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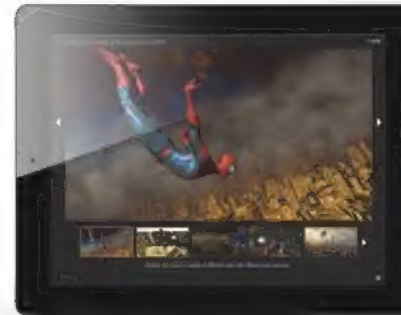
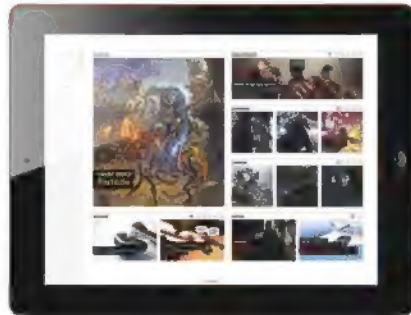
THE WORLD'S #1 VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE



BATTLEBORN

HEROES FROM ACROSS THE UNIVERSE ASSEMBLE
FOR GEARBOX'S NEW TWIST ON MULTIPLAYER

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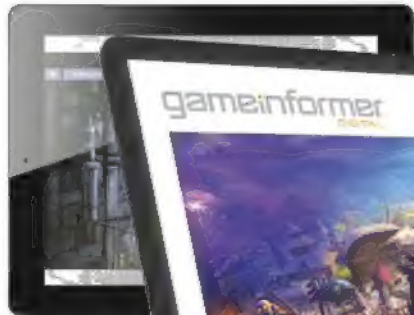
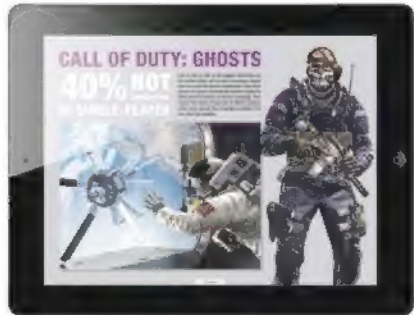
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Games Slip To 2015, But 2014 Holds Strong



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

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

E3 was an interesting battleground this year, despite the fact that the press conferences were average, the news was predictable, and the videos were (mostly) pre-rendered. Surprisingly, for how safe it all felt, I'm excited about the holiday ahead.

Our annual E3 Hot 50 (pg. 36) sheds light on what we loved from the show. The list of games we had to choose from was long, and that's a good thing. A lot of high-quality games are on the horizon, and that news should put a smile on any gamer's face.

While there is always a moment of disappointment for all the games that slipped out of 2014 and into 2015, this holiday should still have a great selection of releases. October alone is just insane (assuming there are no additional delays), with *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, *Alien: Isolation*, *Evolve*, *Assassin's Creed Unity*, *Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor*, *Battlefield: Hardline*, *Super Smash Bros. (3DS)*, *Sunset Overdrive*, *The Evil Within*, *DriveClub*, *Bayonetta 2*, *Skylanders: Trap Team*...and that doesn't include any "fall" releases that might hit or digital-only games that tend to get release dates at the last second. It also doesn't take into account games like *Destiny* that hit in September, or *Far Cry 4* or *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* that release in November. Make sure you clear your calendars and stock up the fridge.

When you look at the games that slipped into 2015 combined with all the announcements from E3, it looks like next year could see more groundbreaking titles than we've seen in over a decade (though I suspect a few will slip into 2016).

While E3 may have lacked some flash, there are an amazing number of games on the horizon, including *Battleborn*, which skipped E3 to grace our cover this month (pg. 24). While other games at E3 brought trailers, we sat down and played *Battleborn*, and I'm excited to say that Gearbox is trying to change the way we look at cooperative first-person shooters again.

Enjoy the issue. More than 90 games are featured in the pages ahead, so if you can't find something to love you are reading the wrong magazine.

Cheers,

0814 contents

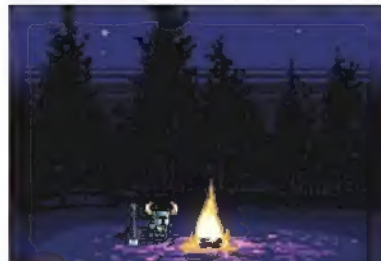


Battleborn

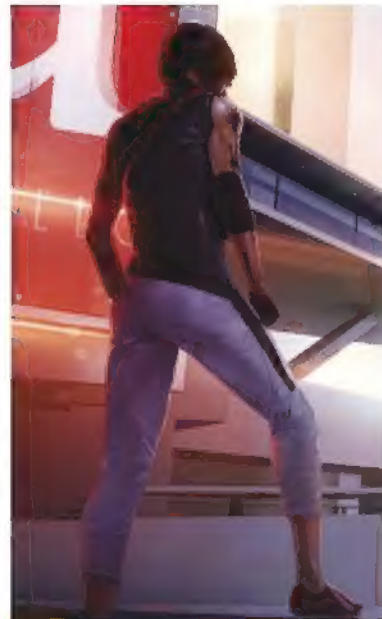
Gearbox has developed a new IP with a universe's worth of characters, all waiting to fight one another for the last star in the cosmos. It's a hero-based competitive and co-op multiplayer shooter that you will only find on new-generation consoles, and we have the first details. **by Tim Turi**



08 E3 2014 Reports



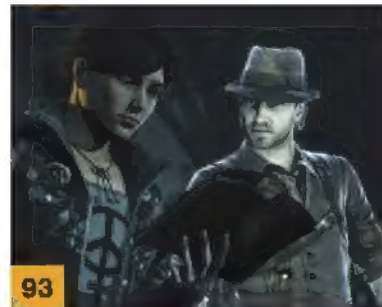
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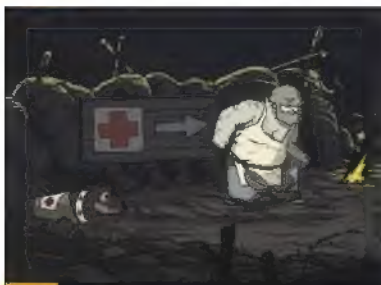
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Readers share their enthusiasm for empathy games, question criticism of buggy goat simulators, and demand to know why Texas doesn't get blown up more in video games.

» 8 Connect

E3 2014 offered an impressive look at what we can expect from the new generation of gaming consoles. We take a look at the press conferences of the big publishers, remark on virtual reality's presence at the show, and highlight a few indie titles we thought stood out.

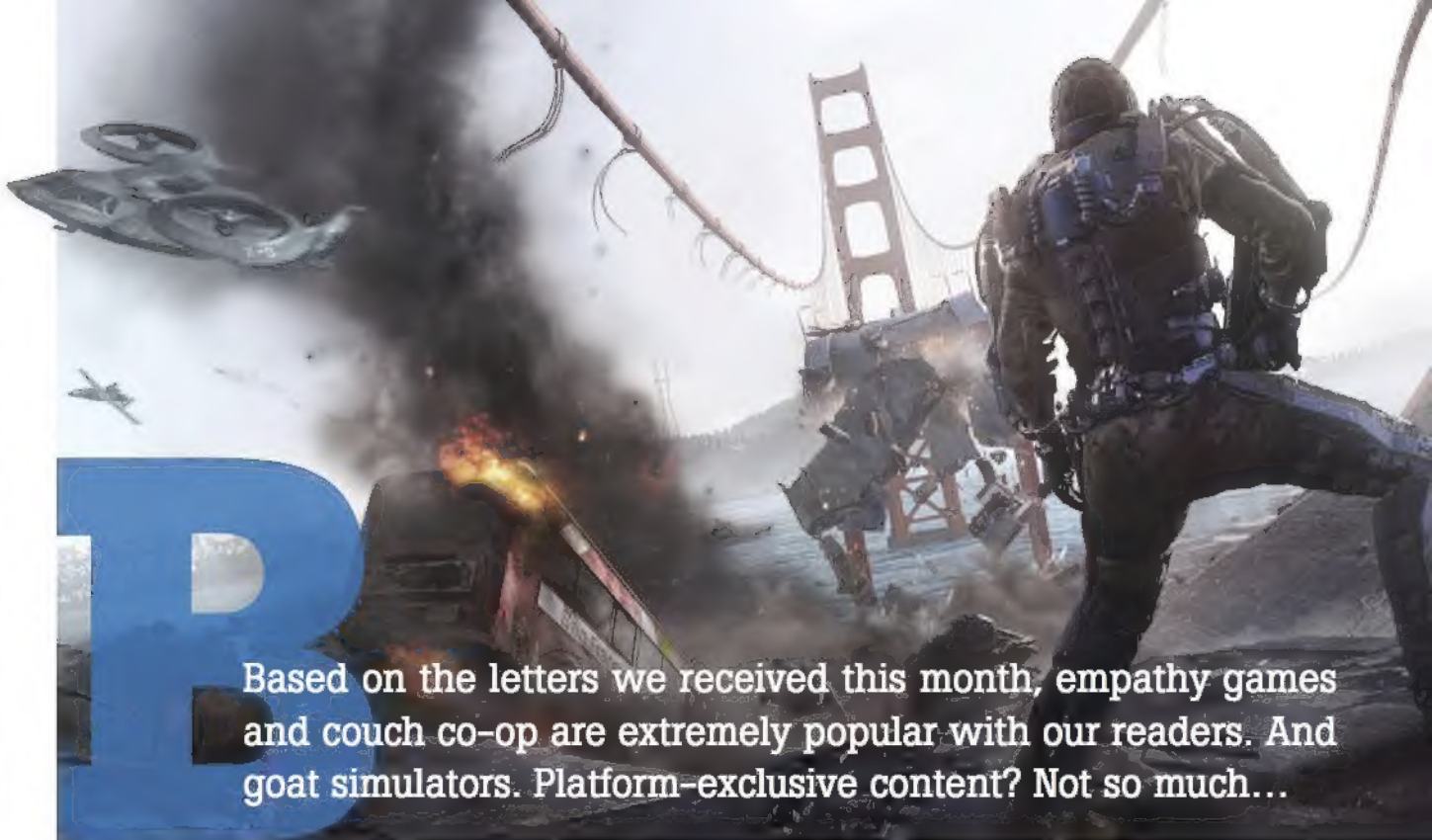
» 36 Previews

As we do every year, we've gathered a list of our 50 favorite titles we saw at E3 2014 and order them from our favorite, to not quite our favorite, but still worth getting excited about. We also round up the games that weren't playable at the show, but we can't wait to get our hands on.

» 92 Reviews

This month we solve a mystery from the other side in *Murdered: Soul Suspect*, take a look at the latest entry in the *Grid* series, see *World War I* from a different angle in *Valiant Hearts: The Great War*, and try to wrap our head around Nintendo's bizarre *Tomodachi Life*.

CORRECTION: In our FIFA 15 preview in issue 255, we mistakenly attributed "You'll Never Walk Alone" and the Yellow Wall to Arsenal and Bayern Munich. They belong to the teams/fans of Liverpool and Borussia Dortmund, respectively. Our apologies to the teams and their fans.



R

Based on the letters we received this month, empathy games and couch co-op are extremely popular with our readers. And goat simulators. Platform-exclusive content? Not so much...

Story Time

I just read your Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare cover story. I'm a huge Battlefield fan, but I'll admit, Call of Duty's single-player campaigns are always better than Battlefield's forgettable campaigns. When I read how Sledgehammer is approaching the story, I was deeply impressed. But then I realized something. Isn't it pointless to make a campaign for a game that many people only play for the multiplayer? My dad and his friends are huge Call of Duty fans, but they openly admit that they couldn't care less about the story. I know Advanced Warfare's promising campaign won't be easy to make, and many are going to overlook it. Do you think it's worth the effort?

A.J. Figueroa
via email

While Call of Duty's multiplayer offerings are the primary destination for many fans, many gamers still enjoy the series' bombastic single-player campaigns. Perhaps the extra attention and effort Sledgehammer is spending on Advanced Warfare's narrative will convince some new players to check out the solo content, but either way, we can't really fault the developer for trying to offer gamers the complete package. For more on Advanced Warfare, head to gameinformer.com/advancedwarfare for our full month of bonus coverage.

The New System Seller?

After watching this year's E3 press conferences and your video recaps, I'm very excited for the fantastic and long-awaited explosion of games on the horizon. However, I was disappointed with the large amount of platform-exclusive content being released for many of these upcoming games. For example, PS4 owners will get some pretty cool extras with Destiny, including a special edition system, early beta access, etc., while Xbox owners have always gotten new DLC for the Call of Duty games first. Sometimes a system even gets extra missions, such as with Watch Dogs. At that point it seems like developers are punishing gamers for purchasing one system over the other. It seems like it's all about which company will pay more for exclusive content just so they can say it's better on their system.

Andrew Long
via email

That's exactly what it's about, Andrew. Due to the rising cost of game development, console manufacturers are less willing to shell out the cash necessary to secure a third-party exclusive title anymore. Instead, they complement their first-party offerings with timed exclusives or DLC – a practice we don't see disappearing anytime soon. While missing out on some extra content is annoying, it sure beats not being able to play a game at all. After all, would you rather be late to the Destiny beta, or not play Destiny at all?

Gaming For All

I read your article "Creating Controllers For All Disabilities" in issue 254, and I honestly almost cried. The amount of effort that Special Effect puts into helping out those who are unable to use a conventional controller is incredible. Their constant monitoring of each developing case is very touching, and it makes me so happy that there are people who go above and beyond to help others. Thank you for the article; it absolutely made my day.

Corey Mattingly
via email

I just want to tell you guys how happy I am that there is a company like Special Effect out there! I say this because I am paralyzed from the waist down due to a plane crash. When I lost the ability to play sports, it was devastating, but I have always had video games to help me deal with it. I always thought about what it must be like for the people I have met who are paralyzed from the neck down. I wished there was something I could do to help them also have video games to escape or better deal with their trials. I just heard of Special Effect today and will give donations to them for many years to come. Thank you for letting your readers know that there is hope for people with physical disabilities to still have something they can play with their friends and be on an equal playing field!

Ben Harris
via email

In an industry where gamers are constantly inventing new ways to troll and grief each other, Special Effect is a wonderful reminder of the lengths some people will go to share the joy our hobby can evoke and bring a smile to a worthy person's face. To help their efforts, head to specialeffect.org.uk



Don't Mess With Texas?

I love video games, especially war games. However, in all of the military shooters, the themes are the same; some terrorist gets a hold of something they shouldn't have and wreaks havoc on major cities in the United States. But I've noticed that they never feature Texas. What gives?! Texas is the fifth largest market in the United States; if you're looking at real-life scenarios for terrorism, Texas is potentially a major target, yet is never mentioned or seen in these games. I'm not sure if the developers of games like Call of Duty just really hate San Francisco and so they continually destroy it, or if people still haven't figured out that there's more to Texas than cows and ranches. So what gives? Where's the love for Lone Star State?

Michael Benningfield
Dallas, TX

We're not sure if that's the kind of love you should be seeking for your home state, Michael, but it is comical how many times we've seen the Golden Gate Bridge get blown up in games. If the saying "Everything is bigger in Texas" also applies to set-piece moments, however, you might be on to something...



Rated "E" For Empathy

I want to thank Kimberley Wallace for her excellent article on empathy games (Demon Slayers, issue 254). This article voiced some of the thoughts I've had about the gaming industry and its handling of adult subject matter. I think many of today's major publishers release games with content – such as violence and language – that isn't necessarily mature, but instead panders to the target audience's lack of maturity. I'm glad to see more and more developers tackle truly mature themes, like dealing with cancer or having a relationship with an alcoholic father. I wish all developers could possess the creativity and drive to really explore meaningful themes and storytelling.

David Stubbs
via email

I am a 50-year-old guy who has been playing video games since I was a teenager. I loved the Demon Slayers article, which introduced me to a genre of gaming I did not know existed. I am always impressed at how the gaming industry has evolved and matured over the years and with games like Heavy Rain and the indie titles you referenced in the article, I am psyched to see this trend continue.

Sam Spink
via email



We heard from a number of readers this month who appreciated our look at empathy games and those developers tackling adult issues in games. However, we wouldn't want all developers to address such serious topics; video games are capable of offering all kinds of different experiences, from the sophomoric to the serious. The industry isn't "growing up" as much as it is diversifying – something we can all be thankful for.

Billy Goat Guff

Do you guys have a sense of humor? Your Game Infarcer features are quite funny, but I was frustrated by your review of Goat Simulator. Yes, it is a small, broken, and stupid game – that is where most of the fun lies! I, for one, have always enjoyed exploiting glitches in games. So when I played Goat Simulator, I played it for hours because of all the stupid and funny glitches like falling through the map, neck distortion, and my stupid goat head sticking through walls and then flipping out. These glitches made the game even more enjoyable; I agree that without those glitches the game would get very boring after 10 minutes. The great thing about glitches is that you can play a game for hours and still find more of them. This is the only time I've gotten frustrated at Game Informer and I hope it's the last.

Dashiell Gregory
via email

We've received a lot of complaints about our review scores being too low over the years, but this is the first time we've been called out for not appreciating a game's glitches. It certainly proves the age-old adage: One man's buggy goat simulator is another man's game of the year.

Short Answers To Readers' Burning Questions:

"When are you going to post an article on grandma gamers?"

Wait, is that what "GG" stands for?

"What is the highest level that you can get on Wizard 101?"

Is Gandalf a level? Because we're totally as cool as Gandalf.

"Do you guys know why Titanfall, one of the most hyped games of the year, failed?"

You're not living in reality.

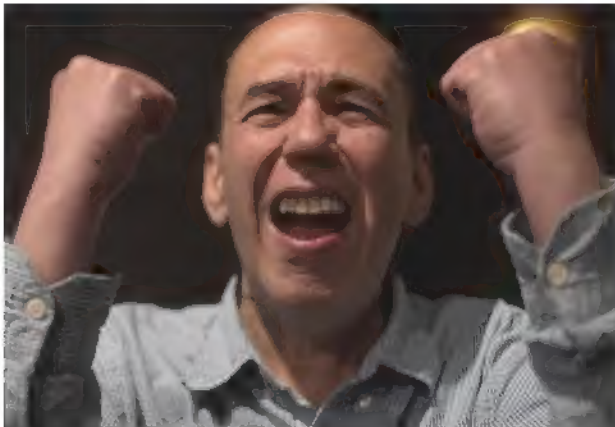
Groan-Worthiest Line In A Feedback Letter:

"In truth I love your publication – that is the real reason behind my vitriol."

Question Of The Month:

Which game company do you think will have the best holiday this year and why?

gi spy

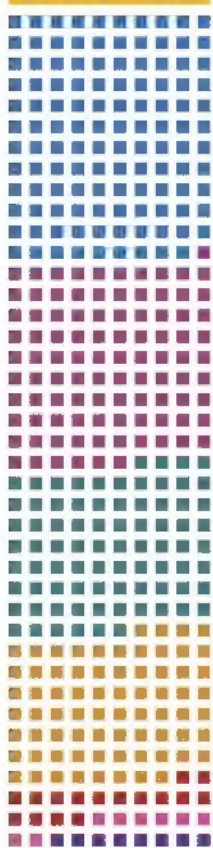


(Left) At this year's Minneapolis Comic-Con, the GI crew talked comedian Gilbert Gottfried into narrating some of our favorite games. Hear his voiceover work at gameinformer.com (Right) EA's Tammy Levine hugs her number-one fan – California's lieutenant governor Gavin Newsom – at Michael Pachter's annual Wedbush Morgan E3 party

GI SPY
continued on page 8

CANDID PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

On Your Mind



- **30%** New-Gen Multiplayer Desires
- **24%** E3 Excitement
- **20%** Requests For More Couch Co-op
- **18%** Newfound Empathy Game Fans
- **04%** Call Of Titanfall Jokes (Haters Gonna Hate)
- **02%** Requests For Fewer M-Rated Games (From Kids)
- **02%** Video Game-Inspired Poetry



What's Next For Multiplayer?

In issue 254, we asked readers what improvement they would like to see in new-gen multiplayer games. While some readers reached for the sky, most pine for a decidedly old-school feature. Here are some responses:

I know this may sound ridiculous, but what I really want from new-gen multiplayer is more local multiplayer games. Sony and Microsoft's libraries consist mostly of online multiplayer games, or mundane local multiplayer experiences. Nintendo is the only one still embracing local multiplayer, with games like Super Smash Bros. and Super Mario Kart 8. I don't want to always rely on my Nintendo every time my friends come over.

Jose Corrales

If I saw fewer subscription services and a little more co-op, and I'd be a pretty happy camper.

Jake Reed

I'd really like to see skill-based matchmaking improve. I don't feel like any developer has really knocked that out of the park recently. I'm tired of Battlefield contests being decided by 600 tickets, Titanfall games being decided by 150 attrition points, and Call of Duty matches being decided by 35 kills. I know there are tons of variables in multiplayer games that make it tough to balance, but think how great it would be if almost every multiplayer match came down to the wire.

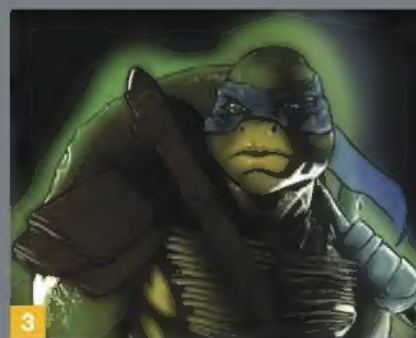
Matt Wingler

One improvement I'm dying to see is better developer commitment to online launches. Despite the fact that we've had online gaming for over two decades, companies still get launches wrong. This last year alone, we've seen games like GTA V, Battlefield 4, and numerous sports games utterly blow their launches. And yet game companies keep pushing for an online-centric future? What reality do they live in?

Bobby B.

(Left) Some of the talented folks from Visceral Games started the celebrations early in Santa Monica, California after showing off Battlefield: Hardline at Pre-E3 Judge's Week (Right) Tim Turi also headed out to California early to see Insomniac's wacky open-world action game, Sunset Overdrive. Here he is with Insomniac's James Stevenson, and Microsoft's Blaine Howard





WINNER

1 Crystal Mielcarek

The gang from Earthbound may look cute, but we wouldn't want to run into them in a dark alley

2 Roberto Palacios

This Kirby-inspired artwork is adorable, until you realize that cat is tearing open a portal to Carcosa

3 Junior Balthazard

The detail on Leonardo is exceptional, even if it is based on the weird CGI redesign of the new Michael Bay movie

4 Steven Sliwa

Barret would make a great life coach – if you're willing to overlook the Gatling-gun arm, of course



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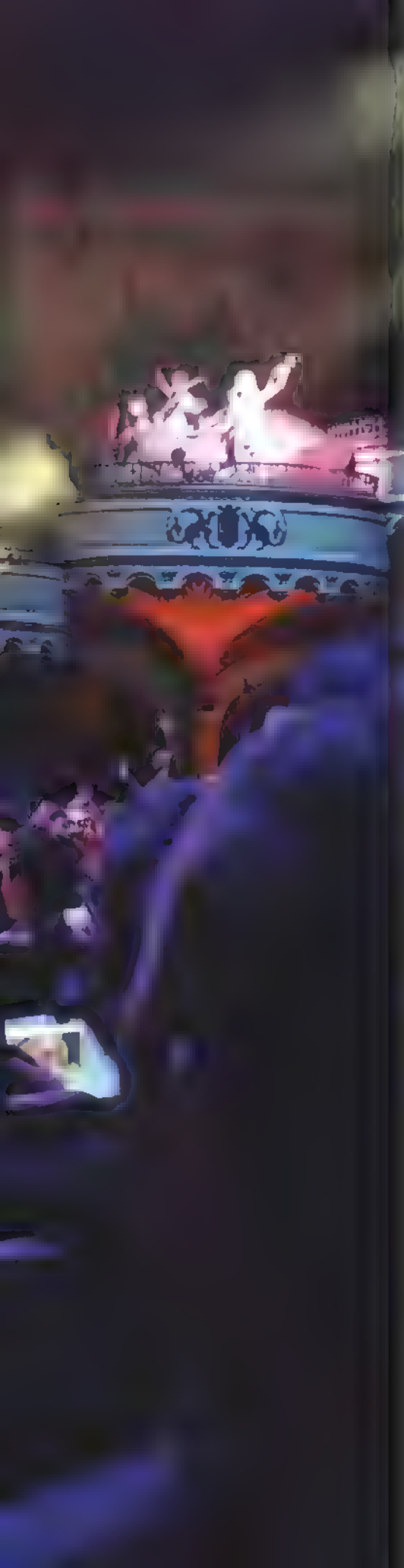
(Left) Once E3 started, we locked Tetris creator Alexey Pajitnov, Threes creator Asher Vollmer, and The Tetris Company's Henk Rogers in a room together to discuss game design. Watch their candid conversation at gameinformer.com

(Right) While the other GI editors were hard at work writing previews at E3, Dan "The Mack" Tack partied with Zeno Group's Audrey Adair and Nicolette Song



NOTABLES

- 10 microsoft report card
- 12 sony report card
- 14 nintendo report card
- 16 virtual reality makes a real appearance at e3
- 18 impulse: the indie games of e3 2014
- 20 massive: wildstar



E3 ★ ★ ★ 2014

With less than a year under their belts, both Sony and Microsoft are still in the show-me stage with their new consoles. The PlayStation 4 and Xbox One took center stage again at this year's E3.

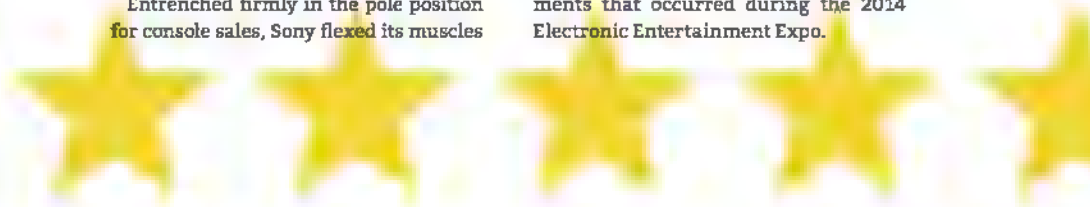
Having already distanced itself from Kinect by unbundling it and dropping the Xbox One price by \$100 before the show, Microsoft spent all of its press conference focused on games, announcing new titles like Crackdown, Ori and the Blind Forest, and Playdead's follow up to Limbo, Inside. Transitioning repeatedly from demos to trailers, the information-packed press conference moved as quickly as Microsoft hopes Xbox Ones jump off the shelf with its new price point.

Entrenched firmly in the pole position for console sales, Sony flexed its muscles

with a strong lineup of indie games (No Man's Sky, Abzû) alongside its triple-A offerings (LittleBigPlanet 3, The Order: 1886). The Japanese platform also had a few surprises under its belt - including From Software's Dark Souls II follow-up, Bloodborne - and viewers got a sneak peek at Uncharted 4: A Thief's End.

While groundbreaking announcements showcasing the untapped potential of the new consoles may have been lacking, third-party publishers had no shortage of quality titles in their lineups. Games like The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt, Evolve, Destiny, and Batman: Arkham Knight all signal a bright future.

Read on for comprehensive recap of all of the headline-grabbing announcements that occurred during the 2014 Electronic Entertainment Expo.





Microsoft Plays It Safe & Steady

After suffering a total and embarrassing loss to Sony last year, Microsoft used this E3 to regain some lost ground. Coming into the show with a second-place console (recently decoupled from its Kinect requirement), Microsoft showed off a mix of new and familiar titles, several of which are exclusive to Xbox One. However, even with some surprises, the company didn't gather enough momentum to secure a decisive victory.

With a new generation under way, simply boasting about what is possible on your system is no longer sufficient. Customers own the hardware, and they want reassurance that their purchases were worthwhile. Microsoft delivered on that front. Like last year, this press conference focused entirely on games. Unlike last year, the presentation did not come on the heels of a botched console reveal, nor was it followed by a drastic reversal of policy, resulting in a more consistent message and positive reception among gamers.

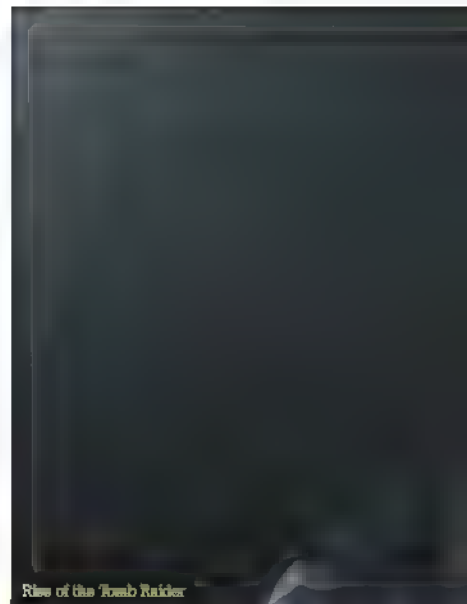
Phil Spencer - newly appointed head of Xbox - kicked off the press conference

with a minimum of posturing and bravado. During this first major appearance since his promotion in March, Spencer acknowledged that Xbox One has been made better through community feedback. He then moved quickly to the game demos, without wasting a word talking about media partnerships, Kinect, or TV. It was a smart move, and may signal a change in the message surrounding Xbox One, putting the all-in-one concept on the back burner.

The games' first approach was a success, initially showing off titles on the way in 2014. Gameplay demos of Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare, Assassin's

Creed Unity, and Sunset Overdrive (an Xbox One exclusive) gave extended glimpses into these big titles. Forza Horizon 2, Evolve, and Dragon Age: Inquisition turned heads with more traditional trailers. Bonnie Ross from 343 Industries took the stage to announce the comprehensive Halo: The Master Chief Collection, which is the crown jewel in Microsoft's 2014 lineup.

Not every game on display was a resounding hit; reaction to Fable Legends was mixed, and the addition of Conker to Project Spark was the only notable aspect of its showing. The release of the Nürburgring track for Forza Motorsport 5



Rise of the Tomb Raider

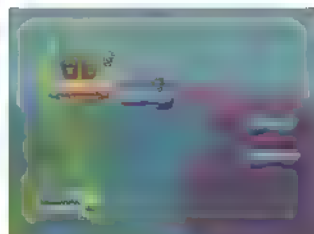
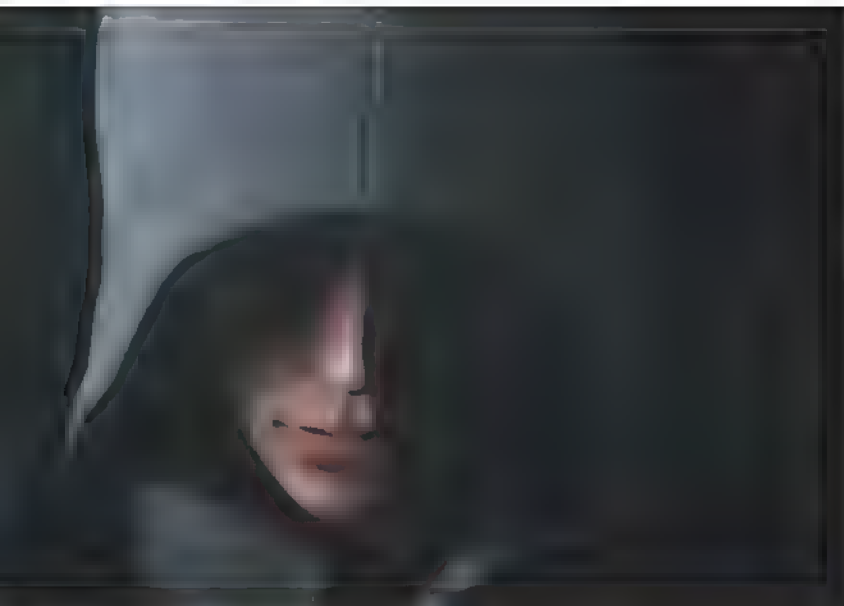


and some crazy DLC for Dead Rising 3 were unexpected, but not jaw-dropping.

Microsoft had bigger surprises waiting for the second part of the briefing, devoted to games releasing in 2015 and later. Square Enix revealed Rise of the Tomb Raider (its follow-up to 2013's popular reboot), and Limbo developer Playdead showed off Inside (which is not exclusive to Xbox One, but will debut on the console). CD Projekt RED's The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt looked great in action, as did The Division from Ubisoft.

While those post-2014 releases are all multiplatform, Microsoft also had a few exciting exclusives on hand. A new Crackdown from original creator Dave Jones is in the works, the obscure Xbox exclusive Phantom Dust is being rebooted, and Platinum Games is working on a new IP called Scalebound. The Scalebound team is led by Hideki Kamiya - the director behind Bayonetta, Viewtiful Joe, Okami, and the original Devil May Cry.

The press conference ended without



Indie Love

Lots of ID@Xbox projects shared the spotlight with the heavy hitters, both on the show floor and the Microsoft stage. Perhaps this move was Microsoft's response to the accolades Sony received last year for its indie focus, but it worked. Indie titles like Cuphead (left), #IDARB, Below, Fenix Rage, and Fruin (above) had people talking. Check out Impulse on page 18 to read about the notable downloadable titles from the show.

Kinect Adrift

After cutting the device out of the Xbox One bundle, Microsoft barely acknowledged its Kinect camera at E3. Despite the company's previous insistence that Kinect is still an important aspect of the Xbox One, only a handful of featured titles incorporate the device in significant ways, like the indie game FRU and two titles from Harmonix (Fantasia and Dance Central Spotlight). If this trajectory continues, the peripheral is unlikely to ever receive the support it needs to form a game that justifies its existence, effectively making it dead in the water.



a shocking tease or crescendo. Spencer concluded with a promise to continue letting feedback from the community shape the Xbox One experience.

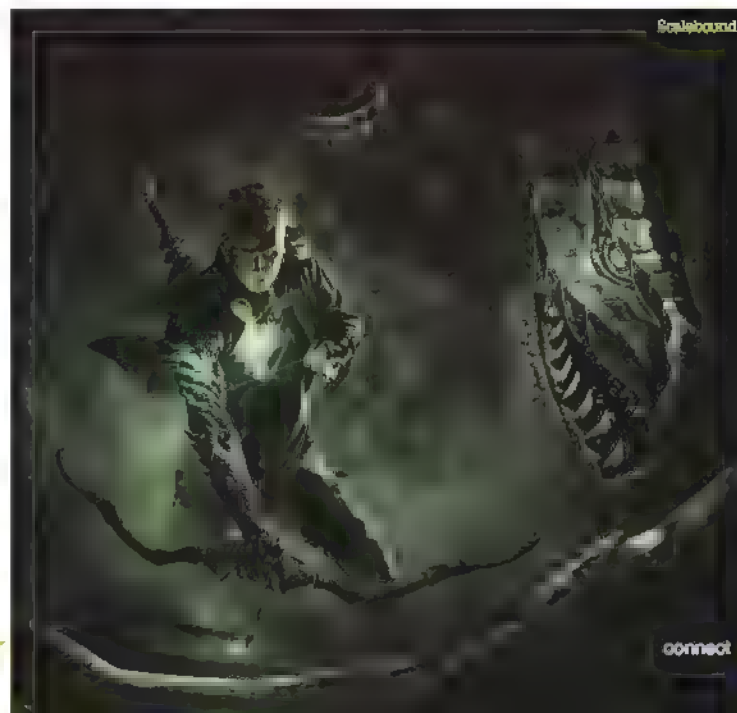
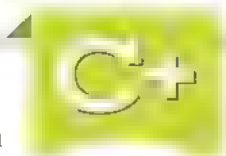
As the closing montage reeled, gamers were left to wonder about the titles that weren't given much attention. Halo 5: Guardians was only shown briefly, paving the way for the Master Chief Collection's reveal. Gears of War wasn't mentioned at all, despite the

fact that Back Tusk Studios is working on a new entry in the juggernaut first party franchise.

No-shows aside, putting the spotlight on games was a step in the right direction for Microsoft, but it doesn't fix the core problem. If the company hoped to close the gap between the Xbox One and the PlayStation 4, it needed to bring a more exciting 2014 lineup -- not one filled with safe and predictable titles. **★ Joe Juba**

Final Grade

Microsoft's performance is a step up over last year, but it still failed to make a good case for its new hardware. With all of the cross-generation and cross-platform content, the reasons to own an Xbox One specifically are still few. Yes, plenty of good games are coming to the system this year, but the most memorable moments of the press conference came in the post-2014 section. That means that Xbox One owners will have had their consoles for over a year before the compelling, exclusive games start releasing with any regularity. The long-term projects look interesting, but that doesn't do much good if the console's immediate future hinges on a bunch of Halo games you've already played.



Esports

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Sony Stands Pat

The PlayStation 4 is off to a good start since its launch last November, leading Microsoft in global sales with over seven million systems sold as of April. Yet, the next wave of software that truly takes advantage may be further out in the future than consumers would like. Sony's E3 press conference highlighted the bright future of the PlayStation 4, but it also unwittingly shone a light on the fact that in the short-term – 2014 – the majority of Sony's first-party studios are either reloading from launch or have yet to bring their projects to the system.

To bolster its relatively shallow first-party 2014 PS4 roster – DriveClub, LittleBigPlanet 3, The Last of Us Remastered, and Infamous: First Light DLC – Sony highlighted a clutch of titles from third parties that are exclusive in some fashion or have exclusive content on the PS4. The company has struck deals for big-name titles this year like Destiny, Batman: Arkham Knight, and Far Cry 4 to feature exclusive content or early access via betas on PlayStation platforms. Destiny in particular is getting the special treatment, complete with a bundle with the system and an exclusive multiplayer map and co-op content. Nabbing exclusive components for

these third-party titles is a good attempt by Sony to try and brand those games for the PS4 even though they are also appearing on other platforms.

One of the big reveals of the press conference was the renewal of Sony's partnership with From Software for a new game called Bloodborne. Sony declined to publish Demon's Souls in the West (after doing so in Japan in 2009), letting Atlus handle the game while Bandai Namco published its spiritual-successor franchise, Dark Souls. Sony will publish Bloodborne in 2015 (formerly known as Project Beast), and the game – by Hidetaka Miyazaki – shares the hardcore action/RPG spirit of those

early From Software titles. Bringing the next From Software creation into the fold is a big win after seeing the success of the Demon's Souls and Dark Souls franchises.

Sony also highlighted a number of games that will either be console exclusives (also appearing on PC) or are timed to come out on PlayStation systems first. The crowd was surprised by the announcement of the resurrection of Tim Schafer's adventure classic Grim Fandango for PS4 and Vita, and Sony followed it up with news that a lot of publisher Devolver Digital's titles will appear on Sony platforms first. This includes Hotline Miami 2: Wrong Number,

Broforce, and the upcoming The Talos Principle from Serious Sam's Croteam. Similarly, Sony has a deal with Paradox Interactive to make the console maker the first stop for Magicka 2 and Paradox's other titles. Finally, Sony caught the attention of the gaming community with two games that will debut on Sony's systems – Abzû and No Man's Sky. The former is a new title from the art director on Journey, and the latter by Joe Danger's Hello Games is what some called the game of the show (see page 44 for more).

These titles may not be true Sony exclusives, and how much they move the console-war needle in Sony's direction is debatable, but they certainly bolster Sony's software roster. They also force consumers to consider how long they can tolerate waiting for these titles to eventually appear on another system. Sony appears to be making good on its previously stated commitment to indie gaming, and it could end up striking gold if one of these games becomes the next big indie thing.

Just when the press conference got rolling, however, Sony detoured to talk about other efforts like bringing

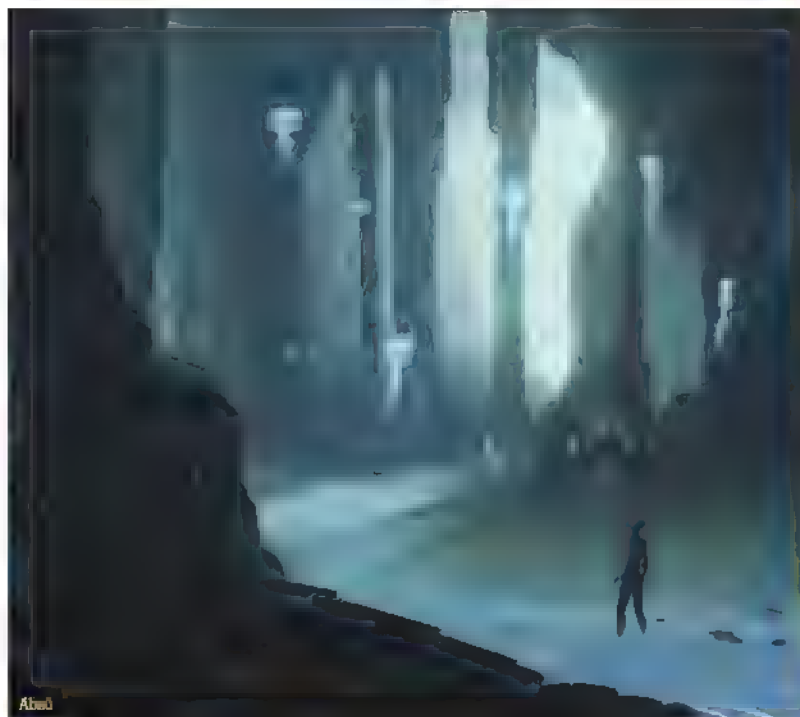


PlayStation Now

Sony announced that the streaming service starts its open beta on the PS4 in the U.S. and Canada on July 31, with PS3 and Vita following shortly after. By the end of the year PlayStation Now will also be available on select Sony TVs. The service's beta starts with more than 100 PS3 titles from publishers such as Activision, Atlus, Double Fine, Electronic Arts, Sega, Sony, Square Enix, Telltale Games, Warner Bros. and more. Titles specifically mentioned include *Dead Space 3*, *God of War: Ascension*, *Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes*, *Ratchet & Clank: Into the Nexus*, and *Ultra Street Fighter IV*. Sony says the beta will be used to gather feedback on PlayStation Now, including testing out a range of rental durations and prices.



Let It Die, a free-to-play hack 'n' slash title by Suda 51, was originally called Lily Reagans. It's scheduled to come out in 2015.



Atari



Battlefield: Hardline's beta comes first to PS4 and PC, leaving Xbox One users out until the fall.

SOUTH ONLY

PlayStation TV to the West for \$99, continued development on the Project Morpheus VR headset, PlayStation Now (see sidebar), Vita, and the Powers comic book show. These are laudable endeavors, but they are secondary in the context of transitioning the brand from its launch phase to kicking the console generation into the next year.

Sony clearly wasn't going for the jugular of competitor Microsoft and when the

press conference concluded with multi-system games like *Grand Theft Auto V* and *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* – strong titles that don't offer any significant difference on the console. Wrapping up the press conference with stunning in-engine footage of Naughty Dog's *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* brought the conversation back to where it belonged – arguing the superiority of the PS4. **★ Matthew Kato**

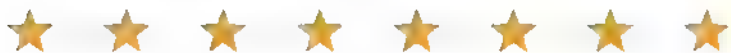
Final Grade

For now Sony seems to be content with not blowing its lead, with third parties doing most of the heavy-lifting for the PS4 in the short term. While the system will see plenty of titles this year and beyond, Sony refrained from overly pressing its advantage over the Xbox One. Even a symbolic price cut or perhaps including the PlayStation camera for free as a dig at Microsoft having to drop the Kinect, would have been an alpha-dog assertion of superiority.

With titles like *The Order: 1886* (see page 68 for more) and *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* in 2015, next year should be a great one for the system in regards to Sony's first-party studios – an area where the company has an advantage over Microsoft. In fact, Sony's E3 2015 presentation could be packed with titles like *The Last Guardian*, and new offerings from Guerrilla Games (which is working on a non-Killzone title), Media Molecule, Polyphony Digital, and Sony Santa Monica (*God of War*) – but that's an E3 press conference for another time.



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Nintendo Bounces Back – But Is It Enough?

Last year, Nintendo abandoned a traditional E3 press conference in favor of a Nintendo Direct stream and an awkward press preview event held at its E3 booth before the show opened. Like most of the company's 2013, it was a misstep, failing to generate any buzz for the Wii U to carry into the latter half of the year.

