous Edisons are based off a family that Gilbert and Winnick knew. Gilbert says he'll never reveal who the family really is, but he abhors and denies the rumor that Nurse Edna is based off his mother.

Gilbert also strove to change adventure

games after his own frustrations with the genre. He liked games like King's Quest, but hated the language parser because it was too reliant on finding a specific word. The difference between calling something a plant, bush, or shrub separated success from failure. Gilbert just wanted to point at the object instead of typing out a word. This led him to create the Maniac Mansion interface, where you interact with objects using a set of various verbs. He forever changed the graphic adventure genre. "There were games before it that were kind of point-and-click stuff, but they weren't [using] that same animated, list of verbs, [presentation]," Gilbert says. "...had Maniac Mansion not been made I don't think we would have had the point-and-click games the way we do," Gilbert says. "They probably would have evolved eventually, but it definitely set the whole style for [the genre]."

Maniac Mansion creator Ron Gilbert



This statue was too scandalous for Nintendo



This shot shows the verb-based interface Gilbert created



Behind Weird Ed hangs the copy of the map showing the puzzle paths of different characters



## Molding the Pieces

Creating his first game with Winnick, Gilbert had very few creative boundaries. He says that from the beginning they were extremely naïve about development. "We had no idea what we were doing, and we were throwing everything weird and fun that we thought of into it without much rhyme or reason," Gilbert says. "We didn't have this grand plan for how everything would come together."

This extended to the introduction of multiple characters. Maniac Mansion allowed cast customization in a way few games did at the time. Each character had his or her own unique puzzle path to get out of the mansion, which ended anywhere from calling the "Meteor Police" (Gilbert's favorite ending) to landing a book deal for the meteor. Gilbert believes this approach is why the game resonated with people so much. "If it was just about Dave going into the house to rescue his girlfriend...I don't think that the game would have been that interesting," Gilbert says. "But the fact that you did actually have to make that choice, I think that was very appealing to people that played the game."

The challenge with such a complex cast was not only having those paths work out no matter which combination you chose, but finding each character a niche. Jeff, the surfer, remained mostly useless, while Razor and Syd had identical abilities. They even cut a character named Chet, a no-nonsense ROTC member. "In retrospect, he might have been more interesting than Jeff," Gilbert says.

Those puzzles, like using tentacle mating calls to break a chandelier, were brilliant, and pathing the puzzles of all the characters was a major headache. "This was the first adventure game I had ever done," Gilbert says. "The whole notion of puzzle structure isn't something I had ever thought of beforehand." Being newcomers, Gilbert and Winnick drew a map of the house on cardboard with boxes and lines connecting the puzzles. A copy of this map is hanging on Weird Ed's bedroom wall. Gilbert remembers having to play the game and trace each step to make sure each puzzle led to the correct finale.

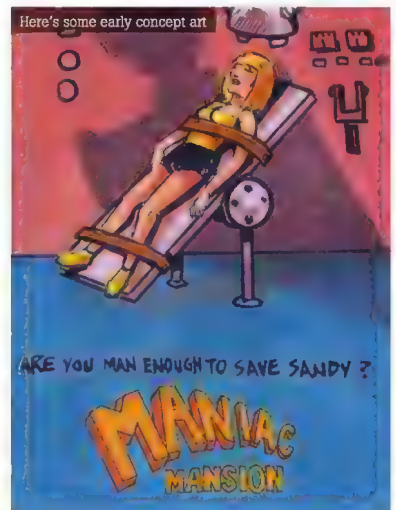
Between Gilbert and Winnick's inexperienced approach and the complexity of multiple paths, it's surprising they released Maniac Mansion without any game-breaking bugs. Only one tester was on the project, Tim Schafer, who later made a name for himself with games like Psychonauts and Grim Fandango. He even helped Gilbert design Maniac Mansion's follow-up, Day of the Tentacle. Gilbert also sent his uncle floppy disks of Maniac Mansion in the mail to get

an extra set of eyes. Looking back, Gilbert is surprised the outcome wasn't a disaster. "I think that's a big testament to David Fox, who did a lot scripting for the game," he says. "He was very meticulous about the scripting and making sure everything worked correctly."

