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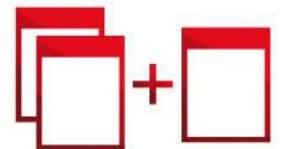
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And The Beat Goes On...

The first Call of Duty was made by Infinity Ward in 2003, and the world has been given a new Call of Duty in some form every year ever since. It has gone on to set sales records, and is a franchise that brings in billions of dollars. The series is a part of pop culture, sits in rarified air, and will be remembered and played for decades to come.

The amazing thing about Call of Duty is the consistent level of quality. Though the series has stumbled, most entries are impressive and engaging – and Infinity Ward's work on Modern Warfare changed the face of first-person shooters forever. Of course, the Infinity Ward that once created the gold standard for first-person shooters is no more; the company changed after Activision and its founders bitterly split in 2010, when Vince Zampella and Jason West were fired.

The studio was in tatters, but still managed to release Modern Warfare 3. Since then, talent from other development studios (like Neversoft) were folded into Infinity Ward to try to bring the studio back to greatness. I think it is more than a coincidence that Infinite Warfare is more than a little close to the name of the company creating it; this game represents more than a journey to outer space for Call of Duty. It represents an opportunity for a studio to be top dog in the world of first-person shooters, but the climb won't be easy.

Respawn, the company that rose from the ashes of the original Infinity Ward, is releasing Titanfall 2 later this year. Call of Duty's longtime competitor, Battlefield, is getting a new entry that goes back to World War I-era fighting. Infinity Ward knows Call of Duty is a juggernaut, but the competition is fierce. This year is more than a fight for our entertainment dollars; it is a battle rooted at the core of who Infinity Ward is, and the team is pulling out all of the stops to reclaim its crown.

Enjoy the issue.

Cheers,

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

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

0716

36 Call Of Duty: Infinite Warfare

Infinity Ward is back in the driver's seat, taking the series further into the future than ever before. We traveled to the studio to see what's next for the world's most successful shooter. *by Daniel Tack*

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Destiny's next big expansion is in the works, and we have the first details from Bungie.

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We spoke with the man behind *Moon* and *Source Code* about how the Warcraft movie came to be.

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How do you create a fictional language from scratch?

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As the publisher/developer behind Assassin's Creed (and many other games) nears its 30th anniversary, we spoke with its CEO about where the company has been and where it's going.

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We visited Eidos Montreal to see how Mankind Divided is shaping up.

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DICE is looking toward the past while its main competition looks toward the future.

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We've spent tons of time with Blizzard's new shooter, and we have our verdict.

83 **Doom**
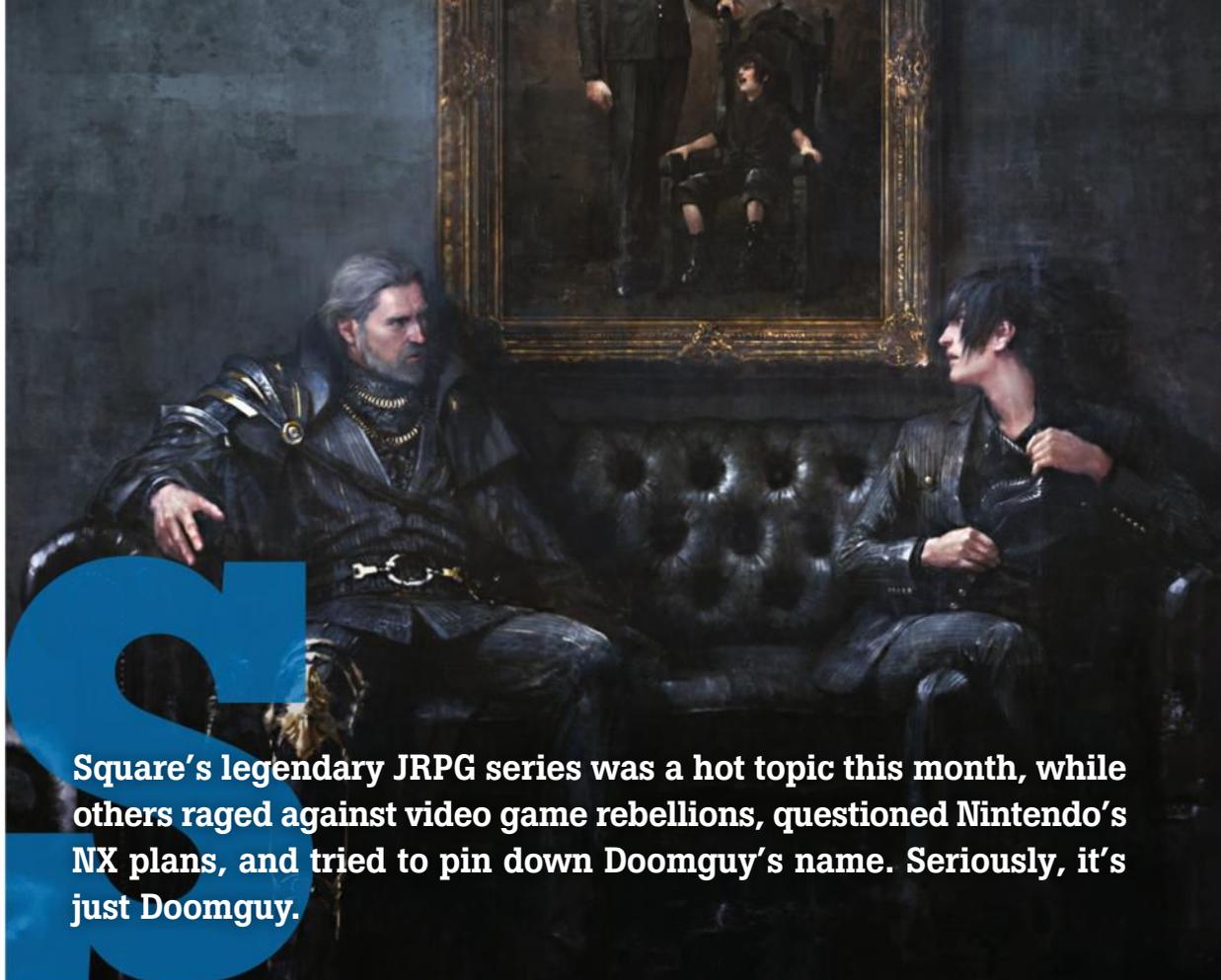The game that popularized the FPS is back. Does the franchise feel new all over again?

88 **Uncharted 4: A Thief's End**
Nathan Drake's story is coming to a close, and it's as engaging as we hoped it would be.

Square's legendary JRPG series was a hot topic this month, while others raged against video game rebellions, questioned Nintendo's NX plans, and tried to pin down Doomguy's name. Seriously, it's just Doomguy.

Finally Fantastic?

It was with great excitement that I pulled this month's issue of Game Informer from my mail box and found Final Fantasy XV on the cover (issue 277). As a longtime fan of the series, I've been more and more disappointed with every release since FF X. I didn't even bother to play the sequels to Final Fantasy XIII. As such, I have lost faith that the series I love so much will bounce back. After reading your cover story, however, some of that faith has been restored. I'd hate to see the RPG series that means so much to so many people fail.

Christopher Miller
via email

I just wanted to tell you that I enjoyed your cover story on Final Fantasy XV. Despite being a fan of RPGs, I've never gotten into the Final Fantasy series primarily because of the poor reviews that the Final Fantasy XIII games received. However, after reading your article I'm very intrigued, both by the game and the efforts that its creators are putting into making it right. If they can do everything they promise, FF XV might just get me into the series.

Katelyn Scott
via email

We heard from a number of disenfranchised Final Fantasy fans this month who are cautiously optimistic about the direction of FF XV. Whether Noctis' epic road trip meets their expectations or not remains to be seen, but one thing is clear from our time at the studio: Square Enix knows this is a make-or-break moment for the series, and is aware of its previous missteps. For more on Final Fantasy XV, visit our hub at gameinformer.com/ffxv.

A Fan Of The Man

I realized something after reading the newest Homefront preview: There are a bunch of games about rebellions, like Red Faction, pretty much all of the Far Cry games, and even Assassin's Creed. Too often the establishment is seen as the enemy. One of the things I liked about Skyrim and Brink was that you could choose to align yourself with the people in power; there was a choice in deciding whether to be a rebel or not. I feel that a game from the established government's perspective could offer unique story elements and add some new gameplay experiences by tasking the player with working to maintain something instead of just mindlessly tearing it down. If there was a good, anti-rebellion game out there, I would buy it in a heartbeat.

Liam Farrell
via email

Shootouts and explosions tend to favor rebellions over diplomacy, but the experience you're looking for may already exist in other genres. Series like Civilization and SimCity task you with building up and leading a society to prosperity, without resorting to bombs and bullets. If you're looking for something more action-oriented, Fable III lets you slice up bad guys while also running your own kingdom – but don't blame us if it's not as much fun as blowing stuff up.

Better Luck NX Time

Nintendo has informed us that its new Zelda game and the mysterious NX console have been pushed back to a March 2017 release. I'm totally okay with this, but what I'm not okay with is the fact we know nothing about the NX and that it's skipping E3 altogether. Nintendo has always done things at its own pace, but E3 is just nine months out from its supposed March 2017 launch. I don't feel like anything less than nine months is enough to successfully market a console. Right now, there are probably some fans still buying Wii U systems – it's gonna be a slap in the face when Nintendo finally says, "By the way, this new console is out in like, six months." I sincerely hope that whatever the NX is, it is amazing enough to sell itself and that we get the old Nintendo back.

Kolby Galloway
via email

Nintendo's announcement that it will only be showing Zelda at this year's E3 has raised more than a few eyebrows, but it's likely a reflection of the company's waning interest in the show itself, and not the NX or its software lineup. However, given the confusion consumers had over the Wii U, you would think the company would give itself more time to educate the public on its new console. Regardless of when Nintendo decides to reveal the NX, you can expect to read about it here and at gameinformer.com. That is kind of our job, after all.

Virtual Rivalry

I noticed in your VR roundup (Virtual Reality Races Toward The Starting Line, issue 277) that the Oculus Rift and HTC Vive have surprisingly distinct launch lineups. Both share a few games like Elite Dangerous, but Valve's The Lab is exclusive to the Vive and the Oculus-bundled Lucky's Tale is exclusive to the Rift. Even though these devices are very similarly designed and implemented, are we still doomed to have to choose between the two based on title lineups? I had hoped that VR wouldn't create another console war (peripheral war?), but it seems like if I get the Rift, I won't be able to many play Vive games, and vice versa. I know I'd be disappointed if I dropped six or eight hundred dollars only to find that my device wasn't compatible with a game it would have no trouble running simply because of a licensing deal.

Alex Marino
via email

The disparate launch lineups of the Oculus Rift and HTC Vive may be discouraging for potential buyers, but they're not the only ones taking a risk on the new medium. The slow rollout and adoption of VR effectively ensures that most developers creating games for the new devices aren't going to see a profit any time soon. Making their games multiplatform would certainly help recoup their investments, but it also adds to their upfront costs. We suspect a lot of the currently exclusive VR titles will eventually make their way to other headsets, but like all aspects of the nascent technology, it's just going to take some time.
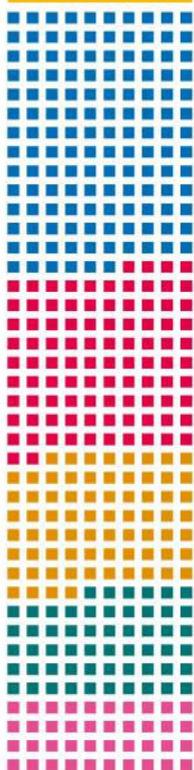
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gi spy

PHOTOS FROM THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

(Left) Wade secretly infiltrated the Infinity Ward crew during our recent studio visit thanks to his penchant for flannel. He's still there now!
(Right) Suda 51 was *really* happy to catch up with Mike at this year's PAX East.

Sequel Or DLC?

In issue 277, we asked readers whether they would prefer a year of DLC support for a game they already own or a sequel to it. Once we weeded out the wishy-washy responses (it's an either/or question!), DLC was the clear, not to mention surprising, favorite.

Personally, I think a year of DLC for a game you love is the best way to go. I mean, don't get me wrong, I'd be all over a sequel, but it'd take longer to develop and might not be as good. Plus, the DLC might even end up being free.

Austin Michelson

I would say a sequel is better than a year of DLC support. Why? Because the sequel will be new while the DLC is still part of the same game – why would I need more content than I already own?

Ahmed Abdalla

It depends. If the game wraps its story up in such a way where a sequel would be unnecessary, like Arkham Knight, then DLC is a great option to increase the game's longevity. However, if the story leaves enough mystery and questions to warrant a sequel, like Uncharted, or its universe is broad enough in scope like Fallout, then a sequel is great.

Tyler Cox

No Fly Zone

Like many gamers, I was introduced to the first-person shooter genre with the original Doom. With the new reboot to the franchise fast approaching, I still wonder why many sources say there is no name for the main protagonist other than "Doomguy." The 1995 novel *Knee-Deep in the Dead (Doom, Book 1)* gives our hero the name Flynn "Fly" Taggart. Why is it that only a few sources apply Fly's name to our lovable slayer of the demon hordes? Also, will the new Doom game give the character a name or simply refer to him as "Doomguy" as well?

**Ethan Pethel
via email**

According to the myriad game spinoffs and extended fiction, Doom's main protagonist has at various times been called John Grimm, John Kane, B.J. Blazkowicz, Stan Blazkowicz, and the aforementioned Flynn – none of which are any cooler than the fan-given moniker Doomguy. The truth? The protagonist is unnamed and referred to in the second person during the game for a reason: He's supposed to be you. In our hearts, however, he'll always be known as Doomguy.
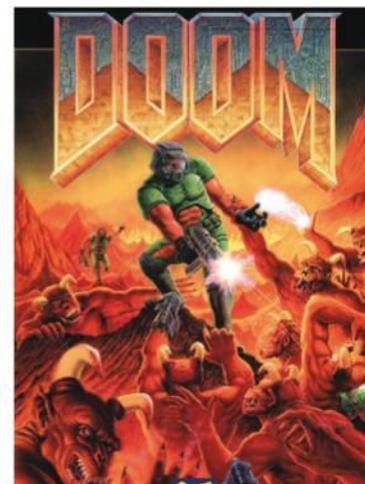
(Left) During a recent trip to Santa Monica, Kim ran into *Twilight* actor Kellan Lutz and wouldn't let him go until she took this picture. **(Right)** Kim also ran into *GameSpot* editor and former G.I. intern Mike Mahardy, who wouldn't leave until she took this picture.

gallery

(Left) A big thanks to all the G.I. fans who came to last month's Glitchcon to watch a live episode of Replay! **(Right)** Dan had a festive GDC thanks to Bender/Helper Impact's Kate Lollar, Trion Worlds' Evan Berman, and GREE's Steven Spagnolo.

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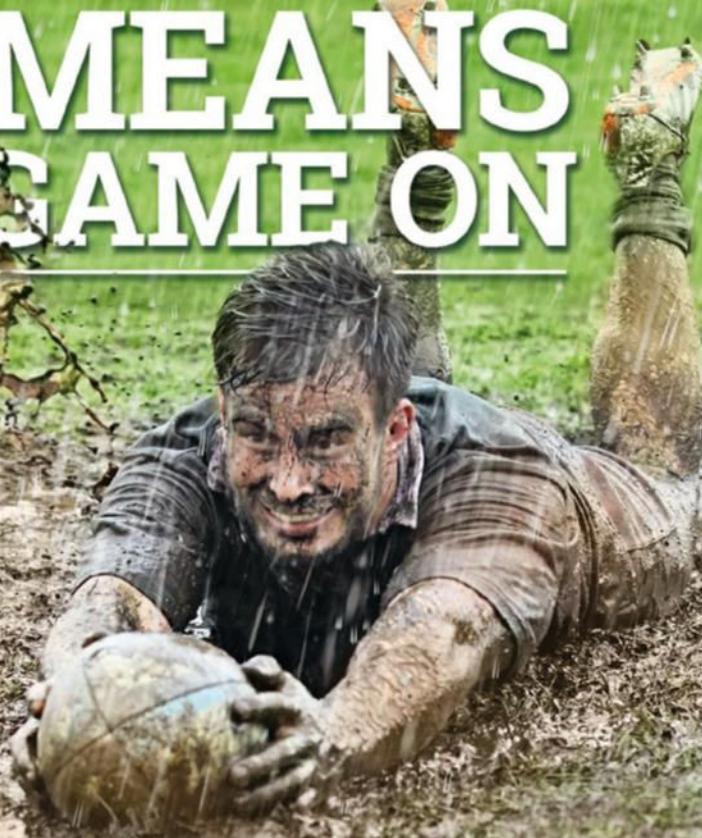
CLEANS A MAN UP RIGHT™

NOTABLES

Destiny: Rise Of Iron Targets September Release

Bungie goes new-gen only in latest expansion

In advance of the slew of impending E3 announcements, Bungie shared a taste of what fans can expect out of Destiny later this year. After a leak in late May, the promised expansion now has an official name; Destiny: Rise of Iron is the next large-scale release for the ever-expanding shooter. Like last year's The Taken King, the new content is steering toward a September launch date.

by Matt Miller

Longtime Destiny fans should have no trouble recognizing the title's origin. The Iron Banner competitive tournament occurs on a monthly basis, providing a focused event for players to test their skills against the rest of the community. But since its inception, the Iron Banner has also alluded to a broader narrative surrounding a cast of legendary figures called the Iron Lords. Rise of Iron puts those characters front and center in a new story-driven chapter set on Earth, and also introduces a new faction of enemies – a mutated twist on the Fallen aliens first introduced in the base game.

The Taken King established a precedent with the introduction of the Hive ship called the Dreadnought as an exploreable locale, and Rise of Iron appears to be following suit through a new area set on Earth called the Plaguelands. The new site is the home of a resurgent threat from the past, and one that connects to the new Devil Splicer faction of Fallen foes. Bungie is also promising a new social space for players to gather, but the details and purpose of the space are yet to be revealed.

"I'm really excited to finally tell the tale of the Iron Lords," says game director Christopher Barrett. "Players have been given small nods to the lore through evocative Iron Banner weapon names like Jolder's Hammer and Efrideet's Spear, but behind each name is a heroic story waiting to be told. That story will take players on their own journey deep into the Plaguelands, where they'll find a new cinematic story, new enemies to fight, new weapons and gear to earn, and of course, a brand new Raid to conquer, all on a quest to become an Iron Lord themselves."

In addition to a full campaign of story missions, players can look forward to an unannounced competitive mode, new Crucible maps, an as-yet-unseen three-person cooperative strike, and an elevated light value to try and achieve as they level up their characters. While details on most of the new arsenal of weapons remain under wraps, Destiny's most popular (and infamous) rocket launcher from Year One is returning. The Iron Gjallarhorn is colored in black and silver, and is currently designated as a pre-order bonus. Bungie also promises that all players can forge a new version of Gjallarhorn through an in-game quest, but absent the cosmetic black aesthetics.

One of the most surprising details to emerge about Rise of Iron is the decreased platform options. Beginning with this expansion, Bungie is abandoning PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 to develop Destiny exclusively for PlayStation 4 and Xbox One. The move allows Bungie to not be held back by technical constraints regarding future releases, but it also means that previous-gen players need to upgrade if they want to continue to experience new content for the sci-fi/fantasy shooter.

Back in June 2015, Activision CEO Eric Hirshberg may have telegraphed the writing on the wall in a conversation with Game Informer. "We'll never [let last-gen] hold the game back," Hirshberg said at the time. "I think people imagine that there is some sort of anchor around the ankle of the developers because it's on last-gen platforms. We develop the right game for each platform and optimize for that platform. What you're seeing on the next-gen is Bungie's full vision for that game, unencumbered."