This year, the company put all of its eggs in one basket: a Nintendo Direct video presentation beamed out to the world early on the first day of E3 2014. This focus paid off. In terms of both production values and reception, it was the company's most successful Direct to date – earning kudos on social media and from the online press. Many declared that Nintendo had “won” E3, besting Microsoft's slim offerings and

Sony's overlong and sometimes awkward press conference. However, our opinions of a press conference often have as much to do with our expectations. Sony was never going to top last year's celebratory smackdown of Microsoft's unpopular anti-used game policies, and Nintendo was not likely to repeat last year's stunted affair. The Direct started with a Ken-doll Reggie Filis-Aime (animated in the

style of the popular *Robot Chicken*) tweaking past Nintendo press conferences – as well-entitled game journalists. Unlike many past Nintendo attempts at humor it was actually funny – and even a little hip. From there, some impressive special effects transformed Reggie and Nintendo head Satoru Iwata into Super Smash Bros. combatants, which served as segues into two related announcements.

The first revealed that players can bring Mii into Super Smash Bros. (see page 61). The second unveiled “Amiibos” – small figurines of Nintendo characters that players can bring into their game by setting them on the Wii U GamePad. On the one hand, it amounted to Nintendo's admission that it should have bought Skylanders when Toys for Bob had offered to sell. On the other, Amiibos have a lot of commercial potential and make good use of the Wii U's controller. Super Smash Bros. is the first game to use Amiibos, but support is also being added to Mario Kart 8 and other past Wii U games, as well as some unspecified 3DS titles. Amiibo characters can level up in unique ways, have customizable special moves, and even be used as an A.I. co-op or sparring partner. All of your Amiibo's customization settings are stored in the figure, so you can bring them over to a friend's house to have them battle other people or other Amiibos.

From there, the Nintendo Direct video switched to one of the oldest tricks in the



Mii are now playable in Super Smash Bros.

Deal With The Devil

Nintendo hasn't had much luck garnering third-party support, but it did announce a high-profile acquisition at E3 – a deal to publish Valhalla Game Studios' Devil's Third. Valhalla is the studio formed by former Team Ninja head Tomonobu Itagaki, the creator of the Dead or Alive series. Devil's Third was originally going to be published by now-defunct THQ for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. Now, Nintendo has stepped in to save the project, and has another promising game from an outside studio to go along with Bayonetta 2 and Xenoblade Chronicles X.

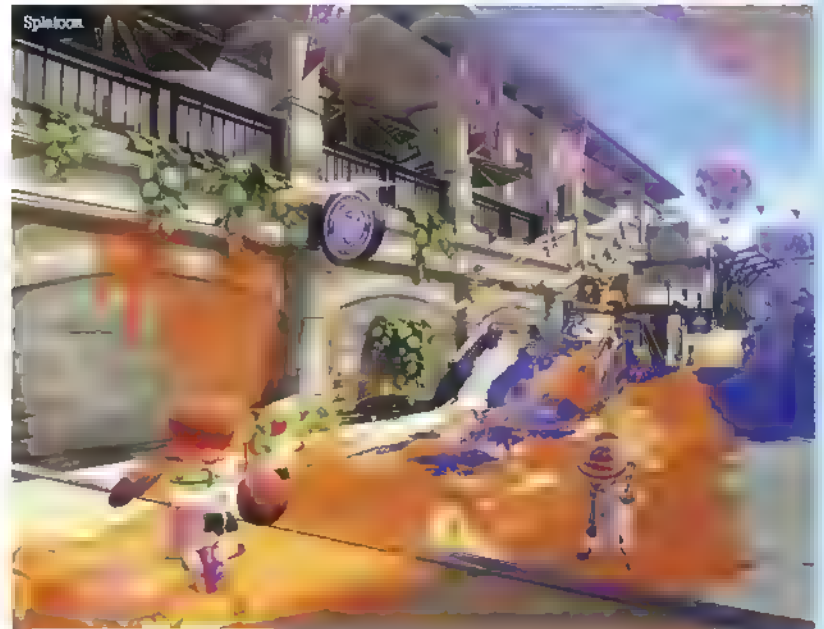


A new, HD The Legend of Zelda entry is in the works for Wii U

Final Grade

Give Nintendo credit, this Direct was its most entertaining, polished E3 presentation in recent memory. It was short and to-the-point (something last year's E3 champ, Sony, should learn from) and it put the emphasis squarely on the company's strength: its excellent first-party games. Big franchises like *Zelda* and *Super Smash Bros.* made waves, but Nintendo also revealed promising new properties like *Yoshi's Woolly World* and *Mario Maker*. While *Amibo* appears to be the rare case of Nintendo following the crowd instead of leading it, *Skylanders* and *Disney Infinity* have proven that collectible figurines are a lucrative market segment. Overall, Nintendo comes out of this E3 enjoying better PR than it's had in a few years.

However, it's important to understand the difference between "winning" E3 and winning the console battle. Despite this strong showing, we saw few indicators that the Wii U is going to seriously challenge the PlayStation 4 or Xbox One. As with Sony and Microsoft, many of the products Nintendo showed this year won't release until 2015. Add in the fact that the third parties have almost totally abandoned Wii U, and you have a company that still faces some considerable challenges. That said, E3 2014 was a step in the right direction for Nintendo.



including an all-too-brief glimpse of the new HD *The Legend of Zelda* game for Wii U. Creator Eiji Aonuma said this is the first truly open-world 3D *Zelda* game. Link and company will appear in stores this year in *Hyrule Warriors*, the *Zelda* meets *Dynasty Warriors* game that got a long segment but still looks relatively unimpressive. *Pokémon Omega Ruby* and *Alpha Sapphire* look solid and should prove to be bankable products.

Nintendo's E3 Direct showcased a lot of notable games, but a dark cloud still hovered over the presentation – the lack of third-party software support. Worse, prior to the show, Ubisoft's Yves Guillemot revealed that his company is actually sitting on finished Wii U games until the install base grows. Nothing Nintendo showed at E3 may do much to change this attitude among other publishers in the industry. **— Matt Helgeson**

E3 promotional book – footage of two well-dressed Japanese men shopping for yarn. The pair, Nintendo's Takashi Tezuka and Good Feel Ltd.'s Etsunobu Ebisu, then showed off one of E3's most interesting-looking games: *Yoshi's Woolly World*, a gorgeous-looking spiritual successor to *Kirby's Epic Yarn*. The use of yarn textures in HD, as well as a host of creative 2D platforming design, tab this game as one of Nintendo's usual can't-miss in-house projects.

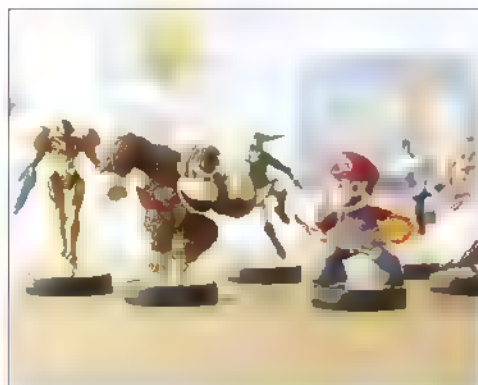
Nintendo's conference was loaded with other new game announcements. *Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker*, based on the *Super Mario 3D World* engine, looked appealing, as did *Kirby and the Rainbow Curse*, which uses a drawing mechanic on the Wii U GamePad similar to the DS title *Kirby: Canvas Curse*. The surprise announcement was *Splatoon*, an odd multi-player game in which players use paintguns to claim territory by covering the levels with squid ink. The most intriguing were *Mario Maker*, which enables users to create their own 2D *Super Mario* platformer levels with a simple

point-and-click mechanic on the Wii U GamePad, an *Monolith Soft's Xenoblade Chronicles X*.

This impressive lineup was marred solely by the fact that *Captain Toad* is the only newly-announced game due this holiday season, when the ailing Wii U desperately needs new games. Though only teased by Shigeru Miyamoto at the end of the Nintendo Direct, the publisher announced a new *Star Fox* game for Wii U as well, which uses an odd motion-based control scheme.

Aside from the post-Direct announcement of *Code Name: S.T.E.A.M.* (an intriguing steampunk-themed game set in London developed by *Fire Emblem/Advanced Wars* creators Intelligent Systems), the 3DS received almost no push from Nintendo during E3 – an odd move considering that this system has been paying the bills for the last few years.

Outside of *Super Smash Bros.*, which will anchor Nintendo's holiday season, Nintendo also gave us updates on some previously announced projects,



Where's Samus?

Once again, Nintendo neglected its third-most iconic franchise. *Metroid* was nowhere to be found in Nintendo's Direct presentation or in its E3 booth. It has now been four years since a *Metroid* game release, and that was Team Ninja's mediocre *Metroid: Other M*. Even if a full-on Wii U game isn't in the cards, a 2D classic-style *Metroid* game for the 3DS would have been well-received by fans and the press. Let's hope Nintendo is saving some surprises for later in the year.



Virtual Reality Makes A Real Appearance At E3

E3 might not have been the showcase for virtual reality that this March's Game Developer's Conference was, but that doesn't mean the enthusiasm is waning. Since Facebook's purchase of Oculus VR, attention has only amplified. "It's changed for us... because some of the national media started to write about VR," says Sony president of worldwide studios Shuhei Yoshida. "It's Facebook, it's Sony, it's Oculus – it's a much bigger story."

We went hands-on with three demos for each head-mounted display to see with our own eyes how things are coming along.



Sony gave us a chance to play the same demo of *Eve: Valkyrie* we tried at GDC, but it also brought along two more *Morpheus* demos. *Street Luge* thrusts players onto a downhill course as they lie back on a beanbag. With no controllers to worry about, this demo was designed to show off head tracking with the PlayStation Camera and the glowing blue lights on the head-mounted display. The second demo, *Castle*, was available

in limited form at GDC, but because of signal interference, this was our first chance with it. Using PlayStation Move controllers, players are cast in a virtual environment and interact with a dummy, touch it, lift its hand, and then pick up a sword and hack it to bits.

Oculus had a big presence on the E3 show floor, offering up three new experiences. *Lucky's Tale* by Playful Corp., headed by *Words with Friends* creator

Paul Bettner, is a platformer in the style of *Super Mario 3D World*. It's still very much a work in progress and the camera needs work, but as a proof of concept for third-person VR gaming it gets the job done.

The second demo, a virtual-reality version of the Kickstarter darling *Superhot*, allowed players to bend around moving bullets just like Neo from *The Matrix*, all while seated in their chairs. *Superhot* is coming to PC, and developer *Superhot Team* has hinted at an interest in console releases.

We were most impressed by Creative Assembly's demo of *Alien: Isolation*, which showcased how horror gaming could make the leap to head-mounted displays. The goal of the demo is to escape the xenomorph – a frightening, impossible task. After the alien inevitably pounces, looking down shows its spiked tail protruding through your chest. Even more terrifying is looking up to find the creature's hand seemingly inches from your face. It was definitely a disturbing experience that amplifies the terror.

The modest showing at E3 proved that both Sony and Oculus are taking measured approaches, with Oculus' biggest concern that someone will poison the well before they are ready. "What we don't want is for someone to ship bad VR," says Oculus VP of product Nate Mitchell. The most devastating thing for

his company would be a major player rushing a product that doesn't offer a great experience out the door.

Oculus is nearing its final testing, and assures us that there won't be a third developer kit. "We're locking down the consumer spec," Mitchell says. "We're on track to ship [developer kit 2] in July. The retail Rift will double as a developer kit." Without a fixed timeline, possibly to keep competitors from rushing to beat them, it's not yet clear when we'll be bringing home an Oculus retail unit.

Things are starting to heat up, though Oculus hired Naughty Dog co-founder and former THQ president Jason Rubin to head up its worldwide studios, former EA Partners head David DeMartino to focus on developer relations, and former Steam boss Jason Holtman to aid with the distribution platform. This signals a spin-up for content creation. In order for the Rift to succeed at market, there need to be compelling experiences for it on day one.

We're looking forward to finding out exactly when "day one" is. The demos are impressive, but the shine is starting to wear off, and consumers are getting eager to bring one home. It's time to start talking about full experiences, long-term wearability, and what it means to have a virtual-reality device in your home. Until those conversations start happening, it's hard to understand what the VR revolution means for the average user. ♦

g-b-u-

THE GOOD, THE BAD, & THE UGLY

The Good



FINAL FANTASY TYPE-0 (originally introduced as FF Agito XIII) is coming to new-gen systems in North America. The game came out for PSP in Japan in 2011, and now a remastered version is headed to PS4 and Xbox One at some undisclosed time in the future.

Quotable

"Right now, the technology isn't quite there yet, in our view. Certainly, it's something we're looking at. We look at a wide range of technologies. When it's there and enables a fun experience, we'll be there, too."

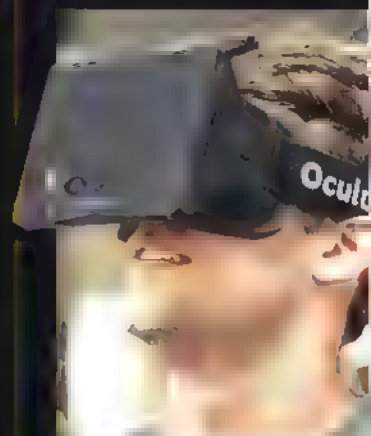
The Bad

VALVE has delayed its Steam Machine and Steam controller into 2015, citing the need to refine the controller based on developer and consumer feedback. Valve's digital gaming PC Steam Machine uses the Linux-based SteamOS, and the controller attempts to merge keyboard/mouse functionality into a controller form that includes haptic feedback. There's no word on if this will affect the release of Steam Machines from third-party manufacturers.

The Ugly

NEW FRANCHISES

from the major first- and third-party publishers were scarce at this E3. Sure, Nintendo revealed a handful of new titles, Sony announced From Software's Bloodborne, and Platinum Games showed off a new concept called Scalebound. But when you compare this crop to the bold, boundary-challenging concepts like Assassin's Creed, BioShock, and Mass Effect publishers were showcasing at this juncture last generation, it's clear that gamers looking for titles that aren't sequels will have to wait a little longer or invest heavily in the indie scene.



Nintendo of America president Reggie Fils-Aime on virtual reality

The Indies Of E3 2014



Each passing year finds E3 doing a better job of embracing indies, and 2014 was no exception. To claim that I'm going to write about the indies of E3 is perhaps unfair, dozens of great-looking independent projects were scattered around the show floor, with particular hot spots at the Microsoft, Sony, and IndieCade booths. Since there's no way to adequately encapsulate them all in just a couple of pages, I've chosen six projects for inclusion here both because they had great showings, and we've yet to feature them.

I happened upon **EarthNight** as a happy surprise at Sony's booth, and the visual presentation immediately caught my eye. Once I played it, I was totally sold. Developer Cleaversoft has taken the popular runner genre so prevalent in mobile gaming and applied a critical eye to crafting a deeper, more robust experience. You control one of two characters living in Earth's orbit after dragons have taken over the planet. Fed up with confinement, your hero or heroine leaps out into the atmosphere on a quest to retake the planet. Gameplay begins with a fall through the sky until you drop onto one of the many dragons flitting through the air. At that point, the action shifts to a more traditional 2D runner perspective, and you charge along from left to right, leaping across the dragon's back, collecting pick-ups,

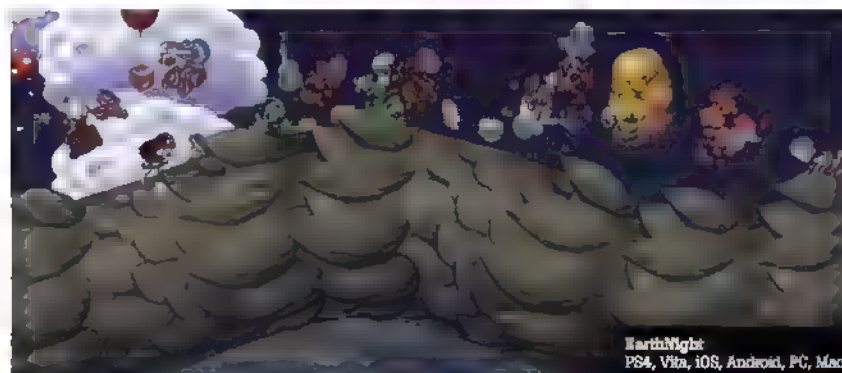


and slashing through monsters. One of the two characters is built for more experienced players, and offers added control and speed but with increased complexity. Hidden collectibles are scattered on each dragon, waiting to be found. A stellar chiptune soundtrack accompanies you on your run. **EarthNight** got its hooks in me right away, and I predict it won't be the only one.

The story of **#IDARB's** creation is almost as interesting as the game itself. Other Ocean Interactive began **#IDARB** (an acronym for It Draws A Red Box) with a simple premise encompassed by the name – the picture of a single red box on screen. From there, the team took the game to Twitter and asked for suggestions for how to proceed. It became a platformer, then a competitive deathmatch

game, and finally settled in the direction of an eight player arena-sports game that the creative director, Mike Mika, has described as a cross between Super Smash Bros. and NBA Jam. Dozens of distinct characters are selectable before heading into the fray, which sees you and your team leaping between platforms to grab a ball and fling it into the opposite team's goal. Pulses of energy push away nearby players as you volley for control. The action is fast and chaotic, and occasional half-time minigames are inserted to mix things up, like one where the team that makes the most noise for the microphone wins. This intriguing mix of crowdsourcing and game development will hit Xbox One first later this summer.

CounterSpy comes to us from independent game studio Dynamighty, but with publishing support from Sony. Set in an alternate history version of the Cold War, players are cast as an agent of Counter, a non-governmental spy agency working to control two competing superpowers, the imperialists and socialists, and prevent worldwide disaster. Both world powers are threatening to blow up the moon with nuclear weapons, which sounds like a crazy premise until you learn that in the real world the U.S. Air Force actually considered detonating a nuke on the lunar surface in the late 1950s. Your spy moves through 2D side-scrolling levels as he infiltrates heavily guarded complexes. Stealth is the goal, but when necessary, you can hop into cover and the action seamlessly shifts into a third-person 3D shooting view so you can take out guards. You're always working against time and the escalating threat of a DEFCON clock that leads to mutually assured destruction. Each time you play, levels are structured differently through a simple procedural generation, so the action and sneaking remains fresh. I really liked CounterSpy's sharp aesthetic and clever mix of gameplay styles. We can expect a release on PS4, PS3, and Vita before the end of the year, with a different mobile version due sometime after that.



Looking for more great independent and downloadable games?

Check out regular updates at gameinformer.com/impulse.

For more in this issue, read our E3 Hot 50 entries on *No Man's Sky* (p. 45), *Below* (p. 57), *Ori and the Blind Forest* (p. 60), *Axiom Verge* (p. 66), *The Witness* (p. 71), *Dreadnought* (p. 71), *Galak-Z: The Dimensional* (p. 72), *Helldivers* (p. 76), *Hyper Light Drifter* (p. 77), and *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* (p. 82)



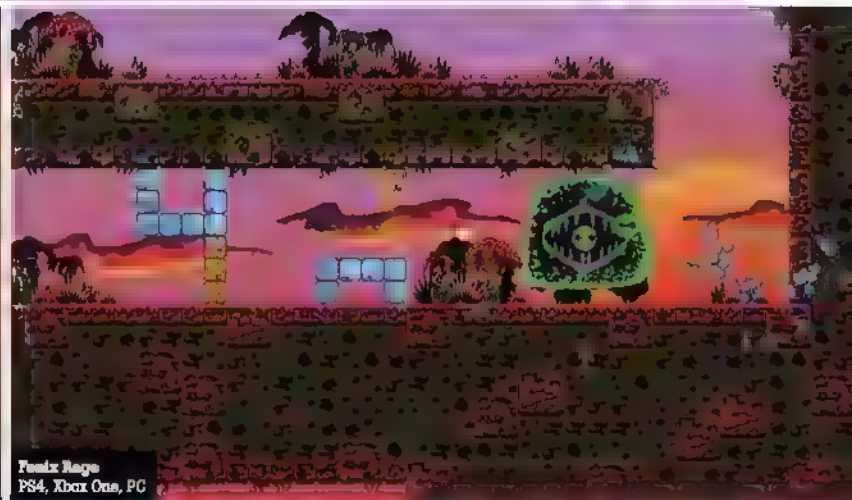
Comanche 5
PS4, PS3, Vita



Never Alone
PS4, Xbox One, PC



Velocity 2X
PS4, Vita



Fenix Rage
PS4, Xbox One, PC

FuturLab's **Velocity 2X** is hard to wrap your head around until you get your hands on it. Building off the formula established in the previous franchise entry, **Velocity 2X** sends you hurtling through space taking out enemy ships in a classic top-down perspective as an energetic electronic soundtrack (composed by Klizone's award-winning Joris de Man) drills into your brain. The major feature that sets the game apart is the ability to teleport past impassable walls as you surge forward across the screen. In addition, **2X** adds the ability to dock your ship and run around on-foot through 2D platforming levels, where your pilot has the same rapid-fire teleporting ability as her ship. Whichever mode you're in, the tone of the game is all about incredible speed and flashy futuristic visuals. It has the hypnotic quality that fans of the genre long for, in which you find yourself rapidly falling into a hyper-focused flow of movement and shooting. **Velocity 2X** will hit PS4 and Vita later this summer.

I had the chance to play several levels of Green Lava Studios' **Fenix Rage** at E3, and it's an easy recommendation to those gamers

hungry for the next hardcore trial. **Fenix Rage** can't avoid comparisons to the excellent **Super Meat Boy**, but I found that a number of gameplay mechanics set this newer project apart. You control Fenix, a fiery little creature on a quest for revenge and cookies as he moves from one seemingly impossible level to the next. His movement set allows him to jump indefinitely and regularly dash across short distances in midair, which challenges the initial assumption that the game is purely a platformer. Instead, much of the action in **Fenix Rage** occurs above the platforms, as you flit between crowded groups of enemies and dangerous moving traps. A first glance at many levels had me wondering how it's even possible to get through to the level-ending cookie. I foresee equal measures of skill-based fun and maddening frustration in store for devoted players when the game releases later this year on PS4, Xbox One, and PC.

Never Alone has been crafted with a dual goal in mind. Mechanically, it's a puzzle/platformer that draws comparisons to games like **Limbo** and **Brick**. However, at its heart, **Never Alone** is a tribute to and continuation

of the storytelling traditions of the Inupiat Alaska Native people. The project comes through a cooperative development venture between Upper One Games and E-Line Media, and aims to find new avenues to communicate the cultural stories of Alaska Natives through the explicit cooperation and involvement of the tribal elders whose families carry the tales. A young girl sets out to discover the source of an endless blizzard, and she is soon joined by an arctic fox that becomes a second controllable character. The levels I looked at focused on the interdependence of these two characters. The fox might climb to a high platform to lower a path for the girl, and the girl might push a box into place for the fox to cross. **Never Alone** presents haunting visuals and a pervasive sense of the cold winter through which the pair travels, and I found myself thoroughly engaged in the spirit-rich world of the game. The developers shared with me that they're interested in the potential of exploring other worldwide native cultures in subsequent games, which strikes me as an intriguing source of narrative to tap. The promising **Never Alone** heads to PS4, Xbox One, and PC this fall. ♦



WildStar

An action-MMORPG all-star

Carbide Studios has finally found that Holy Grail of MMORPGs in *WildStar*, a title that feels like the ever-elusive, often sought-after action-MMORPG. While not straying far from conventional application of many systems, such as questing, leveling, and PvP battlegrounds, every system has a layer on top to differentiate it from the rest of the pack within the confines of a brilliantly executed action shell that keeps players engaged and invested. At the core, that's what makes *WildStar* brilliant — no matter what kind of player you are, there's a constant stream of activities to participate in so things never get stale.

by Daniel Toci

The stage is set in a cartoony space dual-faction backdrop, but don't be fooled by the cute Chus or jovial dialogue. *WildStar* has options for players of every level of time and skill commitment, but also has the hardest of the hardcore options available for genre veterans. The dungeons are on par with many other titles' raids in terms of difficulty, boasting some of the most challenging MMO content one can find anywhere. If competitive PvE is your thing, *WildStar* delivers on a level we haven't seen in

a decade. If you're only into PvP, players can level all the way to cap solely through battlegrounds and then suit up for the guild vs. guild warplot endgame.

An eight-slot hotbar paired with a "telegraph" battle system sets the stage for some of the most compelling MMORPG combat I've ever experienced. While many in the genre have chased four or five slot hotbars with swapping functionality, *WildStar* simply gives players eight core abilities at a time that can be swapped on the fly to mix up builds mid-adventure. Combat flow feels right, moving from pack to pack with quests popping up and challenges being issued. Sprinting, double-jumping, and evasive rolling are seamlessly integrated into the mix to create a rewarding combat experience that makes it tough to even imagine going back to tab targeting titles. Quests are standard fare for the most part — Kill X, collect Y — but when challenges to perform other tasks in the area are popping up for additional rewards, things feel fast-paced and almost arcade-like. The action is continuous and constant, and players are rewarded with short-term buffs for mowing through packs of enemies and earning double, triple, and super kills.

WildStar may also have the distinction of having the best implemented housing of any

MMORPG to date. Players can decorate a wide plot of land with a huge variety of items that can be crafted, found, and purchased. Some of the most exciting drops in the game are not massive swords or giant guns, but desks, beds, or carpets for player housing. These décor items add experience bonuses for resting at home. On top of the customization options from these posters and trinkets, each plot can be outfitted with a variety of functional crafting stations, resource nodes, minigames, and even small adventures for the housing owner and friends. It's fun to just hang out at a neighbor's house and see what minigame options are available, and maybe take home a plush carrot-doll prize to place on your bedside table.

While players unlock skills and abilities on the way to level 50, there's another aspect to each character designed to sync up with each player's personal play style. Four "paths" can be paired with any class to provide additional quests and locations of interest in each zone and give special abilities. Do you like holding off waves of mobs, performing assassination missions, and uncovering storage containers filled with frag grenades and sniper rifles? The soldier path is probably for you. Like buffing yourself and faction friends by creating enhancement machines, taxi spawn points, loot, experience, and reputation boost nodes? The settler is the best way to approach your journey in Nexus. Like finding those out-of-the-way spots in every zone and special areas? Try the explorer. For the lore junkie, there's the scientist path, which tasks you with using a special robot companion to discover the world's hidden history.

MMORPGs are shifting entities that can live and die from decisions made down the line, but *WildStar*'s launch is enough for me to keep this one in the spotlight for the foreseeable future. *WildStar* serves up compelling combat, fun customization, and a deluge of content offerings that should keep even the most hardcore genre enthusiast satisfied. ♦



NETFLIX

FROM EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ELI ROTH

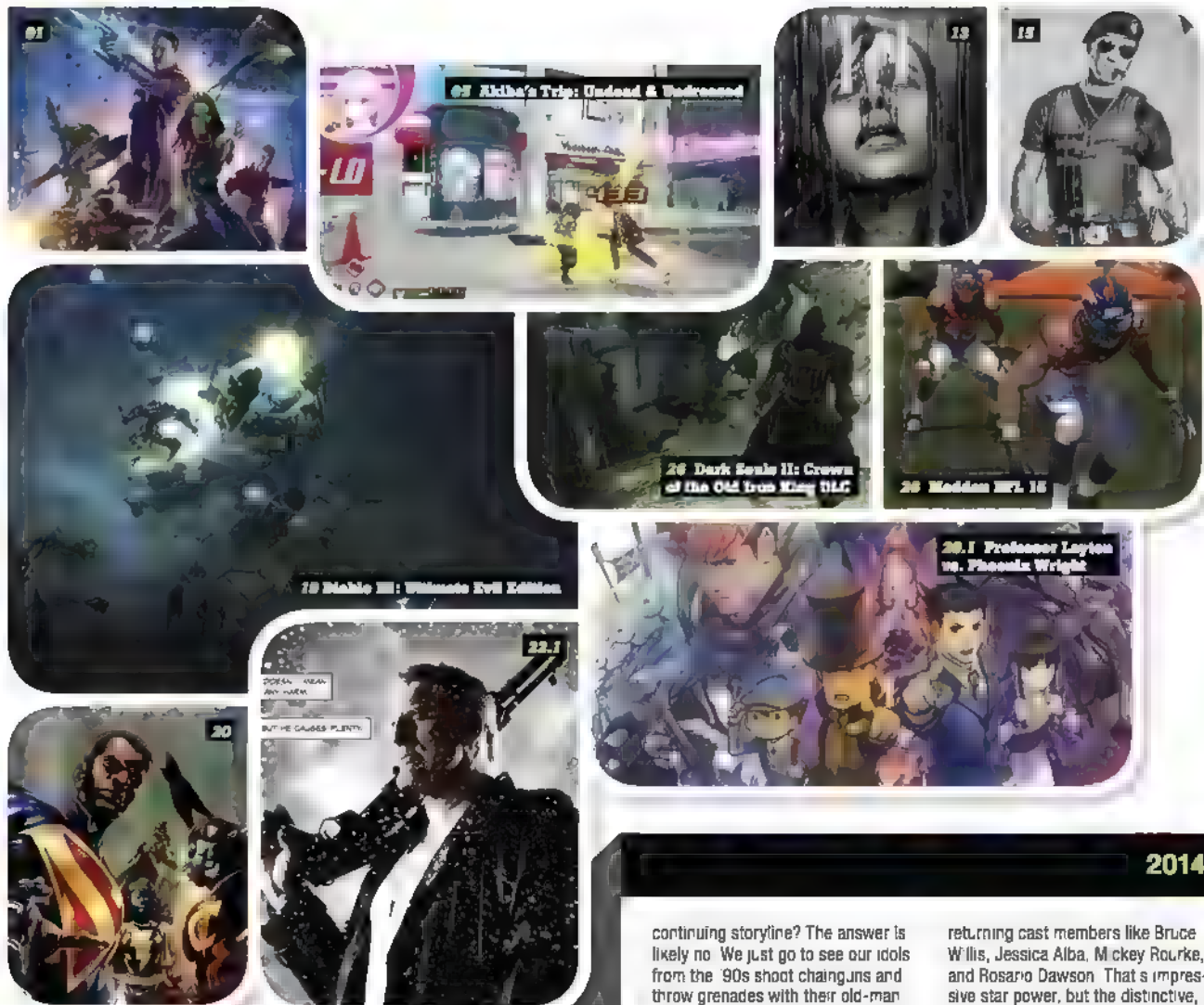
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ALUMNI

01 Marvel Tests Its Limits

Getting people to see *Iron Man* and *The Avengers* was a no-brainer. *Thor* and *Captain America* might have been stretches, but people flocked to theaters to see them. Today Marvel puts its audience's patience to the true test with the release of *Guardians of the Galaxy*. It features a talking space raccoon, a fighting space tree, and that dude from *Parks and Recreation*. If people pay money to see this, they'll pay money for anything, prepare for announcements of movies based on Night Hawk, Marrow, Spider-Ham, and Daredevil.

05 New Releases

- › Akiba's Trip: Undead & Undressed (PS3, Vita)
- › Need for Speed (Blu-ray, DVD)
- › Sacred 3 (PS3, 360, PC)

08.1 New Releases

- › Ultra Street Fighter IV (PS3, 360, PC)

08.2 Produced By Michael Bay

After a lengthy hiatus, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles return to theaters today. If you are expecting people in cheesy rubber suits, you're going to be disappointed, the turtles are highly detailed, beautifully animated, and guaranteed to freak you out. Don't worry, Megan Fox plays the leading role of April O'Neil, and Michael Bay is producing, so you know this movie has to be good.

12 New Releases

- › Dsgaea 4: A Promise Revisited (Vita)
- › Hohokum (PS4, PS3, Vita)
- › Risen 3: Titan Lords (PS3, 360)

13 Silent Hill Returns

Konami hasn't announced a new Silent Hill game yet, but IDW is releasing a comic pre-quel to the 2012 entry titled *Silent Hill Downpour: Anne's Story*. Penned by Tom Waltz, the co-writer of the Downpour game, this tale fills in the blanks of Anne Marie Cunningham's story.

14 Gamescom 2014

Called "E3 Overseas" by many in the video game industry, Gamescom 2014 offers new looks at upcoming games from almost every publisher in the industry. The show is held in Cologne, Germany, and runs from August 13-17. Be kind to the game developers, folks. They are in midst of back-to-back conventions.

14 SOE Live 2014

Over the next three days, Sony Online Entertainment is outlining the future of EverQuest Next, Landmark, PlanetSide 2, H1Z1, and DC Universe Online. For those attending this event at Las Vegas Planet Hollywood, events include a Landmark megabuild, dev panels, parties, and a game room that is open to all.

15 I Know That Guy: The Movie

Sylvester Stallone's juggernaut action franchise, *The Expendables*, is back for a third installment today. Does anyone even care what happens in these movies? Is there a

continuing storyline? The answer is likely no. We just go to see our idols from the '90s shoot chainguns and throw grenades with their old-man arms. This entry stars popular actors Harrison Ford, Jason Statham, Jet Li, and Wesley Snipes. It also features Mel Gibson.

18 New Releases

- › Diablo III: Ultimate Evil Edition (PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360)
- › Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare (PS4, PS3)
- › Tales of Xillia 2 (PS3)

20 DC's 52 New Worlds

Grant Morrison is bringing back DC Comics' multiverse in a big way in a new comic called *The Multiversity*. This issue, shipping today, takes readers to Earth-18, where the Justice Riders preside; Earth-43, to get to know the Vampire League, to other Earths containing such characters as Dino-Cop, Lady Quark, and the Nazi New Reichsmen, and the Atomic Knights of Justice. The first issue of *Multiversity* spans 48-pages and contains six different stories.

2014 About Damn Time

The original *Sin City* came out nine years ago, but directors Robert Rodriguez and Frank Miller have teamed up again for the next chapter *Sin City: A Dame To Kill For* hits theaters today, and features

returning cast members like Bruce Willis, Jessica Alba, Mickey Rourke, and Rosario Dawson. That's impressive star power, but the distinctive, comic-inspired art direction returns to steal the show.

22.2 Insomnia52

Host to one of the world's largest LAN parties, Insomnia52 is a three-day event held in Ricoh Arena in Coventry, England. Outside of the sleepless multiplayer gaming, this festival offers tournaments, panels, separate Minecraft and YouTube zones, and a retail sector.

23 New Releases

- › Dark Souls II: Crown of the Old Iron King DLC (PS3, 360, PC)
- › Madden NFL 15 (PS4, Xbox One, PS3, 360)
- › The Walking Dead: Season 4 (Blu-ray, DVD)

23.1 New Releases

- › Professor Layton vs. Phoenix Wright (3DS)

23.2 PAX Prime

Penny Arcade's popular expo happens four times a year now, but Seattle's PAX Prime is still the biggest show and the place to be for cosplayers and people wanting to get a look at upcoming games. The show is sold out, but you can always turn to gameinformer.com for live updates and the latest news.

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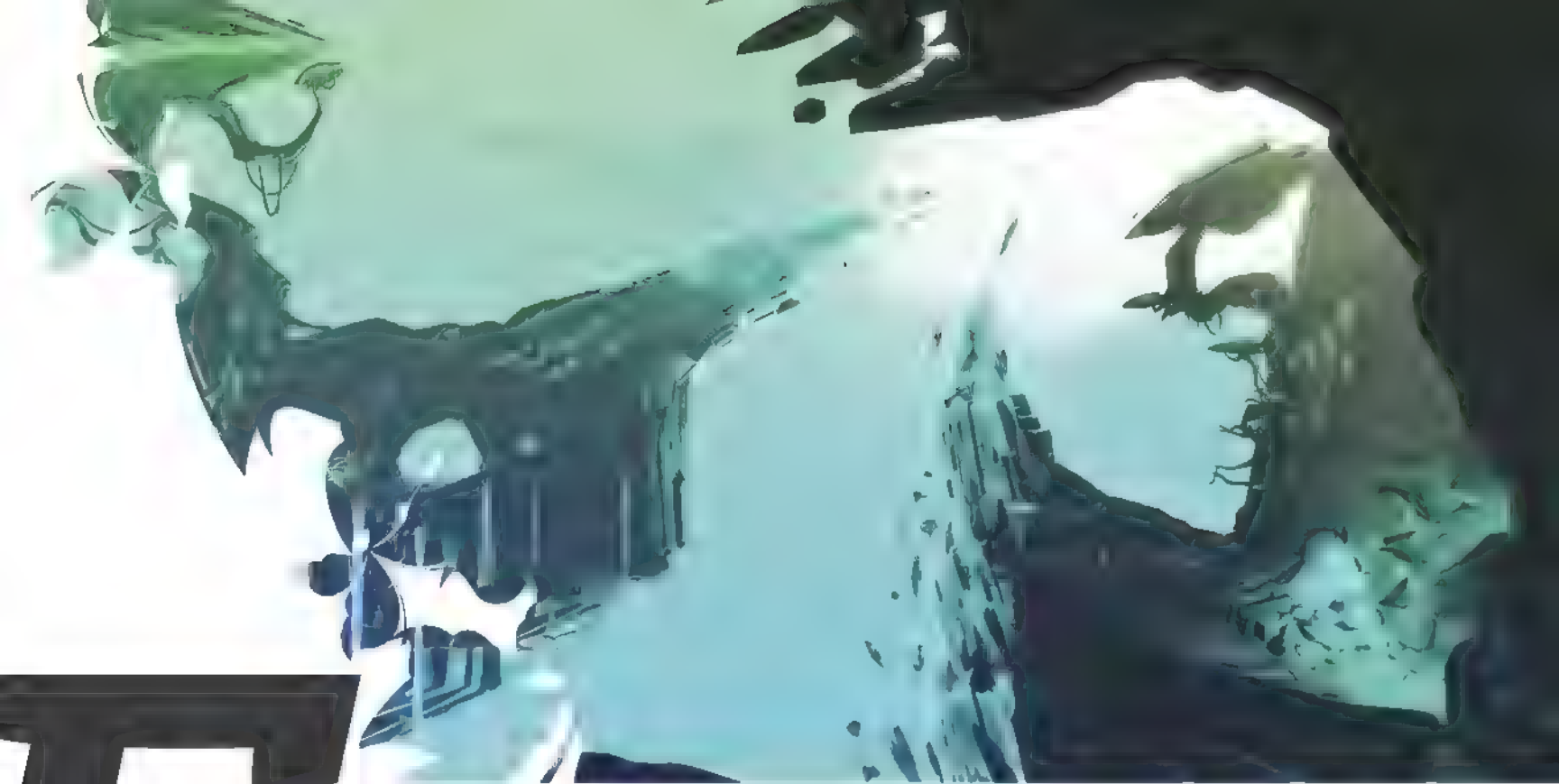
Bat

by *Tim Turi*

- 
- ▶ PLATFORM
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC
 - ▶ STYLE
1 or 2-Player Action
(,0-Player Online)
 - ▶ PUBLISHER
2K Games
 - ▶ DEVELOPER
Gearbox Software
 - ▶ RELEASE
2015

titanfall

GEARBOX BLENDS A UNIVERSE'S WORTH OF BADASS HEROES
IN A NEW CO-OP/COMPETITIVE MULTIPLAYER FRANCHISE



First-person shooters are a core part of Gearbox's pedigree. The studio got its start developing spin-offs of the legendary *Half-Life*, porting *Halo: Combat Evolved* to the PC with online multiplayer, and creating the World War II series *Brothers in Arms*. Gearbox dramatically broke out of its comfort zone with *Borderlands*, an inventive hybrid of slick FPS gameplay, loot-grabbing, and RPG progression. A striking art style and absurd sense of humor made the exotic cocktail even more enticing.

The *Borderlands* franchise is alive and well, with two successful main entries, a "pre-sequel" on the way to last gen consoles, and a story-driven Telltale spin-off re-releasing soon. However, just as Gearbox hit full stride last generation, it also endured two major stumbling blocks. The developer revived 3D Realms' doomed *Duke Nukem Forever*, but its harsh critical reception suggested the long-delayed sequel may have been better off a myth. *Aliens: Colonial Marines* further tainted the waters, with scorned xenomorph fans crying out that Gearbox's early previews didn't accurately reflect the final, rough release.

For the new console generation, Gearbox's most obvious bet would have been to deliver a glimmering new entry in the *Borderlands* series. Instead, the developer is once again showcasing its knack for genre hybridization in an imaginative new IP built around campaign co-op and competitive multiplayer.

BLENDING GENRES ONCE AGAIN

Borderlands wowed gamers in 2009 by combining twitch shooter action and satisfying RPG progression. Gearbox is back to creating an "I didn't even know I wanted that" experience with *Battleborn*. It's a first person game through and through, but simply calling it a shooter would be a misrepresentation. A huge cast of playable characters, all locked in battle around the last star in the universe, brings strikingly unique gameplay styles to the table.

This tremendous variety of heroes provides an eclectic mix of genre tropes and first-person gameplay styles. Some characters carry rifles, pistols, and Gatling guns, while others launch cursed arrows or telekinetic swords. Some characters play like they're from entirely different genres, such as a Sith-inspired dual blade-wielding space samurai, or a bipedal mushroom man that sprouts poisonous fungus patches. The roster of wildly different characters is reminiscent of all-star fighting game mash-ups like *Super Smash Bros.* or the ever-expanding casts of MOBAs.

Speaking of MOBAs, Gearbox is leading the reveal of *Battleborn*





Rath is annihilated in this campaign mission after responding to a distress call

with a five-versus-five multiplayer mode called Incursion that draws obvious inspiration from games like League of Legends and DOTA. The elongated battlefield we saw features multiple twisting paths flanking a broad lane running down the middle. Robot minions (manufactured by the industrious Last Light Consortium), pour forth from two bases on either end of the map. The squat little bots march toward a pair of huge, mechanical spider sentries guarding each team's base. Like projectile-firing towers gating players' progress in MOBA matches, these spiders devastate players who get too close with a salvo of missiles, laser beams, and more. By protecting the minions' march towards the spiders, players help them to launch a combined attack against their powerful shields. With the shields down, teams of up to five can whittle away the arachnid's health and eventually siege the enemy's base.

Incursion's concept may be recognizable to MOBA players, but Gearbox's signature first-person gameplay changes the experience dramatically. Even if you're not familiar with MOBAs, the accessible FPS controls allow players to engage in the exciting tug-of-war battles that make the highly competitive genre so exciting. The host of wildly different characters offers tons of play-style options, deepened further by an

accelerated progression system.

Character leveling in Battleborn borrows another page from MOBAs. Gearbox wants players to hop into games with their friends no matter how much experience they have, so it is embracing a speedy leveling system that resets after each match. Dubbed the Helix, pulling up this leveling menu presents players with two choices that can be selected with a quick tap of a trigger button. These options generally augment existing abilities, like adding frost bullets that slow enemies or increasing jump height. Oftentimes these choices are at odds, presenting players with the choice of focusing on mobility or increased defense, for example. Level seven unlocks a powerful ultimate ability that can turn the tides of battle. It's a fresh take on first-person multiplayer matches, which in the case of shooters like Call of Duty can become imbalanced due to progression systems that imbue longtime players with over-powered unlocks.

Why Not Make Borderlands 3?