## Adding Suspense

Playing Maniac Mansion was tense, thanks to a goosebump-inducing setting and its always-prowling inhabitants. "We wanted the house to feel like a place that you weren't supposed to be," Gilbert says. Timed events also kept players on their toes, especially when Weird Ed and Nurse Edna would leave their rooms and could catch a character, banishing them to the dungeon. "It did lend to being paranoid and scared about what was going to happen, because you just never knew when the camera was going to get yanked from you and somebody was going to start walking down the stairs." The team started calling these sequences "cutscenes" around the office, because they were literally cutting away from the player to show a scene that the player might not have been a part of. The neologism caught on in the office, became the term used within the game's SCUMM engine, and, according to Gilbert, even made it onto the back of the game's box. The term is still used in gaming today.

The Commodore 64 version unintentionally added more trepidation due to the idiosyncratic hardware. Gilbert noted they couldn't fit everything into memory, so before the cutscenes started, the disk drive would spin



## THE CAST



### Dave

The protagonist on a quest to save his girlfriend Sandy.



### Syd

Syd has the power of music to help the green tentacle out of depression.



### Michael

Michael has the power of photography. Be afraid, Dr. Fred!



### Wendy

As a novelist, there's nothing Wendy can't pen, including fixing the meteor's manuscript.



### Bernard

The resident nerd. Bernard's brains makes solving complex puzzles a cinch.



### Razor

Rock on, girl! Razor's musically gifted, but enough to score a record contract?



### Jeff

"Surfs up, man!" Jeff's greatest asset? He can fix the phone.

## THE "TUNA HEAD" CATCHPHRASE

The "Don't be a tuna head" line remains a classic, and it was created in an act of rebellion. Originally, when Bernard wants to bail at the beginning, Dave said, "Don't be a s--- head." Gilbert's boss didn't want a swear word, so he requested he change it. "I was 21 years old, and I was like, 'No, you have to say s---. You're ruining my art!' Eventually I had to change it, so rather than rewrite the line, I just said, 'Don't be a tuna head,'" Gilbert recalls. "That was a little bit defiance on my part, 'Well, I'm not going to write a good line then.' But that line is something a lot of people quote and remember. So if I think back to the game, that's a very memorable piece of the development and genesis of that line."



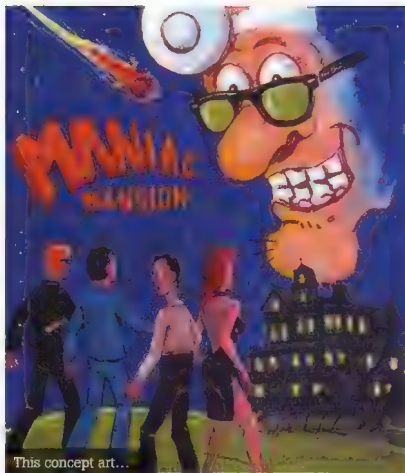
up. Players would freak out because they knew something was going to happen. "That weird Commodore 64 disk light became this Pavlov's dog thing for people playing the game, because whenever it came on they'd tense up," Gilbert says. After Maniac Mansion, Gilbert swapped to event-driven sequences. He realized it was problematic to randomly cut away from the player, especially if they were solving a puzzle.

## The Censored NES Version

Creator Ron Gilbert is humble and quick to point out that Maniac Mansion wasn't considered a "successful" game. However, when the NES version hit in 1990, it gained more momentum. When people approach



Dr. Fred, Nurse Edna, and Weird Ed are the antagonists set to make your trip into the mansion tense. Protip: Help out Weird Ed; he has daddy issues.



This concept art...



Became the game's well-known cover



Skywalker Ranch was used as an inspiration for the mansion

Gilbert about the game, he says that nine times out of ten, they played it on the NES. But Nintendo made some odd censorship requests. For instance, Nurse Edna couldn't make obvious passes at the characters, a poster of a mummy posed seductively was too scandalous, and the nude statue had to go. Oddly, Nintendo still allowed a hamster to be microwaved. Nintendo also requested that each character have their own music track, a great addition that helped shape their personalities. The NES iteration also featured improved visuals.

