

gameinformer

THE WORLD'S #1 VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE

grand theft auto

The logo for Grand Theft Auto V, featuring a stylized green and silver 'V' with the word 'FIVE' written across it in a metallic font.

ASSASSIN'S —CREED— III

AVAILABLE NOW

IGNITE THE REVOLUTION



UBISOFT

FARCRY 3



MATURE 17+
M
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Nudity
Strong Language
Strong Sexual Content
Use of Drugs

COMING 12-4-2012

farcrygame.com

© 2012 Ubisoft Entertainment. All Rights Reserved. Far Cry, Ubisoft, and the Ubisoft logo are trademarks of Ubisoft Entertainment in the US and/or other countries. Based on Crytek's original Far Cry directed by Cevat Yerli. Powered by Crytek's technology "CryEngine." "PlayStation", the "PS" Family logo and "PES" are registered trademarks and the PlayStation Network logo is a trademark of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. Kinect, Xbox, Xbox 360, Xbox LIVE, and the Xbox logo are trademarks of the Microsoft group of companies and are used under license from Microsoft.

"Far Cry 3 is like Skyrim with guns"

-Machinima

"An echo of Red Dead Redemption"

-Kotaku

"Hell of a lot of fun"

-IGN

"Gorgeous"

-CNET.com

18
BEST OF E3
Awards
& Nominations

JOURNEY INTO THE HEART OF INSANITY

Far off the charts lies an island unlike any other. A place where heavily armed warlords traffic in slaves. Where outsiders are hunted for ransom. And as you embark on a desperate quest to rescue your friends, you realize that the only way to escape this darkness... is to embrace it.



GameStop EXCLUSIVE: PRE-ORDER NOW TO GET 4 BONUS MISSIONS



PS3



XBOX 360

XBOX LIVE



UBISOFT



ANDY McNAMARA
EDITOR IN CHIEF
andy@gameinformer.com

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

The Year Ahead

Every year, our holiday issue is a little bit terserwot for me. I love that we completed another 12 fantastic issues of Game Informer and finally got Game Informer Digital up and running on iPad and 10-inch Android devices this year. It's always exciting to create new products, as I enjoy the trials and triumphs that we encounter as we try to conquer this new digital domain.

With victories come new challenges. Our readers are demanding that we deliver Game Informer Digital to seven-inch devices and mobile phones, as well as improve our current products and deliver them to all the corners of the world. I'm confident we are up to the task. I am thrilled with the work the team has done with our tablet edition, and our plans for 2013 are to create better experiences in more places for Game Informer Digital while expanding and enhancing gameinformer.com along the way.

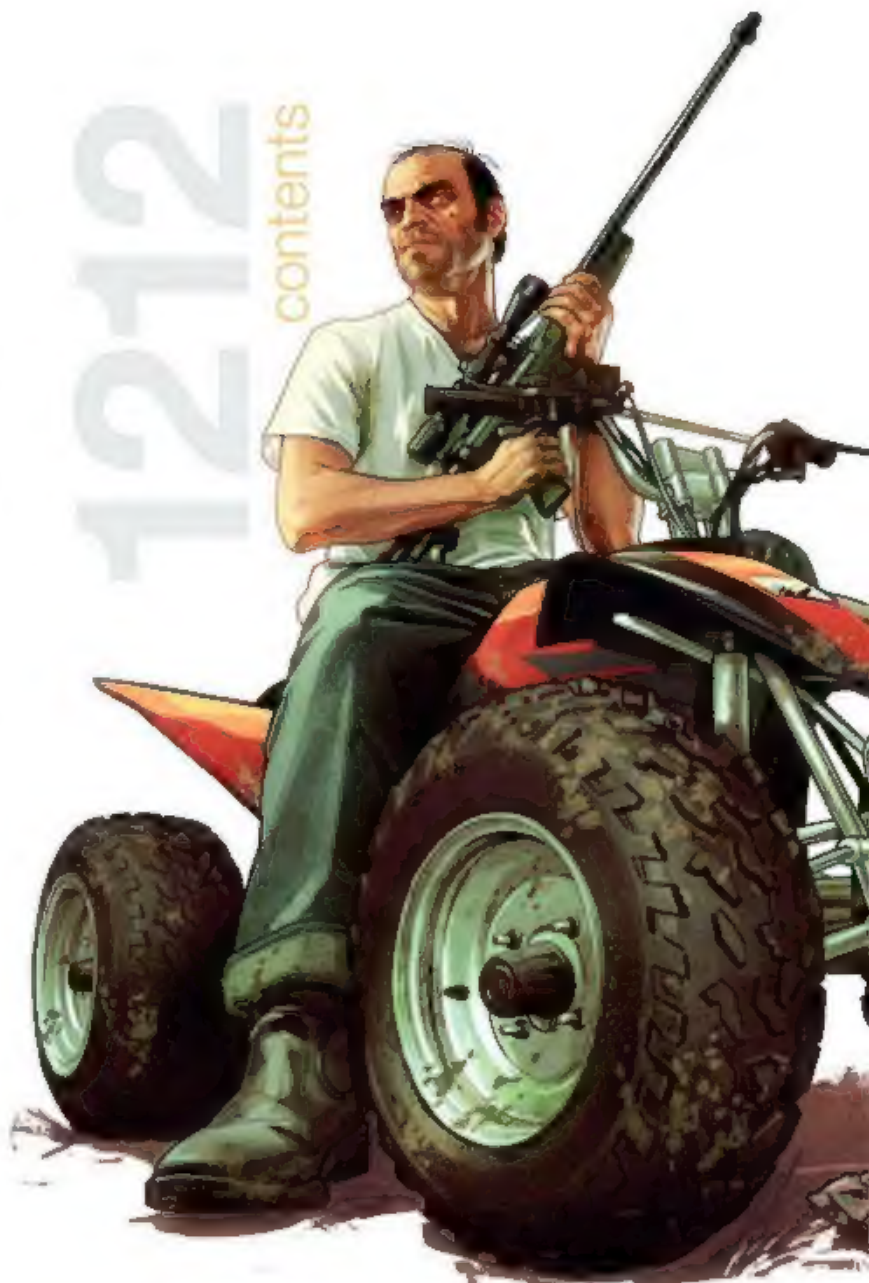
The year 2013 will be a very exciting and busy year for Game Informer. I can't share all our plans with you quite yet, but I promise you that we won't take our growth for granted. We value your readership and contribution to Game Informer in print, digital, and on gameinformer.com, and will do everything in our power to make sure that we bring you only the best.

We are not alone in that endeavor. The new year starts with a number of fantastic games that slipped into the first half of 2013, a spring that will bring Grand Theft Auto V, a Nintendo Wii U system just starting to show off its capabilities, and hopefully new systems from Microsoft and Sony. With so much exciting news to look forward to, you can bet we'll have another year chock full of world-exclusive game reveals.

Yes, 2012 was great, and I'm sad to see it come to an end, but I'm excited for the thrills that lie ahead. We have lots of exciting games and news to unveil in the year ahead that we will bring to you in new and innovative ways. Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

1212
contents



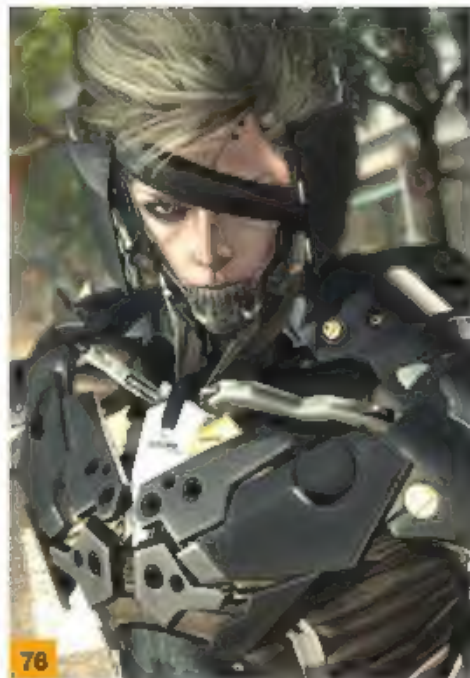
» 52

Grand Theft Auto V

Rockstar is changing everything for Grand Theft Auto V. Check out our cover story to read about the game's three protagonists, the largest Grand Theft Auto world ever created, and tons of additional details and new screens.



70



76



92



80

Remember Me



20

25 Years of Maxis



14

Cliff Bleszinski Leaves Epic Games



18

Spike TV's VGAs Turn 10



42

2012 Holiday Buying Guide

regulars

Feedback

Readers take a break from gaming to reminisce about Nintendo's iconic plumber, speak about the need for accessibility in video games, and marvel at our ability to see into the future.

14 Connect

We celebrate the 25th anniversary of Maxis with a huge feature recounting the SimCity creator's impressive history. Also, check out our holiday buying guide and top 10 favorite video game holiday homages.

76 Previews

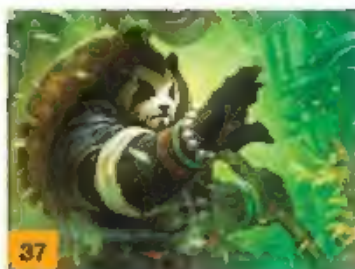
This month we put our hands on Raiden's sword in Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance, design our own metropolis in SimCity, and change our perception of the past with Capcom's Remember Me.

90 Reviews

Many of the 2012's biggest games are reviewed this month. How did Halo 4 turn out in 343 Industries' hands? Does Assassin's Creed continue to excel in a new time period? Head to our reviews section to find out.

112 Game Over

We ask the producer and director of Pokémon Black and White 2 important, long-standing questions about the series like, "What's it really like inside of a Pokéball?"



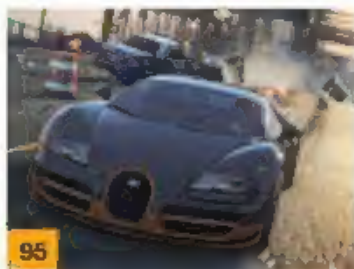
37



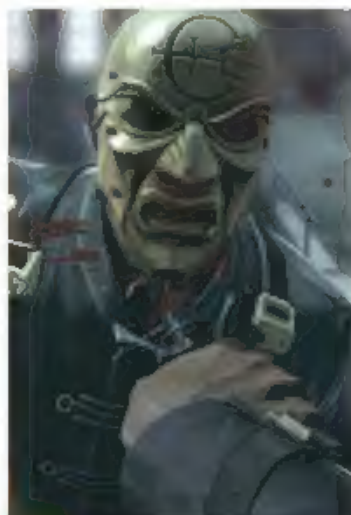
99



40 Interview: David Helgason



95



101 Dishonored



99



94



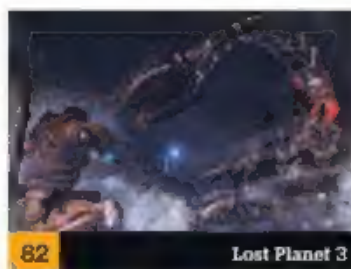
96



97 NBA 2K13



100 Zero's Escape: The Last Virtue



82 Lost Planet 3



87

games index

Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs	85
Angry Birds Trilogy	108
Assassin's Creed III	92
Brother: A Tale of Two Sons	36
Code of Princess	107
Command & Conquer: Tiberian Dawn	101
Dokuro	108
Fable: The Journey	109
Forza Horizon	103
FTL: Faster Than Light	109
Gateways	108
Grand Theft Auto V	52
Grid 2	84
Insiders of Middle-earth	83
Iron Man 3	102
Just Cause 3	108
Wrath of the Dead Rabbit	108
Hitman: Absolution	99
Karateka	99
La-Mulana	109
LittleBigPlanet: Karting	104
Lost Planet 3	82
Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance	76
Mugen Battle	108
NASCAR The Game: Inside Line	108
NBA 2K13	97
Need for Speed: Most Wanted	95
Neverwinter	87
Paper Mario: Sticker Star	106
Pid	109
Professor Layton and the Miracle Mask	107
Rescue of Ariadne: Now	108
Resurrection Now	80
Rock City Rampage	100
Sim City	78
Stylendiers Giants	96
Star Citizen	86
Tales of Xillia	88
Torchlight 2	105
Unfinished Swan, The	104
Walking Dead Episode 4: Around Every Corner, The	99
World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria	37
WWE '13	94
Yakuza: Ni-pa: Yakuza 2	89
Zero Escape: Virtue's Last Reward	100



A WORLD OF COURAGE AND HEROISM BEYOND YOUR FINGERTIPS.

Disaster strikes, there you are. Rescuing. Helping. Protecting. As a member of the National Guard, you get to do some extraordinary things. For your community as well as your country. Go online to learn what serving part-time is about.

NATIONAL GUARD 

NATIONALGUARD.com



This month in Feedback, readers reminisce about Mario, marvel at our all-seeing omnipotence, advocate game accessibility, and shower us in motherly love.

Mario Mania

I want to thank you for your cover story on the new Mario. Never has a magazine cover given me so much happiness. It's definitely going in my scrapbook.

Katie Williams
via email

I was shocked to see Mario on the cover of issue 234. I am so used to having FPS games or fighting games on the cover, I didn't realize it was Game Informer. I am such a Mario fan that I skipped everything else and read and enjoyed every word of the cover story. But one thing bothers me. Why do the goombas always look mad while the koopas look like they're smiling?

Kim Hancock
via email

Without a doubt, our New Super Mario Bros. U issue features one of the happiest covers we've ever had – a fitting honor for Nintendo's legendary mascot. As for the disposition of goombas: If your only purpose in life was to fall off ledges and get stepped on, wouldn't you be mad too?

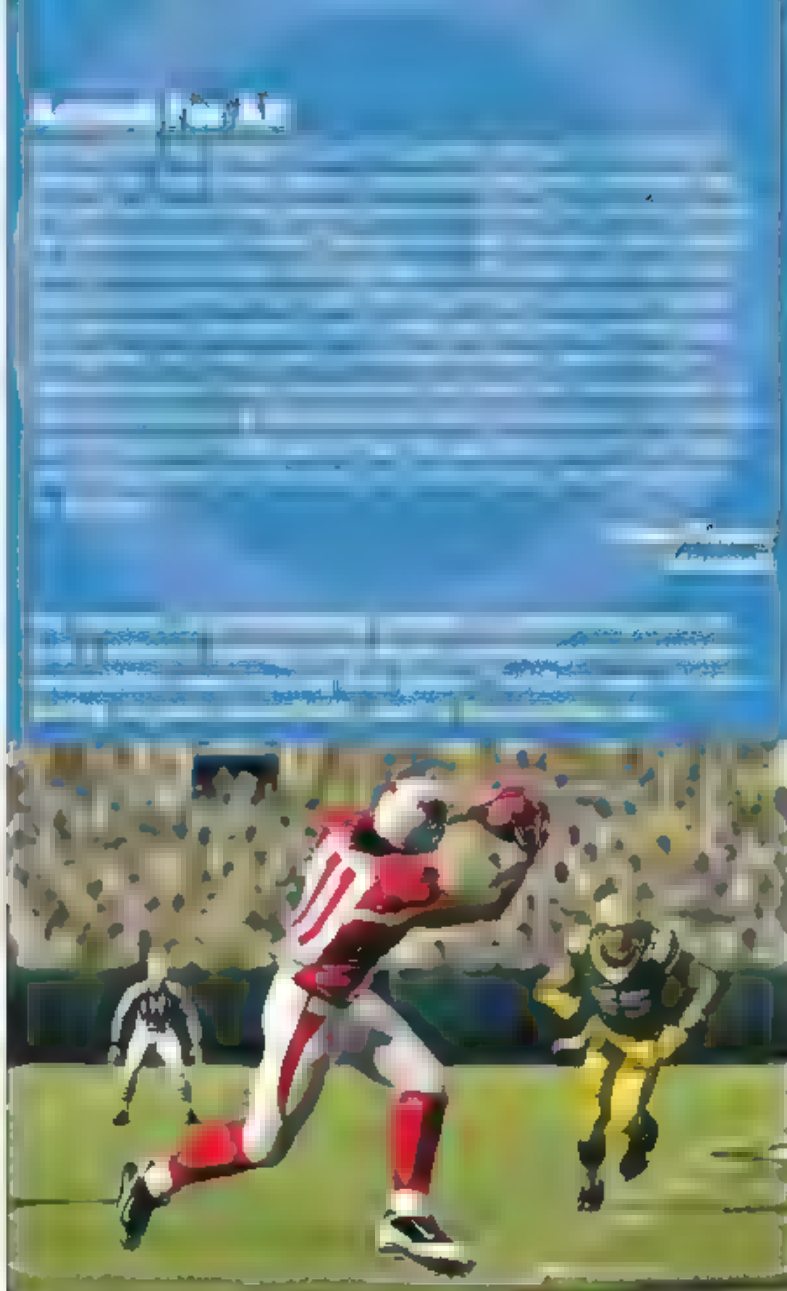
Before They Were Super

I'm curious, why does the original Mario Bros. game always get overlooked? I'm talking about the non-scrolling platformer in which Mario and Luigi had to jump up to knock turtles, crabs, and firelles onto their backs, and then kick them off the screen. You did a whole feature on Mario Bros. games, but didn't mention the original. I asked some friends if they remembered the game, and they said I was mistaken. According to them, the Mario Bros. series started with Super Mario Bros. Has everyone just wiped this game from their minds? Does no one else get the urge to kick a turtle when they hear the opening notes of "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik"?

David T.
via email

Fear not, David: While our Mario timeline only covered the "Super" installments of the series (and not the "New" series and other spin-offs, as other readers inquired about), you're not mistaken. The 1983 arcade hit Mario Bros. introduced a variety of elements that would become staples in the Super Mario Bros. series, including Luigi, prototype koopas, POW blocks, and Mario's questionable plumbing skills.





Another Perspective

I agree with every part of Josh Straub's article on game accessibility. But of the couches on how many months of physical therapy a portion of the disabled community must endure, they are right. I had a brain tumor, and I lost my legs, including the cerebellum, frequently use a wheelchair, and I use a cane to walk or my balance. Walking abilities I lost them to a brain tumor. The tumor made it more fun to regain these skills, and I felt much less empathy raised, to fall over playing a game, than while performing a certain task. These examples are appropriate for a game, but physical therapy as you are not sitting with the laptop at the computer physical work. So the more patients to help missing a patch, work on it, getting it with a big magazine with Josh about eliminating some disabled gamers, just want to point out how they are helping others as well.

Krista Lundberg
Twitter: @kristalundberg

You bring up an excellent point, Krista. It's easy to overlook both the negative and positive aspects certain gaming trends have on different populations of the gaming community. Recognizing that diversity is part of Josh's goal; we're sure he appreciates your input.

Short Answers to Readers' Burning Questions:

"Isaac Clarke of Dead Space needs a tug. Is there any way to manage this?"

Not without getting sliced in half with a plasma cutter.

"My wife won't let me buy Mass Effect 3 because it's the most boring game ever, and she hates it. Any advice for her?"

Tell her to get some better opinions.

"Have you guys ever thought of advertising your magazines with a bunch of cats and explosions?"

Obviously!

Worst News Tip of the Month:

"I need make good luck."

Worst Opening Line to a Feedback Letter:

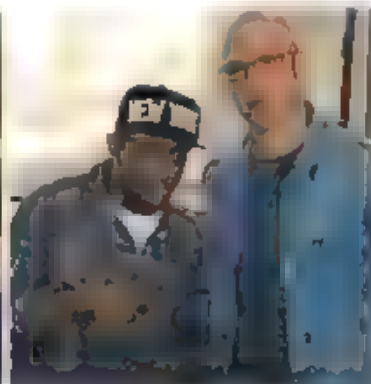
"First of all, this is an enraged letter."

Reader Gibberish:

"Hello, I'm writing to you because one also A writing an article about the importance of having the outfit game."

Question of the Month:

What classic video game genre would you revive and why?



"After giving Renner a member for an episode of Kenan comedian Mike Gendro became the fourth member of EY's official board. Raging Joysticks chair the ability episode season 1. Raging: Alan Jackson and Anthony of 4/10/10. See, when involved in the series of the best of the best, it's an exhibit in Manhattan."

On Your Mind



Support For Game Responses

34%

Willian Roleplay Responses

31%

Mario Cover Story Happiness

17%

Madden 13 Grips

10%

Tabletop Gaming Love

6%



Post Apocalypse Pokémon 1?

I'm trying to get the word out on a big idea. Pokémon meets Fallout. If Nintendo and Bethesda could join up and fuse their styles together, the impact would be gigantic. Picture this: You start by creating your own character (choosing what he/she looks like and what abilities they want). Then you go on your three starting Pokémon and begin your RPG adventure. But instead of the normal 2D Pokémon, we're all used to, it's in the form of Bethesda's 3D RPGs that are quickly taking the world by storm later in your journey, you can choose to be good and fight evil with your Pokémon, or end up joining Team Rocket. It's a pretty decent idea.

Tanner W.

We're willing to overlook the ridiculousness of this idea if it means we can one day decapitate Meowth in a slow-motion V.A.T.S. sequence. Consider us on board.

Kid Detested, Mother Approved

Thank you for printing the feedback letter from the boy who started the "No Video Games" website, and for featuring the piece by Kaitlyn and the "Privileges Revoked" column. My 12-year-old son had just spent a "Minecraft" instead of getting ready to go to a soccer game, which made leaving really hectic. He was getting an attitude about it when I had him read the letter and response. Parenting in the gaming age is a serious challenge: supporting drive and creativity while keeping kids grounded in the things of this world to "licky." Any advice you all can give kids about balance in life and responsibility is greatly appreciated!

Lara Lewis

I wanted to thank you for your response in "Privileges Revoked." All gamers will be a mom and appreciate you and what I hope will always siding with "measurments." It's very difficult to be a responsible parent in the age of digital media and video games. There is so much clutter and monitor, and I am always grateful to see your responses to kids that complain their parents won't let them play Call of Duty or other M-rated games. Thanks for helping us parents.

Adina Johnson

Sarcastic Soothsayers

Did you know you guys are psychic? In your Game Inferno parody in issue 204, you (or should I say Derth Clark) wrote about the Nintendo WiDS, and it was described as "a hybrid of handheld and console gaming." Well, the Wii U is a combination of handheld and console gaming. Just wanted to give you credit for your remarkable forecast.

Kenny Martin
Pacifica, CA

Derth Clark may be arrogant, but there's a reason we keep him on the payroll: Specifically, he can see the future. We're still waiting for his prediction of Red Dead Reifrigator to come true, but he assures us the game is in the works.

The Gaming Apocalypse?

A lot of gamers online seem worried about the game industry and many are predicting its downfall. Whether it's the announced shutdown of triple A franchises, the oversaturation of FPS games on the market, or the damage that the great jump in the price of development studios, everything seems to be leading up to a huge gaming apocalypse. However, at least as I read or hear about these issues, I never get the impression that the quality of indie games has decreased, nor do I believe there is not enough variety in genres and settings. What is your take on this dark prophecy that tells of the demise of all gaming?

Eiblin Caisev

We don't have to be oracles to figure this one out. Every time a new trend emerges

In gaming, someone declares it the death of industry—and they've been wrong every time. While nostalgia will continue skewing some peoples' memories of how great past generations were, this year's holiday lineup proves that the industry is still alive and well.

Bad is Better

In issue 234, we asked readers what video game villain they would like to play as. We received an abundance of enthusiastic replies, making us question the morality of our readership. Here are some responses.

I would be Bowser from the Super Mario Bros series. Apart from being Mario's main antagonist he is an amazing, fun, power filled anti-hero. He obviously has the security figured out in princess Peach's castle. Sam Fisher and Snake could learn a thing or two from him.

I would like to play as Lex Luthor. Seriously, can you imagine a game where you plan crimes and manage multimillion dollar corporate decisions, all while slowly working on a plan to destroy Superman? That would be way cool.

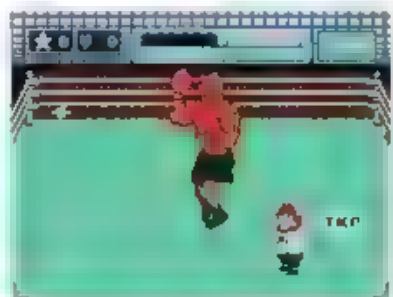
Robert Perry

Pyramid Head from Silent Hill. I don't think there even needs to be a reason to back this up.

Judi Corvineill

I'd be Mike Tyson from Punch Out! Then I would mercilessly crush the dreams of young gamers with just a couple of punches to the face. Fare you, Mike Tyson!

Ed Lind Thompson



(Left) Wii U. This creative director Cory Ledesma was suddenly impressed on an air-wrestling contest and a wife created out by how strong he makes his Sheamus doll. (Right) Bar. Internet's "do it den!" Reeves hung out with this Hollog statue news to go, how delicate he realized it wasn't alive, this too bad, as they were quickly becoming BFFs.



AVAILABLE NOVEMBER 20, 2012

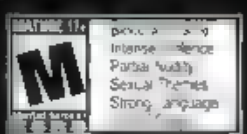
HITMAN

ABSOLUTION

"THE STUFF PRIMAL GAMING DREAMS ARE MADE OF"

"LOOKS ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT"

"THE GAME LOOKS AS BEAUTIFUL AS IT DOES BRUTAL"



www.hitman.com

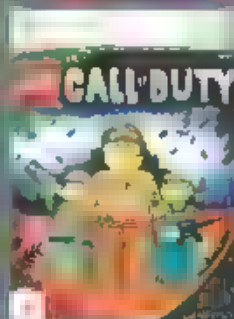
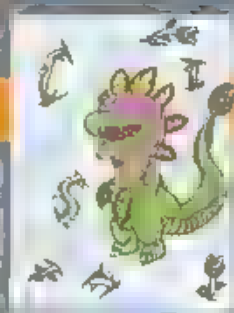


io-Interactive



SQUARE ENIX

Hitman Absolution is a trademark of IO Interactive. IO Interactive is a trademark of IO Interactive. The Hitman logo is a trademark of Square Enix. The IO Interactive logo is a trademark of IO Interactive. The Xbox 360 logo is a trademark of Microsoft. The Xbox Live logo is a trademark of Microsoft. The PS3 logo is a trademark of Sony. The M rating is a trademark of ESRB. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

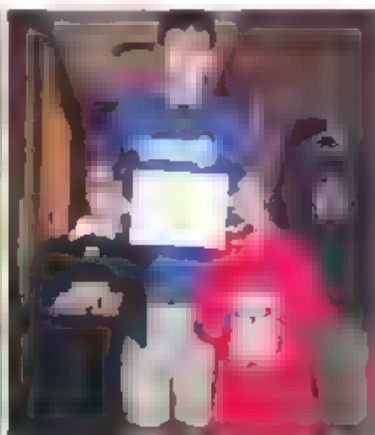
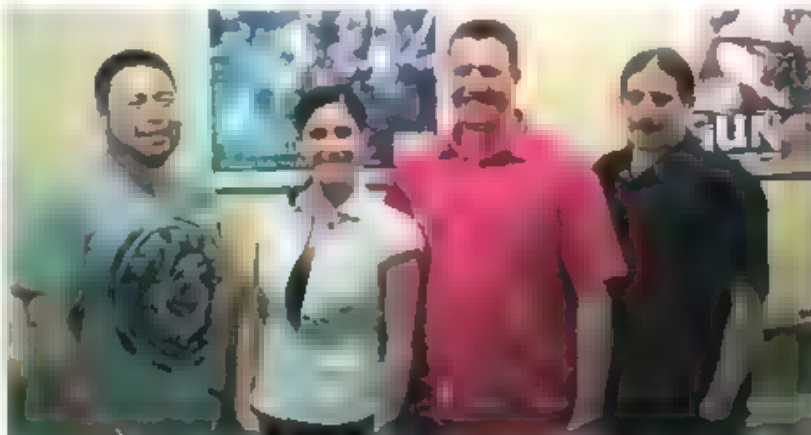


By Matt Kasper
 "Call of Duty's Activision
 finally responds to
 complaints about Call
 of Duty never changing
 things up."

Submit your art for a chance to win our monthly prize. Please include your name and return address. Entries become the property of Game Informer and cannot be returned. Send to: Game Informer Reader Art Contest | 724 First Street North, 3rd Floor | Mpls, MN 55409

WINNING ENTRIES

Left: Ubisoft's Stone
 The, Rana Gouda and
 Richard reprise pose with
 Mads in trip of a lifetime
 right: Call of Duty: Modern
 Warfare III
 (left) by award-winning
 Capcom artist and former
 artist Raphael Barthele is
 an entire wardrobe devoted
 to the snow. Thanks for
 watching. Adnan





TURTLE BEACH. #1 IN GAMING AUDIO



HEAR EVERYTHING. DEFEAT EVERYONE.
VISIT US AT TURTLEBEACH.COM 

© 2012 Turtle Beach, Inc. All rights reserved. Turtle Beach and the Turtle Beach Logo are either registered trademarks or trademarks of TB, Inc. Major League Gaming, MLG, the MLG Cup and the Major League Gaming logo are trademarks of Major League Gaming, Inc. Call of Duty and the Call of Duty logo are trademarks of Activision. All other trademarks are property of their respective companies and are hereby acknowledged.



Cliff Bleszinski Leaves Epic Games

What does the Gears of War creator's departure mean for the industry?

"This just happened." Those five words, tweeted by Epic Games' design director Cliff Bleszinski on October 3, sent shockwaves through the game industry and the Gears of War fan community. The tweet was accompanied by a link to a page on Epic's website, which broke the news: Bleszinski, widely known as "CliffyB" and the backbone of the company for two decades, was leaving.

by Matt Helgeson



In Epic's official site, CEO Tim Sweeney and President Mike Capps expressed their admiration for Blasznicki and wished him a fond farewell. Sweeney said, "In 20 wonderful years with Epic, Cliff Blasznicki has grown into a true design luminary, and his contributions to the Unreal and Gears series have helped shape the game industry into what it is today. Cliff leaves with our gratitude for his many contributions, and our wishes for continued success in the next chapter in his life."

Capps' statement read, "Cliff has been a business associate for the past 20 years and, while it is sad to see him move on from Epic, I know that everyone here has benefited from his passion for gaming and the depth of his expertise and experience."

They also released an excerpt from Blasznicki's note to his Epic colleagues, which expressed gratitude for the talent and friendship of his workmates past and present and also hinted at some of his reasons for leaving: "I've been doing this since I was a teenager, and outside of my sabbatical last year, I have been going non-stop. I literally grew up in this business, as Mike [Capps] likes to say. And now that I'm grown up, it's time for me to take a much-needed break."

While the break appears to be amicable, Blasznicki was the latest in a string of high-profile staff members who have departed Epic Games in recent months. In August, Peter Fergusson, a Microsoft veteran who had served as Epic's production director for more than eight years, suddenly

left for a position at Irrational Games in Boston, where he is working on the long-awaited BioShock Infinite. A few days later, Adrien Chmielarz of Epic's People Can Fly studio, also announced that he was leaving the company. Chmielarz was the creative director at People Can Fly, and played a major role in the development of Bulletstorm and Gears of War: Judgment. In recent weeks, Chmielarz announced that he had formed a new independent studio called The Astronauts, which recently signed a deal to use Epic's ubiquitous Unreal Engine 3 development tools. Back in July, Lee Perry, the senior lead gameplay designer for the Gears of War series, exited Epic to form Blinqueater, a new company focused on mobile development.

This exodus of top talent from the company has led to speculation that there is trouble behind the scenes at Epic. Though there is little hard evidence, it's odd to see such highly placed (and, we assume, highly paid) employees leaving a company that appears from the outside to be a developer's dream: Independent, flush with cash, and equipped with a world-class technology base. It is worth noting that these departures came in the months following the announcement that the Chinese technology investment company Tencent (which also owns a share of League of Legends developer Riot Games) had purchased a minority share of Epic Games. Though Tencent and Epic did not disclose the terms of the purchase, the announcement said that Epic would continue to operate independently. It's unclear whether Tencent's investment in Epic has anything to do with the departures of any of the previously mentioned staff.

It's also anyone's guess how Blasznicki's exit will affect Epic's future. Blasznicki was not one of the founders of the company, but over the course of his 20-year tenure there, his outsize personality made him Epic's public spokesman. Blasznicki, always quick with a joke and a pithy soundbite, is a popular interview in the gaming press, and has legions of both admirers and detractors in the online gaming community. While many game developers struggle with the spotlight, Blasznicki embraced it, and was sure to be spotted onstage during Microsoft's E3 press conference, demonstrating the latest edition of Gears of War to the crowd and millions watching worldwide. With his flashy cars and spiked hair, he is, in many ways, the dream of the average gamer come true: a guy who made his fortune doing what he loved, and had fun doing it.

With Blasznicki gone, Epic has lost a great personality, but more importantly, it's lost a tremendously talented game designer. At times, Blasznicki's gregarious temperament and everydude persona overshadowed his significant accomplishments. A teen prodigy, Blasznicki made his first game while still in high school, and created Jazz Jackrabbit for Epic at the age of 19. As the years went on, he played a major design role in Epic's Unreal franchise and was the driving creative force behind Gears of War, which helped establish Epic as a major console player and gave Microsoft a much-needed blockbuster franchise to complement Halo. His work on Unreal Tournament, which was one of the first to push the idea of FPS-as-sport (even in its name), still echoes in the professional gaming scene today.

Though a company as talented and successful as Epic will hardly wither and die, there is always a risk that a studio's vision can become compromised when some of its figureheads depart. However, there's also the chance that, as was the case when Naughty Dog's founders Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin left the company in 2004, the absence of Blasznicki, Fergusson, Chmielarz, and Perry will give other talented developers the chance to shine in new leadership roles.

As to what's next for Blasznicki, it's anyone's guess. Now out from under the thumb of Epic public relations, he seems to be doing exactly what he said in his statement: taking a break. Judging by his Twitter, he's spending it exactly how most of us would: playing games, seeing new movies like *Looper* with his wife, and generally enjoying the good life. Still, one wonders what happens when the itch to make games again returns?

The concerns for Epic are obvious, but Blasznicki's departure, coupled with the recent announcement from BioWare's Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk that they were leaving the game industry altogether, should be cause for dismay for the game industry as a whole. If Blasznicki, at the ripe old age of 37, can't hack the grind of triple-A console development anymore, what does that say about the industry? If it can't get a handle on making the production of large-scale games more manageable, it's likely that more high-profile developers will wake up one morning, check their bank balances, and decide that Sims creator Will Wright had the right idea when he tramped off from the industry to go play with robots. ♦

30 BUCKS SAYS YOU CAN'T BEAT THESE GAMES IN UNDER A MONTH

GET \$30 IN-STORE CREDIT WHEN YOU TRADE
THESE SELECT GAMES WITHIN 30 DAYS OF RELEASE

AMOUNT	TRADE BEFORE
ASSASSIN'S CREED 3	12/11/11
HALO 4	12/11/11
THE HONOLULU KINGDOM	12/11/11
NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. 2	12/11/11
ZEPHYRUS	12/11/11



©2011 GameStop. All rights reserved.

GameStop is a registered trademark of GameStop. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. ©2011 GameStop. All rights reserved.

Spike TV's

VGAs Turn 10

turn 10



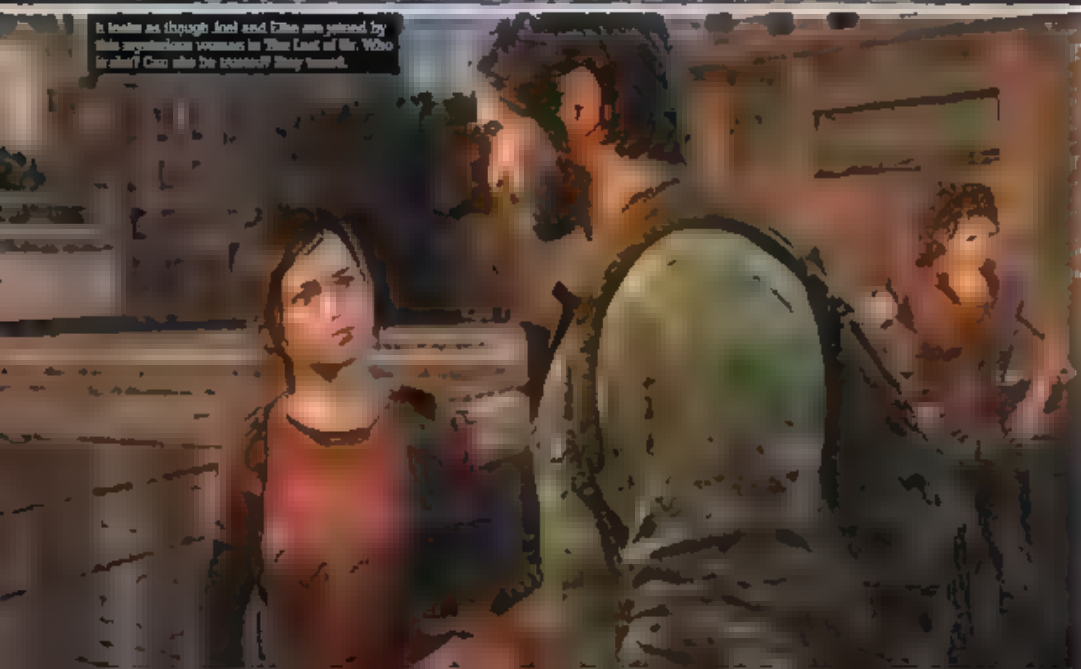
The network's first original TV show, *The Howard Stern Show*, will debut on Tuesday, Sept. 23, 10 p.m. (ET/PT). The show, which will be hosted by the radio personality, is one of the new additions to the network's lineup. The network also announced that it will be adding a new comedy series, *The Bill Engvall Show*, to its lineup. The show, which will be hosted by the actor, is one of the new additions to the network's lineup. The network also announced that it will be adding a new reality series, *The Restaurant*, to its lineup. The show, which will be hosted by the chef, is one of the new additions to the network's lineup.



Warrior and look forward to a more look at *Call of Duty: War Judgment*, including some never-before-seen environments. Here are a few concept illustrations that provide a sneak peek at what's on the way.



It looks as though Joel and Ellie are joined by this mysterious woman in *The Last of Us*. Who is she? Can she be trusted? Stay tuned.



Samuel L. Jackson

Actor Samuel L. Jackson returns to the show after taking a few years off. We spoke to the veteran host to get his thoughts on the show, gaming, and more.

You've hosted before, in 2005, 2006, 2007, and now 2012. Are you the Billy Crystal of Spike TV Awards? A not-so-secret weapon? You saying I'm getting predictable after all these years? Maybe I'll switch things up this time.