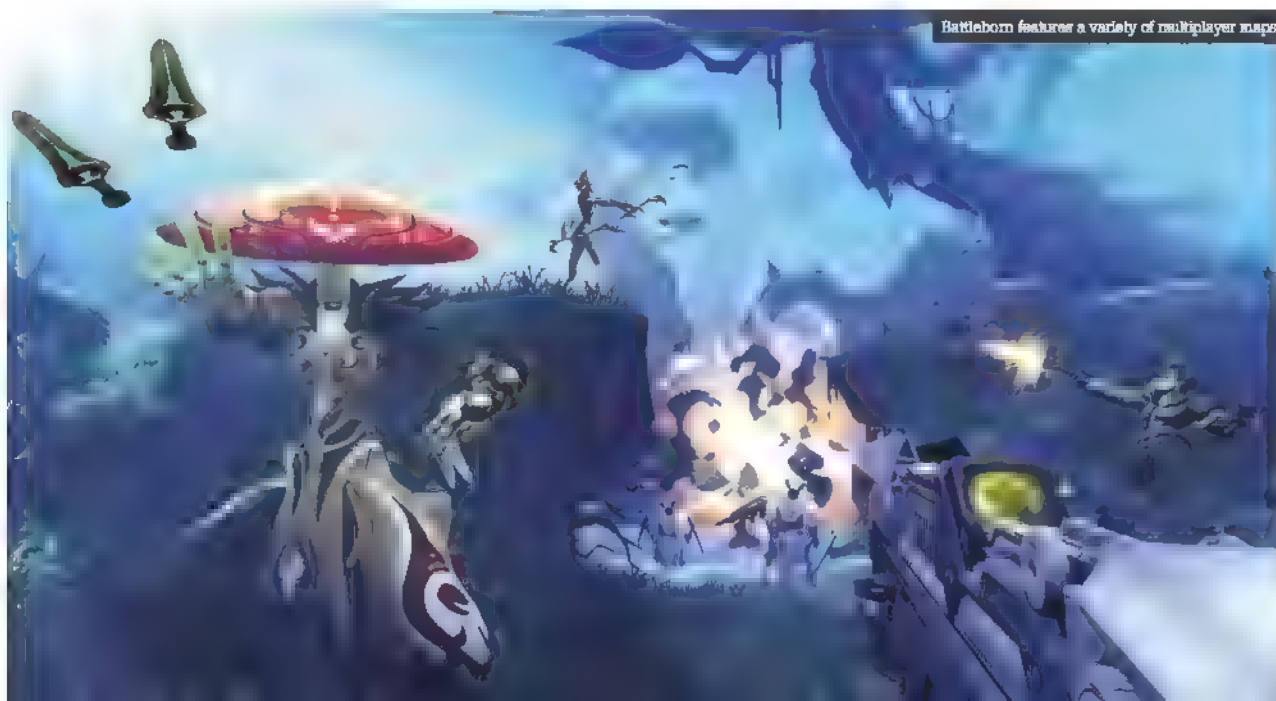
With 2K Australia hard at work on Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel for last-gen consoles, fans may be wondering why Gearbox isn't working on a big, bold in-house follow-up for the new consoles.

"There's a point where it's like, 'What should the next Borderlands be? Should there be another Borderlands, and what should it be?'" says Randy Pitchford, president of Gearbox Software. "We had that discussion and there was this weird mixed bag. On one level it's like, 'Woah.' If you're going to do something that's called Borderlands 3 and it's going to be done in this next-generation environment, there's a whole bunch of ideas that come around of what has to happen in order for that to live up to what that needs to be."

Gearbox rounded up the lingering ideas they had for filling in the Borderlands series' gaps—including telling the villainous Handsome Jack's backstory and flying the vault hunters to the moon—and entrusted 2K Australia with creating the game.

"[2K Australia's involvement] did two things," Pitchford says. "It took care of that real deep interest we had [in continuing the story], but it also changed the nature of the pressure of what Borderlands 3 had to be for us. If there's going to be a Borderlands 3 and what that would be. We imagine what that might be, and frankly it scared us. It's like, 'That's so crazy and so big that I'm not sure we can succeed.'"

Gearbox is by no means ruling out Borderlands 3 for this console generation, but for now the developer's interest is set squarely on making Battleborn the best it can be.



Battleborn features a variety of multiplayer maps





The fight spills over onto the Jannari home world of Tarpeet, another multiplayer map

and struggle. Some of it's for resources, some of it's personal, and everybody seems to be ignoring the big threat up north that's about to plow over the realm. We got to imagine in the future upcoming ideas of Martin's they're going to have to learn to put aside some of those differences and deal with that common threat. Thinking about that has been some really great inspiration."

For now, Gearbox isn't sharing any further details about the Varelsi's true intent and exact role in gameplay. However, we know the shadowy creatures play a part in multiplayer and the campaign, offering new enemies to fight beyond rival factions; we can only speculate that the unaligned Varelsi might act as neutral NPCs that players can attack and gain experience from in multiplayer. Given Gearbox's infatuation with enemies united by a common foe, the Varelsi also have the potential to disrupt matches with surprise attacks, prompting both sides to temporarily unite and distinguish the dark menace.

TWINKLE LITTLE STAR

Battleborn's unique multiplayer matches and five-player campaign are tied together through a story about multiple factions racing toward Solus, the last star burning in the universe. Every other solar body in the cosmos has been snuffed out by a dark, mysterious force called the Varelsi. This enigmatic threat steadily mounts as the factions fight amongst themselves for dominance over the last solar system. Each faction has its own unique band of champion fighters, called battleborn, united under their respective banners. Gearbox points to the kingdom-based warping of an immensely popular HBO series as inspiration, which also features a mysterious, indiscriminate murder machine primed to obliterate the temperamental factions.

"One of the really early campaign motivations for creating the factions was *Game of Thrones*," says creative director Randy Vaneil. "We're all huge nerds for *Game of Thrones* and have been for years. We love the fact that one of the things that [George R.R. Martin] did with that was he created characters that aren't unilaterally good or bad."

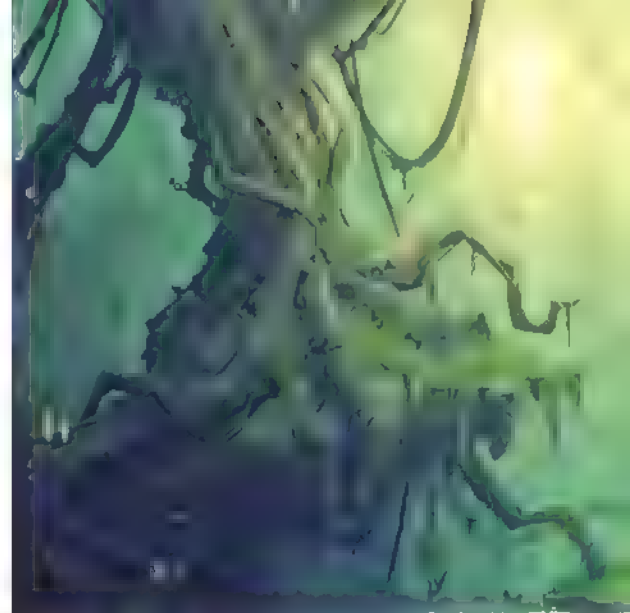
"There are a lot of reasons for these groups in the kingdom to fight

The factions vying for the last energy source in the universe are a motley bunch from different reaches of the galaxy. The rush towards Solus has brought together groups of space travelers that may have never crossed paths if all the stars weren't veiled in darkness. This collection of desperate travelers blows the creative doors for Gearbox wide open, allowing them to bring together factions that might not narratively gel well together.

On one hand you have the L.L.C. (Last Light Consortium), a technologically advanced group mainly composed of robots looking to make money off the war for Solus. These eccentric profiteers are decked out in custom Victorian Age-inspired styles, showcasing their wealth and elitist attitudes. The L.L.C. would fit nicely into any light-hearted sci-fi epic. But on the other hand you have the Elorid, a faction of wood and dwellers plucked straight from a high fantasy tale. These creatures worship the mysterious beauty of the universe, eager to keep it intact without needlessly exploiting its dwindling resources. Bow-wielding elves and bowler hat wearing butler bots may not blend well together on paper, but therein lies the strength of Battleborn.



A joint team assault on the gigantic S1 "Widow" spider sentry is necessary for gaining ground



The Factions Of The Solus System

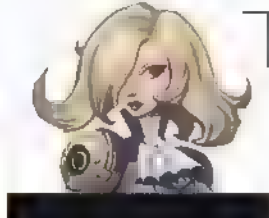
Meet the opposing groups of Battleborn, all fighting for living space in the universe's last solar system.



THE PEACEKEEPERS

Think of the Peacekeepers as the intergalactic space-police analog to America's role in world politics. Once a massive fleet of many ships, the fading stars and resulting lost planets have greatly diminished the Peacekeepers' presence. Lead writer Aaron Linde says the Peacekeepers are rounding up their remaining "Battlestar Galactica-sized fleet" and heading for Solus. The faction once relied on its vast military might to solve interstellar disputes, but now has to adapt in these dire times. Making matters worse, they settled late in the game on the semi-terraformed planet of Bliss, where the only vacant spots are covered in ice and snow.

"They can be draconian, they can be beauracratic, but at the end of the day they are a pure-hearted bunch," Linde says.



THE LAST LIGHT CONSORTIUM (L.L.C.)

This economic and technological powerhouse is a collective mostly made up of business-minded robots. The L.L.C. used to be an important extension of the Peacekeepers, but splintered off as the United Peacekeeping Republic's wealth and influence began to dwindle. Now unburdened of the Peacekeepers' stiff ethics, the L.L.C. is free to become filthy rich as the universe's biggest arms dealer. The L.L.C. supply chaotic battlefields with hundreds of minions and giant spider mechs, all from the comfort of their self-sustaining Arc fleet. The numerous robots and few organic members of the L.L.C. wear their wealth and elitism on their sleeves with top hats, monocles, canes, and more. Phoebe, the genius descendent of influential human L.L.C. engineers, even wears a Victorian Age hoop skirt.

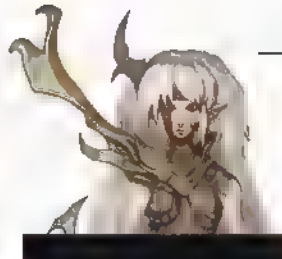
"They certainly don't want everyone to destroy themselves, because then they have no purpose," Linde says. "But they don't want people to stop dying, either, because that would cut into their profits."



THE ROGUES

This band of misfits is composed of the unaffiliated free peoples of the Solus System. The factions of Battleborn are all cosmetically unique from one another, but that diversity is taken to new extremes with the Rogues. This shady lot is a collection of mercenaries, smugglers, pirates, refugees, and other undesirables hailing from all corners of the universe and all races. True to their fractured nature, the Rogues call an asteroid belt at the far edge of the Solus System home. They settle on the larger chunks of planet in the Detritus Ring and sustain themselves by harvesting wayward scrap.

"If you take a bunch of civilizations, grab them all by the neck and shake the crap out of them, whatever falls loose is basically the Rogues," Linde says.



THE ELDRID

At first glance, the Eldrid look like an assortment of nature-loving fantasy tropes. But this collection of mushroom people, tall, bow-wielding elves, and more aren't quite what they seem. The Eldrid aren't only in tune with nature, they worship the mathematics and physics that drive the universe. This ancient society has made it their duty to observe, study, and archive the cosmos' mysteries in vast planet-sized knowledge depositories. The Eldrid practiced non-combative isolationism until the Varelsi wiped out their precious archives. Motivated into action by the Varelsi's interloping and the darkening stars, the Eldrid now take up arms to defend their lush, resource-rich home planet of Ekkunar against the encroaching factions.

"They see their roles in the universe as stewards of the cosmos, in so much as they believe the cosmos to be a grand engine, and they're an expression of that engine," Linde says. "It's their role in the universe to be the observers of that engine. They want to see it play out to its natural conclusion, and they've got front-row seats for it."



THE JENNERIT EMPIRE

In stark contrast to the Eldrid, the expansionistic Jennerit Empire is happy to bend nature to its will. This empire sought for years to unlock eternal life. The Jennerit eventually unlocked the key to immortality by setting their planet, Tempest, into a fixed orbit around the sun that allows them to continually harvest huge amounts of energy. This energy powers their empire and converts them into the Sustained beings that do not die of natural causes but can still be killed. The Sustained nobles hold themselves above the lower, mortal castes of the Jennerit Empire. While the faction isn't evil in intent, they don't mind wiping out planets to secure resources for their perpetually living elite. When a sun burns out, the Jennerit simply hutch their power-generating planet to a tremendous ship and set course for the next solar body. Presently, the Jennerit are heading for Solus.

"They're not quite as distasteful of genocide as most," Linde says. "They're kind of jerks."

A SOLAR MELTING POT

The race to the center of the universe has brought together a rogues gallery of quirky characters. Gearbox is taking the storytelling of Battleborn seriously, but the developer is putting gameplay and fun first when it comes to creating these wildly different interstellar travelers. If someone on the development team has a wacky idea for a new Battleborn, Gearbox bends the fiction to accommodate the newcomer.

"It's kind of like grown-up action figures," Varneil says. "You go to any game developer studio ever – and [Game Informer] is probably the same way – we put our little icons on our desks of the things we love. There's always something so powerful about characters. I've got my original Star Wars action figures' Darth Vader collector's case.

"They're very precious to me, but they're not in great condition. They've been buried in sand, molded in clay, and even burnt a little bit. I don't know how that happened. They've been shot with BB guns and everything else. But there's something so great about that experience we take from our childhood and into our adulthood and just rally around these characters. I think we're seeing a resurgence in that as adults in

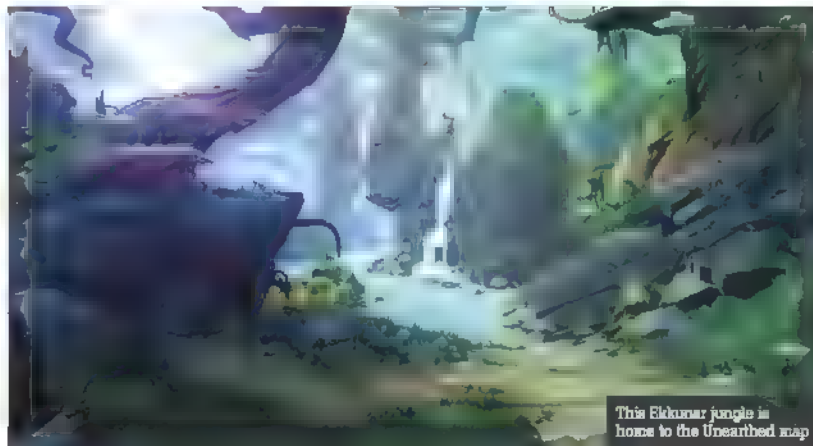
video games these days where we gravitate towards these games with strong characters."

The merciless Jennerit Empire is host to two archetypal warriors Gearbox wanted to get into the game yet fit into the story in meaningful ways. Rath is an obvious, bad-ass homage to the lightsaber-wielding villains of Star Wars. Early on Gearbox developers stumped themselves trying to decide if the sword-wielding killer should dual-wield a pair of energy-infused katanas or lug around a massive sword reminiscent of spiky-haired JRPG characters. The team asked themselves "Why not both?" and gave Rath access to three swords.

For the other announced Jennerit character, Caldarius, Gearbox started with a simple yet noble blueprint of "Jetpack Soldier." The team wanted an armored super soldier reminiscent of science-fiction heroes and giant robots from Japanese anime.

"Caldarius is the iconoclastic, Evangelion, Gundam, space marine, super suit type guy," Varneil says. "There's a little bit of Samus. A little bit of anime and several different things in him."

The Rogue faction is a catch-all collection of unaligned misfits



banding together so they don't get steamrolled by the other intergalactic exiles. Reyna Valera (alias: The Valkyrie) is the leader of the patchwork organization, supporting her allies on the battlefield with heals and buffs.

Another example of Battleborn's flexible universe is Montana, an elephant-sized, muscled, bubbly, chewing-commando with a Gatling gun. While Gearbox isn't commenting on the connection, Montana appears in the trailer for the studio's canceled *Furious Four* game. His official backstory isn't completely filled in yet, but Gearbox's willingness to emigrate Montana ignites the imagination regarding other possible crossovers. Publisher 2K has a robust catalog of possible characters that would be perfect fits for Battleborn's character-driven mayhem, not the least of which are Gearbox's own vault hunters from the *Borderlands* franchise.

"I won't say that we haven't talked about [including vault hunters], but it's really important that Battleborn is its own universe first and that it has its own tone and its own style and that it can grow its legs," Varnell says. "But it is a universe. It's a vast universe with who knows what. It's set way, way in the future and so I can't say that [vault hunter characters] would never happen..."

Don't let the dire stakes of Battleborn's cataclysmic premise fool you; Gearbox isn't eschewing the goofiness of *Borderlands* for a straight-faced space opera. The Battleborn are a colorful bunch brimming with creative insults and comments to sling alongside their attacks. For example, the aforementioned Montana unabashedly loves the thrill of battle with a childlike glee. Get him rolling on a kill streak and he enthusiastically bellows, "I just want everybody to know I'm having a great time," as he shreds enemies to bits with his Gatling gun.

Gearbox is taking advantage of all the mismatched characters on the



battlefield by implementing unique insults exchanged between specific matchups. Gun down Rath while playing Montana and you'll hear him brag about killing Dracula. Should Rath get revenge on Montana you might hear him slam all gun users as cowards too afraid to clash swords. The earthly elfin archer, Thorn, is the butt of a van-load of hippy jokes, including the promise of sprinkling granola on her grave and that she "smells like camping." If *Borderlands* is a rapid-fire barrage of hit-and-miss jokes, Battleborn feels more like laser-focused jabs that punctuate in-the-moment action.

"We have this humor that just sort of seeps out," Varnell says. "Early in the project we wanted it to be more serious, but as we got going it's just too hard not to get some of that humor and amusement back in there. I don't know that it's going to be the same type of tone of humor as in *Borderlands*, but it certainly has a little bit more of that light-hearted attitude."

Clever mockery and one-liners are great for making each moment more entertaining, but they're not the best vehicle for delivering an impactful narrative. Gearbox says the five-player co-op campaign unravels more of the story, including further insight on the warring factions and the mysterious Vares's threat.

"We love when players play together, and when players get in that play space together," Varnell says. "In a hero game -- a game that has a diverse amount of heroes and RPG loops and all that -- we want to give you a lot of different ways to play it. Certainly one of the ways we want you to play the game is with people against these galactic foes like the Vares and other robots and all sorts of other weird, wild creatures that we can dream up."

Further campaign details are scarce, except that Gearbox says it is being "built for replayability." Whether this means a short, fighting-game-esque series of co-op matches against A.I. or something more substantial to be determined. But from the sounds of it, Gearbox wants to check expectations that the campaign will be on par with *Borderlands*' 30-hour-plus adventures.



The Jannari Empire has spent centuries perfecting their flair for ominous, geometric architecture.





Meet The Heroic Battleborn

Gearbox hopes to have around 20 characters playable when the game releases. Meet nine of the revealed cast:



name: OSCAR MIKE
faction: Peacekeepers
This consummate space marine is unflinchingly earnest in his exuberant love of battle. But for all his noisy military jargon, he's not quick to discuss his past. There are many like Oscar Mike in the United Peacekeeping Republics who unquestioningly follow orders and deliver justice on the battlefield. He's what you've come to expect and appreciate in space-faring armed forces.

On the battlefield, Oscar Mike deals consistent, pestering medium-range damage with his rifle and grenades. Call of Duty fans will feel right at home with his grounded traversal and precise iron-sight aiming. His trusty frag grenade deals a blast of damage to enemies' health, while his pulse grenade drains the shields of foes in the area. His airstrike ultimate ability allows him to call down a barrage of laser-guided missiles great for quickly finishing off wounded opposition or dealing a wide swath of damage.



name: THORN
faction: Eldrid
This lithe, nimble elf lived on the planet of Elkkunar in the Solus System long before the rival factions appeared and started blowing things up. She honed her skills and knack for survival while growing up on the frontier, abilities that will be put to the test against warring groups and the tightening Vareisi stranglehold. She's a conflicted battleborn, wrestling with her non-aggressive upbringing as the mounting galactic threats force her into the fray.

Thorn is a fast, powerful mid-range glass cannon without a shield. Her curse magic allows her to charge up arrows for added damage the longer they're pulled back in her bow. Playing her efficiently requires patience, steady aim, and the wisdom for when to retreat into the shadows. Her generous jump allows her to leap out of enemies' view and reach heights many cannot. Thorn can knock a cluster of arrows for a spread shot and lay down an aura of corruption to hurt and slow down enemies. Her ultimate ability unleashes a deadly scawolf, a lightning-fast canine companion that hones in on and devastates targets.



name: RATH
faction: Jennerit
This seasoned swordsman has had unnaturally long experience with a blade thanks to the Jennerit Empire's immortal Sustaining process. Formerly among the elite guard for the Jennerit Empress, Rath abandoned the position when infighting broke out within the upper class. Rath is less interested in power struggles and more concerned with sticking his energy-imbued katanas through enemies on the frontlines.

Rath forgoes the clumsy firearms of the battlefield in exchange for three swords he handcrafted. He dual wields a pair of blades, slicing vertically and horizontally with presses of the trigger buttons. He raises his third sword, a massive blade reminiscent of Cloud Strife's buster sword, overhead when preparing for his catalytic smash attack. The resulting ground slam sends enemies into the air, setting them up for his short-range energy projectile fired when he crosses his blades. For Rath's ultimate ability, Dreadwind, he becomes a spinning whirlwind of death that can obliterate foes too slow to seek higher ground.



name: MARQUIS
faction: L.L.C.
This snappily dressed robot was formerly a butler for Phoebe's prestigious family of early Last Light Consortium founders. After centuries of loyal servitude, Marquis' programming has been swapped out with a new A.I. that has made him slightly more unhinged. Ever the gentleman, this robot still wears a bowler cap that he clutches to his metal skull as he tally-hos across the battlefield.

Uninterested in dirtying his hands with close combat, Marquis' fancy cane transforms into a sniper rifle for long-ranged gunplay. Players can aim down the cane-rifle and adjust the level of zoom using an analog stick. Marquis can deploy an explosive robot owl named Hoodini to patrol a small area and detonate on enemies that come too close. Marquis can also throw down another area-of-effect ability that slows time for anyone who steps through it, becoming easy fodder for his rifle. For his ultimate, Marquis charges up and fires a large single shot of deadly energy that glides across the battlefield, arcing electricity towards nearby enemies.

ENTERING THE GALACTIC FRAY

While the campaign remains a question mark, Gearbox is far enough along in development that we played a handful of multiplayer matches. We cut our teeth on the five-on-five, MOBA-inspired game mode, Incursion. The build was up and running on PCs, complete with a wired Xbox 360 controller and mouse/keyboard.

Forever drawn to the dark side, I chose Rath as my starting character. Teams start out in their base, watching as a door slowly lowers to reveal a lush, green jungle stretching into the distance. This map, Unearthed, is just one example of a variety of battlegrounds Gearbox has in the works.

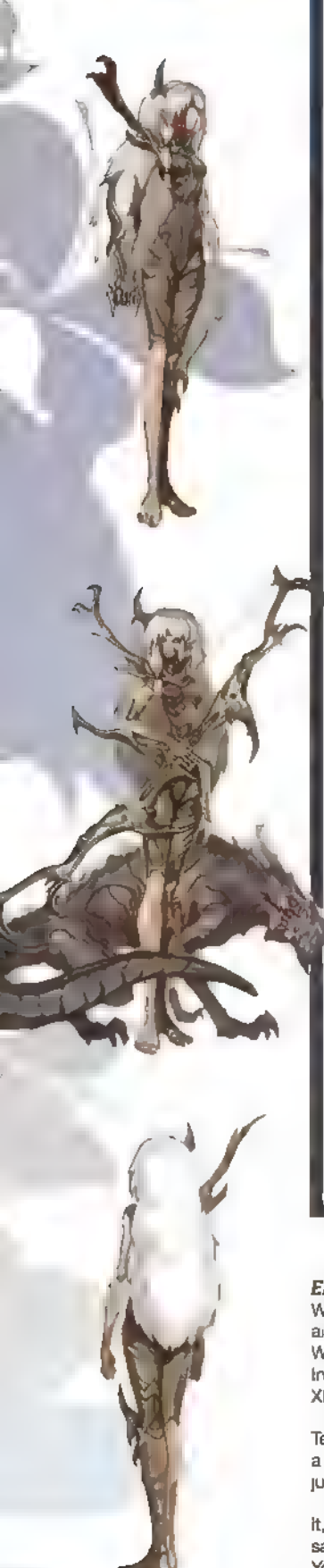
"Not only does it have that kind of *Avatar*-type of alien jungle feel to it, we wanted something that was a little more unique in ours," Varnell says. "We put in these massive golems from an ancient civilization. You're going to see them starting to a most come alive and power up

out of the jungle while spinning, lighting up, and glowing."

An onscreen minimap shows off the twisting, complex series of paths ahead. Players can also mark enemies once spotted on the battlefield, making them temporarily trackable on the map. For players who struggle in battles against more experienced players, Gearbox is implementing a variety of NPCs to tear up.

"One thing we realized is it kind of sucks when you're playing a competitive game and you're coming in and you're not at the top of your game," Pitchford says. "If you're a new player coming into Call of Duty right now, it completely sucks because everybody on your own team calls you every racial slur and sexual-orientation insult you can possibly imagine if you're not the best player possible. And then you can't do anything because the other team is so skilled."

"The fix for that is this really clever, in my opinion, concept of layering



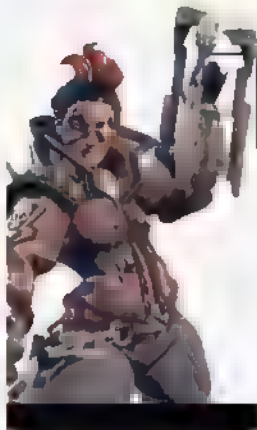


name: MONTANA

faction: Peacekeepers

The bubbegum-chewing Montana is four times the size of any battleborn revealed so far. This hulk's time serving the Peacekeepers has strained the ideals he once held dear, but his gusto for combat is alive and well. Montana's tremendous personality isn't just for his own amusement—he uses it as a tool to motivate his fellow brothers in arms.

Montana is an easy target on the field, but he can soak up a good deal of damage while peppering enemies with his humongous minigun. This beefy machine gun can be augmented to blast frost bullets that slow enemies and decrease overheating, or flame rounds that boost damage but cause the gun to seize up more quickly. While among the slowest of the battleborn, Montana can close the distance with a speedy dash that knocks enemies backward. For Montana's Transformation ultimate ability, he coats himself in steel, leaps into the air, and crashes down on a targeted area to deal damage as huge as his frame.



name: REYNA

faction: Rogues

The unaffiliated free peoples settled on the Detritus Ring asteroid belt and answer to no one, except sometimes Reyna. This faction's default commander leads the ragtag crew when dire circumstances require cooperation. Referred to some as Valkyrie, Reyna is a supportive leader that does all she can to keep her allies in healthy, fighting shape.

Reyna carries a pistol into battle in one hand and wears a laser-firing command glove on the other. Energy projectiles fired from her command glove whittle down enemies' shields, while her six-shooter chips away at their health. Her command glove also fires friendly energy blasts that home in on allies and give them a temporary over shield. On the flip side, she can fire another burst that locks in on and marks specified enemy targets. The priority-target status allows teammates to deal damage on the mark that bypasses shields. Reyna's ultimate ability lets her teleport to any ally on the battlefield to either heal a friend at the last minute or escape the fray.



name: MIKO

faction: Eldrid

This mushroom-headed creature hails from a planet of genetically identical fungus life forms. When the Eldrid discovered Miko they took the sentient fungal entity with them, thusly saving the being from the impending demise of the colony. When Miko speaks, it refers to itself as "we," continuing the legion-esque collective consciousness of its home world.

Like any hardy fungus, Miko is built for survival, complete with a generous health regeneration rate and multiple self-healing abilities. The creature is also an indispensable medic with decent speed and kunais for dealing mid-range damage. Miko can toss down a cloud of spores that deals damage to nearby foes and slows them down. The fungus' mushroom cap can be removed and thrown on the ground for its special ability, creating a healing aura that also damages enemies caught in its radius.



name: PHOEBE

faction: L.L.C.

Phoebe is the last in a long line of brilliant inventors that helped shape the highly profitable and technologically advanced Last Light Consortium. Her human traits, like emotion and mortality, make her an oddity among the robotic leaders of the L.L.C. The robotic butler-turned-sniper, Marquis, was formerly the loyal servant of Phoebe's family. However, Phoebe excused Marquis from his duties when alterations to his A.I. caused him to become unstable.

This brilliant aristocrat's presence on the battlefield is immediately noticeable. A set of floating rapiers hovers above her, controlled by some techno-wizardry or magic powers. Phoebe can stab and slash with her airborne blades, and completing a combo against a foe enhances her suite of other abilities. Her abilities let her teleport short distances or unleash a flurry of telekinetic rapier attacks directly in front of her. For her ultimate ability, Phoebe digs her heels in and prepares to parry an oncoming attack. If she deflects an incoming assault, she retaliates by directing her entire floating arsenal of rapiers towards the unfortunate soul.



name: CALDARIUS

faction: Jennerit

This armored, jetpack-wearing champion is a lower caste Jennerit that fought his way to the elite ranks of the immorta. Sustained Caldarius excelled in broadcasted gladiatorial tournaments and won the prize of eternal life when he emerged victorious. The Sustained made true to their promise and granted him immortality, but locked him away for a long, long time to put him in his place. After emerging from his prolonged detention, Caldarius is ready to take out his pent-up aggression in battle.

Caldarius is a hunter-killer that can handily chase down targets, dash in for an assassination, and retreat into the air via his jetpack before anyone can retaliate. He wields a submachine gun and a sword for up-close damage, which become even deadlier when combined with his blinding flash grenade. The character's abilities aren't set in stone, but Gearbox envisions an ultimate attack where Caldarius slams into the ground from above to deal a huge splash of damage.

the competitive game on top of the player-versus-environment game. When we talk about the minions in *Minion Robotics*, there are all these war machines that are fighting and when you play the PvE game you realize there's a mission."

The enemy team's robotic minions encroach on our defensive spider bot before I encounter another player-controlled Battleborn. I use these short, admittedly adorable little machines as whetstones to get a feel for Rath's swordplay. Plates of armor dent and fall off of the minions as I get used to the rhythm of his basic dual sword swipes.

One ability causes Rath to draw back his massive broadsword overhead and pull the camera out to third person. A targeting aura projects onto the ground, allowing me to aim a strike that smashes into the ground and sends enemies into the air. Mincing defenseless airborne minions is a devilishly fun time, and it's enough to level up.

The Helix leveling system makes choosing Rath's skill augments and new abilities quick and easy, which is important for staying alive on the battlefield. Two columns of available upgrades appear on screen with the push of a button, which can be quickly selected by pressing the left or right trigger. Rath deals devastating melee damage, but inexperienced players (me) run the risk of getting mobbed by the opposing team. After several deaths, I steer Rath away from Helix upgrades that increase power—like an attack boost when health is low—and toward more defensive perks like increased movement speed when my shields bust. While I fail to become a slicing 'n' dicing powerhouse, I help out the team by destroying the enemy's minions. This nets our own minions far out around the opposing spider robot, wear down its shields, and deal some damage. It's a close match, but we lose when the winner is determined by point totals after the 30-minute mark.



The deadly Varelai attack Montana and his teammates in the wilderness of Ekkunar



I find better luck in the next round as Thorn. The elven huntress starts off as a fairly unremarkable bow wielder with slightly increased mobility and a slow rate of fire. Not as immediately deadly as Rath, she becomes a lithe predator on her trek to level 20. Drawing back her bow charges up an arrow infused with curse magic. The longer you charge it, the stronger it gets. Her bow isn't as user-friendly as a rifle, but getting a feel for the arrow's arc and punking off big chunks of enemies' health is satisfying. Like Rath, players can choose skills that either boost her ability to stay alive or deal extra damage. In this case, I choose to increase Thorn's jump distance and turn her melee attack into a Force push-like backward boost.

"Bunny-hopping in shooters has always been an issue, but with her we just embrace it," Varneil says. "It's part of how we balance the character. It's how she survives without a shield and moves around this wilderness."

Suddenly I'm leaping through previously inaccessible breaks in the brush, soaring across elevated areas that once required careful platforming, and bunny hopping out of harm's way when things get hairy. Toss in her area-of-effect curse aura and multi-arrow blast and I'm taking down enemies left and right.

Racking up kills isn't a guaranteed path to victory. My team won matches when we focused on protecting our marching minions, working together to take down enemy spider bots, and barking out enemy locations. Support characters like Miko also have vital roles on the

battlefield. Montana may be powerful, but his tremendous character model makes him an easy target at a distance. Team him up with the sentient mushroom medic, Miko, and you've got a combo that could give the opposing forces a tough time. Even better, Miko can steer away from heal-focused Helix augments and instead focus on boosting allies' attack power.

Battleborn's diverse characters look and act like they're ripped from a variety of genres, but even more impressive is the fact that they all control like they're from different games. Oscar Mike, the consummate space marine, is the perfect starting point for players more accustomed to modern shooters like Call of Duty. His iron-sight aiming, grenade selection, and airstrike special ability make him a familiar yet satisfying point of entry. On the other end of the spectrum, lining up first-person sword slashes with Rath feels more like timing out combos in a fighting game. Launching an enemy into the air with Rath's ground smash and executing a mid-air finisher is just as satisfying as nailing a flying knockout in Street Fighter II.

A clean, striking art style unites the charismatic collective under the guidance of Gearbox veterans and a visual-effects legend. Art director Scott Kester, one of the developers responsible for Borderlands' unique comic-book veneer, returns for this project. He's joined by effects director Michel Gagne, a film animation-effects veteran with decades of experience including *The Iron Giant*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, the PS3 game *Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet*, and much more. His experience translates perfectly into Battleborn's clean visuals, accentuated with swirling puffs of smoke and explosions that burst with the personality of their corresponding characters. The colorful, elegant visuals aren't just attractive, they're downright necessary for reading the chaotic flow of battle.

AN EXPANDING BATTLEFIELD

Gearbox wants all Battleborn characters to start matches at level one to ensure players can match up with their friends anytime, but there are plans for meaningful meta progress as well. A handful of characters are available from the start, but you must work through the cooperative campaign and multiplayer matches to unlock the rest. Gearbox isn't going into specifics regarding how many battleborn will be available from the start, but hopes to include around 20 on retail discs. Similar to the *Borderlands* series or MOBAs, Pitchford suggests that more characters will become available as DLC down the road.

Players also earn in-game currency through playing matches and performing well, which can be used to purchase alternate skill





Each hero has multiple build options, allowing players to customize their character to suit their play style

upgrades and character skins. Every battleborn comes with his or her own stock Helix skill path, but purchasing additional abilities lets you customize what powers become available on the path to level 20. Character skins offer a unique look that make your battleborn stand out on the battlefield. Gearbox isn't sure whether duplicate characters will be permitted on a single team, but purchased skins could help differentiate teammates. I spotted a "Dark Elf" skin for Thorn as one example of an alternate aesthetic.

"We want this to become a hobby for us and for our players, where we're always developing our player's profile," Pitchford says. "The idea of Bad Ass Ranks in *Borderlands 2* is [small] in comparison to the ambitions of what this could be."

While not as flashy as new duds or abilities, Gearbox is also taking advantage of the powerful data-collecting tech this new console generation affords to help shape the battlefield to players' needs. For *Borderlands 2*, Gearbox subtly tweaked under-the-hood balance metrics without big annoying updates by logging them into the Shift network. Gearbox plans on continuing this trend with dedicated servers, allowing the team to adjust Battleborn's delicate balance in response to fan feedback and information collected from thousands of matches. Is

Rath's deadly whirlwind attack making players rage-quit? With the new tech, Gearbox can adjust the experience faster than ever.

The last console generation was a rollercoaster for Gearbox. The inventive *Borderlands* series solidified the studio as a creative powerhouse, but the team's struggle to deliver on existing licenses smudged its track record. Gearbox is charging into the new generation with an exciting, original project that's already a ton of fun at this early point in development. Gearbox is back to doing what it does best: making the game nobody asked for but everyone should want.

"Battleborn is the biggest thing we've ever done by a long shot," Pitchford says. "It's the most ambitious thing we've ever done. We have more energy, more people, and more mindshare dedicated to this effort than we've ever had for any project ever. As a matter of fact, I think that by the time it ships, the amount of effort that's gone into Battleborn will be greater than the first 10 years of Gearbox's existence all added together." ♦

Learn more about Battleborn via our month of exclusive online features, including extended hands-on impressions, extensive video interviews, and more detailed breakdowns of the first playable characters, at www.gameinformer.com/battleborn



Players can spend currency earned on the battlefield to teleport further out on the battlefield from home base





E3

2014

Hot 50

The PlayStation 4 and Xbox One are just starting to come of age, which means publishers and developers finally have a firm grasp of how to leverage the increased horsepower of these systems. That expertise came into focus at E3, where a deep lineup of impressive titles convinced naysayers that console gaming is here to stay. Nintendo also gave the Wii U a much-needed jolt of enthusiasm, and even though we didn't see as many 3DS titles as we would have liked, a couple managed to pique our interest. As always, PC gamers have plenty to look forward to as well.

The industry still may be short on original new concepts, but fans of all platforms should have no shortage of quality titles to choose from as we move through the rest of 2014 and into 2015. Here are the 50 games at the show that impressed the Game Informer staff the most.





Evolve

The Kraken captivates E3 attendees

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PC ★ Style: 1-Player Shooter (5-Player Online) ★ Publisher: 2K Games ★ Developer: Turtle Rock Studios ★ Release: October 21

Evolve's asymmetrical four-versus-one multiplayer matches have been engaging from the first time we laid hands on the game for our February cover story, but we've been eager to see how new player-controlled hunters and monsters would shake up the shooter's intriguing mix of cooperative and competitive gameplay. Last issue we showcased four new hunters, which, like the first tier of human characters, all have their own unique weapons and abilities. However, Turtle Rock Studios was keeping one more big reveal up its sleeve for this year's E3, in the form of the massive, Cthulhu-esque monster called the Kraken. Like the Goliath before it, Evolve's newest metamorphic beast didn't disappoint during our hands-on demo.

The Kraken provides a whole different play style and design aesthetic for Evolve's would-be monster players.

Whereas Goliath's anthropomorphic frame was designed to feel familiar to anyone who has ever seen a King Kong or Godzilla movie, Kraken's body is a mess of tentacles and talons, and its face splits apart below the eyes into a long gaping maw full of deadly teeth. The differences between Goliath and Kraken extend to the gameplay as well; Goliath is a melee-focused brute, whose thick skin and sheer power allow the creature to thrive in close-quarter encounters against the opposing team. While Kraken can bound across the ground using its arms and legs, pressing the jump button allows it to float in the direction the player is aiming. This ability to hover above the battlefield makes it perfect for ranged combat. Kraken isn't as fundamentally tough as Goliath, so gliding around the outskirts of combat and using the verticality of the environment to evade the hunters is highly recommended.

Kraken's abilities also facilitate ranged

combat. Aftershock allows Kraken to smash into the ground, dealing major electrical damage to nearby enemies, but the rest of the squid-like creature's abilities can be performed from a distance, allowing Kraken to stay airborne while on the offensive. Banshee mines are electrical orbs that slowly target nearby enemies after deployment and explode on contact. Vortex sends out a directed shockwave that blasts hunters off their feet, dealing minor damage in the process. Finally, lightning strike summons several electrical charges that slowly converge on the player's reticle and send down massive lightning bolts from the heavens. Thanks to Evolve's recent skill-point redesign, the player controlling the monster can upgrade each ability up to three times when staging up, allowing them to spread their points out evenly or focus on maxing out a single attack or two.

Our demo on the E3 show floor pits me against two of my fellow editors and two

other journalists. At the advice of a developer from Turtle Rock, I place my initial skill points in the Kraken's ranged abilities, leaving aftershock locked for later down my evolutionary timeline.

I spend the first few minutes of the match getting accustomed to controlling the Kraken and feeding on wildlife to level up. The new monster's hover ability provides a good view of the map and allows me to effortlessly glide between rocky outcrops and up canyon walls. While the Kraken's spiky tentacles do a decent amount of damage against the random beasts I come across, my vortex attack proves invaluable; a single blast of the ability knocks down the A.I.-controlled beasts, allowing me to finish them off, feed, and be on the move again in a matter of seconds. It serves as good practice for the player-controlled hunters who are stalking me from the shadows somewhere out in the sprawling, open environment.



While the Kraken is capable of moving on the ground, you're better off using its hover ability to float above the battlefield.

I manage to stage up to level two before encountering my pursuers for the first time. Daisy, Maggie's bloodhound-esque Trapjaw companion, is the first to locate me, and the rest of the pack is hot on her heels. I make a concerted effort to stay out of range of Hyde's flamethrower to avoid becoming fried calamari. I alternate between my lightning strike and banshee-mine attacks, while occasionally using my vortex ability to keep my foes separated and blast them off of ledges. When the squad's support member – a bipedal robot named Bucket – lays down a few autonomous sentry guns that add even more firepower to the fight, I decide it's time to tuck tentacle and run. I disorient my foes with one final lightning strike, then dash off through the air.

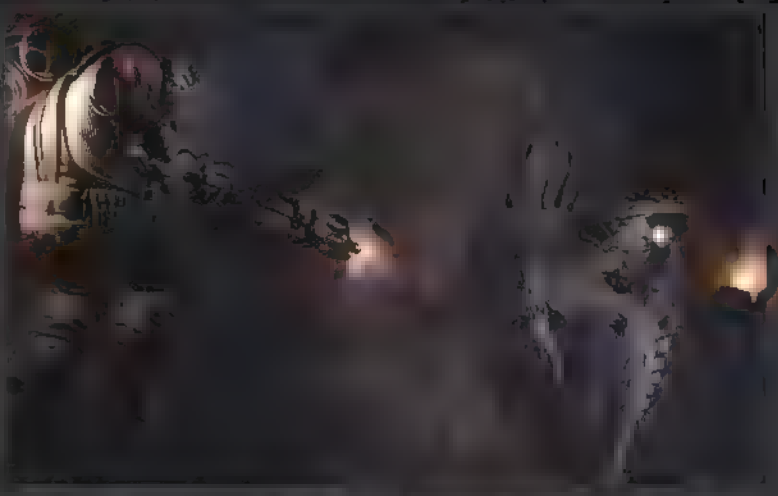
I stay on the move and recover by feasting on more animals. Distinct behaviors start to emerge as I encounter different creatures; some species are aggressive and attack me on sight, while others are territorial and fight me for the tasty corpses I've worked so hard to attain. I do a poor job of avoiding nesting flocks of Bat Rays, which kick up into the sky and alert the hunters to my presence. I wouldn't find out until after the match that my opponents were running into their own problems with planet Shear's native wildlife, which gave me enough time to evolve into Kraken's third and final stage.

I use the extra skill points to max out my lightning strike and vortex abilities, then set out for a final showdown. I pick a fight by heading to the map's dam and attacking its large electrical generator;

destroying it is an alternate win condition for the monster, so the squad of hunters double-times it to my location. However, I have no desire to squeak out an objective-based victory.

The fight that ensues is as epic as any video game boss fight, as the tide of battle shifts between our opposing teams. Bucket's sentry guns once again shower me in a hail of gunfire, and I must hover around the buildings of the facility for cover. The support character continually pelts me with rockets from his guided missile launcher, whittling away at my shield while Hyde hurls toxic grenades at me and compounds the damage with fire from his minigun. Despite the chaos, I focus my attention squarely on the squad's medic, Lazarus; he has the ability to raise his teammates from the dead, so even if I do manage to kill off one of my opponents, I'd have to guard the corpse as long as he's alive.

At times the coordinated attacks of the hunters feels overwhelming, but the newly formed crew sports a fatal flaw; they have a tendency to stick in a tight pack when on offense, which allows me to swallow them up with my maxed-out lightning strikes. Eventually I kill off Lazarus, and the tide permanently shifts in my favor. Confident in my lead, I slam down onto Hyde with my aftershock attack, and finish him off with melee strikes. Bucket and Maggie put up a noble fight, but with their efforts divided and reinforcements still a minute away, they don't stand a chance. After finishing them off with punishing combos from



my overpowered abilities, I destroy the generator for good measure, bringing a decisive end to the match.

The play-style differences between the Kraken and the Goliath were striking, but I was also impressed by how much the tactics vary between hunters. Lazarus' revival ability was a serious thorn in my side, but Val's medgun would have let her heal teammates from a distance, allowing the pack to split up and avoid my stronger attacks. While Bucket's sentry guns dished out a good deal of damage, Hank's orbital barrage could've punished me for lingering in one spot for too long, a bad habit I caught myself doing more than once. I can't imagine what kind of advanced strategies and ability combinations veteran players will come up with,


but I'm looking forward to discovering more for myself.

The compelling match-ups of Evolve's hunt mode drew massive crowds to 2K's booth all week during E3, right up until the close of the show. Our hands-on time with the Kraken and new hunters gave us another tantalizing glimpse at the amount of variety and replayability Turtle Rock is striving to attain, and earned Evolve our Best In Show award. All that's left now is the long road to October 22, which will undoubtedly be paved with more exciting reveals. ★ **Jeff Marchiafava**

Find out what our match was like from the hunters' perspectives and get more hands-on impressions by reading our Evolve Editor Roundtable at gameinformer.com/mag.



The Kraken's banshee mines creates floating energy orbs that seek out players and explode on impact.



The Kraken can glide effortlessly between rocky outcrops, so trapping him with the Mobile Arena is imperative.