Activision has held off on reporting unit sales for Destiny, so we don't know about the current split between players on old versus new consoles. However, it's clear that Activision sees Destiny as one of its most successful projects, as the publisher recently reported 30 million users – up from 25 million just one financial quarter prior. Rise of Iron undoubtedly hopes to continue the upward trend to close out 2016, even as Bungie continues to work toward the full sequel planned for 2017. ◆

Gjallarhorn makes a triumphant return in Destiny: Rise of Iron

A GAMER IN THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

We talk with director Duncan Jones about the Warcraft movie

by Ben Hanson & Andrew Reiner

Video game movies rarely meet the expectations of the fan bases, often spinning the fiction that made the games compelling into something unrecognizable. Filmmaker Duncan Jones, who directed *Moon* and *Source Code*, is hoping *Warcraft* shows the world that video games can successfully be adapted to film. As a World of Warcraft guild leader and lifelong gamer, Jones believes he knows what gamers want to see on the big screen.

When you are absorbed in the post-production world of creating *Warcraft*, do you have time to play games on the side?
All I do in the free time I have is play XCOM 2. That's my go-to escapism game.

Do you name everyone in XCOM 2 after *Warcraft* characters?
No, I make them all look like my friends and crew members. The people that piss me off get made tanks, and get thrown in the front. Everyone else I like gets to stay behind and snipe.

What's your favorite game of all time?
It's a tie between three different games. One is Syndicate Wars by Bullfrog out of the U.K., which was absolutely fantastic. You were the brains behind four android-like heavies down the street in sort of a *Blade Runner*-inspired city

from an isometric viewpoint. You could upgrade your guys to try and dominate sectors of the city. You could up their weapons and technology, and there was this constant wave of enemies you were dealing with as you were trying to complete missions.

Another of the three is Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe by The Bitmap Brothers back in the day. The Amiga version is the one that I loved. I know they've remade that game over the years, and tried to update it, but whenever they do, it just doesn't work. But for whatever reason, there was this magic when they first made Speedball 2. It's a future sports game somewhere between ice hockey, soccer, and mixed martial arts. It's incredibly violent with a steel ball that they throw to each other and a goal they try to get it into.

Finally, for my nerdy RPG credentials it would be Richard Garriott's Ultima III: Exodus.

Is there a British theme running throughout all of these games?
Well, I grew up there, so a lot of my early gaming came from the U.K. or just in Europe. But that's not true. Lord British [Richard Garriott] came from Austin, Texas. He's faux British. Of all three games, he's the only [creator] who has a medieval castle.

As a big gamer, when you heard there was a Warcraft film being made, did you petition to get it?
Let's get into the nerdy technicalities of it. I started and ran a guild in Ultima Online for years, and having run that for several years, and as that game finally came to a close with the cataclysm of Lord British getting assassinated in the game and the world overrun with demons, we decided to find a new game to move to. We moved en masse to World of Warcraft, when that eventually opened. We played that.

I became a fan of World of Warcraft because of my guild, but I had already played all of the real-time strategy games from Warcraft: Orcs & Humans on through. I used to bounce between the Warcraft RTS games and Command & Conquer back when there was an arms race for real-time games.

Do you miss the RTS Warcraft games? Do you think World of Warcraft has consumed too much of the lore?
It's kind of crazy how many real, serious, hardcore fans of Warcraft were involved in the making of the movie. Myself; Bill Westenhofer, who is the VFX supervisor; both Jeff White and Jason Smith, who were sort of the heads of VFX at Industrial Light & Magic; Rob Kazinsky, who plays Ogrim Doomhammer in the movie – all of us were hardcore Warcraft players.

We have this constant contact with the people at Blizzard and we're all sort of saying "You know what would be really cool? Why don't you make a new Warcraft RTS for the iPad or something like that? We really want to play one!" They were getting bugged from us all of the time to make a new Warcraft RTS.

Can you walk us through the early meetings with Blizzard, and what you thought their priorities were for the direction of the film?

I think since the very beginning of World of Warcraft – about 10 years ago – they have been talking about making a movie. I know that Legendary got involved very early on, and started working with Blizzard on the movie. They got Sam Raimi attached and started working with him for a couple of years on development, but things just didn't dovetail between what Sam and Blizzard and other interested groups wanted the film to be. Eventually Sam went off to do *Wizard of Oz*, I believe.

I had been a fan, obviously, and I had been following along with what was happening with the movie. I was bugging them constantly, and then found out it had fallen off of the tracks a little bit. *Source Code* had just come out and was being pretty well received, so I had two movies in a row that were doing okay, and I said "Look, I've only done two smaller films, but if I could come in and have a meeting, I would really, really love to do this movie. I think I could do something with it."

There was a little bit of a passing of time and then eventually I got a phone call saying, "Do you want to have a look at this script we got? We'd like to talk to you about it." I read it, and it was a draft that they were working on after Sam had left for a new approach to the *Warcraft* movie. It was basically going back to the first game, Orcs & Humans, and that first contact moment between them. It made absolute sense. I read the script and was a little disappointed because the one thing that, to me, Warcraft does is it takes the fantasy tropes and expectations and puts a little twist on them, and makes things a little bit different.

If you're used to J. R. R. Tolkien, and you're used to humans and very human-looking elves all being the good guys, and the monsters are the ugly things are the bad guys, that's kind of the fantasy people know. What Warcraft did in the early games is allow you to play as the Orcs, the monsters, and be the hero on that side, and have your own story lines and how to save the world for the Orcs. That was [Blizzard's] twist. Not to have that in the script was sacrilegious. That's not Warcraft anymore. My pitch was: "Look, I would love to do this movie, I like elements of this script, but you really need to get the audience to be as comfortable and care just as much for the Orcs

as they do the humans."

That obviously resonated with Blizzard. They thought, "Yes, that's what we've been missing," I did a rewrite and I integrated that into the script and everyone got excited.

In an interview, Sam Raimi mentioned he was put off by how much veto power Blizzard had with the script. Can you talk about how much power Blizzard ultimately had in the direction of this movie?

One thing you have to remember is they've been making these games successfully with the love and support of their fan base for 20 years. It's a huge business for them. They don't want some movie coming in and pooping on something they've worked so hard on. I get that.

As a fan, I don't want that either. As a fan, it's easier for me to come in and work copaseticly with Blizzard, because I kind of know what they care about. As much as possible, I'm in sync with that, and I want the same thing. It makes my job much, much smoother. If you are coming at it from a completely different angle, and you are fighting what they think Warcraft is, I can see that being very frustrating for both parties.

As a World of Warcraft player, did you hide your character in the movie?

I did not hide my character, but there is a very graphic and obvious shout-out to my guild.

How much did you focus on slipping in Easter eggs for fans of the series?

There're basically two versions of me that you get when I have to do interviews. There's the version that has to make it very clear that this is a film for absolutely everyone. It appeals to everyone, and has a narrative and characters that you don't have to have previous knowledge of. That is true, but for you, who are more game-centric and understand the excitement that people who love Warcraft have for this, there is so much buried in there and woven throughout the fabric of the movie that will get fans excited – whether they are going to go to the Lion's Pride tavern, whether they are going to see places they've seen and spent weeks, months, years of their life in. They are going to see those places as real, sumptuous places. They'll feel at home. I wanted to make the movie in such a way that it absolutely works as a movie in its own right, but for those

people who know about Warcraft, they're going to feel like they've gone home.

The film takes place in the time of the first contact between orcs and humans. Was it also in consideration to think about this being a franchise, leaving plenty of room to grow and get to the Warcraft III storyline?

I think everything is utterly dependent on how this film does, but just for the fun of it since you can't help yourself, when I was working with Chris Metzen [Blizzard's game designer] a bit, we talked about, "Okay, if we did get the chance to do three movies, what would those three movies be?"

We kind of have a sense of what those three movies would be. Anything beyond that is absolutely possible, but all things are dependent on people enjoying and wanting more after they've seen this movie.

Source Code **and** *Moon* **were ambitious films.** *Warcraft* **must be leaps and bounds beyond**

them. As a filmmaker, what's it been like working on a huge project like this?

As much as I may have consciously told myself I knew what I was jumping into with this movie, the marathon nature of this is something I wasn't ready for. It was three and a half years. With *Source Code*, we didn't even have a script, and by the time we finished the script, shot the film, and edited it, it was 12 months. *Source Code* was short, massively short in comparison to *Warcraft*, which is three and a half years. Trying to maintain the quality control, and the focus, and the energy, and drive for three and a half years on a project is really hard work. It's taxing. You know, we did it. I'm proud of it, and now I just want people to see it.

The internet is a hard place to live when you hear people talking about marketing but actually haven't seen the movie yet.

Are you going to bring your guild to the premiere?

Um… I don't know. I don't know if I'm ready for that [laughs].

Duncan Jones on the set of *Warcraft,* opening on June 10

The Good

RESPAWN Entertainment, the studio behind Titanfall, is working on a third-person Star Wars action game to be published by Electronic Arts. If the developer's pedigree alone wasn't enough, the project is being headed by Stig Asmussen, the director of God of War 3.

The Bad

DISNEY canceled its Disney Infinity toys-to-life franchise, but also shut down the internal studio behind it, Avalanche (no affiliation to the similarly named developer of the Just Cause series). From now on the company will license its properties, like Star Wars, out to others for future video games. Previous to launching Disney Infinity, Disney Interactive shut down several of its own internal studios, and back in 2013 when Disney bought LucasFilm Disney also closed video game arm LucasArts.

The Ugly

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA ON WII U

has been delayed into 2017, and will now release with a version of the game on Nintendo's upcoming NX system. This is bad news for Wii U owners, as they have one less exclusive title to look forward to on the system. It also signals the effective end of the console, since a chunk of its crowd will now buy the NX version instead. Nintendo only expects to sell 800,000 units of the Wii U worldwide in fiscal year 2017.

Quotable

"We'll deliver the new play in the new future with the cutting-edge equipment, technology, and the frontier spirit. The gear he's wearing is the extra-vehicular activity (EVA) creative suit."

– **Hideo Kojima** explains the 3D image of Kojima Productions' new logo.

World-Building With Words

How developers approach language creation in games

To feel a connection with the virtual world, we first have to believe in it. With sci-fi and fantasy settings in particular, designing fictional languages can help paint a more realistic world that captures the diversity and personality of its characters. Would Far Cry Primal's prehistoric setting be conceivable in modern English? What if Skyrim's ancient draconic tongue didn't exist? Whether they are pushing creative player engagement with ambiguous speech as we see in The Sims, or mimicking real-life dialects to give the impression of multiculturalism in Dragon Age Inquisition, video games are heightening the bar for immersion. We chatted with various developers about how they approach this unique and daunting task.

by Elise Favis

REVIVING THE PAST

When Ubisoft decided Far Cry Primal would be set in 10,000 B.C., the team faced a glaring problem: How would they coherently tell a narrative if all the characters are primitive cavemen? Would groans and grunts suffice? Before settling on Proto-Indo-European, Ubisoft first explored other routes, such as tasking its writing team with creating a fictional language from scratch. After realizing it would be too much of a strain on the writers, they looked for outside resources.

A member of the localization team suggested two linguists, Andrew and Brenna Byrd from the University of Kentucky. They had prior expertise in researching and translating Proto-Indo-European (PIE), a rudimentary language that was spoken between roughly 2500 and 4500 B.C.

"Toward the beginning of the project, when [Ubisoft] sent us an email, we actually thought it was spam," Andrew Byrd says, laughing.

The Byrds translated the game's 40,000-word script, which was previously written in simplified English. The colossal project tasked the two with building a fictitious language based on variations of PIE for three of the game's tribes: the Wenja, the Izila, and the Udam. Each tribe's name is inspired from a combination of words that best represent the tribe's mindset. For example, Wenja is derived from the word "wan," which means "to hunt." The Izila speak a language of their own — a more melodic iteration of Wenja. While the Wenja and Udam can understand each other, their dialects differ phonetically in a similar way that Southern English and New York English would.

Ubisoft wanted the Byrds to base the language off a more archaic version of PIE, which the linguists call Proto-Proto-Indo-European. Modifications were made to better suit the setting, and to accommodate voice actors who struggled with specific words. While the Byrds estimate that 95 percent of language in Far Cry Primal are reconstructions molded from PIE, the remaining five percent are educated guesses. In PIE, there are nearly 20 different roots for the verb "to shine," but modern words including expressions as simple as "yes" don't have an existing term. The two had to improvise with creative solutions, such as "yes" becoming "it is correct."

"[Accuracy] was something that was very important to all of us in the project, because Proto-Indo-European is something that many, many people have studied," Brenna says. "We wanted it to be as authentic as possible. We wanted it to be believable for other linguists."

The result was a rich, complex language that breathed life into the land of Oros and gave an aura of realism. A problem the development team soon realized, however, was that the foreign language would mean a heavy usage of subtitles. Ubisoft didn't want players to spend their entire time reading, so they put more emphasis on motion capture to drive home the narrative through body language and facial expressions. To test this out, the team revisited their previous entry, Far Cry 4, but this time entirely in Japanese.

"We wanted to see if we were able to understand what was going on in the world without understanding the language," says narrative director Jean-Sebastien Decant. "And of course, the body language, the emotion, and the situation made it very clear that people would get what was going on."

In the Dragon Age series, the Elven language is spoken without closing your mouth often due to its scarce usage of hard consonants

CREATING SPEECH FROM GIBBERISH

Far Cry Primal's language-building posed many questions. Could the game remain immersive even if players didn't understand a word? Would their interest wane? The Far Cry 4 test affirmed to the team that a story told entirely in an unknown language was conceivable if done right. In comparison, The Sims' creators at Maxis built a language that was supposed to be unintelligible, so players could create emergent narratives of their own.

During the development of the original Sims, which released in 2000, creator Will Wright and his team experimented with foreign languages such as Navajo for dialogue, but that idea soon fell through after the voice actors struggled with the performance.

"We brought in some improv actors from the Bay area, and we gave them those languages, but they were very confusing for them to work with," says audio director Robi Kauker. "They didn't know where to put their emphasis."

Two of the original Sims actors, Stephen Kearin and Gerri Lawlor, brought a new idea to the drawing board. They informed the team of an improv exercise where the goal was to build a coherent story using only nonsensical sounds such as hums and mumbles. From there, early iterations of Simlish were born. After seven days of recording improvised sessions of Simlish, Kauker and fellow audio director Kent Jolly spent six to eight months editing pieces of audio, mixing them up in new combinations to build the Simlish we hear in the game.

As the series matured, so did Simlish. A basic vocabulary began to form and phrases became more consistent. For example, "Sul Sul" is known as the hello greeting and "nooboo" means infant. The language is simple and much of it remains gibberish to this day, except for a short list of words that have their own definitions. While some vocabulary defines certain objects, many of the words have multiple meanings relating to various emotional inputs. This was especially prevalent as Maxis moved forward with The Sims 4, which puts emphasis on emotions more so than any other Sims game.

"We have a lexicon, but it's not a one-to-one translation by any means," explains The Sims 4 audio director Jackie Gratz. "It's more [based on] emotional context. We have five or six other words that in general express that you're enjoying eating something, or something is really grossing you out, or something has a flavor to it. But the words can be used in many different contexts within that general idea."

The team kept much of Simlish ambiguous for players, leaving it up to their own interpretations. Considering the series is user-generated in many ways, from home building to in-depth character creation, it comes as no surprise that the language, too, was there to breed creativity.

Reteaching Artists Their Songs In Simlish

When Sims audio director Robi Kauker spoke on the phone with David Gahan of Depeche Mode during the development of The Sims 2, the singer told him he had a very strange job — and he wasn't wrong. The two, along with other members of The Sims development team, would later sit down and discuss a script of lyrics that reimagined the band's song "Suffer Well" into gibberish.

"Suffer Well" is one of many hit songs that are recreated in Simlish, which appear in-game for your Sims to dance and listen to through CD players and stereos. Depeche Mode was followed by several other famous artists, including Katy Perry and the Barenaked Ladies.

The process begins with the sound team at Maxis contacting an artist of interest, with the musician choosing their preferred song to undergo the lyric transformation. A loose translation is then given to the artist, so they can rework their song to reflect their singing style and personality. Finally, they hit the recording booth.

THE ADVANTAGES OF FRAGMENTED LANGUAGE

A full-fledged fictional language is an ambitious task, but it's not always necessary, as we saw with The Sims. At BioWare, creating condensed, fragmented language was more efficient for its fantasy role-playing franchise Dragon Age, due to the large size of the writing team and the extensive lore of the game. Simulating a sense of realism was a primary goal, but sacrifices were made so intricate details wouldn't end up lost in translation. They settled on a compromise: The team designed bits of language and borrowed inspiration from real languages to build a world that is as believable as it is multicultural.

With an internal language database of grammar rules and vocabulary, any writer in the team can glance at a list of words quickly to grasp the many fictional languages from Dragon Age.

Thedas, Dragon Age's sprawling fantasy setting, is a continent filled with several empires and kingdoms home to elves, dwarves, humans, and others. While English (usually called "the common tongue" in-game) is spoken universally, each area comes with its own dialect, and several races have their own language they revert to occasionally with brief phrases. Most dialects and accents resemble real languages, such as the Orlesians speaking with French accents. The team saw this as the best compromise. The latest entry to the series, Dragon Age: Inquisition, covered more ground than any other installment. The deeper the lore and cultures became, the greater the team wished to flesh out fictional languages too.

For the languages that are completely fictitious, it's a different story. The two most complex languages, and most heard in the series, are Qunlat (spoken by the Qunari) and Elven (spoken primarily by the Dalish elves), though these are far from fully realized languages. BioWare describes them as being closer to ciphers.

"In both cases, they are languages that are good for communicating simple feelings, or pointing at something and saying what that thing is," says BioWare writer Patrick Weekes. "They're not languages that you can use to get instructions on how to program your microwave."

This was deliberate, because a language with extensive vocabulary and grammar would mean each writer would have to learn a new language from scratch. But the purpose of this direction goes deeper: Fragmented language is used to illustrate how little is known about Elven in the world.

"It was deliberate that it was just fragments, because until you get to Inquisition, there's not a single elf in any of the Dragon Age games who knows how to speak Elven," says Dragon Age writer Mary Kirby. "The language is kind of a lost part of their culture, so they have phrases and words and that's it."

Qunlat features more vocabulary than Elven, though once again it remains fragmented. The Qunari are a brutish race that uses oral communication less frequently than other races do. Their speech is stripped to mere necessities, and most words have several meanings, which creates a highly metaphorical language. This makes Qunlat a challenge to write, whereas Elven is more difficult for the voice actors due to its sibilant sound.

TEACHING THE CAST A NEW LANGUAGE

It's common for voice actors to first struggle with learning a new language. With Far Cry Primal's PIE-inspired language being exceptionally in-depth, it required teaching and mentorship from the linguists. Every morning, Andrew Byrd would hop on Skype with voice actor Elias Toufexis, who plays the protagonist Takkar, to teach him the proper annunciations of Wenja.

"We would get together every morning on Skype and practice his hundreds of lines,"

Andrew Byrd says. "He's such a talented actor that he needed very little coaching."

The rest of the cast, particularly those that took part in motion capture, were guided through the language by Brenna. She taught three immersion courses on set. The actors would introduce themselves in Wenja, and speak it for the entirety of the hour. Then Brenna shouted out commands in Wenja, such as telling the cast to run around the room or pretend to throw objects. This is a technique known as Total Physical Response, an instructional tool that has been used in language classes since the 1970s.

"The actors would not speak, only react physically to what I was communicating verbally," Brenna says. "It's a little like the game Simon Says, except the challenging part is remembering what the words mean." It became a chaotic but fun activity that the two linguists believe was a turning point in the project, allowing the cast to become more comfortable with the language.