What is it about these awards that keeps you coming back?

They're one hell of a party. It's just a blast to host them. I like the bands, the game character costumes, and the crazy gamers.

You hosted the BET awards back in July. Any danger of being hosted out?

Ha! I think I've still got something left in the tank.

Philosophical question: What do you consider the role of a host? Are you basically the hype man?

Really, I think a host is there to, one, keep the show moving, two, keep the show fun, and, three, make everybody on stage look good. That makes for a dope show.

Should Spike TV's censors hover their fingers over the bleep button?

Now, a three-second delay ought to do the trick! But it is a Spike show, so you can at least make the show a hard PG-13 if not a full-blown R-rated one.

You've appeared in a number of games over the years. Would you call yourself a gamer?

Yeah, of course! I'm not super hardcore, but I like blowing things up, shooting bad guys, and running around in fantasy worlds. I do it on screen all the time.

You've also voiced several memorable animated characters in movies, including *The Boondocks*, *The Incredibles*, *Afro Samurai*, and *Astro Boy*. Is the recording process basically the same as working in video games?

Yep. Voice acting is voice acting is voice acting to a large degree.

I've read that you like to see your movies in the theater at least once. Do you try to play games that you're in, too?

For sure. It's great to have a little pixel version of me running around with crazy weapons and crazy powers.

Living the Simulated Dream



25
Years of Maxis





T

he was. At 27, he was young, but the
 May 1997 meeting with MegaMitt
 Minkoff was a turning point. "I had about
 10 contacts and I got 10 calls. As we're
 the most prominent, I probably got more calls. I
 had a few more experience, but I didn't
 stop to be really, I don't know, I was
 a good candidate. Minkoff was interested
 by me. We had a lot of things in common
 and I was the

gaming landscape of 1987 a small, un-
 arched urban building was busy, but
 not and Wright said that it would
 be a challenge.

Two years later, in 1989, he was
 working at a company where he had
 the idea of starting a small net services
 corporate buyout. He had a high profile
 disappointment and was the best thing
 I could do. I was the best thing I could
 do. I was the best thing I could do. I
 was the best thing I could do. I was
 the best thing I could do. I was the
 best thing I could do. I was the best
 thing I could do. I was the best thing
 I could do. I was the best thing I
 could do. I was the best thing I could
 do. I was the best thing I could do.

These were the stories of his best per-
 formance. The ups and downs of his
 career with EA, EA GAMES and EA
 GAMES. He was a man who was
 always in the middle of things. He
 was a man who was always in the
 middle of things. He was a man who
 was always in the middle of things.

Contributors

Current Maxis Staff

- **Ben Bell**
 executive producer, The Sims Studio
- **Lucy Bradshaw**
 senior vice president, Maxis
- **Kip Katsarelis**
 lead producer, SmCity
- **Charles London**
 creative director, The Sims Studio
- **Ocean Quigley**
 creative director, SmCity
- **Robi Kauker**
 audio director, The Sims Studio
- **Lyndsey Pearson**
 producer, The Sims Studio
- **Christian Stratton**
 UX Director, SmCity

Former Maxis Staff

- **Will Wright**
 CEO, Stupid Fun Club
- **Chris Hoeker** (uncredited)
 developer, SpasParty
- **Rod Humble** (uncredited)
 CEO, Linden Labs
- **Alex Hutchinson** (uncredited)
 creative director, Amassika, Crut III





M

Will Wright: I met Jeff at that pizza party and he had shown me an early version of SimCity. Jeff at the time had a small company making font software for the media. But he was really into games. He didn't give a s--- about fonts, but he loved games. He saw SimCity and he just got really excited about it and said, "Let's do a game company together." We started talking about it more, and he ended up selling his font company. He had some money from that, and I had some money from royalties on a previous game, and it just kind of went from there.

Lucy Bradshaw: I don't think Will of his own impetus would have formed Maxis the way that

it was. There are those people in life that, together, they can take out of themselves that all-around would be possible alone. I think Jeff has that ability to make other people even better than they are. Both of them together were a fascinating combination.

Ocean Quigley: My first impression of Jeff was, first and foremost, he's a businessman. He was the guy who was setting the top-level objectives for the company.

Wright: I think I was more in the creative space. Jeff was in the business space, which worked out well. Jeff has a passion for growing a company and running a business, and I had more of a passion for creating a product. I think my perspective was more, "How far we could take this stuff on the computer? What can we do that's cool?"

Building SimCity

Wright: I think the first time I really kind of realized that was when *Time* or *Newsweek* did a full-page review of SimCity and that was the first time they had ever reviewed a computer game. At the time, all of the games were kind of fantasy-based or combat. There weren't any quality games in the strategy realm. There were a few turn-based games like *Dissidence* or the old *Avalon Hill* stuff. But none of it felt like it was contemporary, real-time, and accessible to a lot of people.

Wright: We got letters from all sorts of people. It was funny, we got one from the mayor of Portland saying, "Oh god, wish Portland was SimCity. This is a great idea." I had mud-slower in this game, but I don't have that power in Portland. There was also this kid in New Hampshire who lived in this small town and there was this mayoral race happening. And the kid invited each of the five candidates over to his house to play SimCity and he wrote an article for the local paper

talking about their approaches to SimCity. It was wonderfully written, maybe a 10- or 12-year-old kid. It was one of the most brilliant things we would ever see.

Bradshaw: We get the purist. They will point out if we've missed a number. We strive for integrity and we strive for consistency in our integrity. It is a game. It needs to be playable and it needs to be understandable. So we strive for that and we also strive to make it behave consistently with that construct.

Quigley: The actual urban planners I think like it a lot because it takes the thing they have to stress about and turns it into a game. People who aren't city planners know this game, and people who are city planners just realize that it's about simulating anything that relates to their profession.

Kip Katsarolis: There's definitely a challenge in not just repeating what's been done, but capturing the essence of - for SimCity - that puzzle solving and that challenge and that pushback you get from the simulation.

Christian Stratton: We've explored ideas that bridge between The Sims and SimCity. We explored the idea of games that brought the camera in closer. It was a natural thing, and people had been asking for it. We did explore it, and after what happened is we came away thinking, "Well, we just don't really have the right game here." So we just drop it once we felt confident in that assessment.

Bradshaw: I came on board to lead SimCity 3000. It had moved to being 3D, but it wasn't at a time when computer processing could ultimately tackle such a thing.

Quigley: My favorite game that we've done so far is SimCity. Because of that hobby, model

abroad (quality to it). When I was a kid, I'd build cities out of blocks and go down the stream and carve in a landscape or houses. On the games we've shipped so far, SimCity 4 is the game that scratches that itch for me the best.

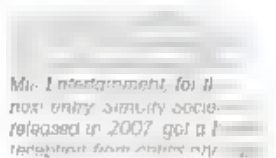


Alex Hutchinson: Think that Maxis is a always growing and changing, and that they have a lot of people who work on it. People forget that before The Sims went large, the studio wasn't the best space.

Outgley: Maxis had decided that they wanted to become like Electronic Arts and be a publisher as well as a developer. At that point, the game "The Sims" was a work in progress. It was a very early effort of the studio, and it got lost in a bunch of projects that will wash away much attention.

Wright: There was 30 days of things that was going on, not just the game, but with a lot of the medium-sized

studios. Just the way business worked back then, we had our own sales force, and we were trying to sell to international markets. Before EA bought us, we were about 40 to 50 people at Maxis. A lot of the number of those people were just on the marketing side, which is almost like a third of the way to feed. They need a number of products from you. So we were trying to actually produce software and more titles, and we were talking to a lot of outside developers (about doing other Sim titles).



Bradshaw: Part of the reason I want the director that I did, in fact, it was because of the way that it didn't have a lot of the same kind of simulation games. It was a line game in and of itself, but for that SimCity player, it didn't meet the expectations for that level of it.

Wright: I don't have anything to do with the game. Honestly, I don't know why. So, I guess, I read some of the stuff about it, though.



Maxis employees taking a break in the studio in Emeryville, CA.



Meeting Will Wright

Will Wright: Will may be a legendary figure in game development, but to the people at Maxis who worked alongside him for years, he earned a variety of other titles. Whether he was a mentor, prankster, or just a smoker, the people at the studio had different stories to share.

Lucy Bradshaw: Will is one of the most jaw-droppingly brilliant people I've ever worked with, largely because of the way he looks at things. And he will look at things in such a unique way, and be articulate about that. It's not just about how he goes about making games, it's how he views the world.

Chris Hecker: Will's humor and wit is unmatched. Someone would come in and be like, "Hey, Will, think that part of the game needs to be changed," and he's like, "Ah, Game on." And then you'd leave the office five minutes later, thinking something completely different. The problem with it, actually, is that he's overpowered. That might have been a good idea, but it's kind of a game for him. He's like, "Wow, great meeting!" and he's a little DP on that front.

Rob Kauter: Will struck me as one of those great people that, in the music world, where you'd come from, you meet and you go. "This is going to be fun."

Top Katsaralis: My very first impression was "Who's this guy smoking all the time?" (laughs). A few months after being at Maxis, they had a "bring your kid to work" day, where Will brought his son. I never thought that experience it was that situation, so it was his own time, and he

sat there and played. They had toys and Legos and paper. He's just like a kid, so he was down on the floor with them, playing and talking, then how to build games. I got a picture of my son sitting there with him.

Charles London: He's also a total prankster. He loves silliness, and he tells the world's worst jokes, which is a form of his satirical humor. There's a donut joke that he tells. Everyone knows the donut joke, and we just love the way he tells it. It is not funny. It's not, in any way, a funny joke. But the fact that that's the one he likes to tell makes it a good

The Donut Joke

A man walks into a hardware store for some store that clearly has nothing to do with baked goods, and says, "One donut please." The shopkeeper, confused, replies, "Sorry, sir, we don't sell donuts." The customer says, "Okay," and he leaves.

The next day the man returns and says, "One donut please." The shopkeeper, a little irritated now, replies, "I'm sorry, sir, but I told you yesterday that we don't sell donuts." Oh, the customer says, "Okay," and he leaves. The next day the man returns and says, "One donut please." The shopkeeper, fully irritated, replies, "Sir, I've told you we do not sell donuts. There are no donuts for sale here!" Oh, the customer says, "Okay, then I'd like one hundred donuts."



...the EA...
...the EA...
...the EA...

Wright: There were three aspects that...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Chris Hecker: Everyone was like...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

from EA. Maxis was always...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Wright: I think we were bought by...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Stratton: Maxis was probably EA's...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Introducing the Sims

...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Wright: I was having a hard time...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Almost everybody that saw it within...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Rob Kaizer: I can see how Will...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Hecker: The Sims wasn't about...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Kaizer: It was too...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Wright: I don't think EA had any...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Quincy: We thought it would...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

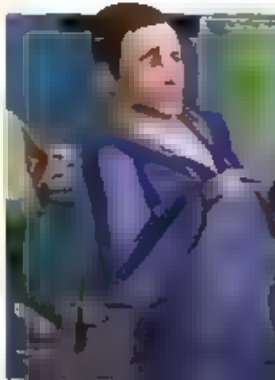
Wright: I would probably say the...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Ben Bell: There are so few games...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Quincy: I was...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Charles London: We're always...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

Pearson: The Sims philosophy...
...the EA people thought that...
...the EA people thought that...

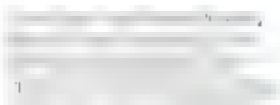


Wright: I think we had these aspirations for The Sims. I used to primarily custom content. I never got in. I think we underestimated the engineering to even get the thing up and running with the amount of time and resources we put behind it. We were hoping to get this thing online and get custom content following up very shortly thereafter. Instead we had all those other issues that came up and kept pushing back the idea of custom content further and further back to where it never made it in the game. If it would have been more of a freemium model like we have nowadays, I think it would have been a totally different story.

London: Unlike Sims 1, all of the effort was trying to get EA to understand why the game was a game. But with Sims 2, the success was so phenomenal that it was an entirely different challenge. EA was like, "Now you've got to take it 'GX.' And 'GX' was actually the phrase that kept getting used - 'GX his' and 'GX'." In retrospect, I'm grateful for the ambitious target because it really made us think about the biggest competition was ourselves, which by the way is a condition that has never changed. It remains true.

should have everything all the expansion packs used to have." There's a reason why we don't do that beyond just the facile answer of, "Well, that's impossible." The reason is that it takes a lot of thinking and a lot of nuance and careful design to bring the best out of those subjects.

Pearson: There's always people who will say, "It's just more stuff," but it's actually a very different experience, and that's why the players keep coming back. The way we can best combat that perception is to offer something new that is really a substantially different experience. Players always want to roll a new story with their sims. They always want somewhere new to take them something new to do with them.



Mauker: It was a small collection of words that mean something. "Nabu" translates to baby, "Sule" and "dag dag" are kind of "soha" - hello/goodbye-type things. There's probably, right now, about 20 of those working. And then there are about another 100 or so that have contextual value you're sad, happy things like that.

Humble: When we put little character actors on the screen, the fact that they don't talk really enables us to fill in the gaps. When we were developing The Sims 3, we would



The Sims (1999) EA (2003)

fill them. Just match with jobs. They're little pet people, and we're kind of looking at them like animals, but we can also relate to them.

Bell: You know when you read a book, and you've got this image in your mind of what it means? There's this thing that happens between you and the fiction - you add a lot to it. The same thing is true with a physical toy, like when a kid is playing with Legos. They see a world that's in there, but it isn't really there. If the sims spoke, you couldn't imagine all the kinds of things that happen. It

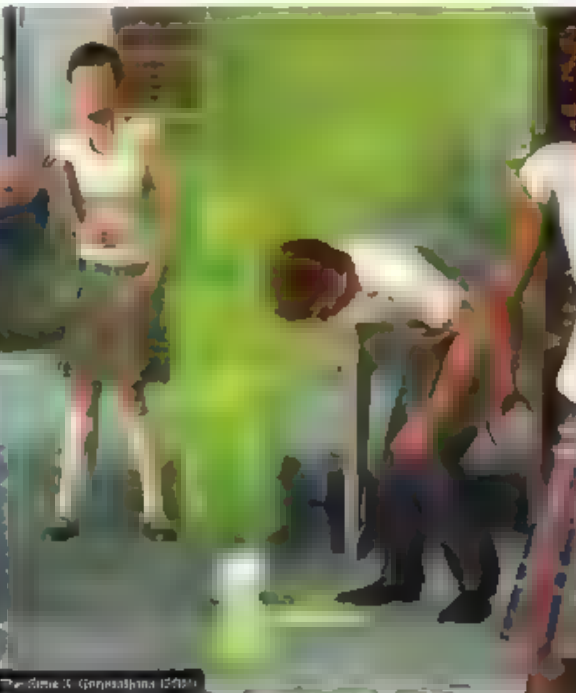
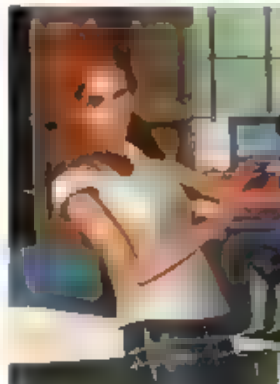
takes you up as a player to go any where you want with the fiction.

Pearson: One of the practical reasons [behind Simlish] is that we've shipped the game in so many different languages that that amount of support for all of the different translations would be huge. Astro-nomical. But the more important philosophical reason for it is that they are their own little culture. They live in their own little world. If we had made them speak English, it brings them closer to being in our world.

Red Humble: We did try to combat it, but we also needed to make our customers happy. It's kind of like a band, you know? "Play Freebird!"

Bell: We work so hard on these games. It's hard to express that there's tons of craftsmanship in every one of them. Every day we have to work and ask how we can make a beautiful game. How we can push the limits.

London: It is natural and understandable for our audience to say things like, "The new base game



The Sims (1999) EA (2003)

A Selected Gameography

- 1998: SkyDress
- 1999: SimCity
- 1999: SimLife
- 1999: SimArt
- 1999: RoboSport
- 1999: SimLife
- 1999: SimCity 2000
- 1999: SimFarm
- 1999: SimTower
- 1999: SimStar
- 1999: SimTown
- 1999: SimCopter
- 1999: SimPark
- 1999: SimTunes
- 1999: Streets of SimCity
- 1999: SimGolf
- 1999: SimSafari
- 1999: SimCity 3000
- 2000: The Sims
- 2002: The Sims Online
- 2003: SimCity 4
- 2004: The Sims 2
- 2004: Jitz: Sims in the City
- 2004: Spore
- 2009: The Sims 3
- 2011: Darkspore
- 2013: SimCity





Evolving Spore

[Redacted text]
 [Redacted text]
 [Redacted text]
 [Redacted text]
 [Redacted text]

Kahnrigus: I saw Will give his talk and I was down in Redwood Studios and I was just a junior but I got like... was... work on... all game

Becker: There were those three axes we were trying to innovate on. Just all, how do you make these things accessible and make design... there we... it was... work in the first... so... think we... talked... the game design

Wright: I think we probably should have waited longer... reveal... turned out to be an... yet... inprec... edented amount... engineering... with the procedural... and... needed... equis... but... at... an... unprecedented amount... design

that we had to attack with at the same time

Meeker: When you're making... create... you should innovate... on one axis. Do one thing no one's ever done before and do it as az... ingly... we... were... long... like... 4D... eggs... could... had... over... done... before... it... took... so... much... time

Marchionini: I think that at the end of Spore... we... were... all... at... the... base... and... we... ready... for... the... ship... People... had... been... wrestling... with... the... problems... of... that... game... for... so... many... years... and... finally... at... this... point... you... can't... make... radical... changes... you... just... need... to... do... a... change... again... and... again... and... hope... and... make... it... work... because... outside... the... end... of... the... game... is... full... of... incom... patibility... so... how... that... requires... different... types... of... people

Wright: I think we expected it to be... it... five... times... harder... than... a... regular... game... or... the... usual... job... with... a... lot... of... time... to... be... set... time... to... do... it... by... itself... and... it... was... almost... completely... different... Apollo... a... great... like... space... shuttle... NASA... to... roughly... expect... the... space... shuttle... which... had... about... three... times... more... parts... than... the... Apollo... to... be... about... five... times... more... expensive... than... the... Apollo... This... aspect... of... the... space... of... the... was... about... three... times... because... it... was... really... dependent

Bradshaw: (Spore) didn't achieve the kind of success that we would have had to have seen that we have with both Spore and with The Sims... how it's still something that... it... really... only... particular... what... you... do... with... the... entirety... of... that... what... it... is... about... it... is... just... think... what... we... get... to... see... believe... some... things... by... those... who... played... it... engaged... with... it... very... deeply

[Redacted text]

Merkey: There was a lot of noise in the market on that game design wise... which is another one of the problems. But from a technology standpoint... of... man... Spore... was... the... best... thing... a... huge... part... of... the... web... site... that... was... a... huge... part... of... the... job... that... it... was... the... best... job... ever

Quigley: I think the stuff that works for us and the stuff we most personally proud of is all of the... the... cultural... world... creator... and... the... cultural... creator... and... with... the... world... that... was... kind... of... the... head... and... the... tail... that... is... what... I... look... for... people... to... build... entire... us



Borderlands 2

Borderlands 2 is a critical and commercial success, with Gearbox succeeding in making it bigger and better than its predecessor. Now that it's been in gamers' hands for a couple of months, we spoke to Gearbox CEO **Randy Pitchford** about the sequel's development and future

We know that you did the voice for Crazy Earl and creative director Mikey Neumann is Scooter, but are any other characters voiced by members of the team?

The biggest role from a Gearbox team member is David Eddings, Gearbox VP of licensing and business development, playing the role of Clap Trap. He also does the voice for TK Baha. Several other people on the team do parts here and there. The audio guys, Raison Varner and Mark Petty have done a bunch of bandit voices and other content. Most of the key roles have been cast with professional voice actors, but occasionally we have the perfect voice amongst us already.

Did you ever consider making the original vault hunters playable, or did the plan from the beginning focus on new characters?

From the beginning of Borderlands 2's development, we knew we were going to bring a whole new cast of heroes. It was really important to us to make sure that Borderlands 2 was a full-on 2.0 experience, and developing new characters and skills is a key part of that. However, we love the heroes of Borderlands and I'm really glad that we worked them into the narrative in such an important way.

Is there any one class that the dev team tends to prefer over the others, or is it pretty spread out?

It's pretty evenly spread out, which is one of the indicators that we're doing it right. Everyone seems to have different favorites and various people on the team keep telling me about how they change it up and go with something new. About a week after launch I got some data from the five team about what customers are choosing. Their favorite seems to be Zero, with over 30 percent of the customers picking that character. Least played is Salvador, which is interesting because, well built and with the right gear, Salvador easily has the highest damage potential of any character in the game. I played a lot of Salvador during development because he was the first character we really had going. I switched to Zero when the Bloodshed tree got sufficiently fleshed out and had a dust suck! two months before launch. I started playing with Maya and really liked her. With the retail version of the game, I'm really looking forward to building a level 50 Gunzerker with my retail copy of the game, and I think I'm going to do a playthrough with a Mocho-maniac.

The various skull trees allow for some crazy class customizations. What's the most

ridiculously overpowered character that you've seen?

A Rampage-built Gunzerker with a bee shield and a pair of infinite Cef shotguns seems to be the most overpowered configuration at the moment. There's a mid-nerf coming to the bee - just tung the downside, but not hurting the upside. We're pretty cautious about nerfs - we'll balance with new gear instead. It's going to be hard to beat the bee shield, though, so we may have to do more to it.

Secrets like the Minecraft and Dark Souls areas are all over the internet. Are there any big Easter eggs or secrets that are still relatively undiscovered?

There are a ton of secrets in the game, likely uncountable. A lot of good stuff has been discovered but there are a lot of esoteric things and convoluted references that are mostly just us entertaining ourselves that most people will over and up on an Easter egg list. One super minor Easter egg is a picture of a panda in the background of a cool/interesting indie film project out of Australia that caught my eye. Some folks have found the hidden panda image and have asked if it's a reference to an animated film or an MMO expansion. That's funny.

The Minecraft area isn't just an homage, as it features actual creepers and what

looks like Minecraft assets. What kind of communication did you have with Mojang to make this happen?

We reached out to Notch and he was down with it, so it happened. We had a Minecraft server at Gearbox and a lot of us have had a lot of fun in Mojang's game. Some of the experiences in Minecraft create revelations that you can't get in any other game right to not just do a reference but a more built-out homage and gameplay space.

Tell us a little about the creation of Bonerfarts. Were there any other incredible names floating around for them?

The name of Anthony Burch is a word that's been around for a long time. It's a name that comes up during development if you think Bonerfarts is strange, you should've seen some of the stuff on the white board that were made in a meeting way too early for it to stick. Mikey Neumann tossed out a few names like Quazimolo. We're going to have to bring that one into play some day. Maybe Quazimolo can ride around on Buti Station.

With the success of both Borderlands games, can we look forward to the franchise continuing?

No. That's A. We're outting the plug. Kidding. We're having fun and we seem to have a huge number of fans that want more. So we're doing a lot of stuff to add on to Borderlands 2 and we think about where it goes from there when we have a moment to breathe.

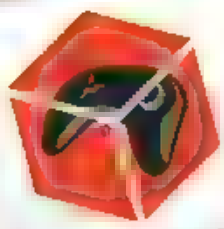


THE
GAME
INFORMER
SHOW

SUPER
replay

gameinformer.com

TEST CHAMBER
GAMER CULTURE
SPOILED



TEST CHAMBER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

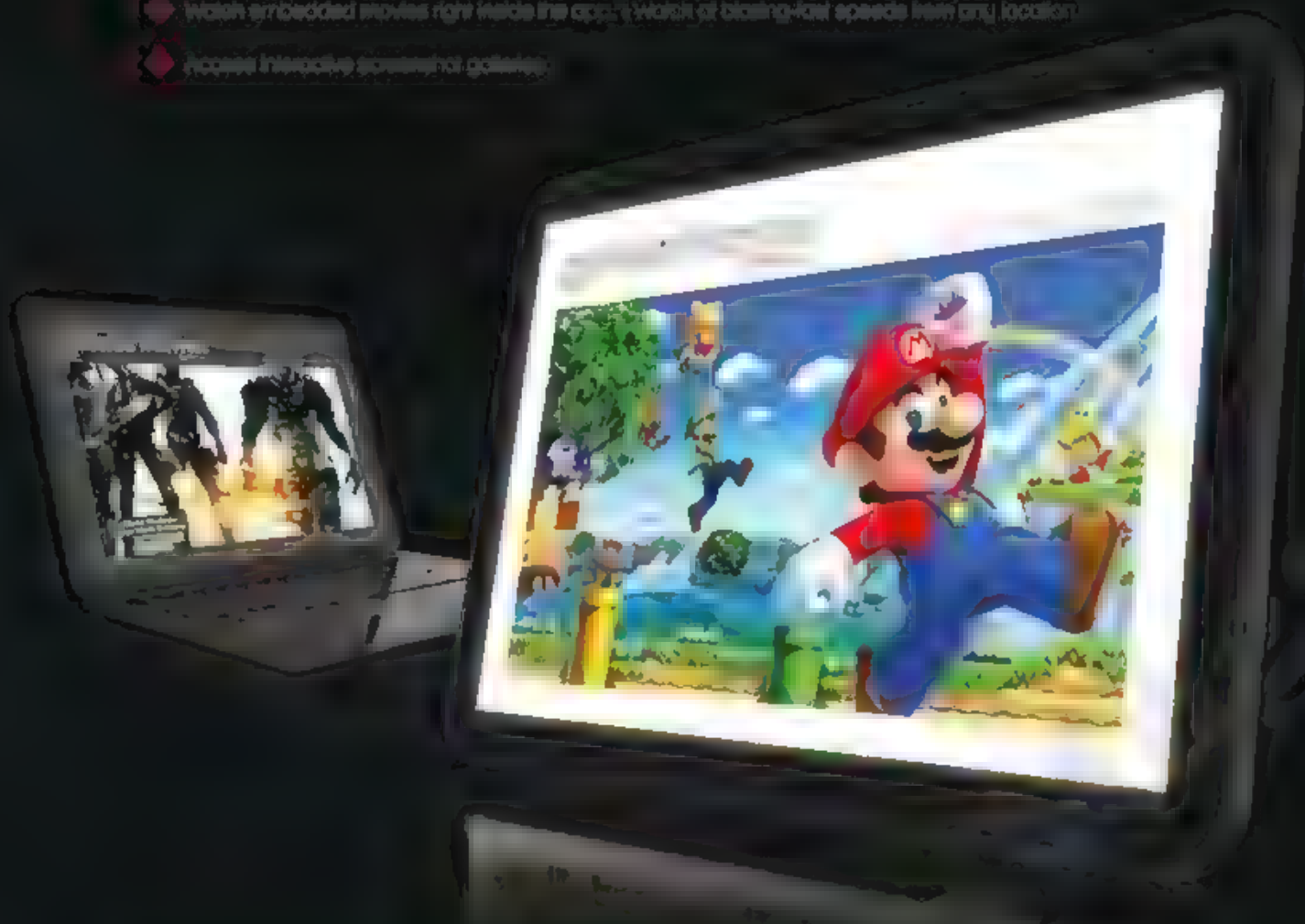
Super Replay An expanded version of Saturday's Replay show, Super Replay has GI editors adding colorful commentary while playing the entirety of a classic game

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

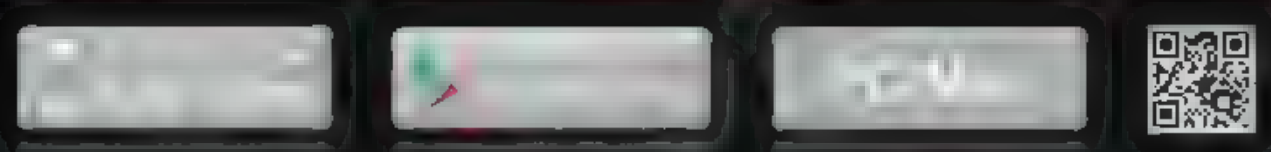


Experience it

- ◆ PowerUp Rewards Pro members who choose Game Informer Digital get full access to the PC/Mac edition, as well as the iPad app and IFT Android tablet app.
- ◆ Get earlier access to new and expanded content than past subscribers.
- ◆ Watch embedded movies right inside the app. Watch 4K blowing-fair speeds from any location.
- ◆ Access interactive gaming hot galleries.



Subscribe to Game Informer Digital now!



gameinformer.com/digitalnow

AFTERGLOW®



קצק



**THE ULTIMATE
GAMING EXPERIENCE**

Sports

- @DallasCowboys - 430,646
- @NFL - 3,000,000
- @KingJames (LeBron James) - 6,282,058
- @FCBarcelona - 6,900,639
- @Cristiano (Cristiano Ronaldo) - 13,500,390
- @ESPNsports - 494,000
- @2KSports - 204,373
- @EAASports - 278,811
- @EAAGamesMVC - 112,535

Music

- @GuitarHero - 6,200,300
- @GunsN - 5,100,000
- @wweyoutube - 107,880
- @videogames_live - 5,555
- @GuitarHero - 48,718
- @Rockband - 78,108
- @RockbandOnline - 88,108

The Twitter

We've been proclaiming video games are a part of mainstream culture for years, and in many ways, franchises like Call of Duty and Grand Theft Auto have become touchstones for a generation. Gamers are also supposed to be among the most connected and social media savvy consumers. So why do video games seem to have trouble keeping up with other forms of media on Twitter? We took a look at some

of the most popular gaming-oriented people, franchises, and companies on Twitter, then compared them to their counterparts in other forms of entertainment. The results

Source: SocialMint.com

Gap

- @GuitarHero - 102,070
- @AngryBirds - 800,000
- @GunsN - 100,070
- @MaddenNFL - 100,000

- @HarryPotterFilm - 100,000
- @BigBang CBS - 800,070
- @Twilight - 1,000,100
- @WWE - 1,767,030

The Walking Dead

@WalkingDeadTV - 1,001

@TheWalkingDead - 50,400

@WalkingDead - 1,001

@WalkingDead - 1,001

Top Personalities

@Kanye - 38,001,300

@Oprah (Oprah Winfrey) - 14,011,530

@CaitiLinn - 5,908,100

@JustWiney - 3,000,071

@mrdatayglover - 1,801,005

@BBauergerber (Brian Baumgartner) - 130,621

@TheWigglez - 70,000

@HIDEK_HOJMA - 142,031

@GervasioGib (Gib Gervasio) - 604,170

@fourzotwa (Robert Bowling) - 300,000

@malomstana (Larry Nyby) - 407,312

@GervasioGib (Gib Gervasio) - 604,170

@tragedolls (Frag Dolls, Professional Entert) - 1,317,100

Big Franchises

@gameofthrones - 130,000

@kotaku - 100,250

@gamepot - 602,341

@ign - 520,000

@nylines - 6,346,140

@cnn - 6,165,942

@peoplenet - 5,307,000

@peoplenet - 4,172,031

Media



Starbreeze Studios' Surprising New Project

Swedish filmmaker Josef Fares (known for the films *Jalla! Jalla!* and *Zozo*) may not be a programmer, but he's an avid gamer. Fares, however, isn't interested in going back to the console. That's why he's been thinking about stepping back from the industry to explore his great passion for the interactive medium—partnering with *The Darkness* and *Syndicate* game creators at Starbreeze on a new game project. Fares is leading the team behind *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons* and recently sat down with the director to play the innovative new title.

Brothers tells the story of two siblings in a fantasy world who must save a village for their ailing father. Playing together from a top-down perspective, a single player controls both brothers simultaneously via a single analog stick. In addition, each brother is afforded a context-sensitive shoulder button that lets him interact with the world. No HUD or interface appears on screen, so players are left to learn and experience the world on their own.

As I play an early part of the game, *Brothers* shows few fantasy trappings. Wandering through a village, each brother exhibits his personality through the way he interacts with the world. The older brother is responsible and serious. Press his button in front of a townsfolk, and he pulls out a map to ask for directions. Meanwhile, the younger brother is playful, creative, and mischievous. In one scene, a young woman pushes her back and forth on her rocking chair, eliciting excited laughter from the old girl.

Brothers distinguishes itself with the variety of actions available to the brothers. Without exception, every context-sensitive action is different from previous ones. Steal a ball from a little girl and throw it back and forth between the two characters. Strum the strings of a harp belonging to a local musician. It's fun to interact with the world just to see how each brother will approach the situation.

The gameplay is simple and experimental, reminding me of that game company's journey, with its focus on discovery and exploration. At times, simple puzzles bar my progression through the brothers' adventure. In one instance, our path through a field is blocked by a simple puzzle. The brothers have to help a dog reach the far side. Later, a drawbridge must be lowered by running on a hamster wheel. In another, one brother activates the bridge and the other uses a rope to grab a sheep and bring it back across the street instead, allowing both brothers to cross.

By the end of the game, the brothers find a magical realm, a realm of nativity parables, scrambled along cliff walls, talked with plenty of townsfolk, but seen in the evidence of the deep fantasy setting I'd been promised. That changes in the final scene, as the brothers climb up to the mountain abode of a hulking troll. Despite his monstrous appearance, the creature seems friendly. He helps point the ledges in the night, and the brothers just jump and flip their way across a chasm to a distant outcropping. Fares promises that *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons* is built to slowly

unfold in most unusual and fantastical settings and creatures. By the end, the brothers will find themselves in situations that are anything but familiar.

I'm intrigued by *Brothers*' secure pace and unusual controls, and I've seen a fan of *Brothers* on the PlayStation 3. Fares' development experience with new game ideas in the indie market speaks to his unique artistic and creative influence. He makes it more intriguing. I'm eager to see if the simple gameplay and puzzles add up through the experience, but the brief section I played certainly left a lasting impression. *Brothers: A Tale of Two Sons* is being released by 505 Games in spring 2013, and will be available on PS3, Xbox 360, and PC.



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Mists of Pandaria

No longer the undisputed champion

It was bound to happen eventually. After more than seven years of supremacy as the MMO of choice for genre players, World of Warcraft's new expansion is the first to feel like it's not the definitive king of the MMO pack, even if its player count still dwarfs everything else. Star Wars: The Old Republic's storytelling, Rift's dynamic events, The Secret World's innovative progression system, and especially Guild Wars 2 and its across-the-board evolution of genre conventions each borrowed heavily from Blizzard's juggernaut while moving in new directions of their own. At times, World of Warcraft feels dated in comparison. Even so, Mists of Pandaria makes an excellent case that the game still has plenty to offer longtime players. If it's not the undisputed champion, WoW is still certainly a serious contender.

Much has been made of the streamlined gameplay, an issue I recently raised that permeates all of Pandaria. It's not only your daily beyond level 90, but a smoother transition. Most of the changes to progression feel natural. The newly revamped talent system is simpler and has less number-crunching, but the core of my night remains familiar. The new heroic options that reward you a lot less well, with a clever twist instead of the expected $\times 1.5$ or several times as much, by offering a more difficult challenge, is a subtle but welcome appendix, not a replacement for the main event. Similarly, about the new farming and cooking options: these are major diversions for those willing to invest, but peripheral to the rest of the player base. For those most avid or players, Pandaria still has a slow reputation grinds that, for better or worse, will keep you busy for a long time.

The real meat of the expansion is right where it should be: with a large new continent to explore, several exciting dungeons, and a new chapter of storytelling for Azeroth. The greatest success Pandaria taps its Asian influence from its opening zone and keeps the focus here throughout the subsequent ride across the massive island. The storytelling feels more structured than in previous expansions, with a lot more of non-player characters that speak to you, and the main questline is more focused on the story. The new zone might have started out as something of an afterthought, but Blizzard has done a fine job of fleshing out the culture, architecture, and personality of these big bears, and I enjoyed exploring their homeland. The Pandaria new zone is a great first step in a fight against the Lich King, and the new zone is a great first step in a fight against the Lich King. Blizzard's most cohesive storytelling to date.

Quality of life Pandaria really offers, and it's one of the game's biggest well-kept secrets. It's not only the new $\times 1.5$ or several times as much, but a smoother transition. Most of the changes to progression feel natural. The newly revamped talent system is simpler and has less number-crunching, but the core of my night remains familiar. The new heroic options that reward you a lot less well, with a clever twist instead of the expected $\times 1.5$ or several times as much, by offering a more difficult challenge, is a subtle but welcome appendix, not a replacement for the main event. Similarly, about the new farming and cooking options: these are major diversions for those willing to invest, but peripheral to the rest of the player base. For those most avid or players, Pandaria still has a slow reputation grinds that, for better or worse, will keep you busy for a long time.

The new dungeons are uniformly strong, from the goofiness of fighting a elemental in Stormstout Brewery to the mystical vibe of the Temple of the Jade Serpent. The focus is on big, challenging bosses over constant mobs, and these fights are really a lot of fun. Heroic versions of those dungeons (and only more only available as a heroic) are just one of many great new options to challenge the endgame. A more varied approach to story, with a new standard scenarios, two new battlegrounds, and keyboard-supported challenge modes for the dungeons all prove that Blizzard is still the best in the business at supporting level-capped play. In fact, the Mists of Pandaria is a great first step in a fight against the Lich King, and the new zone is a great first step in a fight against the Lich King. Blizzard's most cohesive storytelling to date.

Dedicated players will want to check out the new Pandaria play area and accompanying monk class. The Pandaria starting zone is the square of the excellent $\times 1.5$ or several times as much, but a smoother transition. Most of the changes to progression feel natural. The newly revamped talent system is simpler and has less number-crunching, but the core of my night remains familiar. The new heroic options that reward you a lot less well, with a clever twist instead of the expected $\times 1.5$ or several times as much, by offering a more difficult challenge, is a subtle but welcome appendix, not a replacement for the main event. Similarly, about the new farming and cooking options: these are major diversions for those willing to invest, but peripheral to the rest of the player base. For those most avid or players, Pandaria still has a slow reputation grinds that, for better or worse, will keep you busy for a long time.

ch building and ch spending abilities. Moreover, the unnamed martial arts style has a style all its own that feels like an overdue addition to the class list. All that aside, players are looking at a long and potentially expensive climb to 90 if they want to take this new zone whole. It's up to you. Visually, Pandaria is a gorgeous addition to the game, but there's a lot of things that feel like the game is breaking down. That's equally true with combat, which feels very tactical and makes it a great competing MMO. Blizzard has made strides in including more characters and named dialogue this time around, and it's a sign of what many players will be used to after nearly two years of content. The new zone is a great first step in a fight against the Lich King, and the new zone is a great first step in a fight against the Lich King. Blizzard's most cohesive storytelling to date.