The Fall Guys

Turtle Rock Studios just isn't talking about Evolve's additional gameplay modes, single-player content, or progression systems. However, the developer did confirm the final number of playable characters. Evolve will ship with a total of twelve hunters, three monsters, and over a dozen maps. Those who pre-order the game will receive a free fourth monster. The DLC sometime after launch. "Given the developer's enthusiasm for the game and experience creating quality expansions for Left 4 Dead, we're guessing that will only be the beginning."

Batman: Arkham Knight

The Batmobile injects new elements into the Arkham formula

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PC ★ Style: 1-Player Action ★ Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive ★ Developer: Rocksteady Studios ★ Release: 2015



In the last issue, we showed you the first look at the Batmobile's transformation into battle mode. Now, we're back to dig deeper.

We return to Ace Chemicals to stop villain Arkham Knight's hostage scheme. In a lengthy hands-on demo of the PlayStation 4 version. In a traditional Arkham game you'd swoop in and trade off between combat and stealth sections until you reached the end. For this mission, and for much of the game, the Batmobile is an integral part of the gameplay.

A wide chasm is all that's left of the bridge that led to the plant. You drive Batman's signature ride to the edge and a small prompt appears. Tap R1 and

a tow cable launches out. You jam on reverse and the Batmobile burns rubber, bending the edge of the busted bridge back to form a ramp. Holding down the triangle button fires up the jet engine in the back, allowing the Batmobile to charge up some instant speed to jump the gap instead of having to back up and gain momentum the old-fashioned way.

This standard pursuit mode feels like a typical fast car, however it's not the best for the tight corridors of the chemical plant. By holding down the left trigger, it changes to battle mode instantly, revealing one of the most maneuverable vehicles I've ever controlled. Not only does it work great for battles, it's nimble enough to scoot along narrow, twisting bridges.

The stralling ability is perfect for little tweaks necessary to line up with a ramp for a big jump or to simply turn around.

The Batmobile's maneuverability comes in handy for vehicular battles as well. Enemy trucks line up green lasers that change to red once they've targeted you. At this point, it's easy to tap a button to perform a quick dash move and dodge the barrage. Offense includes infinite-ammo machine guns and a rocket launcher that runs on a cooldown. If you connect enough shots without getting hit, you can unleash a barrage of homing missiles to finish off several foes at once. Higher-powered enemy vehicles are invulnerable to Batman's machine gun "bullets" so you'll have to build up the

more powerful shots to take them down.

In regards to these seemingly deadly munitions, the Batmobile auto-detects when you're targeting a human and switches over to non-lethal rounds. These have a faint smoke trail as they fly through the air and knock humans over with a satisfying thud. Batman can even run people over safely. When you bump into people, the entire Batmobile turns blue with electricity and the guys fall over stunned. It's a stretch, but I'd rather have that than enemies constantly jumping out of the way like grasshoppers.

If you feel like getting your hands dirty, the Batmobile also helps out with melee combat. Once you build up a combo, a prompt appears onscreen for some



Battle mode handles like a dream



A mass of troops and vehicles guards Ace Chemicals

vehicular assistance. If you mash the two face buttons simultaneously, Batman uppercuts the foe into the air and the Batmobile's stunner cannon targets and blasts him like a clay pigeon.

The Batmobile isn't all offense. It also comes into play during puzzles. At one point, you blow up a wall with explosive gel to access the next hostage and there's some hot steam blasting out of a pipe underneath. At the top of a button you can control the Batmobile remotely, clamp the towrope onto a pipe further up the line, and yank it off to prevent steam from making it to Batman's position.

Once you rescue the hostage, he doesn't just say "Thanks, Batman" and somehow mysteriously teleport back to the police waiting back on the other side of the bridge as in standard video game logic. You must summon the Batmobile to your position and the entire back end opens up, revealing a concealed passenger seat (There's no room in the main cockpit for civilians, c'mon). Then you drive him over and personally drop him off. Rocksteady says this seat comes into play for enemies as well, so maybe we'll see some bounty missions back in the main city area.

Batman: Arkham Knight has slipped into 2015, but if the extra development time is going to produce more highly polished, inventive gameplay than I can sit outside Gotham City limits for as long as it takes. ★ **Bryan Vore**





03

Destiny

First step into a larger world

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 ★ Style: Online Multiplayer Shooter ★ Publisher: Activision ★ Developer: Bungie ★ Release: September 9

Bungie released a public alpha version of *Destiny* to coincide with E3, giving players their first chance to extensively explore one of the game zones, several missions, the social hub, and competitive play. Depending on how you looked at it, it was either an impressive slice of pre-release fun, or a maddening tease that makes September seem even further away.

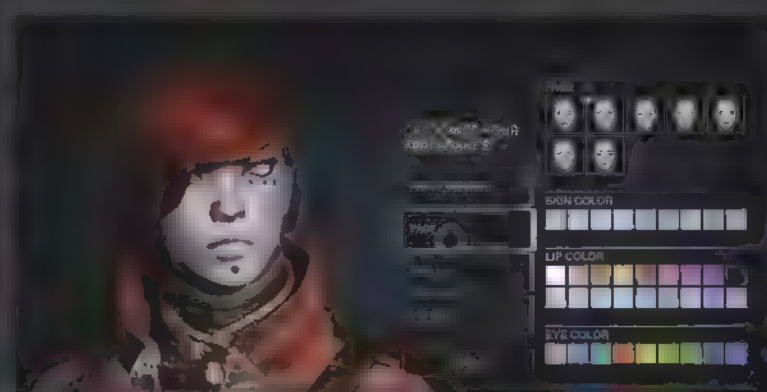
While limited in scope, the alpha proved a worthwhile proof of concept, making good on many of the ambitious promises made so far. Equally important (but less acknowledged), these several days of game access helped prove that the tech works. Player meet-ups, matchmaking, and public events all worked seamlessly on PS4, and the servers remained rock-solid for this early test.

One of the most enlightening aspects of this early version was a glimpse at the Tower—the social and vendor hub that beats at the heart of *Destiny*. Home of the player character guardians, the Tower is the place that feels most akin to a traditional MMO. Players move around in third-person with their helmets off to showcase their character's appearance. Genre standards like a post office and a bank vault allow the sending of messages and the storing of items to pass between different characters on your account. Numerous vendors are scattered throughout the Tower, offering weapons and armor that help move your character up the power ladder, but also cosmetic

vanity items like new ships and personal vehicles (think *Star Wars* speeder bikes). The majority of sellers take the primary currency of the game, called glimmer, but others require special marks earned in the competitive or high-end cooperative missions. I also like the idea of the bounty board found at the Tower; players can select several of these bounties to be active at any one point, and each offers rewards for objectives like killing a large number of enemies without dying, or completing a requisite number of precision kills.

The solo and cooperative content I played brought me back to the now-familiar environs of *Old Russia* on *Earth*. While the locale has been the main area showcased since the game's announcement, it was enlightening to finally get to explore the zone freely. The area is an entertaining mix of large outdoor open arenas and dimly lit underground corridors. In between major story missions or strikes, players can pick up simple missions from beacons scattered around the zone, which serve as incentives to move you around the area to interesting combat sites.

At any time, friends can join up into a fireteam and explore the game together. The story missions and cooperative strikes offer more structured content, with included narrative moments, checkpoints, and bosses to confront. The small number of these missions in the alpha were little more than a taste of the broader experience that's been promised



for the full game, but I enjoyed the battles. As for storytelling, too little was on display in these missions to draw any conclusions about how strong or weak it might be.

The competitive Crucible mode lets you jump your character from PvE to PvP with ease. Match-made games allowed me to explore two distinct maps, but only one game mode: Control. This six-on-six style of play should be familiar to even the most casual competitive multiplayer fan; three flags must be controlled to earn points, and additional points are gained for taking out players. The Earth-based "Rusted Lands" offers a tightly clustered complex of ruined buildings to fight over, where control is often determined by the team that is most adept at capitalizing on the vertical movement modes to reach elevated perches.

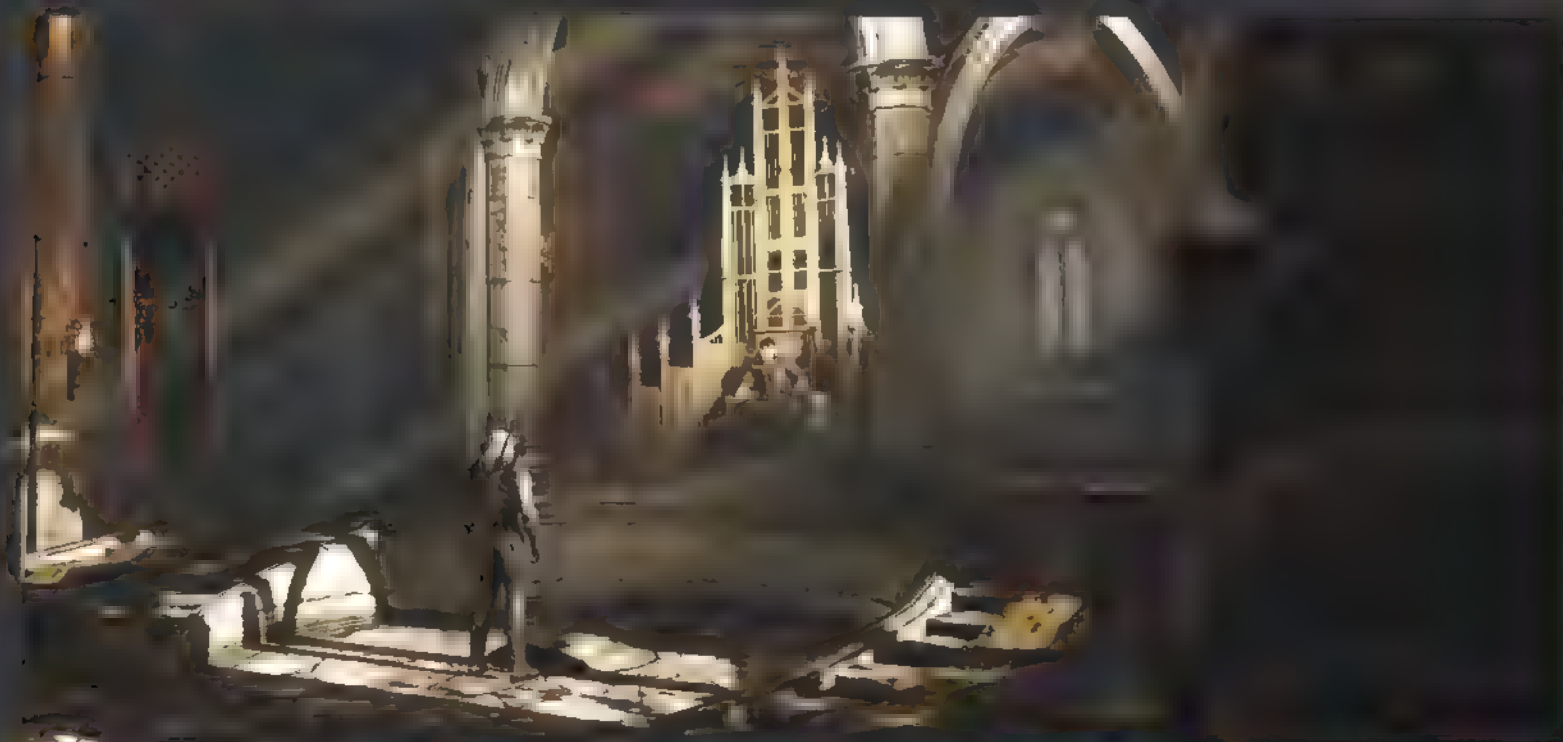
Earth's moon is the sight of "First Light," a large lunar facility with plenty of room on the periphery for vehicle combat. Competitive play feels like a natural evolution of Bungie's *Halo* framework, but the addition of super abilities, more varied weaponry, and vertical movement actions ensure that everyone is going to have to learn some new tricks.

The alpha is a small slice of the overall game, and it leaves some important questions unanswered. Plot and characters remain almost completely under wraps, high-level play is yet to be detailed, and the other worlds of the solar system remain virtually invisible. However, I can say with authority that what I played was enough to convince me of *Destiny*'s potential, and I'm already thinking about what my next character for the summer beta might be. ★ **Matt Miller**

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

Going all out for Geralt's last hurrah

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 - Xbox One - PC ★ Style: 1-Player Role-Playing ★ Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive ★ Developer: CD Projekt RED ★ Release: February 24



The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt is bittersweet. On one hand, CD Projekt RED is giving its all to the project and it shows – the visuals are breathtaking and the choice-and-consequence storytelling is strong as ever. On the other hand, this is protagonist Geralt of Rivia's final adventure. Thankfully, he's going out like a witcher should. CD Projekt RED is providing him the biggest stage possible: an open-world game with opportunities and choices around each corner.

What's immediately striking is how alive the world feels. As Geralt walks the streets of Novigrad, the largest city in the game, he runs into children fighting over who will play the witch they pretend to burn. These exchanges feel authentic, and the NPC chatter is cleverly written. The world appears boundless, with towers, bridges, and the sea visible in the distance. This isn't merely decoration; CD Projekt RED says if you see something, you can interact with it, often revealing hidden paths and treasures. In our live demo, Geralt continues on a quest to find the "ashen-haired woman." Longtime fans should have an inkling of who he's pursuing.

The basic premise and gameplay remain unchanged, but Geralt looks quicker on his feet. He still has a silver sword for monsters and a steel one to fell humans, alongside his handy set of



magical powers. His witcher senses still prove fruitful for finding enemy traces, like footprints to keep him on the right trail. Now here is Geralt's access to a crossbow to help him shoot down flying enemies like harpies.

Geralt soon hits his first obstacle: A monster child referred to as a godling has information but lost his voice. Geralt must restore it if he wants answers, so he follows the godling. Through the murky swamps, Geralt encounters drowners, dead bodies that guards dispose of by throwing them in the water. Now they've come back to pester anyone who goes through their territories.

Geralt restores the godling's voice, who then leads him to an elderly woman

She can channel spirits for three different women, beautifully showcased on a tapestry. These women hold the key to the ashen-haired woman. We must fulfill a favor first, which leads Geralt to a man who needs him to destroy a tree monster that's cursing his village. At this point, the mission is starting to become dependent on fetch quests, but the next event turns things around by bringing what we know and love about The Witcher. As we're about to slay the tree monster, it pleads for us not to kill it saying, "Only I can save the children."

On our way, we passed an orphanage with children playing outside. At this moment, Geralt's path branches. Can we trust this creature? It could just be saying

this to save its life, but what if it's telling the truth? In the demo, Geralt chooses to kill it. After our quest, we go back to the man, who slices off his ear like it's no big deal, giving us what the spirits wanted.

When Geralt brings the ear back, the beautiful ladies from the tapestry transform into their true selves. Let's just say they're more grotesque than the pretty picture we previously saw. We then get a glimpse of the ashen-haired woman, who fans will recognize as Triss, except her hair is now gray. That's enough to leave us intrigued, but as the demo closes, we see the impact of the choice to kill the tree. The orphanage has disappeared; the children are nowhere in sight.

★ *Kimberly Wallace*



No Man's Sky

Hello Games' project shines at Sony's press conference

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 (TBA) ★ Style: 1-Player Action/Adventure ★ Publisher: Hello Games ★ Developer: Hello Games ★ Release: TBA

In our feature on No Man's Sky last issue, we spoke at length with managing director Sean Murray and teased what we knew about what would happen at its E3 showing. The game received a marquee spot in the middle of Sony's press conference with Murray appearing onstage to showcase two video clips and announce the game's "console debut" on PS4. The presentation made major waves and stood out against Sony heavy hitters like Uncharted 4: A Thief's End and Bloodborne. In fact, in an Informal Game Informer twitter poll, No Man's Sky came in number one as game of the show.

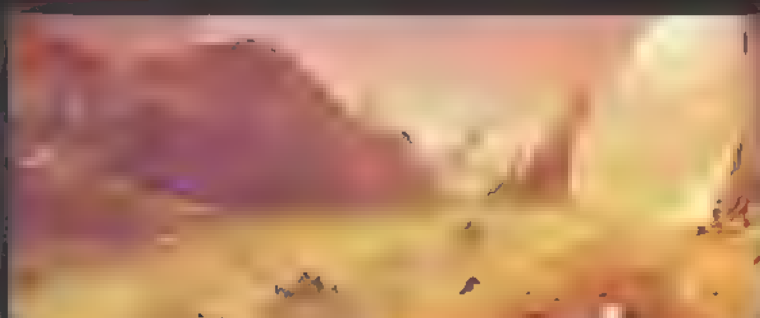
For those unfamiliar with the concept, No Man's Sky starts every player on their own unique planet at the edge of the galaxy. The team has created an entire procedurally generated galaxy to explore, brimming with endless variations of terrain, creatures, and plant life. The general goal is to journey to the center of the galaxy in your spaceship toward ever-increasing danger and rewards.

We caught a real-time demo with the team to see a little more of the location

shown in the primary trailer. We start in a dim cave full of stalactites, rock formations, and strange vegetation. A bright, sunny landscape awaits outside. We look back and see another opening about a kilometer away. Heading outside, we see abundant wildlife consisting of everything from deer to massive dinosaurs. A group of ships zip across the sky above, sending the wildlife scattering.

We hop in a nearby ship and soar into the sky toward a planet hanging in the distance. A.I. wingmen (a later upgrade) fly to our aid as we blast up asteroids. A convoy of freighters and fighters drops out of hyperspace nearby and we peacefully cruise through it in the opposite direction. We pass through the atmosphere of a barren, red planet, and set down for a landing.

At the close of the demo we peppered Murray with questions, and it's clear he's heard them all before. "Most of you grew up with Mario and SNES and Genesis, and my world for so long was like missions and quests and levels and progression and stats and rank and story and narrative. That was really important to me," Murray says. "I didn't



like Minecraft and DayZ, but I've started to come to terms with it. I find it super interesting now and I try and convince everyone to play those games because the industry's swung really far in this direction. At E3, teenagers come running up and they're super excited. They've grown up with those kinds of games and they don't ask any of those questions. It's only old farts like me who are like 'Who are you?' and 'How many weapons?' They expect to just be landed in that universe and just go crazy and do whatever they want. They find The Last of Us, which I love, to be confusing because there's so little choice."

In gameplay and footage shown so far, we've seen many ships and several structures created by intelligent life, but players shouldn't expect bustling cities and widespread civilization. "The early Star Wars films, the original three, that's what I think of — Tatooine and things like that, the feeling of the frontier," Murray says. "It was dangerous and exciting. And then I think of the more recent films that I personally found less interesting. They had a lot of cities and they had the senate and they had the council, less what sci-fi is to me, this exciting kind of thing. That's what we want, this real feeling of exploration."



Surprise of Your Own Game

"I've had the strangest conversations of any game I have ever worked on, where things happen that you absolutely don't expect to happen," says managing director Sean Murray. "I was in some caves and found some glowing bacteria, and I didn't think that the planet I was on could support life. And then I found it really deep down there was actually some water in this cave and there was some bacteria growing there. It's not a great story, but it's an amazing moment where you're like, 'It's down here and surviving and I never thought it could. It found a way to live.' You have these great moments where you're witnessing something that you've created finding a way to survive where you didn't expect it to survive or to surprise you in a way you didn't expect."



Just seeing what's out there.

One thing you shouldn't expect to see much of is other players. While there technically is multiplayer in No Man's Sky, everyone is light years apart from each other. Even if you wanted to meet up with a friend, you'd have to acquire a ship with lots of fuel capacity and hyperdrive range and spend untold hours trying to reach the same planet at the same time. "I would say think about it in terms of Journey. We want people to have a feeling like there are other people in the world, but it is not the way people will play," Murray says. "Even on a planet, if you think of just landing anywhere on Earth and just trying to meet up, it's a difficult thing to do. It's more likely that you'll just see something by chance and getting a feeling for it and that being a moment."

Hello Games is still in the thick of development, with no estimated release date. A game this ambitious and open seems like it would be difficult to call finished. We're hoping the next time we see No Man's Sky it'll be far enough along that we can get our hands on it and get a real taste of galactic exploration. ★ **Bryan Vore**

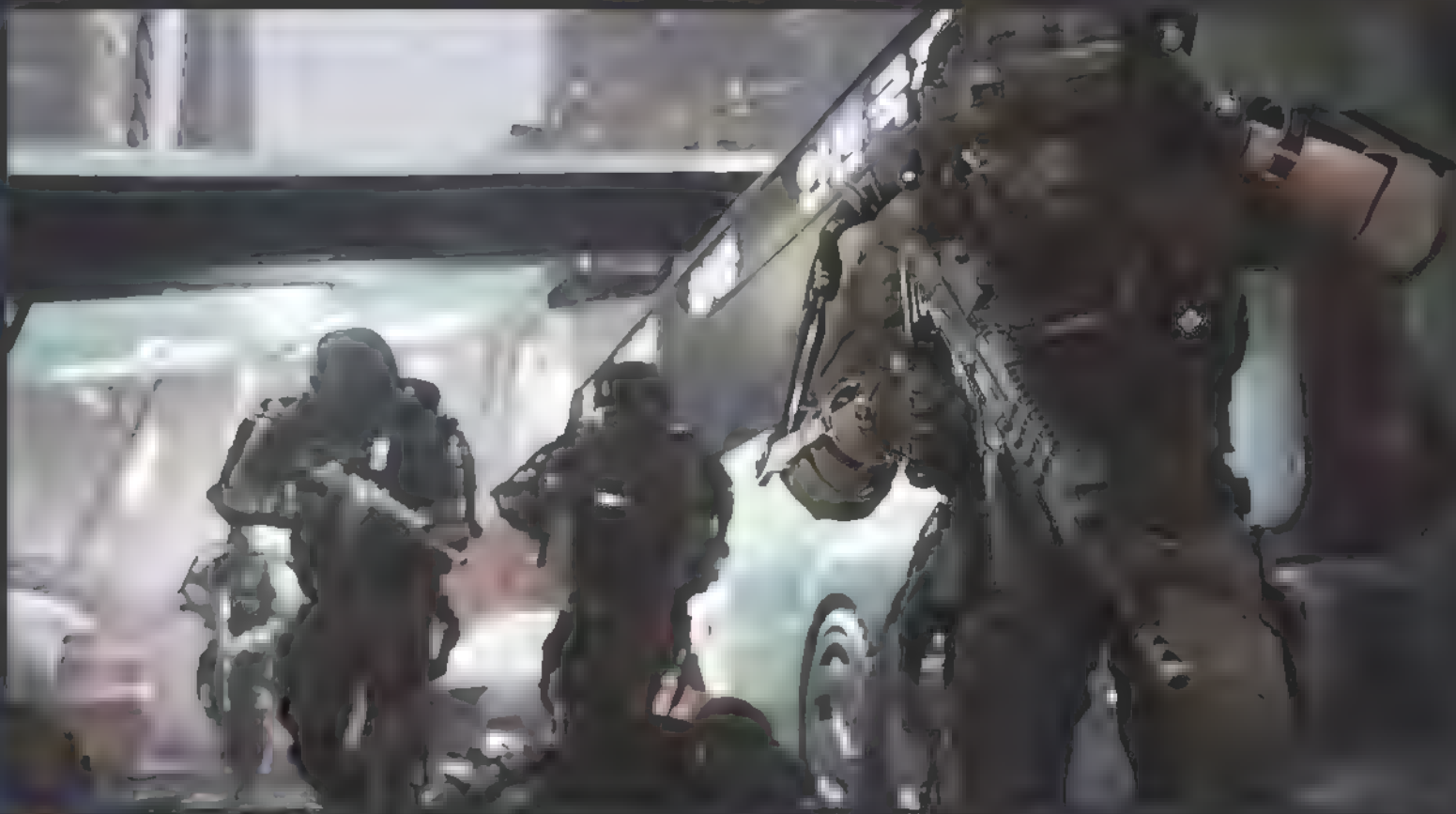


"I need to stress this isn't a game about dinosaurs," says managing director Sean Murray. "A lot of the tweets that were just like 'Space dinosaurs. This is the best game ever!' People seem happy with that and we're like, 'We're making an infinite number of creatures. Please do not pigeonhole us as the dinosaur game!'"

Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare

Sledgehammer's campaign-crafting prowess already shines through

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PC ★ Style: 1-Player Shooter (Online TBA) ★ Publisher: Activision ★ Developer: Sledgehammer Games ★ Release: November 4



Over the years the Call of Duty single-player campaigns have scrambled to outdo themselves with more exciting but predictable set-piece moments, like dropping nukes or apocalyptic assaults on sleepy suburbs. Yet one of the most beloved missions in the entire series is Modern Warfare's "All Ghilled Up," two snipers' tense, slow-paced crawl behind enemy lines. Sledgehammer Games, staffed by many veterans from the original Dead Space, are experts in narrative pacing and understand that for every Golden Gate Bridge terrorist attack you need something more subtle to offset it. The studio's skill is on full display during a trek through the Bulgarian mountains that shifts the mood dramatically in a short timeframe.

The action begins on the outskirts of a forest with a broken squad of Exo-suited super soldiers fleeing from an attack chopper. Unfortunately, the batteries on their ability-enhancing exoskeletons are completely drained, forcing them to duck and weave as the chopper takes potshots. The duo scrambles up a small cliff leading into the forest. Protagonist Private Mitchell falters during his clumsy

climb just as the chopper's searchlight is about to reveal him. Suddenly, the Exo suit's cloaking ability comes online and Mitchell blends in with the stony surface. The chopper loses them and the pair slinks into the cover of the woods.

The gameplay shifts from an intense escape to a careful, deliberate sneaking mission past a handful of armed guards. Their touch-and-go Exo suits leave them without their significant battlefield advantage. The two sneak past the guards, occasionally using their cloaks as the slowly recharging battery allows. At one point, they take cover behind a fallen tree as a sizeable unit of heavily armored troopers loudly stomps through the woods in ominous rhythm.

The two soldiers eventually meet up with the rest of their squad and uncover a hidden laboratory deep in the woods beneath an optic-camouflage canopy. The team sabotages the research facility and other sensitive enemy resources before discovering an experimental hover tank. The soldiers quickly decide to commandeer the armored craft and begin an action-packed escape from the premises. Salvos of anti-personnel missiles snuff out dozens of enemies at

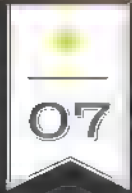
once. A massive energy blast obliterates hostile tanks that roll into view. An EMP blast makes short work of pesky helicopters, killing their systems and sending them crashing to the ground in flames.

These contrasting sections – along with the previously shown trek into the creepy, flooded slums of Detroit –

have me hopeful that Sledgehammer is bringing a much-needed breath of fresh air into the franchise's campaign structure. The Exo suit looks like a blast to control when it's up and running, but Sledgehammer's skill in using its absence as a narrative device suggests this futuristic entry is in the right hands.

★ **Tim Turi**





Far Cry 4

Turning a gun for hire loose

★ **Platform:** PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC ★ **Style:** 1-Player Shooter (2-Player Online Co-op, Multiplayer TBA)
★ **Publisher:** Ubisoft ★ **Developer:** Ubisoft Montreal ★ **Release:** November 18

With open worlds teeming with wildlife to hunt and outposts to overrun, the Far Cry campaigns have always seemed like natural candidates for cooperative play. With Far Cry 4, you can finally bring a friend along for the ride.

Though you can't team up to complete the story missions, any time you are exploring the open world you can call in support with the Guns For Hire feature. Here, a friend, stranger, or A.I. companion can drop into your world to even the odds against whatever threat emerges from the Himalayan setting.

Taking a fortress is one of the most likely scenarios where you'll appreciate having extra firepower. Each major region of the fictional territory of Kyrat

features one of these strongholds, which is nearly impossible to take when you first venture into the area. As you take down outposts and turn the region toward your cause, the fortress will begin to show weaknesses.

I teamed up with an Ubisoft representative to test the defenses of one of these fortresses. To begin our assault we both hopped on the Buzzard, a small helicopter that gives you a great vantage point but has hardly any armor, leaving you exposed to gunfire from below. With my comrade marking targets with his binoculars, I lobbed grenades toward clustered groups of enemies on the ground. The soldiers aren't helpless against these attacks; in response they started shooting mortars in our direction, one of the new tactics enemies have

when responding to attacks from afar.

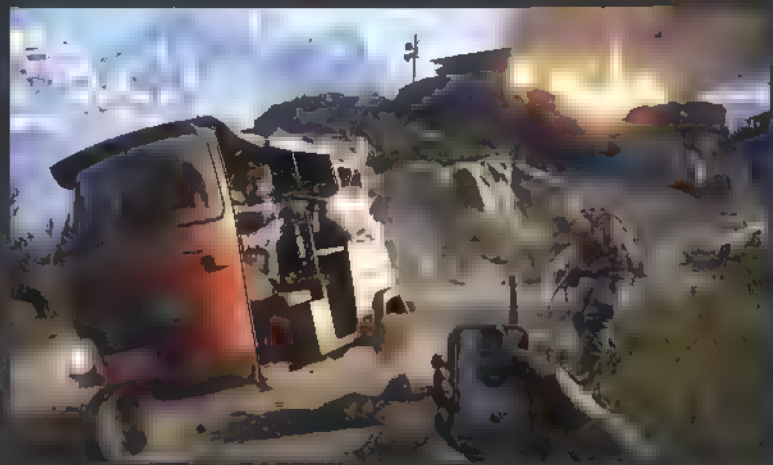
The mortar shots drove us away from the base, so we decided to switch up our approach. Landing on the other side of the fortress, I jumped on the back of an elephant and led a charge right through the fortress gates. The power of these majestic beasts is impressive, as they crush enemies underfoot, toss them to the side with their trunk, and ram through vehicles. The ensuing

explosion took out the elephant, but I was able to retreat to a room in the fortress where I stumbled upon a rocket launcher.

A helicopter arrived for the fortress last stand, and we peppered it with rockets until it crashed into the countryside. This was just my first taste of marauding through a Far Cry world with a friend, and I look forward to continuing the campaign. ★ **Matt Bertz**

Playing With A Friend For Free

One of the surprises of the Sony game conference was that you could join a friend in Far Cry 4 even if you don't own the game, provided you are playing on PlayStation 3 or PlayStation 4. All you need to do is download a separate client from the PlayStation Store to take control of their play while also enjoying in Far Cry 4.





Bloodborne

Dark Souls creators make an exclusive deal with Sony

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 ★ Style: 1-Player Action/Role-Playing ★ Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment ★ Developer: From Software, SCE Japan ★ Release: 2015

Given the success of Dark Souls II this past year, Sony landing the next From Software game is a big boost to its exclusivity lineup. Bloodborne is a slick, stylish Victorian gothic-horror action/RPG with mechanics that appear firmly rooted in From Software's previous series.

Demon's Souls and Dark Souls director Hidetaka Miyazaki returns to orchestrate the grand design behind this dark fantasy. Players must seek out the cure for a horrible curse that has turned the city of Yharnam into a breeding ground of transformed citizens and monsters from nightmares.

From what we've seen, Bloodborne takes an aggressive angle on Souls-style combat. The difficulty level and precision that players may be familiar with from the Souls games are preserved. Evasion and timing are still critical aspects, but there appears to be less of an emphasis on blocking and more focus on aggressive assaults and encounters featuring multiple enemies.

Gone are the days of timidly entering a boss room and holding up your shield to analyze the opponent; life and death decisions must now be made in the heat of combat. Magic spells seem absent in what we've seen so far, with their

functionality being added to a host of weapons. The signature, extendable saw blade serves as a close-range melee option alongside the crowd-controlling blunderbuss, and we're told that there is a considerable range of options beyond these to discover and choose from.

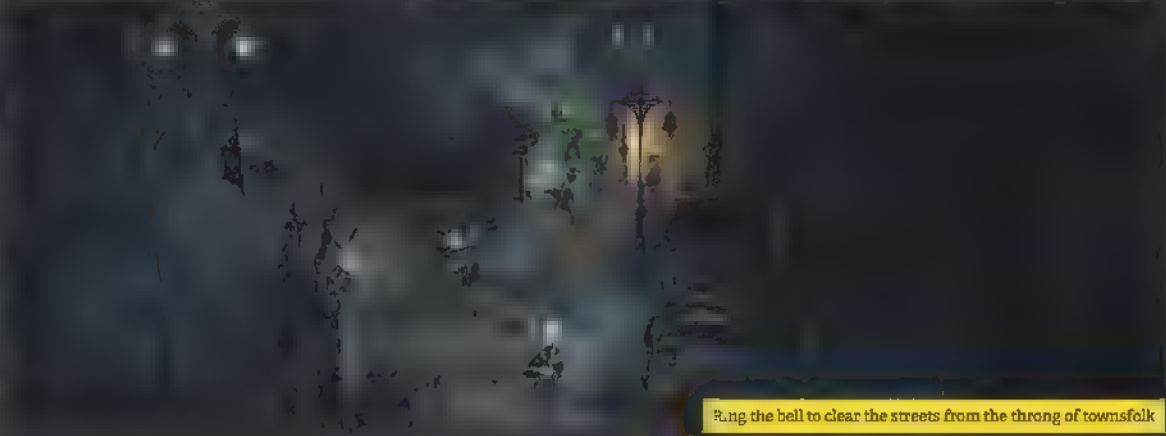
It wasn't explicitly stated that players would be collecting resources from killing monsters, but the swirl of energy and accompanying sound made it seem like resource collection is similar to soul acquisition from the Souls titles. Players can also stop and heal, reminiscent of

Estus Flask quaffing, to restore life. We don't know if this is tied to a limited use item or is some player ability. After a few kills, the player's outfit is drenched in the blood of enemies, showing the title isn't afraid to embrace a gory vision that goes far beyond what we've come to expect from Souls games.

Those that remember the lighting fiasco from Dark Souls II will be pleased to hear that dramatic lighting effects are present and seem to be the focal point of interior area exploration. Players swap out their offhand weapon for a

torch to explore pitch-black areas to discover danger and treasure, and can also use the torch as a weapon to light opponents aflame.

Fog gates, enemy swing chains, rampant rolling, and many of the other Souls staples form an underlying framework for a beautiful new setting that seems to be story-driven rather than an open-world construct where the story is formed via item descriptions and detail-driven minutia. We witness torch-wielding townsfolk marching through the streets, burning a massive beast in the square. Should



Ring the bell to clear the streets from the throng of townsfolk



The streets are not safe at night. They're actually *never* safe here.


we wander into the horde or search for another solution? Players interact with the environment in a number of ways to trigger events, such as ringing a bell to clear out a throng of townsfolk to open up a path ahead.

Some aspects of the Souls games, such as calling in an NPC to help through a summoning sigil, appear to have been moved to a new method based on the live gameplay demo we saw at E3. In it, the player encounters another hunter facing down two huge beasts – helping the NPC out is your choice, but if you do, he or she will appear during the area's boss battle and assist with dispatching the enemy.

The demo highlighted all kinds of twisted creatures from corrupted, bloated crows, turned townsfolk, plague dogs, an abomination banging on a door, and an enormous area boss fought on a bridge. The encounter, accompanied by Souls-style boss music, is reminiscent of the Taurus Demon boss battle from Dark Souls with darker undertones.

Bloodborne may have many of the systems that make the Souls games amazing experiences underneath the hood, but on the surface there's a slick coat of blood that makes this PS4 exclusive look like a tantalizing treat when it arrives next year. ★ **Daniel Tack**





09 Assassin's Creed Unity

No man is an island

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PC ★ Style: 1 to 4-Player Action ★ Publisher: Ubisoft
★ Developer: Ubisoft Montreal/Toronto/Quebec/Annecy/Bucharest/Kiev/Shanghai/Singapore ★ Release: October 28

The first new-gen exclusive entry in the Assassin's Creed franchise looks the part. From its incredibly detailed crowds to its immaculate presentation of French Revolution-era Paris, Unity is a visual marvel even before accounting for the centerpiece new feature — cooperative play for up to four friends. It's hard to wrap one's head around the idea that eight Ubisoft studios are now credited as part of the production for this huge game — a testament to the amount of work that can go in to a triple-A project on the newest consoles and PCs.

Unity stars a new assassin named Arno Victor Dorian, a man of French and Austrian descent who joins the assassins on a quest of redemption after the death of his adoptive father, for which he blames himself. Like the franchise entries that preceded it, Unity focuses on this personal tale amid the backdrop of major historical events. In this case, that

backdrop is the dramatic and brutally violent events of the French Revolution.

Paris is a sprawling metropolis twice the size of the land area depicted in Assassin's Creed III, with one out of every four buildings now complete with an interior. Landmarks like the Louvre, the Bastille, and the Luxembourg Gardens are all present. I had a brief tour of the Notre Dame Cathedral and its breathtaking nave, filled with sunbeams slanting in from the windows. Notre Dame has around a dozen distinct entrances to track down, illustrating the depth of content Ubisoft is putting into one of the game's centerpiece locations.

While Paris' impressive architecture is beautiful, attention is easily shifted to the large crowds that populate the streets. One thousand individual A.I.-driven characters can act and move within the crowd at one time, giving Arno a wealth of possibilities for mischief. The crowd is more alive and active than in

previous entries, with more opportunities to engage directly with the conflicts, crimes, and day-to-day activities of the citizenry. Equally important, these dense crowds can slow down Arno as well as his targets, making rooftop and inside building movement more important than ever.

Cooperative play is integrated into the campaign, but only on certain missions. The in-game locations for meet-ups are taverns, where you find the "ghosts" of friends who are also actively playing at the same time. By approaching their ghost, if they're at a joinable part of the game, you can hop in and start at the most recent checkpoint. Up to four players can join together in this fashion, offering some intriguing new coordinated options to confront mission objectives.

You always appear as Arno in your own game, while fellow players in the Brotherhood look like other assassins. However, each of you brings your own

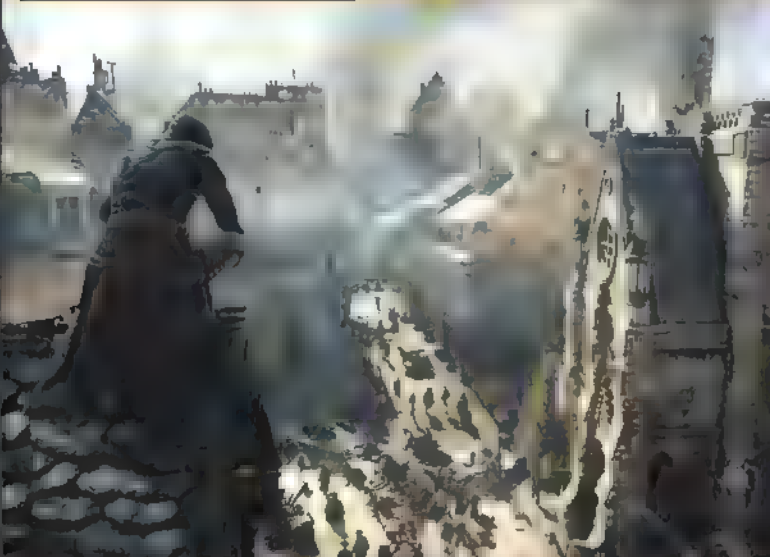
suite of abilities to the fight, thanks to Unity's new upgrade mechanic. Steering the game more in the role-playing direction, major missions now provide skill-point rewards, which can be spent to add or improve Arno's active skills, like lockpicking, disguise, or eagle vision. In addition, many weapon and equipment options also offer skill buffs, so the visual style of your character helps speak to his skill specialties.

Assassin's Creed Unity is one of a small handful of new-gen exclusives targeting release before the end of 2014; my multiple demos at E3 revealed a relatively polished gaming experience with several months of development yet ahead. Lingering questions about mission structure and story will have a profound effect on how Unity turns out, but my first impressions of the game as a whole were very enthusiastic about where the series is headed.

★ **Nate Miller**



Cooperative play is a major new feature, allowing up to four friends to work together on some campaign missions



A quarter of all the buildings in Paris now have interiors to explore



10

Alien: Isolation

Tension continues to rise in this sci-fi survival-horror game

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC ★ Style: 1-Player Action ★ Publisher: Sega ★ Developer: The Creative Assembly ★ Release: October 7

Last time I was in Sevastopol Station, I didn't have any tools to keep me alive as a xenomorph did its best to track me down. Staying silent and out of sight was the only viable approach, since this isn't a game about taking on the alien head-on, strapped with weapons. The latest playable demo didn't change that core philosophy — if anything, it helped reinforce just how helpless it feels to be hunted.

I was dropped into a challenge mode, where I had to make it through a section of the decommissioned station's living quarters, gathering victims' dog tags along the way. In my first attempt, I ignored the ominous pings from my ever-present motion tracker and made

a beeline toward the first waypoint. That worked out as well as you might imagine. After a few seconds, my sprint was interrupted as the xenomorph lunged and killed me.

Next, I took a more methodical approach. I grabbed some crafting components from a nearby table, as well as a flare. As I inched through a doorway, I spied the creature at the far end of a corridor. It didn't see me, so I thought it would be a great time to distract it. I flicked the flare into life, and threw the sputtering tube into the corner nearest the xeno. My plan was to run down the opposite hallway while its attention was temporarily diverted. That didn't work, either. I don't know if it saw me light the

flare, if it spotted its origin, or if there was something else going on altogether. All I can say for certain is that I learned: Amanda Ripley can't outrun an alien, and that hiding in a locker only works if you get in there undetected. I was in the locker for an instant before being unceremoniously yanked out and killed again.

The creature's spawning location seemed to be random in the demo, which ramped up what was already a tense experience. Couple that with the creature's cunning A.I., and *Isolation* has all the ingredients necessary to generate plenty of survival-horror memories.

Sega showed off some other elements of the game in a non-interactive presentation. We've known that crafting would

play a part in *Alien: Isolation*, but I hadn't seen it in action until this second demo. Amanda can combine various components to create a variety of useful items, such as med kits and tools to distract the xenomorph or other enemies. That's right — you aren't only in danger of being attacked by a ridiculously powerful alien. Sevastopol Station is also host to a number of survivors and androids. Some of these inhabitants provide aid, or only want to be left alone. Others, however, are so traumatized by the alien's attacks that they've become (or are programmed to be) hostile.

The synthetic humans are particularly fearsome opponents. Even though the Weyland-Yutani knockoffs aren't as sophisticated as their brand-name counterparts, they're able to detect Amanda and are keen to enforce security protocols. In the demo, I watched an android relentlessly follow her even after being attacked and set alight with a flame-thrower. She was only able to destroy the machine after using an EMP grenade to stun it, following up with a decisive melee attack.

Everything I've seen (and played) of the game so far points to a fiercely accurate adaptation of the classic *Alien* film. Even surrounded by the din of E3, I couldn't help but feel startled and vulnerable by *Alien: Isolation* — I can't wait to see how the atmosphere holds up at home.

★ Jeff Cork

Even fire is a temporary setback for these androids

Rainbow Six Siege

Team Rainbow emerges with a new tactical plan

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PC ★ Style: 10-Player Online Shooter ★ Publisher: Ubisoft ★ Developer: Ubisoft Montreal ★ Release: 2015



For Tom Clancy fans, E3 2014 brought both good and bad news. The unfortunate reality was that after burning through several leadership groups, Ubisoft couldn't fulfill the promise of our December 2011 cover-story game *Rainbow Six Patriots* – and has indefinitely suspended development. The good news is that a multiplayer-centric

title that stresses tactics is stepping into the vacuum.

In the six years since the last *Rainbow Six* game, the multiplayer landscape has changed drastically. *Call of Duty* has released five titles during this long absence, and *Battlefield* has successfully migrated its brand to consoles, with four big sellers released in that span as well. To re-establish its position in this

ultra-competitive market, Ubisoft knew it needed to bring something significantly different to the table. Enter *Rainbow Six Siege*.