"As you can imagine, it's really hard to learn a completely made-up language," Andrew Byrd explains. "Not only do that, but coordinate it with new movements that are completely foreign to you, and express emotions within the cinematics – it was a very, very difficult thing for the actors. But in doing these lessons, Brenna really created a community among us."

BUILDING BELIEVABLE WORLDS

Whether it's using internal wikis for consistency or hiring linguists to build entire languages, developers are paying more attention to what their language conveys to the player about the universe they're stepping into, and as we've seen with these various games, it's paying off. Creating languages is an ambitious task, but the value is substantial: boundaries continue to be pushed to portray a living and breathing world, one word at a time. ◈

While Far Cry Primal's Wenja and Udam can understand each other, their dialects differ phonetically

Big Indies Aim To Steal The Spotlight

Abzû
PS4, PC

As E3 rolls around yet again, bringing with it the expected mix of announcements and reveals, the independent games movement continues to steam ahead. This month, we check out several of the coolest titles on the horizon looking to shake up gaming's biggest yearly show.

by Kimberley Wallace, Javy Gwaltney, & Matt Miller

If you're looking for something that's just all around beautiful rather than chaotic and bloody, Giant Squid's **Abzû** should be on your radar. Not many games give you the relaxing, meditative feeling that this third-person exploration game does. As a diver, you probe the world beneath, brushing up against aquatic life. You may be lost in the ocean, but it doesn't feel alarming. Instead, the vibrant atmosphere makes it feel inviting. For our most recent hands-on session, the orchestral music by composer Austin Wintory (Journey, Assassin's Creed Syndicate) was finally in the game, and it makes a big impact, by setting the mood and capturing the surreal feeling of just drifting through the sea.

As you swim, sea creatures react to you and each other; you can even latch onto larger fish to see the world from their perspective. One recent addition is implementing a food chain into the game as a way to juxtapose the beauties of ocean with its harsher realities. The experience also holds its share of surprises, such as drones that help you get past barriers and magical undersea pools that warp the environment into a more fantastical landscape. The story comes through exploring, and Giant Squid is already prepared for plenty of different interpretations when the games launches this summer for PlayStation 4 and PC.

Loot Rascals, a roguelike strategy game with collectible card elements, has some interesting talent behind it. Developer Hollow Ponds includes team members who worked on the quirky and experimental game Hohokum. We recently saw the new game in action, and though it has a fun sense of humor, it also delivers interesting strategy elements.

In Loot Rascals, you need to escape a hostile planet fighting zany aliens, robots, and monsters. You move across a procedurally generated level divided into hexagonal tiles, searching for gear and engaging in turn-based battles. The card collecting element is the most intriguing aspect; you can only equip a limited number of cards (which alter your attack, life, and defense), forcing you to choose wisely. You lose this equipment when you die, but when other players defeat the same enemy that killed you in their game, they have the option to either keep your gear or send it back to you. Giving it back allows your avatar to appear in their game and help them for a period. If they're mean and keep it, you can enact revenge and hunt them down. Loot Rascals launches early next year on PlayStation 4 and PC.

Loot Rascals
PS4, PC

We Happy Few
PS4, Xbox One, PC, Mac, Linux

Compulsion Games' **We Happy Few** makes you want to know more about its world immediately. In Wellington Wells (a dystopian, alternate version of 1960s England), everyone is taking "joy" drugs and you're just a downer who won't and is trying to flee the chaos.

After getting feedback from Early Access, Compulsion Games discovered people enjoyed its lore so much that they wanted more story, so it's adding specific narrative levels called "encounters," which will become available after the game ships. For now, the focus is on only one character and his escape.

This survival game has roguelike elements, as dying forces you to begin again in its procedurally generated landscape. To get past the delusional citizens, you must craft everything from weapons to disguises and make sure you eat and stay hydrated. Blending in with the citizens by taking drugs or wearing the right attire makes things easier. Otherwise, you must hide or stealthily take down the residents before they swarm you to death. Talk about a bad trip.

Strafe is a first-person shooter that harkens back to a simpler, gloriously stupider time, with sci-fi weapons blowing holes through monsters. It's loud, occasionally veering on obnoxiousness

Strafe
PC, Mac

with its soundtrack and waves of enemies, but the 45 minutes we spent with an early section of the game showed that developer Pixel Titans know just what elements of Quake and Doom to tap into when making this gory homage. The action is off the wall, with limbs and expended ammo raining down on the environment as you rush through each level, blasting everything in sight, never ever stopping because the moment you slow down, your odds of survival drop dramatically. Strafe is coming to PC in early 2017. ◈

Do Genres Mean Anything Anymore?

by Jeff Cork, Senior Editor

Let's play a word-association game. I'm going to call out a series of words, and your job is to think of the first game that comes to mind. Got it? Great!

First-person shooter. Real-time strategy. Fighting.

What did you come up with? For "first-person shooter," maybe something like Doom, Call of Duty, or Counter-Strike? Did "real-time strategy" conjure up memories of StarCraft or Age of Empires? And how about that last one? Are you a Street Fighter person? Maybe The King of Fighters is more your style? Or how about Super Smash Bro–NOT SO FAST!

Despite being a game in which your primary way of interacting with other players is punching and kicking, Nintendo's franchise isn't technically considered a fighting game in some competitive circles. Naysayers cite the game's easy-to-execute special moves, emphasis on platforming, and randomized item distribution as disqualifying factors. While I think those arguments are silly – and you can create custom rules to circumvent most of them – they're indicative of a larger issue: As games continue to borrow elements from other genres, the concept of genres as a whole has become increasingly irrelevant.

Take Rise of the Tomb Raider, for example. What is it? Lara Croft explores her surroundings, solving puzzles to navigate dangerous environments. That sounds a lot like an adventure game, in the same way that The Legend of Zelda games can be lumped into that broad genre. But hold on – there's a big emphasis on stealth, putting it in the company of series like Splinter Cell and Metal Gear Solid. Then again, you can also play it like an all-out action game, taking on foes like you would in a typical third-person shooter. However you decide to tackle combat, it's wise to put points toward the abilities that will best help your style, adding to the invisible damage rolls that happen behind the scenes. Wait, is it an RPG?

Ultimately, Game Informer filed it under "action," which is the big-top-sized umbrella that these hard-to-categorize games typically live under. Whenever I type the word "action" in a genre bullet point, it feels like a synonym for defeat. Once a game slips away from genres that are purely descriptive – first-person shooter, rhythm, racing – pinning them down can be futile. When I talk to my friends about a new game they should try, I rarely bring up the genre. Instead, the discussion sounds like an elevator pitch to a movie executive. "It's like Skyrim, but in a post-apocalyptic world." "It's Dark Souls meets H.P. Lovecraft." "Think Uncharted, without all the dopey jokes."

The indie game Stardew Valley was an office sensation, but not once did I hear anyone talk about it as being "role-playing," which is what we categorize it as. "It's like old-school Harvest Moon," was the common refrain, which summed it up about as best as possible.

I understand that categorizing is important for the magazine and a few other oddball instances, even though doesn't translate to how we talk about games as players. Netflix and other streaming sites categorize wildly diverse films under categories like drama, comedy, and that old bugaboo action, to make it easier for viewers to find what they're looking for. At the same time, algorithms create far more granular sub-genres – such as "suspenseful action featuring a strong female lead" – which are verbose, but certainly more helpful than "drama."

Other forms of entertainment struggle with this, too, as artists pile their plates high with a variety of dishes from the creative buffet. Many of us laughed more at the Hollywood Foreign Press Association for awarding *The Martian* a Golden Globe for best comedy or musical than we did with the actual film. Sure, it featured bits of comedy – and Matt Damon's astronaut did play some disco CDs while marooned on Mars – but does that make it a comedy?

In spite of my bellyaching, I'm trying to see the positive side of things. It's a plus for gamers to even to be able to talk about this. Think about how far we've come. RPGs almost always used to mean "Games where you buy new swords and shields on your way to slay a dragon or ogre chieftain." Now, an RPG can take place in a high school – or inside Bowser. Meanwhile, though I still may have to fill in "action," in the little sidebar, I'll do my best to tell you what's really going on in the meat of my writing. ◈

The views and opinions expressed in this column are strictly those of the author and not necessarily those of Game Informer

I CAN DO
THE FATALITY
WITH ANY
CHARACTER

NOT JUST A PRETTY HAIRSTYLE.

MESSY LOOK
FLEXIBLE PASTE.

AXE
STYLING

URBAN
MESSY LOOK
FLEXIBLE PASTE
BOOSTS TEXTURE INSTANTLY.

SHAPESHIFT ANYTIME.
ANYWHERE.

AXE
FIND YOUR MAGIC.

QUANTUM BREAK

While the Quantum Break live–action show left some feeling empty, that didn't diminish our enjoyment of Remedy's stellar third–person action shooter, which lets you tap into an array of time–manipulation super powers. Remedy's game/show hybrid was in development for over five years, so it took a few twists and turns along the way. We spoke with Remedy about this unique hybrid's extended development. *by Ben Reeves*

How does Remedy feel about the response to the live-action segments? Are you happy with how those turned out?

Sam Lake (creative director): Creating a live-action show that has both branching material and one-to-one crossover elements with the game was a huge challenge. Considering how hard it was, I'm very proud of the result we achieved. There were a lot of learnings along the way that I hope we can put to good use some day in some future project that involves multiple mediums coming together.

Time-travel stories are often confusing. What were some of the plot holes you had to fix during development?

Mikko Rautalahti (narrative lead): Usually, if you change an event around the last third of a story, it only affects the ending. With time travel, though, a change at the end can affect the beginning – and that affects everything. So you have to plan very carefully. One example of that is Beth Wilder. She's manipulating her younger self, lying by omission. We had to manage that carefully. If she knew too little, she wasn't effective; if she knew too much, she wouldn't be committed. She's quite ruthless about screwing up her own life. It says a lot about her character and her commitment.

Jack has a lot of time-based powers, but he still can't do a Max Payne-
style slow-mo dive. Why did you steer away from straight up adding bullet time as one of his powers?

Mikael Kasurinen (game director): The cinematic action of Max Payne was an homage to the legendary Hong Kong movies like *Hard-boiled* and *The Killer*. With the style and tone of those movies comes a very established choreography that is iconic for that world. It fit perfectly for Max Payne's unique blend of Hong Kong action and film noir. In our eyes Max "owns" those classic combat moves and it is a core part of his visual identity.

While we initially didn't explicitly decide to rule out bullet time, there was a clear desire to have a fast and energetic pacing for combat. Taking that into account, a huge part of the bullet-time experience is to provide the player a cinematic moment in slow-motion, giving time to be in awe of the spectacle. So it didn't quite fit with Quantum's faster pace and emphasis on combining the use of powers and attacks.

Did any of the game's characters change dramatically over the course of development?

Greg Louden (narrative designer): The cast of Quantum Break evolved throughout production. For example, we had three different Jack Joyces. A little known fact is that before Shawn Ashmore was finally cast as Jack Joyce we had Sean Durrie (now our

Nick) in the prototype phase, but we also had Gethin Anthony (Renly from *Game of Thrones*) in our first prototypes. However, once we had our final Jack in Shawn Ashmore we could find his brother William Joyce, and Dominic Monaghan was a natural choice. Along with this, we also originally had four main characters. However, we found it diluted the storytelling and we wanted a key focus on the protagonist.

Were you ever tempted to turn Quantum Break's live-action bits into their own standalone series to be streamed/sold on Blu-ray?

Thomas Puha (head of communications): No, not really. The live-action show is an integral part of the game, so it should stay within the game.

It seems like a lot of companies have had trouble porting their game to PC recently. What was your experience getting Quantum Break onto PC?

Puha: At the end of the day, we shipped a DX12 title on Windows 10, both of which were very new things at the time. There were definitely some challenges, and we've been diligently making updates to the Windows 10 version to fix the issues that the game launched with. Still, it was great that we got to bring Quantum Break to fans on another platform, and as a studio, the key learnings we took away from the development experience were incredibly valuable.

Are you hoping to work on Alan Wake 2 or Quantum Break 2 next?

Puha: I'm pretty sure we'd love to work on both, but like Sam said earlier, these are complicated business decisions, so it's not always entirely up to what we at Remedy want. We would love to make sequels for both, but on the other hand, we've got a lot of new ideas we would love to explore. ◆

Unresolved Cliffhangers

by Javy Gwaltney

Half-Life 2: Episode 2
01

Could any other game have taken this spot? Not only does the second episode of Half-Life 2's continuation end bleakly and with a series of unanswered questions, but it's been nearly a decade since then with no word on the next installment.

Alan Wake
02

Poor Alan. He goes through so much trouble to save his wife, only to end up in a mysterious limbo, exclaiming cryptically "It's not a lake…it's an ocean." Though Remedy followed up with DLC and American Nightmare, we still haven't received a sequel or an answer to Wake's current predicament.

Mega Man Legends 2
03

Legends is a great subseries to the beloved Mega Man franchise that ends on one heck of a cliffhanger, with Mega Man and friends stranded on a mysterious planet. Mega Man Legends 3 would have wrapped things up, but it was canceled in 2011.

XIII
04

XIII was a slick shooter with a great espionage story centered on protagonist Jason Fly being framed for the assassination of the president. The game ends with Fly facing off against the the true villain, but the lack of a sequel means we'll likely never see how that scenario plays out.

Darksiders 2
05

Across two games Darksiders built a fascinating world and story about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and the (premature) end of the world. The second game ended on a mysterious note, hinting at larger things to come in a sequel we may never get.

Conduit 2
06

Conduit 2 ends with Abraham Lincoln and George Washington stepping out of a portal wearing battle armor and coming to your aid in an epic battle…that never manifested because we never got a sequel, robbing the world of wacky sci-fi delights.

The Darkness 2
07

Jackie Estacado can't catch a break. After avenging the death of his girlfriend and trying to keep his powers in check, he faces off against the mysterious Brotherhood and eventually ends up stranded in hell, howling in despair. Bummer.

Advent Rising
08

The first in a trilogy that never came about, Advent Rising was an ambitious action adventure game with a compelling story that ended with a series of portal hops and a mysterious being leading our hero into the unknown future.

Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy
09

Psi-Ops let you use a number of psychic powers to crush your enemies. It also had an interesting military-complex action story that didn't get proper closure due to Midway Games' closure.

TO BE CONTINUED
10

photo: Florent Schmidt

Ubisoft's CEO Discusses *The Publisher's Critical Year Ahead*

Ubisoft is turning 30 this year, and with Assassin's Creed on the back burner, The Division off to a strong start, and multiple virtual-reality games in development, this is a good time for us to find out what's in store for the publisher. We sat down with CEO Yves Guillemot to talk about why Ubisoft makes a point of being at every hardware launch, the company's commitment to developing the industry in new regions, and the threat of a Vivendi hostile takeover.

Vivendi has been purchasing Ubisoft stock at a rapid rate. They now control 15 percent of voting shares. Are you concerned about this, and what are you doing to protect the company from a hostile takeover?

We are very concerned. We feel the way they operate is very "brick and mortar" style. They are not from our industry. They follow the old industry rules, without understanding that creative people are very important in our business. The quality of games is connected to the amount of freedom creators have and their ability to take risks and to fail. This gives us an opportunity to create new IP and new experiences that are difficult to achieve in a company that is managed differently. What we fear the most is that they would destroy our model and come in with their own. The second issue is that what they are doing is "creeping control." This means that they aren't making an offer for our company. They are trying to install board members and then take over. They won't actually buy the company. They'll just take control without buying it. But the main concern is that we'd become a totally different company than we are today.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently visited Ubisoft Montreal, and in a statement following, you said that the discussion was about "the importance of Ubisoft's presence in Canada." There have also been links to potential courting of public and private investment. Is there a relation between this and the Vivendi actions?

Justin Trudeau is a gamer. Having some of the best games in the industry made in Canada is important to him. He considers it important to make sure that Ubisoft continues to deliver high-quality games. When games are created in a country, that country can shine on the world stage. It's a showcase for what the country can do in terms of technology. Just like Hollywood did for the U.S. way of life and its attractiveness, video games do the same for the countries in which they are created. Video games are influential.

Video games are also a business. There is a lot of revenue generated from Ubisoft games, and we're going to have 4,000 employees in Canada by the end of the year.

It's not only the revenue that's generated in the country, though. It's the know-how and technology that is created and can be used in other fields. It's a new infrastructure that can expand to other businesses. There are a number of elements in creating video games that translate well to other fields.

While Trudeau was at Ubisoft Montreal, he took a picture wearing a VR headset. You've got a couple of games in development for virtual-reality hardware (that we know of). When do you expect VR to be a profitable technology?

It won't be long before VR will be profitable. We expected a medium start. Companies are able to deliver a number of headsets, and customers seem to like what they're experiencing. It's just the beginning of what will be delivered. Like any new hardware, it's the content that's going to make the difference. I think we'll have good content coming this year, and we have something new we'll unveil at E3.

Being present in the world and being immersed in a world that reacts to us will be another dimension in playing video games. If we manage to build the right experiences, I think that business will take off and take off quickly. Sony's on the way with a more affordable headset and it will help kickstart the new segment. We feel that it will be a huge industry, because it's not only games; it's movies, sports, education, and more. All of that content will bring new people to VR. Next year, we expect that VR games will bring in strong revenues.

Have the Rift and Vive shipping issues impacted how quickly that segment will ramp up, and has it changed your thinking about when and how to launch games like Eagle Flight and Werewolves Within?

Any problem has an impact. We have to be careful, for sure. It's making us say, "Okay, we're going to take our time developing the games. Let's make sure there are enough headsets out there so when we launch there are enough customers to buy and experience the games we make."

Ubisoft has a tradition of being present early on new platforms. What is the reasoning behind that?

This is something that's going to continue. NX is coming, and other new technologies are going to emerge. It's something as a company that we'll continue pushing forward on. When you arrive early, you learn how to deal with those problems and opportunities. What happens is very often you discover new types of experiences that haven't been created before, and generally they can attract new gamers. When we led early with Rabbids on the Wii, it included a Just Dance experience that became a huge IP afterwards. We found that new players were completely different than older players and were interested in playing the dance minigame more than the others. It gave us a chance to address that population, and we wouldn't have discovered that just by asking customers what they wanted.

For the development teams, the reward is a lot higher when they can innovate than when they have to chase after others who discovered new things. If you arrive early, you get to experiment with a lot of new possibilities, and you're in front of the industry with innovative experiences. When you arrive later, you're copying things that have been done, but doing them a little bit differently to ensure you enhance them.

You also find out early if the hardware is going to succeed or not. If it succeeds, you can increase the number of teams working on that platform. When you start later, you don't know what you don't know.

Are there any lessons from the Wii U you're using to adapt your strategy?

We could see it wasn't selling as fast as expected, so we reorganized around other platforms. With the Wii U, we were able to relaunch Rayman 2D. It was a good thing for the company and the brand and its fans. If you remember, it was supposed to be Wii U exclusive, but we made it multi-platform when we saw it wasn't selling fast enough. The Wii U has done quite well. It's still a Nintendo machine with lots of great franchises, and we've sold lots of copies of Just Dance on it.

Do you expect to be present during the NX launch window?

You can expect we'll support Nintendo. Nintendo is one of the best partners in the world.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visited Ubisoft Montreal to sample some of the company's upcoming VR games

Have there been any changes in the triple-A landscape since the start of the new console generation?

If we look at the environment, each time there's a new generation there are players that leave and new players that enter. THQ is gone, and a number of Japanese companies have invested less in the consoles, because they invested more in mobile. There's less competition in terms of number of companies compared to last generation.