Animal Crossing

Nintendo's charming series goes into the spirit of the season more than any other. When the console's internal clock nears December 25, a reindeer named Jingle wanders the festively decorated town to celebrate "Toy Day." Both he and Mayor Tortimer offer you gifts if you talk to them, many of which are Christmas themed.



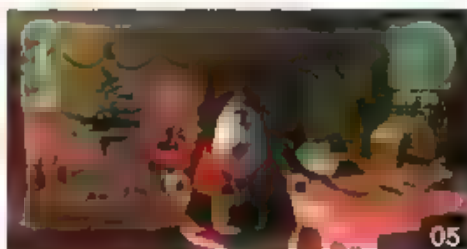
Jimmy Hopkins is a cool kid, but fashion sense doesn't run in the family. His mother sends him a reindeer adorned sweater for Christmas, causing his classmates to viciously mock him when he wears it around campus.



In this rare SNES Mega Drive title, you play as Santa Claus as he attempts to save Christmas from an evil snowman. You use magic to turn his mis and living toys into presents, and other power-ups make Santa future to his evil alter ego, Anti-Santa.



On the snowy mountaintop of Freezeezy Peak, Banjo and his bird-buddy deliver presents to baby polar bears, jump into a giant snowman's pipe, and light up a Christmas tree. You also turn into a tiny warus for some reason.

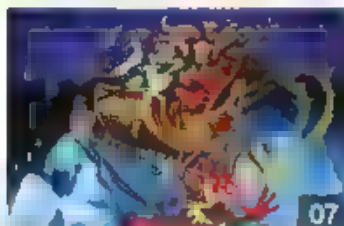


Toy Commander: Christmas Surprise

If you subscribed to *Official Sega Dreamcast Magazine* around Christmas of 2000, you received a disc that contained this holiday-themed level. It was just a modified stage from the original game, but you got to play as Santa Claus with a jetpack. And he could fly into a toilet.

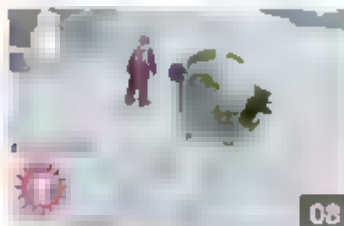


The Sega cult classic, *Nights into Dreams*, received the holiday treatment in this bonus disc that came with select Saturn games and some magazines. It tasked the protagonist with defeating the Christmas Star from Yollolopa, which was littered with holiday cheer thanks to the dreams of hopeful children.

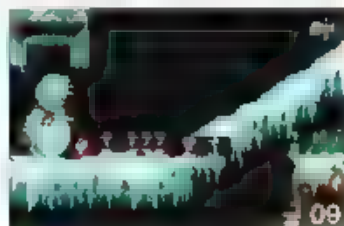


Jazz Jackrabbit: Holiday Hare

Former Epic Games design director Cliff Blesinski put his teeth on this PC platforming series and designed several Christmas-themed episodes. Everyone's favorite green rabbit collects candy canes throughout holidays if he goes to get a kiss from Eva Earlong.



In a series that evolves around pushing things around in an effort to make a bigger, it's only natural to feature a snowman episode. When the kind of All Goshins hears a suggestion that Katarina is a copycat of the snowman he needs the Prince out to collect polar bears skiers, Santa, and igloos to make his own.



Like jazz Jackrabbit, this 90s PC title released several short episodes. Holiday Lemming captured the adorable features of little Santa hats that you had to prevent from mindlessly committing suicide by walking off a cliff.



A lot of things don't make sense in this awful PSone sequel, such as fighting a cybernetic tyrannosaurus rex with a night-saber family dog. With this abandon-ness, you can Santa Claus' star that stands outside Temple Pizza, which offers \$50 horse meat burgers and \$100 bananas.

The Good

CD PROJEKT RED, developer of *The Witcher 2*, announced that its previously teased upcoming sci-fi RPG *Cyberpunk 2077* is based off of Mike Pondsmith's *Cyberpunk* pen-and-paper RPG. The company didn't announce specific platforms for the game, but promises a mature game that's faithful to the source material thanks to Pondsmith's involvement. The game features a non-linear story with divergent paths.

Quotable

"[WWE '13 will be] without question, the greatest video game in the history of technology."



— WWE commentator Jim Ross

The Bad

SOME BORDERLANDS 2 players are annoyed by a bug that drains their badass tank and prevents them from re-obtaining it. As of the time of this writing, developer Gearbox has not found a solution for all three versions of the game (PS3, Xbox 360, and PC) even though the glitch has popped up two different times.

THE NO SHOW

What is *NBA Live* anymore? EA Sports canceled *NBA Live 13*, meaning that the publisher's last slim NBA basketball is 2009's *NBA Live 10*. The game showed poorly at this year's E3, and the development team hadn't used the extra time since canceling the last *NBA Live* to its advantage.

The Ugly

interview



Bringing Advanced Game Technology To The Masses

Unity Technologies and its Unity game engine have quietly sparked a revolution in game development. The engine and toolset has become ubiquitous among smaller developers, especially in the mobile space for its low cost (there is even a free version) and ease of use. We spoke with Unity CEO David Helgason about the company's philosophy, history, and expanding console plans.

interview by Jim Reilly and Matt Heigeson

Can you talk about the origins of your company? What was your original vision when you got started, and how many of you were there when you started that?

You might say there are two stages. The original vision was to just have fun and make games. There were three founders, all programmers. We didn't have any experience from the industry. We were pretty good programmers, but we really didn't know much about games at all except of course, we played them a lot. We did this thing that was sort of natural [to us], especially back then when Unity didn't exist, which was you start building the engine because eventually you have these tools and maybe you can make a game later.

In 2004, we actually realized that we were more passionate about the technology, and we felt that we had built something that would be able to enable other people to make games. We wrote the first business plan. We decided that we wanted to charge uniform prices and make it super-simple to use and, by doing that, we could have a lot of users. Everyone else in the game industry was either selling their stuff for millions of dollars or charging a big percent age of the revenue of the games. We said, "No we're not going to be that business; we're just going to be like Photoshop for games, or Final Cut Pro for games." The thing about that is it has to have simplicity, it has to have directness, and the price point has to be accessible. But the belief was that, over time, the economics of having an approach like that would be so strong that eventually we could make it more advanced and better than anybody else.

What are some of your major platforms? I know you do mostly mobile and PC, but you're dabbling with consoles with Wii U.

We started on the Mac, so in the beginning you actually had to have a Mac to develop with Unity. Now it works on PC and Mac. We know we wanted to go to the console eventually, and we felt that eventually mobile would be interesting. That all changed when the iPhone App Store opened up in July 2008. We knew this would be the perfect platform for us, because we felt like it was bound to be successful for small game studios. We had a Mac, back-ground, and we felt we could make this work really well. So we worked as hard as we could and launched support for the iPhone in October 2008. We actually felt we were a bit late to the

party. There were no other engines supported for the platform, [so we] felt that maybe the iPhone was not going to be that big. Of course that was extremely wrong, and it just kept ramping up.

What is it about Unity in particular that is such a draw for people? Is it the ease of use, the cost, or I guess the lack of cost? What have you gotten back from your developers about your engine?

People pick Unity for many different reasons. We kept the prices down because we really feel that the engine should not be a big burden, and we want everyone to be able to afford it. And it's the simplicity, it's really easy to get started with. Game development is never truly easy, but it's pretty straightforward.

Then there is the fact that we now support practically every interesting platform - we just launched support for Linux as well. The last piece is the big community, the fact that there are over 1.2 million registered developers using Unity, and something like a quarter of them used Unity in the last 30 days. It's pretty amazing. It's a huge community and there are [many] online resources. There are probably 20 books in many different languages, there are video tutorials, you can find answers to almost any question you need in the community.

What is your take on the industry as a whole right now? There is lots of talk about the death of consoles right now, and mobile is clearly taking off.

There are going to be many answers. First off, consoles are not [dying], and I think the rumors of their demise are slightly exaggerated. There is still more money generated in consoles than any other category - not more units sold, but more revenue generated. The next generation of consoles [hasn't been announced], but the Wii U has been announced and shown. We know it will sell in the millions, although the number of Wii Us that are going to sell [will] be a lot less than a mobile phone. The difference is that people who buy a game console by buying it they kind of told people, "I am a gamer, I am going to buy games here. I made this investment and I want to have fun." So these people who buy the console will buy a lot of games. The console is not going away, but the growth is probably shrinking as a business. For smaller developers, it's a hassle [to get

the approvals and even the development kits. So the smaller developers are making mobile games, web games, and so on.

If you look at the iPhone, some of the top-selling games have not been done by big studios. Angry Birds was actually done by a pretty small company in Finland - now they're big, but they really weren't when they made that game. So you had this explosion of cool companies and cool games that would have had a hard time getting through. We think the next-gen consoles will be more open to that, which will be great for studios and gamers because I think people really enjoy these cheaper and often just as fun games.

What are some trends you're noticing in the industry now that you think are going to be big deals in the future?

One thing we're seeing now is many developers going cross-platform, building games that will work on many different devices. Before, you would have a PlayStation version of a game and a PSP spinoff, a completely different game in the same world. These games were typically built from the ground up. Now, it's not really porting in the same sense that you first make an Xbox game then you make a slightly worse PlayStation version. It's actually games that were born multiplatform and launched at the same exact time. Some of them, not as many of them as I would like, are being crafted so you can actually have the same character, the same score, and keep playing across these games. I'm hoping there is going to be more of that. It's really frustrating to start over on a different device.

Where do you hope to see Unity go down the road? Do you want more developers on board or are you hoping to explore areas of the industry in terms of hardware?

We have one fundamental tenet, which is that we want to make more people make better games. That's kind of what guides us, that's everything we do. From supporting a lot of platforms, because that's important for developers, to having really good tools and making it as cheap as we absolutely can. We're making a free version so more people can have access. We basically want to close the gap between what is theoretically possible, like the Frostbite engine that EA develops. It's one of the best engines in the world. It's only for EA, so you can't really get it if you're not EA, though, it's done by these tremendous engineers and we need some of them. We want to close the gap so that everyone can have access to the same technology.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

1996 WITH THE PROGRAMS
Helgason becomes a programmer at Egnberg, a software communication for a couple years.

1998 BIG DEVELOPMENTS
Starts developing at Metropolis, a technology consulting firm.

2001 THE BUSINESS WORLD
Co-founds Pathfinder Apps, a consulting company focused on business processes.

2002 TECHNICAL WORK
Co-founds and serves as CTO of iCover, a music-related tech startup.

2004 UNTITLED FRONT
Co-founds Unity Technologies with Jason Teague to democratize game development and develop technology for the next generation of the industry.

2005 BIG LAUNCH
July 7 engine launches onstage at Apple's WWDC.

2009 RUNNING FREE
A free version of Unity is announced and released. Unity triples in value and Sequoia Capital leads \$2.5 billion Series A investment round with Intel, Autodesk and John Geronzi.

2010 HUGE SUCCESS
Unity surpasses the 250,000 developers milestone and both the Unity Asset Store and Unity launch.

2011 FUTURE INVESTMENTS
Unity Technologies raises \$1 billion Series B funding, opens offices in Canada, Japan, Seoul, and Stockholm. The company surpasses 100,000 developers and 100 employee milestones.

2012 THE LATESTS
Unity launches Unity 3.5 and surpasses the 1 million registered developers.

2012 GAMES GADGETS GIFTS

by *Jeff Labrecque*

The end of the year is rolling around, which means it's time to start thinking about gifts. For the generous gamers, that means coming up with

perfect presents for your friends and family. For opportunistic gamers, that means scribbling out a list of gifts for others to buy you. We're not here to judge; we just want to highlight the hottest gadgets, newest gizmos, and best games that 2012 has to offer. All that you do with the information is up to you.





www.CardsAgainstHumanity.com

Smart Art \$10.00 • **Monkey Milton Press** • **Mega Man** • **Assassin's Creed Army of Trots T-shirt**

Bobble Budds • **Uber** • **Bodyweight Training You Are Your Own Gym** • **Khan Academy** • **Kingdom Rush HD** • **Middle Manager of Justice** • **Numberlys** • **Organ Trail: Director's Cut** • **Rayman Jungle Run** • **Room**

Uber • **Bodyweight Training You Are Your Own Gym** • **Khan Academy** • **Kingdom Rush HD** • **Middle Manager of Justice** • **Numberlys** • **Organ Trail: Director's Cut** • **Rayman Jungle Run** • **Room**

Uber • **Bodyweight Training You Are Your Own Gym** • **Khan Academy** • **Kingdom Rush HD** • **Middle Manager of Justice** • **Numberlys** • **Organ Trail: Director's Cut** • **Rayman Jungle Run** • **Room**

Uber • **Bodyweight Training You Are Your Own Gym** • **Khan Academy** • **Kingdom Rush HD** • **Middle Manager of Justice** • **Numberlys** • **Organ Trail: Director's Cut** • **Rayman Jungle Run** • **Room**



Free
eightyeightgames.com



Bodyweight Training You Are Your Own Gym
 iOS, Android
hardrocksstudios.com



Khan Academy
 iOS, Android, Windows Phone
 Free
khanacademy.org



Kingdom Rush HD
 iOS
armorgames.com



Middle Manager of Justice
 iOS
middlemanagerofjustice.com



Numberlys
 iOS
numberlys.com



Organ Trail: Director's Cut
 iOS, Android
 \$2.99
haisproductions.com



Rayman Jungle Run
 iOS, Android
ubt.com



Room
 iOS
 \$4.99
fireproofgames.com



Uber
 iOS, Android, Windows Phone
uber.com



Rock It 3.0 \$34.99 (prepaid) • You will spend the afternoon... and we're not talking about your stupid ex-wife. With Rock It 3.0, we can turn your favorite games into... edge games... you can play... defense and the... that get... into sound waves... where you... Rock It to the... of the... **X-Wing Star Wars Miniatures Game** \$39.95 (prepaid) lightgames.com • Fight... vs. The Empire... of Star Wars... forms up... one another in a... game... The game includes... and allows players... their... **Dungeon Command** \$9.99 (prepaid) • US... looking for a quick... forward experience... for 2 to 4 players... with... your... the game... **1 Kingdom Hearts Heartless Inspired Apron/Pinafore** \$14.99 (prepaid) • This... inspired... Army... and... the... to enjoy...

BOOKS

- A** **Absolute Green Lantern: The Sinestro Corps War**
\$99.98 dccomics.com
- B** **Building Stories**
by Chris Ware
\$50.00 | randomhouse.com
- C** **How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying**
by David Mitchell
\$ 5.00 randomhouse.com
- D** **War**
by George Orwell
\$39.98 books.williamston.com
- E** **The Fifty-Year Sword: Deluxe Edition**
by Mark Z. Danielewski
\$3,000.00 randomhouse.com
- F** **Future Perfect: The Case for Progress in a Networked Age**
by Steven Johnson
\$26.95 penguin.com
- G** **Luminous Chaos. A Novel**
by Jean-Christophe Valtat and Mahendra Singh
\$24.95 mhbooks.com
- H** **Marvel Comics: The Untold Story**
by Sean Howe
\$29.99 harpercollins.com
- I** **Saga Volume 1**
by Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples
\$9.99 | imagecomics.com
- J** **Scott Pilgrim Color Hardcover Volume 2: Vs. The World**
\$24.99 antpress.com
- K** **Star Wars and History**
\$29.95 wiley.com
- L** **Superman Earth One Volume 2**
\$22.99 dccomics.com
- M** **Telegraph Avenue**
by Michael Chabon
\$27.99 harpercollins.com
- N** **The Walking Dead Compendium Volume 2**
\$59.98 imagecomics.com



you collect while taking your dog game, fitness mistakes, or refresh your wardrobe whenever it's necessary. We'll be honest—we have no idea what the next chapter is. **Rebo Series Hard & Sugar-Free Cotton Candy Maker** \$24.99 amazon.com • Develop your cotton candy-making skills. It gives you the ability to get your hands dirty, so to speak, it's also to make you own cotton candy machine. \$49.99 amazon.com • This appliance from the 1950s has a built-in sugar ball sugar and is made of no fluff, and the only one that can be used though the kind of candy you make. **Star Trek Door Chime** \$24.99 amazon.com • If you're like us, you've probably had a door chime that doesn't work. This door chime is a Star Trek Door Chime made of a door chime that would make a great addition to your home. **Star Trek Door Chime** \$24.99 amazon.com • If you're like us, you've probably had a door chime that doesn't work. This door chime is a Star Trek Door Chime made of a door chime that would make a great addition to your home. **Gears of War Erector Construction Sets** \$24.99 amazon.com • If you're like us, you've probably had a door chime that doesn't work. This door chime is a Star Trek Door Chime made of a door chime that would make a great addition to your home.



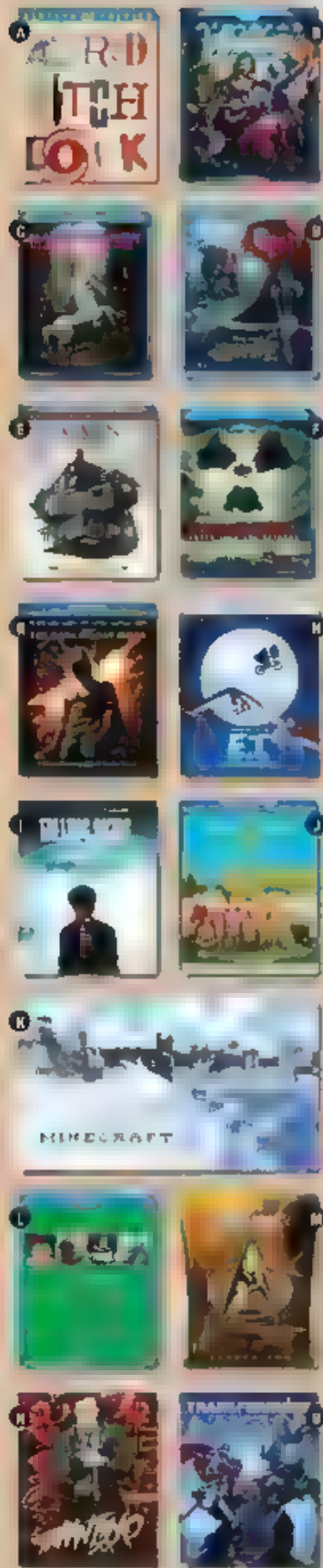
Lego The Hobbit: The Goblin King Battle \$149.99 (lego.com) • The 200 video games provide plenty of fun for the whole family, but if you're looking for a game that's both fun and educational, look no further than the new Lego The Hobbit: The Goblin King Battle. This game is a great way to introduce your kids to the world of Middle-earth.

Logitech Wireless Solar Keyboard \$119.99 (logitech.com) • The Logitech Wireless Solar Keyboard is a great choice for anyone who wants a keyboard that's both wireless and solar-powered. It's a great choice for anyone who wants a keyboard that's both wireless and solar-powered.

Kindle Paperwhite \$139.99 (amazon.com) • The Kindle Paperwhite is a great choice for anyone who wants a Kindle that's both waterproof and has a higher resolution screen. It's a great choice for anyone who wants a Kindle that's both waterproof and has a higher resolution screen.

NES & Super NES Hard Drives \$99.99 (retrogame.com) • The NES & Super NES Hard Drives are a great choice for anyone who wants to store their retro games. They're a great choice for anyone who wants to store their retro games.

LeapFrog LeapPad2 \$129.99 (leapfrog.com) • The LeapFrog LeapPad2 is a great choice for anyone who wants a tablet that's both educational and fun. It's a great choice for anyone who wants a tablet that's both educational and fun.



VIDEO

- A Alfred Hitchcock: The Masterpiece Collection**
\$299.99 | www.paramount.com/entertainment
- B The Avengers**
\$39.98 | marvel.com
- C Blade Runner 30th Anniversary Edition***
*Additional gift not shown. See picture.
\$64.99 | wbsshop.com
- D Brave Three-Disc Collector's Edition**
\$39.99 | disney.go.com/brave
- E The Cabin in the Woods**
\$34.99 | disney.com/thecabininthewoods.com
- F Chernobyl Diaries**
\$29.98 | wbsshop.com
- G The Dark Knight Rises**
\$35.99 | wbsshop.com
- H E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial Anniversary Edition**
\$34.99 | etonbluray.com
- I Falling Skies: The Complete First Season**
\$49.99 | shop.iondrama.com
- J Moonrise Kingdom**
\$34.98 | moonrisekingdom.com
- K Minecraft: The Story of Mojang**
\$15.00 | 2playerproductions.com
- L Pixar Short Films Collection 2**
\$39.99 | disney.com
- M Star Trek: The Next Generation – Season 2 HD**
\$129.99 | paramount.com
- N Tarantino XX 8-Film Collection**
\$119.99 | paramax.com
- O Transformers Prime Season 2**
\$29.98 | showfactory.com



features front-and-back camera, with video recording, up to 1GB of memory, a library of 305+ game cartridges and downloadable apps, and access to a wealth of eBooks, music, and games. Keep nature and love your LeapPad. If night someday, grow into an iPad. **Nike FuelBand** \$149 (store.nike.com) • **Monile Gear Y-Shot Slinghol** \$119 (thelikegear.com) • **Technomancer Digital Wizard Hoodie** \$119 (thelikegear.com) • **NuForce Cube** \$99.99 (nuforce.com)

LeapPad 2 \$149.99 | leapfrog.com • **Nike FuelBand** \$149 | store.nike.com • **Monile Gear Y-Shot Slinghol** \$119 | thelikegear.com • **Technomancer Digital Wizard Hoodie** \$119 | thelikegear.com • **NuForce Cube** \$99.99 | nuforce.com

LeapPad 2 features front-and-back camera, with video recording, up to 1GB of memory, a library of 305+ game cartridges and downloadable apps, and access to a wealth of eBooks, music, and games. Keep nature and love your LeapPad. If night someday, grow into an iPad. **Nike FuelBand** \$149 (store.nike.com) • **Monile Gear Y-Shot Slinghol** \$119 (thelikegear.com) • **Technomancer Digital Wizard Hoodie** \$119 (thelikegear.com) • **NuForce Cube** \$99.99 (nuforce.com)

Nike FuelBand \$149 | store.nike.com • **Monile Gear Y-Shot Slinghol** \$119 | thelikegear.com • **Technomancer Digital Wizard Hoodie** \$119 | thelikegear.com • **NuForce Cube** \$99.99 | nuforce.com

Monile Gear Y-Shot Slinghol \$119 | thelikegear.com • **Technomancer Digital Wizard Hoodie** \$119 | thelikegear.com • **NuForce Cube** \$99.99 | nuforce.com

Technomancer Digital Wizard Hoodie \$119 | thelikegear.com • **NuForce Cube** \$99.99 | nuforce.com

NuForce Cube \$99.99 | nuforce.com

A quality headbasher amplifies high-performance guitars and professional-grade microphones—all cradled into a sleek, curved frame. The NuForce Cube keeps the party jamming for up to eight hours.



GAME

- A Assassin's Creed III Limited Edition • \$119.99**
 - 9'44" Connor statue
 - 28" x 48" embroidered flag
 - 3" x 3.25" sturdy metal belt buckle
 - George Washington's Notebook
- B Borderlands 2 Deluxe Vault Hunter Collector's Edition • \$99.99**
 - Fit of Art Set
 - Game book download
 - Map of Goodhead
 - Map of Dharma
 - Inside the Vault hardcover book
- C Call of Duty: Black Ops II Care Package • \$ 79.99**
 - Remote-controlled UAV/Drone
 - 3x Call of Duty: Black Ops II campaign coins
 - Gift of Dharma T-shirt
 - Additional in-game content
- D Guild Wars 2 Collector's Edition • \$ 49.99**
 - Collector's metal box
 - 10 Days of Celebration
 - Full set of Guild Wars 2 armor frame and portrait
 - Best of Guild Wars 2 soundtrack
 - Making of Guild Wars 2 hardcover book
- E Halo 4 Limited Edition • \$99.99**
 - Additional in-game content and maps
 - Bonus digital content and features
 - UNSC Infinity briefing packet
- F Skylanders Giants Starter Kit • \$74.99**
 - Portal of power
 - Three Skylanders figures, trading cards, and sticker sheets with secret codes
 - Collectible character poster

Bloggie Live HD Camera (\$249.99 | store.sony.com) • We no longer just chronicle our lives, we broadcast them. Sony's Bloggie makes it easier than ever to broadcast your life. The Bloggie Live HD Camera captures up to 8GB of full HD 1080p video and then wirelessly uploads it to Facebook, YouTube, or your home PC. With the easy-to-use app, you can broadcast. You're probably more interesting than anyone from *How Comes Money Bro Bro*, so go for it.

MGS REX Collectible Figure (\$48 | sideshow.com) • Here's a figure you won't need three key cards to enjoy. Sideshow Collectibles collaborated with Konami Productions and ArtStation to create this authentic model of the Metal Gear Rex from *Metal Gear Solid*. This detailed figure features a 23-inch long base that houses a running, jumping, and breathing mechanism and measures 19 inches in height. It also killed our friend Gray Fox, and we may never be able to forgive it.

Logitech Harmony Touch (\$149.99 | logitech.com) • Juicyly snaps and scrolls through your favorite entertainment options with Logitech's Harmony Touch. The sleek remote features a ergonomic design, a vibrant touchscreen, and 50 easy-to-customize channel icons make channel surfing a breeze. Screw that wizard hoodoo, the Harmony Touch is the future of remote control.

Lytro (\$349.99 | lytro.com) • The Lytro doesn't just take pictures, it records the entire light field. This means that the resulting images are "living pictures," which you can endlessly refocus even after they've been taken. It's like capturing light's memory. You can view desktop applications and share your captures online, letting your friends experience the magic.

MUSIC

- A** **Dethklok**
Metalocalypse Dethklok Dethalbum III
\$ 1.99 | duftrwith.com/metal
- B** **Dinosaur Jr.**
I Bet On Sky
\$13.99 | dinosaurjr.com/restamerc.com
- C** **Health**
Max Payne 3 Official Soundtrack
\$9.99 | rockstargames.com/maxpayne3
- D** **Kendrick Lamar**
Good Kid: M.A.A.D. City
\$9.99 | kendricklamar.com
- E** **Flying Lotus**
Until The Quiet Comes
\$9.99 | warp.net
- F** **Yeekayer**
Fragrant World
\$ 7.99 | secretlycanadian.com



1 Sony Bravia 64-inch 4K TV, \$24,999 Here you go—4K. It's not a good thing to get into a new world of eyes. The new generation of consumer electronics delivers more pixels to your living room. A 64-inch Sony Bravia 4K TV is the new standard in home entertainment. Instead of a standard 1080p image, you'll get a 4K image with four times as many pixels. The result is a sharper, more detailed picture. Best of all, it's available in a variety of colors to match your home's decor. **2 New Razer Blade S, \$2,299** Razer's new Blade S is a sleek, thin laptop that's perfect for gaming. It features a 15.6-inch display with a 144Hz refresh rate, which means you can see more frames per second. The result is smoother, more fluid gameplay. **3 Acer Aspire S7 Ultrabook, \$1,649** (us.acer.com) • Maybe you don't need a laptop that chews through games. You might want a machine that's powerful and ultra-compact. The Acer Aspire S7 is a new 13.3-inch ultrabook that's perfect for travel. It features a 1920x1080 display and a 3.5GHz processor. **4 MakerBot Replicator 2 S, \$499** (makerbot.com) • You can now print your own parts. The MakerBot Replicator 2 S is a desktop 3D printer that can print parts for a variety of projects. It's easy to use and can print parts in a variety of colors. **5** ... **6** ... **7** ... **8** ... **9** ... **10** ...

Letting Go

I used to never put a game down until I'd completely conquered it, even if things got so ridiculous that I found myself dodging 100 consecutive randomly timed lightning bolts. Nowadays I've stopped going for the full-clear in games from Final Fantasy to Arkham Asylum, and I'm enjoying my gaming hobby more than ever.

Credit (or blame) World of Warcraft for my change of heart. There was a time in 2009 when interpersonal drama blew up the group I was raiding with. Without a steady crew to conquer the game's toughest challenges with, but unwilling to quit and give up the game that had brought me closer than ever to out-of-town friends who had moved away after high school, I was left to my own devices. At first, completing challenge achievements in five-man dungeons kept me going. For a time after that, bringing my stable of alternate characters up to level cap occupied me. I checked one side goal after another off of my list — and World of Warcraft does nothing so well as providing a lengthy checklist — until I did the unthinkable: I began fishing.

Fishing around the world and finding rare fish was fun for a time despite the brutal tedium of the fishing minigame itself. Grabbing a couple buddies and taking a shot at the ultra-competitive weekly contest in Booty Bay had its moments. Eventually, though, nothing was left but to earn my coin from the wishing well in the hub city of Dalaran.

Imagine rolling five dice every twenty seconds, trying to get all five matching for a Yahtzee — on each number, one through six. The first Yahtzee is a great moment. The thirty-third, when you get a set of fives when all you need is the sixes to finish your set, is maddening. Fishing up that damn coin breaks me.

I saw too deeply into the Matrix; the process of checking off that final box was too transparent in its deliberate spacing out of rewards for performing trivial actions. I had always known I was on an intellectual level, but internalizing the fact that I was a middle-classer was banished through a steady drip of

merit, triggered a sleep revolution in me.

Ignoring the voice in my head that urges me to engage in gaming activities I don't enjoy just for the achievement, trophy, or simple feeling of completion is now trivial. Sifting through the entirety of Arkham Asylum in detective vision, mining every planet in Mass Effect, sopping arbitrary chests to get the Zodiac Spear in Final Fantasy XII: no thanks. Those are games that I love all the more for my avoidance of aspects that have negative appeal to me.

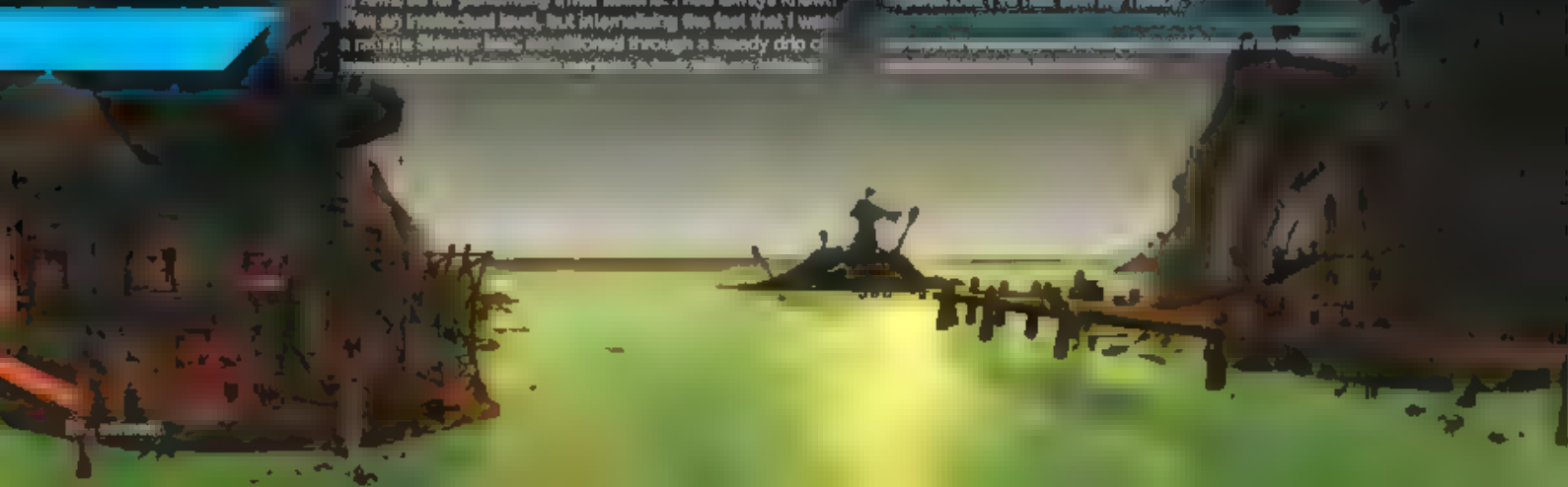
At the same time, I happily die over and over in New Super Mario Bros. to get every last star coin and play Civilization V again and again to get the achievement for winning with each leader. The difference is that the pursuit of these goals is great fun for me, rather than being a monotonous chore endured in order to check an item off of a list someone slapped together to pass Microsoft certification.

You and I may love the same game for different reasons. My nephew adores playing Minecraft in creative mode on a server with his friends, an experience that quickly bore me even though I adore single-player survival mode. Why, then, should either of us force ourselves to slog through the parts we don't enjoy just to say we've "beaten" a particular game?

I nearly didn't complete Mass Effect — one of my absolute favorite games of this generation — because the sidequests were so awful. It took me three tries to beat Final Fantasy XII — likewise an all-star of the PS2 era — because I kept restarting after realizing I'd opened the wrong chest hours of playtime previously. Letting go of the completionism bug hasn't just freed up more time in my schedule for a wider selection of games, it has led me to some of the best experiences I've had with my hobby.

Opinion

If you work in the industry and would like to share your thoughts, contact editor Matt Helgeson at matt@gametriforce.com

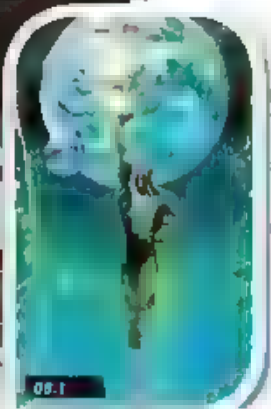




04 **Avengers: Battle for Earth**



04 **Far Cry 3**



08.1



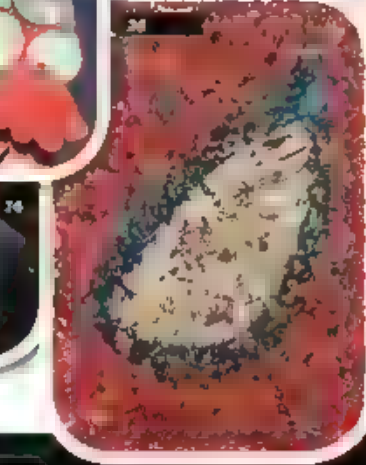
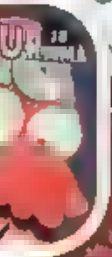
04 **The Walking Dead**



06



05.2



31

04 New Releases

A few new titles for both Wii U and PS4 are due out on 3/10, including the Walking Dead PS4, 360, PS3.

05! New Shades of Green

So many new titles! New Super Mario Bros. U, The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, and more are on the way. We'll see you all the way through the year.

05.2 The New Avengers

Check out the new Avengers: Infinity War, which is a new era of the franchise. It's a new kind of movie, a new kind of story. It's a new kind of movie. It's a new kind of story.

06 NeoGeo Returns!

NeoGeo is back! The classic NeoGeo games are being re-released on modern consoles. It's a great way to experience these classic games on a modern system. The games are being re-released on modern consoles. It's a great way to experience these classic games on a modern system.

07 Who Will Win at the Spike VGAs?

Who will win at the Spike VGAs? It's a tough question to answer. There are many great games and developers out there. It's a tough question to answer. There are many great games and developers out there.

13 Learn About Social Games

Learn about the social games that are taking the world by storm. These games are designed to be played with friends and family. They are a great way to spend time with loved ones.

14 A Weird Return to the Shire

A weird return to the Shire. The classic Lord of the Rings games are being re-released on modern consoles. It's a great way to experience these classic games on a modern system.

18 New Releases

More new titles are coming out on 3/17. We'll see you all the way through the year.

26 Spider-Man's Amazing Run Ends at 700

Spider-Man's Amazing Run ends at 700. The game is a great way to experience the classic Spider-Man games on a modern system.

37 Ring In the New Year with Super Replay

Ring in the new year with Super Replay. The game is a great way to experience the classic Super Replay games on a modern system.





» **Platform**
PlayStation 3 • Xbox 360

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

» **Publisher**
Rockstar Games

» **Developer**
Rockstar North

» **Release**
Spring

GRAND THEFT AUTO OR GO HOME

*With Grand Theft Auto V, Rockstar Games
rewrites its entire playbook*

 **by Matt Bertz** 



It's not easy to stay at the top. When video games become multimillion dollar franchises, a publisher's natural inclination is to preserve its cash cow by continuing to offer the same kinds of game experiences that made it popular. As time moves on, the big changes the creative teams took to create the blockbuster are replaced by minor, calculated

creative decisions backed with gigabytes of research data and focus-group analysis that proves people will keep paying the price of admission. The new additions become predictable. Add dual-wielding to Sequel 2. Introduce co-op for Sequel 3. Yeah, it's primarily a single-player game, but why not take a stab at multiplayer for Sequel 4?



Rockstar Games achieved blockbuster status in 2001 when *Grand Theft Auto: The Trilogy* game—the whole package that came with all three games—was introduced to the market. It's since its introduction, it's been a success story. The publisher's natural inclination is to preserve its cash cow by continuing to offer the same kinds of game experiences that made it popular. As time moves on, the big changes the creative teams took to create the blockbuster are replaced by minor, calculated creative decisions backed with gigabytes of research data and focus-group analysis that proves people will keep paying the price of admission. The new additions become predictable. Add dual-wielding to Sequel 2. Introduce co-op for Sequel 3. Yeah, it's primarily a single-player game, but why not take a stab at multiplayer for Sequel 4?

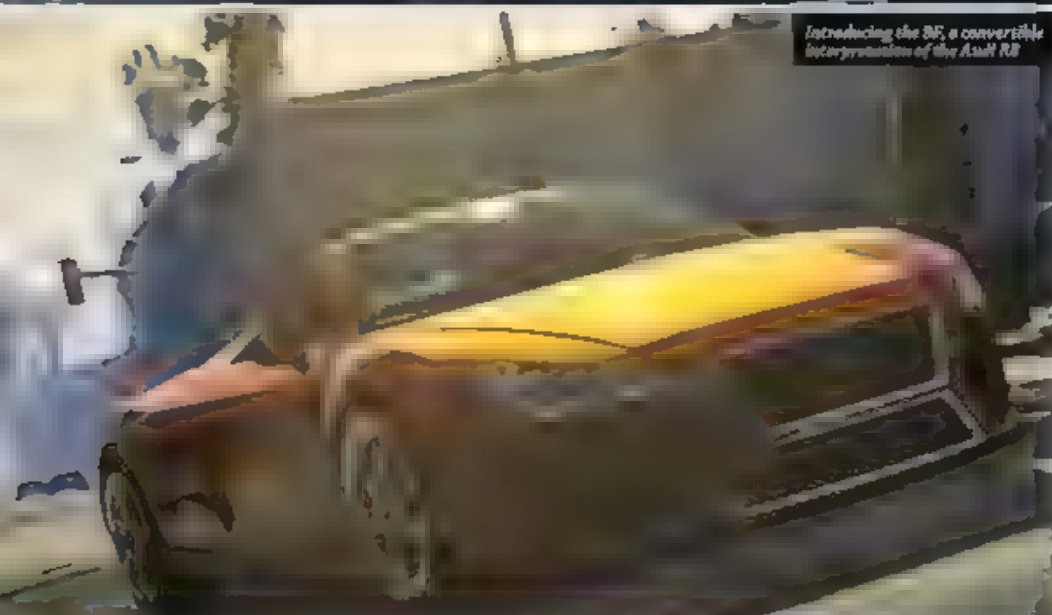
For the industry, it's a great follow-up. Rockstar isn't playing it safe by offering marketing research and watching focus groups at a game to predict what expectations push its creative boundaries internally, and hopefully add something to the discussion of game design in general. The studio is taking the risk—since most publishers would dismiss immediately for being too difficult, expensive, and time-consuming.