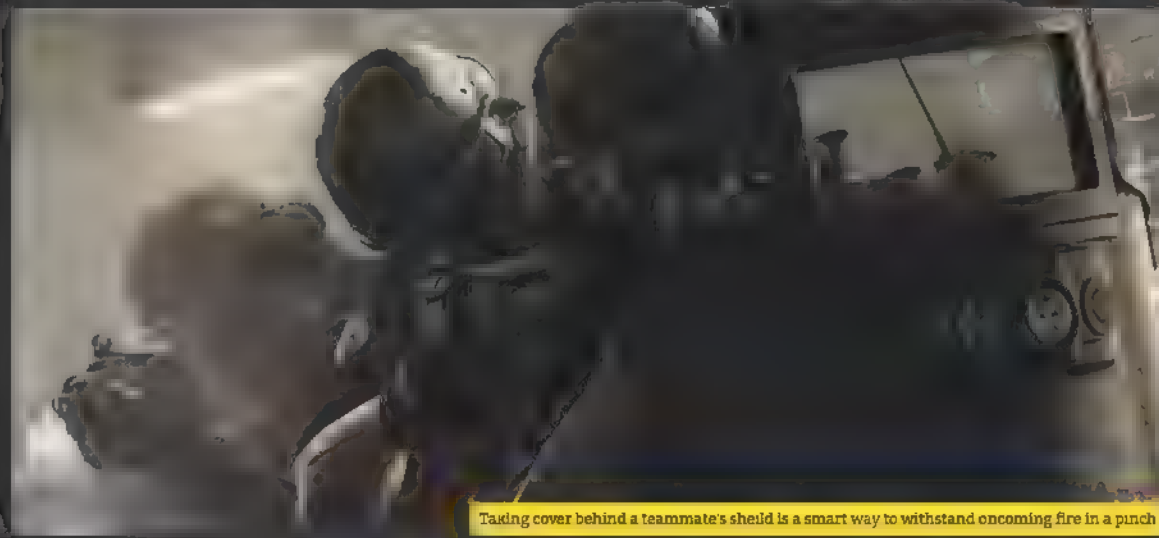
Siege takes the tactical strategy at the core of the *Rainbow Six* brand and builds outward, introducing new five-on-five competitive matches that test players' wits as much as their twitch skills. Before a match starts, the attacking

team sends in drones to note enemy positions and locate the hostage they must recover to win the round while the defenders barricade their entrenched position in anticipation of the assault with barbed wire, deployable shields, and mines.

After this brief reconnaissance period, the infiltration begins. The attackers can choose to assault a weak entry point together, or split up for greater efficiency. Options include breaching doors, basement entries, and rappelling up the building to crash through windows. Meanwhile, the defenders brace themselves for the onslaught.

The combat is lethal, and with no respawns available, moving cautiously is strongly encouraged. To keep the action from devolving into cover-based bullet exchanges around corners and through doors, Ubisoft has introduced a powerful destruction mechanic that allows players to make their own firing lines through walls, doors, ceilings, and floors. This further adds to the tension.

Many of the other *Rainbow Six* staples, such as unique classes, upgradable weapons, and different armor options that affect your mobility are also coming to *Siege*. Ubisoft says it has plans for other modes beyond elimination, and will share those at a later date. ★ **Matt Bertz**



Taking cover behind a teammate's shield is a smart way to withstand oncoming fire in a pinch

12

Dragon Age: Inquisition

*Arguments, espionage, and consequences:
Dragon Age on a much larger scale*

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC ★ Style: 1-Player Role-Playing ★ Publisher: Electronic Arts ★ Developer: BioWare ★ Release: October 7



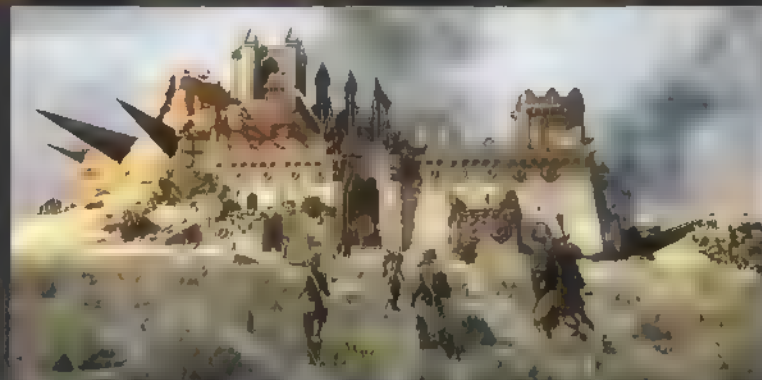
Dragon Age: Inquisition is BioWare's chance to pull out the red carpet for its biggest game to date. This is especially important as Dragon Age II scaled back from the original game. Everything from the past two games has been building to Inquisition's climax, increasing fans' expectations. At E3, BioWare's live demo showcased the team's confidence in its work. "This is the Dragon Age game we've always wanted to make," says creative director Mike Laidlaw.

Thedas is now embroiled in war with larger threats lurking; tears are opening in the sky, allowing demons into the world. The world reflects this chaos; war-torn lands are filled with fires, broken structures, and NPCs commenting on the state of the events. These aren't the linear environments we saw in Dragon Age II. The world's vastness is evident; something in the distance is always vying for your attention, whether it's wildlife or majestic mountains. "Inquisition is the biggest Dragon Age game," Laidlaw says. According to Laidlaw, the area we saw in the demo is "larger than the

play space of Dragon Age: Origins in its entirety."

As Inquisitor, your job is to grow your influence and power. You decide how to proceed at the war table, which is where you command your forces, agents, and spies. The war table is also where you determine where your story goes next, such as searching for new locales, sending your agents out on missions, and choosing which objectives to pursue. You're in charge, but rule wisely, as your decisions factor into branching paths and unlock exclusive content.

This wouldn't be Dragon Age without arguments or consequences, so expect those to tie into your choices, right down to which characters you tap for certain missions. During the demo, Lailana was brought into a mission to hunt down a corrupt mage. She took a much more ruthless approach than you'd expect from her, since she's consumed with restoring the world. "Sending Lailana into here was a decision that we made and it's one that will have consequences," Laidlaw says. "In fact, it may damage our relationship going forward."



You can't please everyone, and part of your role as the Inquisitor is deciding your leadership type: Will you rule with an iron fist, or try to diplomatically reason with others?

Even the battlefield is full of decisions. You can get right into the action, or if you want to assess the situation, you can use tactical view. This approach allows you to pause the action and choose the best placement for your character, like positioning archers on high ledges or sending

a tank right into the fray. Once you select positions, you set the moves into motion and can always adjust your tactics if they aren't working.

Dragon Age: Inquisition is the series' biggest undertaking yet, and so far it looks as if everything we love about Dragon Age is here, but on a much grander scale. From fierce battles to tough decision-making, life will be anything but easy as you step into the role of the Inquisitor. ★ **Kimberley Wallace**



Middle-earth: Shadow Of Mordor

Sauron's legions have a new leader

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC ★ Style: 1-Player Action
★ Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive ★ Developer: Monolith Productions ★ Release: October 7

The Lord Sauron has been lying in wait for centuries, so when this Necromancer preps his return, his armies lay waste to the surrounding countryside, sacrificing anyone who gets in their way. The victims of these sacrifices include a ranger of the Black Gate named Talion and his entire family. However, Talion is refused a peaceful death thanks to a restless spirit of vengeance that possesses his body, effectively making him immortal. This wraith points Talion at Sauron's army and sets him off on a quest for vengeance that reshapes the land of Mordor.

In our cover story last December, we

unveiled Shadow of Mordor's unique Nameless system, which randomly generates Sauron's legions, creating a social hierarchy where each Uruk grunt has his own special traits and weaknesses. This system alters each playthrough based on players' actions. At E3, I put that system to the test, and watched Sauron's armies bend to my whims.

The demo dropped me into the land of Num, where a queen named Marwen has asked Talion to help shore up the rebellion's defenses by using his wraith powers to possess and command several local war chiefs. I set off across the land, but traveling by foot is too slow, so I use my wraith abilities to shadow mount a

caragor and then use the wild, lion-like animal to work my way up a cliff face near a war chief's stronghold.

I try to sneak through this fortress, but I am quickly spotted, and several Uruk captains overwhelm me. I fire a wraith arrow into a bonfire, which causes an explosion that takes out a few grunts, but it's not enough. I'm eventually overtaken.

Death is not the end. In Shadow of Mordor, however, because my wraith companion soon brings me back to life. While I was "down," time marched forward, and the Uruk who killed me was promoted to captain. A few of the grunts that I blasted with fire have also developed a fear of fire, which I might be able

to exploit in a later fight.

At this point, I could make another run at the war chief's fortress or chase down the Uruk who killed me, but while I try to decide, another Uruk seeks me out. This Uruk has a special tracking ability and has been hunting me down ever since I sneaked through his camp earlier in the game. I make short work of his guards and use my wraith powers to bring him under my command.

Now that I have dominated an Uruk, he will complete quests for me. I could send him after the war chief himself, but that seems like a suicide mission, so I command him to usurp one of the war chief's bodyguards. After issuing these orders, I could just go about my business and wait for the Uruk to finish his job, but I want to make sure this gets done. I follow him to his encounter with the bodyguard and use my bow to snipe the bodyguard's companions from a nearby tower, ensuring that my guy kills his foe and assumes his new spot as the war chief's bodyguard.

Now that I have a man on the inside, my assault against the war chief should go smoother, but just to be sure, I spend the next half hour possessing a couple other captains and sending them on missions to infiltrate the war chief's fortress. The next time I go after the war chief, there is going to be another slaughter, but I won't be the one who ends up with his head on a pike. I just wish I didn't have to wait until October to finish infiltrating Sauron's ranks, because I've got a lot of Uruk left to bend to my will. ★ **Ben Reeves**

Talion prepares to give an Uruk a close shave he'll probably take too much off the top



Civilization: Beyond Earth

New directions within a familiar framework

★ Platform: PC • Mac ★ Style: 1-Player Strategy (8-Player Online) ★ Publisher: 2K Games ★ Developer: Firaxis ★ Release: Fall



If you've played Civilization before you'll be able to hop right into the next cosmic chapter of the Civilization series. But along with its many franchise similarities, Beyond Earth brings a significant amount of differences that keep the gameplay fresh. Forget negotiations with Napoleon, get ready to touch down and colonize an alien planet.

Beyond Earth sets players on a path to embrace one of three affinities each playthrough. These affinities, which are essentially ideologies on how to deal with the next era of human development, give players access to special units, bonuses, and win conditions beyond the standard domination victory. Players choose to progress toward the goals of Purity, Harmony, or Supremacy over the course of each game. Affinities all play different from each other, adding a new layer of strategy to the game far beyond custom culture units and bonuses.

Beyond Earth also changes how

Firaxis handles the tech tree. In classic Civilization games, technological progress was easy to chart thanks to recorded history that chronicled a linear progression from pottery to the printing press, but with Beyond Earth looking to the future there's no need to speculate in a single line. Instead, players are introduced to the "tech web," which allows them to freely move about and invest in technologies in a non-linear

fashion. Some of the technology choices contain special perks or units for specific affinities.

Players also engage with quests for the first time in a Civilization game. These help tell the story of your civilization as you progress through a game in meaningful ways, and depending on your decisions, offer incentives for building various upgrades and units or performing tasks. While completing these

is optional, the extra perks are often worth pursuing.

The uncolonized planets are teeming with miasma, a dangerous substance that hurts your units if they finish their turn in a polluted square. This substance also heals alien life forms that take on the role of the barbarian or unaffiliated faction in this Civilization title. After playing for a bit at E3, I'm ready to start the countdown to launch. ★ **Daniel Tack**





Below

A dark quest for a better game

★ Platform: Xbox One • PC ★ Style: 1-Player Action/Adventure ★ Publisher: Capy Games ★ Developer: Capy Games ★ Release: TBD

We've covered Capy Games' modern take on the roguelike a few times since its debut during Microsoft's E3 press conference last year. The game stars an adventurer who explores a mysterious island full of procedurally generated rooms where one wrong move could spell death. Once this character inevitably falls, the cycle starts again with a new adventurer, though the player retains all of the lessons learned last time. The idea is that the each new character ventures further and further into the depths, eventually learning the skills to survive all the way through. While this core concept remains the same, many of the finer details are constantly iterated upon to create the smoothest experience.

Crafting was only hinted at in April's PAX East demo, but it was opened up fully at E3. While exploring the dungeon, you could, for example, collect a container, some water, and an indigenous plant, and combine them to make a health potion. In a game where you can bleed to death from any injury, knowing this recipe is more important than ever. "Crafting is something that is meant to be relatively light," says Capy president Nathan Vella. "You don't have a ton of options in terms of combining 12 different things. Those combinations are not explained, like everything in the game, but they are always the same." This means once players discover a recipe, they'll have it forever as long as they remember it (keeping a notepad nearby is probably a good call).

The PAX demo also included a hunger/constitution mechanic that players had to manage. This was left behind for E3.

"We've not necessarily thrown that idea out, but decided to remove it for the E3 demo and see how that felt," Vella says. "See if it relieves some player confusion and questions like, 'What is that thing in the right hand corner of my screen every time I enter a new level?'"

Capy didn't only tweak feature sets; it also unlocked more of the world. Previous demos consisted mostly of natural cave structures filled with organic and ethereal monsters, but the latest build allowed skilled players to access a new zone that is obviously crafted, carved, and built by something or someone. "The game is not just, 'Hey, you're always in caves,'" Vella says. "There's a lot more variation and a lot more of the world to explore than just what you see when you arrive in the depths."

Laser-blasting spherical robots guard this new zone. The shield holds up against this attack and gives you time to observe the drones' patterns. Players must dash in close for a quick sword slash between shots and be careful not to get surrounded or risk a blast to the back while blocking another shot.

We still have yet to see traditional boss characters outside of a black tentacle smoke monster in one of the trailers. So how do you go about creating a boss when every enemy in the game has the capability to kill the protagonist in one hit? "That's definitely something that we're trying to figure out on our end as well," Vella says. "It's not going to be easy on us to integrate big things like bosses or large-scale enemies because of how the health system works and how the game is permadeath and how it's not a loot grab. There's not a billion potions for you to find so you can keep

healing and dispatch a larger more challenging boss in your first try, but we'll figure it out."

Due to Capy's experimental process and dedication to getting it right, *Below* still has no clear release window, nor will it anytime soon. Vella says that there are still plans to add more "pretty big pillars" that are not in the current build, ranging from weapons and enemies to multiplayer elements to larger story components. "There's still a ton of work to be done on the game for sure," Vella admits. "But the reason we started showing it at PAX East and E3 was because we felt really confident that the core of the game — the combat, the exploration, the survival, the art style, the music — all of that was at a state where we were very happy with it. We felt like it was a great time to start showing a controller in peoples' hands and watching what they do." ★ *Bryan Vore*



Mortal Kombat X

Let the blood flow

★ **Platform:** PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC ★ **Style:** 1 or 2-Player Fighting (Online Multiplayer TBA)
★ **Publisher:** Warner Bros. Interactive ★ **Developer:** NetherRealm Studios ★ **Release:** 2015

NetherRealm's *Injustice: Gods Among Us*, was a great fighting game, but with a different fighting system and Teen-rating levels of violence due to the use of DC Comics characters, it had a very different vibe than the studio's traditional offerings. If you've missed the blood and gore, *Mortal Kombat X* cranks it up to new heights with the added power of new-gen consoles.

NetherRealm came out strong at E3 with a playable demo featuring six characters, four of which are new to the series. In addition to MK mainstays Scorpion and Sub-Zero, we battled as Cassie Cage (the daughter of Johnny Cage and Sonya Blade), the insect-like D'Vorah, Aztec god Kotal Kahn, and two-for-one fighting pair Ferra and Torr. This focus on new faces runs beyond just the debut demo. "I think, according to my immediate memory, we're introducing more characters in this game than we have since the first *Mortal Kombat* game," says NetherRealm creative director and *Mortal Kombat* co-creator Ed Boon.

Adding to the roster variety even further

is the new character-variations system. After selecting a fighter, players can then choose one of three specialized move-sets. For example, Cassie Cage's Brawler variation makes her fists glow and adds an air powerslam and takedown. With Spec Ops, she wears more militaristic gear and is able call down missile strikes from the sky. Selecting Hollywood results in her dad's signature sunglasses and nutcracker attack.

All of these variations add more options for players, but it can triple the development headaches when you're trying to make everything balanced across the board. The team is prepared to do the extra work to incorporate new elements. "It makes balancing a lot harder, and we're going to get all those pro players in the studio and give them as much time on the game as possible," Boon says. "I really think you need to do that. I don't want us to put out a game that's MK 9.5 and just has nicer graphics."

X-ray specials return, and they're more gruesome than ever. For those unfamiliar, you build up a meter throughout the battle and pull both trigger buttons at the same

time. If the opponent isn't blocking, the camera zooms in during key moments in the combo to show the bones, muscles, and guts getting annihilated. New character Kotal Kahn stabs people through the neck with his ancient dagger, grabs both sides of the weapon, twists the head like a corkscrew, and finishes it off with a

nose-breaking knee to the face.

As cringe-inducing as the X-rays are, they're always going to be beat by MK's signature fatalities. The button combos were extremely simplified for the demo so we could pull off the moves easily. My favorite kill so far goes to Cassie. She shoots out the opponent's kneecaps.





Kota: Kahn launches D'Vorah



Scorpion's Ninjutsu variation includes unique sword attacks

follows with a pistol shot to the forehead, takes out some bubble gum she's chewing, and plugs the head wound. The gum expands into a blood-filled bubble before popping and splattering everywhere. I also enjoyed when Torr lifts up an opponent by the arms and Ferra cuts them in half from top to bottom. Gore like

New two-in-one character Ferra/Torr

this makes you wonder if anything is off-limits when it comes to fatalities. "There have been a few that have been pitched that are just like 'No, no, that crosses the line,'" Boon says. "The fatality meetings are some of the more entertaining and disappointing for the person that's pitching it. Someone stands up and they start acting it out, and we're like, 'We can't do that.'"

The demo debuted three new arenas that look great and include several interactive elements. The Snow Forest features logs and branches that you can pick up and smash people with or throw at them. You can even perform swinging, gymnastic kicks by grabbing a branch in mid-air. The Outworld Marketplace has all manner of beasts and vendors in the background and includes throwable barrels and old ladies. Cove is basically a pirate-ship dock with waves crashing in the background. Fighters can jump off the dock posts, run up the side of the ship on one side and flip to the center of the map to escape attacks, or swing on a chain hook. Drowned bodies pop up out of the water randomly and it's possible to



snatch them out of the air and toss them at your opponent.

NetherRealm isn't going into specifics yet, but it sounds like there are some major plans in the works for online play and features. "As far as the gameplay is concerned, I think the main thing is the online component," Boon says. "We're going to be introducing this online metagame that everyone participates in. It's an online experience that is persistent. Everyone is going to be playing it, and

there are benefits. It's definitely something that's going to play a major role in people's experience playing Mortal Kombat."

Mortal Kombat X looks to have all the right ingredients to live up to the high quality (and sales) bar set by the most recent title, and this is only the first small peak. "[Mortal Kombat 9] was the highest selling Mortal Kombat of all the games," Boon says. "Who would have thought 22 years later that would have been the case?" ★ **Bryan Vore**

Ori And The Blind Forest

A new action platformer four years in the making.

★ Platform: Xbox One • PC ★ Style: 1-Player Action/Platforming ★ Publisher: Microsoft Studios ★ Developer: Moon Studios ★ Release: Fall

Sandwiched between giant triple-A reveals at Microsoft's E3 briefing was a surprising announcement from a studio few knew about. Ori and the Blind Forest is the brainchild of Moon Studios, a small indie studio made up of developers working together virtually via Skype from across the world. The team has been crafting its first title for the last four years. The game melds the traditions of Metroid and Castlevania with taut and responsive platforming inspired by games like Super Meat Boy.

Ori is a diminutive forest spirit making his way through the dangers of a mystical wood. The anthropomorphized

animals and lush visuals call to mind Studio Ghibli animation, which is no surprise, as Moon Studios cites those films as inspiration.

The beautiful storybook visuals bely the truth about Ori's gameplay; namely, it's very challenging. Jumping and movement controls are precise and responsive, which is necessary to nail the wall-jumping, spike-avoiding, and platform-landing demanded by even the early sections of the game. New upgrades crop up on a regular basis, from health increases to navigation abilities. Progress is handled through interspersed gates; opening any given gate requires the gathering of several key

stones scattered around a level.

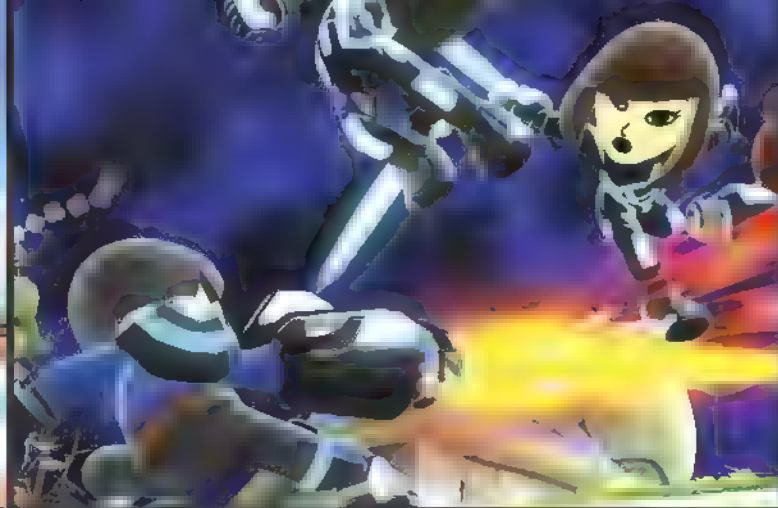
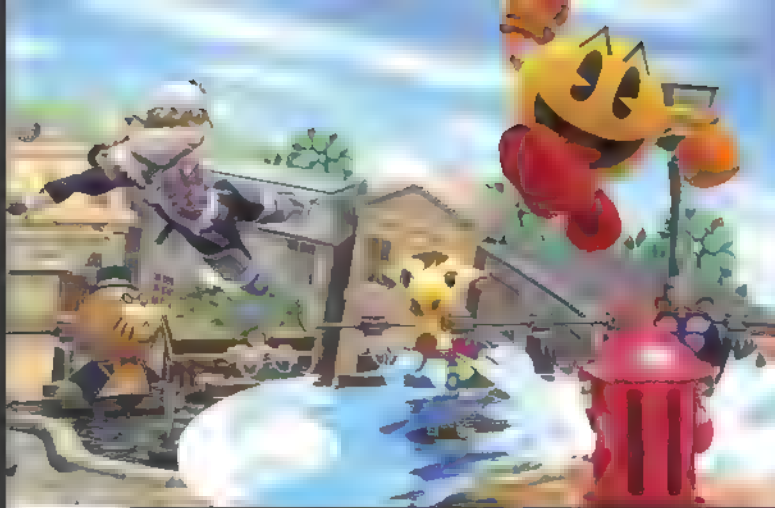
I played a rewarding demo that helped to demonstrate Ori and the Blind Forest's many strong points. Initially, Ori is largely helpless in his wanderings, until he encounters a small blue floating light spirit that helps him deal with the more dangerous forest denizens. This attack can be flung out at enemies a certain number of times before it needs a brief recharge. The number of attacks needed before a recharge is just one of several upgrades Ori can get through skill points he acquires on his journey. In addition to the standard upgrade picks-ups (like wall jump) these chosen skills help customize Ori to your satisfaction.

Moon Studios is exploring an intriguing approach to game saves. Players collect a form of energy as they wander through the world and fight enemies, and this energy can be expended to

save at any point. However, because it's a finite supply, you must think carefully about when and where to set your checkpoints. Wait too long (or forget) and you risk having to replay an especially challenging fight or platforming sequence. Save too frequently, and you won't be able to set a checkpoint after one of those hard sections.

Some games have too many features or moving parts to get a clear picture of during a busy show like E3, but not Ori and the Blind Forest. While much of the quiet charm and grace of Ori may have been hard to grasp during the show, the solid gameplay, excellent platforming, and high production values make this an easy pick for a game to keep an eye on. It may have been a smaller downloadable game, but Microsoft should rejoice that it has such a promising console exclusive on its roster.

★ Matt Miller



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Super Smash Bros.

Nintendo's mascots equip themselves for combat

★ **Platform:** Wii U • 3DS ★ **Style:** 1 to 4-Player Fighting (4-Player Online) ★ **Publisher:** Nintendo
 ★ **Developer:** Sora Ltd., Bandai Namco Games ★ **Release:** October 3 (3DS), Holiday (Wii U)

Since the series' introduction on the Nintendo 64 in 1999, Smash Bros. has been setting players free to create their own epic fantasy battles. However, these fighters' attributes have always been fixed statistics. With the newest installment, players get to reshape their favorite characters into brawlers that fit their unique desires.

In classic Smash Bros. fashion, players can unleash a series of special moves for each character by holding down different directions on the analog stick and tapping the special-attack button. However, players are no longer limited to a character's predetermined special attacks. Before a match begins, you can customize a fighter by swapping out each directional special attack with one of three different attacks—creating a total of 12 different special attacks for each character. For example, Mario's standard fireball attack can be swapped out for either a smaller, faster fireball, or a fire orb that is bigger and

slower but hits multiple times.

Special moves aren't the only way that players can customize their fighters, because the Smash Bros. cast can now take advantage of equipment. Characters can equip up to three items, and the gear they use modifies their strengths and weaknesses. For example, ultra-lightweight shoes allow a character to move faster, but their attack power is also reduced. Alternatively, high-power gloves beef up a character's punches while making it easier for them to get launched out of the arena. Unfortunately, many of these customization options are only be available in the *With Friends* mode and not in the more competitive *With Anyone* mode.

The final feature that Nintendo announced at E3 was Amiibo functionality. Using near-field communication technology, Smash Bros. players can save game data to their Amiibo figures by holding them up against their Wii U GamePad. Players can fight alongside

or against Amiibo figure data much like a normal CPU opponent. However, these Amiibo fighters gain experience with every fight and can eventually become more challenging than a level-nine CPU opponent.

Many of Super Smash Bros.' new

features fundamentally change how players use their favorite Smash Bros. characters. We look forward to crafting our own perfect roster of brawlers when Super Smash Bros. releases for the 3DS on October 3 and for the Wii U this Holiday season. ★ **Ben Reeves**

4 New Challengers Approach

Starting at E3, Nintendo added a few new fighters to the roster. Here's what to expect from these new characters.



Mii Fighters

Smash Bros. fans can create their own fighters based on Nintendo's Mii avatar system. Mii's come in three different flavors: Mii Brawlers fight up close in furious hand-to-hand combat; Mii Swordfighters use heavy-hitting melee weapons, but move a bit slower than Brawlers. Finally, Mii Gunners attack other players from a distance using a wide range of projectile weapons. The character creator that Nintendo demoed at the show was robust enough to allow Sora to create Mii-like facsimiles of Ace-T, Elijah Wood, and Abraham Lincoln.



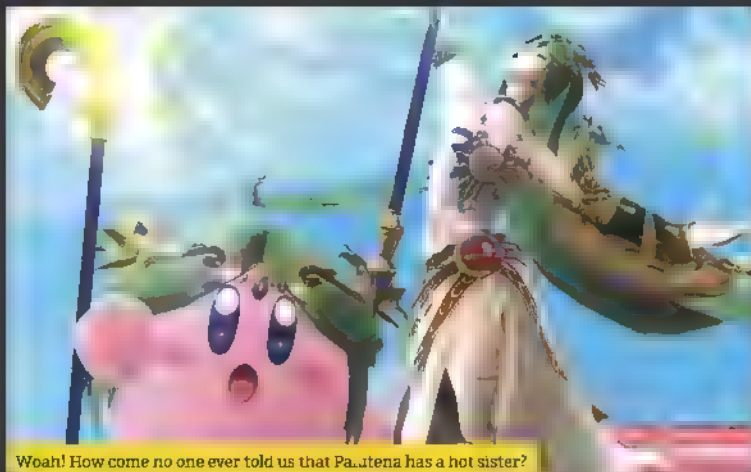
Palutena

The Goddess of Light and leader of Kid Icarus' Angel Land makes her fighting debut in Super Smash Bros. Palutena glides across the battlefield, using her staff and shield to battle foes. Her move set features a lot of quick, teleporting dodges, spinning staff attacks, and light spells that repel foes or ignite the air around them in a fireworks display. One of her bigger attacks creates a black hole that sucks every opponent into the center of the screen and then bombards them with a beam of pure energy.



Pac-Man

Nintendo has pretty much tapped every top-level character it owns for the Smash Bros. franchise, but that doesn't mean the publisher is out of big surprises for the roster. Namco's popular dot-chomper Pac-Man is joining the Smash Bros. cast. This arcade legend attacks other players by throwing power pellets and creating poisoned fruit bombs. Pac-Man's final smash allows him to transform into a giant version of his classic 2D pizza shape and chew up everything on screen.



Woah! How come no one ever told us that Palutena has a hot sister?



Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain

Looking to the past to build a better future

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 ★ Style: 1-Player Action ★ Publisher: Konami ★ Developer: Kojima Productions ★ Release: 2015

Released on PSP and later as part of the HD collections on last-gen consoles, Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker is an entry many may have missed. One of the most important and differentiating elements of that release was the use of the Fulton Recovery System (FRS). Using the FRS, Big Boss could airlift knocked out soldiers back to his base, recruiting them to his cause. It gave new incentive to taking out soldiers without killing them, and added the joy of collection to an already solid action-stealth game. Along with demonstrating many of the gameplay elements established in Ground Zeroes in a new environment, The Phantom Pain's showing at E3 detailed how integral the return of the FRS is to the game.

The segment shown appeared to be the game's opening mission. Ocelot escorts Big Boss on horseback through a sandstorm to a heavily guarded base where he is tasked with recovering intel that will ultimately lead them to an imprisoned Miller. Big Boss is having trouble with his new robotic arm — a casualty of the events of Ground Zeroes. He struggles to reach for and drink from a pouch of water, and Ocelot asks, "Getting used to it?" Big Boss dives right in after a short briefing, knocking

out the first enemies he encounters, quickly getting to work adding more soldiers to his cause using the FRS.

The big change to the FRS from Peace Walker is now you can airlift almost anything out of the battlefield to Mother Base — an area you can now visit, explore, and expand. Big Boss transfers every soldier he encounters to Mother Base, but he also airlifts gigantic supply containers, vehicles, and livestock. It's unclear how the latter will help Mother Base, but after coming across a sheep in the wild, Big Boss knocks it out with a tranquilizer dart and airlifts it into the sky as it bleats in surprise.

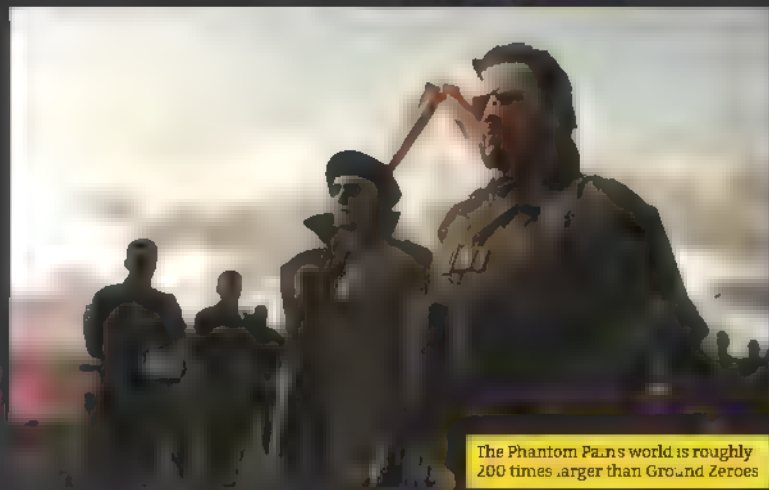
As Big Boss moves closer into the heart of the base, Konami shows off a collection of new mechanics. He calls in an airdrop of ammo, setting it to land on top of a patrolling soldier, effectively knocking him out. He calls in a supply drop for a single cardboard box — a Metal Gear Solid staple — and shows how he can now jump out of it like a jack-in-the-box to surprise enemies. While waiting for the guards to change shifts, Big Boss pulls out an electronic cigar and the world begins fast-forwarding around him. The weather changes dynamically as it begins to rain and another sandstorm picks up, affording Big Boss the perfect opportunity to

sneak in undetected.

Once inside, Big Boss begins taking pictures of the intel he needs, and relocates a prisoner outside to be airlifted back to base. Much in the same way Big Boss completes the level in Ground Zeroes, he calls in a helicopter lift at a pre-determined location on the outskirts of the base, meets it, and escapes mostly unscathed.

If our demo is any indication, Ground Zeroes barely laid the groundwork for

The Phantom Pain. It gave us a chance to acclimate to the new controls and get a setup for the story, but it is just an appetizer for the full meal. Big Boss' arsenal of tricks seems hugely expanded for the follow-up, and with the help of the FRS and the constantly expanding Mother Base, it looks like The Phantom Pain offers a world you could comfortably live in, as opposed to the brief visit we made in Ground Zeroes. ★ *Kyle Hilliard*



The Phantom Pain's world is roughly 200 times larger than Ground Zeroes

Battlefield: Hardline

With a new developer at the helm, Battlefield takes a left turn

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC ★ Style: 1-Player Shooter (64-Player Online P&A, Xbox One, PC) (24-Player Online P&A, 360)
★ Publisher: Electronic Arts ★ Developer: Visceral Games ★ Release: October 21



When we think Battlefield, we think large-scale combat with tanks, air support, and team-based gameplay. This preconception has been turned on its head with *Hardline*, a new take on the franchise that abandons the military theme in favor of pitting corrupt cops versus ambitious robbers in a fight over a big score.

Given this new direction, it's easy to be skeptical of new developer Visceral Games. How much does the studio even know about the legacy of this proud franchise, anyway? In executive producer Steve Papoutsis' case, he's been following Battlefield from the beginning, cutting his teeth on 1942 and using subsequent releases as excuses to upgrade his PCs. After sharing his passion with DICE general manager Karl Magnus

Troadsson, they brought up the idea of Visceral doing its own take on the brand. The cops and robbers motif they settled on had actually been percolating through the DICE offices for some time.

Before Visceral would be given the keys to DICE's flagship franchise, Papoutsis says they needed to get their "sea legs." To learn the ropes, the team led the development of the Battlefield 3 expansion pack *End Game*, which reintroduced capture the flag and included new vehicles like motorcycles. Once the team had its footing, it began the *Hardline* project in earnest.

As a long-time Battlefield fan, Papoutsis knew one of the major issues that has always faced Battlefield multiplayer—accessibility. If a new player isn't taken under the wings of an experienced player, it can take a while to get

familiar with the nuances of the teamplay. With *Hardline*, Visceral making adjustments to make sure new players are caught up to speed, and some of the changes may please Battlefield veterans as well.

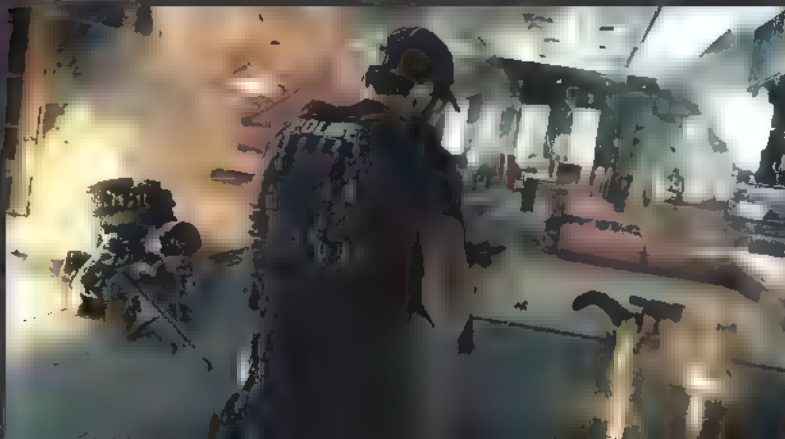
Have you ever repeatedly requested an ammo or health pack only to have your teammates ignore you? Now you can get the service you need by simply walking up to a teammate of that class and holding down a button. Visceral is also adding more voiceover work to keep players abreast of the objectives. To reward teamplay, group bonuses give squads more points for tackling objectives together.

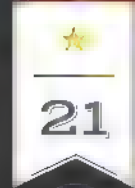
Visceral is only showcasing its new Helst and Blood Money modes thus far, but Papoutsis says *Hardline* also features conquest and team deathmatch

among other modes. The hardcore modifier is also returning for players who prefer a more realistic experience.

After you finish matches you are rewarded with experience, but in a twist on the Battlefield formula you are granted cash payouts as well. Players can use these rewards to purchase new weapons, attachments, and gadgets, many of which will be blocked until you reach a particular level or spend enough time with a weapon. You can also purchase weapons licenses to port weapons to other classes.

Hardline may alter the core formula of Battlefield, but perhaps it's just what EA needs to reinvigorate a franchise that has suffered some hiccups the past few years. If Visceral can deliver a strong single-player campaign as well, the game could turn some heads. ★ **Matt Bertz**





Mario Maker

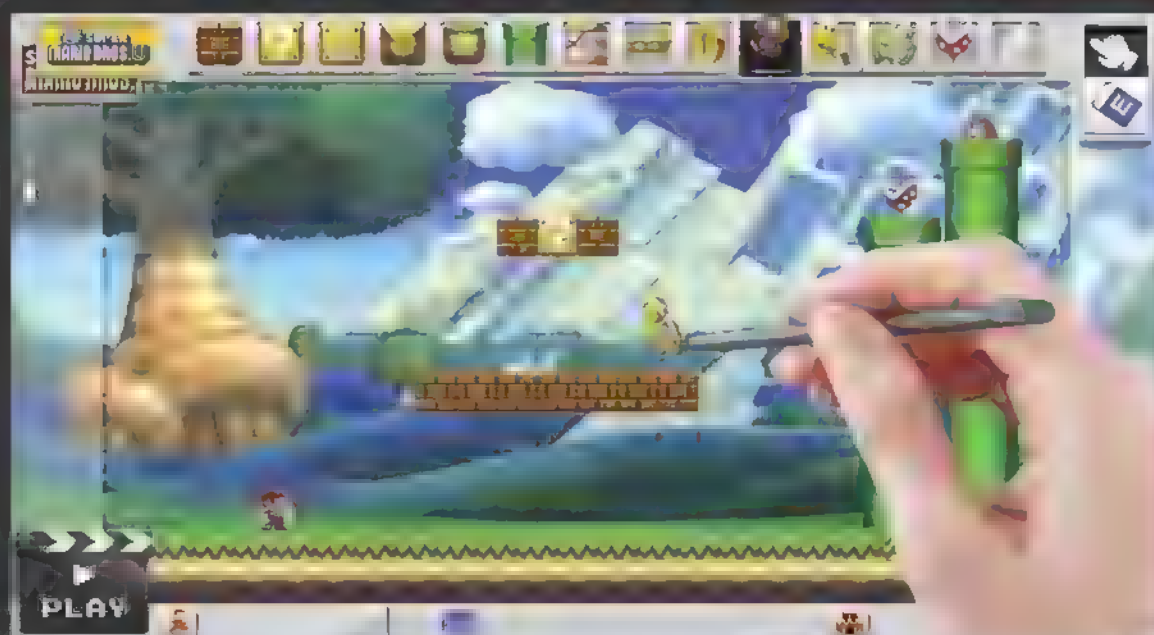
Rebuild your childhood memories

★ Platform: Wii U ★ Style: 1-Player Platforming ★ Publisher: Nintendo ★ Developer: Nintendo ★ Release: 2015

Next year, Super Mario Bros. celebrates its 30-year anniversary. It's an important classic for the history of video games and Nintendo. Developers have been trying to recapture the magic of the game for decades, and now Nintendo is putting those tools into the hands of the common gamer.

The Mario Maker interface is reminiscent of Mario Paint for the Super Nintendo. Entering edit mode pulls in a border of easy-to-understand tools around the screen. You can erase blocks, add them, drop in enemies, and adjust the size of elements of the level with simple taps and drags on the Wii U GamePad screen. As you tap on the GamePad and build your level, a hand appears on the television emulating your actions. The level we created on the E3 show floor was impossible to complete, but it accurately reflected exactly what we were trying to create, and we put it together in a matter of seconds.

Alongside the creation tools, the option to immediately switch between classic 8-bit Mario aesthetics and modern New Super Mario Bros. visuals exists. It lets you see how your level would appear in 1985, as well as in the recent New Mario Bros. games. As you playtest your creation you can switch back to edit mode at any time, and a trace of Mario's platforming



path will appear. This lets you make sure your platforms are spaced correctly for Mario's jumping ability, and highlights difficult or problematic areas. For example, in our level, which was just the gigantic letters G and I (for Game Informer), Mario hit his head on the bottom of the G when trying to jump over to the I, instantly falling

to his death. A smart designer would use the trace as a metric to raise the G to a point where Mario would not hit his head.

Nintendo isn't ready to showcase how deep the tools go or explain exactly how created levels will be shared—an important element of comparable games like LittleBigPlanet.

Creating Mario levels is a straightforward idea, and the options in Mario Maker make it very easy to understand. The tools provided leave a lot of room for creativity, and though I have never been much for creating my own levels, I am looking forward to seeing what sort of radical ideas fans will inject into Mario's familiar world. ★ [Kyle Hilliard](#)



22

Madden NFL 15

Thanks to NFL Films, Madden looks better than ever

★ **Platform:** PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360
★ **Style:** 1 to 4-Player Sports (6-Player Online) ★ **Publisher:** EA Sports
★ **Developer:** EA Tiburon ★ **Release:** August 26

Madden never quite figured out its presentation during the last generation. First, it started with the horrible decision to remove broadcast commentary altogether. When EA Tiburon finally relented and added color commentary, it made a terrible decision to go with Tom Hammond and Gus Johnson. The developer eventually got it right by replacing this awkward duo with CBS stalwarts Phil Simms and Jim Nantz in Madden NFL 13, but even then the rest of the presentation package proved lacking. To bring the new game up to the level of television broadcasts, EA enlisted NFL Films cinematographer Brian Murray.

The payoff is immediate. Quick cuts between whistles showcase everything from coaches calling plays (each of which now features unique bodies and facial models) to quarterbacks barking out plays in the huddle with camera angles that demonstrate a

better understanding of how to frame the action. Players react more realistically to making big plays, a half-time highlight show breaks down the tide-changing plays, and the broadcasting commentary will discuss the same stats that are being shown on the screen instead of being disjointed like in past years.

The on-field improvements are also noticeable right when you grab the sticks. Revamped passing trajectories help avoid rocket-jump interceptions from linebackers. Quarterback accuracy is more sporadic, which helps showcase new catching animations and defensive breakups, and new defensive-line controls let you jump the snap, shed a block when it's time to make a tackle, and perform rushing moves with the face buttons.

If EA Tiburon can tie all these improvements together, the future looks bright for Madden. ★ **Matt Bertz**



23

Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel

2K Australia sells us on the moon



★ **Platform:** PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC
★ **Style:** 1-Player Shooter (4-Player Online) ★ **Publisher:** 2K Games
★ **Developer:** 2K Australia, Gearbox Software ★ **Release:** Fall

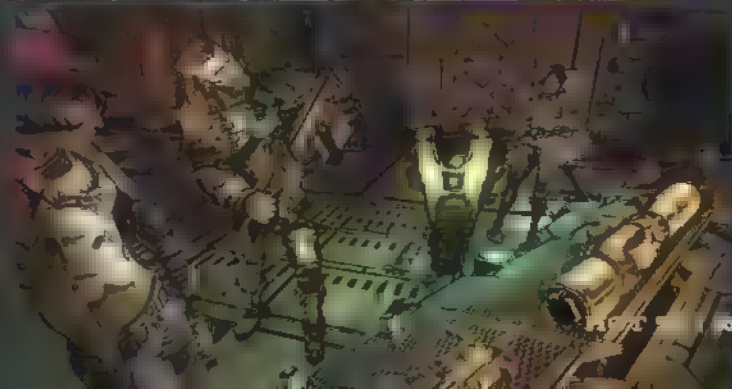
Fans bristled when they learned that the next installment of the Borderlands series wouldn't be Borderlands 3, but rather a "pre-sequel" spinoff developed exclusively for last-gen consoles. While the new adventure may not be the giant leap fans were dreaming of, 2K Australia's detour to the moon still packs plenty of crazy new additions to get excited about.

Our E3 demo reassured us that, although a moon may seem like a boring locale for a first-person shooter, Pandora's orbiting satellite doesn't have any shortage of chaotic action. Run-of-the-mill psychos, now called lunatics, sport bulbous space helmets and use the low-gravity environment to their advantage, bounding through the (absence of) air in long, lazy arcs while blasting laser beams and volleys of rockets at us. A host of vibrant new species inhabit the lunar landscape, including skagg-like ice kruggons that shatter into smaller kruggons, and floating sac creatures with spindly insect legs. None of them

pose much of a threat to our hastily selected bulks of Wilhelm and Athena, and their overpowered weaponry, but shooting up everything that moves is as fun as it's always been.