On the other side, there are a few free-to-play games from different companies (Perfect World is one of them) that are doing quite well on console. That didn't exist before. There's also World of Tanks. So there are new types of games that have emerged this generation. One of the things that I love about this generation is that there's a chance Sony will beat PS2. We're coming back to a mass-market business that will spur another round of growth. This will give us the revenue to invest in totally new, big projects. You've seen a lot of things exploding this generation, like open-world games. At Ubi, we have a strategy in this area, and you're seeing games come from us that are using a combination of open world with persistence. The Division is out. For Honor is coming next year. We have a new IP at E3 that you'll love, because it's the 2.0 of video games. You'll have a chance to play by yourself, play with the community, and create content. The new consoles brought new connectivity and have given the industry room to grow fast with new experiences that didn't exist before.

Do you see games like The Division as this generation's open-world evolution? Is it the new standard? Ghost Recon: Wildlands seems like it might be a fit for this kind of approach; do you think we'll see elements from The Division in that game?

We have an evolution and new types of games on the way. The Division is a good example. We've become a service provider, where we have to make sure we have regular content and extend the experience, even if it's a challenge. It's something totally new for the industry and for us. I think we'll see lots of growth in games like The Division, For Honor, and the new IP. On the other side, we'll still have single and co-op games like Ghost Recon and the next Assassin's Creed, where you'll be able to play alone and with no persistence. They will be two different types of experiences. Ghost Recon, as you saw at E3 last year, is a new experience in an open world, which is a huge evolution. We feel those new possibilities are going to enhance community and the ability to create content so people play longer.

Are costs still rising, or have they leveled out now that last gen is being phased out?

Costs are under control. We have to make sure we can create content at a reasonable price. We have to create engines that are agile. We have to be able to use techniques, like procedural generation, to create spaces in which we can have lots of gameplay. We have to develop technology to cope with the new demands of 100, 200, and 500 hours of gameplay in our games. We have increased costs because of that, but we also have increasing revenues. We have to work hard with the teams to make sure we supply high-quality content to make sure people want to play longer.

Given social media and online retailers, is it possible to keep a game secret until you're ready? If so, what steps do you need to take to make that happen?

Because games are created by more and more people with lots of external partners, it's more of a challenge than it used to be. For us, it's important that we're organized well so we can prepare announcements and give gamers all of the information when we announce. When someone else announces our game, it's only part of the information. It's not complete, and it can be bad, actually. Gamers want the full picture to make up their minds. The better we all work together to respect the unveiling of a new project, the better it is for everyone.

Ubisoft has had a tumultuous relationship with PC gamers. There isn't a lot of love for Uplay, for instance. What are your thoughts about re-engaging with the PC community?

PC gamers are often early adopters, and they purchase new technologies and want to experiment with new things. We're trying to give them ways to use those new technologies for better graphics and other advancements. We make sure that our games are adapted to them, but we're not always as good as we would like to be. We are working to meet PC gamers' expectations. We've been working in the last five years to understand the needs of PC players and to release games that are fully adapted to the capacity of their machines. We also try to introduce new features that emerge first on PC. We consider the PC like a new console that's always a new console, so we can experiment with new things and maybe bring those to console. We've seen some improvements; we have a way to go, but we're on the right track to give PC players better experiences. We like customers that want a lot, and we're trying to serve them.

There has been a lot of talk about The Division. I know the team is working on ways to combat the cheating and exploiting. There have been some opinions suggesting that in order for the game to reach its potential on PC, it needs a "rewrite" in order to combat hacking. What are your thoughts on that?

That's false. The team is working to solve the problems we're encountering. They're not intimidated by the problems that we have today. They're working on these new challenges. Some of these were expected. Some were not. The team is hard at work to make sure we can ban cheaters. To do that, you need the right data to find out what they did. And we're also letting people who use exploits know that they could lose their progress or be banned. It's something that happens on new games all the time. It's not just The Division. Rainbow [Six Siege] was also affected by it. All games have trouble. It's a challenge, but the team is confident that they can find solutions for the problems we're encountering. They won't let the experience be ruined for everyone, and they are going to do everything they can.

We hear from readers all the time that there is still a lot of hope for Beyond Good & Evil 2. Anything you can share to keep the flame alive?

The only thing I can say is that at Ubisoft when we create a good experience, we want to come back with another at some point. I say regularly that you'll hear about [Beyond Good & Evil 2] at some point, but I can't say when. We deal with creators, and we have to make sure that they have the time and that they can

deliver what they want. Sometimes they start something, they stop, and they restart to make sure they find the right recipe to create the best experience possible.

About what percentage of Michel Ancel's time is spent working on Ubisoft projects?
It's a 50/50 split.

Likewise, fans have been clamoring for a new Prince of Persia. Is there anything you can share about that franchise's status?
As you might have expected, not yet. There's nothing to share at the moment. As I mentioned, we always want to make sure our franchises come back at some point, but I can't say more right now.

You're taking a big step with the Assassin's Creed franchise, taking the year off. Obviously this isn't your only annual franchise, but what did you learn from Assassin's Creed about managing a yearly franchise?
We learned to give a lot more time to the team so they can come back next time with the best possible Assassin's Creed. They're working on that to satisfy fans. In the meantime, we have the Assassin's Creed movie, which will give fans something this year. For a brand like that, there are business motivations, but we're under pressure from fans to release on a regular

basis, but with the best possible game.
    In this case, we stopped the annual cycle in order to put enough energy behind the franchise to deliver the best experience possible. We know what we have in mind for the next volume will be fantastic.

Will you ever go back to an annualized Assassin's Creed or, for that matter, any other franchise?
What's important is to deliver new, creative experiences. How often we release isn't the most important thing. It's how innovative we are in each release that's important. The model of having multiple studios on the project helps us to deliver innovation on a regular basis. When we look at Call of Duty, they have three different teams working on the IP. They are able to release regularly with high-level games. The most important part is if we have enough new ideas and the team behind the next game needs to feel that they'll do a fantastic job when they're ready with the game. The main issue is how we can deliver a game that will be fantastic for fans of the series.

Assassin's Creed has been fascinating to watch from a franchise perspective. It grew into comics, there's a young-adult novel coming, and of course the film this year. How does that change the way you think

about the franchise? Do you see this path for other franchises?
On top of Assassin's Creed, we had a good evolution with the Rabbids on television. That's pushed the brand and let people get to know the Rabbids better while we have been waiting for new possibilities for an audience that is large enough to purchase the game. It's going to happen. We can't say more today, but the next Rabbids will show that it was a good idea to wait and come back with a big, new experience.
    We have a huge advantage in the video game industry in that launching a game is a huge event, just like in the movie industry. This gives us the chance to create new experiences in other media that can have two elements. It can make the brand shine more and known by a larger audience. And when we don't release games on a regular basis, gamers can remember the IP because they consume other things than games. Our customers are watching TV and movies or reading books, they can interact in some sort with our IP. A good example is what LucasArts was able to do. They had the movies, but then they had games for a long, long time, before coming back with movies. The property was still hot thanks to video games. I think we are doing the same thing with Ubisoft IPs. Sometimes it's better not to release a game and instead make a movie or a TV show and then come back when the market is ready for the IP as a game. ◆

Crown Jewels

Class up your look with some video game jewelry

by Ben Reeves

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$149 | *gear.playstation.com*

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6 Warcraft King Llane Lion Head Ring

We don't know why you'd want to show pride for the Alliance, but you can with this sterling silver band. Even better, shove this replica of King Llane's ring from World of Warcraft on your hand and pretend it's eating your finger.

$249 | *wetanz.com*

3 Final Fantasy XV Silver Ring Of The Lucii Pendant

The Ring of Lucii has been passed down from generation to generation among the kings of Lucis, carrying with it their power and wisdom. You'll look equally smart wearing this intricately designed collector's item.

$250 | *store.na.square-enix.com*

4 Fallout Nuka Cola Bottle Cap Necklace

Nuka Cola Bottle Caps are the preferred bartering tool in the post-apocalyptic world, so you might want to keep one on hand. Cast in white bronze, each of these life-sized Nuka Cola Bottle Caps are unique thanks to their gunmetal antiquing and brush finish.

$60.00 | *store.bethsoft.com*

5 The Elder Scrolls Amulet Of Mara

In Skyrim, this enchanted symbol of Mara, the goddess of love, helps you get married. With any luck, this replica intertwined knot-work necklace featuring a 6mm turquoise center might help you do the same thing in real life.

$95.00 | *store.bethsoft.com*

7 Assassin's Creed Syndicate Belt Buckle

Nothing is worse than scaling a medieval church while your pants are falling down. Cinch that waist up with this 2.25-inch by 2.75-inch metal buckle, inspired by the design of Jacob Frye's belt.

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8 Portal Aperture Logo Cuff Links

Like Cave Johnson, you're a snappy dresser. Show your love for science with these officially-licensed Aperture logo cuff links. These rhodium plated cuff links with bullet back closures look great during any suit-and-tie affair.

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9 Mega Man Enamel Pin Sets

These stickback Mega Man pins are the perfect companion for your jean jacket. An 8-bit series features Rush, Mega Man, Proto Man, Roll, Auto, Dr. Light, Dr. Wily, and Bass. The anime series features Roll, Mega Man, Proto Man, Dr. Light, and Dr. Wiley.

$19.99 | *thinkgeek.com**

LEAGUE OF DRAGONS (TEMERAIRE) BY NAOMI NOVIK

Video game programmer turned epic fantasy novelist Novik reimagines what the Napoleonic wars would have been like if they had been fought with dragons. This Nebula Award-winning series finally draws to a close with *League of Dragons*.

$28.00
naominovik.com

ORI AND THE BLIND FOREST VINYL SOUNDTRACK

Moon Studio's Metroid-inspired Ori and the Blind Forest was a visual and auditory treasure, so it's fitting that Gareth Coker's soothing orchestral work is now accompanied by a stunning, hand-painted jacket from artist Aya Kakeda in this limited release LP.

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ZOOTOPIA

As the first bunny on Zootopia's police force, Officer Judy Hopps has a lot to prove. Unfortunately, she'll have to team up with scam-artist fox Nick Wilde to solve the city's biggest mystery in Disney's latest animated hit.

$39.99
disney.com/zootopia

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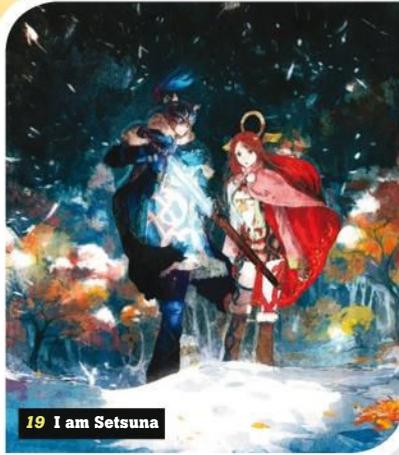26 Shiren the Wanderer

15

19 I am Setsuna

31

timeline

2016

July

01 The BFG
No, *The BFG* isn't a movie about the Doom video game. Today, director Steven Spielberg's adaptation of Roald Dahl's book *The BFG* opens on the silver screen. *The BFG* is a story about a friendly giant and a little child. It's basically *The Iron Giant*, but not as cool because it doesn't have a robot in it.

05 New Releases
› Rocket League: Collection's Edition *(PS4, Xbox One, PC)*
› Romance of the Three Kingdoms XIII *(PS4, PC)*

06.1 Justice League
The second month of DC Comic's *Rebirth* event welcomes a new ongoing *Justice League* series that kicks off with the team adding three members to its roster. DC is also releasing two new Batgirl series and *New Super-Man* this month. Yes, his name has a hyphen in it, and he's a new hero manufactured by China. Yes, you read that correctly.

06.2 Doctor Strange Prelude
Marvel's *Doctor Strange* film isn't due in theaters until November 4, but fans can get a jump on the story with the two-issue *Prelude* comic. The first issue ships today and begins with a mystical relic stolen from the British Museum. The Masters of the Mystic Arts are called in to investigate.

12 New Releases
› 7th Dragon III Code: VFD *(3DS)*
› Ghostbusters *(PS4, Xbox One, PC)*
› Mobile Suit Gundam: Extreme VS Force *(Vita)*
› Song of the Deep *(PS4, Xbox One, PC)*

15 Ghostbusters
A new generation of capturing spirits kicks off today with the theatrical release of *Ghostbusters.* The new team consists of the comedic might of Melissa McCarthy, Kristen Wiig, Kate McKinnon, and Leslie Jones. *Ghostbusters* seems like a perfect fit for director Paul Fieg, who brought us *Bridesmaids, Spy, The Heat,* and several episodes of *The Office.*

19 New Releases
› Ark: Survival of the Fittest *(PS4)*
› I Am Setsuna *(PS4, PC)*

21 San Diego Comic-Con
Over 130,000 people went to last year's Comic-Con, making it one of the most crowded, but exciting shows. This is the place to be for first looks at new films, television shows, video games, and comic books. Most of the creators of these projects are in attendance. Shopping remains a huge part of this four-day show, with most toy manufacturers bringing exclusive items you can't find anywhere else.

22 Star Trek Beyond
Chris Pine, Zoe Saldana, and Simon Pegg return to the Enterprise today in *Star Trek Beyond*, the third installment in the new series. With director J.J. Abrams exploring another science-fiction universe, *The Fast and the Furious* director Justin Lin brings this sequel to the screen. This may sound like a disaster, but Lin has proven he can make fun, team-based action. All he's doing is replacing cars with ships, right?

26 New Releases
› Fairy Fencer F: Advent Dark Force *(PS4)*
› Shiren the Wanderer *(Vita)*

31 Harry Potter and the Cursed Child: Parts I & II
Nineteen years have passed in Harry Potter's world, and he now finds himself working hard in the Ministry of Magic. He has three children, one of them named Albus Serverus, who is struggling with his father's legacy. *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child: Parts I & II* is a new story written for the stage by J.K. Rowling, John Tiffany, and Jack Thorne, debuting at London's West End on July 30. A day later, the book adaptation by Jack Thorne releases to stores. ✎

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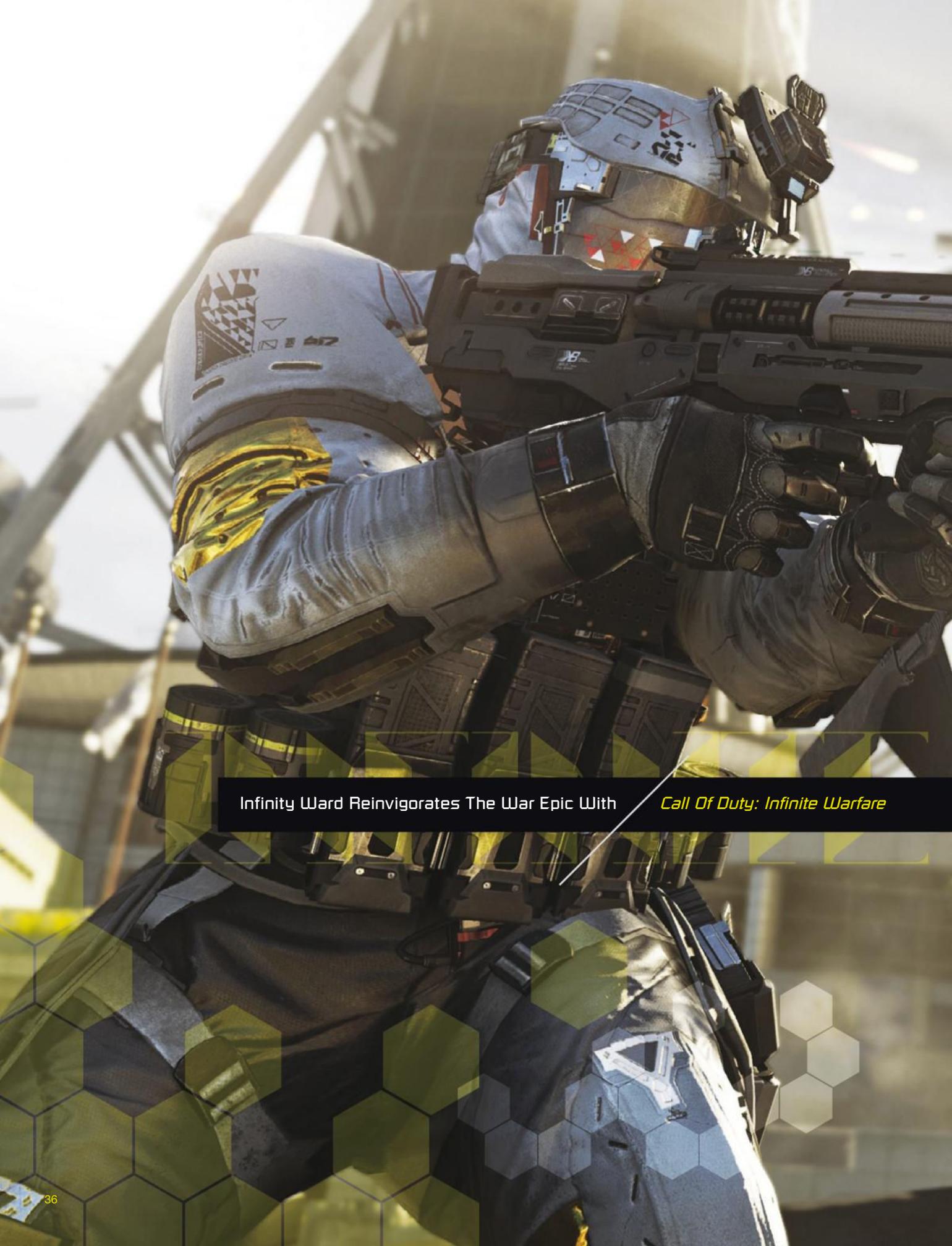Exclusive Funko Pop! Figures

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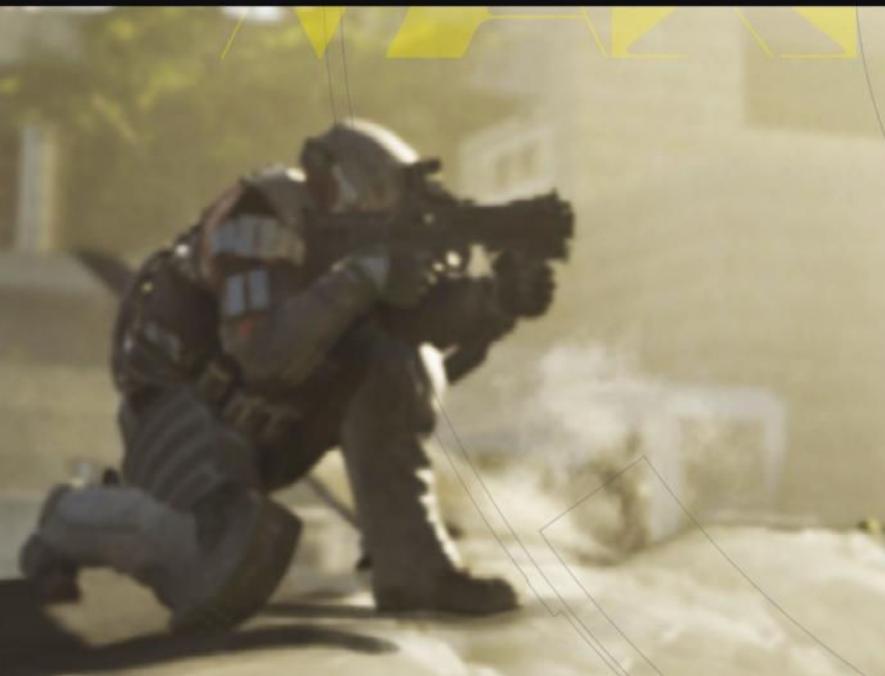New rewards are added all the time!