Grand Theft Auto's open-world environment features the biggest and most detailed world ever seen in a game. It's a world that's not only a challenge to the player's skills, but also a world that's full of life. The game's story and characters are so rich that you could switch between them at nearly any time.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

The evolution of open-world protagonists in Rockstar games only shows the maturity of video game storytelling in general. The early top-down games showed the player through subtle character traits of the main character, with grand theft auto protagonists like Tommy Vercetti and CJ whose personalities were defined by their respective eras and time periods. At the dawn of the high-definition era, Rockstar qualified itself from caricatures in video games by creating a more realistic and detailed world. *Grand Theft Auto IV's* main character, Niko Bellic, is a former Yugoslav war veteran who has come to America in search of a better life. He's a complex character with a rich backstory and a deep understanding of the world he's living in. He's a character who's not just a player's avatar, but a fully realized person with a rich backstory and a deep understanding of the world he's living in.

But the evolution of open-world protagonists in Rockstar games has many different lead characters, each with their own unique story and personality. Niko Bellic is a former Yugoslav war veteran who has come to America in search of a better life. He's a complex character with a rich backstory and a deep understanding of the world he's living in. He's a character who's not just a player's avatar, but a fully realized person with a rich backstory and a deep understanding of the world he's living in. He's a character who's not just a player's avatar, but a fully realized person with a rich backstory and a deep understanding of the world he's living in.



Introducing the BF, a convertible interpretation of the Audi R8



Michael cruising down the street in flip-flops on his bicycle

GAMEPLAY EVOLVED

For Grand Theft Auto V, Rockstar Games has rebuilt most of the gameplay mechanics from the ground up—vice president of creative Ian Foster wouldn't speak to particular aspects, but he says that work on each system delves into finer details at a later date but he did offer general impressions on the driving, shooting, and melee combat.

Driving

"The cars hold to the ground a bit better. We thought they were big and brutish like GTA IV and we feel like it has really wrapped its head around what we're doing on all the more physics on them. It feels more like a racing game. There are not a lot of high-level racing games out there at the moment, and that's why going to be scratched by this game in a way maybe it hasn't been in previous GTAs."

Shooting

"We see how we've evolved it on from where we had it in any previous game a long way. And not just in terms of how it works, but also in terms of the core mechanics of how you play the game."

Melee Combat

"It's better than we had in the past. How far we can push it, we will see depending on resources we allocate to it. It's never going to be as big a deal as shooting with the way that we do it in game, but we do want it to feel really fun and strong."



"One of them is motivated by ambition, another is motivated by ego, and another one of them is motivated by id. What happens when you smash those together?"

- Dan Houser



loved Niko and felt he was a very strong lead protagonist for a game, and we were starting to get into John Marston," remembers Rockstar Games vice president of creative Dan Houser. "We were still being told a western was going to be a disaster but we thought we were going to make something interesting with a strong character that you started to fall in love with. We just felt that after those two games just doing more of the same wouldn't be enough because we wouldn't be able to surpass them for a while. That was really where we came up with the concept of doing it like the episodes with three characters."

As episodes from Liberty City demonstrated, giving the player multiple perspectives has clear advantages. When you rode through Alderney on the back of a chopper as Johnny Korbitt, carrying all the emotional baggage of his motorcycle club, Liberty City felt drastically different than when you were partying with the one percenters as Luis Lopez or carving your American identity as immigrant Niko Belic. The city, which one could argue is the true main character of any Grand Theft Auto game, felt more alive, as if these were just three of the thousands of stories that could be told within its boundaries.

Once Rockstar began discussing what having three playable main characters in Grand Theft Auto V would entail in terms of game design, the idea gradually evolved past the simplistic delineation between characters that seemed like the natural progression from the episodes. Instead of rotating between five missions as one character, five as the second character, and five as the third, what if you were constantly switching between them? It wouldn't be easy to pull off, but Rockstar deemed the opportunities for both narrative and gameplay flexibility worth the effort. On the plot side, it would allow them to create a more diverse style of lead protagonist and tie certain behaviors to particular characters. On the gameplay side, if the characters lived far apart then players could experience more of the world more quickly off-mission, and Rockstar could eliminate flat spots during missions by allowing players to switch between perspectives at the press of a button.

"It's been very challenging, because before you were trying to keep one story alive and now you're trying to keep three," Houser says. "It's definitely had complexities and things that have challenged us, but I think the advantage at a very simplistic and blunt level is it lets you tell a more complex story in a more naturalistic way. It is the same with game design as it is with story design, so you aren't forcing the lead character through every situation and every piece of information. At another level, it lets you play as both protagonist and antagonist. We hopefully have a strong and interesting cast of supporting characters, but maybe less wide-ranging than in previous games because a lot of the time, the people you're not necessarily fighting with, but bickering with, are your other lead characters."

OCEAN'S THREE

We first meet Grand Theft Auto V's three playable characters by jumping into their day-to-day lives during a hands-off game demo. Rockstar first introduces Michael in a trailer whose perspective we heard in the voiceover of the Grand Theft Auto V trailer. Michael is a retired bank robber who is living a more lavish lifestyle than most people in the witness protection program thanks to an unconventional deal with the FBI. As the demo opens, he's relaxing comfortably in a pair of flip-flops alongside a pool in the affluent neighborhood of Rockford Hills (think Beverly Hills), in the near distance you can see his private tennis court, and if you look onto the smoggy horizon you can see the cityscape of downtown Los Santos.

Though he appears to be living the good life, Michael isn't content. His wife is burning through his cash reserves like she's auditioning for a role in *The Real Housewives of Orange County*, and he doesn't have the slightest idea how to communicate with his children. As he walks into his opulent mansion we meet Tracy, his teenage daughter, who is jamming out loudly to a just Dance-style video game.

"It's called exercise - you should try it," she says flippantly to her father.

She clearly takes after Michael's wife, Amanda. We cross paths with her as she's heading out the front door for another



THE NEW FACES OF GRAND THEFT AUTO



Name: Michael

Occupation: Retired

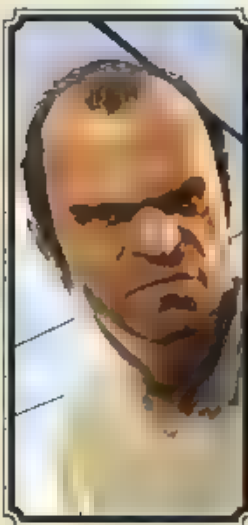
Age: Early 40s

Location: Rockford Hills

History: A highly successful former bank robber, Michael retired in luxury after making a sweetheart deal with the FBI. Currently in the witness protection program, it may look like he has the idyllic life, but he hates his wife Amanda (who reciprocates the feeling and spends all his money) and doesn't understand his two teenage children (Tracy and Jimmy). With the money running out and his domestic life driving him crazy, Michael needs to get back into the game.

Appearance: He may be older, but with a clean-cut appearance, nice clothes, and a big house, Michael doesn't look out of place in high society.

Houser's Take: "When we started with Michael, the idea was an older guy who was very successful getting sucked back into the game. Of all the various stories we've told about bank robbers, thieves, and hit men over the years, this was a story - just as we thought with GTA IV and Niko as an immigrant - that's got a lot of freshness to it."



Name: Trevor

Occupation: Career criminal

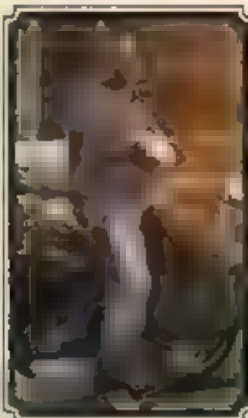
Age: Early 40s

Location: Blaine County

History: A frequent drug user who is governed by his desire and prone to violent outbursts and deranged escapades, Trevor is the proverbial loose cannon. A former military pilot, he used to work a few bank jobs with Michael back in the day. You don't need to twist his arm to get him on board with a heist.

Appearance: Balding and disheveled, the years haven't been kind to Trevor. He frequently wears plain white t-shirts and has a tattoo that says "Cut Here" with a dotted line around his neck.

Houser's Take: "Trevor appeared to us pretty much out of nowhere as the embodiment of another side of criminality - of freedom, and of doing what you want. If Michael was meant to be the idea of some version of criminal control, or some sort of bourgeois criminal who tries to go straight and gets sucked back in - what about the guy who didn't do that? What about the opposite guy? What about the guy who just says f--- off every moment is relentless, doesn't want to stop taking drugs, doesn't want to stop partying, doesn't want to be mild on by anyone, and just completely revels in chaos?"



Name: Franklin

Occupation: Repo Man

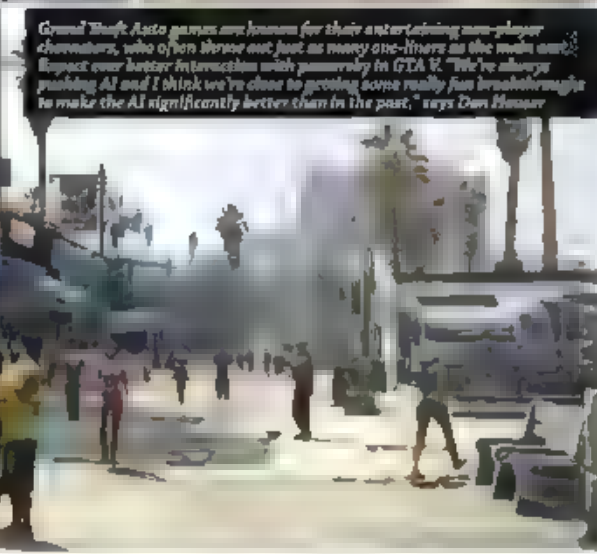
Age: Mid 20s

Location: South Los Santos

History: Franklin currently works for an Armenian luxury car dealership who specializes in people who can't afford them. When they default, Franklin plays the role of the grim repo man. Franklin stumbles into Michael when looking for a hustle.

Appearance: Fit and fashion conscious, Franklin is the young and capable one of the bunch.

Houser's Take: "Franklin was the idea of this street hustler in the modern world where the glory days - if there ever were glory days of gang banging - had long since passed. When some of the illusions of this life have been shattered, what do you do now having been in that world? That seemed like an interesting character; a guy in his mid-to-late 20s who wants to move forward but doesn't really know how and is being held back by some of his more idiotic and dangerous friends."



Grand Theft Auto games are known for their entertaining non-player characters, who often serve out just as many one-liners as the main cast. Expect ever better interaction with passersby in GTA V. "We're always pushing AI and I think we're close to proving some really fun breakthroughs to make the AI significantly better than in the past," says Dan Houser.

shopping spree. As she walks out of the house she says, "If you want to know where I am, you can check your credit card statements."

She hops into her Sentinel XS sports car and Michael gets back. "Hey, I'm feeling lucky! I'll check the hospital." These two make Tony and Carmela Soprano seem like the Humabiles.

At the car garage, Michael grabs a bicycle out of the garage. As he introduces the "freedom" of his first glimpse of the neighborhood. With rusted-out lawns, sprinkler systems, and not enough high-end luxury cars on the street to make the Groff dealership in Liberty City look like a used car lot. Rockstar has once again accurately captured the vibe of a region.

The contrast between Michael's world and that of his longtime friend Trevor is jarring. When the Rockstar game first rolls up its quick menu to which character the player pulls away from the affluent community and

rooms out to a Google Earth-style vantage before dropping us into a ramshackle trailer in a desert region of the map. As we greet Trevor, he's fighting a courageous battle with constipation on the toilet, yelling, "I need a f---ing megawife for this s---!"

We spend only a brief moment with Trevor, but his nonchalant personality doesn't take long to make an impression. He hops into his Bodhi, a large truck that looks sort of like a convertible Jeep Wrangler JK, and heads around the road. Blaine County is a barren, rundown desert region filled with bikers, meth heads, and other walks of life more comfortable on the fringes of society (think the destitute area around the Salton Seal). Trevor rolls down the street, pulls into a parking lot and flicks off a group of people loitering in front of a building. Something Rockstar seems to do in varying circumstances to see the different reactions from people. People in rough-and-tumble neighborhoods will take it quite differently than the suburban

moments of the posh boutique store.

Time to wash some senseless revoc. With Trevor the player playfully nonchalantly grabs a can of gasoline, slams the wall of the building, tosses it into a parked truck, and pours a trail away from the vehicle. He then takes the reflective qualities of the gasoline for a brief moment, drops his lit Zippo, and steps back to address his handiwork. The flame travels violently toward the truck, first setting the tires on fire, then the chassis, and finally resulting in a gas fire after a sizeable in-car explosion, just another day in the life of a drugged-out person.

When we switch over to the third protagonist, Franklin, he's taking a walk with a friend, thinking about a car he's supposed to repossess for his boss. The waterfront is filled with activities, including a muscle beach gym. A Jesus look-alike is conducting a sermon on a nearby street corner. Franklin eventually locates his target, a GTA equivalent of the Audi R8. When he gets in the car, he drops the top down before taking off. Driving toward downtown Los Santos, we see several familiar faces, including Michael, in a car. After a brief cutscene, Grand Theft Auto V thanks us for Liberty City's strict gun control laws, and we see the return of everyone's favorite one-stop gun shop.

These brief introductions give us only a small sample of each character's personality, but it's easy to see the potential for this narrative approach. Michael, Trevor, and Franklin aren't interchangeable ciphers. Each one has his own personality, motivations, and skillset. When you're not controlling them, they're going about their daily business, and you may be surprised by the situations they find themselves in. A character may switch back to check up on them. Just like the way that the game's story is a series of events that connect between the characters at any time when off-mission.

The contrast between these different experiences, geographies, and vibes of everything should be really strong, and I think it's something that gives the game a unique feeling where you're visiting these people's lives and seeing what they do," Houser says. "Within the story you're going to know information about a character before they show up because you're going to know what the other people know when you play as them."



WELCOME TO SUNNY LOS SANTOS



When the leadership group at Rockstar Games started conceptualizing Grand Theft Auto V shortly after wrapping up IV, many ideas were on the table. But rather than venture into a historical setting or new location, the team felt it still had work to do in San Andreas.

"Sam, my brother more than anyone, but also the lead artist Aaron Garbut, were both really interested in the idea of doing a proper Los Angeles," says Rockstar Games vice president of creative Dan Houser. "We felt we hadn't done that with San Andreas—which was these very small, sketchlike cities. Los Angeles and the surrounding countryside would be very interesting, giving us good themes to play on and lots of good, different gameplay environments—something that could allude to aspects of IV and allude to aspects of San Andreas, but still feel very fresh and different from both of them."

Though Rockstar has focused on this region several times over the last few years with titles like L.A. Noire, Midnight Club, Los Angeles, and Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, they

still felt they had only scratched the surface of the culture. "San Andreas is ripe for a GTA-style parody—the vanity capital of the modern world. With Hollywood, the porn industry, the decriminalization of marijuana, the immigration battle, gated communities, the pockets of luxury amidst the tent cities of homeless people, and the bankrupt government, there are more than enough topics ripe for parody in the signature Rockstar style."

"The geography you could get outside Los Angeles is spectacular," Houser says. "The contrast between desert/rural Southern California, inland from L.A. and just a bit north, compared to L.A., gives you a great microcosm of red state/blue state theme—different vibes culturally as much as geographically. I think that was something we really felt would be good about this location."

Grand Theft Auto IV featured a densely packed urban environment filled with activities around every corner, and Red Dead Redemption made large open expanses more gameplay-friendly with dynamic encounters that lure players into interesting situations. Grand Theft Auto V combines

the best of both, giving players the largest open-world playground in Rockstar history with a huge and diverse city serving as the epicenter.

When I ask why they chose to make one large city instead of making two or three, Houser says it was a design decision primarily driven on making the best possible experience. "The bottom line was building one city and doing it properly. To do a proper version of L.A., which area-wise is the largest city in the world, the game has to give you a sense of that sprawl—if not completely replicate it. You have to spend a lot of your city budget time and money making L.A. To split that into two, you would lose what L.A. is."

Just how big is this new world? Art director Aaron Garbut crunched the math. When you include interior and exterior spaces together, Los Santos is bigger than the worlds of Red Dead Redemption, San Andreas and Grand Theft Auto IV combined, with room to spare. This expansive environment includes beachfronts, wine country, a large wilderness area surrounding a fully explorable Mt. Chiliad, a Salton Sea region, a military base, and of course the sprawling suburban hills leading up to the bustling urban center of Los Santos. Bring your scuba equipment too, because you can even explore the fully detailed ocean floor along the Los Santos coastline.

GETTING AROUND LOS SANTOS

To encourage players to explore this vast expanse, Rockstar is giving them more vehicles than any other Grand Theft Auto to date. Confirmed vehicles include a BMX bike, mountain bikes, road bikes, dirt bikes, a huge variety of cars and trucks, helicopters, planes, ATVs, and Jet Skis. You won't have to wait until the endgame to take to the skies: either Slice Trevor is a former war veteran with flight experience, you just need to find a plane to fly it.

LIVING THE HEIST LIFE

Why would three seemingly disparate characters team up? The pursuit of a million dollars. Each character has a fully fleshed-out story arc, but it starts by waiting for the hook to introduce complex missions. Grand Theft Auto 4 peppers several complicated, multifaceted heists in the initial Grand Theft Auto 4 popular "Three Car Chase" mission across the map.

"We really want to make sure that by the time the game and we'll deliver the game later on, the player has a massive amount of information about the previous games, things, especially regarding the heist," Houser says. "Because our focus will be on the bank jobs, particularly why they feel like they have preceded the bank jobs. We've never let us do a great job with a bank job, so we decided we'd properly invest the story and the mission design of some of the missions into making some of these heist but several heists. That was a huge part of the story and story—trying to not let the game apart from games where they're the lead."

It's not just the heist, though. Rockstar is also adding mission diversity to look strange different pairings of the antagonists.

"We want to move from having one character in a mission to having two to having three," Houser says. "This makes the mission feel better in that they feel right about it, but they will give users different goals depending on who's in them, how many people are on them, and how much work they'll have to do if they're there."

Rockstar also wants to make sure that the way the characters work together and how they interact is a key part of the story. The characters work together.

MAKING THE SWITCH

When we meet up with the crew, Trevor and Michael have already reunited, but not necessarily by choice. The FBI is on their case, and together with the heist, the two need to perform a snatch and grab mission for them.



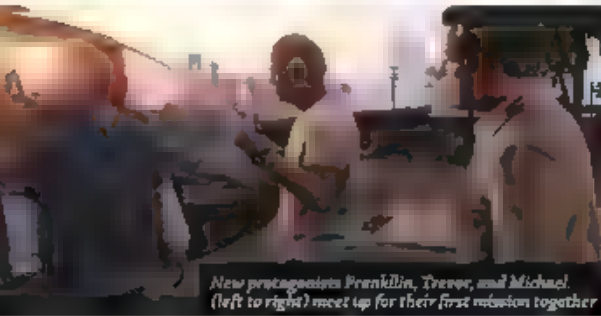
They meet at a hotel to pick up the civilian chopper the FBI is searching for the mission. As Michael gets up, Trevor is operating the security agent guarding the chopper about starting around with his earpiece while everyone else is "but there's a big monkey and a big truck." When Michael gets his partner friend to go to work, Trevor gets into a fight with the mutant, like a dog named Donna, despite the fact that he's supposed to be a friend. It's a promise that it will lead to the springing of his friend Brad. When he reiterates this, Michael replies, "I know about Brad later." Sounds like there could be differing opinions on that.

This appears to be Franklin's first exposure to Trevor because after seeing him taken back by the psychopath's hot-headed rant, of which Michael's parenting skills eventually become the target. Michael tells him, "I know the situation, but you're not the only one who's not the only one."

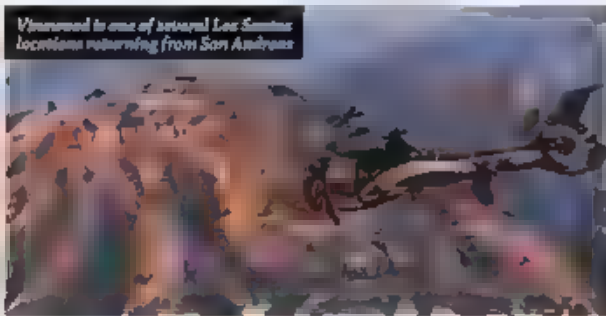
The mission proceeds as planned: Michael changes into an outfit suitable for rappelling down the side of a skyscraper and he and Trevor hop in the chopper.

When they arrive at the towering AA headquarters (the GTA equivalent to the CIA), Franklin is already perched on a wing of a plane in a nearby building, ready to report if they get caught. As Trevor heads toward the chopper, Michael and Michael approach down the side of the skyscraper to locate the correct office. They appear and disappear in a series of combats. So, though the plot may as well control over the game and control the speed of the descent. As Michael descends along the side of the building, we can see more of the offices where people are going about their day-to-day business. We also notice the musical score ramping up the tension a bit for the GTA series.

continued on page 65



New protagonists Franklin, Trevor, and Michael (left to right) meet up for their first mission together.



Viewed to one of several Los Santos locations returning from San Andreas.





KILLING TIME IN LOS SANTOS

With welcome diversions like bowling, strip clubs, live stand-up comedy, internet cafes, and a great selection of television shows to watch at home, players rarely found themselves twiddling their fingers in Grand Theft Auto IV. For the sequel, Rockstar Games plans to blow out off-mission activities to an even greater degree with a variety of different side missions and more sophisticated minigames in the vein of Red Dead Redemption's poker.

"What we really wanted to focus on in mission design is a huge amount of diversity," says Rockstar Games vice president of creative Dan Houser. "We want to use the characters and use the rest of their lives - be it Michael's family, Franklin's crazy friends, or Trevor out in the desert with access to planes very early on - to quickly get you into a lot of action and a lot of different kinds of things. You can go from being in as heavy a shootout as you've ever seen in a GTA game to doing yoga within a matter of missions. Hopefully it feels very nice, consistent, and held together, but you're being pulled around into a lot of different activities by the story in a really fun and interesting way." Here is what we know so far:

GTA IN CHARACTER

Many of the side activities are available to each of the three protagonists, but to drive home the differences in their personalities and develop their characters further, Rockstar plans to give Michael, Trevor, and Franklin unique hobbies that only they can participate in. "We're still ironing out all the details, but we want one or two key minigame activities

per character to really help the characters get separated from each other," Houser says. "We just want the world to feel different when you're playing. If you're Trevor, you're more likely to find the world antagonistic than if you're not."

CUSTOMIZE YOUR LOOK

Because Michael, Trevor, and Franklin are fully fleshed out characters with specific skill

sets, Grand Theft Auto V does not have the RPG-style player customization so many people loved in San Andreas. Allowing players to gain and lose weight had a unique set of technical challenges. "The main thing is at a technical level to get the changing scale of the character - to get them bigger and smaller - is hard, and in San Andreas the standard definition graphics were

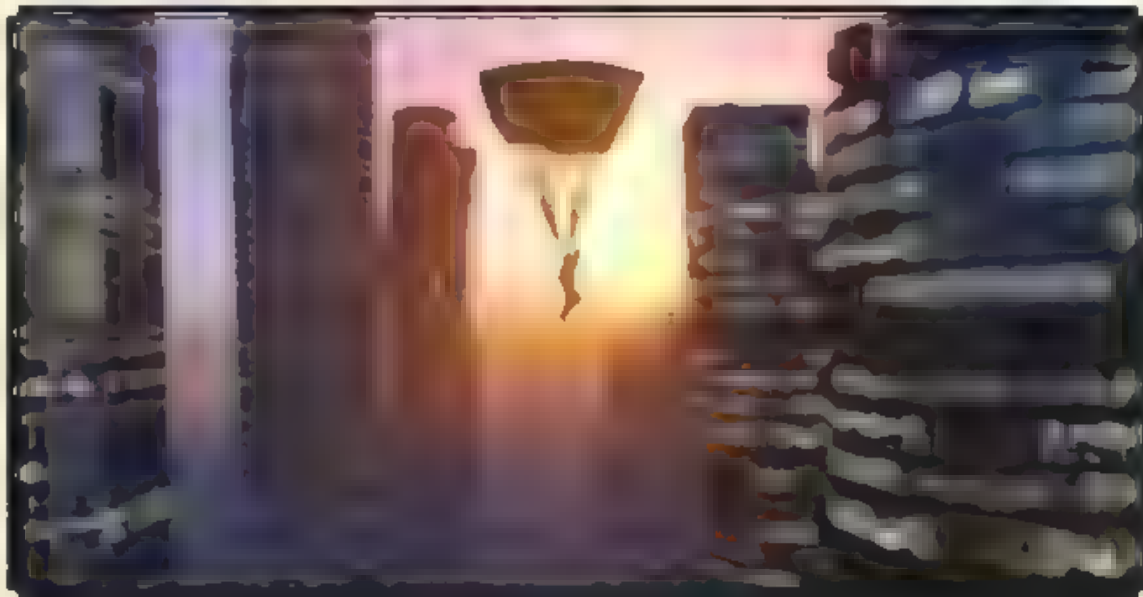
more forgiving." Houser says. "Doing that with three different characters - we definitely thought about it but decided it was impossible. We just weren't going to get the results we want with the way the rest of the animation system works. It was just not worth making our promise elsewhere. Though you can't go on a NutraSlim diet, you can still customize the look of your characters with different clothing."

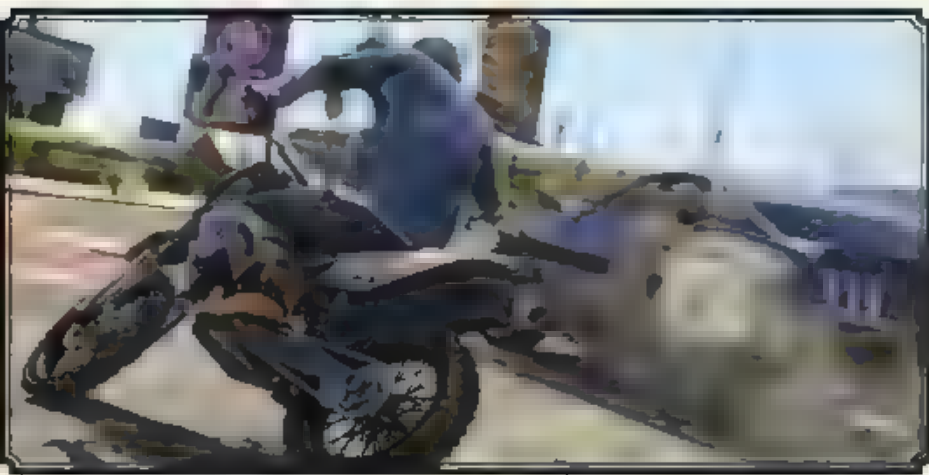
ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT

Even if Niko stayed in his crappy tenement, he had plenty of entertainment at his disposal with a collection of hilarious television parodies. Our favorites included the ram-bunctious cartoon *Republican Space Rangers*, a scathing parody of George W. Bush's foreign policy, and the hilarious Ken Burns sendup documentary *A History Of Liberty City*. Rockstar confirmed that the "entertainment inside the entertainment" is returning in Grand Theft Auto V, but chose to keep specifics under wraps outside of saying it has "funny new stuff that's pretty odd to do in a game."

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Grand Theft Auto V expands on extracurricular activities in a major way with options like yoga, triathlons, Jet Skiing,





base minigame tennis, and even a full-fledged golf game. "We've actually got a full golf course which we're very pleased with because it's pretty fun," Houser says. "What we'd learned on the best aspects of GTA IV and Red Dead was that it's better to have one really good minigame built by a really good design team than five half-assed ones that aren't that fun. People will try everything, but if it's fun they'll invest more time into it."

NO ROMANCE IN THE AIR

Niko Bellic had several women available on speed dial to take on dates, but the cast of Grand Theft Auto V won't be spending its free time chasing tail. When asked if romance would return in GTA V, Houser says, "I don't think so, simply because of the nature of the characters. We weren't sure it would work, and we're doing lots of other new stuff. We definitely would bring it back in the future, but not in this game. It just felt like it was going to be overly complex [with three protagonists]."

MAKING FRIENDS

Players won't be spending free time wining and dining women in Los Santos, but each protagonist has his own cast of friends to interact with when they aren't performing heists or hanging out together. We asked Dan Houser to highlight a few Rockstar favorites:

Lamar: "I really like Lamar who is Franklin's crazy friend. He's just a good sort of crazy the guy who does the acting is brilliant. Franklin's kind of serious and ambitious, and Lamar's a more lunatic version from that world and he's just very funny."

Jimmy: "I love Jimmy,

Michael's son. The actor captures the story of a whiny, lazy, pot-smoking 20-year-old kid so brilliantly. They've got this awful and confused father-son relationship. You've never seen a relationship like that in a GTA game or in games before. You never see a lot of family stuff. So you have a fun family thing that we are excited by, because it seems sort of fresh and weird."

Ron: "Ron is Trevor's best buddy—as much as Trevor can have a buddy. He's a paranoid conspiracy theorist living in a neighboring trailer. Trevor is like the shark, he's like the remora. He's completely paranoid but terrified of this man, so he's got to spend time with."

Amanda: "Michael's wife Amanda is great. The actress is brilliant and the vibe of them is just so funny because he's been awful to her and she's a really strong personality as well. We've never had a woman like that in one of these games before. They've always been the gun-toting type or damsels in distress. Here's something completely different where she's bound to him by their past lives and they can't stand each other anymore. It's something that feels very fresh, feels like GTA, and it's just sort of amusing."

FAMILIAR FACES

Though he wouldn't name specifics, Houser confirmed that some familiar faces from Grand Theft Auto IV and Episodes From Liberty City may resurface in Los Santos. Just don't expect major characters like Niko Bellic or anyone from the PlayStation 2-era GTA games

"The five PS2 games are one universe, and this is the high definition universe, so they don't co-exist," Houser says. "You wouldn't ever see CJ or Tommy Vercetti. They would be like mythical characters in this world who never existed."

THE LOS SANTOS ECONOMY

Past Grand Theft Auto games featured the ability to purchase real estate to expand your criminal empire or collect homes. For GTA V, Rockstar is taking a different approach to creating an economy. "A valid criticism of GTA IV is that there wasn't enough to do with money at the end of the game," Houser says. "We are definitely going to have a very vibrant and fun economy from earlier in the game to after you've completed everything. There won't be property, but there will be loads of other stuff."

YOU BETTER CALL SOMEBODY

Since Vice City, Rockstar has used a cell phone to drive gameplay and give players new activities to pursue. GTA V preserves the mobile-phone concept, but you won't be getting calls from friends all the time. For all intents and purposes, you are your best friends. Rockstar plans to streamline the phone to surface some of the activities. "One criticism people felt about GTA IV was there wasn't enough to do when you weren't doing story missions," Houser says. "A lot of it was hidden on the phone, so we've taken a lot of that and moved it onto the map." Though it may be losing some functionality, Houser says it's gaining

new features as well. "It will be a more contemporary phone, so I think you'll use it for things like accessing the Internet," he says.

WALKING THROUGH THE STREETS

Walking through the streets of Liberty City in Grand Theft Auto IV, you would occasionally run across a pedestrian you could interact with. These random encounters are coming back in a bigger way for GTA V. When Franklin drove around Vespucci Beach briefly in the demo, we noticed a Jesus-looking preacher dressed in white robes speaking to his flock. He is just one of many pedestrians who have more to offer than a witty one-liner. "This time they are fully uncapped, they've got a lot more to say, and you can interact with them a little more," Houser says. "There's a far greater array of them along with just huge numbers of other pedestrians and other systems, so it should feel like it's a lot easier to meet people and stumble into interaction as well if you want to."

BEHIND THE SCENES

Because the expansive frontier in Red Dead Redemption was so wide open, Rockstar Games devised a dynamic mission system that would present players with scenarios they could either ignore or engage rather than making them wander aimlessly between missions. This structure proved so successful that Rockstar is migrating it over to Grand Theft Auto V. When you're driving around in the country, you may see a

broken-down car or hitchhiker on the side of the road. If you're the curious type, pull over and see what happens. Going off road in the desert, you may come across two parked cars and a sea of dead bodies around them. Did a *Breaking Bad*-style drug deal go bad? Investigate if you want. Dynamic missions extend into the heart of Los Santos as well. If you see a cash van, you can attack it to make a quick score, or if you're looking to do a good deed you could catch the mugger who grabbed a granny's purse.

MULTIPLAYER

Rockstar is saving the multiplayer mode for Grand Theft Auto V with Houser only offering, "We're very pleased with the direction it's heading. We're ever closer to nailing the fun and excitement of open-world multiplayer." Though we have to wait for hard details, we already know some of the basics. During the Max Payne 3 press blitz, Dan Houser confirmed to IGN that the Crew infrastructure introduced in that title will carry over into Grand Theft Auto V via the Social Club. Though Rockstar says much of the HUD elements we saw during the demo were placeholders, we did notice that the multiplayer menu was located directly underneath the switch icons, which means players will probably enter the competitive modes through the single-player experience again. Given the single-player campaign's focus on heists, we hope Rockstar creates a dedicated cooperative competitive mode based around this concept as well.







Rockstar says it has no plans to introduce Kinect or Move functionality to the game, but if a particular game system works as intended, the studio would consider releasing an iOS companion app to perform an as-yet-unannounced task

(Continued from page 6)

Michael locates their extraction target just in time as the city—conducting the inter-ship—is threatening in some way. We're with an Agent Maggie, says Lube. As they're being bled, he and I smash his fingers with the heavy-duty flashlight, he sticks to his position that he installs camera equipment... no surveillance.

Before things get too hot, Michael smashes through a door, and just as he's holding his own, we lose with our arm while you're going through the door, our tactical "touching" for the people in front of him. Suddenly an icon on the screen presents the player with the first switch option.

From here out, you could stay in the role of Michael trying to pick off agents while waiting for Franklin to "snipe the rest" of them from afar, but instead the player puts up the "snipe" button, and a "snipe" button. Upon pressing the button, the player perspective switches instantaneously

putting you behind the trigger of a sniper rifle in the building across the way. The transition is executed smoothly with a camera angle that lets you adjust to your new role instantaneously. As Franklin, the player makes short work of the remaining agents.

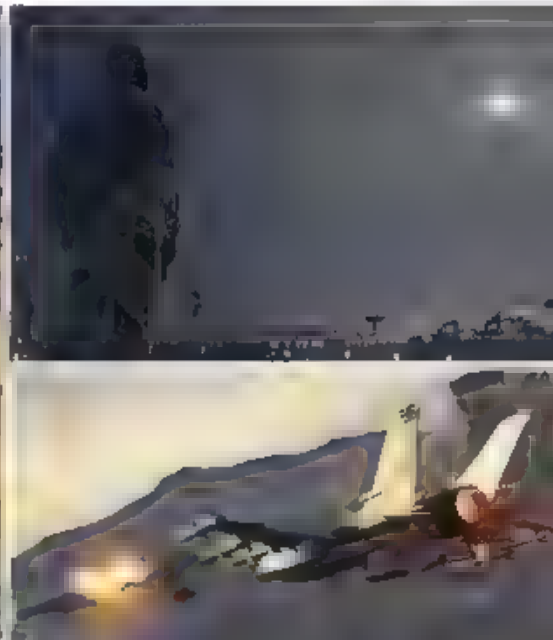
After Trent picks up Michael and the target, a helicopter chase ensues in the sky above downtown Las Vegas. During the chase, the player has three "switch" options available: you can stay in the getaway car, Trent, try to snipe other players, or take control of the helicopter. The rest of the mission is Michael. After a few more birds, the mission concludes.

After seeing this one short demo, the gameplay possibilities that open up with three varying perspectives are immediately evident. Switching to another character at any point during an encounter will let you spend your missions and keep the player at the heart of the action, letting you

swap between characters handling various tasks should you make them all too gameless. It's a major part of the experience, making a safe, fun, and a character and then immediately switching to the man guarding the door who is just about to open fire on the arriving police.

"We have a design issue that all games have—that games are a little better about doing stuff you're doing the wrong way of the game, it's kind of weird. When you get into the game, you're always going to be doing what the developer has decided, and the interesting part is, when the fly, you're always going to be doing what the developer is fun. If you're not doing things, you're not doing it, having a lot of time spent climbing ladders or a lot of segue from moment to moment that can end up being quickly continued. With multiple simultaneous perspectives, we can get past that and also put our own in the transitional moments to just always put you in the action."

(Continued on page 6)



THE ART OF GRAND THEFT AUTO

To gain insight into the process of creating the intricate worlds of Grand Theft Auto, we spoke to Rockstar North art director Aaron Garbut

When you finally settled on returning to Los Santos for Grand Theft Auto V, what elements of the San Andreas version of the city did you want to preserve, and which parts were you comfortable leaving behind?

We wanted the world to feel fresh, so, like Liberty City in Grand Theft Auto V, our reference for the world wasn't the city from the earlier games. Instead, we went back to the real place, the real locations. Some elements found their

way back in, but more through nods to the past than trying to recreate the original. This is an entirely fresh game world waiting to be explored and experienced.

Liberty City captured the spirit of New York City better than most books and films. What elements of Southern Californian culture did you want to include in Los Santos that perhaps you didn't get the chance to include in San Andreas?

Our processes and the fidelity of the world have evolved so much since San Andreas that it's hard to think about San Andreas in those terms anymore. We didn't have the power to do this properly in the past, but it's an area we're always trying to push forward. To get beyond the city as just a backdrop or a game level with pedestrians randomly milling about and instead make it feel like part of a real world, with distinct areas and individuals going about their lives, a real place that you can visit and exist within.