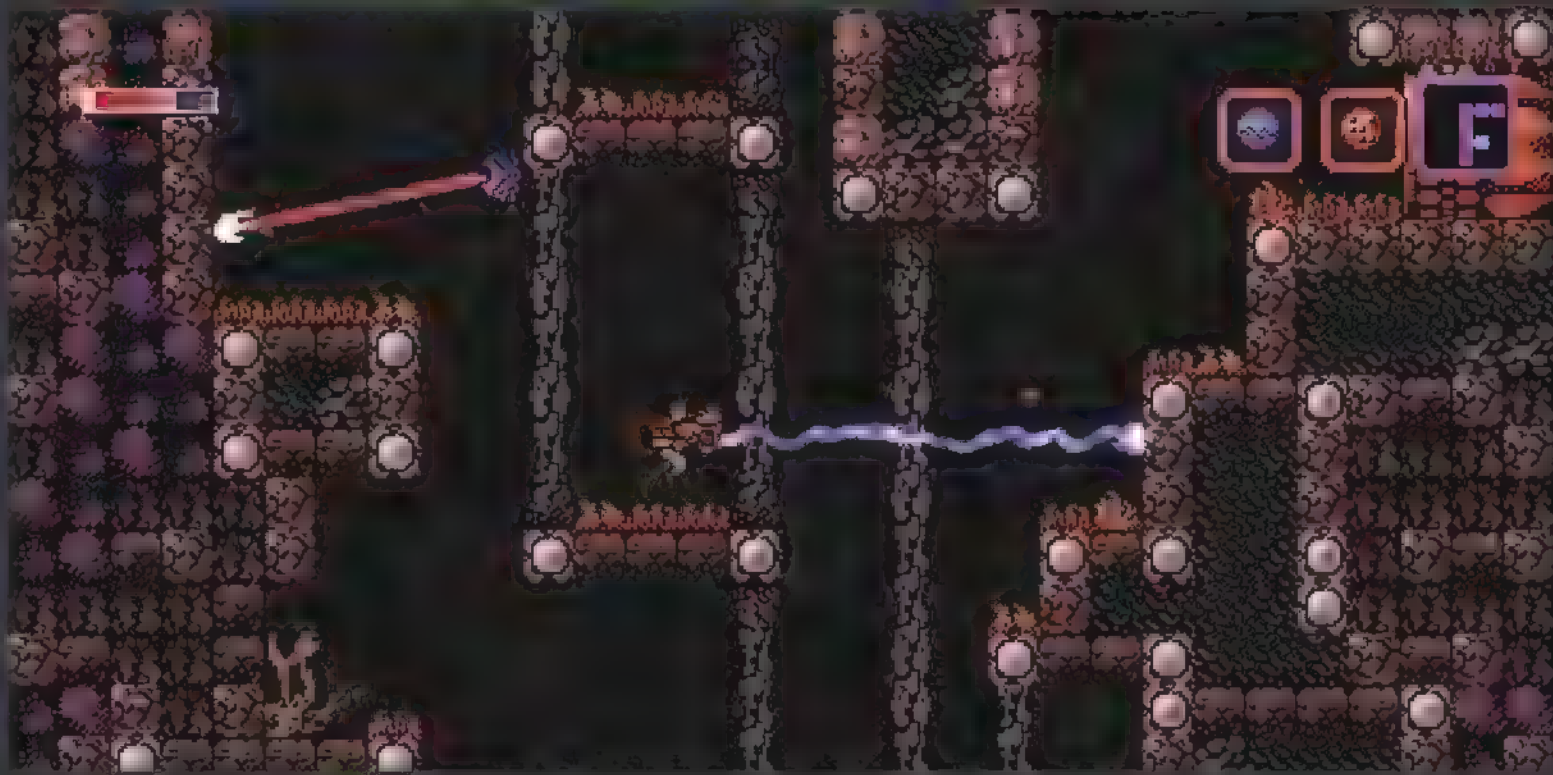
I was worried that The Pre-Sequel's new oxygen mechanic would feel like a hindrance, but instead it provides an additional layer of options when traversing the landscape. You can use your O2 reserves to perform double jumps, change your direction in mid-air, and slam down on top of enemies with a powerful butt stomp, my new favorite move in the series. I always enjoyed hopping my way through Pandora in search of hard-to-reach treasure chests, and The Pre-Sequel's new low-gravity environment makes exploring even more fun.

Like most gamers, I can't wait to see what Gearbox dreams up for a true, next-gen Borderlands adventure. The Pre-Sequel isn't that game, but based on our E3 demo, it should deliver plenty of fun to tide us over while we wait. ★ **Jeff Marchiafava**



Axiom Verge

Imitation as the highest form of flattery



★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Vita • PC ★ Style: 1-Player Action ★ Publisher: Tom Happ ★ Developer: Tom Happ ★ Release: Early 2015 (PS4, Vita), 2015 (PC)

Even the most cursory of glances at *Axiom Verge* leads to some confident conclusions about the games that inspired it. Classics like *Blonic Commando*, *Mega Man*, *Castlevania*, and *Contra* might come to mind, but more than anything, the original *Metroid* and *Super Metroid* seem built into the DNA of Tom Happ's impressive one-man project. From the background tilesets to the disquieting tone of the music, Happ has generously drawn from the

classic formula – and that's fine with us, as Nintendo has left the *Metroid* franchise to lie fallow.

I played a lengthy chunk of *Axiom Verge*, and while the roots of *Metroid* and other action/platforming classics run deep, it has an identity all its own. You play a scientist named Trace, who after a devastating lab experiment wakes in a hostile world of strange biological nightmares and ancient machines. A strange woman's voice begins to guide him on his way, and later revives him from death

at egglike save stations after particularly nasty encounters. Within minutes, Trace already has some impressive armaments at his disposal – artifacts left behind in the hostile horizontal and vertical corridors through which he runs and jumps.

The many weapons and items at Trace's disposal help set the game apart from its inspirations. The nova gun lets loose a glimmering ball of energy, while a second button tap disperses the ball to send it flying in multiple directions – perfect for nailing a switch behind an

inaccessible corner. The laser drill lets the scientist dig down into previously inaccessible areas through weak blocks. The reflector sends out bouncing bullets, while the firewall spews flame that arcs down to the ground and then explodes upward into a superheated column. Another fascinating tool is called the address disruptor, which sends out pulses of energy that can transform glitched-out blocks into solid platforms.

Trace's varied arsenal is used to confront the Giger-esque creatures that populate the alien world. I love all the unique enemy movement and attack patterns on display in the section of the game I played, from foes that dive toward you in swarms to floating monsters that eject laser beams in your direction. The most original creature designs are reserved for the bosses, which are hulking monstrosities that shout cryptic phrases at Trace before trying to kill him.

Axiom Verge manages the impressive feat of instilling both nostalgia and a sense of innovation and creativity. With plenty of time remaining before the planned release, I'm hopeful that Happ has the time he needs to tweak and polish the already impressive levels he's crafted into something magical.

★ Matt Miller





25

The Evil Within

Many scary things to shoot, so little ammo

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • Xbox 360 • PlayStation 3 • PC ★ Style: 1-Player Action ★ Publisher: Bethesda Softworks
★ Developer: Tango Gameworks ★ Release: October 21

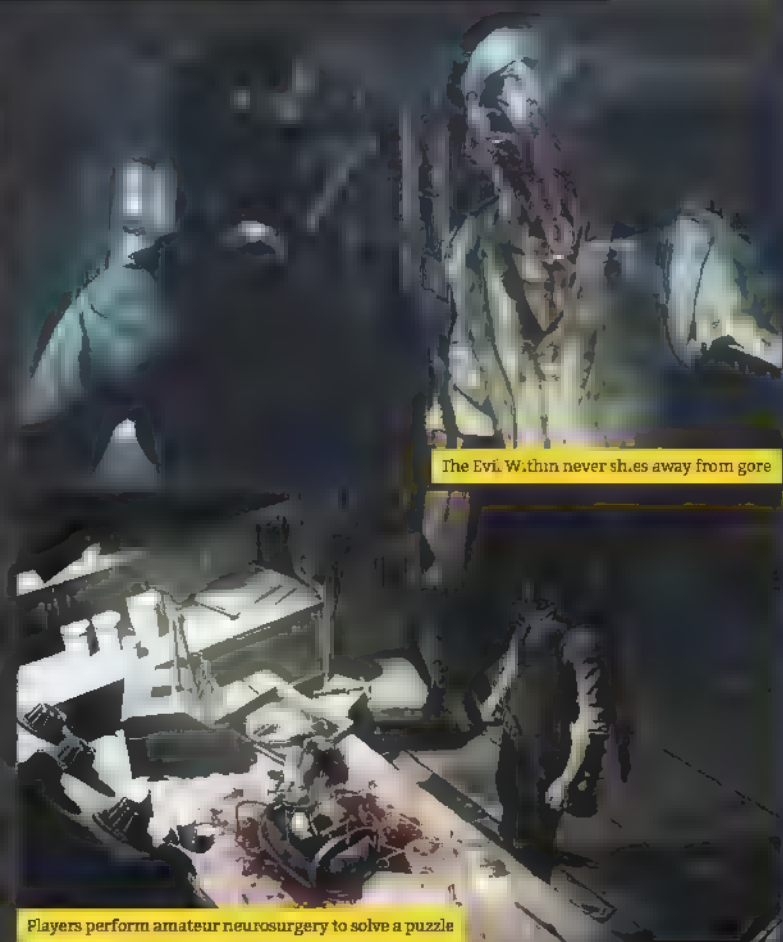
Shinji Mikami, the madman behind the legendary Resident Evil series, and his co-developers at Tango Gameworks are among the few folks carrying triple-A horror games into the new generation. Until now we've only seen hands-off demos showing creepy asylums, hallucinogenic horrors, and gameplay of the hero detective gunning down zombies in third-person. These previews did little to instill confidence that Mikami was making something more than a generic zombie shooter, but a recent hands-on session changed our tune. The Evil Within's tense combat combines surprising ambushes, punishingly little ammo, and lethal enemies that often-times won't stay dead.

Detective Sebastian Castellanos' bizarre spiral into a demented, evil world delivers him to a rustic village filled with zombies carrying sharp farming implements. Resident Evil 4 fans may find this scene familiar, and the comparisons don't end there. Castellanos can creep among the dark buildings and attempt to quietly dispatch the undead with his knife and avoid getting everyone's attention. But if he blows his cover, he'll have to either start running or pull a gun. The third-person, over-the-shoulder gunplay feels similar to the genre-defining combat of Resident Evil 4, but a bit snappier. Like RE 4, sniping a ghoul's ankles makes him fall down, and a well-placed headshot explodes in a gush of red. Headshots are important if you want

to ensure common enemies stay down. Similar to the Resident Evil remake on GameCube, some creatures rise again if they're not burned to a crisp. In addition to a scant supply of shotgun shells and bullets, Castellanos also has a limited number of matches to immolate fallen foes with. It was a clever game mechanic in Mikami's Resident Evil remake, and I'm glad it's coming back.

Playing The Evil Within with a pair of good headphones is an unsettling experience. The lethal combat and scarce supplies combine with foreboding environments to create omnipresent tension. Each time I heard moaning voices and dragging feet I dreaded that something awful was about to happen. The tension hit a crescendo when I sneaked past a door rattling on its hinges and something began bursting through the filmy wood like a horror-movie villain. I was so taken off guard I didn't have time to shoulder my shotgun, and the ghoul cut me down. Within is a difficult, stressful experience, and less masochistic players may have to crank the difficulty down.

I don't want to spoil any of the surprises in store for horror fans when The Evil Within hits just before Halloween. Mikami's latest has all the makings of a hit: weird puzzles in dusty mansions, intense third-person combat, and sadistically little health and ammo. We can only hope The Evil Within succeeds fantastically and reinvigorates the genre on consoles. ★ **Tim Turi**



The Evil Within never shies away from gore

Players perform amateur neurosurgery to solve a puzzle

The Order: 1886

Ready At Dawn tries to turn the tide of history

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 ★ Style: 1-Player Action ★ Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment ★ Developer: Ready At Dawn Studios ★ Release: February 20



The knights of The Order may be near immortal thanks to the mysterious Black Water substance that slows their aging and helps them heal, but these aren't alternate-history supermen and women dominating their world. They are in a desperate, centuries-long fight against a new species of man-beasts that are stronger than humanity.

However, The Order also faces foes from all sides, including fellow humans. The E3 demo opens with Galahad, Igraine, Lafayette, and Percival pinned down in the streets of London by thugs from the Rebels of Whitechapel. The rebels are bunkered down in balconies and doorways, but Galahad's thermite rifle is the perfect weapon for the occasion. The byproduct of the aluminum iron-oxide rounds it fires is a dust that is easily set alight by the flares of the rifle's secondary-fire function. This is perfect for subduing the hail of fire coming from all angles, allowing the group to recover in a nearby building before heading out into the back alleys where more rebels wait in ambush.

During gunfights the camera is slightly behind and just over the character's shoulder, but for cutscenes the angles and edits are more cinematic. This, combined with the excellent voice work, augments the graphics and adds a layer of believability to this grim story. Despite the quality of the cutscenes, gameplay looks just as good, and the transition between the two is smooth. During

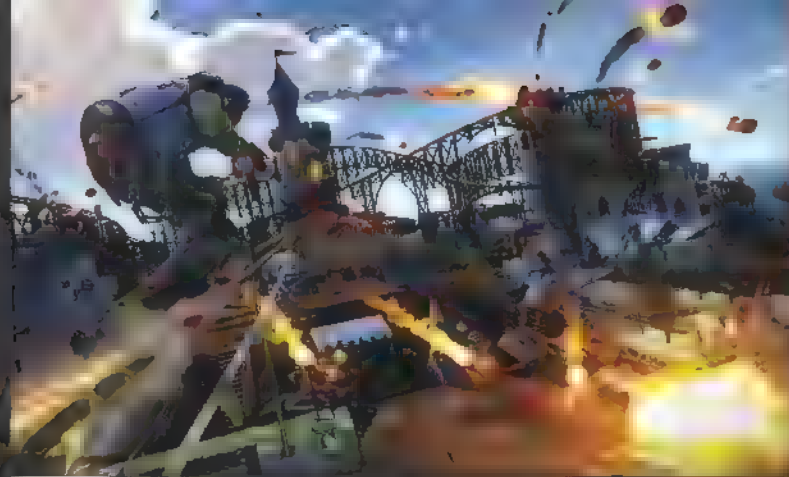
gunplay you also experience occasional breaks from the traditional over-the-shoulder look, whether that's the camera panning up for sequences of enemies attacking from above or zooming in when you initiate Galahad's slowed-time combat state.

The trouble the band of rebels gave us should be nothing compared to The Order's fight against their half-breed foes. E3 also provided us our first glimpse of this subspecies, which is

capable of shape shifting between a human-like form and a more feral one. This wolf-like form charges fast on all fours, has claws, and is more physically imposing in every way. Developer Ready At Dawn hasn't revealed many details about the story, but one look at the beast in the trailer and it's clear that even with a near-immortal group of knights fighting on its behalf, mankind is on the losing side of this evolutionary battle.

While it's a little worrisome that all we've played of the game since our late-2013 cover story is the same sequence in the streets of London, the game undoubtedly looks and plays well. The title was delayed into early 2015, giving Ready at Dawn a few extra months to polish the product and hopefully enough time to affirm The Order as a triple-A experience and not just a tale from some alternate history of the PlayStation 4. ★ **Matthew Kato**





Multplayer features several stages that culminate in a battle to protect these energy drink vats

27

Sunset Overdrive

Insomniac's latest looks worth the price of admission

★ Platform: Xbox One ★ Style: 1-Player Shooter (Multiplayer TBD) ★ Publisher: Microsoft Studios ★ Developer: Insomniac Games ★ Release: October 28

Even though it's not the spectacle that it once was, E3 is still a dazzling display filled with crowds, attractions, and people desperate to catch your eye. Fittingly, Insomniac decided to showcase a new amusement-park level for its *Sunset Overdrive* show demo.

As with the rest of Sunset City, Wondertown Land is overrun by monstrous beasts – the result of the

disastrous launch of the Overcharge Delirium XT energy drink. Your character, who was at the product's glitzy debut, is trapped in the quarantined city and has to do what he or she can to survive.

The most effective way to stay alive is to keep moving, which is *Sunset Overdrive's* best trick. Players can bounce, rail-grind, and vault over nearly everything in sight. Plenty of unique

elements keep with the theme-park motif, too. Smash onto a strength-test machine hard enough, and it'll destroy nearby mutants with a zap. Navigate a tricky path onto the top of a rocket-shaped ride, and its cars will fire into crowds with satisfying explosions. If *Wondertown* was fun before the infestation, it looks even better now.

Lording over the park is a *Road Warrior*-style maniac named King

Scab. To beat him, first you need to lure him out of his hiding spot. He's taken up residence in the *Dragon Slayer* roller coaster. To get him to open the drawbridge, players must grind on the coaster's rails and destroy enough of its runaway cars. Succeed, and he'll come out to play. A warning: If the rest of the park's inhabitants are any indication, Lord Scab plays rough. ★ *Jeff Cork*

28

Yoshi's Woolly World

Yoshi's back in a crafty new adventure

★ Platform: Wii U ★ Style: 1 or 2-Player Platforming (Multiplayer TBD) ★ Publisher: Nintendo ★ Developer: Good-Feel ★ Release: 2015

Mario's dino friend Yoshi has carved out a successful solo career, but he hasn't starred in a console release since gaming's Jurassic era. Yoshi's *Woolly World* takes the lovable character on an exciting new adventure with an equally enchanting presentation.

Yoshi has stomped around in worlds rendered in a variety of art styles – such

as pseudo pastels, scribbly pencils, and oil paintings – but *Woolly World* follows a consistent craft-store look. Like Good-Feel's own *Kirby's Epic Yarn*, the characters and environments are constructed with felt, buttons, and other textiles.

The presentation is full of delightful little graphic touches, such as the way that *Shy Guys* disintegrate into puffs of string when they're attacked. Throw a

yarn egg at a piranha plant, and instead of merely exploding, its jaws are bound and incapacitated. Those details extend into exploration, too. Yoshi can tug onto loose threads with his tongue, revealing hidden paths as the foreground unravels.

We played some of the multiplayer mode, which allows two Yoshis to tromp through the knitted landscapes. You can go full-on jerk, inhaling your counterpart

and wheezing him out into the nearest pit. More productively, we used our powers for good and hurried our buddies into areas that we couldn't otherwise reach.

Even back in the Nintendo 64 era, Yoshi's games were more about exploration than enduring tests of ridiculous challenges. *Woolly World's* adorable presentation is perfectly suited for the game's laid-back fun. ★ *Jeff Cork*



Yoshi can use his yarn tongue to reveal hidden paths

Forza Horizon 2

Gorgeous cars weather the storms in Forza's other series



★ Platform: Xbox One ★ Style: 1-Player Racing (Multiplayer TBA) ★ Publisher: Microsoft Studios ★ Developer: Playground Games ★ Release: September 30

Creative director Ralph Fulton says he wants the World of Forza Horizon 2 to be a happy place. The latest game moves the rollicking festival from Colorado to southern Europe, maintaining the cheerful atmosphere while the Rockies are replaced by the Alps. The hot-air balloons that hover over Horizon Festival will have to share space with storm clouds in the new-gen sequel, however, now that the series is

adding dynamic weather.

I live through spring in the Midwest every year, so I'm not a stranger to storms. That said, I couldn't help but be impressed in the demo, watching as a spotless Lamborghini Huracan was hit by a rainstorm. As it started, the wipers kicked on automatically, dragging the windshield clean with each swipe. Droplets formed on the supercar's bright-yellow paint, merging with others

to form trickles that streamed down to the now-reflective paving stones. The attention to detail is staggering, and while it's unlikely that I'll spend much time in the game ogling wet cars it's impressive nonetheless.

Once it's on the ground, however, you'd be foolish not to pay attention to the water. Puddles—which Fulton says are meticulously modeled, along with conditions including the atmosphere,

particulates, and the way roads dry up—aren't merely just for splashing pedestrians. The puddles and slick roads affect your car's handling. If you're not careful, you could end up inadvertently discovering an alternate route as your vehicle slides and exits the road. That could be catastrophic in a close race, but the world is designed with alternate routes in mind.

Forza Motorsport 5 introduced the concept of Drivatars, A.I.-controlled vehicles designed to mimic each player's behavior. The idea being, your friends could race against reasonable facsimiles of you even while you're out running errands. Forza Horizon 2 is expanding that idea to accommodate Horizon's open-world format. You can cruise around southern France and northern Italy, taking on challenges as they come, or simply poke around for unlockables like hidden cars. Your Drivatar learns as you go, so players who take on your virtual self will face an A.I. opponent that knows about the shortcuts you've discovered—in addition to your style of driving.

Playground Games says the game will ship with more than 200 cars on disc, and they won't be blocked by microtransactions. Between discovering those and competing in about 700 different racing events, the studio says players are looking at more than 100 hours of racing bliss. ★ **Jeff Cork**

Also on 360

Forza Horizon 2 will come out on Xbox 360, though it is being developed by Xuxus Digital and won't feature the same weather and Drivatar systems.

The Witness

Reading between the lines

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • PC • iOS ★ Style: 1-Player Puzzle
★ Publisher: Thekla, Inc. ★ Developer: Thekla, Inc. ★ Release: Winter



When *The Witness* boots up, you are staring at a dark screen with a circle of light emanating from its center. It takes you a moment to realize that the game has actually started and you're standing in the center of a tunnel. As soon as you walk toward the light, you emerge onto a mysterious island full of puzzles.

The opening to our E3 demo of Jonathan Blow's new game is free of many of the tutorial trappings found in most games. In *The Witness*, players are free to explore the island's various districts at their leisure. You might be drawn over to the island's castle before running up against a puzzle you don't understand and then wander toward the island's cherry blossom garden or its deserts.

The Witness' puzzles slowly teach you the rules necessary to solve them. They never present onscreen prompts telling players how to solve a problem.

Instead, it breaks down complex tasks into a series of small solutions for players to walk through.

Even though every puzzle in *The Witness* revolves around drawing lines, there is a great breadth of variety to the puzzles. We saw some puzzles that required players to view a puzzle through a metal gate in order to see the correct path to the finish point. Another puzzle required that we depress plates on the ground in the middle of a garden to draw a line on the board on a pedestal.

It's hard to fully grasp some of *The Witness*' mechanics until you get your hands on it yourself, but those puzzle and adventure game fans who are still confused about how the game works shouldn't lose enthusiasm for this artsy indie title. The mysteries of *The Witness* will become a lot clearer when it releases sometime late this year or early next year.

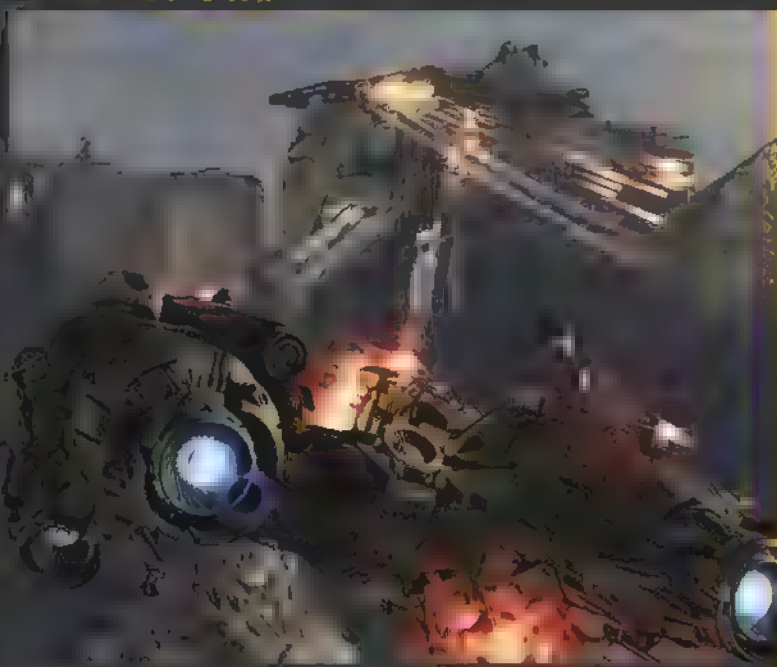
★ Ben Reeves



All of the puzzles of *The Witness* require players to draw a line on a board, but there is a great deal of variety in how those puzzles are solved

Dreadnought

When it comes to ships, size matters



★ Platform: PC ★ Style: 1-Player Shooter (10-Player Online)
★ Publisher: Gray Box ★ Developer: Yager ★ Release: 2015

Forget the little X-Wings and Vipers that are often the focus of space sims and space combat fighters – *Dreadnought* is all about the big ones. Capital-class ships duke it out within a free-to-play frenzy in *Spec Ops: The Line* developer Yager's upcoming PC title.

Players control ships from a third-person perspective, aiming the full concentration of turret fire with the click of a mouse button. From heavy armor-clad destroyers that can withstand extreme punishment, support cruisers that can repair damaged ships, and fragile sniper-style artillery loadouts, players have the option to select an archetype that suits their play style. Each ship also has four special abilities, ranging from cloaking, blinking, missile strikes, snares, projectile jammers, and epic blasts. Loadouts will presumably be

able to be altered and fine-tuned on release; the team deathmatch demo session only allowed us to play with preset templates.

The action is bite-sized, with matches taking around 10 minutes. Coordinating with your teammates to locate that support ship hiding under the rocks that's beaming repairs to an undefeatable destroyer on the front lines is essential to victory. Each ship can also choose to route power to the shields, which is the recommended course of action should you become the focus target of the opposing team and need to survive whilst your team picks them off.

This Unreal Engine 4 powered space combat game promises more than just team deathmatches, with episodic single-player missions and other competitive modes. Look for *Dreadnought* in early 2015. ★ Daniel Todd

Big ships, big battles



HOT SOFT

Galak-Z: The Dimensional

Dodging and weaving through a random hostile galaxy

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Vita • PC ★ Style: 1-Player Shooter ★ Publisher: 17-Bit ★ Developer: 17-Bit ★ Release: Holiday



Galak-Z was a hard game to ignore on the E3 show floor. Even amidst the flash of a thousand gaming monitors and the glitz of developer presentations, 17-Bit's colorful '80s anime designs stood out. Seconds after getting our hands on the game it proved equally as hard to forget.

The universe of Galak-Z is one giant space combat zone. Players take control of a pilot named A-Tak who runs missions across a procedurally generated environment – the ships, weapons, and layouts of levels change for every play-through, making each run at the game a different experience.

Galak-Z's world is inhabited by three warring factions: Imperials, space pirates, and hostile alien bugs. These factions all have different A.I. patterns, and can be

pitted against one another. At one point in our demo, we picked a fight with some space pirates who outgunned us. A fleet of Imperials showed up and helped us take out the space pirates before turning their weapons on us.

Galak-Z's controls straddle a delicate balance of feeling complex enough to require several hours to master but only a few minutes to grasp the basics. The physics-based controls have you holding down thrusters to propel yourself forward. If you let go of the thruster you continue to float forward until you rotate your ship around and hit the gas while facing another direction. After a few minutes, I was doing advanced maneuvers that had my ship looping around asteroids and zipping away from space debris at the last second.

The physics are also useful during

combat – as long as you understand how to manipulate the world around you. While approaching a fleet of space pirates I fired my blasters at a nearby barrel, hoping it would explode and damage the ships, but the barrel ended up ricocheting off a wall and came flying toward my ship. Alerted to my presence, the space pirates started to encircle me like buzzards.

Enemies in Galak-Z are far smarter than the average gunners in a 2D shooter, who often simply fly toward you with their finger on the trigger. Galak-Z's A.I. pilots track you across the map for long periods of time, send out search orders, and call for backup. Bulkier ships even nudge toward you to protect their weaker support ships.

The world of Galak-Z is a dangerous place, and smart players will use their

surroundings to their advantage. As the space pirates tried to flank me, I pushed a few of them close to the edge of an asteroid inhabited by giant worm, who hungrily snapped forward and swallowed one of the ships. Then I fired at an alien plant near a cluster of other ships, which unleashed a cloud of spores that attached their ships and slowed them down long enough for me to zip behind them and send some missiles up their thrusters.

During my demo, I died several times, but I never felt like it was anyone's fault but my own. Galak-Z's controls are so fluid that I had a blast dodging enemy fire while flying figure eights through their attack formations; more often than not my dogfighting sent me back to the mission select screen. Galak-Z may not be an easy game, but it's also not an easy game to put down. ★ **Ben Reeves**

The physics-based controls allow players to perform a series of dazzling flight maneuvers

A Tak runs a variety of different missions across the universe – many of them are death-defying



33

Homefront: The Revolution

The revolution gets a new leader

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PC • Mac • Linux ★ Style: 1-Player Shooter (2-Player Online) ★ Publisher: Deep Silver ★ Developer: Crytek ★ Release: 2015

When Kaos Studios and THQ teamed up with legendary Hollywood screenwriter John Millius for Homefront in 2011, the game impressed with its intriguing story detailing a Korean invasion of the United States. All of the narrative promise was ultimately wasted on a derivative single-player campaign that locked players in uninspired, linear environments. For the sequel, new franchise stewards Deep Silver enlisted Crytek (Far Cry, Crysis) to shore up this glaring weakness. The result is a sequel that extends the revolution into an open world.

Using its considerable experience building large, open environments, Crytek is transposing the Homeland theme onto an open-world sandbox. Taking place four years after the original Korean Invasion, players join a resistance movement based in Philadelphia that uses guerrilla tactics to slowly chip away at the occupiers.

Taking a tour through the streets of Philadelphia, it hardly resembles the birthplace of Independence. Korean checkpoints are set up all over the city, drones conduct surveillance passes, and Americans are routinely beaten for any act of defiance. This discontent has funneled into an underground resistance movement that challenges the invaders through any means necessary. To



weaken the Korean People's Army, you must employ hit and fade tactics, including assassination attempts. As you successfully undermine the police state, more citizens will rally to your cause.

Powered by the CryEngine, Homefront: The Revolution features day/night cycles, dynamic weather, and a reactive A.I. that responds to your tactics with brute force. Don't expect to last long in a direct firefight against the overwhelming odds, especially when the heavy armor arrives. The KPA has superior weapons

and much more ammunition than your small resistance forces.

Pulling off successful ambushes takes preparation. In the demo we saw, protagonist Ethan Brady stealthily explored abandoned buildings, scavenging supplies that would aid in attacking a police headquarters. Found objects like remote-controlled cars can be used to create improvised explosive devices that you can navigate into a vulnerable position. Brady uses this contraption to kick off the gunfight at the police station.

Gunplay looks to have the satisfying pop of previous Crytek games, and weapon customization is similar to the Crysis system that allows you to tweak underbarrel attachments, scopes, and silencers.

Given the promise of Homefront's original premise, we hope Crytek's pedigree can be put to good use in The Revolution. Liberating the franchise from THQ was just the first step; now it's time to enact meaningful change.

★ Matt Bertz



34

Xenoblade Chronicles X

A massive JRPG ready to compete with the big dogs

★ Platform: Wii U ★ Style: 1-Player Role-Playing ★ Publisher: Nintendo ★ Developer: Monolith Soft ★ Release: 2015

When Xenoblade Chronicles debuted on the Wii two years ago, it left an impression. Met with critical acclaim, Monolith Soft proved that grand JRPG adventures are still desirable and can be successful. Last E3, Nintendo announced a mysterious Wii U title called "X." While we knew it was a new Monolith Soft game, we weren't sure if it was connected to Xenoblade, and very little news surfaced clarifying what the game would be. At E3, Nintendo set the record straight, bestowing the 2015 release date and new name Xenoblade Chronicles X, along with live-streaming 43 minutes of its opening moments.

Nintendo clarified some basic details during this event. Xenoblade Chronicles X is not a direct sequel to Xenoblade Chronicles. Instead, X is a spiritual successor, tapping into many of its philosophical ideas. The minds at Monolith Soft crafted many different "Xeno" tales, like Xenogears, Xenosaga, and the recent Xenoblade Chronicles. Nintendo confirmed that the concepts in X go further back than the Wii entry; it taps into director Tetsuya Takahashi's origins, with nods to his past games for long-time fans. I noticed a Xenosaga vibe right out of the gate, especially with the character models.

Xenoblade Chronicles X opens with two alien species battling above Earth. Unfortunately, the huge space battle is damaging Earth in the process. Humans are panicking, trying to flight back with all the technology they have, but it's no use. To survive, they must evacuate Earth immediately. During the frenzy, the crisp visuals stand out, as laser beams and explosions fill the screen, showcasing the pandemonium and letting you sense the hopelessness. Suddenly, the Earth, before your eyes, evaporates into nothingness.

During the battle, your ship becomes damaged, crashing into an alien planet. This is where X takes place, and the story begins with you awakening in an escape pod. This immediately leads to a character-creation screen to customize your character's gender, hairstyle, eye color, and facial features. After your selections, you meet your first party member, who introduces you to the strange, expansive world. She lets you know not everyone made it to safety and that you must search for survivors.

The real-time combat looks similar to

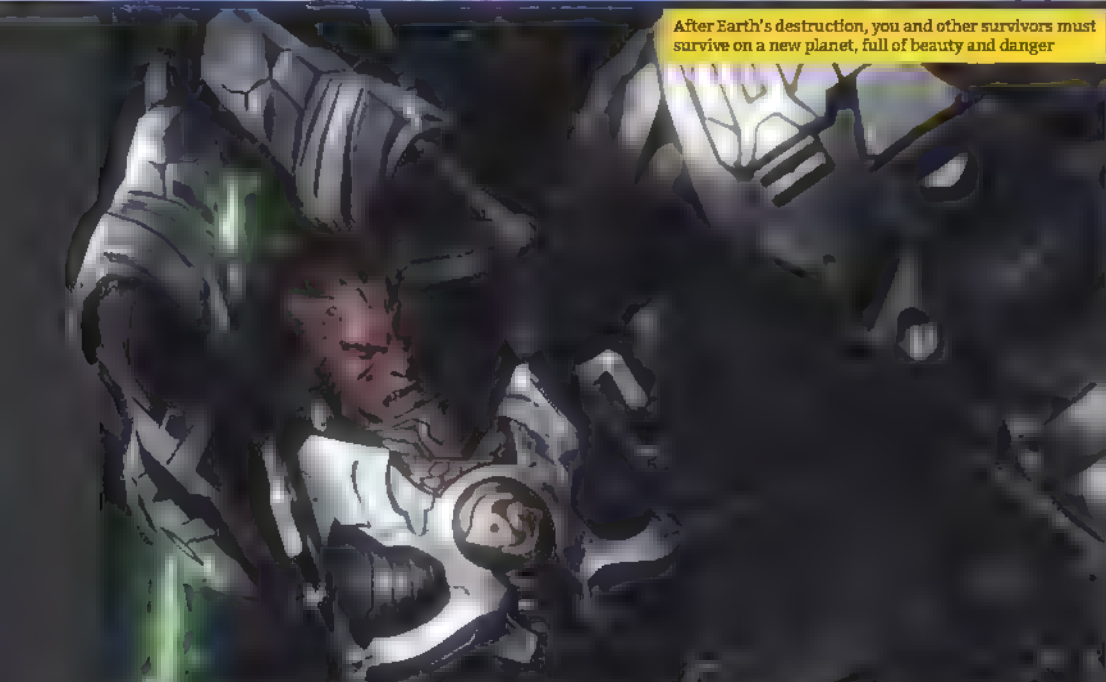
Xenoblade Chronicles. You target enemies and use the arts palette to select special skills. Arts use up technical points, which you can restore quickly by using melee attacks. If you want a more cautious approach, you can slowly earn them back with ranged attacks. It also has B-button events, where a partner shouts out to you in combat. If you hit the button at the right time, you earn valuable perks like health restoration for allies. During battle, your party members also call out actions they think you should take, like telling you to melee.

The character models definitely resemble Monolith Soft's past work





After Earth's destruction, you and other survivors must survive on a new planet, full of beauty and danger



attack because your technical points are dwindling. Positioning also matters; you can attack enemies from the back, side, or front to exploit different weak points. You have some control over your A.I. party members; you can issue orders during battle, like focusing fire, so they attack the same target as you.

As you explore, the world has time-of-day shifts and changing weather. This also affects which types of enemies you encounter and their behaviors. Also, before you attack an enemy, symbols above them indicate what to expect. For instance, red warns

of a hostile enemy, shows if they can detect you by sight or sound, and even lets you know if another enemy is likely to join if you attack. The game has yet to unveil all its classes, but a new feature lets you swap classes on the fly, even mid-battle. You can mix and match arts from different classes to cater to your gameplay style.

Xenoblade Chronicles X's world is striking; standing on vantage points, you can see the massive scope. The fantastic music already leaves an impression, as it adds depth to all situations, whether it's an intense battle or the personality of a city. One of the last towns

shown in Nintendo's demo looked like a futuristic Los Angeles, with bustling traffic, people shopping, and vibrant structures. This city is important as it's referred to as mankind's last hope. It may be a work in progress, but the inhabitants look to make it a home for the future.

Xenoblade Chronicles X looks impressive so far, from its creative, dinosaur-like creatures to the deep battle system. We can't wait to see the mechs that you can ride and control in action. Open-world JRPGs are a rarity, making Xenoblade Chronicles X even more exciting. ★ *Kimberley Wallace*



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36

Helldivers

Death from friend and foe



The Division

35

The decimation of New York City seems a ways off

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • PlayStation 3 • Vita ★ Style: 1 to 4-Player Shooter (4-Player Online) ★ Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment ★ Developer: Arrowhead Game Studios ★ Release: Summer

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One ★ Style: Online Multiplayer Shooter ★ Publisher: Ubisoft ★ Developer: Massive Entertainment ★ Release: 2015

Outside of a few videos highlighting the capabilities of Massive's impressive SnowDrop engine, we hadn't seen any new footage of The Division since last E3. On the anniversary of its debut, Ubisoft gave us another hands-off look that demonstrated how New York City evolves as you take sections of the city back.

For the uninitiated, The Division places you in New York City after a disease spreads through the city on Black Friday and leaves its infrastructure decimated. As a civilian member of the Strategic Homeland Division, your job is to team up with other agents to help take back the city.

In the first demo, a group of agents teams up to capture a base of operations near the 34th St. subway station in Midtown. To defeat the group of NPCs, the team must coordinate its strikes using gadgets and skills, both of which give The Division a distinct role-playing feel. A tactical read can highlight enemies in the area, a strobe drone can temporarily blind an enemy

to expose him to fire, and an auto-turret can keep some enemies occupied while a player rushes to heal a fallen comrade.

The second demo gave us a glimpse of how the city looked well before the area was safe enough to set up a base of operations. When accessing the map, the player is given information about the area's security level, contamination level, and morale level. To influence these readings players must take out various enemies, capture vital buildings like warehouses that hold valuable resources, and eventually capture the base of operations.

These coupled demos gave us a glimpse at one of the systems at the core of The Division, but there is still so much we don't know about the game. Right now The Division is listed for a 2015 release, but unless Ubisoft is just holding back Intel on the other core elements (including the multiplayer) it has a lot of work to do before this game is ready for prime time.

★ Matt Bertz

During a live demo of Helldivers at this year's E3, Arrowhead Game Studios president and CEO Johan Pilestedt joked that his team has started calling the game "Hellders" in the development studio. "The game is set up for brutal failure," he says. "It's set up to become this huge slaughter."

In this top-down shooter, up to four-players can quest together through online or offline play. They don't have to be on the same system, as Helldivers takes full advantage of Sony's cross-play functionality, allowing PlayStation 4, PlayStation 3, and Vita players to join the same game.

In each mission the team descends onto an alien world that won't always look the same thanks to the procedurally generated map. As the surroundings are revealed, fast-moving bugs leap from the shadows, and heavily-armed aliens move in for the kill, but your biggest threat may end up being the friends you are playing with.

"Friendly fire is always on," Pilestedt says. "It creates a really good dynamic while playing. In other games, you really don't have to pay attention to where your friends are, because it doesn't matter. In Helldivers, you always have to watch where the other players are, especially when an enemy drops into the middle of the team, and everyone scatters and fires inward."

It's imperative that the team works together and uses its resources at the right times. Mechs, stationary turrets, and airstrikes can be deployed...but not without effort. To access any of these weapons, the player must pull up a menu, and then enter a series of button presses correctly.

"You can't imagine how hard it is to hold down a button and press up, down, up, down, during the heat of battle," Pilestedt says with a laugh.

Helldivers doesn't have a definitive release date yet, but publisher Sony says that all three versions will ship this summer. ★ Andrew Reiner



37

Pillars Of Eternity

Obsidian returns to its RPG roots

★ Platform: PC • Mac ★ Style: 1-Player Role-Playing ★ Publisher: Paradox Interactive ★ Developer: Obsidian Entertainment ★ Release: Winter

The Infinity Engine titles of yesteryear like Baldur's Gate and Icewind Dale are often the topics of conversation in the PC role-playing space, but despite being excellent games, when you go back and play them today they show their age something fierce. Pillars of Eternity takes those same concepts and packages them with modern graphics and

usability enhancements.

Composed of many former Black Isle Studios developers who worked on Icewind Dale, Obsidian Entertainment is in a good position to translate this gameplay to the modern era. Pillars of Eternity's gameplay is deeply rooted in those older titles, with combat pausing, diverging paths that can kill off party members forever, and a heavy focus

on using dialogue and feats to take the story in different directions.

Actions and choices have consequences, and players have plenty of opportunities to take the story into different directions with quick, meaningful decisions as they move through the game.

As with the titles that inspired it, Pillars of Eternity features complete character customization in terms of race

and class, and gives players the ability to use core skills like survival, lore, and stealth to tackle various situations. The emphasis on freedom and consequence promises that most playthroughs will have few similarities, and your experience and challenges may be quite different than your fellow adventurers.

For many fans of classic RPGs, that's exactly what they want. ★ **Daniel Tack**

38

Hyper Light Drifter

A pixelated and profound take on a classic Nintendo franchise

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • Wii U • PC • Mac • Vita ★ Style: 1-Player Action/Role-Playing ★ Publisher: Heart Machine ★ Developer: Heart Machine ★ Release: 2014

Heart Machine's Hyper Light Drifter shows extreme promise as a unique 2D action RPG in the vein of The Legend of Zelda. The setting, art style, sound, and story weave together to create a hypnotic journey through high-tech dreamscapes.

The Drifter must search lost ruins and discarded technology of a long forgotten world for a cure to his mysterious illness. Players wield an energy sword and have access to a variety of other weapons and

tools throughout the course of gameplay, a SNES style-dive against swarms of creatures and singular, signature bosses. Skilled players can play through the game with just the base weapons and tools, but the many different items and enhancements players can find over the course of the game provide major assistance.

Combat is extremely fast – perhaps even punishing – but it's fair. After any given death it's easy for players to look back and see what they did wrong. Few

situations present themselves where the correct course of action is to go in guns blazing; if you use this approach you'll just waste resources. Drifter favors a tactical approach to twitch combat. High mobility, situational awareness, and adaptation to different situations are crucial to survival.

I've only played through a single level of the game, but Hyper Light Drifter is undeniably enchanting – this is a pixelated world that I may never forget. In an environment where people are always

ranting about 1080p and graphics, it's impressive that a handful of carefully crafted pixels can have more impact than the most realistic shooter.

In addition to a single player campaign, Hyper Light Drifter also includes a co-op survival mode where players can challenge themselves to last as long as possible against an unending tide of enemies. I'm excited to play more of it when the game releases for several platforms later this year. ★ **Daniel Tack**





39

Lara Croft And The Temple Of Osiris

Croft's newest isometric adventure offers double the fun

★ Platform: Xbox One • PlayStation 4 • PC ★ Style: 1 to 4-Player Action (4-Player Online) ★ Publisher: Square Enix ★ Developer: Crystal Dynamics ★ Release: TBA

Cystal Dynamics announced Rise of the Tomb Raider with an explosive reveal trailer during Microsoft's E3 press conference, but it wasn't the only game at the show that Croft fans should be excited about. The developer is following up its 2010 downloadable hit Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light with another puzzle-filled co-op adventure, and this time up to four players can get in on the temple-looting action.