## An Undying Legacy

To this day, Maniac Mansion still engenders strong feelings of nostalgia. Even Gilbert can't believe its legacy. "It certainly makes me feel good that [it's] 25 years [later and] people still love and play that game and it meant so much to people," he says. If Gilbert had to do it all over again, would he change anything? He admits he would fix the dead ends: "I would have made it so you can't completely screw yourself. If you do something bad, you can always work your way out of it. It's a philosophy I carried into all the other games I've done ever since."

As for if we would ever see another Maniac Mansion, licensing aside, Gilbert isn't sure. "There's part of me that really would," he says. "But then there's another part of me that is like, 'Do I really want to do that?'" [It's] reached this state of nostalgia with people that part of me feels like I could never live up to their expectations...ever. No matter how good the game is, it will just never live up to 25 years of nostalgia in people. That's the part that would scare me." ♦

## THE HAMSTER GAG

One of the most memorable moments in Maniac Mansion is that while playing with Razor or Syd you could steal Weird Ed's hamster and put it in the microwave. That timed ding said it all: The hamster was roasted. If you gave the hamster to Weird Ed, he would murder the character. When we ask Ron Gilbert how the gag came to fruition, he says he can't take the credit. Scriptor David Fox and artist Gary Winnick concocted the idea together and showed Gilbert, who thought it was hilarious. "We knew it was really funny and certainly the timing of the ding and everything," Gilbert says. But did he expect it to become one of the parts people latched onto? "You never know that. No game I have ever made did I ever guess correctly the things that became the catchphrases or the super-popular things," Gilbert says, "You just don't know...and I think if you try to design that stuff into the game, you fail. So what you do is put as much fun stuff as you can and hope two or three of them just stick with people, and I think the hamster is kind of like that."





## ***My First Game***

### *Keiji Inafune: Street Fighter*

**B**efore becoming the founder of Comcept and one of the most outspoken Japanese game developers in the industry, Keiji Inafune got his start on the granddaddy of the fighting genre. The visionary put his artistic talents to use on the first Street Fighter before moving onto other Capcom series like Mega Man, Resident Evil, and Dead Rising. We had a chance to talk with Keiji Inafune about his first-ever project at Capcom, what it led to, and how he became a champion for fighters at Capcom.

#### + Street Art

"I did work on character design. There was a character called Adon who is a Thai character. I drew the winning and losing faces for him. That was my first work."

#### + Building the Blue Bomber

"It was my first year at Capcom and two of the best employees were being chosen to work on a new game. I was chosen to draw the faces for Street Fighter,

so I believed I was going to be moving on to work on other arcade games, but the next project I was assigned to do character design was a Nintendo game called Mega Man."

#### + Love at First Sight

"Street Fighter was my first job ever in development. It's like your first love. I have strong feelings for the franchise. At one point there was a decision to stop making Street Fighter games at Capcom. The company decision was to not

go on with it, but I wanted the American market to enjoy Street Fighter IV, so I fought to bring it back. I'm glad I did that." ♦





AVAILABLE AT  
**GameStop**  
power to the players®

## INCREDIBLE SOUND

**50mm custom drivers** with **angled acoustic baffle** for best sound projection.

**Studio tuned** acoustics for peak audio performance.

**Selectable profiles** for custom audio experience.

### Universally Compatible:

XBOX 360® | PLAYSTATION®3 | WII™ & WII U™ | PC GAMING



# AFTERGLOW® WIRELESS GAMING HEADSET

© 2013 Performance Designed Products LLC. All Rights Reserved. PDP and AFTERGLOW are registered trademarks, of Performance Designed Products LLC. PlayStation 3 is a registered trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment, Inc. Xbox 360 is a registered trademark of Microsoft Corporation. Wii and Wii U are trademarks of Nintendo. This product is not designed, manufactured, sponsored or endorsed by Sony, Microsoft or Nintendo.

[www.pdp.com](http://www.pdp.com)



US \$5.99 | EUR €5.99 | UK £3.99



Issue 241 • May 2013

[www.gameinformer.com](http://www.gameinformer.com)



Made with love by

# RETROMAGS

Our goal is to preserve classic video game magazines so that they are not lost permanently.

People interested in helping out in any capacity, please visit us at [retromags.com](http://retromags.com).

No profit is made from these scans, nor do we offer anything available from the publishers themselves.

If you come across anyone selling releases from this site, please do not support them and do let us know.

Thank you!