The primary focus of San Andreas was gang culture. This time we are trying to capture the contemporary culture of L.A. as a whole, the entire cross section and the variety that brings a city surrounding towns and settlements to life. So in some senses the difference between San Andreas and V is that V is so much broader. Conversely, everything about V is so much more detailed and thought through. So it comes down to increased scope with massively increased fidelity, not a bad goal. We're trying to capture the nuances that make a place feel real, but doing that in the context of a city that also has such extreme contrasts.

That's the interesting thing about L.A. It's this so diverse. That's how the city gets the diverse sprawl of larger

than life, and more than a little bit mental. We've toned down its sprawling nature in Los Santos - we compressed the city somewhat so that it never felt dull, but everything is there including those special mental characters and moments you just wouldn't experience any where else - the oddness that's as much a part of L.A. as the palm trees and the traffic jams. We're filling the world with unique characters you can come across and random events you can witness or become involved in that really can bring this world and your experience of it to life in a way we've never done on this scale before, and certainly in a way we really couldn't achieve in San Andreas. We're trying to move beyond the city as just a backdrop to a game level with pedestrians randomly milling about and instead make it feel like part of a real world, with distinct areas and individuals going about their lives, a real place that you can visit and exist within.

What are some of your favorite details about Los Angeles you've incorporated into Los Santos?

One of the biggest achievements we've made with this game is the detail we have created over such a massive and varied world. I love the contrasts L.A. provides as a city - there's so much variety, so many extremes and we've done our best to capture all we can. When we're building the world we tend to fly about and check things out using a freely moveable "debug" camera. It's pretty incredible to start out nearly a mile up looking over the vast city, rivers, coastline, countryside, hills, mountains, canyons, deserts, wetlands, forests, and all the little towns, farms, buildings, and settlements and then zoom in to an area. Starting high enough up that you can watch the shadows of the clouds in the sky roll over the world far below, seeing the helicopters, birds, and planes flying about and then zooming in until you first see the cars and pedestrians driving and hanging out, then closer still, and you can make out the unique architecture

of the area, the graffiti on the walls and the areas that have been painted over the countless fake brands on shop fronts and the TV shows, films, and ads on billboards - then closer again until you see the way the sprinklers turn on in the evening to keep the grass wet or the way puddles have gathered around the hoses in a carwash or the dog jumping against a fence as someone walks too close, while the neighbor lies on a sun lounger by the pool soaking in the last of the day's sun. The way some dodgy morning guys hang around outside the store ready to hassle anyone getting too close, then zoom further into a 24/7 store where everything from the food on the shelves to the cigarettes and magazines behind the counter are individually modeled and textured with specific designed branding. Where the floor has been worn by foot traffic and the tiles have lifted a little in places and curled up a little around the edges. Then zoom from there back out through the door, past the canopy flapping gently in the wind, back out and out and out a mile up again, that 24/7 way too small even to see anymore. Knowing the same detail is everywhere you want to look. Whatever you can see, and you can see a lot, is fully realized, fully resolved, filled with unique characters, vehicles, missions, and experiences and waiting for you to explore its intense.

Talk about the level of research Rockstar puts into capturing the culture and vibe of a city and its various neighborhoods. How deeply do you dive into census information, etc.?

We go to quite extreme lengths to make sure we capture the right flavor of each area. We've always done a good amount of research, but going a large part of the team over to photograph the locations, but since V has really moved up a gear. We took over a quarter million photos this time and filmed many hours of video. We pored over the various online mapping and street view tools. Our research team created dozens of DVDs filled with information

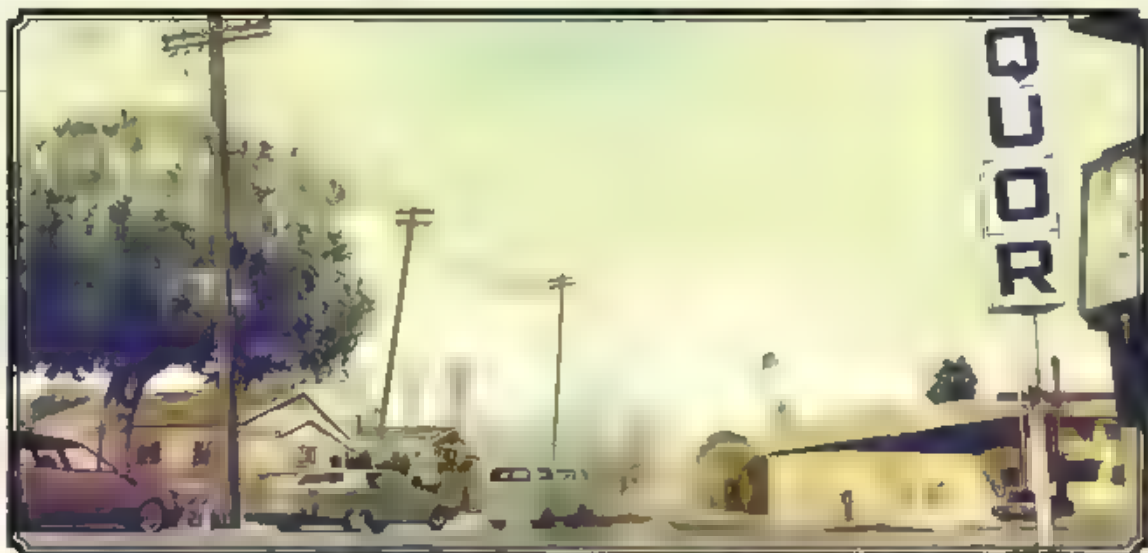


documentaries, news stories, video clips, etc. Census information informed the population control in the game for each area. We looked at information on car sales and ownership in California to guide our vehicle list. Basically, any information we could get our hands on has been used in some way. All this stuff just works as a guide; we aren't just trying to copy or emulate the real place. We're using it as a basis to push and pull into something vibrant and distinct. That's easier to do when it's based on the solidity of reality though, when you're building on something rather than freestyling.

When scouting locations during the research phase, Rockstar often relies on locals to introduce them to the different cultural pockets of the cities that tourists don't often come across. Who showed you around Southern California?

The research trips were huge. We covered such a huge area. Just covering a massive sprawling city like L.A. is hard enough without also including the desert, hills, forests, towns, and farms with that. Our research team did a fantastic job organizing this all and hooking us up with the right people to show us around. From architects, historians and business accounts, to off-duty cops and DJ Pooh. We were taken to the perfect places, educated, and kept safe!

Pedestrians have always made GTA cities feel bustling, but as anyone who has visited L.A. can attest, Californians would rather drive their car halfway down a block and leave it with another valet than walk. How are you making this city feel vibrant with a diminished number of pedestrians in some areas? What we find is that although the number of pedestrians wandering around the streets is reduced, there are always people actually doing things or hanging out. We have written a system to handle this. Creating people and cars doing specific things around the map scheduled throughout the day. You can see the gardeners and cleaners waiting at bus stops in East Los Santos in the mornings then find them tending



the gardens and houses in our Beverly Hills during the day. This system does a lot to bring the world to life and it's the key to giving each area the proper flavor.

Los Santos is bigger than GTA IV, Red Dead Redemption, and GTA San Andreas combined. From the art design perspective, what are the biggest challenges of creating a game world of this scale?

The main challenge is keeping it all in your head and keeping it all moving forward consistently. A lot of us now know Los Santos better than Edinburgh, but getting to that point has been a struggle. It's a massive task in terms of production in all sorts of ways. There are so many diverse areas and filling them with unique features and getting it all to just feel right has been a massive undertaking that has seen the combined efforts of a lot of very talented people across many of the Rockstar studios. This effort though has given us a world that should keep people interested for quite a while and one we can continue to expand on.

With GTA V, you're not only allowing players to explore Los Santos and the surrounding wilderness they can explore the ocean floor as well. How did you approach designing these regions? What kind of surprises can gamers look forward to encountering? We get the world roughly

blocked in as quickly as we can then constantly play and evolve. We add new features, areas, and detail pretty much right up to release. Detail and features are added in layers and passes. This helps us keep a level of consistency, but the fact we continuously play and feedback that experience into pushing and pulling the map and evolving it means that areas almost grow into their final forms, sometimes driven by gameplay, sometimes by visual needs. We are always looking for ways we can give the player a different experience or new toy set to use, allowing the player to go underwater is a function of that. Like any area, the underwater has had the same attention as above land with rocky canyons, deep ravines, and coral beds, with the same goal of distinctive features, areas, and fun.

What comes first - the creation of the game world or a list of missions the designers hope to include with location requirements? Walk us through the close partnership that needs to exist between these two disciplines on a project of this scale.

We build the world first. A relatively small team builds an untextured version of the world before anything else happens. This lets us get a sense of scale, see the skyline, and get a sense of each area. Once we're happy with this we build up the team and start to turn the untextured world into a finished item. Once the untextured world is built, it can be

driven about on so missions start to progress, too. Some ideas come from playing about in the world, others are just built out on paper. The missions evolve in a similar way to the world, starting as rough playable sketches and evolving. As the missions develop the map can be built up around their needs. There's a lot of back and forth and adjustments to suit the needs of the missions, and sometimes missions get adjusted when we need to change the world for visual reasons.

As technological capabilities have advanced over the years, GTA has gravitated toward photorealism on consoles but stopped short of fully embracing it. What is the philosophy behind this approach?

I think photorealism is a bit of a boring goal, actually. It's not really a goal at all, more an inevitable technical achievement. Pushing Grand Theft Auto a bit towards photorealism has suited its grittier approach, but it's vitally important to give the world and the characters in it their own personality. It's just more fun, more interesting, and - to me at least - a lot more appealing.

At what point in the process do you start conceptualizing the look of the protagonists?

Mike Kane, one of our associate art directors, works with the guys in New York, who cast and then scan our characters. Mike and his team then work to

give them the right flavor and push them to where we need them to look - like everything else, that evolves all the way through development.

As the level of detail has increased over the years, Rockstar's cutscenes have gotten increasingly more cinematic. What, if anything, did you want to do differently or improve upon for Grand Theft Auto V?

The main thing we've tried to do is integrate them into the game experience more, flowing in and out of cutscenes as seamlessly as possible so everything ties together into a single experience.

What are the new technical tools provided by the RAGE engine that the art team was most excited to exploit for GTA V?

There have been some very nice advances in the lighting and shader model that gives us much more control and subtlety. The ramp up in scale has been exciting, new features that have meant essentially we draw everything into the distance. We used to "only" render 1.5 km at most in IV now we render the most distant mountains at the other end of the world many, many miles away. You can even see the little lights on the street or on buildings draw right into the distance. It all gives the world a lot more solidity. Really though, on a project this size there's a million things, small and big, that have given us the ability to push the experience.



Grand Theft Auto V includes the biggest list of vehicles to date for the franchise.



continued from page 65

A RISK WORTH TAKING

As the biggest structural change to how Rockstar designs games since *Grand Theft Auto III*, implementing this switch technology isn't easy. Being able to jump into another player instantly is onerous on the game engine, so Rockstar is still optimizing the performance. In doing so, they've also found spots in big missions where they can make the switches feel more cinematic and spectacular, leveraging all of the new techniques they learned in making tailored shooting experiences in *Max Payne 3*.

Coupled with the narrative flexibility that multiple protagonists provide, Rockstar believes they've created a foundation for its most innovative game yet.

It's a starting point that's our strongest plotted game because the three protagonists interweave. Houser says, "When you're advancing Michael's story, you're also advancing Trevor's story in a different way, and the matching

points are very exciting. I think making that work has certainly been challenging given our inexperience and lack of skill, but we've done our best to come up with something we think is giving this much more densely plotted experience that we couldn't have pulled off when you always need the lead character in every moment.

For a series as successful as *Grand Theft Auto*, any major change is a risk. Fans expecting a bigger version of *GTA V* set in San Andreas are going to get a whole lot more. Time will tell whether Rockstar's fans embrace this new three-protagonist structure, but based on what we've seen, this has the potential to take the franchise—and open world games—to new heights. Change isn't easy, but if Rockstar's creative gamble pays off, the rewards for Take-Two and *GTA* fans could be great indeed.

Rockstar's creative gamble pays off, the rewards for Take-Two and *GTA* fans could be great indeed.

SHELVING THE CELEBRITIES

Past *Grand Theft Auto* games are remembered for their colorful casts of celebrity voice actors. The impressive roster of big name talent includes Ray Liotta, Samuel L. Jackson, Peter Dinklage, and the late James Earl Ray. But when Rockstar moved into the high-definition era, they eschewed celebrity talent for major roles. This philosophy extends to *Grand Theft Auto V* as well, which has no major names cast as the main protagonists. We asked Rockstar Games vice president of creative Dan Houser about the reasoning behind this decision.

"We've done two or three movie shoots for this game spread out through various three-week shoots," he says. "I don't think there would be many celebrities that would be available even if we wanted to spend the money on them for the amount that we've used them for."

"The good thing about most famous actors is they can actually act very well or they can do their shtick really well. Sometimes it's one, sometimes it's the other. I think it was really useful on the PS2 era games for bringing in these somewhat simplistic characters to life."

"But when we went to PS3 and 360 I think it would become a distraction if you were like, 'Well, that's a famous person. Suddenly these characters start to feel like they were alive a lot more and you need that to sell them. As long as you have good actors, not knowing them actually is an advantage in terms of bringing the game to life. I can't see us moving past that for major parts in the game."



PlayStation
PlayStation 2
About 200 - 400
to Play
1-Player Action
(18-Player Online)
to Platform
Shoot
to Strategy
Sports Strategy
to Action
Adventure

Greetings from

FEAR





Paradise Lost

Far Cry 3 opens with a group of fresh-faced buddies enjoying a vacation together. We see them laughing, snorkeling, and skydiving in what appears to be an ordinary montage-style introduction. Then the footage becomes pixelated and we realize that it's all taking place on a phone's screen. A phone held by Vaas Montenegro

Looking around, Jason Brody absorbs his situation, and it's not a pretty one. The blue skies and waters are gone, replaced by a bamboo cage, a dirt floor, and a seriously unhinged, mohawked jairol. Jason's brother Grant is tied up and gagged across the cage and, judging from his bloody face, this vacation is officially over.

by Jeff Cork

THE ISLANDS

Far Cry 3's island chain is scattered by the ruins of crashed planes, moored ships, and past civilizations. What's going on with this place? Is it somehow pulling people to its shores? Does it have some kind of power over peoples' mental states? Or is it just a completely normal island that coincidentally has played host to generations of suffering? Hay answers these questions with a few of his own.

"It's like *The Shining*, like the Overlook Hotel, where it's so remote, where it's a place where you can get away with it?" asks Hay cryptically. The reality is, we specifically didn't answer that question, because we want to be able to do more with it. For us, it's beautiful, it's lush, but it's also convenient for people who are a little bit bent. They can go in and take advantage of the fact that there's no sheriff."



his former position, Grant lures a guard over and repeatedly bashes his face into the cage. It's a sudden moment of intense violence, and Jason is clearly shaken by the man's death. Grant doesn't seem quite as bothered, muttering, "And that is what they teach you in the army," before sliding the cage open. The two are free, and now it's time to rescue their younger brother and missing friends.

As you'd expect, the initial moments serve as a basic tutorial, but the stakes seem significantly higher than being told to look up and down or ping targets down in a military shooting gallery. Grant and Jason realize the scope of the situation while sneaking through the camp. We see the rejects that the man in the suit referred to earlier and watch in horror as the other captives - who apparently didn't bring enough of a ransom - are systematically executed.

Without venturing too deeply into spoiler territory, the duo's plan doesn't succeed. Jason and Grant are separated by Vaas and his men, and we begin to see just how cruel the camp leader truly is. He recaptures Jason, but he's not going back to the cage. Instead, Vaas pushes him into the forest and shouts at Jason to run. It's a head start for a chase that he's not meant to win, the frenzied panting of

his breath punctuated by his pursuer's gunfire. Hay says the goal of the setup was simple: establish Jason as a relatable everyman before setting him loose in the world. Jason's transition from scared little brother to terrifying force of vengeance isn't something that happens over the course of an afternoon, and Hay says the team agonized over that evolution. Jason's first kill hits him with revulsion, but he begins to learn that he is innately able to go to extremes to survive. That transition isn't something that he or his friends and family easily adjust to, either.

The next time we see Jason, he's getting a tattoo chiseled on his forearm by a man in an olive-green army jacket. He introduces himself as Dennis, and he becomes Jason's guide to the island. Dennis sees great potential in the young man, and he encourages Jason to go out into the wilds of Rook Island to gain the strength needed to rescue his friends. Jason protests at first, saying he doesn't know how to do any of these things. "Trust your instincts," Dennis says. "Society has taught you how to fail, not nature."

The first few parts of the game are designed



REALITY CHECK

Dr. Earnhardt is another one of Rook Island's inhabitants, and he's the closest thing to salvation that we've seen. The doctor lives in a white house just off the shore, seemingly above the island's fighting and carnal strife. The criminals have struck a bargain with the doctor, and he's agreed to help them escape in exchange for... well, the exact details are a little blurry, and the doctor is allowing Jason and other freed survivors to use the location as a temporary shelter.

In addition to providing sanctuary and a hub for the player, the grotto is a place where they're called to task for their actions. "When you are getting seduced by the island, you're getting drawn into it. You're getting more and more powerful, and you're beginning to master your environment," says designer Jamie Keen. "Every once in a while, you run back into your friends again, and they're like, 'Dude, what's happening to you?'" Jason understands the changes he's experiencing as his survival skills improve, and they aren't necessarily benign.

As Keen says, you've been out running around shooting people in their faces and taking over outposts, so the while racking up a body count in the hundreds, it's not necessarily an in-your-face morality lesson, but other characters are aware of Jason's murderous actions - and they're not going to pretend that they aren't bothered by it all.

FRIENDLY FACES

Jason's friends and allies join him on his quest before the game begins—and rejoining them is a key to the story. Here are some quick bios for the characters who keep Jason motivated on his island journey.



LIZA SNOW

Liza is a former model and aspiring actress on the island. A former friend of Jason's, she was a major role in a film aimed to showcase his talents. Liza's ambition and appreciation for the arts makes her a strong ally, as her hard work is not living up to his potential.



GRANT BRODY

Grant is Jason and Riley's older brother and a former figure skater. He was once a golden boy at St. Greg's High School and later has served as team captain on St. Greg's high school and college basketball teams. After graduating he joined the Army reserves.



DAISY LEE

Daisy is a swimmer with an incredible talent for competition. She's a top performer and a manager. She and Grant have a good relationship, and she's a great mother. Her calculated nature that her father exhibited when she was growing up.



RILEY BRODY

Riley is Jason's younger brother. After his father's death, he and Grant went to live with their mother. Riley is a great person and a great mother. He's a great person and a great mother. He's a great person and a great mother.



KEITH RAMSEY

Keith has a paralytic condition. He's a great person and a great mother. He's a great person and a great mother. He's a great person and a great mother.



OLIVER CARSWELL

Oliver is a former friend of Jason's. He's a great person and a great mother. He's a great person and a great mother. He's a great person and a great mother.



to acclimate Jason and, by extension, he plays to his new island home. Even though Dennis is providing a distraction on how to hunt, Jason still has to deal with the enemy. It's a tough, tough, tough feeling of isolation and helplessness. We wanted you to feel alone in the woods, like a little kid. Hay says. Even if Jason were to stumble into Hoyt's base camp, it'd be annihilated. For now, he needs to hone his skills and formulate a plan.

Deep Cover

Family is a key theme of the game, whether it's the family you know or the one you're born with. We jump ahead, where Dennis introduces Jason to Cirra, a key figure among the native Rakva's warriors who are choosing to fight Hoyt and his thugs. Her relationship to the enemy is complex and Jason's her brother and she's working to kill him. Cirra's first meeting with Jason is a mix of anger and a sense of purpose. Jason's initial reaction to Cirra is a mix of anger and a sense of purpose. Jason's initial reaction to Cirra is a mix of anger and a sense of purpose.

Jason is given a mysterious cocktail, which leads to one of the game's many hallucinatory

scenes. Far Cry 3 is playing with the concept of sanity and how easily it can break. Sometimes that's in the form of drinking potions that make you see things that aren't there. Sometimes that's in the form of drinking potions that make you see things that aren't there. Sometimes that's in the form of drinking potions that make you see things that aren't there.

In the dreamlike sequence, Jason walks along a path, looking back on his past. We see his friends skydiving and people playing cards, along with the distressing sight of his captive friends in pain. Suddenly, we see a man dressed in white walking ahead. Jason follows the man in the vision before eventually realizing that it's just a hallucination. Jason walks and the door locks tight. A voice on a speaker orders Jason to identify himself within the next 10 seconds or the package will be under a table with detonate. Sure enough, there's an ominous package tucked under the furniture. Jason hammers out his name, which is good enough for the voice on the other end. Desperately, Jason meets another one of Rook's band of off-kilter



Jason forces his skills throughout his journey. He may not know how to throw an axe when he starts out, but he'll see there before the credits.



inhabitants, a self-described CIA agent in

Willis Huntley is clearly paranoid, though it's hard to tell if it's well founded or a result of the island's isolating presence. Jason's new guide explains that he has an entire team in the field, and he's just waiting to hear back from them. A cursory glance around the little shack doesn't show signs that anyone else lives there, casting a silver of doubt on Willis' story. Regardless, Willis is the key to the archipelago's previously unseen south island.

A Whole New World

Until now, all of our Far Cry 3 adventures have been limited to Rook Island. The island is lush and rugged, providing a detailed (if stereotypical) tropical environment. Most of the structures we've seen look ramshackle and temporary, and its enemy forces don't seem especially disciplined or well equipped.

Rook Island's southern counterpart is another thing altogether. "It's much more urban, comparatively," Hay says. "It has a force of privateers working for Hoyt. He's running a huge trade, basically running people like meat. They are trained, and they are tough." We've seen hints of Hoyt's organization before - while Jason and Grant were escaping, they walked through a room stacked to the ceiling with narcotics and hostages' luggage - but its scale didn't sink in until Willis flew us over the South Island compound in a small plane. A runway landing is out of the question, so we see Jason donning a wingsuit for the first time. Think of it like a wearable hang glider, only one with a lot steeper (and exhilarating) descent.

Once we're on the ground, it's time to meet our contact, Sam. The bulked-up German is one of Hoyt's privateers (and a friend of Willis) and he says that Jason's exploits on Rook Island haven't gone unnoticed. The Rakyat are becoming more brazen in their attacks on Vaas' prizes, and word is that they're being rallied by a guy named Brody. Sam is working both sides of the Hoyt/rebel conflict, and he points out a critical weakness in Hoyt's defenses: Hoyt has no idea what Jason looks like. From this point in the game on, players are going to have to change their play style from hiding in plain sight to the challenging task of hiding in plain sight.

"All of the skills you've learned? Hide them carefully," Hay says.

Killing bears and sharks certainly requires a special set of tools, but taking on heavily outfitted privateers is quite different. Once he

gets his hands on a privateer's uniform (R1P unnamed rookie near the docks), Jason can wander around nearly everywhere he needs to go. That's after the orientation meeting, of course.

When we finally see Hoyt up close for the first time, it's during a welcoming ceremony of sorts for the new recruits. Hoyt stands on a stage, greeting the new hires and explaining the three simple rules for his operation. The first rule is to protect the product, including people. Secondly, kill any natives you see on sight. Finally, all profits go to Hoyt. To reinforce his points, Hoyt gestures to a cage with a terrified man inside. If you fail, he says, this is what happens. With that, he sets the cage aight and the sounds of his prisoner's screams fill the tropical air as he frantically shakes the bars in vain.

Would You Kindly?

Our demo ends with one of the more gut-wrenching things we've seen in a game. Again, we won't spoil anything, but Jason has to earn Hoyt's trust in a scene that's bound to stick with a lot of players. Hay says his team purposefully set out to create what he calls "Would you kindly?" moments, referencing BioShock's memorable climax. We saw another one of these moments earlier in the demo, and it resonated emotionally in large part because players are forced to participate.

"There was a very specific effort in making sure that the player is not just a voyeur in the game; that they can actually step in and be the common denominator inside very emotional moments," Hay says. "The idea we embraced is of making the player and the character one, so we built a number of moments through the game where the player needs to do, to act. In that acting, the player is the one moving the story forward, and it's not necessarily with a gun or a weapon."

Those shocking moments, as well as even the most mundane character interactions are reinforced by the superb voice acting and motion capture technology. Facial animations effectively convey subtle emotions such as doubt, or disturbing moments of pure rage. This kind of attention to detail is critical when you're trying to sell the serious kind of story that Ubisoft is telling. When fantastic dialogue isn't accompanied by convincing animations, games can look like amateurish puppet shows.

Far Cry 3's deeper world, missions, and overall storytelling gel in a way that's difficult to ignore. The "3" shouldn't turn off players who haven't played earlier games in the



DINGOS, AND TIGERS, AND BEARS

Far Cry 3's island archipelago is home to a variety of wildlife. Some put Jason on mind, while others charge at him like toothy missiles. Just about all of them can be harvested for their parts, which can then be crafted into holsters, rucksacks, and more. Here's the complete critter roster.

- Asian black bear
- Bird of paradise
- Black eagle
- Black panther
- Buffalo
- Cassowary
- Crocodile
- Deer
- Dingo
- Galapagos tortoise
- Goat
- Great white shark
- Komodo dragon
- Macaque
- Manta ray
- Moray eel
- Red-headed vulture
- Sea turtle
- Tiger



series, either. This game's story and setting is completely separate from those installments. Though Hay says they do share a spiritual core.

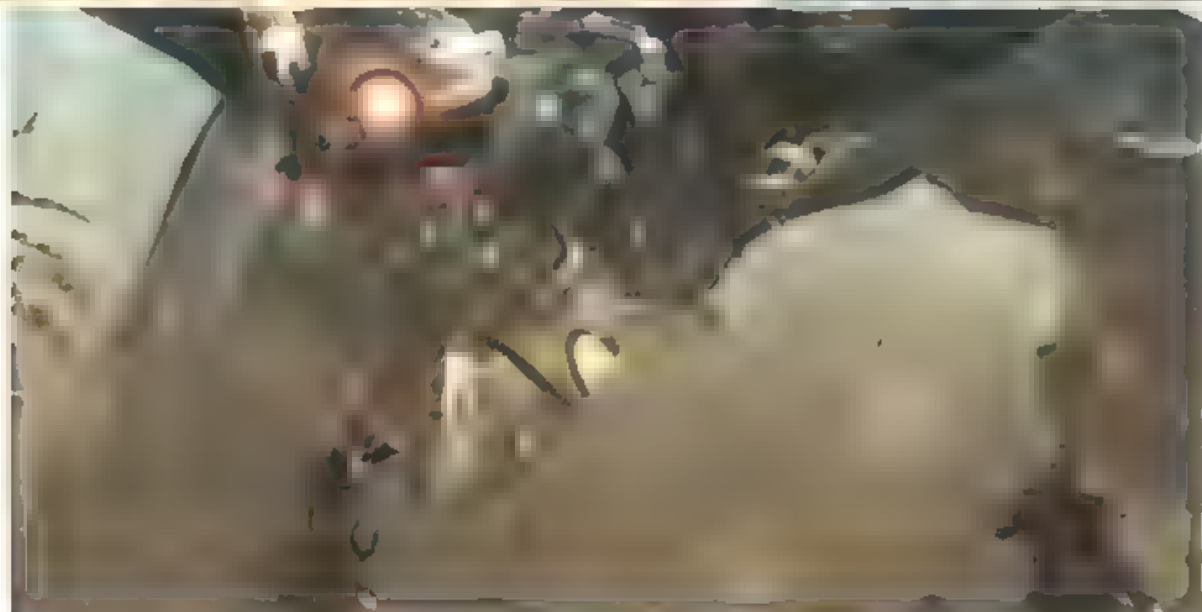
"[What I] like about Far Cry is that it's a moment in time," he says. "You take a regular character and you put them into a situation that is abnormal and you tell that slice of their life. It's not much different to the Viewfinder toy that you had as a kid, where you press a button and it rotates revealing a brand-new image. Where we really found a home was in finding that people responded well to insanity and to a vast open world that is dynamic and alive."

Jason and his friends may be doing their best to get off these islands, but everything we've seen so far makes us want to stick around for a good long while. And that's not just island insanity speaking, either.

Want more Far Cry 3 info? Visit gameinformer.com for an extended cut of our interview with Dan Hay and Willis, along with deleted animal dossiers.



views





Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance

How can you sneak through his Metal Gear? But why would you?

Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance has had a hell of a run developing. The game's hidden narrative is a secondary chronicle of Raiden's adventures, revealing that in Metal Gear Solid 4, however, the project struggled to find focus and development shifted to Platinum Games. The Bay Area developer brings its signature focus on action to the platform. It can still break through enemy encampments, but after a while, it's a game about combat through a unique perspective: why would you really want to hide in the shadows?

Revengeance is set four years after Metal Gear Solid 4. One of the Patriots, Raiden now works for a private military contractor called M.O.D.O.C. Security, where he rescues VIPs and takes down a host of criminals and attacks. The game takes place in the middle of the war on drugs. Raiden's main target is an

Eastern European mob boss, and only once he's surrounded a crowd of cops on a rival PMC, general Desperado, Emergence.

Platinum Games' strength is designing visually stunning yet polished combat, and Revengeance is no exception. Raiden glides, acrobatic battlefields, and tough hitboxes or enemies with gun-wielding. Play's not as slow down the action, but it's more about fast. That's why it's better to use the right attack, attack, attack, attack, attack with the precision.

After you turn a couple of enemy soldiers into shark chum, a bipedal Gekko joins the fray. These Gekkos provide a greater challenge, but after several well-timed combos, one of the Gekko's legs acquires a gun, and it takes a Bark Time, a trick that turns it into a wild and unpredictable.

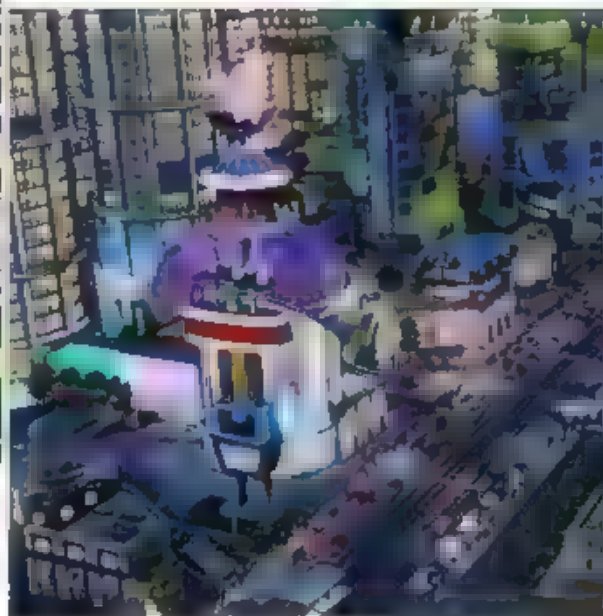
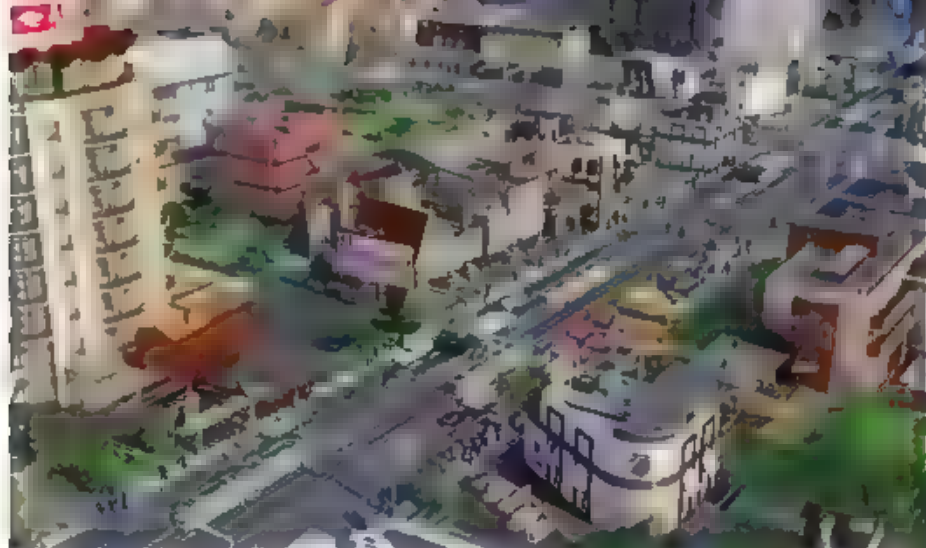
The game also showcased Revengeance's

stealth mechanics. Raiden can sneak up on his enemies and eliminate them with a single hit if the goal is to get rid of them. But it's not always so easy to get through the game's controlling enemies. When spotted, local enemies go on alert, and Raiden can hide in the classic Metal Gear caution to get back to work. However, it's not the same as the classic Metal Gear games. The action is so intense that it's not like you're just a crack sniper and a few minutes.

Revengeance is a game with a cinematic focus. Through a close-up, you'll see my character change a new set of knives and dismember a couple of waves of minions before bursting into a full-on assault that ends with Raiden lopping off the boss's tail.

It's refreshing to see a game that's stylish and Metal Gear Rising. Revengeance is a good game to play if you're looking for a new game when it launches on February 14. — Ben Reeves

- Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360
- Style: I-Player Action
- Publisher: Konami
- Developer: Platinum Games
- Release: February 14



SimCity

Renovated city renovation

Platform

PC

Style

1-Player Simulation
(Online TBA)

Publisher

Electronic Arts

Developer

Maxis

Release

March 5

The SimCity franchise has inspired thousands of many gamers, but it's a mix of the four main series that they have played the most. Whereas your SimCity wish-fulfillment is a goal in SimCity 2000, the latest SimCity combines elements of your favorite entry with new features to ensure your local planning experience feels both familiar and new.

After a few months to go before the game's Friday release, you're given a tour of a city SimCity style at Max. The first lesson learned is that SimCity planning begins with building a road that connects your patch of land to the regional highway. This is how you open the lines of communications and trade with other cities in your region. These roads might be controlled by your friends playing simultaneously, or they

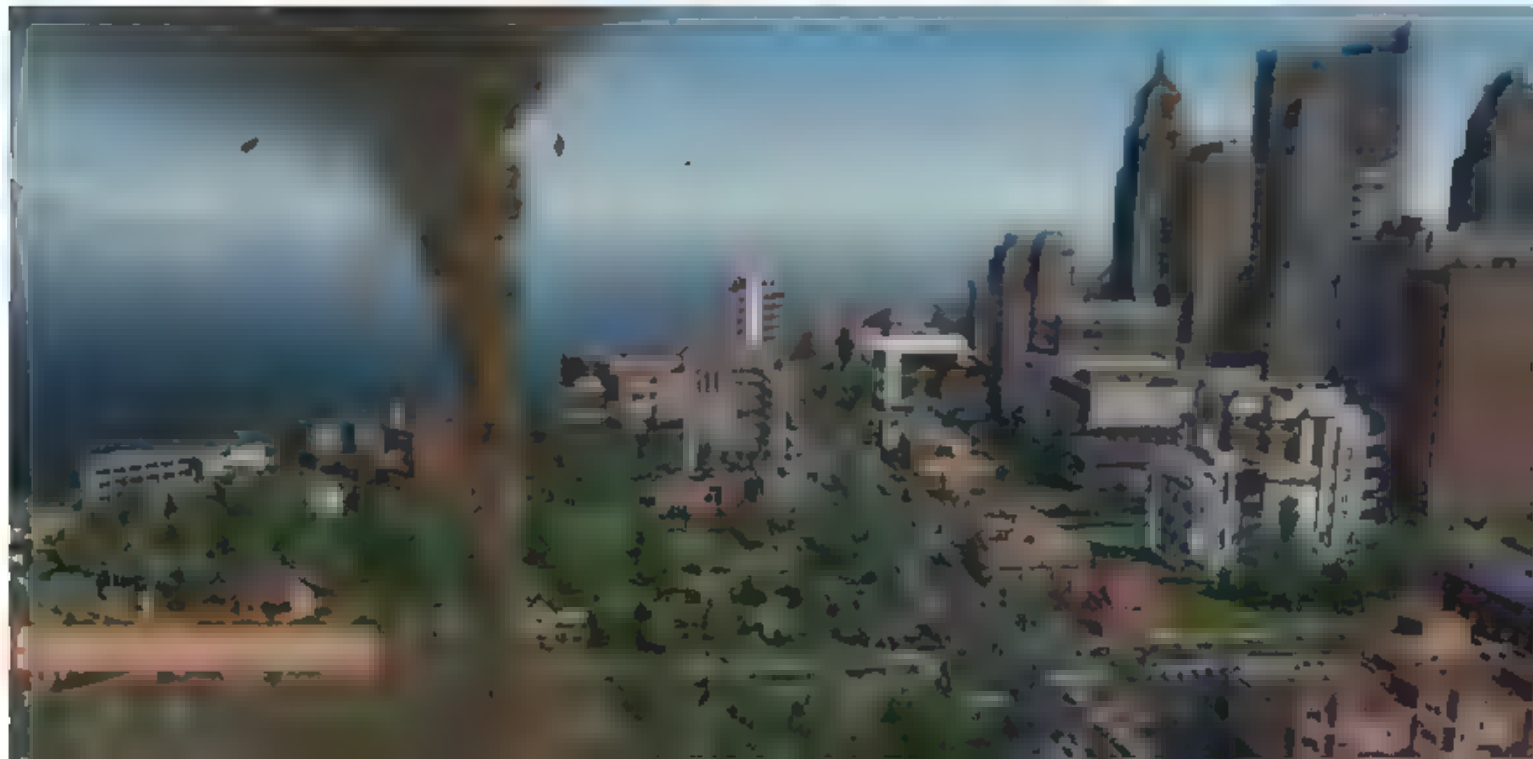
could be your own carefully orchestrated effort. The road in SimCity 2000 was a central line in your own planning, more in the water.