Lara Croft and the Temple of Osiris takes players to Egypt, a surprisingly underused setting for gaming's leading archeologist. While investigating the titular temple with rival-explorer-turned-partner

Carter Bell, the duo becomes marked for death and must resurrect Osiris to break the curse and defeat Set, the god of chaos. The mortal protagonists are accompanied by Horus and Isis, two resurrected gods who harbor their own vendettas against Set after being imprisoned in the temple for centuries.

Both character types sport unique abilities, which players must use to navigate the temple and solve myriad puzzles. Croft and Bell pack dual pistols for dealing with the temple's countless mummies, scarab beetles, and other foes. They also sport grappling hooks for scaling walls, pulling up partners, and creating makeshift tightropes that other

players can walk across. Horus and Isis, on the other hand, wield mystical staves that emit enemy-destroying beams of light. They can also shield themselves in a defensive bubble, which can be used by other players as a stepping-stone to reach higher legends. Finally, Horus and Isis can control objects in the environment marked with glowing hieroglyphs, which in the demo was used to raise and lower certain ledges. Like in Guardian of Light, all players are equipped with unlimited bombs, which can be used to kill enemies, destroy environmental objects, and help/grief your partners.

Puzzles automatically scale based on your player count, ensuring no one

feels like a third (or fourth) wheel when it comes time to implement a solution during breaks in the action. Then again, most of the puzzles we encountered during our demo didn't offer much respite; enemies continued to swarm and attack us, requiring our team to split their efforts between defense and solving the tasks at hand. The challenge posed by enemies also scales dynamically, so hopefully Crystal Dynamics can keep everyone in the sweet spot regardless of how many players are involved.

The Temple of Osiris is being developed exclusively for new-gen systems, and as such looks gorgeous. The player models sport an impressive amount of detail and look great even in close-up shots, which Crystal Dynamics says will allow them to create better cutscenes. The developer also says the sequel doesn't have any load times, and features hundreds of gameplay-tweaking weapons, relics, and artifacts for players to fight over.

Those who prefer playing in the same room as their friends will be happy to know that The Temple of Osiris features four-player couch co-op support in addition to online play. The game can also accommodate any combination of the two, so players shouldn't have a problem getting a full crew together. That's great news, as our E3 demo proved raiding tombs is much more fun with friends. ★ **Jeff Marchiafava**

Action in The Temple Of Osiris becomes more chaotic with the more players you have on your team



40

Bayonetta 2

Faithful action, improved fashion sense

★ Platform: Wii U ★ Style: 1-Player Action ★ Publisher: Nintendo
★ Developer: Platinum Games ★ Release: October



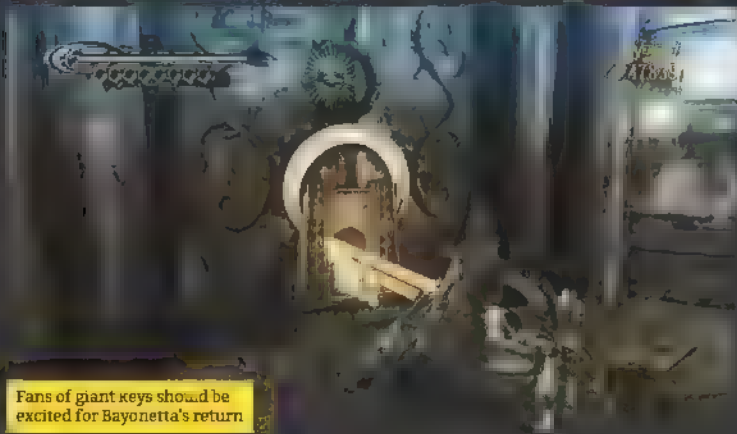
Wii U owners have long complained about a lack of mature action titles for their console. E3 didn't convince us that would change soon, but Bayonetta 2 stands in stark contrast to that fact nonetheless.

Following the events of the first Bayonetta, the titular heroine and her companion Jeanne have been traveling the world and fighting off hordes of angels invading their planet. Our E3 demo threw us right into the middle of a fight. Bayonetta 2's combat doesn't stray far from the original's stylish, over-the-top action. We disintegrated monsters using a series of dazzling combos while riding atop a fighter jet and then smashed a dragon's face into the side of a skyscraper. A new Witchmode mechanic allows Bayonetta to slow down time for a short period when she times her blocks perfectly, and this mechanic comes in handy when the action gets too chaotic.

The combat gave us a brief look at a few of Bayonetta's new weapons. A pair of magic whips attaches to Bayonetta's heels and is great for unleashing a series of quick combos against a lot of smaller foes, while a new longbow is ideal for delivering critical hits to enemies at a distance.

As a bonus, Platinum Games is including a download code for players to access the original Bayonetta. This Nintendo-exclusive version of the original game allows Bayonetta to cosplay as Link, Samus, and Princess Peach. Players can also change the design of the halos – which act as currency in Bayonetta – so that they look like the coins from Super Mario Bros. Mario's arch nemesis even makes a cameo as the monstrous hands that Bayonetta summons with her hair magic.

Bayonetta 2 is shaping up to be an impressive package for Nintendo fans. Platinum Games' gothic-costume adventure should be available just in time for Halloween. ★ **Ben Reeves**



Fans of giant keys should be excited for Bayonetta's return.

41

FIFA 15

Sitting atop the sports game empire, FIFA makes subtle tweaks to its game



★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC
★ Style: 1 to 4-Player Sports (22-Player Online) ★ Publisher: EA Sports
★ Developer: EA Canada ★ Release: September 23

After checking out Madden and NHL on the E3 show floor, I walked over to the FIFA 15 expecting a similar jump in fidelity. Instead, the more time I spent with the game the more it felt like a subtle refinement of FIFA 14 rather than a significant leap forward.

Given the high quality of FIFA 14 (our reigning sports game of the year) having a lot of core gameplay elements carry over isn't a bad thing. After a couple games on the sticks I started to gather the small differences that set the new game apart from its predecessor. The most immediately noticeable change I encountered was a sharpened A.I. when attempting through passes. Defenders rarely knew how to jump into passing lanes last year, but now they aggressively defend space as well as mark attackers. Several

through balls I connected with regularly in FIFA 14 were cut off.

Expect to see more physicality when defenders challenge for the ball as well. More aggressive players will put a shoulder into attackers and knock them off the ball, which creates more urgency to get your pass off in tight spaces if you are controlling a player with a slight build.

Presentation is also receiving attention in the form of increased player emotion. If you shank a golden scoring opportunity or get robbed by a fantastic save, the player will properly lament the missed opportunity. Gamble on a dangerous tackle and your opponent may take issue with the play.

We'll find out in September if these changes make enough of a difference to keep FIFA the best sports game on the market. ★ **Matt Bertz**

A new feature in FIFA 15, run touch dribbling allows skilled players to keep control while sprinting.



Code Name S.T.E.A.M.

Abraham Lincoln takes on the alien menace turn by turn

★ Platform: 3DS ★ Style: 1-Player Strategy (Multiplayer TBA) ★ Publisher: Nintendo ★ Developer: Intelligent Systems ★ Release: 2015



The creators of Fire Emblem and Advance Wars love the strategy genre. They love it so much, in fact, that they want more people to explore the genre. Code Name S.T.E.A.M. is Intelligent System's attempt to appeal to a wider audience while still exploring the genre they love.

Code Name S.T.E.A.M. stands for Strike Team Eliminating the Alien Menace. Before telling us what the acronym stood for, creative director Paul Patraschu warned us to hold onto our seats, acknowledging the absurdity of the name. The ridiculous name extends into the game's general aesthetic. This steampunk world is set in an alternate version of the 19th century where aliens attack and humans are forced to retaliate. The world joins forces to fight behind the leadership of Abraham Lincoln.

Art director Takako Sakai is taking the art style in a different direction than the developer's previous titles, looking toward American comic-book artists like Jack Kirby, Bruce Timm, and Mike Mignola for inspiration. For the aliens,

she looked in another direction – the tentacled creatures of H.P. Lovecraft.

The story and comic-book-inspired visuals might be over the top, but the combat hopes to retain the serious polish typically associated with the developer. Players take turns against the enemy, moving around the map to take cover and aiming manually to fire shots and special attacks. One of the special attacks we saw involved an American soldier throwing golden eagles at an alien while an American flag swayed in the breeze behind him.

The steampunk style extends beyond the visuals to provide a reasonable conceit for why combat must occur on a turn-by-turn basis. As players move and attack, they must pause to allow their steam-powered weapons to build more steam. This occurs between turns.

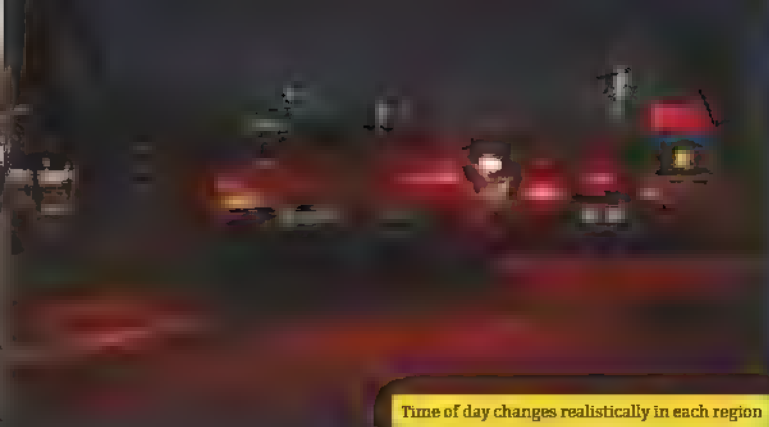
Unlike most strategy games, you won't find an overhead map or radar. Everything must be tracked down with exploration, which is one of the ways Patraschu hopes to separate the game from traditional strategy titles. You also



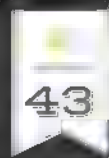
won't experience permadeath of any characters. Patraschu says the game offers appropriate difficulty, but unlike Fire Emblem or XCOM, the team dynamic is much more important than having powered-up soldiers. To permanently remove a teammate would hinder the flow of combat, according to Patraschu. Code Name S.T.E.A.M. is a new IP

for Nintendo – something gamers have been asking of the publisher for the last few years. The strategic gameplay might comfortably fit in developer Intelligent Systems' wheelhouse, but we'll have to play the game to see if the over-the-top comedic steampunk aesthetic can gel with the studio's sensibilities. **★ Kyle Hilliard**





Time of day changes realistically in each region



DriveClub

Days of thunder

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 ★ Style: 1-Player Racing (12-Player Online) ★ Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment ★ Developer: Evolution Studios ★ Release: October 7

At this year's E3 we expected to see more of DriveClub's multi-player functionality (namely the interaction your racer has with fellow crew members), but Evolution Studios instead gave us a demonstration of the dynamic weather conditions.

The sun is in the appropriate location for all of the real-world tracks, and moves accordingly with the changing of time. This may sound like a trivial detail, but the light source tied to the sun plays a large role in the racing. Clouds are not

static images on the skybox. They move with the wind, and are different every time a race loads. A representative from Evolution Studios demonstrates this technology by showing us how a cloud-bank can block out the sun, and dramatically affect the lighting on a track. The muted color palette makes it harder to pick out objects in the distance, and differentiate upcoming turns.

On a track set on a mountainous area in Scotland, the rain affects visibility and the driving conditions. We're told that the rain

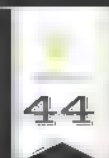
is not an illusion and that it is fully simulated across the region. Puddles form in certain areas on the track, and all of the cars kick up mist as they roar through them. Lights, roadside flags, and the terrain are all reflected on the slick roads. When the rain ends, the puddles evaporate based on the amount of wind at the time and the depth of the water.

The final demonstration is a blizzard that no person should ever be caught driving in. Cars just 20 feet in front of yours can hardly be seen and are mostly

recognizable by their taillights.

All of the weather effects look fantastic, and if this technology plays out like Evolution Studios hopes it will, should elevate the difficulty and give players a sense of unease when driving toward dark clouds.

Evolution says that these beautiful sights can be captured in a photo mode, which they hope to add to the game at some point in 2014. DriveClub ships exclusively for PlayStation 4 on October 7. ★ **Andrew Reiner**



Dying Light

Slice, dice, and run for your life

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360 • PC ★ Style: 1-Player Action (4-Player Online) ★ Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive ★ Developer: Techland ★ Release: 2015

You've got to be nimble if you don't want to become a zombie's dinner during an undead apocalypse. Dead Island developer Techland understands this, and lets players become zombie-dodging parkour masters in this first-person open-world adventure.

During a recent hands-on session with Dying Light, I got a sense for how players become more capable urban runners throughout the game. Early on, your character can slowly but surely mount high ledges, leap across gaps, and slide under narrow openings. Jumping forward in the story

movement speed becomes more fluid and allows you to flee faster and more elegantly move through the city. Killing zombies and completing missions lets you level up and choose new skills, like a jump kick or side dodge.

Exploring the tropical setting and scavenging scrap also lets players craft and modify devastating melee weapons. Guns like pistols and machineguns are available, but custom implements of destruction like flaming machetes and electrified axes do the trick with pizzazz.

These brutal melee weapons feel similar to how they did in Dead Island, but with added visceral impact and gore only possible on the most powerful hardware.

Dying Light plays well and looks stunning in these short hands-on previews, but we won't know its full potential until we're able to survive sunset to sunrise with three other zombie killers. At this point in development, Techland appears to be applying lessons from the buggy-but-fun Dead Island to make a more polished apocalypse. ★ **Tim Turi**



Best wait until nightfall to seize these ruffians base





Everybody's Gone To The Rapture

A mystery at the end of days

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 ★ Style: 1-Player Adventure ★ Publisher: Sony Computer Entertainment ★ Developer: The Chinese Room/Sony Santa Monica ★ Release: TBA

Most post-apocalyptic settings depict the end of civilization as we know it. Our cities lie in ruin, covered in grey ash and the bones of our fallen. This isn't the case with The Chinese Room's newest title, *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture*. In a brief 20-minute demo at E3, creative director Dan Pinchbeck talked about the Cold War and the end of times, but the world he invited us into is serene, beautiful, and a snapshot of prosperity for a farm town on the outskirts of London, circa 1984.

Although Pinchbeck never details the character he is controlling in the demo, we find this person standing on a dirt road overlooking a wheat field on the left, and an autumn forest (dense with orange and green leaves) on the right. The world is inviting and calm, and Pinchbeck moves through it slowly, giving us the time to soak in the details created using Cry Engine, such as how a gentle breeze affects the wheat. As he moves forward, a red phone off to his right rings. His character picks up the receiver, but never says anything as the voice details what sounds like a catastrophe. Before we can truly understand what is happening, the call ends, and Pinchbeck continues forward along the road.

Insects, birds, and wildlife scurrying through the foliage are seen, but something in the world seems off; other than the voice on the phone, there are no other human beings. This village looks to be in tip-top shape and fully functional,

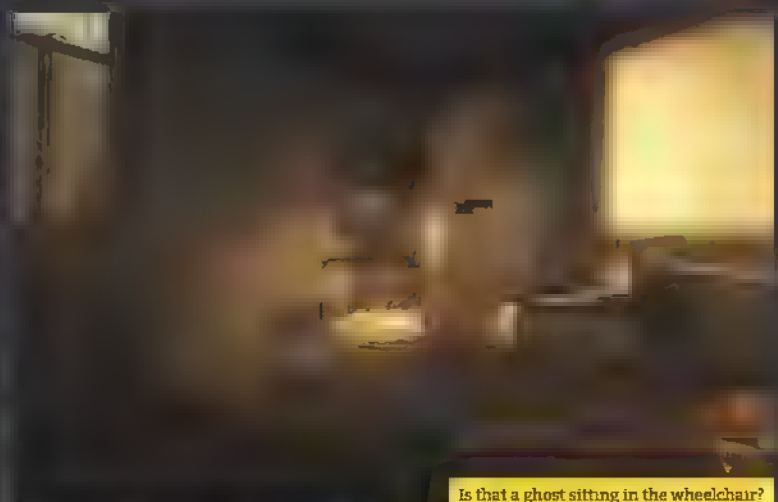
yet it's been abandoned.

Deeper into the village, we see something that doesn't quite fit into the world — a golden orb is floating over the road, moving somewhat frantically, leaving behind a trail in its wake. The orb seems to be summoning Pinchbeck to follow it. He does just that and is led to a stone bridge, providing safe passage over a creek. The orb darts away and two ghostly figures appear on the bridge. One is female, the other male. We learn they have a daughter, and that the father works too much. They also discuss a coming storm that could cause an electromagnetic disruption. The spirits leave the bridge and continue down the road, but Pinchbeck doesn't follow them.

Pinchbeck says the narrative is nonlinear, and most players will experience it differently. The particular meeting of the ghosts on the bridge will only happen once, and by not following them he's going to miss out on part of their story. It's up to the player to hunt down the narrative and piece the threads together to find out what happened to the people of the world.

The orb, which Pinchbeck describes as one of five A.I. characters players get to know, leads us to a farmhouse. A car parked outside is filled with supplies, like oxygen masks and rations. From what we can see, the car was loaded up quickly, and in a panic.

Inside of the house, Pinchbeck barely has time to glance over at the living room before a swirl of particles engulfs



Is that a ghost sitting in the wheelchair?

his character, giving him a brief glimpse of a wheelchair in a small bedroom. Reality flashes back into frame, and Pinchbeck explores the house. Upstairs he comes across the wheelchair and room. No other clues come from it, other than the possibility of the oxygen tanks possibly being for a sick loved one, and not an airborne toxin as originally believed.

Pinchbeck's last stop in the house is a kitchen. Its countertops are overrun with spoiled foods and supplies. He proceeds out the backdoor and the orb leads him to a giant tree. The crackling of energy and a swirl of particles appears again, this time forcing Pinchbeck to rotate

the PlayStation 4 controller to make the swirls align. The screen flashes white, and the demo ends.

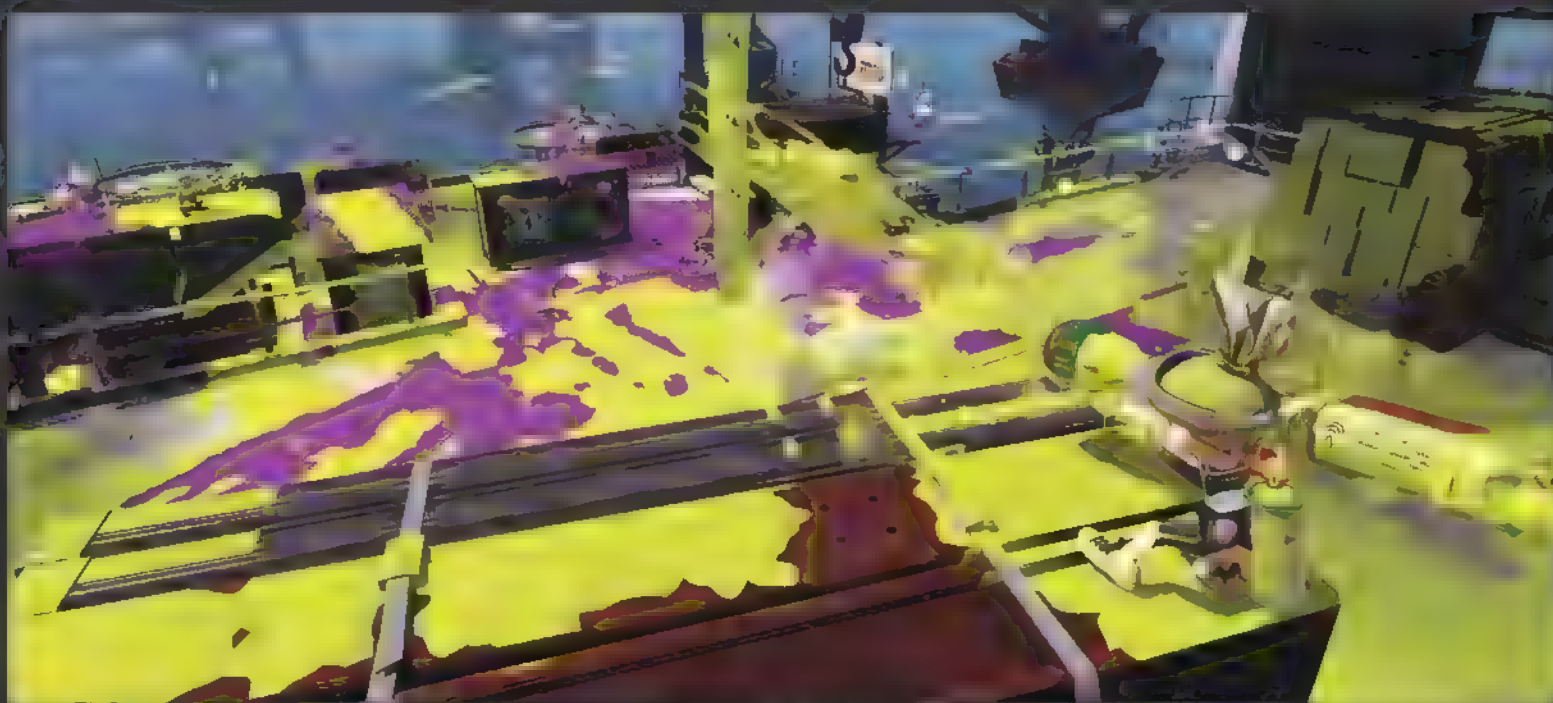
We didn't see much, yet walked away from *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* with dozens of questions pertaining to the game and its fiction. It was the slowest and most uneventful E3 demo I've ever seen, yet one of the most intriguing, thanks to the narrative hooks. It looks like The Chinese Room has a hell of a mystery on its hands.

The only question about the game that Pinchbeck definitively answered is that there are no fall states. "The only fall state for us is the player doesn't care," he says. ★ **Andrew Reiner**

Splatoon

Nintendo brings messy fun in multisprayer shooter

★ Platform: Wii U ★ Style: 1-Player Shooter (8-Player Online) ★ Publisher: Nintendo ★ Developer: Nintendo ★ Release: 2015



Nintendo announced several new games during its E3 Nintendo Direct broadcast, including the delightfully bizarre Splatoon. Describing it, the game sounds like it was designed via Mad Libs. This third-person shooter replaces bullets with ink, and your main goal is to spray more surface area than your opponents. Also, your character can turn into a squid. While the concept might be a bit wacky, it's an interesting take on a genre that's too often stuck up its own blowhole.

As with many shooters, teams are divided by color. In Splatoon, those colors do more than delineate allegiance. I joined up with two other Game Informer editors and a Nintendo ringer to take on another four-person/squid team. The opening seconds are a

frenzy of ink, as players spawn into the arena and begin blasting everything in sight with their sprayers. Thick globs of color saturate surfaces as we charge forward. I got a quick briefing ahead of time, so I know that victory depends on covering more of the world with your team's color. As my teammates forge on, I stay slightly behind, using my hose-like sprayer to touch up any big spots that were missed.

Looking at the Wii U GamePad, I can easily chart the match's progress. I need to catch up, which is a perfect time to transform into a squid. It's an instant maneuver—there's no big fanfare, since it happens all the time. As a squid, I bounce slowly on uninked surfaces. When I cross into a spot that's my team's color, however, I submerge and speed up. Several benefits accompany

this. First, being faster is helpful when success depends so much on getting around. Secondly, your ink supply refills more quickly when you're under. I found myself relying on quick swaps between both modes, which allowed me to pull off tricks like painting a ramp, squidding under its newly colored surface, and then popping out and crossing the otherwise unreachable gap.

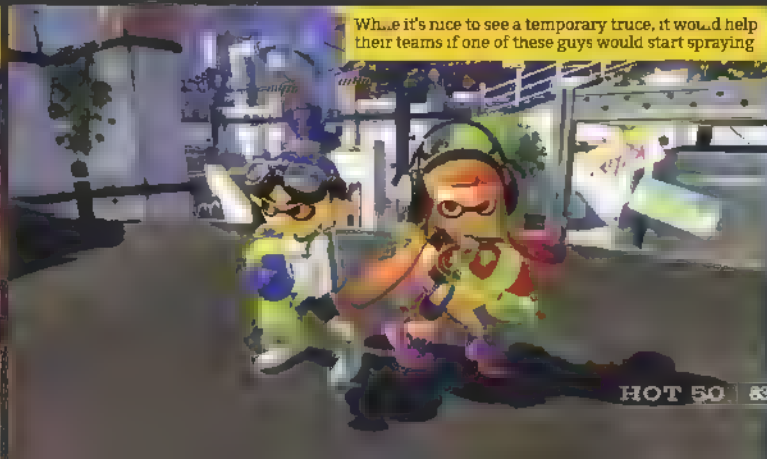
While I'm doing all of that, the enemy team is busy painting their own area and doing its best to cover our tracks. Where you were doesn't matter when the timer hits zero; only the final color state of the arena counts. I stall them as best I can by painting the other team's members when I see them, temporarily knocking them out of play. In a nice touch, Nintendo allows players to leap over to a teammate's side at any time,

by pressing their Icon on the GamePad like Battlefield's squad respawn, only without the respawning part.

I like Nintendo's willingness to try something new with Splatoon, but my enthusiasm doesn't come without reservations. Simply put, the controls aren't great. Neither the gyroscopic nor traditional schemes offer the precision I'm accustomed to. I'm not expecting to pull off inky headshots without thinking—this isn't a typical twitch shooter—but I do expect more from Nintendo than merely "functional." It's possible that there are additional calibration settings that we'll have access to later, and there's still plenty of time for tuning. I hope so, because I love the idea of playing a shooter where the combatants just need to take a shower when it's over, rather than visit the ER. ★ Jeff Cork



Taking the high ground puts you at a distinct advantage, since you can spray farther from above.



While it's nice to see a temporary truce, it would help their teams if one of these guys would start spraying.



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LittleBigPlanet 3

New friends to help Sackboy thrive

★ **Platforms:** PlayStation 4 ★ **Style:** 1 to 4-Player Platforming (4-Player Online) ★ **Publisher:** Sony Computer Entertainment ★ **Developer:** xDev, Sumo Digital ★ **Release:** November

Sackboy is back! Not only did Sony surprise us by unveiling LittleBigPlanet 3, but the company also announced the game releases this November. Those aren't the only interesting developments: LittleBigPlanet is going through some changes with three new playable characters sporting unique abilities. This is also the first main iteration that Media Molecule isn't developing; Sumo Digital and xDEV, who both contributed to past LittleBigPlanet projects are teaming up for this new entry.

The game takes place on a new planet called Bunkum – an imaginative land where ideas flow through the sky. Unfortunately, Sackboy gets himself into a pickle when he accidentally releases three titans, who are bent on destroying his new planet and turning its worst creator, Newton, into a monster. Sackboy can't fix this alone, and must enlist the help of three new friends.

Swoop the bird can fly to high areas or pick up other players, providing extra opportunities to collect hard-to-reach stickers. Oddsock is super fast and his speed allows him to wall jump. Toggle is a transformative character. In his regular form, he's heavy. This is useful for standing on switches and pulling heavy objects barring the path forward to get the gang around. You can also transform him to a mini version that can squeeze through small areas.

At E3, I played a brief four-player cooperative level, and everything that's fun about LittleBigPlanet was in place, like switching between planes and finding a way to navigate through the level

via the various obstacles and jumping puzzles. The basic gist of the gameplay is using a character's distinct ability to afford the others a path. You often need to find solutions to barriers, timed obstacles, and hard-to-reach switches.

The co-op focuses on working together; one character can't just speed ahead of the rest and steal all the goodies. However, in the level we played, Toggle was the most useful and more involved in puzzles than the others. I hope the levels are balanced for the different characters attributes, because at

times, I found myself bored waiting for Toggle to do all the heavy lifting. Still, the platforming was smooth and on par with other entries, and I found myself laughing as my partners miserably failed jumps and cheering when we finally got through a tough puzzle.

The four-player co-op is accessible through adventure mode, or you can take the gang through user-generated levels. You can still use your couch and four controllers, or play online. Create mode has some new features and refinements, like involving the DualShock 4's

touchpad in creation and lending players the ability to customize the look and how each of the four characters play. In my demo, I added a monster suit to Oddsock to make him stand out even more on screen. All your creations can be shared easier than ever, thanks to the share button on the PS4 controller.

LittleBigPlanet 3 has plenty of potential. I can't wait to see more levels and creations, as I have a feeling things will only get more imaginative from our brief introductory experience.

★ **Kimberley Wallace**

Characters with new abilities spice things up





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Danganronpa 2: Goodbye Despair

Playing the murder game again

★ Platform: Vita ★ Style: 1-Player Adventure ★ Publisher: NIS America
★ Developer: Spike Chunsoft ★ Release: September 2

In February, Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc surprised us with its bleak premise and gripping murder investigation gameplay. It also introduced us to a sadistic bear named Monokuma, who locked a group of gifted students in a school and did everything in his power to make them kill each other. That crazy bear is back again and up to his old tricks in the sequel, Goodbye Despair.

Goodbye Despair abandons its hollow school walls for a new locale: a tropical island. The game starts with a class going on a fun fieldtrip, but things soon turn grim when Monokuma

interrupts it to restart his deadly game. Desperation and paranoia set in, and it's not long before the murders begin. Like last time, you're surrounded by eccentric, talented students, like the bear mechanic and the ultimate yakuza. Relationship building, murder investigations, tense class trials, and new minigames are all part of the journey, including a new pink rabbit, who is Monokuma's opposite.

Goodbye Despair already looks to be capitalizing on what we enjoyed, while refining elements from its predecessor. Let the return of psychological warfare begin. ★ **Kimberly Wallace**

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World Of Warships

Strategy on the sea

★ Platform: PC ★ Style: Online Action ★ Publisher: Wargaming
★ Developer: Wargaming ★ Release: TBA

Wargaming is taking its series of war titles to the high seas with World of Warships. Keeping a focus on historically accurate ships down to the last detail and action combat rooted in strategy and teamwork, Warships may end up the most interesting of the company's offerings.

Players can use scout planes to survey the map before engaging the enemy to achieve a positional advantage, with anti-air systems functioning as protection from this valuable

information. Torpedoes offer a compelling combat option to go along with conventional weaponry, with a system showing players the "lead time" and expected landing location of torpedo assaults.

Do you slow down to avoid running into an oncoming torpedo barrage and risk making yourself a target for standard attacks? The gameplay feels quite unlike anything in World of Tanks or World of Warplanes, and I can't wait to see how the fast, tactical battles play out on release. ★ **Daniel Tack**

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Skylanders: Trap Team

Skylanders is back with some unlikely allies

★ Platform: PlayStation 4 • Wii U • Xbox One • PlayStation 3 • Wii • Xbox 360 • 3DS ★ Style: 1 or 2-Player Action ★ Publisher: Activision
★ Developer: Toys for Bob ★ Release: October 5

With each release of the annual Skylanders series, players clear a bit more shelf space and prepare themselves for an incremental gameplay upgrade. Skylanders: Trap Team is offering what sounds like yet another subtle tweak to the game, but it's one that has me more excited about a new entry than I've been in years.

In Trap Team, players can use special Skylanders to – surprise – trap about 40 different enemies. These trapped foes are stored in crystalline shapes that fit into the game's new portal, and the newly reformed bad guys can be summoned (and controlled) with the press of

a button. While there will still be dozens of new character-specific figures to collect, the trapping mechanic means that players can buy a handful of these new crystals and use them to store a variety of wildly different characters, such as tank-riding goblins and angry stalks of broccoli.

I played several of the new characters, including the friendly robot Jawbreaker. His massive fists are attached to flexible arms, which he uses to pound enemies into submission. My favorite character had to be Wolfgang, though. The undead-type werewolf comes equipped with a bone guitar/harp hybrid and a

demented grin. He assails enemies using musical notes, and he can dash using his stage-ready knee slide. He's a powerful ally, but as with all of the captured villains we saw, his use is governed with a cool-down timer.

I only got to check out a few of the new characters, and I'm eager to see more. I love the idea of buying a few

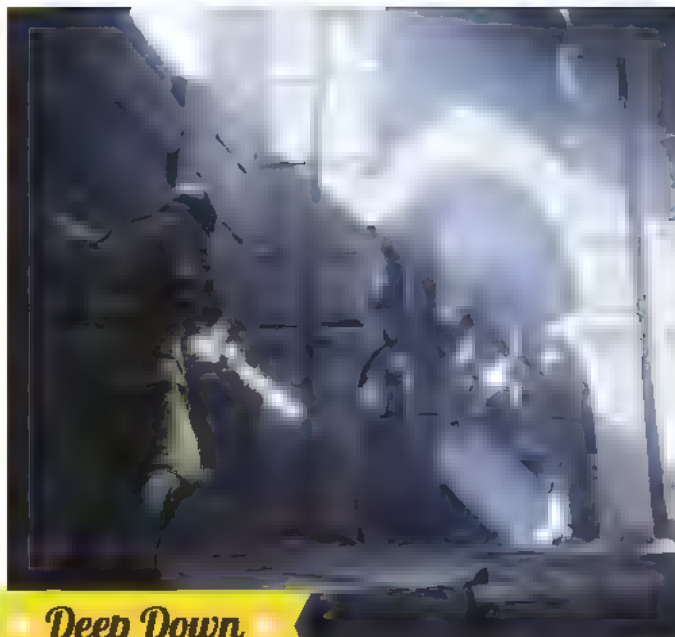
elemental-based crystals and then using them as a temporary "home" for the villains. While you can only have one character in a crystal at once, you store the ones you aren't using in the hub world. That alone makes it seem like a solid value for parents who might be grimacing in advance of each Skylanders release. ★ **Jeff Cork**



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

E3 doesn't start and stop with our Hot 50.

We saw plenty of interesting games that didn't make the final cut, along with titles only present in trailer form (and thus ineligible for our list). The following pages give you a quick glimpse of other games to watch in the coming months and years.



Deep Down

This free-to-play action/RPG from Capcom has not been confirmed for release outside of Japan, but it could still find an audience in North America. Similar to the Souls series, Deep Down features precise combat and shared-world dungeons.

Platform: PS4



The Legend Of Zelda

It doesn't have an official title yet, but Nintendo's latest Zelda game is making changes to the series' formula. An open-world Hyrule means that players can tackle dungeons and bosses in any order, leaving Link and Epona free to explore.

Platform: Wii U



Mirror's Edge 2

Faith is returning to the rooftops in a long-awaited sequel to EA's 2008 cult hit. Developer DICE has only released prototype footage so far, but we know that the story centers on Faith's past and builds on the traversal-oriented gameplay

Platform: PS4 • Xbox One • PC



Fable Legends

Lionhead's Fable series has roots in the RPG genre, but it continues to diversify with Fable Legends. The latest installment is a multiplayer dungeon crawler that lets one player take on the role of villain, spawning enemies and traps to thwart the heroes

Platform: Xbox One



Rise Of The Tomb Raider

Lara Croft had to endure some harrowing situations in Square Enix's 2013 adventure. Lara's exploits continue in Rise of the Tomb Raider, though her previous actions haunt her, compelling her to seek professional help to deal with the issues

Platform: Xbox One • TBA



New Criterion Project

The minds behind the Burnout series are moving beyond cars with this upcoming new IP. Criterion's untitled project incorporates new forms of transportation (like helicopters, parachutes, wingsuits, and ATVs) for even crazier, high-flying action.

Platform: TBA



Halo 5: Guardians

Master Chief's work is never done. Microsoft's iconic hero is returning in 2015, picking up after the events of Halo 4. Guardians also features a new Spartan character, Agent Locke, who appears to be hunting Master Chief and looking for answers.

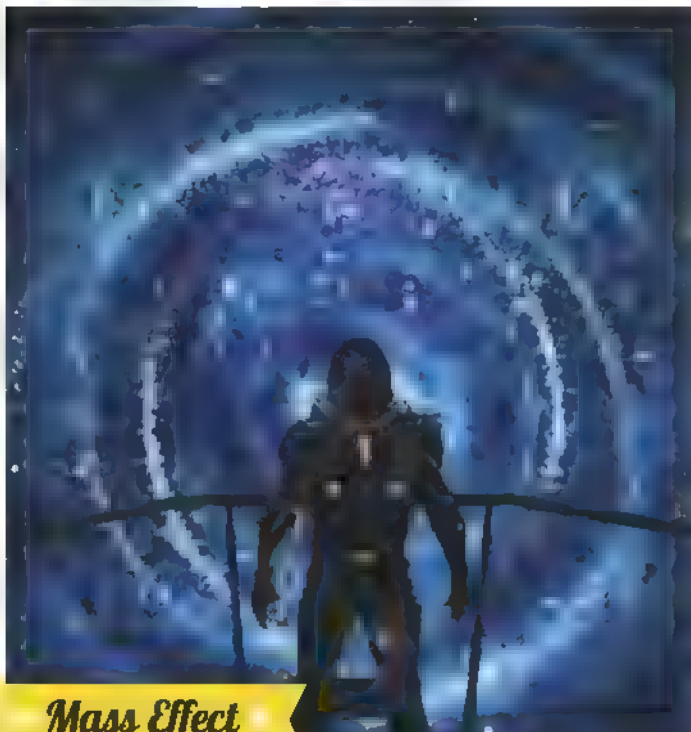
Platform: Xbox One



Gauntlet

The top-down arcade classic returns, this time as a PC-exclusive from WB Games. The basic concept remains the same: Four heroes work together to defeat monsters using unique class abilities. Of course, they also need food badly.

Platform: PC



Mass Effect

Creating a Mass Effect game without Commander Shepard seems strange, but that's BioWare Montreal's next project. Thankfully, the Mass Effect universe is big enough for all kinds of stories and heroes, so we can't wait until EA releases concrete details.

Platform: TBA



Dead Island 2

With original Dead Island developer Techland moving on to Dying Light, the reins of Deep Silver's series have been passed to Yager. Fans shouldn't worry; first-person, open-world, multiplayer zombie smashing is still priority one.

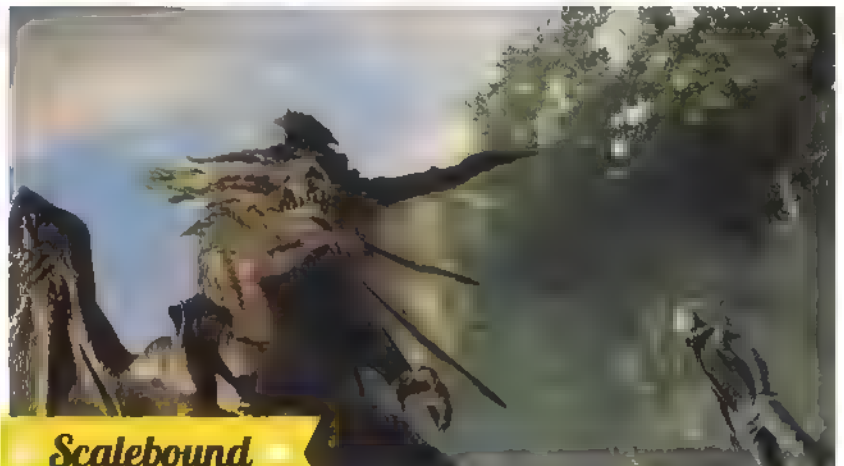
Platform: PS4 • Xbox One • PC



Pokémon Omega Ruby/Alpha Sapphire

You probably know the drill by now. These two Nintendo titles are enhanced remakes of Pokémon Ruby and Sapphire. They use modern graphics and animations while adding new Pokémon and mega evolutions to the mix.

Platform: 3DS



Scalebound

Microsoft is bringing a brand new IP exclusively to the Xbox One, courtesy of the team at Platinum Games. Director Hideki Kamiya (Viewtiful Joe, Bayonetta) knows stylish action, so you can count on crazy weapons and humongous bosses.

Platform: Xbox One



Uncharted 4: A Thief's End

Details about Uncharted 4 may be scarce, but it looks gorgeous. Naughty Dog's cinematic series pushed the PS3 to its limits, and the continuing adventures of Nathan Drake will undoubtedly be a showcase for the PS4's potential.

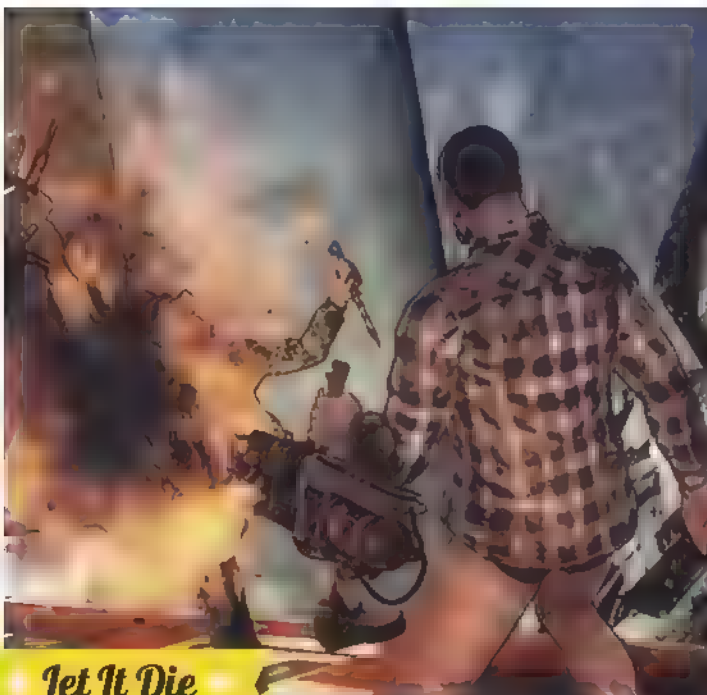
Platform: PS4



Inside

Inside is the latest project from Playdead, the developer behind the indie darling Limbo. Still leveraging stylish platforming, the gameplay and visuals appear more complex. It will release on Xbox One first, but eventually move to other platforms.

Platform: Xbox One



Let It Die

Grasshopper Manufacture's latest is a third-person action/survival game with a focus on asynchronous multiplayer. Goichi Suda (aka Suda 51) always puts a stylish twist on his projects, which might make the whole free-to-play pill go down easier.

Platform: PS4



Grand Theft Auto V

The best-selling game of 2013 is coming to PC and new-generation consoles. In addition to enhanced visuals, eagle-eyed fans have guessed at new features based on the trailer, including increased freeway traffic, new dog breeds, and even domestic cats.

Platform: PS4 • Xbox One • PC



Crackdown

The Crackdown series has been in hibernation since the disappointing second entry in 2010, but the open-world shooter still has plenty of potential. Original creator Dave Jones is leading the team behind Microsoft's new-gen installment.

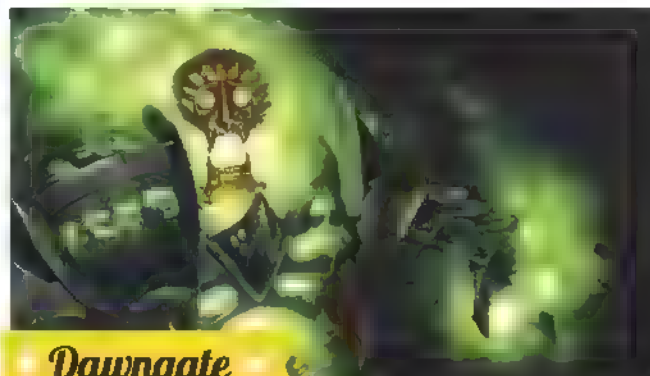
Platform: Xbox One



Halo: The Master Chief Collection

On November 11, all four main Halo titles come together leading up to Halo 5. Guardians' release in 2015. Halo and Halo 2 are enhanced editions (complete with multiplayer and HD visuals), and players also get access to the Halo 5 beta.

Platform: Xbox One



Dawngate

EA is getting in on the MOBA action with Dawngate, which is currently in beta. Players still select characters according to their play style, but the addition of control points (and the jump down to two lanes) sets Dawngate apart from its peers.