Infinity Ward Reinvigorates The War Epic With *Call Of Duty: Infinite Warfare*

BUILDING FUTURISTIC COMBAT FROM REALISTIC ROOTS

by Daniel Tack

» **Platform**
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC

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

» **Publisher**
Activision

» **Developer**
Infinity Ward

» **Release**
November 4

When Infinity Ward introduced the newest Call of Duty installment via a teaser trailer in May, many were taken aback by its hard sci-fi setting. Rather than dabble in near-future technology like Advanced Warfare and Black Ops III before it, Infinite Warfare warped into a new setting complete with massive capital ships, starship battles, and robotic soldiers.

Skeptics laid siege to the video reveal, making it one of the most disliked videos in YouTube history. Haters are nothing new to Call of Duty; as an annualized franchise, disenchanted gamers are prone putting the series in their sights. But this felt like another level of doubt.

To see how different Infinite Warfare really is from the rest of the series we visited Infinity Ward, which gave us a deeper glimpse at how the game fits together with its predecessors. While the latest game features things you won't find in any other Call of Duty title – such as combat in zero-gravity environments, flying around space, and dogfighting – it's rooted in reality, a boots-on-the ground saga its developers say is inspired by media like *Band of Brothers*, *Black Hawk Down*, and *Saving Private Ryan*. To that end, even though Infinite Warfare includes energy weapons and homing grenades, the franchise DNA is readily apparent.

A BLOODY BEGINNING

Infinite Warfare sets its events in the plausible future, with no date given. Earth's resources have dwindled down to nothing, so the planet's governments and businesses are seeking new power sources, fuels, and other supplies elsewhere in the galaxy. "Our rationale is that this is a universe where resources are scarce, and we are basing this all on the reality of what's going on today," says narrative director Taylor Kurosaki. "There's peak oil, we are running short of rare earth metals and minerals. We know that we're going to run out of things like this in our lifetime, and the off-planet moons, asteroids, and planetoids are a vast source of these rare materials that we will need for our further survival."

While the major powers of the world still squabble over control, space trade and travel is governed by a U.N. style organization, the UNSA. The starship fleets of the world have gathered in Geneva, Switzerland, for the annual Fleet Week Parade sponsored by the Solar Alliance Treaty Organization. The powerful peace-week initiative is cut short by a vicious surprise attack by the power-hungry opposing faction of the game, the Settlement Defense Front (SDF), an off-world group of insurgents who want nothing less than complete control of the galaxy. A sleeper-cell agent hijacks the Earth's planetary-defense systems and turns them on the parade, destroying the majority of the allied fleet in moments, while a simultaneous ground attack seeks to take out the world's leaders and other attendees.

We witness this chaos unfold during an early mission through the eyes of Lt. Reyes, a soldier thrust into the reins of command. Reyes is shoved directly into the action, using many familiar Call of Duty weapons like submachine guns and sniper rifles to survive the assault. The weapons have a familiar look to them, but some of them have a decidedly futuristic twist, like using energy instead of ammunition. We see some high-tech armaments, like a seeker grenade that crawls along surfaces before finding and annihilating its targets. Outside of robot soldiers and capital ships hovering above, the action is classic Call of Duty, with explosions everywhere as havoc reigns. Recent additions to the franchise such as four-player co-op and wide-open environments are absent, with things hearkening back to earlier titles in the franchise. After blasting through the battle-besieged streets of Geneva as the fleets of the world are blown apart in the stars above, Reyes is promoted to captain of the new home away from home in Infinite Warfare – the capital starship *Retribution*. With the original *Retribution* captain dead, and the world's fleet almost completely destroyed, Reyes must become the commander Earth needs to chart a course to victory against the brutal insurgents.

Lt. Reyes must assume leadership duties as captain of the *Retribution*

The *Retribution* serves as an evolving hub for the player

MEET THE CREW

While the *Retribution* houses thousands of people from engineer to soldier, the core team close to you plays a huge role in Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare. These are some of the critical characters you interact with on your journey to put a halt to the machinations of the SDF. Due to the global nature of UNSA, your team is composed of many various nationalities and backgrounds. Expect to some other major players as well, but these are the troops you get to know intimately.

Lt. Reyes
Nationality: American

The protagonist, Reyes, is forced into a commanding role, taking control of the last remaining UNSA capital starship, the *Retribution*. Before that he served in the Special Combat Air Recon (SCARs), essentially the equivalent of a Navy SEAL. As captain of Earth's last hope, the war hinges on Reyes's decisions. Due to the urgency and nature of the missions at hand, he must jump in the thick of combat with his team, making tough choices for the good of the mission – and not necessarily the good of the crew. While many Call of Duty titles place you in the position of a soldier following instructions and taking orders, this time around you are the one issuing them.

Adm. Raines
Nationality: American

Lt. Reyes' longtime friend and mentor, Raines would not normally be seen out on the battlefield in close-quarters combat. The events at Geneva put Raines and many other high-ranking officers and officials in the center of a war zone. Raines delivers news and offers advice to Reyes over the course of the campaign against the unshakable SDF.

Lt. Salter
Nationality: Lebanese

Lt. Salter has been Reyes's friend and wingman for many years. While Reyes' unexpected promotion has put added strain on their relationship, as she's now a subordinate in the chain of command instead of equals, Salter isn't one to hold back on speaking her mind. She has plenty of attitude and isn't afraid to challenge her superiors or take things off script during a mission if she feels it's the right thing to do. If Salter has something to say, expect to hear it loudly.

Sgt. Omar
Nationality: British

Sgt. Omar leads the Marines aboard the *Retribution*. He's sort of that hard-ass action-movie foil to Lt. Reyes who doesn't always agree with him, but gets the job done and always has his back in a fight. Omar is all about solving problems with action. He has a personal stake in the fight, as his family suffered at the hands of the SDF. Omar has a brazen, outspoken exterior, but always has his mind on the mission and his men.

ETH.3n
Nationality: American

ETH.3n, or "Enhanced Tactical Humanoid 3rd Revision" is a robot soldier with speed, power, and defenses that human troops just can't match. What separates ETH.3n from the hordes of retrofitted miner bots and other assault robots that the Settlment Defense Front has under its command is that he's one of a kind – a tactical soldier bot programmed to have human responses and emotions to every situation. ETH.3n grows with the team and individuals, even though he's not really accepted at first (especially by old-school troopers like Omar).

The Settlement Defense Front has retrofitted service and worker robots to become death machines

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

The Settlement Defense Front won't be earning any sympathy from most players, they're as "evil" as it gets. While the SDF does not consider itself to be the bad guys, they're scarily single-minded, true believers in their cause. A victory for the SDF means that essential resources and the bounty of space stop going to Earth for good. "They consider themselves the true inheritors of the solar system," says narrative director Taylor Kurosaki. "They feel like their way of life is stronger, more pure. They feel that by living off-world that makes them more worthy of running the solar system and consider the people of Earth weak fat cats that are living off the bounty of the off-world colonies. That's their point of view. But I also think that they are delusional, perverted, fascist, greedy, and are hell-bent on the destruction of the world as we know it."

These off-world colonists are sort of space-age gold-rushers that headed off to the frontier of space. As such they are all about functionality over style, which is reflected in everything from ships and weapons to combat armor. As you grab discarded weaponry and use it, you can easily see that these are no-frills, sometimes even repurposed items from tools or other equipment. They carve out their weapons with raw metals, eschewing plastics and mattes. The SDF has also reprogrammed and retrofitted many service droids to retask them from say, mining duties, to the destruction of their enemies. Solar panels, construction-bot trappings, and many of these other identifiers remain on their new forms. With the SDF's focus on pure efficiency, nothing goes to waste.

"They're willing to kill civilians, soldiers, and anyone else that gets in their way to take control of Earth and the galactic economy," says art director Brian Horton. "We wanted a functional-first aesthetic. Utilitarian. Practical and unrefined. Their suits are modular so they can mix and match pieces, with everything designed to protect them from the elements in harsh areas like Mars. We took inspiration from Soviet designs and British designs from the '60s, giving them a distinct look that gave them a silhouette that was intimidating and unique."

While the SDF has legions of troops, ships, and killing drones with no other purpose but slaughter, some standout faces are in the mix as well. One of these is Riah, a sleeper-cell stationed in Geneva who has planned for years to set off a chain of events that ultimately hijack the Earth's planetary-defense system and blow apart the majority of the world's fleet during the annual Fleet Week Parade.

Perhaps the most prominent of your enemies is Admiral Salen Kotch, the commander of the *Olympus Mons*. Kotch is the big bad and the leader of the SDF. The *Olympus Mons* is an incredible supercarrier starship, almost twice the size of the *Retribution* (900m in comparison to 590m), and the ultimate weapon of the SDF. This enormous capital ship's arsenal includes a devastating array of weapons, and functions as Infinite Warfare's primary nemesis, tracking down your forces like a predator seeking prey over the course of the game. While ultimately we expect to take on the powerhouse vessel, it is a force that will inspire dread and fear into Lt. Reyes' forces and the *Retribution*.

NEW FACES AT INFINITY WARD

Since the 2013 release of Call of Duty: Ghosts, Infinity Ward has made some significant talent acquisitions. The merging of Neversoft (Tony Hawk Pro Skater, Guitar Hero) into the company in 2014 and adding some new faces from Naughty Dog (Uncharted, The Last of Us) like narrative director Taylor Kurosaki and design director Jakob Minkoff have expanded the studio's horizons.

"Infinity Ward has a long history, and this incarnation of Infinity Ward is a new studio in many ways," says studio head Dave Stohl. "It's interesting because it's rooted with a lot of experience in this franchise, plus a lot of new people from other studios that have been kind of brought together. It's a collection of very experienced developers, but it's also a new group of people kind of working together for the first time as a studio."

CHARTING A COURSE

The *Retribution* serves as your base of operations in Infinite Warfare. You can hear the crew members stationed on the massive ship chat and interact with them as you travel to various sections of the ship, pop off a few rounds and perfect your loadout at the shooting range, check out the news reports regarding the war effort on the big screen, track your progress against the enemy fleet, and plan your missions at the bridge.

Infinite Warfare features core story missions that you progress through linearly, as well as a wealth of optional side missions that can offer additional insight into the characters and crew. These missions also provide new upgrades, weapons, and assets, so participating can give you an advantage when you move to tackle the core content. The look and temperature of the *Retribution*'s crew changes based on the mission you are about to tackle or the current events of the war, so expect to see it in states of disrepair, despair, or confidence as the war rages on.

"The *Retribution* is our home, an evolving, mutating hub for Reyes to come back to between each mission," Kurosaki says. "Remember that there is no backup for us. The *Retribution* was not supplied before the Geneva attack when this thing started, we just happened to be at the parade. We're not ready for a deployment. Your crew will be bringing together everything they have to keep that thing floating and keeping us from losing the war."

While this massive capital craft definitely looks like it could pass for a Star Wars ship on the outside, the interiors are inspired heavily by a combination of both Navy and NASA protocol and functionality. These modular and redundant designs offer parts available to be changed out on the fly depending on the situation, and giving the commander utility for any number of contingencies.

"It was very challenging to balance the elements of NASA and Navy," says design director Jakob Minkoff. "It's a unique challenge anytime you are grounding something to make it realistic so that it's recognizable, but also then see enough change that people can see why something may be still happening in the future. An aircraft carrier may be in service for 50 years. That means you can see technology from the '70s next to technology from the '90s next to technology from today."

REMASTERING A MASTERPIECE

Each copy of Infinite Warfare comes packed with a remastered version of critical darling and commercial success Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare. Infinity Ward and Raven Studios are coming together to ensure that the remastered version's controls have button-press timing parity with the original title down to fractions of a second. While the gameplay stays faithful to the 2007 classic, the studios are making visual alterations to take advantage of new technology, from squalls turning into hurricanes to lifelike whiskers on Sgt. Price's beard. Maps keep their original designs down to exact cover locations, but will visually better represent real environments with a new attention to detail.

"The environments are so iconic that it was really important for us to maintain the integrity of the playspace," says Raven Software studio director David Pellas. "We needed to kind of ratchet it up and not just in a visual way but with immersion factor. So we added a lot of interactive objects, a lot more detail went into it."

Alongside the 1080p overhaul, improved textures, lighting, audio, rendering, sound, and motion-capture enhancements, the team also took a look at weapons. While the weapons obviously shouldn't change much in the remake, the technology and rendering improvements has amped things up visually on the weapons to make details more realistic, down to where weapons are held. Raven is also adding little nuances and touch-ups to the existing armory, like scarring, scuffing, and little nicks in the wood stock.

One of the big questions among fans right now is whether or not they will eventually be able to pick up Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare Remastered outside of purchasing Infinite Warfare, and if not, why not? "I know we're very focused about it shipping with Infinite Warfare," Pellas says. "We think the new fans, the old fans, they're really going to love the value they get with them being packed in. As far as what's after that, I'm just trying to get the game done and get it out to the fans as quickly as we can."

SEAMLESS SPACE WARFARE

Infinite Warfare features three distinct modes of combat, and a player may engage in all three during the same mission. The traditional ground-based infantry warfare is at the core, but space combat both inside vehicles and "on foot" in zero gravity give Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare two unique distinguishing factors from the other series directions. From the surface of a planet or the launch bays of the *Retribution*, the player can fire off into space via the Jackal, the UNSA's take on the personal starfighter that Infinity Ward says is inspired by real-world fighter jets.

Jackals feature heavy guns, light guns, and missiles for attacking options and countermeasures like flares that help dodge incoming attacks. During space combat, you also take on turrets on enemy capital ships while protecting your friends and blowing apart swarms of enemy starships, which are called Skelters.

When you are ready to breach and destroy a capital starship, you have to pop out of your craft and enter the void of space to find a vulnerable entry point, taking on other human combatants in a zero-gravity environment where your grappling hook is an essential tool for moving around the environment on a capital ship exterior. It also serves as a deadly ad hoc weapon for pulling unfortunate enemy forces closer to tear their helmets off or send them hurtling through the void of space. These segments looked slightly arcade-like and quite different from anything we've come to expect in Call of Duty vehicular combat.

You face not only Settlement Defense Front soldiers, but deadly robotic enemies as well

Zero-gravity combat is an exhilarating change of pace, and you have special reactive armor available so that a stray enemy shot isn't a death sentence. As we all know that sound doesn't exist in the void of space, a special helmet dodges that plot loophole (as it would be incredibly boring, if accurate, to have soundless segments in a game like this) so that you can hear every powerful rocket-propelled grenade and clip blasted when you romp around on the outside of one of these huge capital vessels.

After infiltrating and disabling the capital ship from within, you can head back to your waiting Jackal and dart back into space to land victoriously at the *Retribution*. This cycle of space combat is unique to Infinite Warfare, and adds variety for players looking for something other than a traditional ground warfare experience. Enemy ship breaches can range from simple scuttling the ship maneuvers to more advanced fare like stealing technology or assassinating a SDF commander.

"The idea is that the whole game is this continuous experience," says chief creative officer Carl Schnurr. "You land in the Jackal, you board, you go up in the elevator, walk to the bridge, you select what you're going to do, go down, suit out, hop back in your Jackal, launch out, get onto the enemy ship, do all this stuff, back into the Jackal, go back, land, and just keep going."

The Settlement Defense Front focuses on efficiency and functionality

Lt. Salter is Reyes' lifetime friend and ally

STOCKING THE ARSENAL OF THE FUTURE

Infinite Warfare features more weapons than any other Call of Duty title. Weapons come in many recognizable styles and types, including different classes of assault rifles, submachine guns, sniper rifles, shotguns, etc. that players are already familiar with from military shooters. "There's a mix of energy and ballistic weapons," says lead weapon artist Sean Byers. "We're trying to create something believable and real, and have created the weapons to reflect that. Each of the weapon companies does a certain thing."

But while keeping the feeling of these weapons true to their original inspirations, the setting has allowed the team to create some more interesting guns as well, like collapsing an assault rifle into a submachine gun to switch functionality on the fly.

The weapons in Infinite Warfare come from five or six core fictional manufacturers, plus a few others for sights, stocks, and other attachments.

KENDALL BALLISTICS: This military-grade weapons manufacturer primarily makes M4s and other traditional Call of Duty weaponry. The recognizable weaponry has a futuristic touch, like a M4 with an OLED GPS display.

"Kendall creates realistic weapons – guns don't look like motorcycles or anything," says Byers. "People still use guns from the early 1900s today, so there's no reason these guns wouldn't exist in some way in this universe. You look on screen, and you'll go, 'Oh, I know that gun.'"

MASHIMO: A Japanese company that creates high-energy, fast-firing weapons. These guns still feel like ballistic-style weapons, but with interesting and unusual perks due to the energy-cell ammunition. For instance, a weapon could have a smart sight on the side so that when you shift the weapon, you can move from submachinegun functionality to blow the rest of your power cell on a shotgun-style blast. You can then pop out your empty energy cell and put it into a rechargeable pack to keep the party going, essentially allowing you to regenerate ammo. These weapons often have multiple functions that can use energy in interesting ways for diverse situations.

FUJIWARA: A Japanese company specializing in energy weapons with artistic and extravagant designs, offering high-class, expensive weaponry in comparison to the more affordable Mashimo. One of the more interesting energy weapons by Fujiwara is the MOD2, a SMG that you can fire at long/mid-range and then rotate and pull it apart in what amounts to splitting the weapon in half to create "akimbo pistols" for a close-combat encounter like breaching a room.

EDI: Focuses on experimental weapon designs and energy weapons, with a focus on high quality. These are some of the most advanced weapons available in the game, showcasing secret prototypes.

ATOMIC DYNAMICS: Prototype company specializing in raw designs with exposed capacitors and wiring, big screen presence, and experimental technology. Expect rail guns and weapons that charge up, but they're a bit more rough around the edges than EDI's offerings.

From pistols with electronically charged ammunition that can shoot multiple bullets at once in a burst-fire configuration to single fire or massive Gatling-gun beasts like the Steel Dragon prototype, you can find the perfect loadout for your style of grounded-in-reality future tech.

In addition to the enormous armory of guns, a number of other notable new items are at your disposal. Spider-like robotic seeker grenades can crawl along the ground and walls and can identify, target, and attack enemies at your command. Autonomous drones can help keep opponents off your back. Zero-gravity grenades can create pockets of zero gravity in the environment, incapacitating groups of enemies and potentially moving them from the safety of cover. If you're feeling like getting right into the thick of things, try a shield that smashes opponents out of the way when you're not protecting yourself from an incoming barrage.

Players can also cook a grenade while firing their weapon, which should shake up the dynamics of grenade lobbing quite a bit.

The Settlement Defense Front proves to be a brutal, powerful enemy

NEW ENVIRONMENTS, EXCITING SET PIECES

The Call of Duty series is known for summer blockbuster-style sequences and campaigns full of explosive moments that often task the player to pilot various vehicles and brave absurd obstacles. Infinite Warfare trades in the same fare and is taking advantage of unique elements that could only take place in the future.

One mission tasks Reyes and his crew to investigate a critical mining facility that has ceased production. The mining crew hasn't checked in, and the supplies are crucial to the ongoing efforts of the campaign. Something big has changed at the facility, as the asteroid it's housed on has been knocked out of its orbit and its rotation has turned the day/night cycle completely out of whack, with the entire cycle completing in around a minute. The volatile new orbit has placed the rock incredibly close to a nearby sun, making the daytime around 2,000 degrees of heat and completely unsustainable.

The mission begins like an unsettling horror film as the crew discovers some of the miners have met unfortunate fates, with the focus shifting toward finding survivors and surviving the ordeal yourselves. The adventure quickly turns into a search-and-rescue game of "red light, green light" where the player must take on both the enemies waiting for them at the facility and the deadly heat of the sun, moving only during brief safe snatches of night to

CHASING GHOSTS

Infinity Ward's last Call of Duty title ended on a cliffhanger, but it's uncertain whether fans will ever get any closer to a resolution or a future for Ghosts. One of the series's more divisive titles when it came to critical reception, there was little surprise when Infinite Warfare was announced instead of a follow up. We asked Infinity Ward about the reception to Ghosts and if the studio would return to that story. "Ghosts was a huge effort," says studio head Dave Stohl. "As you know, it was Infinity Ward's last two-year development cycle, and it shipped during a console transition year. Of course, there was a lot to learn from that title, and as developers, we learn from every game we create. Since Ghosts, the studio has worked hard and put a renewed focus on various innovations. This year, one of those innovations will be our narrative, for instance."