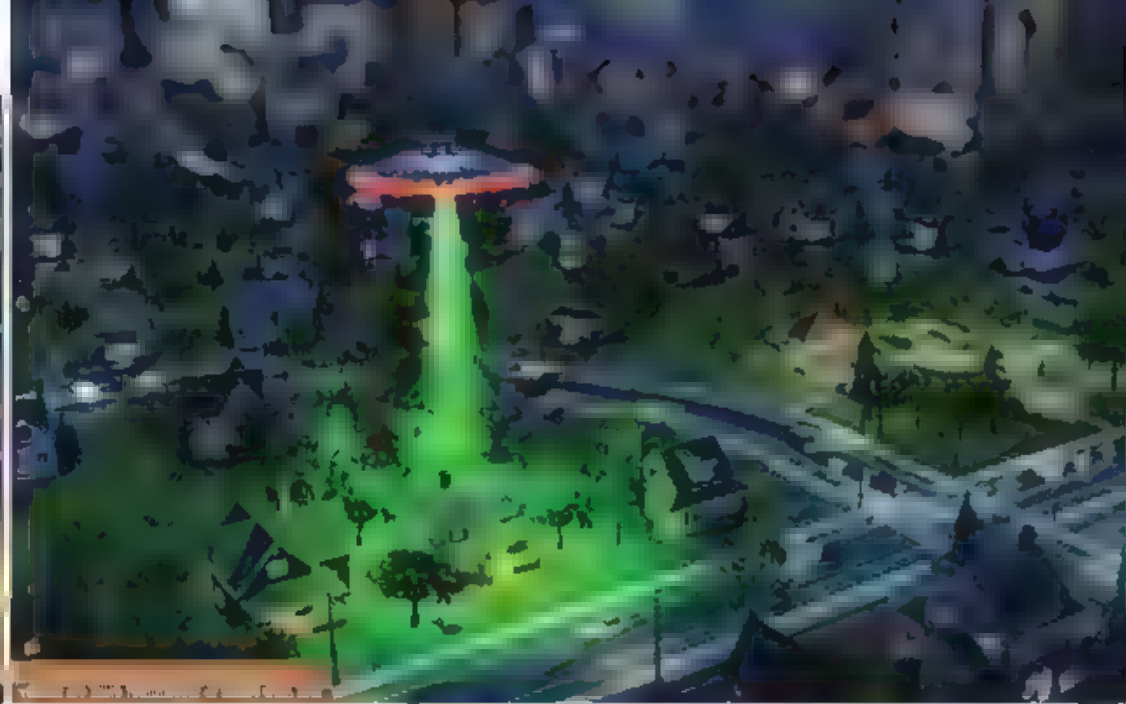
Connecting to the regional highway is crucial because it allows you to start building your own roads. Almost all of the infrastructure evolves around them now. Roads are immediately built, electricity and water flow, and then there are the naturally occurring gas and power lines. All you do is build houses, and the other things will do their respective jobs. SimCity's most interesting twist is that you build the roads and utilities, letting layers script writing paths instead of straight lines.

After laying down a basic grid, started one of the most intense phases in the franchise: zoning. Fans are familiar with the basic industrial

zones, residential zones, but these options are less desirable in our other now. This is where the regional structure and depending on your neighboring cities comes into play again. One can make up for deficiencies in another. If you have a bedroom community full of residential zones, your citizens can drive to other cities for work. If you have a manufacturing power base, you are affected by being a part of a power grid that is more or less a must in your virtual life. Just nearby, there's a balance within your region is necessary to make sure that every city has its needs met.

How you build your city is guided by which specialization you choose. Selecting education (like a school) means that you need to focus on building schools, bus stops, universities, etc.



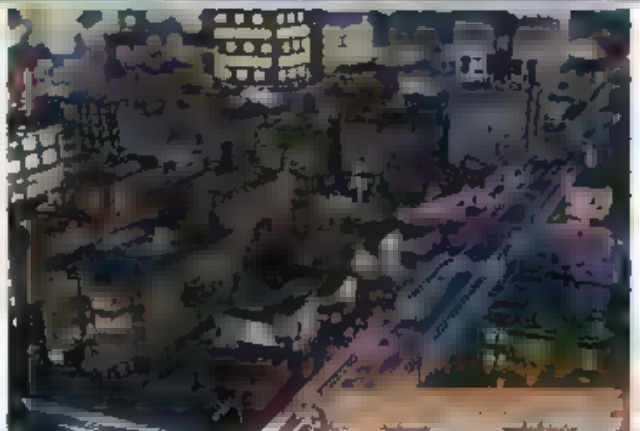


Placing your structures on a just-a-question-whether-it-will-work-or-not basis is an all-too-common mistake. For example, the community college is an option until your town hall is upgraded to a city hall—a separate feat that hinges on meeting a population requirement. Specializations simply keep your eyes on an immediate task and ignore direction to the larger process of building a thriving city.

Most city-building computers in what is called the emphasis on infrastructure. Allowing players to build and interact with their cities is exciting, but requires that other City specializations are necessary to focus players' efforts—yet they discourage building a diverse city that covers all of the bases. This increases reliance on your abilities, so you may have to turn to other tricks for certain necessities

including power. However, the jobs instead of power will fill you in. As a player who likes to build a single sprawling metropolis, I don't quite see sense that way. The way is encouraged. You're supposed to build multiple specialized cities in the same region to work together to achieve the same goal.

Conversations are not needed through cooperation in real life, so it's not that different in SimCity. The purpose of the game is to build a thriving metropolis, so it's not that different. The game is a fun, free-to-play, and it's a good way to learn a kind of simulation. For the game, the game is fun. The SimCity fans have to love it, I'm gone though. The humor, the simulation, and pure fun involved in building a thriving city is intact, and that's what I see how the aspects evolve beyond the introductory hours. Joe Jaba



Remember Me

Build your own combo system

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

» **Style**
Player Action
Publisher
Capcom

» **Developer**
Dotemu Entertainment

» **Release**
May

By 2084, mankind has unlocked many of the secrets of the future. Genetic research, for instance, has become so advanced that it can manipulate DNA. Remember Me's protagonist, Nina Williams, is one of these men. As a hacker, she's been bleached her brain. Now she haunts the streets of Neo-Paris, collecting fragments of old memories as she goes to sort out why her employer gave her this special memory. To get the full feel of this unique experience, you must keep your weapon strategy up-to-date. Thankfully, the combat toolbox is both vast and useful.

Capcom impressed us with Remember Me's Gamescom reveal, so we jumped at the chance to go deeper with the title's unique new combo system at this year's Tokyo Game Show. Using Remember Me's umbrella physics can create the weirdest things. Every enemy in the game has a unique combination of attacks that can be used in different Pressens to create different combinations. For example, you can grab a regular Round Regen

Pressens to regenerate Nina's health while attacking, while using a Heavy Pressens combination to slowly drain the health of the main enemy during a boss. Players can also mix together different attacks to create combos that do 100% in several seconds for finishers. Chain Pressens even amplify whatever kind of attack they are attached to. Dotemu says the combo list is capable of producing over 50,000 unique combos.

When our testers got a series of visual glitches in the game, the screen justifying that Nina's size is small across the arena was just the intro to a mind-blowing "regen" combo. Now Nina's total attack quickly fills up her health. Remember Me's combat opens up when Nina uses created combos in conjunction with her powerful special moves, which Dotemu's senior S Pressens. The terminology gets a little confusing, but S Pressens are the most powerful single move attacks that can be the top priority kind of attack in the game.

One of Nina's S Pressens abilities is called

Logic Bomb. This explosion of chaotic energy affects everything that's on the screen, logic bombs. Nina can use this to make a group of enemies that were once a threat now just a group of flying robots that fall in front of the screen and avoid at Nina interrupting her combos. These hovering drones are nearly impossible to catch. Thankfully, Nina has a S Pressens move called Russian Piece that can capture mechanical enemies and fire them back at the enemy. The side S Pressens are also called split-screen. But again, the combination of physics and the different attacks can be used to create a lot of different and weird combos. Some can even raise enemies or PMP orbs, which can be used to buy new Pressens.

Remember Me makes the story-driven action experience feel like a puzzle. The character with the puzzle-solving skills of Total Recall. So far, this combination of skills has been a great fit for the game's combination of action and puzzle. May release. —Ben Reeves







Lost Planet 3

Capcom lost a planet, but may have found a solid shooter

Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC
Style: Player Action
Online: TBA
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Spark Unlimited
Release: 2013

In an effort to revive the galaxy's riches, the Neo-Yakuza and its company allies are on the planet E.D.N. III. After conducting series of thermal probes that make the planet hospitable for humans, the megacorporation begins digging for precious minerals. A contractor named Jim's primary one of the mining goons working for Neo-Yakuza, but when the other strikes the wrong side of the planet, Jim is left on his own. He begins to

When Jim gets into a recent mining of the galactic. Okwe, who is Jim's wife, was performing basic maintenance on mining equipment. However, daily checks are getting sidelined when he gets a call to check on a communications relay that has mysteriously shut down.

Jim is bundled under a pack of gaikes to protect him from the deadly sandstorms that will quickly swallow us in battles closer

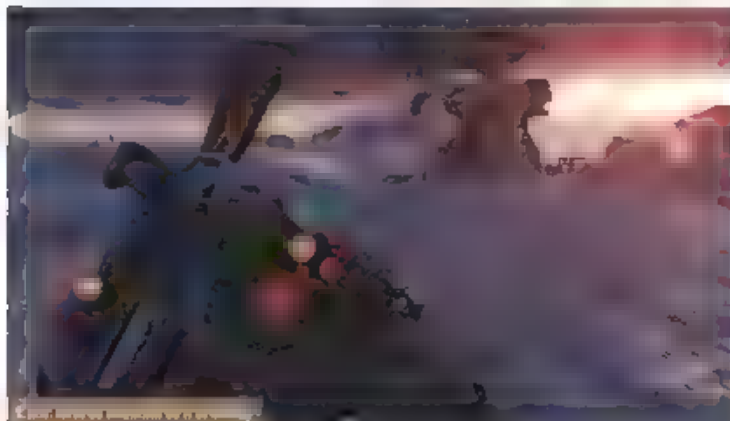
of giant flying insects that inhabit the peak near the abandoned space colony.

These yellow ball-bugs, which don't pose much of a threat, can be sent into prompts a quick ambush that has Jim dodging its stinger using Jim's shotgun as a fly swatter. Making his way to the top of the peak, a quick in-game cutscene reveals that something is dead, and Jim is with the already. The alien insect, which were made to be a threat to the planet. The warning poses a significant threat to the planet's ability to send the communications relay is to be able to do the world, but Jim must go in before he can hunt down the spy.

While I wait for my repair to make its way up the wire, I get a gaikie's attention attacks. In that moment, Jim's wife is shown the gaikie's body, spot on the back of a while dodging its stinger and getting split

up at my neck, so I get to the safety of my steel cockpit. However, the monster as found shelter in its own survival in an ice sheath. I can have his body monster spinning acid at me while trying to repair the relay, so I use my grapple hook to pull the creature out of its hole and slice through its tail with my drill arm.

My tempo ends just as I get to the communications relay, which is a double agent. I have to continue my search for a double agent, which is something that already looking forward to doing. We had a couple embracing this series, but Lost Planet 3 looks like a polished experience. The story is engaging, the controls feel tight, and the action is fun. Lost Planet 3 is an all-around great game that is a perfect entry point into the series. - Ben Reeves





Guardians of Middle-earth

An unexpected journey into console MOBAs

J.R.R. Tolkien is the grandfather of modern fantasy, having laid out a vast Middle-earth filled with elves, orcs, and more. The reason franchises like Warhammer and Warcraft exist. Subsequently, Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos sparked the Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) phenomenon with the user-created mod Defense of the Ancients. Since then, games like League of Legends and Heroes of the Storm have become staples of the competitive multiplayer scene. The genre has come to console, with the exception of bringing a polished, accessible Lord of the Rings-themed MOBA to consoles.

It went into my hands on time with Guardians of Middle-earth with minimal MOBA experience. I've dabbled in the past, but the handheld experience only adds surrounding context. It's a console-friendly MOBA that respects the franchise's lore while playing tight to the genre's core. Guardians of Middle-earth is a polished, accessible MOBA with a console-friendly interface. It's a console-friendly MOBA that respects the franchise's lore while playing tight to the genre's core. Guardians of Middle-earth is a polished, accessible MOBA with a console-friendly interface. It's a console-friendly MOBA that respects the franchise's lore while playing tight to the genre's core.

hobbit and adventurer Hildifons Took.

I started my first match as Hildifons, a newcomer-friendly character that's apt at demolishing the enemy Guardian's towers and minions. Hildifons can throw down fire traps, slow enemies with barbs, and incinerate groups of minions with an area-of-effect fire attack. His ultimate attack lets him set down and sprint away from a powerful powder keg that explodes for huge damage. You can throw down his fire trap to deal destruction to both minions and enemy towers. His easy-to-understand abilities made me feel like an expert. Hildifons isn't especially effective against enemy Guardians, however, but he can slow them down with his Brandywine barbs. Demolishing an enemy tower with a big exploding barrel is a satisfying feeling.

After playing a hobbit, I spent time as an elf, a dwarf, and an orc. Legolas is what you'd expect: a powerful ranged attacker that crumples when put up against strong melee guardians. My favorite tactic as the Mirkwood archer involves closing the gap for a devastating ultimate attack, stunning my enemies, and using a teleport ability to flee. Thrain is a sturdy

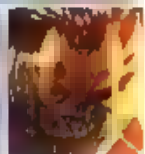
dwarven warrior that deals heavy damage to other Guardians. Combining his protective shield, a ranged hammer throw who knocks foes into the air, and an earth-shaking ultimate ability can trounce packs of Guardians. Finally, Gothmog is an orc lieutenant that specializes in running interference. He can draw fire from towers and minions with a taunting banner to allow other Guardians past defenses unhindered. He also plants catapults with generous range to support the frontlines. My favorite times as Gothmog involves using his charge ability to burst into packs of rival Guardians and activate his potent ultimate attack to finish off weakened enemies.

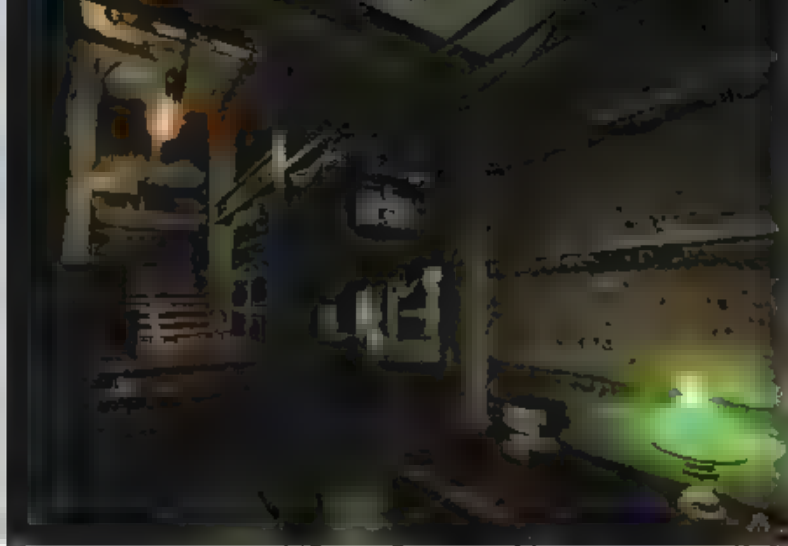
Guardians of Middle-earth is more than a big roster of Tolkien characters and a new control scheme. An overarching, level-based progression system encourages you to keep playing; you unlock stat-boosting gems and relics to place into your characters, slotted bolts, and intuitive social systems make it easy to team up with friends. These features, along with the console-friendly tweaks to the MOBA genre and rich Lord of the Rings lore, are shaping up to be a winning combination. > Tim Turf

- Platform: PlayStation 3
- Release: 2011
- Style: 1 to 10-Player Action
- Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive
- Developer: Monolith
- Release: December 4 (360 TBA)

IGN'S TAKEAWAY

While Guardians of Middle-earth includes a single-lane map, the core of the Multiplayer Online Battle Arena genre is played on maps with three lanes. Two teams of five compete to destroy a shrine nestled within the other's base. The map is littered with armed towers that defend each side and AI creatures that can be destroyed to level up. Lines of minions spawn at each base and march toward the opponent's fortifications. Players level up and improve their skills by destroying towers and killing rival guardians and AI creatures. Guardians of Middle-earth differs from standard MOBAs by offering a timed, point-based mode. Towers and minions can also be upgraded after reaching specific levels.





Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs

The indie horror king gets a new twist

It's 10 years later. Frictional games released a sequel to its award-winning horror game *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*. The first-person survival game takes players with experience in dark, claustrophobic settings with nothing but a lantern to keep their sanity. Disturbing hallucinations and jump-scare moments rattle your nerves, making a name for the series' games ever made. Now a new *Amnesia* game is on the way, and Frictional wants to test your ability to survive in Frictional and Thechineseroom's lead development.

The chance to make an *Amnesia* game is my fanboy dream come true," Pichbeck says. The *Amnesia* creators approached Pichbeck and Thechineseroom to make *A Machine for Pigs*, while Frictional works on a secret project. Pichbeck and the rest of the team will check in with Frictional throughout development to ensure it meets the same high-quality standards as previous *Amnesia* titles. *A Machine for Pigs* picks up the oppressive, desperate atmosphere of *The Dark*

Descent, but takes what's been learned in the light of the 21st century. Computer network Master is a wealthy, eccentric industrialist, formented by visions of a huge, horrible machine. Players can expect to explore dark, mysterious environments filled with dangerous, rusted machinery and bloodthirsty creatures. Pichbeck says primary Art team's year is to ensure it's as good as the original *Amnesia* work, "know what I mean."

It's one of the things that really interests me about this genre is the ability to tell a story in a more visceral, explosive way," Pichbeck says. "Inventions and innovations are happening left and right. Science is leaping forward. There's huge social upheaval. You've got this time in progress, but understanding that is an incredibly dark social world. Massive, dark water, poverty, child sex trafficking, slavery, and the loss of our most sacred rights and freedoms are all going on at once. Putting those two things together leaves us with a portrait in

history where the machine is keeping people in control through a series of events, and all that creates a vapor that's a powder keg of ideas for a horror game."

"We have faith that Thechineseroom is capable of lighting the fuse on that powder keg with *A Machine for Pigs*. The experience involved with the Frictional team is an atmospheric narrative, their game that creates a sense of mystery and a feeling of being a machine, super-willfully blind to the world with the way it's subtly influenced by the world of *Amnesia* behind players' experience of both, more disturbing than the original," Tim Tait.

- Platform: PC
- Style: 1-Player Action
- Publisher: Frictional Games
- Developer: Thechineseroom
- Release: 2013



Spreading Panic?

Right now Thechineseroom is focusing on finishing the PC version of *Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs*, but hasn't ruled out future console iterations following the game's release.



Star Citizen

The story of a developer taking over a game to remake it from the ground up



- » Platform: PC
- » Style: Sci-Fi
- » Player Action: Massively Multiplayer Online
- » Publisher: Roberts Space Industries
- » Developer: Roberts Space Industries
- » Release: TBA

Chris Roberts is, in many ways, the architect of video game space dogfighting. Thanks to his seminal Wing Commander and Freedom series, now he's back with a new company and a new game. Star Citizen aims to be everything the hardcore PC space combat fan has always preferred: to war out of his seat, jump real Newtonian physics, a fly-on-the-wall, omnisciently-wired, open-ended, player-driven game that exists in a vast, dynamic universe between the individual level and kilometric-long supercarriers. Roberts is currently attempting to raise \$2 billion through a private crowdfunding site and Kickstarter, and private investment capital will make up the rest of the total.

Star Citizen is two games in one. The single-player campaign will be a sci-fi style sci-fi dogfight with all the interplanetary drama and space

dogfighting, and you can ask for as much or as little as you'd like. The massively multiplayer part of the game is much more ambitious, with players taking on imperial duties as a citizen of Earth's overbearing empire or a heretige pirate trader preying to carve out a niche in lawless deep space. However you choose to play, the game will reveal itself to be a complex, multi-layered, and, yes, rock-solid, sci-fi RPG. The developers are committed to a quality-of-life focus on the side, to create an environment that grants direct in-game power.

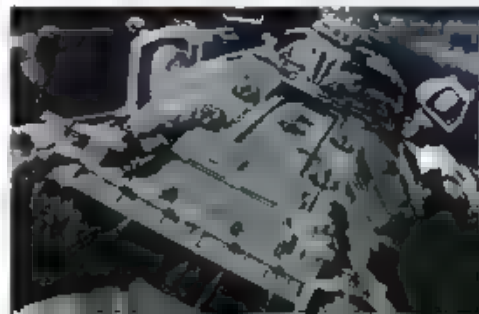
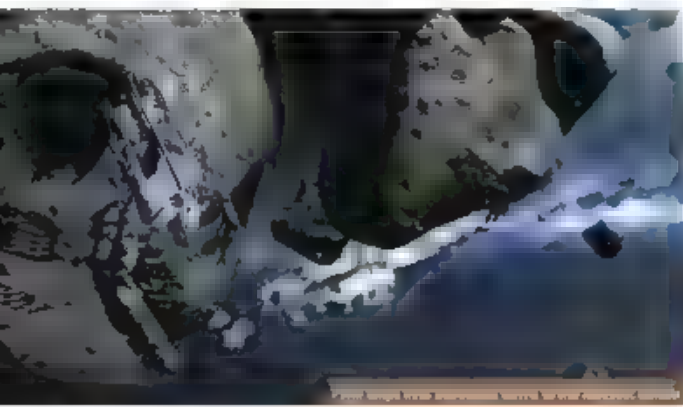
Based on the videos Roberts Space Industries has posted so far, when the company says are re-order from a moderately high-end PC running Star Citizen, it's a bit of a Nvidia-graphic-kind-of-the-same-kind-of-amazing. The game will have a high level of graphical fidelity, with a high number of objects, ships, and people, surrounded by other highly detailed stations. It then proceeds out the window to follow a one-man fighter as it maneuvers from the carrier and engages incoming hostiles in a fast-paced dogfight, with the carrier's long capital ships firing to the aid of the fighter with streams of laser fire. As the vessel swings by in a close approach, the fighter's light armor is hit, and a close-up view of the ship's hull and armor is affected with several small explosions in a row.

The ship's armor is a testament to Star Citizen's realism, going beyond what we've seen in similar games. A small fighter might have four small thrusters each on its top and bottom faces, as well as its main engine in the rear. Each of these thrusters acts as a full-body rocket, ready as it receives commands from the fly-by-wire system that transfer the pilot's input into individual actions, such as steering, damage,

so forth. A single port attitude thruster can't absorb the full force of a maneuvering error. It's modeled in the simulation so you can have a harder time pushing the nose of your ship down and left and in free Mass is also modeled, so dropping your cargo in a heated dogfight could give you the edge you need to survive long enough to make a kill.

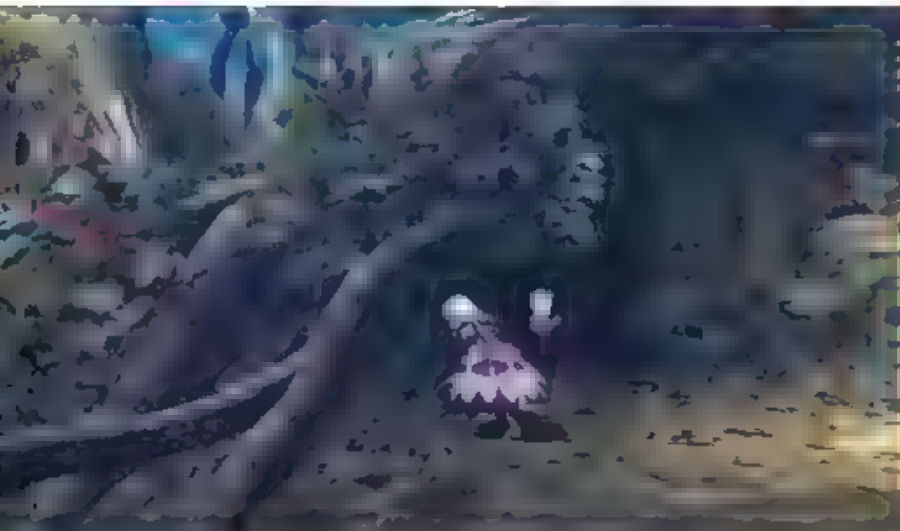
Roberts Space Industries' impression of quality-of-life is a bit of a mystery. The way it really works is that the game will be a massive, open-ended, multi-player environment that supports a limited number of players, so we're not looking at a huge single-mission game like Eve Online. However, the developers have a lot of work to do on social interactions between players. For example, it looks like you can't do a lot of out-of-game things, so you'll have to do a lot of in-game things, like after a mission, the case might be the same, but the way it's done, of course.

Roberts Space Industries is making bold claims about the game for Star Citizen, and the footage we've seen so far backs up some of the possibilities. The developers are undoubtedly reaching for the stars with this almost suicidal, ambitious project, but it's a team led by one of the most experienced and successful game developers in the world. —Adam Bussesser



Tales of Xillia

Celebrating and refining a well-loved series



Platform: PlayStation 3

Style: Action

Player Action: Single

Developer: Namco Bandai

Developer: Namco Bandai

Release: 2013

Few RPG franchises have stuck around this generation, but Tales hasn't lost its steam. The series entered this generation with *Tales of Vesperia*, and more recently saw *Tales of Graces* on the PlayStation 3. Tales fans have also been frustrated with the series' high price tag. The solution? Not at all. Namco Bandai's latest *Tales of Xillia* for North America, the *Tales* series lives on for another game.

Xillia (released in Japan to commemorate the series' 15th anniversary) But *Xillia* isn't all nostalgia; it's a game that takes risks while building off the series' strengths. For the most part, players choose one of two main characters. The storyline does a thing that's used to work back to your choice: alters the perspective through which you see story events and events in the opening. You decide between a male medical student, Jude Maxwell, and a female spirit summoner, Milla Maxwell. Their paths cross when a significant accident occurs, and they both investigate the location. In true RPG fashion, what they find is anything but ordinary. Events are complicated by the fact that the world *Erebon* is a shattering and has a dark side, mostly in conflict over the usual monsters and spirits that lurk in the world for protection.

Xillia also returns with the great action

gameplay that named the series praise in the past. Though *Tales* games' character builds for its combat *Xillia* shakes things up by meshing aspects from previous entries in the series into a new motion-fueled system. Combat still operates in real time, but the main numbers come from two gauges: First, *Tales of Vesperia*, *Xillia* borrows the technical points (TP) system, in which artes cost points, but regular attacks still use meter. Additionally, it borrows *Tales of Graces*' Orb Box system, where the total combo is limited by the number of OC points, except now it's called the Assault Counter. These two systems, while initially appearing contradictory, provide great offense and support a lot of strategy for both attack and defense.

Since *Xillia* isn't just a new system like a tight integration of the previous *Tales* games, it's an entirely original system. However, old the *Xillia* combat and free mode is enabled, allowing evasion of area-based magic spells and better positioning. You also have the ability to link your character to any of the other three party members. By linking the inkert, party members can share skills with you and temporarily take some target and usability you if wounded.

Outside of battle, Milla, Jude, and company

progress like most RPG characters, gaining experience that levels them up. What separates *Xillia* from other RPGs is what separates *Xillia* from other RPGs. Not unlike *Final Fantasy*, *Xillia*'s spheres and each character has a special skill (spells) with nodes on the spheres. It's a different system, and one that character progression is a lot of those unlocked by the individual nodes. This might include a static boost to HP or TP or other similar perks. This system gives you a lot of control over how your character evolves, which is refreshing for a genre that tends to have linear character progression.

Diehard fans are sure to notice that the design of *Xillia* is more than a little different from the rest of the series. It's not just the magnitude of the world. Also, each main character has a unique personality. The previous *Tales* games have provided a great amount of character design and meshes well with the gameplay elements.

Xillia has plenty of refinements to make the series feel fresh, but it stays true to what fans love: gaining character bonds. The battle system modifications all feel significantly improved and the new abilities and skills are new. It's definitely worth keeping on your radar. —Kimberly Wallace





Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z

An All-Hands Interview with the Developers

A little over two years ago, former Mega Man creator Keiji Inafune left the state of Japanese game developer going so far as to say Japanese gaming is dead. Maybe he meant to say that Japanese gaming is at a low, but we recently took the stage at Team Ninja event to announce Yaiba: Ninja Gaiden Z, an all-out assault to Team Ninja's greatest franchise.

Yaiba's plot is pretty straightforward: Kamiyama Yaiba, who was killed in Ninja Gaiden 3, is reborn as Ryu Hayabusa. Somehow Yaiba returns from the grave to hunt down the killer. Team Ninja's tease left us with a lot of questions: Is Yaiba some kind of zombie? What is the origin of the zombie outbreak? Why did Ryu kill Yaiba in the first place?

Team Ninja would address questions about the game's action aesthetic, the game's combat, and the game's art style. The game's art style is cel-shaded and the game's combat is fast-paced and brutal.

Team Ninja's art style is cel-shaded and the game's combat is fast-paced and brutal. The game's art style is cel-shaded and the game's combat is fast-paced and brutal. The game's art style is cel-shaded and the game's combat is fast-paced and brutal.

- Platform: TBA
- Style: 1-Player Action
- Publisher: Tecmo Koei
- Developer: Comcept/Spark Unlimited
- Release: 2013



Game Art
 Game Development
 Game Design

3300 University Boulevard • Winter Park, FL

To view detailed information regarding tuition, student outcomes, and related statistics, please visit fast.edu/outcomes-and-statistics.



800.226.7625

fullsail.edu



GAME SPOT

GAME OF THE MONTH

92 Assassin's Creed III

Several things could go wrong when introducing historical setting, and a new open-world framework to Assassin's Creed III pulls it off as effortlessly as a hidden blade. The threat of an unsuspecting redcoat. Read about the best direction Ubisoft's flagship series takes on in this

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and reflects a game that cannot be missed.	5	Fine. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be unacceptably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reveals its best-and-briest ideas above its competition.	4	Good. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either underwhelms 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	Fair. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and unconvincing characters or themes.
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	Dislike. Barely enjoyable. 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 convincing game experience.	1	Don't touch.

AWARDS

Platinum

Assigned to games that score between 9.0 and 10

Gold

Assigned to games that score between 8 and 8.9

Silver

Assigned to games that score between 6.5 and 6.9

Game of the Month

The award for the most outstanding game in the month

YOU  SAY LEFT.
SHE SAYS  RIGHT.
WHOOOPS, IT'S
STRAIGHT. 



Corolla. WITH AVAILABLE NAV*

Simple directions get you wherever you need to go. And for reasons you can always count on Corolla. Learn more at toyota.com/corolla



Assassin's Creed III

Expanding scope and breath

9.5

PS3 • X360

18+ (ESRB)

Conclude a five-game storyline with a sojourn to the American Revolution

4.5 (Metacritic)

Beautiful wildererness, excellent facial animation, and the best water ever seen in a video game

8.5 (Metacritic)

The new atmospheric focus of the score is a departure from previous entries, but holds its own as the franchise legacy. Voice acting is top notch

8.5 (Metacritic)

New controls take some time to adjust to for longtime players, but they're an improvement in every way

8.5 (Metacritic)

The largest and best Assassin's Creed game yet

8.5 (Metacritic)

Moderately High



GAME OF THE MONTH GOLO

Style 1-Player Action (8-Player Online) Publisher Ubisoft Developer Ubisoft Montreal Release October 30 US\$69.99

Most players will likely spend the first six hours of *Assassin's Creed III* wrapping their heads around the profound size and ambition of the game. Ubisoft Montreal did its job: It built a world that works hard to reflect our unique, unique journey in time. We'll see the best of our past. From the the tower's tower, the Assassin's Creed III is a journey to witnessing the first shots of the American Revolution, and on to the conclusion of the present day storyline introduced in the first franchise entry, *Assassin's Creed II*. It's a journey that flows a little more for good measure.

As a result, it creates a rich, always-on-the-edge world, with a story that's a blend of fiction and colonial American life with exploring. Colonial-era Boston and New York are the liveliest and most authentic open cities I've encountered in a game, from the squealing pigs to the newsboys hawking papers.

The wilderness that separates the two is vast and filled with plenty to do. Many missions are set in the frontier, and in between those missions you can hunt animals, bring down enemy forts, climb cliffs and trees, and explore hidden caves, just to name a few of many diversions. As an open wilderness zone, the frontier shines, though long runs to mission objectives can get tedious. Everywhere you go exhibits dynamic weather effects, and the world feels more varied and alive as you witness its passage from summer to winter and back again.

Along with providing a greater sense of place than its predecessors, *Assassin's Creed III* is more deeply rooted in historical time as well. If new hero Connor isn't involved in every memorable moment of the American Revolution, it's only because he can only be in one place at a time. Throwing boxes of tea into the Boston Harbor and running between cannon blasts at Bunker Hill, the game feels more cinematic and scripted than it has before. Many times this approach results in thrilling intensely, but

some missions subtract from player agency by leading players along with a string of breadcrumb objectives. Other sequences recast the freemove assassination sequences of the first game in the series. An intriguing new approach to mission synchronization offers players more optional mission objectives, increasing replay value. Most of these objectives make the sequence play out in a cooler way, but a few seem contrary to the mission's goals, like the need to perform a special type of assassination kill during a mission that is otherwise about stealth.

It's a mistake to think about the game in terms of a critical path of core missions. Instead, *Assassin's Creed III* excels by providing meaningful story-based content everywhere you turn. One main thread may provide the tale of Connor's lifelong struggle against the Templars, but another line of missions describes his home life and the people who come to live beside him. A different story takes Connor up onto the seas of the Atlantic, to

Stay for the Credits

It's a painfully long credits sequence, but you'll want to stick around for some important story wrap-up post credits. The first cinematic appears a few minutes into the scrolling credits, and the second appears after they conclude many minutes later.



WWE '13

9

WWE
GOLD

ESRB Rating: E
Platform: PS3, Xbox 360
Developer: THQ
Release Date: October 30, 2012

15+ | 4.5/5

Relive the most memorable and exciting period in pro wrestling history

Graphics

Matches and arenas look great, but several faces look odd

Sound

Tons of classic entrance themes are great for nostalgia

Playability

THQ allows you to do almost anything you'd see on Raw without resorting to an overly complex control scheme

Value

Wrestling fans could still ask for a more complete package

Replay value

High

Two years ago, NBA 2K11 released to critical and commercial success. A primary reason for the game's success was a mode that meticulously recreated key moments of Michael Jordan's legendary NBA career. With WWE '13, THQ has produced a similar love letter to pro wrestling's greatest era. Millions were entertained by the antics of Stone Cold Steve Austin, The Rock, and D-Generation X in the late '90s, and the Attitude Era stands at center stage in this year's entry.

WWE '13 attempted to tell the stories of several wrestlers within the Raw 'n' Wrestlingmania mode, but an annoying objective system and match structure brought the entire experience down. WWE '13's Attitude Era mode rectifies the mistakes of its predecessor by making specific objectives "historical bonuses" instead of required actions. If you want your matches to play out the way they did in real life, you're free to throw Mankind off of the set in a Cell or hit Kane with three Tombstone piledrivers. If you'd rather progress through the Attitude Era in your own fashion, you can move on just the same (after without the great bonuses the historical objectives unlock). While you're learning about the history of numerous wrestling legends, the mode gradually introduces the new talent types and gameplay mechanics. In every respect, Attitude Era is the best mode I've ever played in a wrestling game.

This Attitude Era mode features the era's superstars, resulting in a dream roster of the wrestling greats covering everything from main eventers like Triple H and The Rock to mid-card talent like The Godfather and Isiah "Juice" Ortiz. With the Attitude Era mode roster offer more than other titles with a historical focus like Legends of Wrestlingmania and WWE All Stars. They could have called it a pro wrestling game for the late '90s, but THQ also offers a full current roster

and highly customizable WWE Universe mode.

Like previous entries, WWE Universe gives you full control over your story and television schedules, essentially combining a career mode and a general manager mode. Hundreds of scenes can pop up organically before, during, or after matches, and the development team had the help of WWE producer Paul Heyman, one of the best minds in the business, when putting them together. Creating feuds, guiding a created superstar's career path, and introducing your own TV show is great, and the mode is endless for additions and surprises.

These big modes are fantastic in the broad sense, but plenty of little details and tweaks improve the experience significantly. If you're looking at wrestling Eddie Guerrero for four straight weeks, you'll receive a "kick ass" if you win the "match experience" setting to Quick for a brief beatdown. If you'd rather have a Wrestlingmania career classic, you can change it to Epic. It's a subtle addition, but one I found myself using frequently.

Only longtime wrestling fans will notice some of the tiny details, but they're sure to appreciate the attention given to things like accurate cage door Mick Foley's entrance stride and appropriate logos and fonts for your new "beatdown." You may not take notice of THQ's obvious love and knowledge of wrestling, but after a few weeks, the mode will surprise and impress throughout the game.

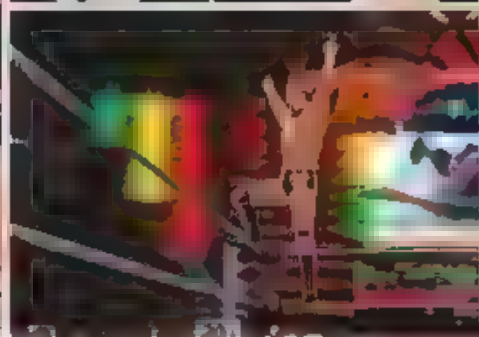
A detailed tribute to the industry's greatest era is great, but it wouldn't add up to much if the union between the modes wasn't up to par. Thankfully, WWE '13 allows fans to recreate virtually anything you'd see on Raw without resorting to an overly complex control scheme. Standard actions like strikes, grapples, and reverses can be mastered if you've ever watched a pro wrestler. Elaborate maneuvers require a one-setup, with

a finisher stored; you can perform your finisher through a table, a superkick to the outside of the ring, or even a mid-air RKO or Swael Chin Mus if your foe makes an ill-timed leap. Multiplayer bouts are a blast, and several submission and son-of-a-bitch matches had me on the edge of my seat.

If a few things it does right, WWE '13 will have a lot of fans, even if occasionally it's caught in odd loops. The Attitude Era mode is a great addition, but the game's quality varies. A non-existent main event slot during an empty arena match. Many of the wrestlers' faces look odd or don't resemble their real-life counterparts. Despite these complaints, very few of them interfere with the experience as a whole.

Wrestling fans may wonder where THQ goes from here, with the Attitude Era mode. WWE offers a straightforward career mode, but it's better than the Attitude Era mode. The online play is a great feature, and the options and functionality of the best fighting games, and it offers two fantastic and expansive modes in Attitude Era and WWE Universe.

We always pointed out THQ's WWE No Mercy as the last wrestling game we ever played, but no longer. It's a shame that it's the last playing WWE '13, but it's a great game to think of as the last playable and complete wrestling game in history.