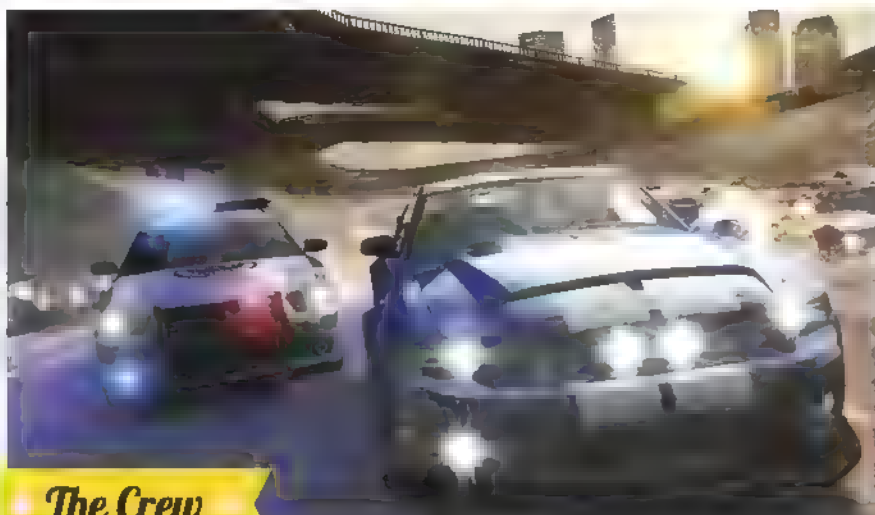
Platform: PC



Kirby And The Rainbow Curse

The successor to Kirby: Canvas Curse for DS, this Wii U title also has players using a stylus to guide Kirby through the world, gathering collectibles and defeating bosses. A new claymation-inspired visual style gives the adventure some additional flair

Platform: Wii U



The Crew

Ubisoft's open-world, massively multiplayer racing game was originally supposed to launch early this year, but it's now slated to release this fall. Players can drive from coast to coast in a massive simulated world, completing challenges along the way

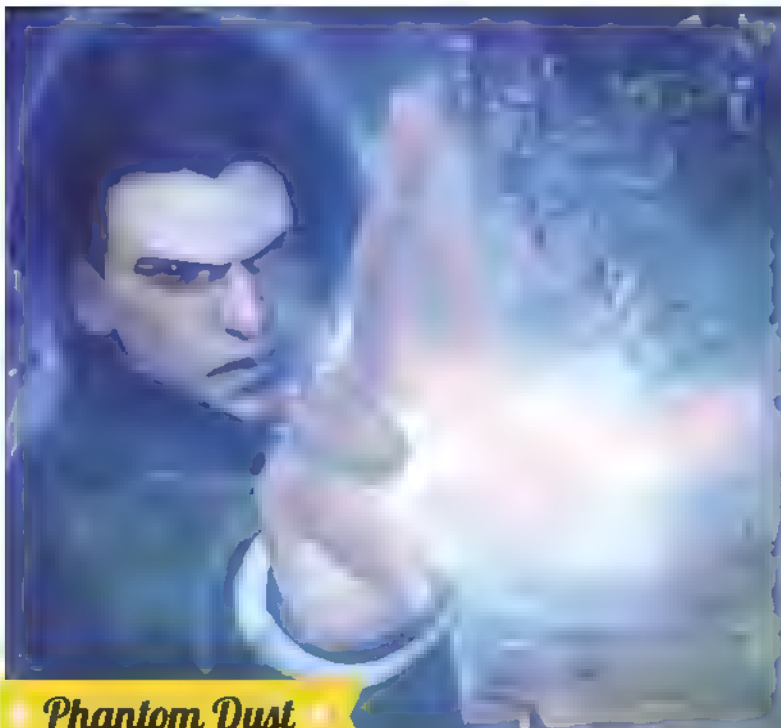
Platform: PS4 • Xbox One • PC



Hyrule Warriors

A mash-up of Dynasty Warriors and The Legend of Zelda, this collaboration between Nintendo and Tecmo Koei allows you to hack through armies as a variety of characters. Link, Zelda, and Midna are just a few of the many options.

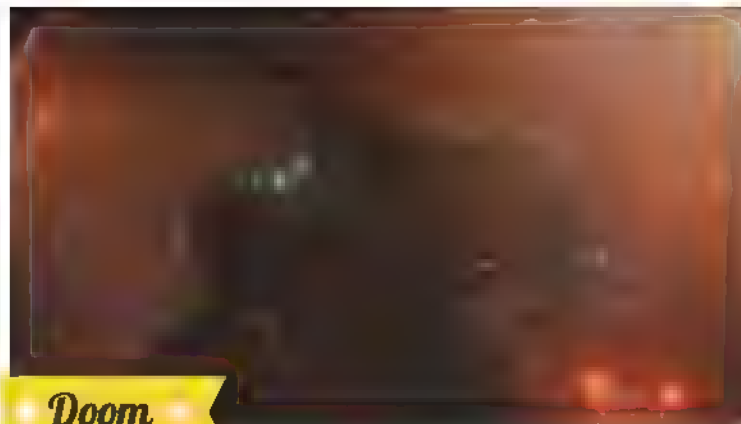
Platform: Wii U



Phantom Dust

If no one remembers the original, why make a reboot? Phantom Dust attempts to answer that question, resurrecting the Xbox action/strategy game of the same name. Microsoft has only shown a teaser, so any new gameplay elements remain unknown.

Platform: Xbox One



Doom

Doom commands respect as a pioneer of the FPS genre, but it's been out of commission since 2004. Can a new entry restore the series to relevance? We have to wait until Bethesda and id reveal more details at this year's QuakeCon.

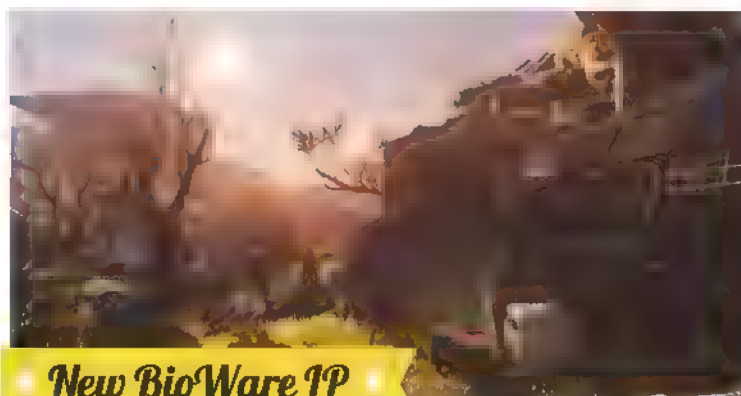
Platform: PS4 • Xbox One • PC



Star Wars: Battlefront

The return of the Battlefront series means that gamers once again can wage war in a galaxy far, far away. Prepare to drive, fly, shoot, and slice in this multiplayer-focused title from EA and DICE - all in familiar locations like Hoth and Endor's forest moon.

Platform: PS4 • Xbox One • PC



New BioWare IP

At BioWare's Edmonton studio, a team led by Casey Hudson (the director of the Mass Effect trilogy) is working on a new IP. Concept art showed futuristic structures and large worlds, but EA is keeping the nature of the game a secret for now. \

Platform: TBA

Reviews



gameinformer
GAME OF THE MONTH
94 Shovel Knight

Nintendo fans and PC users have a new reason to love their respective platforms. Yacht Club Games' Shovel Knight, a Kickstarter project funded last year, is a blast. This loving tribute to 8-bit Nintendo classics blends fun, familiar gameplay with a decidedly modern risk/reward death penalty. Shovel Knight is one of the best downloadable throwbacks since Mega Man 9, and that's why it's our Game of the Month.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.	5	Flawed. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game involved is head-and-shoulders above its competition.	4	Iked. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.	3	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.	2	Broken. Barely playable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	1	That red ring on your face when you take off a VR visor.

AWARDS

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



Murdered: Soul Suspect

A case gone cold

Style 1-Player Adventure Publisher Square Enix Developer Airtight Games Release June 3 Rating M

A good murder mystery keeps its audience engaged, on edge, and guessing correctly until the killer is revealed. As the puzzle pieces come together and the list of suspects narrows, our vested interest in the mystery almost always turns into a competition of trying to be one step ahead of the detectives in the story, or the first friend in a group to say "I know who the killer is!" Our sleuthing skills determine whether we wear the proverbial deerstalker well or look foolish in it – that's part of the fun.

Airtight Games' *Murdered: Soul Suspect* delivers a hell of a mystery for armchair detectives to crack, starting and ending with the surreal concept of tracking down your own killer. The opening sequence shows protagonist Ronan O'Connor gunned down by the Bell Killer, a serial killer who has brought fear and death to the dreary streets of Salem, Massachusetts.

Ronan's death isn't told in a flash forward sequence, a dream, or an event that can be undone. You play as his spirit, trapped in a purgatorial plane of existence. Before Ronan can move on to heaven, he must take care of an unresolved issue that is haunting him.

Ronan believes that his ticket to the cloud kingdom can be obtained if he brings the Bell Killer to justice. With Salem's body bags piling up, and the police finding no leads, he must use his newly gifted ghost powers to uncover clues living eyes could never see.

Many of the murder-mystery genre's classic tropes are used as a narrative backbone for this tale, but Ronan's story is anything but rote. Paranormal concepts are woven in to establish a unique arc that clings to dark themes and unexpected developments. Airtight's scribes penned an engaging story that bounces between detective pulp and ghost story – a strange mishmash that ends up working well, and is carried by a great cast of characters and a plot that ramps up and gets creepier as it unravels.

The thrills tied to the plot points almost always fizzle out when you are asked to become an active participant in them. Although Ronan is technically a detective, the gameplay Airtight delivers assumes that the player has the deductive skills and intelligence of a toddler.

All of the murder investigations are designed in a way to give Ronan freedom to study the crime scene how he sees fit. His goal is to uncover clues that will hopefully create some kind of lead pointing to the whereabouts or identity of the Bell Killer.

Once all of the required elements of a murder are studied and catalogued, Ronan is tasked to select the pieces that matter most and point to some kind of answer. You hear him say things along the lines of "Where did I see that stake again?" When that question is proposed, a dozen different images flash onto the screen. One of these images leads to an answer. Here's the kicker: The stake is only displayed on one image. How could you not pick it? These clues are as easy to piece together as a children's puzzle. And no, the difficulty tied to them never elevates over the course of the entire game.

Since Ronan is a ghost, he cannot interact with most objects in his environment. He can run directly through cars, lampposts, and walls, but cannot pass through any item that has been consecrated, a rule that Airtight uses well to establish gameplay boundaries and progression paths.

The most physical interaction Ronan is allowed is the ability to possess small electronics. Turning on a fan can blow paperwork off a desk, revealing a series of photographs and a hidden clue. Possessing an object like a television set may draw someone's attention – a light puzzle element that is tapped effectively in a variety of ways.

Ronan can also leap into the body of a living being. He cannot force his host to move, but he can listen to their thoughts, and force them to focus on a specific topic that he may need an answer for. These gameplay interactions are fun and used sparingly enough that they remain fresh throughout the entire experience. Unfortunately, they all lead down the same path: to more horribly executed investigations.

Ronan doesn't engage in any forms of gunplay or melee combat, but is still pushed to dispatch enemies from time to time. Demons roam the spectral plane, looking for ghosts to feed on. These terrifying beasts move slowly, and can only be taken down by sneaking up behind them and performing an execution move.

The demon encounters bring an odd element of stealth to the mix, and add a little intensity to exploration, but they never deliver a serious threat. The demons can be dispatched with little effort, and you only have to deal with a few of them at any given time.

When *Murdered: Soul Suspect* is at its best, the player has no hand in it. Its biggest strength is the seed planted within the first few seconds of play: the quest to track down the Bell Killer. That narrative thread gets better as it goes, thanks in large part to the budding relationship between Ronan and a living teenage girl named Joy, who we learn is a medium – a person who can interact with both the living and dead. Ronan and Joy have secrets to tell, and end up being just as interesting of narrative focal points as the Bell Killer.

This is one of those games that I find myself raving about one second, and dragging through the mud the next. Is it worth your time? I think so. Despite its numerous shortcomings, I was entertained to the point of not wanting to put it down. It's a satisfying murder mystery and a sub-par game all rolled in one. The story won out in the end for me. If you can tolerate the shoddy investigation gameplay, there's plenty of fun (and wrong guessing) to be had.

— Andrew Reiner

This review pertains to the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One versions. The game is also available on PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC.

6.5

PS4 • Xbox One
PS3 • 360 • PC

» Concept

Solve your own murder from the afterlife and bring a serial killer to justice

» Graphics

Nicely animated cinematic sequences are in great abundance. The demons are terrifying – almost more so than Ronan's horrible, over-accessorized character model.

» Sound

There isn't much in terms of music. Instead, haunting sounds like the shriek of a demon are used to build tension and set the stage for a dreary Salem. The voice work is excellent.

» Playability

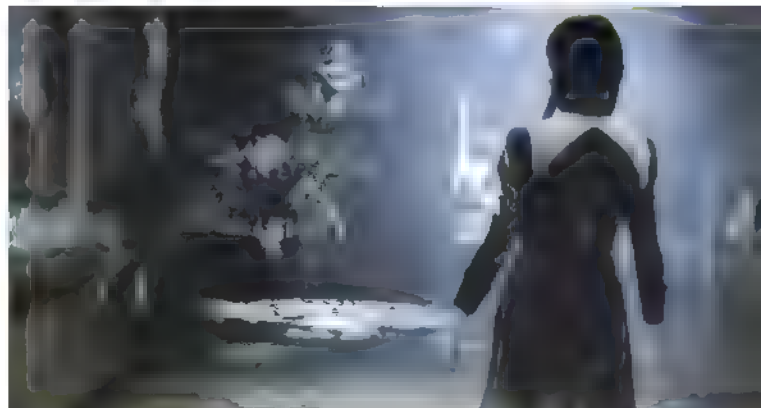
Murdered's gameplay plays second fiddle to the story.

» Entertainment Value

Figuring out the identity of the Bell Killer is a mission well worth taking, even when the gameplay is trying to pull the experience down into hell.

» Replay Value

Low



Shovel Knight

A delightful tribute to the side scrollers of yore

8.75

gameformer
GAME OF THE MONTH

gameformer
SILVER

Style 1-Player Action Publisher Yacht Club Games
Developer Yacht Club Games Release June 26 Rating E

Wii U • 3DS • PC

» Concept

Design a polished adventure that borrows the best elements from NES classics while taking a page from Dark Souls

» Graphics

A bright, cheerful display of exotic settings and adorable sprites with lovingly crafted animations

» Sound

Catchy tunes that evoke memories of Capcom's greatest with a generous slice of Middle Ages compositional flair

» Playability

The generous checkpoints and upgradeable health soften the difficulty old games are infamous for. The controls feel pitch perfect

» Entertainment

A captivating, breezy journey that saves the most punishing levels for last. New Game Plus boosts the replayability factor

» Replay Value

Moderately High



The downloadable market is flush with pixelated throwbacks harkening back to the NES era. So many exist that developers can't get by on 8-bit visuals and chip-tunes alone; a game has to be polished and infuse something fresh and exciting into our rosy memories. Yacht Club Games' *Shovel Knight* not only looks and feels like a lost gem from gaming's past, it hybridizes classic gameplay mechanics from Capcom hits while injecting a modern risk/reward system. The polished core is topped off with a familiar yet authentic visual style that drives the whole experience home.

At a glance, *Shovel Knight* looks like someone swapped out Mega Man's cartoonish futuristic look with medieval castles and armored warriors. This appraisal isn't too far from the truth, but there's more to it than that. *Shovel Knight* fuses together DuckTales' pogo-jumping combat and Mega Man's screen-scrolling level design. You can slash at enemies with a chargeable shovel, gleefully bounce on enemies' heads with your weapon, and explore an overworld map reminiscent of Super Mario Bros. 3. Conquered levels can also be revisited to score extra cash, and optional side bosses prove the map like Hammer Bros. Players have a surprising amount of fun things to do beyond beating the eight knight bosses and facing off against the evil Enchantress.

Fattening your wallet by returning to beaten levels and fighting optional bosses is important for upgrading your armored digger. Towns are filled with NPCs ready to upgrade your health, increase your magic (for using side-weapons like a fire wand and limited invulnerability), and shovel/armor enhancements that offer new abilities like digging up treasure piles faster. *Shovel Knight* eschews the traditional lives-based penalty system of the games it's inspired by in favor of something more engaging. Players drop floating bags of cash with every death and have one chance to reclaim them after respawning at the generously placed checkpoints. *Shovel Knight* ups the ante by allowing players to sacrifice checkpoints for extra cash. It's a unique and interesting way

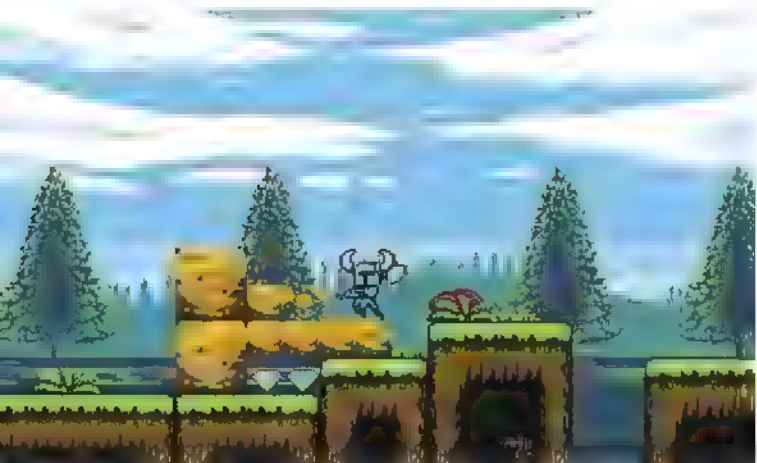
to soften the difficulty, though the risk/reward system loses impact near the endgame after you've purchased everything.

Scouring the kingdom for loot is just part of the appeal—the diverse environments and boss knights had me excited for each new level. Green goo drips from the ceiling of a treacherous fire world, turning hot lava into bouncy platforms. Piles of corpses in a graveyard sink if too many enemies cluster on them, forcing you to thin the crowd or die trying. The Tinker Knight battle begins with an imbalanced duel against the diminutive boss before the ground gives way and you face off against his huge jousting-tank contraption. *Shovel Knight* is a bright, cheery grab bag of good times.

It looks like a simple, straightforward trip down memory lane, but I was surprised by the subtle, emotional story Yacht Club Games delivered. After some boss fights, *Shovel Knight* rests and dreams of his lost partner, Shield Knight. In his dreams she falls from the sky as he fights waves of enemies in an attempt to catch her. These recurring segments are capped off with a satisfying and memorable payoff that raises the experience to a new level.

Indie throwbacks to video games of the early '80s are a dime a dozen, but Yacht Club Games successfully rises to the top. The tried-and-true game design principles and elegant checkpoint system make *Shovel Knight* worth a try no matter which era of gaming you prefer.

—TIM TURT



Valiant Hearts: The Great War

The casualties of war

Style 1-Player Puzzle/Adventure Publisher Ubisoft Developer Ubisoft Montpellier Release June 25 Rating T

In video games about war, we typically assume the roles of gun-toting soldiers who singlehandedly save the day. It's more fun to be the hero who succeeds against the odds than a prisoner of war or an AWOL soldier, but those sadder stories are still poignant. Through phenomenal visuals and audio, Valiant Hearts: The Great War highlights the horrors faced by normal people in extraordinary circumstances – but it's a better history lesson than a game.

Set during World War I, Valiant Hearts focuses on the crossing paths of four people and one dog. Developer Ubisoft Montpellier establishes the horrifying conditions the characters endure through beautiful 2D art and an evocative soundtrack. The animations and character designs are instantly impressive, and the bittersweet music sets an appropriate, reflective mood.

You control each of the humans at different points throughout the conflict, but you aren't shooting up enemy soldiers. It's more of a puzzle game where you overcome obstacles with your wits instead of overwhelming force; you pick items up, stay hidden from guards, and command the dog to interact with objects.

The problem is that Valiant Hearts doesn't grow as you progress; you learn most of your puzzle-solving vocabulary early, meaning that



you're often going through the motions to reach an already-obvious solution. Distracting guards, cranks with missing levers, and barricades in need of some dynamite are all common hurdles. A puzzle game doesn't necessarily need deep ability evolution, but the obstacles should at least require some thought. Figuring out what you need to do is usually trivial – the work comes from pushing, pulling, or otherwise getting items where they need to be.

Actual letters from WWI soldiers inspired the events, making the whole game a tribute to those men and women who fought for their countries. Though the message behind

Valiant Hearts is noble, the storytelling is thin. Mumbles, gibberish, and pictures in word bubbles compose most of the characters' interactions. It's endearing at first, but diary entries and sparse narration aren't effective ways to tell a nuanced tale of love and sacrifice.

Even if the starring characters don't completely come into focus, Valiant Hearts still succeeds at conveying a human story. It may not be challenging or action-packed, but it provides some thoughtful and sobering looks at what life was like on the front. » Joe Juba

This review pertains to the PlayStation 4 version. The game is also available on Xbox One, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC.



PS4 • Xbox One
PS3 • 360 • PC

• Concept

Everyday stories from World War I as seen through the eyes of four heroes and a dog

• Graphics

Fantastic, stylized visuals make the atrocities of war memorable, but less grisly

• Sound

Minimal voice work lets you focus on the somber music

• Playability

Controls are straightforward and functional. You are mainly walking around, picking items up, and then using those items

• Pleasant Surprises

While the puzzles and story aren't especially rewarding, the overall tone is still interesting and successful

• Replay Value

Moderately Low

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EA Sports UFC

EA Sports makes a solid first strike



PS4 • Xbox One

» Overview

Craft a number of unique fighting systems in an effort to emulate a highly complex sport

» Graphics

The character models look great, skin ripples on impact and heads jostle with every punch, but the audience just sits in the background like a blur

» Sound

Joe Rogan and Mike Goldberg do an admirable job simulating real commentary, but you might want to prep your own playlist to augment EA's music selection

» Playability

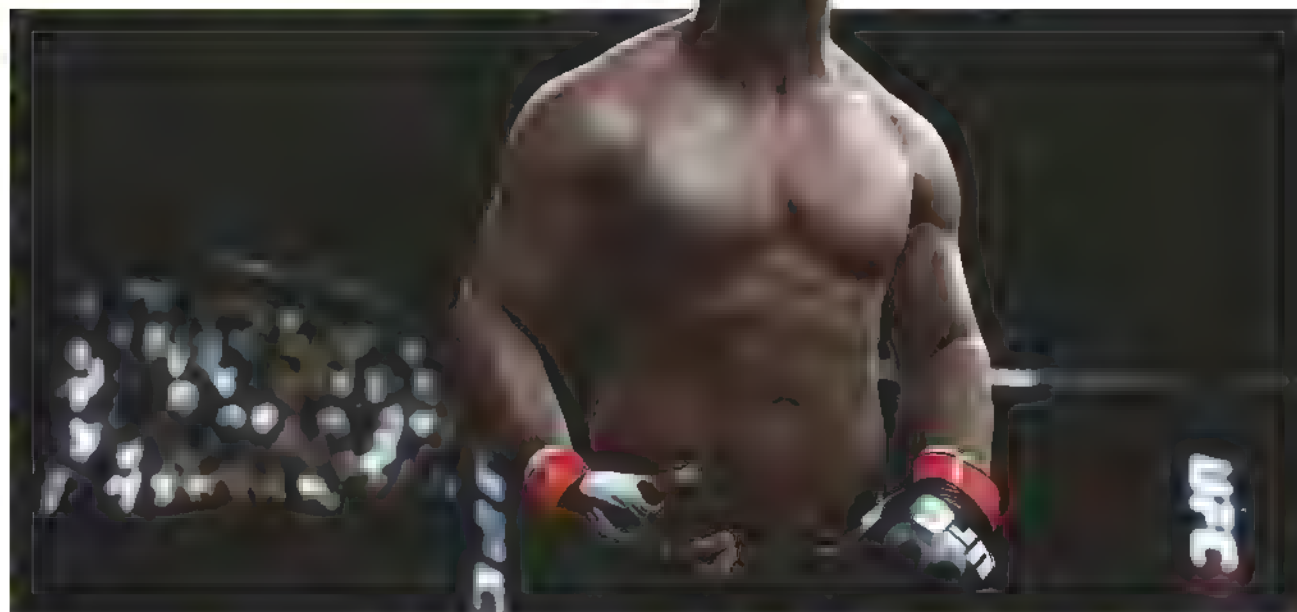
You have to pay attention to the action and be ready to react to your opponent's strikes, since you can't dial in your combos too early

» Entertainment

The fighting system has a bit of a learning curve to overcome before you can appreciate the combat

» Value

High



» **Single** 1-Player Fighting (2-Player Online) **Publisher** EA Sports **Developer** EA Canada **Release** June 17 **Rating** T

It's clear that EA's UFC team bleeds martial arts. Everything about its new title – from the integration of UFC-branded videos to a roster including everyone from Jon “Bones” Jones to Ronda Rousey – has been painstakingly shaped into one of the most realistic depictions of the sport to date. The attention to detail makes the experience feel authentic, though not highly approachable. Don't expect UFC to be like *Fight Night*, transcending its target audience to reach a broader range. Only those with the determination of an athlete can master UFC's complex fighting systems and enjoy everything this title has to offer.

If your approach to most fighting games is to dial in the strongest combos then block whenever you think your opponent is going to swing for your head, you won't get far in UFC. Even when both of your feet are firmly on the ground, you have a lot more to think about than life bars. You can come out of the gate swinging, but that gasses your fighter quickly, making it easier for your opponent to slip past your defenses. Advance strikes cause more damage, but they also cost more stamina and

are easier for your opponent to counter, and blocking becomes less effective the longer you play turtle. This creates a fighting system that is more about strategizing and reacting to your opponent than it is mastering a combo sheet.

More than with most fighting games, I found that I had to pace myself with UFC, which resulted in slower and more methodical matches. I eventually got into the groove of measuring out my attacks while I blocked incoming strikes, but mixing up your moves to maximize your speed is just as important. Fans of twitchy, hyper-reactive fighters will immediately be turned off by UFC's footwork, which is as much about positioning and managing stamina as it is button combos. Since there are no on-screen health bars, knowing when your opponent is going down for the count is difficult. This pulled me into the action more and made me think twice about pushing my attack when it left me exposed.

However, even if you master the ground game, you won't be invincible in the octagon. A good portion of UFC's action is about grappling your opponents and taxing them to the mat to ratchet up the pain with a submission takedown. If you're weak in any of the areas of the sport, your opponent's leverage that against you. Just like a real MMA fighter, you have to know your weaknesses and be prepared to defend against them.

I struggled with the ground game initially, since UFC's many different systems are overwhelming at first. After a bit of practice, I got a handle on transitioning for better positions so I could pepper my opponents with quick jabs or snake my arms around them for a match-ending armbar or spine-grinding twister submission. It takes a long time to get used to the controls, and even after playing for hours you might still occasionally fumble for the wrong button combo and leave yourself exposed to attack.

Defending against transitions or escapes requires players to counter their opponents' power plays with well-timed movements of the analog stick. Which positions provide you with the best leverage aren't always clear, and I was sometimes unsure when I should initiate a submission hold. Once you're placed in a submission, you're thrown into a min-game that has you flicking the analog sticks in various directions to twist out of the hold, and escaping someone's hold is nearly as fun as applying the pressure yourself.

EA has taken all of these different fighting mechanics and packaged them into a career fighter mode that has players working their way through the UFC's reality television show *The Ultimate Fighter* in order to win a contract with the UFC and ultimately a shot at the championship belt. I appreciated the added context for why I was fighting, and loved watching my stats slowly tick up as I won match after match. I also enjoyed tinkering with my game plans, which were basically a series of perks that improve your fighter's abilities, such as increasing your stamina regeneration or improving your striking. Unfortunately, the career story is barebones, and each match is buffered by a series of repetitive training exercises and hollow interactions with real UFC fighters. Players interested in truly testing their mettle on the mat are better off finding breathing opponents or working towards one of the online championship belts.

EA Sports UFC isn't the easiest fighter to learn – it's a complex beast that rewards dedicated warriors who are driven to succeed. Each match plays out like a chess match where combatants feel out their opponents' strategies and exploit openings. EA's attention to detail might feel unnatural to fighting fans weaned on titles like *Street Fighter* and *Smash Bros.*, but UFC's methodical pacing will knock out MMA enthusiasts. » **Ben Reeves**





Pushmo World

Nintendo's puzzling choices hold back evolution

Style 1-Player Puzzle **Publisher** Nintendo
Developer Intelligent Systems **Release** June 19 **Rating** E

7.75

Wii U

► **Concept**

Bring Nintendo's 3DS puzzle series to the Wii U

► **Graphics**

Mallo and the plain grassy backgrounds look nice in HD

► **Sound**

The music is quality as always, but extremely repetitive

► **Playability**

Pulling, pushing, and jumping works well. And if you mess up, the handy rewind button repairs the damage

► **Character Creation**

Wii U owners unfamiliar with the 3DS entries are in for a treat, but fans of the franchise won't find much new

► **Replay Value**

Moderate

The original 2011 Pushmo on 3DS stood out for its unique puzzle mechanics. Little red blob Mallo pushed and pulled blocks like dresser drawers to create platforms that he could use to make his way to the top to rescue a trapped kid. A year later, Crashmo freshened things up by allowing Mallo to move blocks in four directions instead of only two. This changed everything, forcing players to plan out how blocks would fall and beneficially fit together when slid around. The new Pushmo World remains a quality puzzle game, but its lack of innovation disappoints.

Instead of another Crashmo-style leap forward, Pushmo World regresses back to the first game in most ways. Mallo is back to simple drawer-pulling, ladder teleporting, and switch-hopping in the 120 core Pushmo Park stages. You still have plenty of clever, brain-busting puzzle fun along the way, but it all feels too familiar – even though I haven't played the original for years.

All of the new, experimental elements are sequestered over in the Mysterious Pushmo zone, accessed separately instead of being integrated into the main campaign. These stages are where I had the most fun. Linked blocks of the same color all move at the same time when you yank on them. Yin-yang blocks work just the opposite; when you push in white blocks, black ones pop out. Timed blocks slide back into the wall once the timer runs out, changing the pace from slow and contemplative to urgent and breakneck. The 50 unique puzzles here are a great time, and should have been a larger focus.

Puzzle creation works smoothly (I created one shaped like a little bomb guy), and it's easy to upload your work to the World Pushmo Fair. This user-sharing area provides created levels under the "Newest" and "Popular" tabs. As before, most users focus more on making pixel art versions of licensed characters than crafting technically impressive puzzles. Strangely, there isn't a way to search for puzzles using text. You just open these feeds and hope something you like shows up. Like previous games, puzzles can be tagged with a QR code so you can at least search out content people have posted on the Internet. Almost all 3DS QR puzzles from past games can be imported to the Wii U and vice versa, so you have access to years of creations already out there.

Overall, if you've never touched a Pushmo in your life and don't have a 3DS, this is a good place to jump in. Unfortunately, by reverting to older mechanics, Nintendo offers little for longtime fans to get excited about. — **Bryan Vore**



Tomodachi Life

Little Nintendo people

Style 1-Player Simulation **Publisher** Nintendo
Developer Nintendo **Release** June 8 **Rating** E

7

3DS

► **Concept**

Help your Mii live out their dreams, days, and drama on a tropical island

► **Graphics**

Nintendo's simple avatars do the heavy lifting, so it's pleasant – but not a visual tour de force

► **Sound**

Character voices sound like belching synthesizers. That doesn't take much away from the hilarious musical numbers

► **Playability**

The WarioWare-style microgames control well enough, but you spend more time watching the action than you do participating

► **Character Creation**

Laid-back pacing and general silliness won't click with everyone

► **Replay Value**

Moderately High

If Animal Crossing gives players a chance to join a community, Tomodachi Life is Nintendo's way of letting them create one from scratch. Unlike Nintendo's other life sim, you don't have Tom Nook to tell you what to do or provide any sense of structure. You're free to inhabit the world with characters of your design and set your own goals.

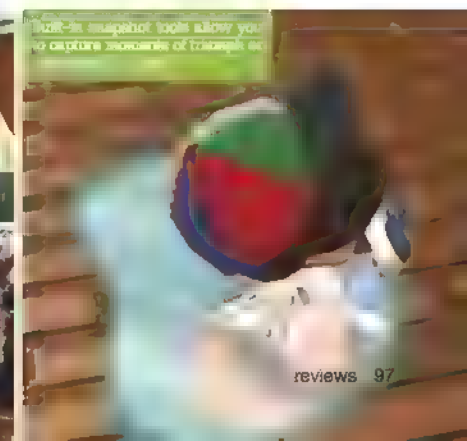
Instead of being part of the town, you're equal parts god and surveillance camera, listening to the pleas of your islanders and peering into their windows (and occasionally, their minds). They ask for dating advice. If they're hungry, you're the first to know. You help them sneeze. You don't control their bizarre little lives; it's more of an aquarium filled with people, and you are an observer with occasional input.

It all starts with character creation, where you design your Mii. In addition to futzng with noses, favorite colors, and all the usual stuff, you also get to tweak personality attributes on sliders, showing how fast or slow they are, if they lean toward being polite or direct, and a few other qualities. After that, you select their strange-yet-endeearing robotic voices. When you're done, they move into an empty apartment and start living their lives.

I created more than a dozen Mii, and after a few days of playing, a nexus of drama emerged – an elderly woman named Marge. She was aloof, boring, and not traditionally attractive. She also seemed to mesmerize nearly every male on the island. Within hours of joining my village, for example, one of my colleague Kim Wallace's Mii creations was head over heels in love with Marge. After getting some tips from me, he professed his love by singing a romantic song to her on the beach. A bit disturbingly, the Mii based on my five-year-old son (age and all) interrupted the proceedings, saying he wanted her heart, too. Alas, she chose neither. I consoled one of the heartbroken characters by giving him olives, then pushing him on a swing.

I enjoyed checking in several times a day and seeing what people were up to. It's a great pop-in game, since you do spend the majority of your time watching as opposed to rotating chairs and shaking trees. That comes at a cost. After playing for about a week, I've started seeing events repeat themselves, which definitely reduces the overall novelty. Similarly, I lost enthusiasm for my Mii's eagerness to play games once I realized there were a handful of these WarioWare-quality diversions.

If you thought Animal Crossing was too sparse on the gameplay front, Tomodachi Life's superficial interactions may stretch your definition of the word "game." In spite of the repetition, this island is a pleasant place to visit, even if I'm not ready to take up a permanent residence. — **Jeff Cork**



PLAYSTATION 4

Amazing Spider-Man 2, The	5.5	Jul-14
Bound By Flame	8	Jul-14
Child of Light	8	Jun-14
Contrast	7.5	Jan-14
Daylight	6	Jun-14
Deception IV: Blood Ties	6.75	May-14
Doki-Doki Universe	7.5	Feb-14
Infamous Second Son	8.5	May-14
Killzone: Shadow Fall	8	Jan-14
Knack	8.25	Jan-14
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Metal Gear Solid V: Ground Zeroes	7	May-14
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NBA Live 14	4	Jan-14
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Rayman Legends	9	Apr-14
Risegun	8	Jan-14
Strider	8.75	Apr-14
Thief	8	Apr-14
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XBOX ONE

Amazing Spider-Man 2, The	5.5	Jul-14
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NBA 2K14	8.5	Jan-14
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Peggle 2	8	Feb-14
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Rayman Legends	9	Apr-14
Ryse: Son of Rome	6	Jan-14
Strider	8.75	Apr-14
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Thief	8	Apr-14
Titanfall	9.25	May-14
Tomb Raider: Definitive Edition	9.25	Mar-14
Trials Fusion	8	Jun-14
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Wolfenstein: The New Order	8	Jul-14
Zoo Tycoon	7	Jan-14

PLAYSTATION 3

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Atelier Escha & Logy: Alchemists of the Dusk Sky	7.75	Apr-14
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BioShock Infinite: Burial At Sea - Episode 2	8.5	May-14
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Dragon Ball Z: Battle of Z	7	Mar-14
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Gran Turismo 6	8	Feb-14

Last of Us: Left Behind, The	8.75	Apr-14
Lego Movie Videogame, The	8	Apr-14
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Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII	7	Mar-14
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Walking Dead Season Two - Episode 2: A House Divided, The	8.75	May-14
Walking Dead Season Two - Episode 3: In Harm's Way, The	8.5	Jul-14
Watch Dogs	7.5	Jul-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 1 - Faith	9	Dec-13
Wolf Among Us: Episode 2 - Smoke & Mirrors, The	7.5	Apr-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 3 - A Crooked Mile	8.5	Jun-14
Wolfenstein: The New Order	8	Jul-14
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XBOX 360

2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil	8	Jun-14
Amazing Spider-Man 2, The	5.5	Jul-14
BioShock Infinite: Burial At Sea - Episode 1	8	Jan-14
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Strider	8.75	Apr-14
Super Time Force	8.5	Jul-14
Titanfall	9	Jun-14
Trials Fusion	8	Jun-14

the score

7.75 | Among The Sleep

Platform PC Release May 29 Rating NR

It leaves more of an impact in a distilled 3 to 4 hours than some games with 60-hour campaigns. The scares may be lacking and some of the puzzles are dull to a fault, but this studio has expertly crafted a game that lets players unravel its story in a meaningful way. — Tim Turi

7.75 | A Story About My Uncle

Platform PC Release May 28 Rating NR

A Story About My Uncle's leaping and grappling hook mechanics are simple, easy-to-understand tools that would be fun even without the alluring world and story accompanying it. It's a short experience, clocking in at only a few hours, but it's an adventure I enjoyed taking. — Kyle Hilliard

Visit gameinformer.com/mag for the full reviews.

7.5 | Dead Rising 3: Super Ultra Arcade Remix Hyper Edition EX + α

Platform Xbox One Release June 9 Rating M

Dead Rising 3: Super Ultra Arcade Remix Hyper Edition EX + α is an ambitious game that's fun in short bursts. Unfortunately, it lasts a little too long, especially if you're dying to see what Annie looks like dressed up as a Breath of Fire character. — Jeff Cork

5.5 | Entwined

Platform PlayStation 4 Release June 9 Rating E

Entwined's experimental nature reminds me of similar games that I've enjoyed, but there's always a "minus" in the comparison; it's like Journey minus the community, like Flower minus the message, like Rez minus the action. — Joe Juba

7.75 | Battleheart Legacy

Platform iOS Release May 27 Rating 12+

The flexible class and leveling system is the spotlight feature for Battleheart Legacy, providing all sorts of interesting skills to mix and match. Unlocking those abilities can be a bit of a grind, but the charming visuals and silly humor soften the blow. — Matt Miller

8 | Kero Blaster

Platform iOS Release May 11 Rating 9+

Studio Pixel's latest is one of the best playing action/platformers iOS has to offer. The toggled firing directions make it a joy to play compared to other clumsy virtual gamepads, and the charming visuals make it a slam dunk for mobile gamers of all ages. — Tim Turi

7.75 | Grid Autosport

Platform PS3, Xbox 360 Release June 24 Rating E

Even though Autosport tries to return the series to its roots, it has lost its bite and raison d'être. The multi-discipline racing remains, but it's an unadorned shell that lacks the creativity that previous Grids tried to inject into the genre. — Matthew Kato

Walking Dead: Season Two Episode 1: All That Remains, The	8.5	Feb-14
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Wolfenstein: The New Order	8	Jul-14
Yaliba: Ninja Gaiden Z	6.5	May-14

WUG

Amazing Spider-Man 2, The	5.5	Jul-14
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PC

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BioShock Infinite		
Bunai At Sea: Episode 2	8.5	May-14
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Goal Simulator	5	Jun-14
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Luftrausers	8.5	May-14
Mercenary Kings	8	Apr-14
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Nidhogg	7.5	Mar-14
Novelist, The	7	Feb-14
Octodad: Dadliest Catch	5.75	Apr-14
Our Darker Purpose	8.75	Apr-14
Path of Exile	8	Jan-14
Rambo: The Video Game	4	May-14
Rekall	2	Apr-14
Shadowrun: Dragonfall	8.75	May-14
Smile	8	May-14

South Park		
The Stick of Truth	8.5	May-14
SteamWorld Dig	8	Feb-14
Strider	8.75	Apr-14
Thief	8	Apr-14
Tizenfall	9.25	May-14
Towerfall Ascension	9	May-14
Translator	8	Jul-14
Trails Fusion	8	Jun-14
Tropico 5	8.5	Jul-14

Walking Dead: Season Two Episode 1: All That Remains, The	8.5	Feb-14
Walking Dead Season Two Episode 2: A House Divided, The	8.75	May-14
Walking Dead Season Two Episode 3: In Harm's Way, The	8.5	Jul-14
War Of The Vikings	6.5	Jul-14
Watch Dogs	8.5	Jul-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 1 - Faith, The	9	Dec-13
Wolf Among Us: Episode 2 - Smoke & Mirrors, The	7.5	Apr-14
Wolf Among Us: Episode 3 - A Crooked Mile, The	8.5	Jun-14
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Yaliba: Ninja Gaiden Z	6.5	May-14

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Professor Layton and the Azran Legacy	8.25	Apr-14
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SteamWorld Dig	8	Feb-14
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VITA

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Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc	8.5	Mar-14
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Off Onli	8	Mar-14
Overaway	9	Jan-14
TxK	7.75	May-14
Ys: Memories Of Celista	8.5	Feb-14

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icyclic: On Thin Ice	8	Feb-14
Joe Danger: Infinity	8	Mar-14
Monument Valley	8	Jun-14
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Tengami	7.75	May-14
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E3

Missing In Action

This year's E3 showcased a host of amazing games, but there were also some big games that weren't at the show. This is a list of some of E3 2014's most notable missing-in-action titles.

★ ★ ★ ★ by Matt Helgeson ★ ★ ★ ★



The Last Guardian

Team Ico's *The Last Guardian* is beginning to enter the ranks of famously MIA titles like *Duke Nukem Forever* and *Half-Life 3*. Footage for the PlayStation 3 title was shown way back in 2009. Since then, it's been put on official "hiatus" – a statement that was later retracted by Sony. Lead producer Fumita Ueda left the project only to return as a freelance consultant. The last we heard was that a small team was "reengineering" the game, leading many to believe it was being transferred over to PlayStation 4. Many expected that it would be Sony's big surprise at E3 2014, but that was not to be.



Kingdom Hearts 3

Square Enix fans rejoiced when an announcement trailer for *Kingdom Hearts 3* was shown at last year's E3. Since then, information on the game – which Square admitted is a long way out – has been scarce. Knowing how long Square takes to make games, it's best not to have any expectations, but that didn't stop the series' ardent fans from holding out hope that it would make an appearance. Now, let's just hope that it doesn't slip to PlayStation 5.



Final Fantasy XV

Even for Square Enix, a company known for long delays, the saga of *Final Fantasy XV* is ridiculous. The game first appeared at E3 2006 as *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*. Since then, three separate *Final Fantasy XIII* games have been released, the *Versus XIII* was retitled *Final Fantasy XV*, and the game has ditched PlayStation 3 for PlayStation 4 and Xbox One. While many fans wonder if it will ever be released, the trailer shown at last year's E3 plus the rebranding as *FF XV* seemed to indicate that there was some momentum behind the project again. Then, it came up missing in action from this year's show.

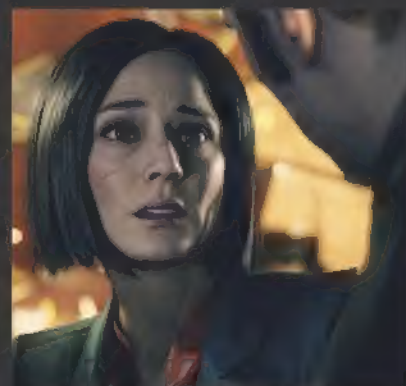
★ Mad Max

Avalanche Studios' open-world *Mad Max* title made waves at E3 2013 with a live gameplay demo that showcased the iconic post-apocalyptic hero in a game that balanced car combat and brutal third-person action. Later in the year, the game was delayed until 2015, leading to expectations that it would be a part of Warner Bros. Interactive's booth this year. Sadly, the show came and went without a mention of *Mad Max*. Let's hope it's still going strong; the 2013 demo had its faults but did show potential.



★ Quantum Break

Quantum Break is an ambitious project for developer Remedy. Its mix of third-person video game sequences and a live-action television, which intersect to help form the game's story, is unprecedented – and was billed as one of the cornerstones of Xbox One's entertainment strategy. Given that Microsoft didn't have a large selection of triple-A first-party games at E3 2014, *Quantum Break* would have provided some needed kick to the company's press conference.



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