While some missions will take you out into space, there are many close-quarter interior encounters as well

avoid baking to a crisp. This tense trek capitalizes on some futuristic fare while maintaining the team-based infantry feel of the series.

We also get a look at something new for this game, the ability to "peek" inside rooms. Players can crack open the door slowly, looking for enemies waiting in ambush instead of kicking the door open entirely. This lets players take out dangerous foes by throwing a grenade in or firing from a better position before knocking out the door entirely. Alternatively, if you're feeling like Rambo, you're certainly more than welcome to kick the door down immediately, or even kick it in during the peeking process.

TAKING FLIGHT

Call of Duty may release annually, but the various studios and visions behind each title bring new things to the formula every time. Infinite Warfare is a mix of things old and new, with classic rooted-in-reality combat, while simultaneously offering a taste of a technologically advanced future and big differentiators like space dogfighting, zero-gravity combat, new weapons, and substantial mechanics changes. While the initial reveal played up elements from the space-age category, it's clear that while futuristic explorations and diversions are on the menu, the core gameplay is down to earth, featuring elements from earlier titles in the franchise before we moved to ages beyond.

Infinite Warfare will also launch with zombies mode and a robust multiplayer component, but we'll have to wait for details to see how space design and feel influences these other styles of gameplay. More details on the multiplayer will be revealed at the Call of Duty Experience event, which is returning this year to Los Angeles. ◈

Visit gameinformer.com/infinitewarfare for exclusive video interviews with the team behind the game, a discussion with some of the actors, in-depth details on game features, and much more

Sgt. Omar commands the Marines aboard the *Retribution*
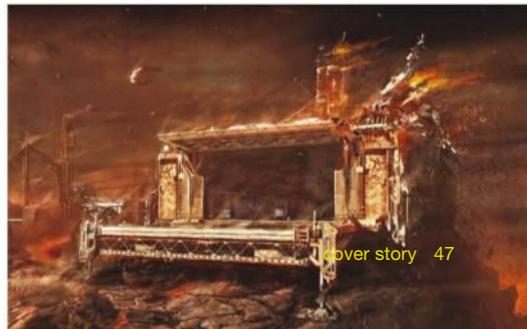
A Future No Longer Bright

Exploring the darker world of
Deus Ex: Mankind Divided

by Elise Favis

In 2027, the Aug Incident shattered the near-future world of Deus Ex, killing millions and traumatizing those who survived. A frequency broadcast worldwide forced transhumans, individuals with cybernetic enhancements, into a frenzy, driving them to commit involuntary acts of violence. Now that two years have passed, the mechanically augmented face rigid segregation from the rest of the population. The golden age of advanced technology has all but ceased, and fear of augmentations has been instilled in society. The cybernetics industry is crumbling, replaced with a growing black market of dangerous aug-mentations, all while a new dawn of terrorism begins. Welcome to Deus Ex: Mankind Divided.

Since our 2015 cover story, much has been under wraps about this futuristic follow-up to Human Revolution. With Mankind Divided's release date looming, I visited Eidos Montreal for a deep dive on its progress and new features. As I explore this ravaged, frightened world, it is obvious the tone is much darker and fiercer than its predecessor, envisioning a future that may not be so different from our own.

A Dark Horizon

Mankind Divided paints a dystopian world emerging from disaster. A strong divide separates those who are mechanically augmented from those who are not. Human Revolution was thematically an analogy to the Renaissance, from its golden color scheme to the world's advanced scientific developments. In contrast, Mankind Divided metaphorically reverts to the Dark Ages, where groundbreaking knowledge has been replaced with terror and paranoia.

"Mankind Divided is a dystopia, so it's a bit of a regression," says art director Jonathan Jacques-Belletête. "It's not a regression in the sense that technology is falling back or being forgotten, but instead this perfect era of augmentations is on the downward slope as we go back to the dark ages."

As I watch a demo set in Prague, this theme of hopelessness becomes readily apparent. After witnessing a horrific terrorist attack at a train station, Jensen groggily wakes from bed in his dim apartment. Hints of sunlight stream through the blinds, almost as a reminder that hope is not lost. Jensen, just like his world, has changed: He didn't save the world two years ago. The failure has made him bitter, but it has also driven him to find the truth.

Rising from his bed, Jensen speaks through his communications implant to Alex Vega, a friend who was by his side at the bombing the day prior. "You sound like s---," she says. Jensen responds by saying that while he's sore, he's doing just fine.

His augmentations, however, took a hit. To fix them up, Jensen decides to visit an underground augmentations specialist, Vaclav Koller, on his way to work. Koller is stationed in a workshop hidden inside a bookstore, but finding a way there is a challenge of its own.

Koller warns Jensen through his comms channel that something has gone awry. The Dvali, a powerful crime family in Prague, is narrowing in on Koller to resolve what he describes as a "misunderstanding." As a result, Jensen will have to be creative with finding an entrance.

Jensen navigates through the city, passing by pastel-colored, European homes that are glued together like siamese twins. Their worn walls are defaced with graffiti, and a tourism poster written in red paint says "This place is hell." On the opposite wall, "Augs will prevail" is scribbled. The divide in society is substantial, with cops lining the streets, separating augmented people from naturals. Jensen finds himself an outcast, and this becomes clear when he's briefly, but harshly, interrogated by a cop who asks for paperwork and performs a scan on him, before he can continue on his way.

Mankind Divided has around 90,000 lines of dialogue, in comparison to Human Revolution which has 20,000

Jensen will travel to several places around the world, including Prague and Dubai

In typical Deus Ex fashion, many paths lead to the main objective. Jensen could bribe his way past the police, or follow a tip about a fake I.D. supplier. A Dvali gangster guards the entrance to another path toward the bookshop. Jensen could pick a fight with them, but he decides to take a stealthier route. He notices an open window from an apartment on a higher level, which he reaches by climbing over a dumpster and other obstacles.

Jensen eventually climbs onto the roof of the bookshop. Before squeezing through an open skylight, he spots a handful of enemies patrolling the room below. Using his Tesla gun arm augmentation, tiny darts shoot out of his knuckles toward the unsuspecting foes below, incapacitating all of them at once. This is one of many new augmentations in Mankind Divided, which allows players to target up to four enemies and disable them simultaneously.

Jensen eases himself into the building. With his sound suppressing ability, and his cloaking augmentation, Jensen becomes both silent and unseen. He takes cover behind a bookshelf and activates his new and improved smart vision, allowing him to see through walls and find out what enemies are carrying as loot. He detects an enemy behind the shelf and performs a non-lethal take down. In one swift movement, Jensen pulls the unconscious gangster toward him and hides the body behind the shelf.

Once he clears the room, he descends to a lower level of the shop to meet with Koller. Behind a hidden door, Jensen finds the eclectic workshop where cybernetic limbs are strung across the ceiling like Christmas lights. Koller is eccentric in both personality and appearance, with his unruly hair and studded lab coat filled with punk-themed pins. He greets Jensen with a grand smile and hearty gesture, reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci from Assassin's Creed II. With Jensen as the guinea pig, Koller adjusts his augmentations to bring them back to their full capabilities.

The Double Agent

The industry of cybernetics is on the verge of collapse. Sarif Industries, where Jensen worked as chief of security during Human Revolution, is no more. The corporate themes of the past game are left behind, replaced by a more militant vibe. Jensen in employed by Task Force 29, a worldwide anti-terrorism operation headed by Interpol. Jensen has a hunch that the group has connections to the Illuminati – society's invisible puppeteers that had a hand in perpetrating the Aug Incident. His motives for joining the task force are twofold: He's hyper-focused on tracking down the Illuminati, but he's also looking for redemption, and hopes to dull the worldwide threat of terrorism.

"Jensen has realized now that in order to get to the heart of the problem, he has to go after the people that really caused it," says narrative director Mary DeMarle. "He has to take this fight to the Illuminati, but to do that, he has to find them. At the same time, he is somebody who is trying to right wrongs, so he gets involved with Task Force 29."

Though he's employed by the task force, Jensen follows his own agenda. He is affiliated with a second organization, The Juggernaut Collective, a hacktivist group dedicated to exposing the Illuminati. However, he must keep his association with them hidden from Task Force 29. Both groups give conflicting missions throughout the main campaign, but it's not presented to the player as two separate batches of quests. Instead, they are intertwined in the storyline, but it's up to you how much information you divulge to either side. For Jensen, these two entities are stepping stones to the intel he seeks.

"They are different channels to get to his purpose," DeMarle says. "The information that they're giving him can sometimes contradict one another or shed new light on each other. He also has to take into account that they have their own opinions. The Juggernaut Collective might believe the task force is an Illuminati tool, but Jensen's not 100% sure of that yet. So you also have to judge the biases of some people."

Boss battles can be approached in many ways, from combat to stealth. It's also possible to defeat a boss non-lethally

Whispers Of Conspiracy

At the end of Human Revolution, Jensen infiltrates Panchaea, a geo-engineering plant built to curb global warming, where he uncovers the truth behind the Aug Incident and its ties to the Illuminati. Players are given a few choices on how it will be revealed to the public: They can unveil the truth, manipulate the story by pinning the blame elsewhere, or cover it up by destroying Panchaea. Because Eidos Montreal didn't know it would make a sequel to Human Revolution until later, it isn't possible to transfer your save to the new game. Instead, Mankind Divided keeps the outcome of your chosen ending ambiguous. Panchaea has collapsed, but the amount of information seeping into the public is up for debate.

"The canon ending is whichever you chose," explains narrative director Mary DeMarle. "There are only three people in the world who know what Adam Jensen chose, and that is Adam, Eliza, and you. We didn't want to rob you of that choice." She uses 9/11 as a comparison: During a horrific event, there is initially very little time to process and rationalize what is happening. The same can be said for the Aug incident; controversies surface and governments or organizations try to manipulate the information to their advantage. "People will believe what they feel they want to believe," she says. "As you play the game, you'll find that there are differing theories about it. Various people support different possible messages that came out."

Near the beginning of the game, Jensen witnesses a terrorist attack at the Růžička Train Station in Prague

Golem City

One of the many places you visit in Mankind Divided includes the Utulek Station, nicknamed Golem City, on the outskirts of Prague. This gritty, rundown station began as a temporary housing unit for transhumans, but after the Aug Incident, it devolved into a ghetto and segregated community for augmented people. The Augmented Rights Coalition (ARC), a group branded as a terrorist organization by the media, has its headquarters stationed inside.

Golem City, with its claustrophobic environment, represents a dark part of the world with only remnants of the golden age still faintly flickering. "As you walk through Golem City, there are these little slivers of gold lighting, almost as if they bought their gold paint and their candles with them," Jacques-Belletête says. "They're bringing the soul and spirit of that lost era."

During a demo I played, Jensen is sent by Task Force 29 to infiltrate ARC and extract its leader, Talos Rucker. The complex is large and multi-levelled, providing me with an impressive amount of entryways and paths. Mankind Divided has put an emphasis on verticality, meaning there are multi-level structures in the level design.

"We brought verticality into the mix, so challenges are not all on the same level. Even in the city hub, and everywhere in the game, verticality is a big part of the experience," says game director Jean-François Dugas.

On the ground floor, I look upward and see patrolling guards overhead on balconies. My first action is to pull up my augmentation wheel, a similar mechanic to Mass Effect's powers wheel, which I use to map different augmentations to the d-pad and left shoulder button. With Icarus Dash, which works similarly to

Dishonored's Blink ability, now easily accessible, I dash from one corner to the next. To take out a guard to my left, I use my nano blade that shoots out of my arm, stabbing my target and pinning them to the wall.

However, because I wasn't careful, I'm spotted by an overhead turret. A group of enemies begin firing at me without mercy. While it was an unexpected turn of events, it doesn't become a problem. Combat in Mankind Divided has improved substantially, with a better flow and more options, bringing flair to these gun fights. First, I switch on my titan shield, transforming me into a walking tank. Then, I switch my combat rifle's ammo to armor-piercing bullets, which blows the turret into satisfying little pieces. Once I'm the last man standing, I move to my next point of interest by crawling through a vent – but I'm far from in the clear.

The exit at the other side of the room is barricaded by laser beams. I use my remote hacking device, reminiscent of the tool found in Batman Arkham games, to hack the lasers.

Human Revolution's hacking mini game returns in Mankind Divided, with a slicker design and a few upgrades. "Hacking is coming back, and now it's deeper than it was in Human Revolution," Dugas says. "The security systems have booby traps and reinforced security systems, but you have more software to play with to circumvent the challenge. It will feel very similar, but it's going to demand more skill than it previously did."

Breaching The Palisade

In addition to an improved hacking system, Mankind Divided includes a new mode accessible via the main menu called Breach that Eidos Montreal describes as Deus Ex with an arcade twist. The mini campaign takes place inside a digital world that the main character accesses through the Neural SubNet, a virtual reality device originally marketed as a therapeutic technology in 2023. The Rippers, a hacking faction you are part of, use this technology in lieu of traditional coding to access the Palisade Bank, a corporate server farm advertised as "impenetrable." Within the Neural SubNet, the servers take the form of a platformer stealth game with several levels where you extract data and receive guidance from your mentor ShadowChild, who contacts you through an instant messaging program.

"One of the things that has become very valuable in Mankind Divided is digital information," DeMarle says. "Within the Czech Republic, the Palisade Bank Corporation has opened up to clients saying that they are a bank that stores your digital information. Rich corporations, the pope, and all these people store their top secret information in there because the Palisade Bank states that nobody can get through their firewall."

The Rippers however, are able to breach the system. You navigate through the digital data storage of four corporations: the Palisade Bank, which is the server host, as well as Tarvos Security, VersaLife, and Steiner Bisley.

Prague

Prague is one of the fully explorable city hubs in Mankind Divided. With more of a focus on visual storytelling and many areas of interest, you can uncover micro-narratives of both its people and its rich history. In 2016, following the election of its first female president, Zofie Ruzicka, the Czech Republic saw an economic boom that transformed Prague into one of the world's leading metropolitan cities. The city saw a rise in immigration, particularly with augmented workers, and it soon became a wealthy haven for transhumans. When the Aug Incident hit, the tables turned drastically. Because Prague has one of the highest populations of augmented people, its authorities took a rigorous approach to controlling and segregating this group of people that the public now deems dangerous.

"Each one of those corporations has a visual and gameplay style that we put together," explains live team producer Fleur Marty. "We tried to reflect their backgrounds. For example, Steiner Bisley is a weapons maker. When you go play their maps, you have the feeling of a foundry, and the music also serves that very well."

Reminiscent of both the indie hit Volume and Metal Gear Solid's VR missions, the aesthetic of these levels is modern with a blocky architecture. In Breach, your enemy is the A.I., a booming voice in each room that controls the robotic foes you face. If you're detected, you're marked as a hostile instantly. This causes the room's enemies, which may include turrets, drones, and sentinels, to attempt to kill you on sight. The Deus Ex philosophy extends to Breach, allowing you to approach each level in accordance to your own play style, from combat to stealth.

Each corporation's servers offer challenges, such as best score, best time, and whether you managed to extract all the data. However, there are also ways you can change the rules of these challenges. With the use of modifiers, you can up the difficulty for a better reward, or give yourself a temporary advantage such as an increase in speed. As the difficulty rises, you can upgrade your Ripper avatar's augmentations, some of which are exclusive to Breach. New weapons and additional experience points can be obtained through booster packs, which are randomized rewards after completing a level.

Breach also tells a story of its own, through darknet files. These are different conspiracies from each corporation, which you investigate and uncover as you progress through the digital world.

Understanding What Makes Us Human

With its reliance on choice and consequence, along with a beefed up combat system, Mankind Divided impressed me with its depth. It is much darker than its predecessor, but the core moral and philosophical questions it poses remain the same. Does the advancement of technology breed freedom or control? Are we still considered human if our bodies are more machine than flesh? The line is blurred, and the outcome of Jensen's quest for redemption and truth remain in the hands of the player. Adam Jensen already failed to save the world, and now he struggles with those consequences, making this super-soldier a flawed human being like the rest of us. ◈

Deus Ex Go

Deus Ex Go is the newest addition to Square Enix Montreal's series of minimalistic mobile games that put an emphasis on turn-based puzzles. In Deus Ex Go, you take the role of Adam Jensen and infiltrate over 60 levels through hacking and stealth. To move Jensen, you swipe the screen in your preferred direction, similar to past Go games.

Each area is patrolled by a series of enemies, from sentries to guards. By finding energy placed around the levels, you can use it to power your augmentations, such as invisibility and EMP blasts that incapacitate enemies from a distance.

Like the main Deus Ex series, hacking is one of the main mechanics. When using a security terminal, you can drag your finger to draw a line to your desired target that you wish to hack and disable. This can be used on enemies such as turrets to disable them, or to build paths that weren't available before. However, you have to be cautious; your hacking can be undone by enemies should they approach the terminal themselves. This evolves the puzzle difficulty over time, with your prime objective focused on making sure you hack at the right time and place to progress.

A new concept coming to Deus Ex Go that hasn't been explored in the Go games before is an interface allowing players to design their own user-created levels. They are given all the surface-level design tools the developers use. These levels will be sharable with friends online.

Deus Ex Go releases this summer on iOS and Android.
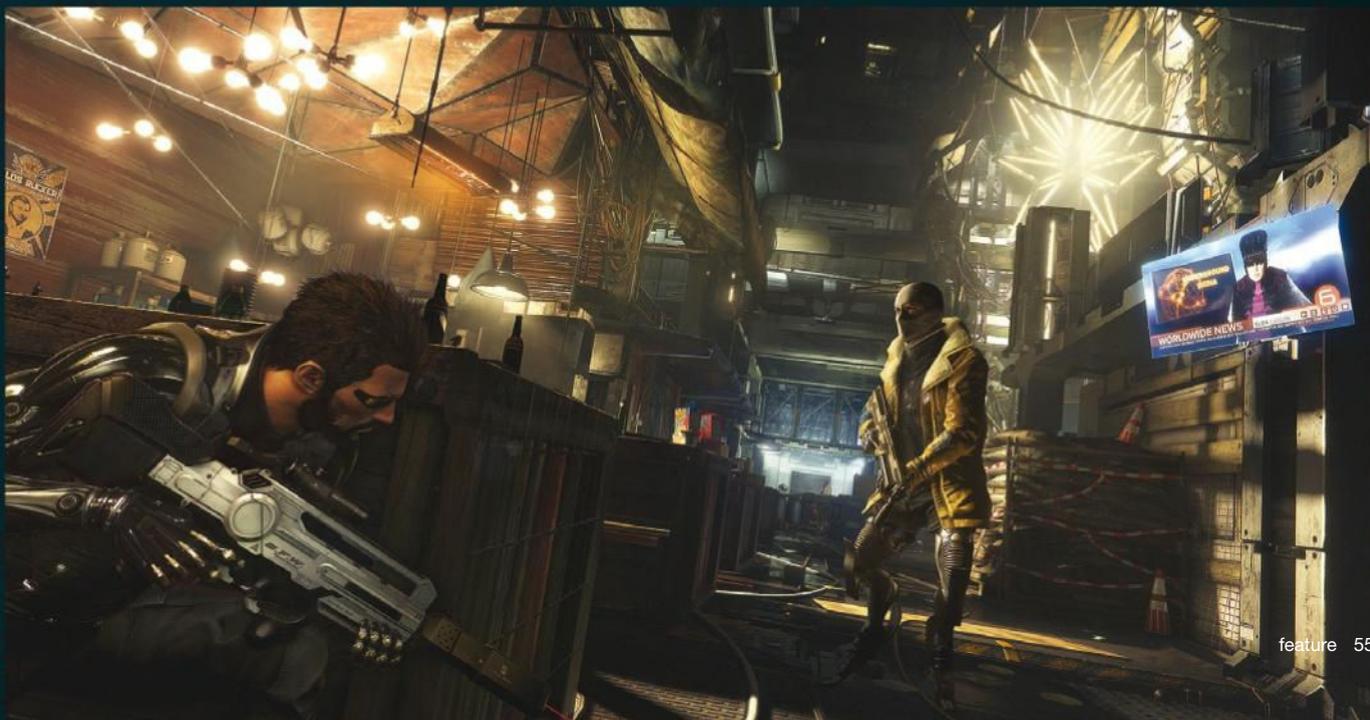
Battlefield 1

Turning back time to fight a new war

After three Battlefield games set in the present day, DICE is diving back into the past with Battlefield 1, taking the series to World War 1. A setting seldom seen in video games, this iteration features intense aerial dogfights as well as trench warfare, with design director Daniel Berlin saying that "everything should feel epic in this game."