Need for Speed: Most Wanted



GOLD

Style 1-Player Racing (8-Player Online) Publisher Electronic Arts Developer Criterion Games Released October 30 ESRB E10+

Concept that at other times already made a game called *Need for Speed: Most Wanted* this game isn't about any one franchise in particular. It's about developer Criterion's relentless pursuit of its own vision. With spectacular Burnout-style crashes, the pickup from 2001's Hot Pursuit, and a sense of racing, it makes a well-deserved case for being a well-deserved honed racing machine of ultimate exhilarating experience.

The open world of Fairhaven is a fertile ground for the Criterion racing concepts of accessibility, freedom, and motor mayhem. Freedom and structure deliberately intersect in a loose career mode based around beating a list of 10 Most Wanted cars. Unlike most games out there, Most Wanted isn't a single way. Jump in a car and do whatever you want, and the game tracks your progress. You can take a break, or you can keep going. You're always free to hop to the next job.

The career-building race events are actually tied to each car. You can race any of the 100 plus cars you find in the world, but to upgrade each one you have to complete an event that's tied to a specific car upgrade. Once your car is upgraded and you earn enough Speed Points, you can upgrade by doing things like near-misses, drifts, etc., you can take out the next Most Wanted car. I enjoyed the freedom this setup provides, since there was more than one way to pursue the same goal.

Cars are simultaneous. Loved and disposable. It's great to find them in the world and put it to rest on beating/earning the high prestige cars on the Most Wanted list, and watching them up in high speed wrecks and launching them off jumps (safe landing or not)

through a smile to my face. An arbitrary car lead to doubt, since you're free to upgrade and use any car in the Most Wanted races, and not all upgrades are clearly advantageous in all situations. Sometimes it's better to have higher top speed than acceleration, so you want to know you're on the right car to compete. The upgrade system that lets down on their entrance and your drive to upgrade all of them.

The cops are the heart of the game, and throughout the game, you can see them now and then. They show up during a scripted moment in an upgrade or Most Wanted race and you have to continue to evade them after the event is over as the action spills out into the open world. For reasons, car chase, however, there are no police chase.

Freeplay mode. Many of the races and special challenges based around specific

locations on the map (such as everyone getting a certain amount of air off a jump). Like other aspects of the game, the online mode blends freedom with structure. Cooperation and competition can be intertwined. For instance, you can gain Speed Points for crashing or taking over another car, and you can also gain points for taking out other competitors, scores by taking them out.

Sometimes while playing Most Wanted I was frustrated when playing a certain volume of opportunities. I was even frustrated at times when seemingly dumb, low-level, a civilian car clogged up the fast turn of a particularly high tension race, causing me to eat metal instead of grabbing a car. But part of the beauty of this game is that there is no such thing as a dumb race. Whether you're taking out your opponents or barrel rolling your way through a race, you're getting what you want. The game that makes you feel like you're getting there.



PS3 • RRP

Concept
Combine Criterion's Burnout Paradise with the traditional cops from the Most Wanted series.

Fun
A lot is going on at any given moment, and things like mid-race medians can sometimes be hard to pick out. The damage and crashes are great.

Sound
If you pay attention to the police chatter, you can tell what they're going to do.

Quality
The cars are fast and sleek, and the rubber-banding is a necessary evil that helps make races intense.

Extra Fun
This game makes everything you do fun and feels like the way racing games should be.

Replay Value
High.

Skylanders Giants

and



ES: 3+ (E10) +

A direct sequel that adds larger characters but recycles most of the gameplay concepts

Outside of the creative character designs, not much catches the eye. In-game raucous animations are once again lacking, and the worlds don't offer many noteworthy sights

A catchy score accompanies the action. Most of the voice work is fantastic

The gameplay is practically identical to the first game but is nicely polished and balanced for the multitude of characters

A repeat performance that is heightened by a strong story and fun new Giant characters

Moderately High



Style 1 or 2-Player Action Publisher Activision Developer Toys for Bob Release October 21 ESRB E10+

When an Activision game is successful, a sequel is likely to follow in the next year. Activision transformed *Call of Duty* into a multimillion-selling annual event, but exploited the *Guitar Hero* and *Tony Hawk* series until they reached bargain-bin status. *Skylanders* appears to be the publisher's next perennial cash cow.

Hitting store shelves just a year after the release of *Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure*, *Giants* follows its predecessor's blueprint. As such, the *Skylands* are once again filled with block-moving puzzles, collectible hats, pushable crates, breakable walls, filled with gems, an annoying green creature that lives inside of locks, doors requiring multiple keys, character tokens that unlock videos of purchasable figurines, element-specific secret zones, and boss fights against shadow versions of many of the popular *Skylanders* characters. Since *Spyro's Adventure* covered the gamut of standard world types—be it fire, snow, or haunted village—most of *Giants*'s level designs repeat those themes. It's the same box, and same.

And that's okay. If this were the fourth or fifth entry in the series, its charm may have worn off. But I had a blast playing this game even if it is painfully familiar most of the time.

The biggest difference between the two entries is the addition of new Giant characters. These lumbering titans stand in at roughly twice the height of standard *Skylanders*, and can be summoned to lift boulders, smash through weaker brick bridges, and light vast areas with lightning bolts. In the night, they're a bit harder and move a little

slower, but fit right in with the other *Skylanders*: assortment of short- and long-range attack strategies.

When it comes to world exploration, the giants are a little too slow, and are tight squeezes on narrow paths. As looked for secrets, you'd switch these sloths out for the faster dragon characters, but used them as much as I could in large-scale conflicts or against approaching swarms. The Giants are particularly useful in the new *Arms* challenges, which pit one *Skylander* against numerous waves of foes.

Think of the Giants as a ninth class, joining the likes of Earth, Fire, and Undead. Although each Giant is aligned to one of those specific traits, only the fact that they are Giants matters in determining which areas they can enter. You won't need a Water Giant or a Tech Giant at any specific point; one Giant (like Tree Rex, who is packaged with the game) is enough to uncover all of the hidden areas.

All 32 previously released *Skylanders* figurines work with this sequel, and can attain five additional levels to reach the new cap of 15. Those levels pass slowly, allowing players to keep their favorite characters in play for a majority of the time. New difficulty settings up the challenge for seasoned players, but even *Hard* is a little easy. You unlock the musical 4-bit ending *Koos* after completing the game.

Two unexpected joys

The Characters I Learned on the Most

I used 26 different *Skylanders* figures throughout the course of this review, but found myself relying on six of them for most of the element-free challenges. These characters are Tree Rex, Spyro, Trigger Happy, Chill, Bouncin', and Jet-Vac.

came from *Giants*. One: The story didn't much care for the cinematics in *Spyro's Adventure*, but laughed frequently at the neatly penned humor in *Giants*. Most of the jokes are tied to Lord Koos, his bid for power, and his loveable-butler Blumshanks. My second unexpected joy was a new collectible card game. In most of the levels, you obtain new cards by purchasing them from vendors or beating rival card players in matches. Always like it when games put a collectible item like these cards to good use.

Although *Skylanders* characters are rarely asked to leave their feet, these games remind me of the great *Insomniac Games* and *Naughty Dog* platformers from the *PlayStation 1* and *2* eras. You wouldn't necessarily categorize them as collect-a-thons, but the hunt for hidden loot is one of this series' strongest elements, not to mention the thrill of racing through levels to hit a par time. Although *Skylanders*'s gameplay more closely matches the hack-n-slash genre, the spirit of the long-lost platformer is alive and well here.

For long a rival, including this year, I suspect another *Skylanders* sequel is already in development and slated for release next holiday. *Giants* makes a good case for the fun and collectability of this series, but also raises the warning flag for franchise fatigue.

Collectors Beware

Giants are not the only new faces in *Skylanders: Toys for Bob*; he's created eight new standard-sized characters, one for each element. That brings the total roster size to 48. Now here's the bad news for collectors: 24 of the original 32 characters are returning with new poses. On top of that, eight characters are upgraded with high-tech technology and yet another pose.

NBA 2K13

gameplay
SILVER

Style 1 to 4-Player Sports (6-Player Online) Publisher 2K Sports Developer Visual Concepts Release October 2 ESRB E

8.75

PS3 (X360)

Concept

Keep this high-flying basketball franchise at the top of its game and restore its shaky online reputation

Graphics

From the accurate player stats to the authentic in-game rituals, Visual Concepts captures the essence of the sport. I could take or leave the Jay-Z inspired presentation flourishes

Audio

The best documentary team in sports games, and the crowd reactions aptly match the intensity of the situations on court

Gameplay

Placing dribbling moves on the right analog stick along with shooting, post game, and passing modifiers streamlines the experience

Difficulty

The easier default difficulty makes NBA 2K13 much more accessible, but hardcore hoops fans still get a detailed simulation experience that rewards smart play

Replay Value

High



the trade lines, and the NBA Today interface is the foundation for a better experience. Fans will appreciate the ability to determine their teams' first three scoring options with the new Total Sim Control feature, but other core pieces like the NBA Draft and player free agency logic need renovation.

My favorite way to enjoy NBA 2K13 is MyCareer, the single-player mode that links you with writing your legacy on the hardwood. New features like virtual Twitter followers, the ability to build your own custom Nike shoe once you become a superstar, and meetings with the general manager that allow you to air your grievances give it more depth than similar modes in other sports games. Becoming a game-changing player early in your career is also easier since you accrue VC outside of the mode.

On the court, the game performs like a perennial star. Taking a page out of EA's playbook, NBA 2K13 relocates dribbling moves to the right analog stick. Transitioning to this new control scheme takes practice. I commonly found myself tapping the right analog stick to enact a shot (which now requires a left trigger modifier) but once you get used to it you'll be breaking the ankles of defenders and bursting to the basket with the skill of an elite shooting guard. Another gameplay change, like the dynamic shot meter that produces a rich atmosphere, context-sensitive shooting animations, make the action seamless compared to several rivals, problems in the series resurface as well. Player animations slip through one another, 60 FPS dips occur, and too many passes are snatched away by defensive players. The lack of a shot meter, a lack of a shot meter, a lack of a shot meter would have been addressed by now.

Niggling complaints aside, NBA 2K13 puts in another solid performance with its unrivaled broadcast-style presentation, improved online experience, and the best single-player mode in sports. None of its new features rival other sports simulations, and cutting out the historical mode was a poor decision, but it's still a top-notch basketball game.

Over the past few years, the NBA 2K franchise has solidified its reputation as one of the premier sports simulations.

Packed with well-crafted game modes, best-in-class presentation, and entertaining yet deep gameplay, NBA 2K13 was the best sports game just your average basketball fan could hope for. However, a series of unfortunate circumstances assembled to address the rampant connectivity issues online. Broken matchmaking, frequent disconnections, and lag ultimately damaged the reputation of the otherwise stellar game. Visual Concepts used the offseason to work on its weaknesses but in doing so neglected some of its strengths.

The game's online play is rated for its robust online offerings, but after a long year the performance of the online play is a mixed bag. The Online Association empowers hosting admins more options to run leagues with their preferred settings. It also allows for head-to-head matchups, or occasionally experienced lag and dropped matches, but the performance improved for the most part outside of a fourth-quarter bug that causes the scoreboard to disappear.

NBA 2K13 lacks a dedicated player vs. player league like NHL's EA NHL, a major missing piece for a sport that's perfect for this kind of mode, but at least you can enjoy the occasional pickup matches on the backlot with your MyPlayer. It's hard to build a full-fledged multiplayer mode. Visual Concepts spent its time creating MyTeam, a mode that operates similarly to EA's Ultimate Team. Starting with a squad of scrubs, your goal is to build a team of NBA superstars by spending virtual currency (VC) or real money on

players or booster packs.

The VC also extends to modes beyond MyTeam. Whether you're playing Association mode, MyCareer, or taking on competitors online, you're looking up at a virtual VC used to improve your skills, or as for your MyPlayer. One of the new additions to the game is the new currency, NBA 2K13's VC, that can be used in no matter what mode you are playing. The game needs to interface with the servers. When the game launched, it suffered from connectivity issues that resulted in me losing VC and the results of the Association games just played. Visual Concepts has since tweaked the servers to prevent this from happening.

Even when games are recorded appropriately, Association mode hasn't moved the needle much. It's still a mixed bag of experiences, but the defined roles determining player happiness



Hitman: Absolution

8.75

PS3 • X360

Developer

Improvements on Hitman's core strengths and boost replayability with the new contracts mode

Graphics

The environments are gorgeous and packed with NPCs with only the occasional minor slowdown

Sound

The voice acting is solid (if a little mannered) at times and the soundtrack is top notch

Playability

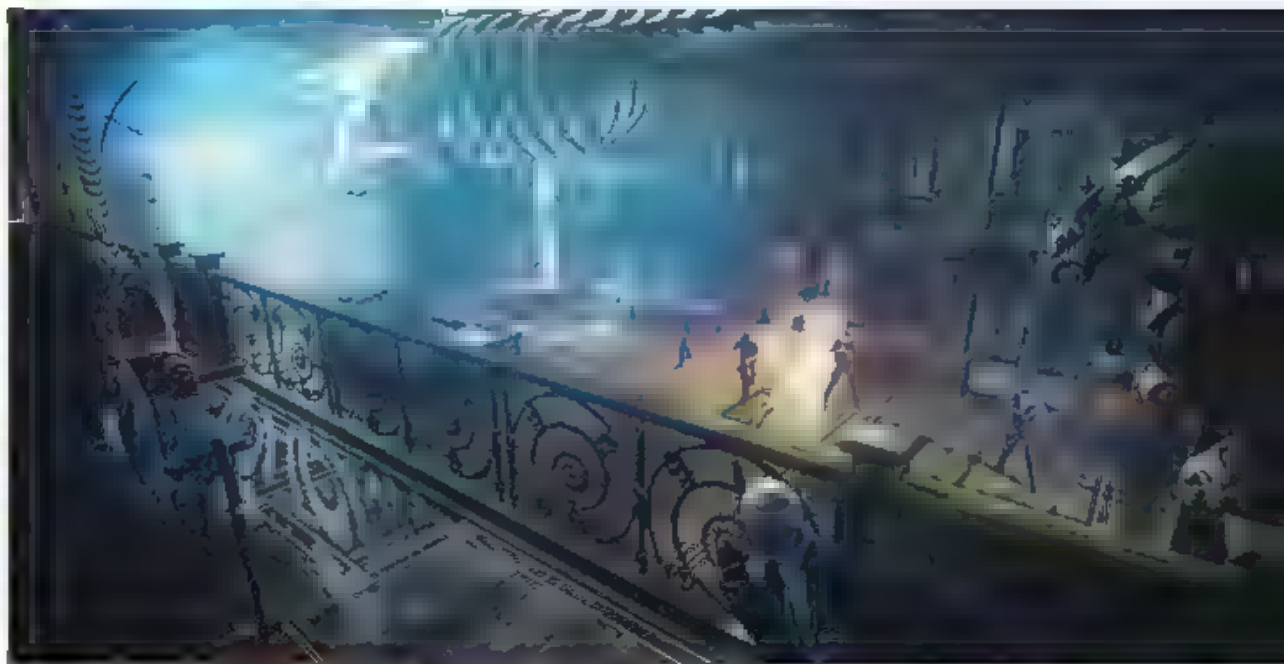
Agent 47 has never been deadlier thanks to a refined and simplified control scheme

Value

Hitman fans will be in heaven, though Absolution may still be too slow for more trigger-happy gamers

Difficulty

Moderately High



IGN **SILVER**

Genre: 1-Player Action Publisher: Square Enix Developer: IO Interactive Release: November 20 ESRB: M

After a six-year hiatus, IO Interactive's consumer-grade hit franchise is back in business, and the familiar assassin—the developer has honed its skills to a razor's edge, providing the best gameplay the series has seen to date.

Hitman alone has the pedigree that has always been the series' weak point: It was left with a weak feeling about its core identity, which for Agent 47 was a lack of continuity from his stealthy, silent, and almost invisible combat to his gun-and-sword work. On one hand, the story line has most of the soft-focus sense of realism installments from a more personal narrative and features a solid voice cast. On the other hand, most of the characters are insufferable exaggerations of the cliché in crime, and many of the game's mechanics are a trite, plain effort to repeat that a variety of items might be useful in many circumstances, and that does make the game's mechanics formidable especially when they're delivered in a boring manner. The main story arc ultimately succeeded in making me dislike the characters it was meant to kill, but the constant attempts to kill, combined with an unnecessary and unwelcome distraction.

Thankfully, the rest of the game has been improved in virtually every way. Absolution features a variety of new weapons, more than 20 types of vehicles, and more significant incentives for repeating missions. The levels are sprawling, gorgeous, multi-layered playgrounds that hum down and kill your targets in and feature some of the most impressive crowds seen this generation.

Better yet, the environments feature numerous kill options, including dropping a massive whale skeleton on an unsuspecting target

imprisoning an insane criminal to get thrown into a boat, or using an exploding tagline in a mailbox to zap an unsuspecting henchman as he takes a whiz—sometimes the best hit isn't the flashiest. You also have an array of silent weapons and improvised weapons to take out targets with.

Absolution offers two different mission types. Most are traditional, with a goal to be achieved by using a variety of methods to reach objectives, and a few are elaborate, a lage locations, unlike the original Hitman's meandering action diversions. These latter are better, as they pay to the series' core strengths: using distractions and disguises to traverse the environments, sight unseen. These levels are shorter and more fun than the usual solo-in-mission, but not a fun.

Absolution introduces several technical techniques that are fun to use, such as temporarily disabling the sound, disabling some control schemes. Your instinct power, which allows you spot objects of interest and enemies through walls, cuts down on much of the frustration and radar-watching of past installments. Likewise, the new head-stalk provides an increase in security for evading nosy guards. Even when a hundred mission turned into a quest, it was better.

The challenges, environmental kills, and Easter eggs built into each level provide a good level of replayability, but the new "front acts" mode is the real hook in this regard. Creating and uploading your own missions is as fun as playing other players' contracts, and the scoring system and global leaderboards should be compelling to hardcore fans. It's still a far cry from an action

level/mission editor, but I can envision spending plenty of hours creating the perfect contract, and many more completing the missions of others.

Despite all of Absolution's improvements, Hitman still isn't for everyone. The game remains slow and more a little more than a few games, and you'll see all the same things, these past installments, and you'll see them again, they're from a slightly different perspective, you'll see a different approach, and at the level, you've had in mind, you may miss them completely. Attaining the rank of Silent Assassin still requires patience, skill, and more than a little trial and error. But while Hitman is still slower than most games, it's also smarter. Devising a strategy, using that strategy, and adjusting to a new environment are what makes a game so fun. And Absolution gives Agent 47, still gaming's premier hitman.



The Walking Dead Episode 4: Around Every Corner

by the foundation of the original TV finale

1-Player Adventure Platformer Telltale Games October 9, 2013 \$19.99

8.25

360 • PC

100 min

An emotional tale about being thrust into a zombie apocalypse and making difficult decisions along the way

Graphics

The comic book art style is unique, and the realistic environments have the right amount of detail

Interactive sound design builds up high-pressure moments. Great voice acting enhances the emotional intensity

Playability

Clicking objects and making decisions are the obvious main purposes, but a few action-packed scenes require quick responses

Entertainment

Episode 4 offers deeper insight into the characters and our choices, and also appropriately builds up to Episode 5

Replay Value

Moderately High

The Walking Dead Part 4, our final installment, will be an emotional roller coaster. Characters gradually reach a point where choices are essential to the story. With the impending conclusion, Telltale's emotionally rich and spins heads with challenges, making the walking Episode 5 unbeatable.

Episode 4 picks up right where the third left off. The group arrives in Savannah, searching desperately for a way to escape the city and find safety for survival. The journey of the group is down hill, a few setbacks, but the group's ability of time reflects on their journey, and the story is quite amplified. The reason writing is a bit flawed, but it's not perfect. Some scenes force feed emotions instead of letting them come naturally. For instance, a burial scene takes place, and with each shovel hit, there's a pause while the camera zooms in on the ground. The scene gets the point across with its visual, but it's not a good idea to have a scene that is so long.

Death still permeates the tale and Telltale does it superbly. Everything The Walking Dead does well is still pumping through Episode 4, but it scales back Episode 3's constant stream of highly charged moments. That's not a bad change, since Episode 3 gave so much to digest.

Suspense is at the core of the entire



sequences, and while Telltale does a good job with limited reaction time, this was a bit quick. Looking in the wrong direction for an object likely means game over. The shooting sequences are still awkward with clumsy aiming and no auto-targeting. However, the exploration scenes are where Telltale best achieves suspense. Little touches, such as the uncertainty of opening lockers and doors

provide scares.

Episode 4 builds to a promising finale, and the toll of every horrifying decision plagues your psyche. In that, it succeeds by laying down all the groundwork for Episode 5. The episode starts slowly but climaxes with a worthy cliffhanger. I'm still thinking about it, and it doesn't get much better than that. **X** *Mike Ley Weir*

Karateka

1-Player Fighting Platformer U3 Publishing December 6, 2012 \$19.99

8

PS3 • 360

100 min

Recreate the beautiful Mariko from an evil warlord using your martial arts mastery

Graphics

Attractive Disney-style anime for caters the game forward into the current generation

Sound

The stunning score by Grammy Award-winning composer Christopher YOUNG nails the desired tone

Playability

Simple stick-based controls are easy to master

Entertainment

Very brief when stacked against other downloadable games, but strong style and simple gameplay carry the day

Replay Value

Moderately High

Simple and straightforward isn't bad. Imagine some video game that puny little-governed Jordan Weir and his team at Liquid Entertainment have built, the remastered Karateka. The original Karateka released in 1984 and starred a heroic karate fighter on his way to save Princess Mariko from Akuma's mountain-top fortress. Players used timed punches and kicks to fight their way to victory. This remake doesn't diverge from the formula and the result is a game that feels more simplistic than most modern releases, though it remains relevant through high-production values and a smart approach to replay.

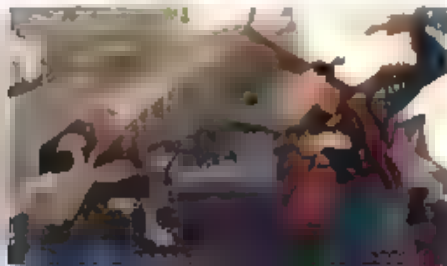
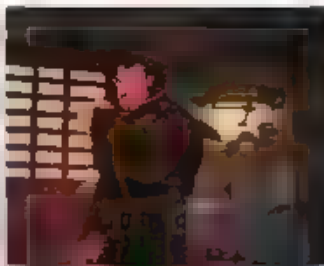
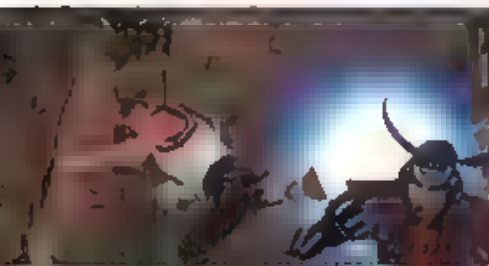
Gameplay in the new Karateka couldn't be easier to understand. Watch the enemy combatants for signs of their attacks, and time a button press to counter their blow. Succeed

and you can get in a few hits of your own. One opponent after another begins to lay on harder attacks, more blows at one time, and other tricks. The game never strays from the classic platformer, even when you come face-to-face against the iconic hawk in battle. Despite the simple premise, I found myself engaged in the fights and eager to progress up the mountain for the sake of the princess.

One big innovation is the approach to fall states. Rather than plastering up game over when your martial arts master is finally defeated, Karateka introduces the idea of stage-outlets who are attempting to save the princess. The first and most-challenging to succeed with is her true love. One day with the princess, you make Mariko's escape. Some time later, she's being held from the mountain. The righteous monk will die, up to console the

fight. If he falls, a lumbering or no can save the day, but Mariko won't be especially excited about her savior. The three characters offer a good reason to hop back to the beginning and play again, if only to give the princess her happy ending.

Karateka steps beyond its simplistic gameplay with exceptional production values. A vibrant art style recalls classic Disney animation, and the evocative, orchestral scoring with more exotic themes to great effect. Karateka also offers something of a rarity in today's market: It's an accessible experience that can be played to completion in less than an hour. If that's an advantage rather than a detriment for your busy life, Karateka may be just the game you need to remind you what made those early arcade games so fun. **A-** *Matt Miller*



Retro City Rampage

A frustrating, hilarious tribute to the NES

7

Style: 1-Player Action Publisher: VBlank Entertainment Developer: VBlank Entertainment Release: October 9, 2013 ESRB: T

PS3 • Vita

Concept

Make a game with every 80s and 90s reference you can think of

Controls

The core game doesn't emulate any specific game but it's distinctly 2-D

Sound

A fantastic soundtrack does a great job of mimicking the era's tunes

Playability

Major balancing issues rear their head late in the game, but most of it controls admirably

Entertainment

This look back is equal parts fun and infuriating

Replay Value

High

Next to gaming's past, it's in no short supply these days. Designer Brian Provinciano began work on *Retro City Rampage* over a decade ago, with the vision of it being yet another love letter to the era. He has certainly succeeded in that regard, for better or worse.

Retro City Rampage bombards you with gaming and pop culture references. Obvious nods to properties like *The Dark Knight*, *Saved By The Bell*, and *Paperboy* occupy entire

missions, although many others are snuck in invisibly.

At a certain point, the novelty wears off. Once you're over the quirkiness and charm of its initial hours, *Retro City Rampage* can become a chore.

Its core gameplay is clearly inspired by the first two *Grand Theft Auto* games, featuring an open world littered with missions, sidequests, and pedestrians to plow through. Frequently, it mocks gaming in general with jokes about boring "tail the car" missions, invisible walls, and micro-

actions. Despite how self-aware the game humor is, the gameplay features some of the worst elements of NES-era gaming.

We like to remember the *Maruo*, *Zelda*, and *Mega Man* of the period, but rarely are the downsides of less-prestigious titles

remembered: unbalanced checkpoints, wildly unbalanced difficulty, and cheap boss fights were par for the course. Rather than moving

away from the ugly side of the time period, *Retro City Rampage* embraces it.

Early objectives are relatively inoffensive, sending the player on a variety of fetch quests and wacky missions revolving around fixing a time machine. Many are unique but not exactly fun, and the final set of story missions turn into a gauntlet of cheap deaths and infuriating boss battles. One stretch involves a tribute to the awful *Ninja Turtles* underwater level from the NES game, a difficult *Dr. Robotnik*-inspired boss fight, and an extended section based on *Mad Rider*. If you're enough of a nostalgia fiend to get through these levels without becoming genuinely angry, you're a more patient gamer than most. Despite my frustrations, defeating the final boss gave me a feeling of triumph that's been difficult to duplicate in more recent generations of gaming.

I loved the initial hour of *Retro City Rampage*. It seemed like a last-paced and funny reminder of one of my favorite eras of gaming. As I dove deeper, I realized that there are better alternatives for those looking for an experience like this. If you want a healthy dose of NES nostalgia, the free *Abobo's Big Adventure* is fantastic. If you want to re-experience GTA's introduction of the open world genre, play the first two games on PSOne. — Dan Ryker



Zero Escape: Virtue's Last Reward

Building upon a graphic adventure legacy

8.75

generations SILVER

Style: 1-Player Adventure Publisher: Aksys Games Developer: Spike Chunsoft Release: October 24, 2012 ESRB: M

Vita • 3DS

Concept

Alternate between a choose-your-own-adventure suspenseful narrative, and thought-intensive puzzles

Graphics

Crisp and clean character models with unique designs outshine the drab, ordinary environments

Sound

Music builds off the suspense, but the voice acting is inconsistent

Playability

The puzzles are challenging, but not overwhelming. The touchscreen interface is a good fit for the visual novel style.

Entertainment

A thrilling, unpredictable story with fun-to-solve puzzles makes this one of the best graphic adventures around.

Replay Value

High

Most video games are predictable. They are programmed to follow rules, and characters are scripted to say specific things at predetermined times. Rarely can games make you feel like you are matching wits with another person — much less one with intricate motives. This is the standout achievement in *Zero Escape: Virtue's Last Reward*. Every time you make a choice, a doubt, a desire, and angst surging forth are real.

Abducted and trapped in a top-secret government facility, you are forced to be part of a sick game that consists of locking you in puzzle-filled rooms and pitting you against eight other characters. VLR's "prisoner's dilemma" forces you to ally with or betray characters, resulting in the gain (or loss) of points. These points are critical: nine points grant escape

while zero points provide death.

The excitement builds as conspiracies show characters' true colors in the face of death. Can you trust the others to align with you, or will your multifaceted allies/opponents go from altruistic to heartless in the blink of an eye? Every possible outcome is covered, resulting in a branching tale full of tension and uncertainty. The fact that VLR can meet such a reaction is a testament to the quality writing.

The other half of VLR focuses on demanding but creative puzzles. The riddles and logic challenges got my head spinning and adrenaline pumping just as much as the unpredictable story, leaving me with a sense of accomplishment unmatched by most games.

The 24 endings are a big part of how the story unfolds. Different paths bring new puzzles, decisions, and revelations, all of which are equally addicting. Not every ending is satisfying, but since the complete story only surfaces when you see them all, you have extra incentive to push forward and explore every option.

The Edge

While the Vita has the graphical superiority, the touchscreen controls don't function as well as the 3DS version. This is a big deal for a point-and-click adventure, making Nintendo a handheld the better option.



Dishonored



GameSpot
SILVER

1-Player Action Publisher Bethesda Softworks | Arkane Studios Release October 9, 2012

Dengeance stories are an old and well established form, but that doesn't make them any less gratifying. From *The Count of Monte Cristo* to *Sweeney Todd* to *RoboCop*, the thrill of watching a wronged hero deliver justice is one of my favorite kinds of entertainment. *Dishonored* falls in step with those notable examples as Corvo Attano hunts those who betrayed him, and the array of choices at players' fingertips makes it a pleasure to be the architect of his retribution.

Dishonored blends aspects of acclaimed games like *Deus Ex*, *Thief*, and *BioShock* to create a world where players are free to decide how to complete their objectives. Games have made this promise for years, but *Dishonored* comes closer to keeping it than anything else.

Navigating a guarded checkpoint might involve open combat, rewiring the security system, using Stop Time to sneak past, or a combination of those and other options. However, getting past the checkpoint is just one step toward your goal, so you also need to be mindful of where your choices lead. Killing six guards might seem like you blew it at the time, but when the streets they were patrolling are empty, it doesn't look so bad. Seeing this snowball effect as you work your way through your missions is one of *Dishonored*'s major payoffs.

The level design accommodates the various options well, and makes each new area feel like a puzzle to solve. Unfortunately, success is rarely as simple as devising your solution and executing it. Enemies' ability to detect you is wildly inconsistent, leading to fuzzy stealth mechanics that aren't predictable enough to be reliable (even with a cool power that shows enemy vision cones and silhouettes behind walls). The spotty

stealth is galling when trying to finish a level with no kills, being detected usually means a swarm of guards descended on you, so you just have to reload if things don't go your way. If you want to take a pure stealth approach, remember to save constantly.

If you don't care about racking up a body count, mixing aggression with deadly stealth is by far the most entertaining way to play. *Dishonored*, Corvo's powers and equipment can be combined to great effect. Effective strategies include freezing time and placing a spring razor trap in the midst of a group of guards, rewiring an arc pylon (basically a weaponized Tesla coil) so it vaporizes nearby foes, and stabbing guards in the neck only to watch their bodies dissolve into ash before they hit the ground. If nothing else, you can just use your gun and sword to mow through foes in cool straight-up fights. Experimenting with your arsenal isn't always about finding your way around a problem; some times it's just pure fun to mess with bad guys and see what happens.

Murdering guards and assassinating targets raises the level of chaos in the plague-stricken city of Dunwall, while finding nonlethal solutions decreases chaos. Chaos only has two values — low and high — but managing it is never adequately explained. How many people can you kill before chaos rises? If you stab a wolf hound, does that count as a kill? What about deaths resulting from reward traps? You have to wait until the post-mission stats to find out what effect your actions had, which makes it difficult to extract answers.

This mechanic is problematic because your cumulative chaos value determines which of the two endings you receive. For all of *Dishonored*'s attempts to avoid the traditional morality found

in choice-driven gameplay, you're still making a binary choice: Will you kill people, or not kill people? The latter option leads to the satisfying ending, while the former results in a punitive conclusion. This divide establishes a right and wrong way to play; high chaos makes the game harder, adding more plague rats, infected citizens, patrols, and even a more difficult alternate version of the final level. However, playing this "wrong way" is the real of sneaking and assassinating that makes *Dishonored* shine. If you want to see the good ending (and avoid being punished for playing the game at its best), you must forsake the multitude of cool death-dealing contraptions and upgrades in favor of the comparatively sparse offering of nonlethal alternatives — which doesn't help endorse low-chaos stealth as a valid style of play.

Maybe I wouldn't care so much about getting the bad ending if I didn't love Dunwall so much. Corvo may be the protagonist, but the city steals the show as a gritty, industrial backdrop for the action — and I didn't want to see it devastated at the end. The steampunk-inspired technology is fascinating, and the art direction superbly establishes a distinct visual style to accompany the dark and disturbing lore lurking behind the city. I hope this isn't the last time I play a game set in Dunwall.

Though I was frustrated by the chaos system and how it alters your actions, the heart of *Dishonored* is about being inventive, adaptable, and ruthless. The team at Arkane Studios has injected an array of possibilities into the simulated city of Dunwall, and discovering them all is a bliss. When you come face-to-face with the people who wronged you, your only dilemma is deciding which poetic method of elimination will produce the coolest result. — Joe Juba

8.75

PS3 • 360 • PC

+ **Group**
Seek vengeance as a super-powered assassin in a rapidly decaying city

+ **Story**
The city of Dunwall's artistic direction is great. The stylized approach suits the characters well, but the cutscenes look more muddled than deliberate.

+ **Gameplay**
The cast includes some heavy hitters like Susan Sarandon and John Slattery, but the voices for many incidental characters are stilted.

+ **Gameplay**
Everything feels natural for all of the different powers, weapons, and options. You even get a lean function!

+ **Entertainment**
The rush of a well-planned strategy going off without a hitch is pure gold, but tighter stealth mechanics would help that happen more often.

+ **Difficulty**
Moderately High

The Edge

The console versions of *Dishonored* have more graphical tweaks like framerate issues and screen tearing (especially on PS3). The textures look a little muddy no matter how you play, but go for PC if you have the option.

Halo 4

343 Industries balances old and new

9.25

Game of the Year
GOLD

Style: 4-Player Shooter (8-Player Online) Publisher: Microsoft Studios Developer: 343 Industries Release: November 6, 2012 ESRB: M

- Concept: Master Chief's epic space opera steps in a new direction while maintaining the series' legacy
- Visuals: Phenomenal visual detail and lighting makes this a dazzling showcase of the Xbox 360's power
- Sound: A new benchmark in sound effect design, and an imaginative new score – but no manual control of the audio mix is a drag
- Controls: Tight responsive controls are familiar and easy to learn
- Gameplay: A grand sci-fi adventure accompanied by fast, fun, and addictive multiplayer
- Replay Value: High

343 Industries had a series of challenges in front of it when it began to create Halo 4:

Take a beloved series from the original developer Bungie, maintain the legacy established through a decade of development, and reignite enthusiasm by delivering something new. That is a daunting list, but 343 Industries was clearly up to the task. Halo 4 is a thrilling adaptation of the best sci-fi space fiction has to offer, heading into the future with a sci-fi aesthetic that is intact, but the new development team isn't afraid to put its own signature features into play, assuring that Halo is on a path to growth instead of stagnation.

Recent Halo entries left ancillary to the core story. Halo 4 returns to the resonant drive of the series: Master Chief and his unrelenting defense of humanity. For the first time, the story has an emotional core that grounds the action: the connection between John and Cortana. As the two characters face a reemerging threat to the galaxy, we finally gain insight into the mysterious Forerunner race hinted at since *Combat Evolved*. Along the way, 343 Industries plays around with some heady science fiction concepts, from the nature of artificial intelligence to the planned shaping of a species' evolution. While these ideas might be bewildering to newcomers, the story is the most cohesive and well-structured in the series.

As played through that story, I was struck by the extraordinary production values on display. Halo 4 is a visual marvel, with gorgeous environments accentuated by high dynamic range lighting and breathtaking particle effects. However, the experience is more than the graphics; rarely feel the need to call out the sound effects of a game, but Halo 4 is an exception. The first time I fired a gun, I was startled by the forceful burst, and then pressure only improves as the

lights progress. From the distorted static of a scrambled audio communication to the roaring propulsion drive of a speeding Ghost, Halo 4's audio drags players into the game world by their ears. Several strong new musical themes add to the effect, but those melodies are sometimes obscured within the sound mix. I wish Halo 4 allowed for manual adjustment of the audio mix, but most high-end games on the market

aren't. Enemies have defined the feel of Halo gameplay since the beginning, and Halo 4 balances familiarity and novelty. The Covenant returns (for reasons the in-game story fails to articulate), providing the classic experience Halo fans love – popping Grunts, zeroing in on distant jackals, and furiously dueling Elites. Thankfully, new foes enter the picture before long. The Prometheans offer a robust tactical challenge, from the infuriating regenerative abilities of the floating Watchers to the savage Crawlers, and reappearing Knights. Each battlefield becomes a tense puzzle as you decide which bad guy to engage first. That's why the widely spaced checkpoint placements such a bummer – give the searing difficulty the game exhibits on higher challenge levels, but Halo 4 often sends its players to cut or tank as a punishment for failure.

Master Chief has new toys to bring into the fight, including several powerful new guns. Added to the array already introduced previously, the armament variety is impressive, and trying them all out is fun. The game encourages experimentation by severely limiting ammo on most pick-ups. At times, the strategy succeeds by making players use all the tools at their disposal. However, frequently running out of ammo slows their forward momentum, so you're forced to

scavenge for your supplies.

Levels are thoughtfully designed and offer training. One breathtaking environment is followed

by the next, and several alternative gameplay sequences take players from the new walking mech Mantas battles to high-speed fights in outer space. The ever-changing locations and set pieces give Master Chief's adventure a scope and grandiosity that's lacking in many other shooters.

For many, Halo 4's excellent campaign will be secondary to the endless battles of the newly introduced Infinity multiplayer. An integrated cooperative and competitive narrative tracks the progress of your Spartan as he or she trans aboard a UNSC ship and then heads out on missions, ranking up and improving on the way. Advancing your character is a joy, as you unlock armor pieces, customizable loadouts, and bonuses to boost performance in battle. The smooth and streamlined front-end interface is easy to navigate. Playing with friends is so easy, only time will tell if matchmaking can stand up to the pressure of a competitive match.