During a press conference in San Francisco, DICE showed off pre-alpha footage of gameplay. The demo is visually stunning, with soldiers rushing through trenches, cavalry on horseback charging into battle, and front-line fighters stabbing foes with bayonets as mustard gas explodes all around them. Rudimentary tanks rolled over obstacles and mowed down troops with turret gun fire as biplanes dropped bombs from above.

Battlefield 1 is violent and gruesome, with blood seeping from every gunshot wound, bodies being thrown across the landscape by mine explosions, and corpses splattering blood across the grass. DICE has increased its focus on close-quarters fights, and watching someone drive their bayonet into another character's chest through the eyeholes on a gas mask is a level of brutality never seen in this franchise before.

The visuals showcase the high standards set by DICE's Frostbite engine, matching the graphical fidelity of Star Wars: Battlefront. The engine's destructable capabilities are in full effect, with bombs tearing barbwire traps and encampments apart and doors shattering from explosives so

players can storm a bunker.

DICE has some new plans in store for the multiplayer component of Battlefield 1. The game introduces dedicated vehicle classes, letting players step into the boots of pilots and tank specialists. In an attempt to capture the scope of the first World War, maps are scattered across a series of diverse environments, including Arabian deserts, grassy French countrysides, and the Alps. Weapon customization returns as well, but the specifics of that system remain under wraps.

DICE shared few details about the single-player campaign, outside of admitting that the game has one, but the developer did say the story is "centered around a bunch of people and how they react to the world around them," hinting at the possibility of multiple protagonists. Berlin also suggested that the campaign is more open and less linear than previous campaigns, saying it will be "structured around battlefield moments."

While we didn't get any hands-on time with Battlefield 1, the direction DICE is taking the series is off to a promising start that excited the legions of gamers who have been waiting a long time for a quality action game set during the first World War.

» **Javy Gwaltney**

Inside

A stunning tour-de-force six years in the making

After the success of Limbo in 2010, the talented developers at Playdead seemed to disappear back into their cocoon. Information on their sophomore effort has been hard to come by in the intervening years. That's about to change, as Inside is planned for a surprise launch on Xbox One at the tail end of June, with a PC launch to follow soon after. I turned out the lights and sat down for a complete playthrough of a near-final version of the game, and while late tweaks may still affect my ultimate interpretation of the game, my early impressions suggest a masterpiece of artistic presentation.

Even more so than Limbo, Inside is best experienced from start to finish without prior story details to spoil the progression. As such, my impressions steer clear of specifics. The game opens as a virtual homage to Playdead's last project, with a fragile boy's appearance in a dark forest, and a sidescrolling run forward into unknown dangers. From there, the plot and setting diverge from the prior game, and the discovery of what lies ahead for this silent child pulls you through the adventure.

Gameplay combines light running and platforming sequences with physics-based puzzles, many of which are about simple manipulation of mundane objects in the environment, but frequently with strikingly original twists. Playdead's design values novelty above all. A single puzzle might use a surprising new mechanic, but rather than stick with that idea for the rest of the game, a head-scratching new device or environmental concept is introduced next. These puzzles are rarely difficult, but the uncomplicated solutions contribute to the breathless forward pace.

Inside is all about building tension, and steadfastly refuses to answer the growing assortment of questions about what you're seeing and hearing. The effect is one of open-mouthed confusion and wonder, as scene after scene takes you deeper inside. The title is a figurative and literal metaphor about the progression. Between the immaculately constructed ambient sound design and a unique three-dimensional

art style that relies heavily on depth of field to communicate narrative, I couldn't escape the sense that I was asleep, shifting back and forth between a weird dream and the disturbing imagery of a nightmare. Every few minutes brings a striking visual tableau, exploring themes of decay, loneliness, or conformity.

Inside charts a linear path to completion, but a series of hidden rooms and cleverly disguised side paths suggest an additional narrative layer that beckons me back for a second playthrough. Even without that optional element of exploration, the game is enigmatic and disturbing, and I foresee many players debating what it all means. We'll wait to pass a final verdict until we've experienced a version that reflects Playdead's final crucial brush strokes, but there's no doubt in my mind that Inside will emerge as one of the most talked-about games of 2016. » **Matt Miller**

Puzzles frequently use familiar and mundane objects in surprising ways

Inside layers on new mysteries at every step; what lies beyond the glass is one of the few questions that gets a concrete answer

Madden NFL 17

Taking a page from the playbook

The Madden franchise is in the best position it's been in for years. Last year was a good outing, and the series' current leadership has a roadmap of where it wants to take the franchise, trying to avoid creating features one year only to abandon them the next – something that Madden has done in the past. Therefore, this year's game sees the expansion of familiar features, while at the same time honing of past concepts in an attempt to sustain the series' current ascending trajectory.

The recent theme of accessibility continues with an optional display for the ball carrier similar to last year's tackle cone. The threat cone surfaces which special move players should use to avoid being tackled based on the ball carrier's particular proficiencies. A similar icon-based system now also governs breaking out of a tackle. The offensive player jams on their controller to avoid getting tackled during select moments, while the defender does the same to complete the tackle.

In general, the game's arsenal of special moves is rearranged to take into account how fast you are going and how many defenders you can realistically affect. Therefore, there are moves you pull off quickly while trying to maintain your speed and those that develop more slowly but which can affect more defenders. What special moves you can and can't do is determined by players' ratings. If, however, you don't want to fuss with all the buttons, you can have the game perform special moves for you while you simply steer.

Perhaps the biggest accessibility feature this year is called Play the Moment. This uses the series' sim engine to fast forward to the important moments in a game: red-zone plays, key third downs, the two-minute drill, etc. It's reminiscent of how Rory McIlroy PGA Tour culled holes for players, and in that case it was done well.

Regardless of whether or not you actively use Madden 17's various accessibility features, the team is evolving its players' intelligence on the field. Defenders are governed by football strategies rather than just swarming the ball carrier. They have gap responsibilities (shown in the play art) and coordinate appropriately to attack the line of scrimmage. For instance, on some plays one defender may try to keep the running back from turning the corner while another defender stays home for a possible cutback. In the secondary, meanwhile, Madden 17 hopes to shore up a lingering complaint. Defenders in zones won't just sit still as receivers blow by. Following real-life coverage rules, defenders in zone coverage identify threats and react accordingly depending on the play, such as covering a tight end coming across the middle or a slot receiver going deep.

When you put everything together – including revamped blocking techniques and reactions for the offensive line – the sum effect should be that plays develop more organically. Gamers should have more choice and control over what happens during a play, and because real-life football concepts govern players' behavior more, there should be fewer money plays. In fact, Madden 17's playcalling system lets you pick plays designed to cover specific areas of the field where you may be getting repeatedly beat.

Still, success isn't just a matter of calling the right play. Synthesizing what you see as it unfolds with all of the new behaviors on the screen and reacting accordingly will be a welcome challenge for long-time players.

Getting your players prepared before they step on the field is also important. This year's title overhauls game prep to suggest offensive and defensive gameplans each week based on your opponent's tendencies. Get a medal in the suggested drills, and your players will get a boost when that play concept appears in the game. You can similarly train for certain situations like your red-zone offense, as well as game prep specific players for XP. Elsewhere, confidence is no longer part of game prep and is now basically tied to your win/loss record, and the drive goals are being fixed to be more contextual to the game situation at hand.

Last month developer EA Tiburon teased changes for the Connected Franchise Mode, and while the long-requested 10-man practice squad is now in (including the ability to sign those players from other teams as well as lose your own), the balance of additions for this year revolve around tuning. So while the same contract limitations, free-agency structure, lack of coordinators, and restrictions to stadium building remain, EA tuned the game to present more busts/gems in the draft, give users the choice to bring players back early from injury (potentially to sustain more damage like Tony Romo did last season), and curb player regression. The latter is now spread across more attributes, and doesn't drop dramatically in just a single category.

On the surface, there are no headline-grabbing changes for this year's Madden. But planned improvements to the series' gameplay has me excited to see how plays develop in Madden 17 and how quickly I react to them. Madden 17 doesn't include all the features that either you or I want, but if the game can continue to improve on the gameplay of its predecessor, then the developer's vision is at least on the right path.

» **Matthew Kato**

Pyre

Fantasy role-playing meets arcade sports

With titles like Bastion and Transistor, Supergiant Games has established an identity and reputation for originality and innovation. The studio's calling card isn't an ongoing franchise or genre, but rather a visual, audio, and narrative style that is instantly recognizable, characterized by bright colors, mythical overtones, and timeless settings that meld past and future aesthetics. Pyre aims to further cement the team's trademark presentation, this time by melding character-driven fantasy RPGs with clear inspirations drawn from old-school arcade-sports games.

That's a seemingly incongruous meeting point, but a clever narrative setup makes it feel natural. The game opens as you wake in the mysterious world of the Downside, a purgatory for criminals and undesirables in which exiles desperately seek a way to return to the idyllic Commonwealth that expelled them. Rescued by three of these exiles, your ability to "read" esoteric books and signs in the stars makes you the missing link of their team, and gives them the chance they need to compete in the highly structured rites that offer a path to freedom.

Eschewing a traditional combat system, the rites are 3v3 competitions in which a celestial orb is captured, passed, and slammed basketball-style into the opposing team's pyre. While a system of character auras and other mystical terminology governs the rules

Pyre sees your party of characters competing in the rites, a competition seemingly inspired by old-school arcade sports games

MASKED MAN

"Hang on. The markings on his rags. I think he's one of them."
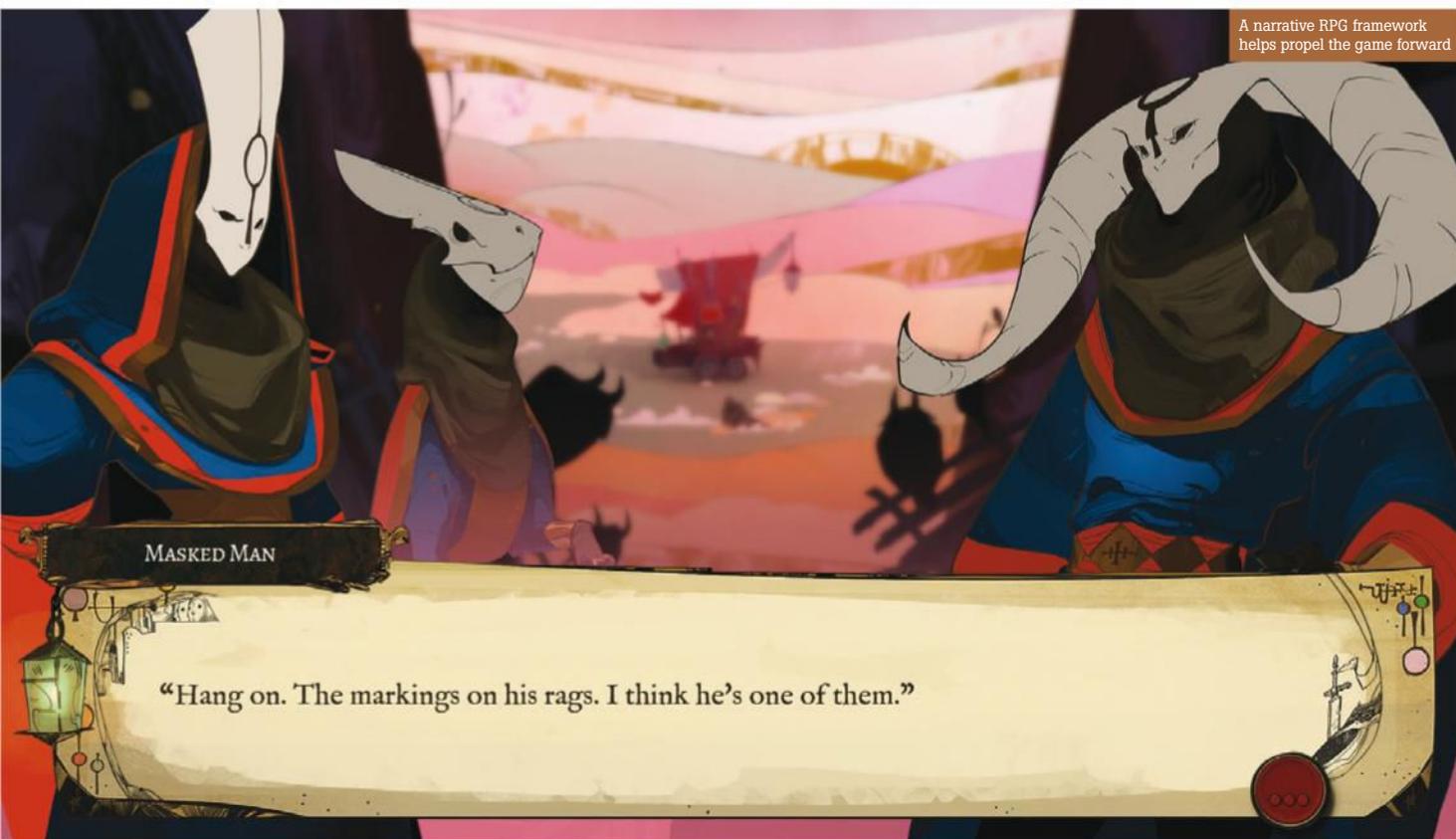
of the competition, the gameplay is unmistakably based in the tradition of older arcade-sports titles like NES Ice Hockey and NBA Jam. Your three playable heroes have distinct traits, like your slow and heavy bruiser and your speedy forward. The orb is passed between heroes, even as the opposing A.I. team maneuvers to block your path. Characters who get hit by opposing players or score (as they self-immolate in the fire) are temporarily absent, leading to a new challenge as you hold off the enemy team while down a hero. The potential for strategic complexity is high.

Between rites, Pyre has more in common with games like Mass Effect, Banner Saga, and Oregon Trail. Your three party members have personalities and quirks, and regular conversations during your journey help to flesh them out. As they ask you questions, your responses provide temporary buffs and change your relationships. The party makes its way across the Downside in a rickety wagon (pushed by specially bred drive imps), and you choose which locales to visit to scavenge for supplies, track down fuel for the wagon, and more. At each stop, you also choose a single activity to spend time on. Foraging leads to valuable discoveries. Studying provides new information about the rites and other info in the world. Mentoring helps to level up and enlighten your heroes, providing new capabilities like more frequent rushing

options, or a wider attack arc when targeting opponents.

Pyre is awash in subtle narrative touches that deepen the experience, from the gorgeous backdrops your wagon rolls across, to the ability to hover over text and images with the onscreen cursor to learn more about the setting. In my early hands-on time, I was repeatedly struck by the novelty

of both its gameplay and world-building. After just a few matches, I'm eager to see whether Supergiant Games can continually make the rites a compelling gameplay loop. If the story and sport-inspired throwdowns lead to the complexity hinted at through the game's intro, Pyre may shape up into an unusual and surprising twist on genre-blending design. » **Matt Miller**

When camping for the night, you can choose whether to develop your party through study, mentoring, or foraging through the nearby environment

Sid Meier's Civilization VI

Making all the right moves

Firaxis finally unveiled Sid Meier's Civilization VI by revealing several savvy changes, from cities spanning multiple tiles to more complex relationships with fellow leaders. To see how everything is coming together, I recently went hands-on with the new entry, completing around 40 turns. Let's just say if you thought the one-more-turn itch was already hard to resist, it's going to be even harder with Civilization VI.

Civilization VI brings all the important decision-making back, but makes the process smoother than before. I notice the improved interface immediately, which makes navigating and setting up turns easier. The game always lets you know which units you haven't moved, if research is available, and a blue outline shows how far each unit can move. I'm more of a builder than a warrior, so my strategy is to do just that and eventually research astrology so I can erect a holy-site district and found a religion.

As the leader of China, I put down my first city and notice one of the new systems immediately. What I do in the world can inspire my people for technological advancements. Since I built my city on the coast, people will naturally go out and establish fishing boats and nets, and I immediately get a boost toward learning sailing. Before I can move on I need to make a production and science decision. I select a scout to help me explore the map, and I pick sailing because my bonus toward it has cut down the time significantly to obtain it (only six turns).

I send men off in two separate directions to discover more of the map and decide to build a monument for my city, which helps me get more culture. Soon enough my city grows; now two tiles around my city are occupied by citizens that can bring things in such as harvests, and it's satisfying already

seeing some progress in the matter of a few turns. I spot some whales that I can harvest to make my people happier, but it requires the sailing technology; thankfully, in one more turn my research is complete.

I move my scout a few spots and discover a barbarian camp. If I don't do anything about them, they're going to raid my city, so I need to act sooner rather than later. This puts a damper on my peaceful plans; I need to build up my power to take on these baddies. I build a ranged attacker, and later I'll build a warrior for back up.

I also have plenty of options for my next research now that sailing is complete. I look around my city; pottery can help me bring in the grain, mining helps with the stone, and animal husbandry helps with a deer nearby. The deer is within the border of my city, so I decide on that. I can also always buy tiles to pull them into my city, but for now I work with the deer since it's already there.

Civilization VI has separate tech and civics trees, which were previously combined. "There were always a lot of things in the tech tree like 'chivalry' that weren't really a technology," says lead designer Ed Beach. I complete my first requirement in the civics tree, which is all driven by culture. Some examples of things under this tree are establishing

a military tradition, starting a new trade up, or dabbling in mysticism and religion. A scroll bar lets you see you how far you can go with your advancements through history.

With my first civic complete, I can now put bonuses into my government. I can select either a military or economic bonus. These come in the form of cards that you place in open slots. I choose combat and production bonuses. I'll get more of these cards as I complete more civics, so I can always adapt it to my playing style at the time.

After building up my army more, focusing on a settler to establish a new city, and starting research on foreign trade, I run into Egypt's Cleopatra. All the leaders speak in their correct native language, a nice touch as Cleopatra greets me in Coptic. She invites me to visit her city and I agree.

Civilization VI introduces leader agendas, and Cleopatra's is "Queen of the Nile," which states that she likes powerful militaries and will try to ally with them. Firaxis pulled this detail from her actual life; she aligned herself with powerful men like Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony, seducing them so Egypt wouldn't get attacked. She also has another randomly assigned hidden agenda that I'll need to discover through trade routes or by sending a delegation.

Cleopatra likes me because I've been building up my army to take out that barbarian camp, but if you don't have a powerful military, she won't give you the time of day. Later, when my army loses forces facing the barbarian camp and I explore too close to her border, our relationship declines. She especially gets mad once I meet and stay on friendly terms with Teddy Roosevelt, whom she dislikes. Rumors and gossip show up about leaders throughout the game; this new system gives you more information to react to and plan your decisions around.