A few small changes to the flow of competitive multiplayer help Halo 4 feel more vibrant and replayable. Points have overtaken kills as the primary scoring mechanic. Random powerful weapon drops remove the chance for experienced players to camp equipment spawns. Support abilities and armor upgrades offer more flexibility. Competitive and intense and free-for-all variants have been added to the series. New multiplayer modes like *Raiders* and *Domination* join perennial favorites like *Slayer*, *Oddball*, and *Capture the Flag*, and all the modes play out across an impressive set of over a dozen strong new maps.

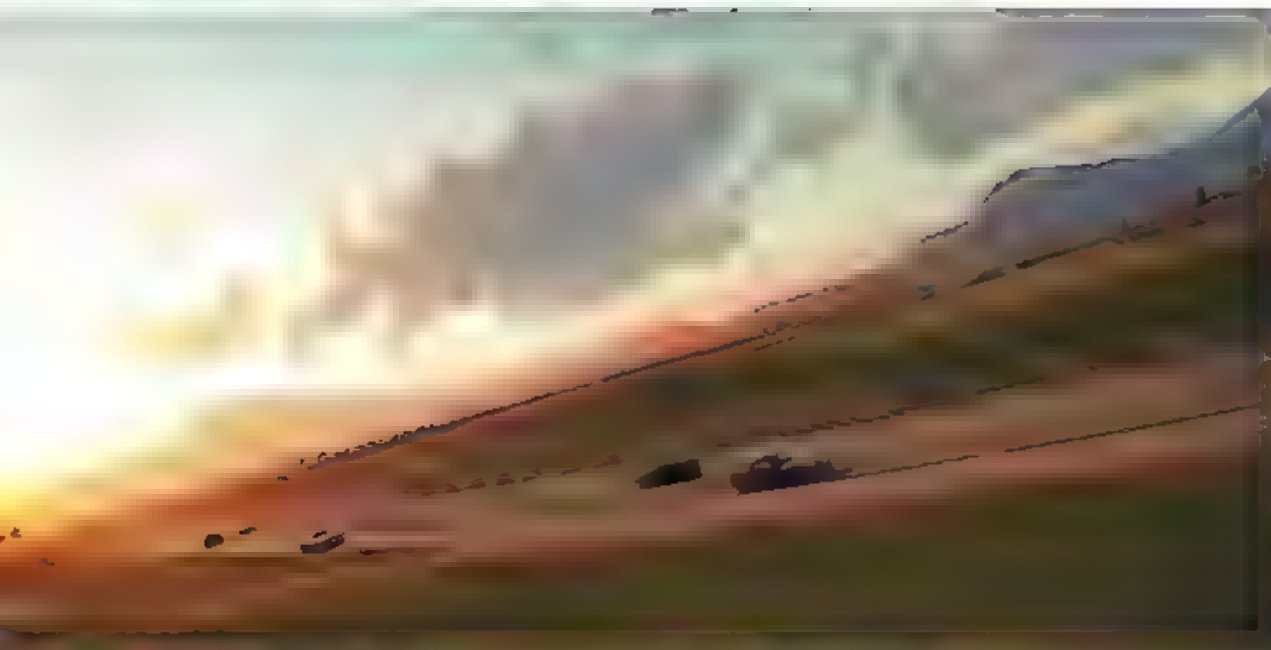
Along with the returning option to play through the campaign cooperatively with friends, 343 Industries introduces an episodic cooperative experience with enormous potential to change the way post-release content is delivered in games. *Spartan Ops* brings a new cinematic episode every week, along with five connected missions. The large battles and objectives available in these missions are ideal for a group of friends, and at a little over an hour per episode, it's perfect for a weekly gaming meet-up. I'm disappointed that this new cooperative mode replaces *Firefight*, but I'm stoked about a continuing narrative that will allow for a more cohesive story.

Multiplayer is rounded out by the return of *Forge* and *Theater* options for the more creative. Each of the multiplayer maps plus several variants can be fleshed out into wholly new levels inside *Forge*. I especially appreciate the new tools to make iteration easier, from magnets that click pieces together to simple button taps that replicate your last objective placed. Along with the new tools, the community has come up with such as gravity shifting. I can't wait to see what the community comes up with.

Whether I am watching a grenade explode or a Promethean into a shower of sparks or charging with friends at my side through a cooperative adventure, Halo 4 makes the series feel new again. 343 Industries' clear affection for the property shines through, leaving me thrilled to join Master Chief for another day in outer space of the galaxy. —Matt M.



Forza Horizon



1-Player Racing (8-Player Online) | Microsoft Studios | Playground Games Release October 23 | ESRB: E

Although Forza Horizon is an offshoot of the sim racer, it captures a lot of what makes the base series notable: Car nuts, decal artists, and those looking for an intense racing experience will all feel at home in Horizon's frontiers. Despite this game's homage to the original Forza, it also strikes out on its own. The open-world format allows Horizon to carve out a unique niche in the larger Forza franchise, but it's a little wobbly with its own boundaries.

In some ways, Forza Horizon gives racers the best of both worlds. A serious love of cars is married to a more accessible approach to the racing itself and game progression. While hardcore drivers will still find the upper echelon cars a challenge with all the assists off, those less skilled can still dial back the car handling at the wheel. If you're not a fan of the open-world endgame, regardless of how you like to drive, Horizon makes finding a race easy.

Horizon Festival event tiers unlock by earning different colored wristbands and, while the game's light story and characters are cheesy, they also open up other kinds of races. Showcase events are races against other machines like planes. Street Race Hubs are easy places to grind for cash, and you can race against Rival ghost cars from online profiles.

I am most impressed by the competition and progression inherent in the fact that skill points are constantly earned for all kinds of racing feats. Driving on two wheels, different kinds of drifts, close calls with other cars, getting air, and more topped my ratings in those categories, raised my popularity, and earned more credits. It also fueled my desire to progress in the game and gave me a great sense of accomplishment.

The game's variety of content, skill points, and multiple ways to earn money are all great features. Horizon's outposts are locations you can

fast travel to if you've completed that Outpost's three objectives. If you don't have the requisite car or need to upgrade, it's noncompetitive; you can buy what you need without having to travel back to the garage. Credits are plentiful, and you become attached to your rides since even the most pedestrian cars can be upgraded to higher classes.

Unfortunately, Horizon's overall stability, the game isn't as accommodating as it could be. This open-world game has some notable flaws. The Colorado landscape is gorgeous, but you can't get to much of it due to the many roadside guardrails that hem you in. This shrinks the map and limits how it's used in the game. One of the effects of this is that Showcase races are pointless. Where's the fun in racing against a plane if you can't chart your own path to an outback goal?

Being able to challenge other Horizon racers when you come across them in the world (even in point-to-point races) is fun, but beating them isn't tied to your progress in the Festival. Moreover, the game's single- and multiplayer portions are separate, so you can't meet up with and race your friends like in Test Drive Unlimited 2. That said, Forza's online Playground games (including my favorite, Car Hunt Motors) and the co-op challenges available in online Free Roam (like trying to get all eight players to cross a speed trap barrier at a roadside high-speed) are really fun.

Forza Horizon is a well-crafted game that offers an enjoyable racing experience that accommodates different approaches. It's not a complete experience, but it's a take-

Homecoming | What does the series

8.5

Score: 86%

Pros: Fun

Bring the Forza series' love of cars to an open-world format

Cons: None

The game has some stunning vistas (including real-time day-to-night shifts), and the cars are fast and smooth, too

Draw: None

There are three radio stations: Bass Area (electronic), Pulse (alternative), and Rocks, as well as a fair amount of character voiceovers

Difficulty

The difficulty assists let you turn the handling to Forza like levels if you desire

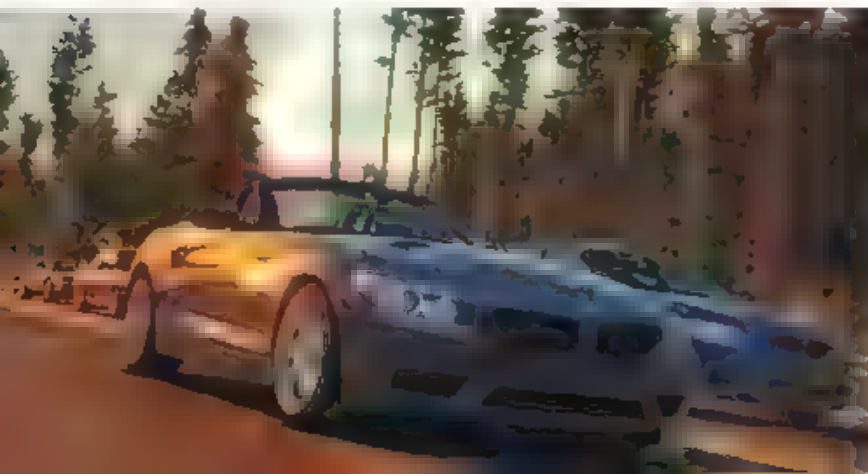
Open-world

Horizon lets you explore the open world, but I don't think it will save your wanderlust

Playability

Playability

High





The Unfinished Swan

Style 3-Player Adventure **Publisher** Sony Computer Entertainment **Developer** Giant Sparrow
Release October 8 **ESRB** E



PS3

» Concept
Explore a storybook world as Monroe, a boy seeking his mother's favorite painting

» Graphics
Sparse, but beautiful. Stark colors mix with minimalist backgrounds to create one gorgeous tree after another

» Sound
An appropriately pleasant soundtrack accompanies you during Monroe's story

» Difficulty
Don't bother with the Move controls, as the Dual Shock 3 is the best way to explore

» In a Nutshell
It's brief and uncomplicated, but I enjoyed every second

» Replay Value
Moderate

The Unfinished Swan's opening cutscene introduces us to Monroe, a child whose mother loved to paint. His favorite painting she made was the unfinished swan, and he wakes up one day to find it missing. The scene transitions into gameplay, although you can't interact for not realizing it immediately: With only a white paint visible against a plain white background, it isn't immediately apparent that you're in control. Once you experiment a bit, you learn that Monroe can throw balls of black paint that reveal the surrounding environment. The concept is novel, but wouldn't make for much of a game by itself. Thankfully, The Unfinished Swan consistently switches up gameplay mechanics, ensuring that it stays interesting throughout.

A running theme is the feeling of disorientation, and you experience it early on as you wildly toss paint across a garden to discover the path forward. At one point, you reach an elevated platform that allows you to look back at the paint-splashed route you took to your current position. The artistic direction is stunning throughout. The Unfinished Swan, and this is just one of the sights that struck with me after my playthrough.

Soon after that moment is another striking visual, and you are treated to many more as you progress. I don't want to spoil these moments here, just as I don't want to spoil the subtle, great moments. The game's aesthetic, with its stark colors and minimalist details, is the primary joy of The Unfinished Swan, and you deserve to discover for yourself if the concept of the early stages intrigues you.

Monroe's story of losing his mother and her favorite painting is a sad one, but it also touches on the more uplifting themes of discovery and childhood imagination. Some areas encourage you to take your time and experiment with the world around you, while you'll want to escape others as soon as possible. No matter which area you're in, the game is fantastic, all making you feel like you're a wide-eyed child in a living storybook.

Regardless of the changing goals and mechanics, you throw balls from a first-person perspective (throughout the game, but their function changes dramatically between areas. None of the levels drag on too long, as the world tends to shift just as you're beginning to settle into a style of gameplay. While a couple of chapters are true standouts, each of them is enjoyable in a different way.

Similar to Journey, The Unfinished Swan is visually stunning and more focused on the experience than with testing combat skills or platforming prowess. Some collectibles are available in the form of hidden balloons and storybook pages, which might bring completionists back for additional playthroughs. While I feel that the overall experience didn't affect me as much as you might stay with me as long as Journey, it still offers plenty of unique ideas. **A- | BY BOB**



LittleBigPlanet Karting

Style 1 to 4-Player Racing (8-Player Online)
Publisher Sony Computer Entertainment **Developer** Joint Front Games **Release** November 8 **ESRB** E



PS3

» Concept
Take Sackboy out of his platforming world, and put him behind the wheel in a proper kart race

» Graphics
The adorable aesthetic of the LittleBigPlanet world is a joy to look at, regardless of whether you are in a kart or on foot

» Sound
With the racing action perfectly (every track invades your subconscious mind and reverberates between your ears

» Playability
LittleBigPlanet's platforming as a little floaty, and its racing feels loose. It's rarely a problem, but it does take some getting used to

» Difficulty
Sackboy's transition from platformer to kart racer succeeds and offers a fun experience surprisingly similar to the previous games

» Replay Value
High

The most important thing to understand about LittleBigPlanet Karting is that it feels like a LittleBigPlanet game. Everything you know about the franchise is here: customization, excellent soundtrack, creative visuals, collectibles, Stephen Fry's dulcet tones, that adorable sackperson, and more creation tools than any reasonable person could ever figure out how to use (somebody will, though). This is more than just a LittleBigPlanet off-shoot. It's a full entry into the LittleBigPlanet franchise that just so happens to place Sackboy into a vehicle.

The racing is simple and doesn't offer a lot of opportunity for crafty tactics. With the exception of a few little tricks, much of your success comes down to luck and avoiding death. You can drift around corners, and if you are able to maintain your slide long enough, you can activate a boost. Outside of that one tactic, your best bet is to think carefully about when to fire your weapons, avoid obstacles, and hit every boost you can.

Control feels loose, but not to the point of frustration. Much like Sackboy's platforming antics, it takes getting used to, but it feels right once you find your stride. Karting is a game that aims to appeal to everyone, gamers and non-gamers alike, and the need to play a few tracks before fully grasping the controls may turn away impatient players.

All of the available weapons serve both offensive and defensive functions. A handy air pop goes wherever missiles and other explosives sneak up behind you, calling out the exact moment where you can fire your weapons backwards to avoid a crash. Expertly thwarting incoming attacks from behind feels great, and the alert helps new players from feeling like they are victims of explosive circumstance.

Track creation starts out simple, blending aspects of LittleBigPlanet's past and ModNation Racers. Laying out a track and test-racing on it is easy. After that, things can get as complicated as you want them to. Everything from what's going on in the background to how players interact with the road is under your control. It's intimidating, but LittleBigPlanet Karting offers you every tool you need to make the course you've always dreamed of with a little imagination and patience.

The existence of LittleBigPlanet Karting is a bit of a head-scratcher. It sort of already exists in the form of ModNation Racers, and to make matters more confusing, it was made by the same development team. Ignoring that weird overlap, however, LittleBigPlanet Karting is a fun racer that almost feels more like a LittleBigPlanet game than it does a kart racer. This is more than just a vehicle for Sackboy—mascot potential is low. LittleBigPlanet game. **A- | BY BOB**

PlayStation Move

Embossed on the front of LittleBigPlanet Karting's box is a sticker that proudly proclaims that this game is compatible with the PlayStation Move. Be warned, though: If you want to play with the Move, you need to purchase the PlayStation Move Racing Wheel, a new \$40 peripheral. The game won't work with the PlayStation Move Racing Wheel. **BY BOB**



Professor Layton and the Miracle Mask

Improved presentation held back by a predictable story

Genre: Puzzle/Adventure
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Level 5
Release: October 28 (USA) \$10-

8

3DS

Concept
 Bring Professor Layton into the 3D realm for the first time

Graphics
 The series' distinct art style remains impressive even in the transition to 3D polygonal character models

Sound
 As always, the music and voice acting are top notch

Gameplay
 The puzzles feel more intuitive, though you'll still have to picture plenty of puzzles in your mind

Entertainment
 The puzzles are as good as ever, but the story falters slightly this time around

Replay Value
 Moderately High

Professor Layton and the Miracle Mask debuted as a 3DS launch game in Japan way back in February 2011 (before North America even got The

big splash of Japan's game and the possibilities of Nintendo's new technology. It's one of the best uses of 3D I've seen on the system. Instead of the flat, static backgrounds of previous games, Miracle Mask's surroundings brim with flowing curtains, fluttering flags, and bustling crowds. Turn the 3D slider up, and it looks like you're peering into a stunning paper diorama. While the 3D effect can still strain the eyes, I always made sure to look at each new screen in 3D at least once.

The traditional tip-toe-and-peek-for-hidden-come-and-puzzles has been replaced with a magnifying glass cursor that turns orange when you pass a point of interest. This also moves the camera around slightly, further selling the illusion of three dimensions. It's nice to feel like I'm not sneaking away at my back screen as well.

Instead of using static 2D art for character interactions, Layton and company now emote and move their lips as 3D avatars. It was strange at first, but now I think it would be tough to go back to the old style. Hand-drawn animation purists can still enjoy the plentiful traditional cartoon cutscenes.

Miracle Mask is the second entry in the proquel trilogy and the fifth Layton game overall. After receiving a plea for help from an old friend, the good professor explores Monte d'Or, a city terrorized by the theatrical Masked Gentleman. Some chapters jump back to Layton's hatless youth when he was first pushed into puzzle solving.

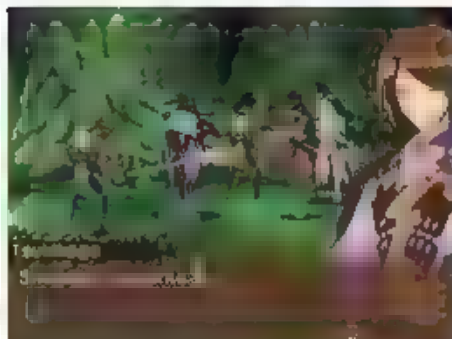
While I always enjoy the character interactions, the overall story didn't do it for me this time. You'll be able to deduce the big mystery right away, so it feels like you're simply guiding the characters along to reach the conclusion you reached 20 hours ago. It helps that there are still plenty of smaller revelations along the way and that the post-credit video teases the next game brilliantly.

And it's harder to rate the puzzles with each successive game in the series. They all have challenges that make you feel like a genius or that you've been robbed. There are some that enthrall you, while others are such a pain that you make it rain hint coins just to move on. The only real shake-up here is the top-down dungeon exploration section that appears later in the game. Here you control Layton in real time, rolling boulders, dodging mummies, and digging up treasure. I'm not sure I'd enjoy an entire game like this, but it is a pleasant diversion from the standard formula.

More new elements like this and a less predictable story would help push Miracle Mask up in the overall Layton ranks. — Bryan More

Puzzles, Puzzles, and More Puzzles!

If the 160 included puzzles aren't enough for you, Miracle Mask is offering a new puzzle to download every day for a whole year. That's 365 more than any single Layton game has ever had!



Code of Princess

Deep combat ignites frenzied battles

Style: 1-Player Action/Role-Playing
(4-Player Local or Online) Publisher: Atlus
Developer: Ageton
Atlus Entertainment Release: October 9 (USA) \$10-

7.5

3DS

Code of Princess' combat embraces depth and simplicity in a way that few titles have. Usually one trait is sacrificed for the other, but Code of Princess functions aptly as a best-of-both-worlds game. However, it's not for everyone. If you thrive off a frenzied challenge where missing a single block results in a "Game Over" screen, Code of Princess isn't your wheelhouse.

As a JRPG-brawler, Code of Princess takes cues from Treasure's classic Guardian Heroes. The inspiration isn't hard to spot—switching between the three planets during battle is required—but annihilating waves of rapidly appearing enemies is truly fun.

During the against-all-odds battles, you alternate between light and heavy attacks, specials, and combos. You customize your character by equipping items and distributing points into different attributes such as attack speed, mind, and defense. All of these are integral to success. The early levels are mostly stocked with cannon fodder, but the missions steadily progress in difficulty. Surprisingly, the AI is competent; enemies work together to outsmart you. It was struck by a freezing attack another enemy would queue up a power while I was helpless. Later levels test your ability to read your enemy; neglect the block button and you will die.

Like most brawlers, Code of Princess doesn't have much of a story. The princess Solange is protecting a powerful sword after her kingdom has been overrun by an evil queen that is summoning monsters, and you've heard this all before. The cast grows on you, but they're still average at best and can't compensate for the poorly crafted story.

Code of Princess is surprisingly deep, offering a challenge for those with enough patience to persevere. The short missions and easy-to-remember controls suit the 3DS well. However, Code of Princess' difficulty is overwhelming if your tolerance doesn't extend to repeated content and frustrating bosses. — Kimberley Wallace



Concept
 Hack and slash through waves of punishing enemies, all in the name of a sword

Graphics
 Characters are unique and flamboyant, but the environments lack inspiration

Sound
 Catchy tunes feed your excitement, unfortunately the tracks are overused. The voice acting is hit or miss

Gameplay
 Intuitive controls and simple missions make it a great pick-up-and-play game

Entertainment
 Plenty of combat depth along with a thrilling challenge makes it a worthy undertaking, especially if you can rope some friends into multiplayer

Replay Value
 Moderately High

Multiplayer Appeal

Playing story missions with your friends online or locally is fun, though versus mode isn't quite as worthwhile. Additional playable characters in versus provide variety but can be unfair to your opponent due to overwhelming power.

Q*bert!

Celebrating Q*bert's 30th Anniversary

Chicago has long been a major hub for the printing, finance, and meat processing industries. But the Windy City was also once the world's largest manufacturer of pinball machines. In the early '80s, Gottlieb, one of Chicago's premier pinball manufacturers, decided it wanted to dive into the burgeoning video game market. This initiative wouldn't change the world — it wouldn't even make Gottlieb a household name — but it would produce one of the most creative and lovable arcade characters of the decade.

FROM ACTOR TO GAME DEVELOPER

When Davis was a starving young actor who couldn't afford to pay the bills. One day while searching through the newspaper classifieds, an ad for Gottlieb's Amusement Division caught his eye. He had no idea how to make games, but it sounded like something he might like to do. "I had a little bit of engineering experience, so he figured he'd give game design a shot. Surprisingly, he was hired on the spot."

Gottlieb was based in the small town of Bensenville, Illinois. In an attempt to develop a think-tank environment, the company threw its hardware designers, artist, and all of its engineers into one large, crisscrossed manufacturing plant.

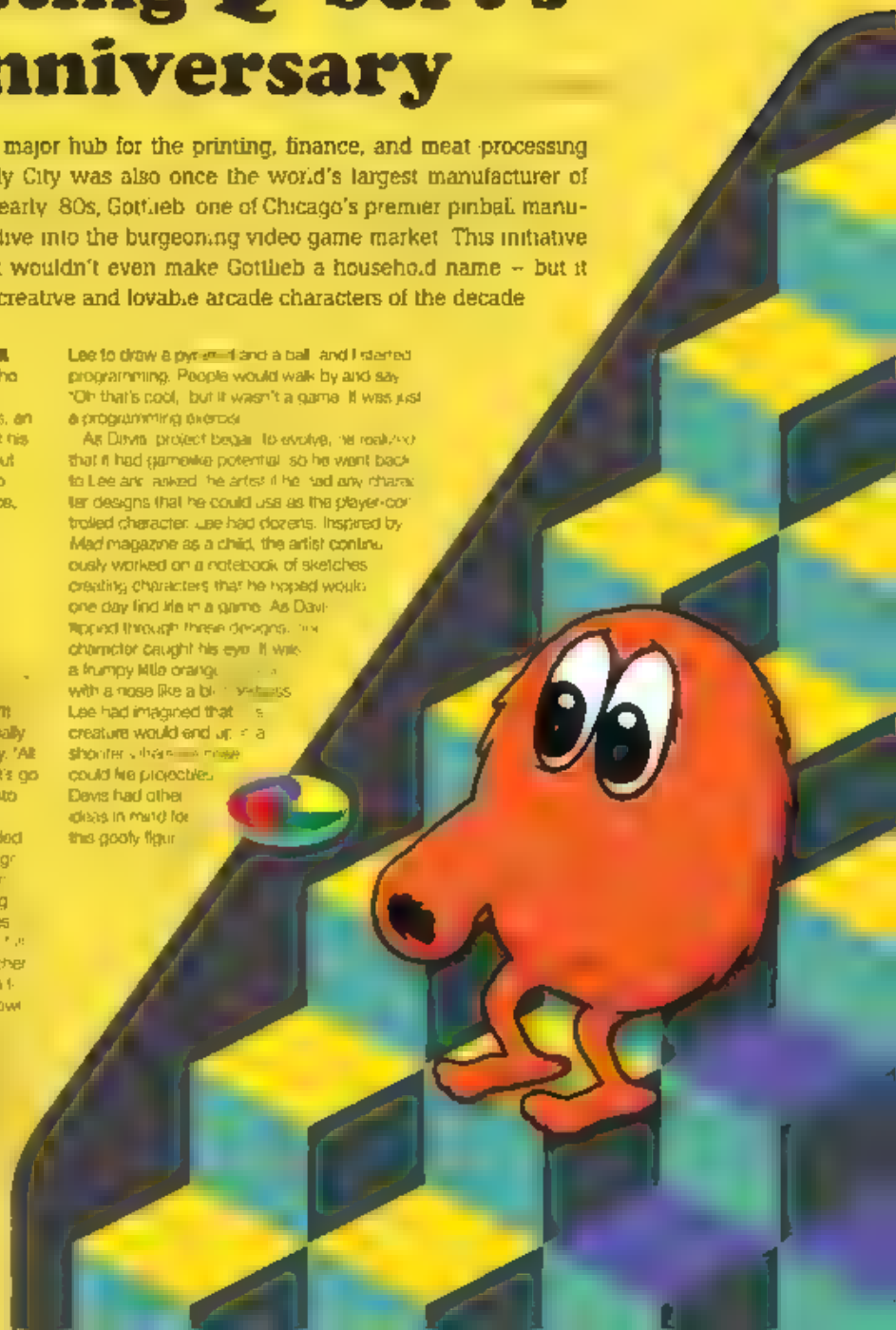
There really was not a lot of supervision, especially in those early days. Davis says, "It was a very laid-back atmosphere. Occasionally our supervisor would come through and say, 'All right everybody, you're working too hard, let's go and play some football' — and he'd take us into the plant and throw the football around."

Being a fairly green engineer, Davis decided to give himself a project that would challenge his programming skills. An idea came to him when he saw a fellow programmer messing around with a program that removed pieces of a static foreground to reveal a background of cubes. It reminded Davis of an M.C. Escher painting, and that immediately inspired him to design a program where a ball bounced down a pyramid of cubes. "What would happen if a ball hit a cube and then had the option to bounce either left or right? Which direction would it fall? Davis was fascinated by the underlying math problems associated with a program like this.

"I thought it would be a great opportunity for me to practice programming creatively and randomness. For me, it was just a programming exercise," Davis says. "So I asked [Gottlieb's in-house artist] Jeff

Lee to draw a pyramid and a ball, and I started programming. People would walk by and say, 'Oh that's cool, but it wasn't a game. It was just a programming exercise.'

As Davis' project began to evolve, he realized that it had game-like potential, so he went back to Lee and asked the artist if he had any character designs that he could use as the player-controlled character. "I had dozens. Inspired by *Mad* magazine as a child, the artist continuously worked on a notebook of sketches creating characters that he hoped would one day find life in a game. As Davis flipped through these designs, one character caught his eye. It was a fumpy little orange creature with a nose like a bird. "Jeff Lee had imagined that this creature would end up in a shorter, where it could fire projectiles. Davis had other ideas in mind for this goofy figure.



Q*bert mouths off

Some of Q*bert's most distinguishing features were the crazy sounds the cabinet made. Gottlieb had incorporated a sound chip into its system architecture, and many of the company's sound designers felt that since it was there they should use it. Sound designer David Thiel tried to program the chip to say things like "Bonus Points," but after days of frustrating trial and error, the closest he could get was a robotic "Boqus Points." In the end, Thiel decided to throw random numbers at the sound chip, which made it produce the gibberish Q*bert is known for.

Thiel was able to program two intelligible phrases into the game, however. One occurs when players enter their initials for a high score, Q*bert says, "Bye bye." The second happens when the machine is first powered up, when a chipper mechanical voice says, "Hello, I'm turned on."

The sound chip wasn't the only source of Q*bert's audible oddities. Near the end of the game's development, one of the company's engineers had the idea to attach a pinball knocker to the inside of the cabinet. When Q*bert fell off the pyramid, the knocker would fall back and bang against the side of the cabinet, creating the illusion that Q*bert had just fallen into the bottom of the cabinet.

"I liked the idea, but I thought that Q*bert hitting the ground shouldn't sound like someone knocking on the door," Davis says. "It should sound like a sack of potatoes hitting the ground. It should sound like a thud."

The team attached a little piece of foam to the inside of the machine, which altered the effect enough to create a proper thud. However, Gottlieb's management felt that they didn't have the manpower to attach pieces of foam inside every cabinet, so most cabinets were released without the foam insert and many more were produced without a knocker altogether.

A GAME TAKES SHAPE

People at Gottlieb began to refer to Davis' project as Cubes, but it wasn't really a game. There was no goal—no reason for the player to jump across this pyramid. Then one day, Gottlieb's vice president of engineering, Ron Waxman, wandered through the office. He sat and watched Davis' project for a while, and then suggested that the colors of the cubes should change as the character jumped on them. Suddenly, everything clicked into place. That was the key to opening up the game. The goal of Cubes would be to start at the top of the pyramid and change all of the cube's colors as you jumped around it.

The rest of the game's design developed rapidly after that. Davis' still-unnamed character needed something to chase after him, so he went back to Lee and asked for more characters. Lee supplied him with a snake and a puffly little green man with sunglasses. Cubes began to grab the attention of the whole office. It looked like the kind of project that could actually succeed and help Gottlieb break into the video arcade market.

However, not everyone agreed with all of Davis' design decisions. Since the character in Cubes always jumped diagonally, Davis felt it made sense to rotate the joystick 45 degrees in order to reflect the character's movements. Many arcade traditionalists within the company thought that an arcade joystick should line up horizontally and vertically, like a plus sign, because that's how arcade joysticks were always positioned. Davis won the battle, but when the cabinet went out to the test market, the rotated control scheme confused some players.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The name of Davis' game went through an almost greater evolution than the game itself. Many people within the company felt like the game should be named after its lead character, but no one knew what that should be. Gottlieb's vice president of marketing wanted to call the game "Q*bert", and a number of test cabinets actually left the factory with that title printed onto the side of the machine. However, Q*bert seemed like an unworkable title. What would people actually call it? How would people tell their friends about this game? Gottlieb had to find an official name for the game before retail cabinets were manufactured.

"I'm really bad at naming things," Davis admits. "So I went around the office with a notepad and asked for everyone's ideas."

Davis ended up with a list of about 60 names, including titles like Snots And Boogers and Arnie Aardvark, but none of the titles felt right. In a meeting with Gottlieb creative leads, Davis tried to hammer out a name for his game. Someone in the meeting suggested that the main character should be called Hubert. Someone else riffed off that idea, suggesting Cubert, which tied back to the original Cubes concept. Davis liked the sound of Cubert, but he wanted the name to stand out visually, so Gottlieb's art director changed the name to Q-beret, a name that retained the same phonetic pronunciation, but seemed more eye catching. In one final fit of whimsy, Lee changed the dash in the game's title into an asterisk, and the game was christened Q*bert.

"We were all like 'Yeah!' It was kind of a crazy moment, but we all just knew that was the perfect name," Davis says.

A LASTING LEGACY

Gottlieb debuted its new game in November 1982 at the Amusement & Music Operators Association trade show. The game tested well, but some thought it was a bit too difficult. "I watched a lot of people put a quarter into the game and then fly right off the pyramid," Davis says. "People at Gottlieb were also terrible at it, so I started to tune the game [to be] easier as we approached release."

Davis eventually grew to regret making the game easier, and immediately started work on a follow-up title that he simply called Faster, Harder, More Challenging Q*bert. This version of the game featured moving blocks, faster enemies, and bonus levels. It didn't test well. Many people weren't familiar with the original Q*bert yet, since that game had just released. Gottlieb decided not to manufacture what Davis felt was the superior version of the game.

The version of Q*bert that did release went on to become one of the most popular arcade games developed by a western studio, selling around 25,000 cabinets. Q*bert became one of the most merchandised arcade characters of the decade, right behind Pac-Man and Donkey Kong. In the early to mid-'80s, there were Q*bert coloring books, sleeping bags, t-shirts, board games, wind-up toys, and stuffed animals. In 1983, CBS adapted Q*bert to be part of its animated cartoon series *Saturday Supercade*. Q*bert's legacy even outlasted the decade. The character and many of his enemies are featured in Disney's new animated film *Wreck-It Ralph*.

"I've never made any money off of Q*bert, because we all did work for hire, but I'm incredibly glad that the character lives on," Davis says. "As a team, I think Jeff Lee, David Thiel, and I all share a pride in that legacy and it is rewarding to know that the game is still remembered this far along—even 30 years later."

If history is any indication, Q*bert won't be forgotten anytime soon. He's the kind of oddball character that is hard to forget. ♦

Designer Warren Davis poses in front of his creation



Pokémon's Burning Questions

Pokémon is a strange world. People are constantly solving their problems by making Pokémon fight one another, children are sent out to explore the world at a very young age, and evolution is more than just a theory. We wanted to know more about this bizarre world, so we asked Pokémon Black and White 2's director, Takao Unno, and producer, Junichi Masuda, all the questions we've always wanted answered.

◀ **What exactly happens inside of a Pokéball? Is there a home in there? Is there food in there? And can humans go in a Pokéball?**

Masuda: It sure would be interesting if Pokéballs existed in real life, and we haven't imagined that. But, in terms of what's inside of the Pokéball, it's a space that's incredibly comfortable for Pokémon. So comfortable that they want to enter the Pokéball without any sort of outside encouragement. What's actually in there is something we would like for people to sort of imagine on their own. In terms of whether humans can enter the Pokéball or not, it's called a Pokéball, so probably not. I think it's just for Pokémon.

◀ **There is a rumor that in the original Pokémon games, versions Red and Blue, that the Pokémon Ditto was a failed attempt at cloning a Mew. I was wondering if you could speak to this, to whether or not it's true.**

Masuda: That's the first time I have ever heard that rumor actually.

◀ **Is that your only answer?**

Masuda: In terms of how Pokémon are designed, they are each their own unique living being. The unique thing about Ditto is that it's a Pokémon that can change forms, but each Pokémon we create with its own unique element, so we just make sure that they are all individual life forms of their own.

◀ **Is everyone in the world of Pokémon a vegetarian? Do people eat Pokémon? When they are eating steak are they eating a Tauros?**

Masuda: There's a lot of fruits and vegetables in the world of Pokémon. There is also a variety of snacks and various candies and whatnot that come from the different regions. The Pokémon world is much more technologically advanced than the world of our own, so perhaps there is probably a lot of different food that we can't even think of.

One example of that is there is even a rare candy which is an actual snack or piece of candy that can make you stronger, raise your level. There are all kinds of strange foods that really don't exist in our universe.

◀ **It's funny you bring up rare candy, because my next question is if humans can eat rare candy, and what happens if they do?**

Masuda: You probably could eat a rare candy as a human, but it might not taste very good. It might be kind of like, an example of our world, a human-eating dog food. It's edible, but it probably doesn't taste

very good. You might hurt your stomach by doing so.

◀ **What happens when a gym leader runs out of badges to give away? Are they fired?**

Masuda: The gym leaders, they're primarily there because they have a strong desire to help trainers grow and really identify the good trainers. They only

give badges to trainers who they have recognized as being strong of heart and a strong battler as well. So they definitely don't quit when they run out of badges. The only time they would quit or stop being a gym leader is when perhaps their ideals change or they want to do something else in life.

And if a gym leader were able to actually give out so many badges to so many great trainers that they ran out of them, they would probably be overjoyed by that fact, that there were so many great trainers that came to challenge them.

◀ **We know the names of the regions in all the different games. We know the geography of the regions kind of mirror Japan and the United States. Our question is, does Pokémon take place on an alternate Earth, or is it in the future, or in the past, or is it an alternate present?**

Masuda: We actually don't think of the world of Pokémon as Earth. If we were to do that, we would kind of be limited by what we could do. By thinking about how physical objects work on Earth and how various elements work on Earth, we would kind of be limited to that if we thought of it as Earth. We think of it as a place that is really similar to Earth, but in a different planet of its own with people on it who may be similar to people on Earth, but they have different values so they care about different things.

It's the type of place, the Pokémon world, where problems we face on Earth just wouldn't happen. There wouldn't be global warming, water shortages, or anything like that. It's

a world where the people in it really want to work together with each other. Their value system is such where they would prefer to work together and eliminate those problems rather than feud.

◀ **Are there worker Pokémon in the world of Pokémon? Are there workers of Pokémon powering a city?**

Masuda: Pokémon as creatures, are much closer to — they're not like how our pets are on Earth — they're much closer to humans than they are to like a cat or a dog pet that we would keep on Earth. Because there is such a closer relationship between humans and Pokémon, most people in the Pokémon world probably wouldn't want to use Pokémon in such a manner as making them work to do something. But there are some people with bad ideas, or bad people in the Pokémon world who might try to do something like that.

◀ **In the same way humans in our world are a type of animal, are humans in the Pokémon world a form of Pokémon?**

Masuda: Humans are definitely separate from Pokémon. The way you think about it is different than how we think about animals in relation to humans on Earth. For example, on Earth we have mammals and reptiles, all these different categories. In the world of Pokémon, they are all Pokémon. We don't really categorize them in exactly that way. It's kind of a different way of looking at it. So yeah, humans are definitely separate from Pokémon. For example, humans can't learn four different moves like a Pokémon can.

◀ **Don't trainers who start their adventure in a town far away from the player's home town have a difficult time starting because of the high level Pokémon and trainers in the area?**

Masuda: If it were me, I would think about moving somewhere else, definitely. ♦



interview by Kyle Hilliard

STEP UP YOUR GAME



The next generation console is already here.

The Alienware X51, powered by NVIDIA® GeForce® Graphics Technology, plays thousands of games on your TV in full 1080p 3D¹ HD resolution and allows you to use the apps you want, like Netflix, Hulu, YouTube, Amazon Instant Videos, Pandora, Spotify, Steam's Big Picture browser and more. Yeah, basically anything on the web.

Stop waiting for the next generation gaming platform and get yours today at www.alienware.com/x51UGS

¹ 3D viewing requires NVIDIA graphics card, plus NVIDIA 3DTV Play software, a NVIDIA compliant 3D TV with 3D glasses, compatible media and HDMI cable, all sold separately.

 NVIDIA





WILEY PERIODICALS DEPARTMENT



Issue 298 • December 2014

www.gameinformer.com