After my astrology research is over, I build a holy-site district and construct a bunch of buildings to produce faith, such as a shrine. This eventually lets me found my own religion; I go with Buddhism and generate a great prophet to spread its message. I don't get to see much beyond that, which is a shame because I think Cleopatra is about to become my enemy and I know my decisions with what to do with her are only going to get harder.

I'm already so immersed at crafting my own tale that I can't wait to dive back in. The drama is heightened by your relationships with leaders and all the systems just play off each other so well. Every improvement we've seen from Civilization VI feels for the better so far. » **Kimberley Wallace**

Multi-tiled cities give you a better sense of your accomplishments

I Am Setsuna

An old-school, somber tale

I Am Setsuna has captured a lot of buzz since its reveal, where Tokyo RPG Factory noted it was inspired by classic RPGs, ranging from Chrono Trigger to early Final Fantasy games. After getting some hands-on time, it's easy to see that influence and feel nostalgic, but I Am Setsuna also immerses you with its beautiful music and tragic story. The more I played it, the more I was drawn to the world.

I Am Setsuna starts off simple: As a young mercenary named Endir, you help defeat the monsters invading the land. As you search a snowy forest to serene piano music, you come across a vicious bear holding a woman hostage.

During the encounter the classical piano score revs up its intensity.

The active-time battle system is reminiscent of Chrono Trigger, right down to combo attacks that you unlock once more members enter your party. For now, it's just a matter of waiting for my bar to charge to unleash attacks, as they're on a cooldown before I can use them again. Edir can also use tech attacks to hit multiple enemies at once. This comes in handy for the pesky penguins I face after I defeat the bear and save the girl. There are no random encounters, but being in the vicinity of an enemy triggers combat.

Endir comes back from rescuing the woman to an interesting proposition. He's told about an 18-year-old girl and a ritual called the "village of sacrifice" where a sacrifice is chosen once every 10 years. He's told to kill this young woman, who's set to be the offering before she goes to the Last Land to fulfill her destiny. After tracking her down, you find out her name is Setsuna and she's warm and friendly. Endir begins to raise his sword, but villagers storm in, coming to her aid and capturing him.

Endir may be imprisoned, but his chance to prove himself comes soon enough: Monsters are attacking Setsuna's village. Setsuna refuses to leave Endir to die, freeing him from the magic that's restraining him. She has an immediate trust in him, even though moments ago he tried to kill her. Her friend, Aeterna, isn't as trusting, but they don't have time to waste and decide to enlist Endir.

This is where battles get more interesting, as I now have a three-member party. Combo attacks are extremely powerful, such as X-strike, which lets Endir and Aeterna team up to attack the enemy in an X shape for deadly damage. The battle system also offers an interesting decision: You can build up your SP points by not attacking when your bar is full, storing up to three turns. This allows you to unleash a charged attack or tech with timed button presses. Positioning also matters, and some of your attacks can knock enemies back. More importantly, characters all have unique perks. For instance, Aeterna can deal two hits to one enemy, while Endir can target multiple enemies at once.

I've only scratched the surface of I Am Setsuna, but so far it's promising. I can't wait to see how deep the battle system goes, and the soundtrack stands out as it drives the emotions associated with each experience. Most importantly, the story is already haunting me. Will Endir really let Setsuna die?
» **Kimberley Wallace**

Maybe **Starburst** juiciness comes from MC Hammer's juicy raindance.

Shazam this ad to see Hammer do his thing. #juicytheory

Starburst

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Below

Descending into darkness

Three years after its announcement, Below is nearing completion. The game pulls elements from series like Zelda and Dark Souls to deliver intentional combat, purposeful exploration, and a high level of challenge for fans of the top-down action genre. I recently played the latest build of Below and talked with Capybara president Nathan Vella about the recent updates.

Putting you in the shoes of a tiny character exploring a massive dungeon, Below offers little guidance. Your early characters are doomed as you use them to learn how the game works. You quickly discover what spike traps and tripwires look like, as well as how to defeat enemies.

Each character has one flexible hit point. If your characters take any damage, they begin a process of bleeding out that continues until they expire. The only ways to survive are to use fire to cauterize the wound or craft a bandage to stop the bleeding. Any characters that die are gone for good, and you have to restart with a new character and an empty inventory. To reflect being a new character, the walls shift using procedural generation to convey the feeling of being in an unexplored dungeon from that character's perspective.

The biggest new feature I saw is the Pocket. This new area is accessible using the fire pits at the beginning of each section. By napping at the fire, your character transports to a location outside of the main game's space. Here you can store weapons, items, and ingredients for future characters.

This lets you keep important or powerful items for specific sections. Say you're venturing into a dangerous region of the map; it might be a good idea to keep some of your rarer inventory items in the Pocket so you don't have to go find the corpse of your previous character just to retrieve something.

Below relies on exploration, and with procedural generation at play, it's hard to be sure about where you're going. To help with that, Capybara has introduced a minimap to show things like corpse locations of previous characters as well as which areas you've explored and missed. While much of Below is meant to be figured out by players, Vella says that the idea of a recipe book that stores crafting formulas once you discover them is something that

has been brought up in playtesting and on show floors.

"I think the more options there are, the more value that some kind of recipe book would add, especially if there are subtle differences between one result and another," Vella says. "We don't want to handhold, but if you've gone through the process of actually figuring it out, we're not holding your hand if we just give you a reminder of how to actually do what you just did – definitely being considered, definitely being talked about."

With Below inching closer to the finish line and Vella promising several surprises that the team isn't revealing prior to launch, we can't wait to see what other revelations lurk in the depths of the dungeon of this darkly beautiful title. » **Brian Shea**

Exploration is a major element of Below

Light plays a key role in the exploration of Below. Holding a light source reveals traps and gives you a better view of the action

Skylanders Imaginators

Warriors of your own design

A day after launching Spyro's Adventure, the inaugural release in the Skylanders series, developer Toys for Bob was bombarded with a common request from fans. "They wanted to make their own Skylanders," says Lou Studdert of Activison's production team. "They sent us art of what their Skylanders looked like, and info on how they played, what they sounded like, and what their catch phrases were. They came up with all of those things that we spend so much time making a Skylander out of; they wanted that power. This year we are giving them that power."

The ability to create your own Skylanders may sound like a joke, since the survival of this series depends on selling figures, but that's exactly what Toys for Bob is doing in Skylanders Imaginators. Players can still purchase new characters at retail, but Toys for Bob is hoping they also buy in on a new physical item called the Creation Crystal. When this item is placed on the Portal of Power for the first time, a character doesn't appear. Instead, you are warped to a character-creation menu where you design your own Skylander. That character's data is saved to the Creation Crystal, an ordinary-looking glass tube with a small, colored "Imaginite" element inside of it. Only one character can be saved to each Creation Crystal, meaning you need to buy 10 different Crystals if you want to create a character for each of the 10 elemental types featured in the game (each retailing for $9.99).

The creation process begins with the player selecting a battle class from 10 options, such as ninja or smasher. Combining the 10 classes with the 10 elemental types gives players 100 options out of the gate. Next up is the customization phase, which is broken down into body, gear, color, powers, and personality options. These categories give way to a wealth of fun choices. The body sculpting allows players to mix and match heads, arms, legs, chests, eyes, and ears. The options cover the gamut, from bird and bug parts to snow and stink themes. The finer tweaks allow players to alter the size and color of the individual parts, as well as the voice and catch phrase menu (which can be assembled from a limited selection of words). New customization items are unlocked through loot chests found in the levels, but may also be dropped randomly by enemies. The items that drop are also random, and fall into the common, rare, epic, and mythic categories. Some of the drops are tied specifically to battle classes.

If the proposal of a custom Skylander doesn't interest you and you'd rather play the game in the traditional way with an action figure created by Toys for Bob, Skylanders Imaginators welcomes 31 new characters called Senseis. Standing in at roughly the same height as the Giants and Trap Team figures, the Sensei are some of the most powerful beings in Skylands, and they all favor black and gold outfit colors. They are the only characters capable of unleashing new special attacks called Sky Chi. We were introduced to three Sensei: Master Kingpen, a giant penguin-like warrior; Master Tri-tip, a triceratops wielding a mace; and Golden Queen, the sorcerer boss from Skylanders Trap Team. She's joined the Skylanders after being rehabilitated for two years. Studdert says other bosses will likely get figures, and didn't rule out the idea of Kaos finally getting his due, even though he is the antagonist of this caper. Following the success of the Nintendo guest stars in SuperChargers, Toys for Bob says Imaginators will have a special guest as well.

Outside of the custom characters and Sensei, Skylanders Imaginators follows the same gameplay we've seen in all of the other Skylanders games. All of the multiplayer racing content from SuperChargers is included in Imaginators, but the vehicles won't have any effect on the campaign.

» **Andrew Reiner**

NASCAR Heat Evolution

Veteran developer Monster Games returns to the track

When Electronic Arts grabbed the exclusive NASCAR console license in 2003, it ended developer Monster Games' strong run with its NASCAR Heat franchise. Since then a lot has changed in the racing landscape. EA isn't making NASCAR games anymore, and developer Eutechnyx is also out after treading water with the license for five years.

Enter DMR – a publisher created by Tom Dusenberry and Ed Martin – two men with long histories in the video game sport. Both Dusenberry and Martin worked with Monster back when the franchise first started. Therefore it's fitting that DMR's acquisition of the NASCAR license signals Monster Games' re-entry into stock-car racing.

In the interim, Monster did some excellent work for Nintendo with the Excite series of racing titles and its 3DS port of Donkey Kong Country Returns. While Monster's return to the franchise is welcome, the company is starting from scratch on the new systems. Thus, NASCAR Heat Evolution isn't a seamless transition from the past Heat games, but a title made by a developer that knows what it's doing.

The game might not have multiple racing series like past Heat titles – although Monster says it's on its wishlist – but progression comes in the form of the career mode where you start out at the bottom of the Sprint Cup series. Do well and you can earn contracts with real-world secondary and primary sponsors who pump money into your operation, improving your car and facilities. Soon, your organization will have a wind tunnel, robotic welding, and machine fabrication at its disposal.

Your progress in career mode or anywhere else throughout the game opens up areas in other modes, such as unlocking challenges replicating events from the current and past seasons in real-life (which also make up some of the game's planned DLC.) You can also play through the Chase portion of a single season.

The other binding feature throughout the game is the adaptability of the A.I. as you race. As you get better in the quick race or season modes, so will those cars around you. This is Monster's attempt at making the game bridge the gap between casual and hardcore NASCAR fans (along with career-mode options for increased tire wear, race duration, etc.). In my short time with the game, I found that racing with all the assists off felt like previous console NASCAR games – not a simulation or a Sunday drive. The main difference lies in the kinds of contact you could get away with before you spin out. Monster says it's working hard on the A.I. drivers' mentality. Since they don't race on preset lines around the track, how they balance aggression versus conservatism and what lines they take will be interesting to see.

Monster Games isn't promising the moon in its first new NASCAR game, but the studio is anxious to get back on the track after its absence and make use of all the horsepower of this generation of home consoles. The company has big plans for where it wants to take the property, and after the relative instability of the past years, it's good to have Monster's veteran presence back behind the wheel.

» **Matthew Kato**

» **Platform**
PlayStation 4
Xbox One • PC

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

» **Publisher**
Dusenberry
Martin Racing

» **Developer**
Monster Games

» **Release**
September 13

Persona 5

More classmates enter the fold to fight the system

Your Contract With The Velvet Room

The Velvet Room and its proprietor Igor are back, but this time the place that's somewhere between dream and reality takes the form of a prison. Igor's new assistants are twin girls who call themselves wardens. They're here to aid the protagonist, with the goal of making him a master thief. Thus, his journey begins to steal the hearts of the twisted members of society. The main character is asked, "Do you have the resolve to challenge the distortion of the world?" With the corruption he's just experienced, we're pretty sure his answer is yes. Your mission is also to reform yourself and grow into a stronger person.

With a Japanese release date locked for September 15, more information is trickling out about the highly anticipated next entry in the Persona series. While North American fans have to wait until next year, breadcrumbs like Atlus revealing three more characters and new gameplay details in the Japanese magazine *Famitsu* prove the game still has plenty of surprises in store.

Persona 5 focuses on a group of friends who band together to become the "Phantom Thieves of Hearts." Their mission? Steal the hearts of corrupt adults and force them to confess their crimes and reform their ways. Some of their targets include an abusive teacher, a plagiarizing artist, and a blackmailing loan shark.

The story begins with the protagonist (who, like previous main characters, is more of a silent protagonist you roleplay through) facing off against a repugnant man harassing a woman. Our main character steps in to protect the victim and injures the culprit, but instead of getting awarded, the truth gets twisted and he is reprimanded and put on probation. This leads him to move into an old cafe with a friend of the family in Tokyo. Throughout the game, you visit real districts, such as Shibuya, Shinjuku, and even the electric town of Akihabara.

We previously learned about a few of the cast members, like a mysterious black cat named Morgana and a troublemaker named Ryuji. Atlus kept three other characters under

wraps until recently. Makoto channels some serious Mitsuru from Persona 3, as the intelligent and strong-willed student-council president who takes things way too seriously. Recluse Futaba is a genius hacker, who has amazing mathematical and programming chops but lacks social skills. Lastly, Haru is the daughter of a renowned food-service conglomerate owner; she's grown up in a wealthy household, making her naive to the dangers of the world. But she's also a keen observer, which is sure to come in handy on their journey to become the Phantom Thieves of Hearts.

This wouldn't be a Persona game without unique dungeons to fight through. Persona 5 has characters entering worlds known as Palaces, using a "Metaverse Navigator" to lead them to the evil hearts they must reform. These worlds have been warped by the corrupt individual's perception. You enter everything from an opulent castle to a pyramid. One world is an art gallery that has you jumping through paintings to navigate it. No new details have surfaced about the traditional battle system.

After a slew of fun spinoffs tackling everything from dancing to crossing over the Persona 3 and 4 casts, fans have waiting for a new cast and entry to embrace. Atlus has a knack for creating captivating, compelling tales with fun battles and great character development. Persona 5 already sounds like it's giving us more of what we love. » **Kimberley Wallace**

Star Ocean: Integrity And Faithlessness

Fun gameplay that keeps getting better

The Star Ocean series has been around for 20 years, but we haven't seen a new entry since 2009's The Last Hope. The absence almost makes the series feel like a relic from the past at this point. Thankfully, Square Enix and tri-Ace are giving the series a much-needed upgrade. From crafting to combat, Star Ocean always stood out for its fun and complex systems. After spending a few hours with the latest entry, that's still the case.

The story begins in typical RPG fashion: The main character, Fidel, and his childhood friend, Miki, must deal with enemy soldiers invading their village after an unexpected war breaks out. Fidel vows to do everything in his power to protect his homeland. Soon enough, Fidel realizes the war is bigger than he thought, affecting not just his hometown, but all of Resulia. Things only get more complicated when he runs into an amnesiac child who has magical powers he's never seen before. Determined to find answers and keep the world he knows and loves safe, Fidel and Miki venture to find answers and help the mysterious child.

While the narrative has plenty of threads typical of the genre, it should be interesting to see how it all pans out. Star Ocean has had some crazy plot twists over the years, so I'm hoping the story and characters get more interesting along the way.

The best features of Integrity and Faithlessness so far are the battle system and progression system. The action battles are fun, allowing you to dole out weak and strong attacks along with specials. You can cancel attacks with its rock-paper-scissors system. For instance, weak attacks can interrupt strong attacks, strong attacks can break an enemy's guard, and guarding can stop weak attacks and initiate counterattacks. Battles flow well, and you can swap between characters at any time to build up your combos. A reserve rush fills a gauge to different levels and allows you to activate a charged special attack for deadly damage – an essential for tough boss battles.

Every character has a slew of roles and can equip up to four at once. These allow you to build characters to your play style and liking. For instance, I assigned Miki to healing and defensive roles, while Fidel learned skills to aid in melee combat. Assigning roles also gives each character perks, such as raising their attack power, allowing them to take more actions, or letting them guard more often. You can even increase their damage for certain enemies. The role system looks to be one of the most promising innovations; they can be leveled up and you can set different roles that play off each other well. It gave me a behind-the-scenes way to control the tide of battle.

With Integrity and Faithlessness's release date right in view, seeing the game in action was reassuring. Hopefully, tri-Ace can find ways to make the many gameplay mechanics exciting throughout the whole trek.

» **Kimberley Wallace**

Manifold Garden

A new, gravity-bending perspective on the puzzle genre

In most video games, gravity is more of a loose concept than a law. Players double-jump and drop from great heights with impunity, explosions blast vehicles sky-high, and even the most novice soldier can throw a grenade clear across a battlefield. Indie developer William Chyr has dreamed up his own unique take on general relativity, giving players the power to shift, flip, and fall their way through surreal landscapes that would make M.C. Escher's head spin.

The core puzzle mechanic in Manifold Garden allows players to change their center of gravity at will by walking up to any perpendicular surface and pulling the trigger. Doing so automatically hops you onto the new plane, shifting your viewpoint of the environment by 90 degrees. The first few puzzle rooms are simple affairs designed to acclimate you to your newfound gravitational freedom, and the stark art style makes it easy to shift your own perspective on the environments. After a few minutes I was transitioning effortlessly between floors, walls, and ceilings, and jogging up (down?) the undersides of stairways in each increasingly complex area.

Soon, a series of colored cubes introduce a new snag; like in any number of other puzzle games, you must pick these cubes up and place them on switches to open their corresponding doors. However, each color of cube has its own fixed gravity, and can only be moved when you are aligned to the same plane. The puzzles quickly ramp up in difficulty as they start combining multiple cubes with different gravitational pulls, as well as multidirectional cubes that can travel in both directions on a given axis. Thankfully, every time you realign yourself the "floor" color shifts to match the corresponding gravitational cubes, which helps mitigate the confusion. At least some of it, anyway.

After solving a series of puzzles in confined rooms and hallways, I stepped out into an open landscape full of infinitely repeating towers. Jumping off the edge didn't end in a game over screen. Instead, I continued falling through space until the areas seamlessly looped around again, a feature Chyr takes advantage of in later puzzles. I look forward to seeing what other vertigo-inducing tricks Chyr is cooking up for Manifold Garden's strange and surprising world. » **Jeff Marchiafava**

Switching quickly between multiple orientations can get a bit disorienting

Ruiner

Brutality and revenge in the city of Rengkok

Developer Reikon is a product of the small-but-successful game industry of Poland. Much of the team has history with CD Projekt Red and Techland, the developers behind The Witcher and Dying Light, respectively. The group of Polish artists and designers stepped away from the zombie and fantasy narrative mainstays of game development to found Reikon and play with a style that isn't touched on nearly as often: cyberpunk.

CD Projekt Red has a cyberpunk game in development (one literally named after the science-fiction sub-genre), but Ruiner's story designer Magdalena Tomkowicz says staying with CD Projekt simply wouldn't be enough for what Reikon wants to do with Ruiner.

Ruiner plays like an even more oppressive and intense version of Hotline Miami. It's a twin-stick action game that uses guns and melee weapons equally. Its art style is inspired by classic cyberpunk like *Blade Runner* and anime like *Akira*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Patlabor*. "*Akira* and Otomo's work was very influential for me, and he was always my master, but of course his visual language comes from other guys," art director Benedykt Szneider says.

The portion of the game we play features a protagonist with his face covered by a mask searching for a hacker named "the wizard" with the help of a remote woman simply going by "her,"

guiding him through the claustrophobic city of Rengkok.

Szneider references Hotline Miami as a starting point for the gameplay, but it doesn't take long to recognize what separates Ruiner from other twin-stick action games. A warp ability allows you to slam into enemies from a distance, or get yourself out of trouble quickly. The combat is fast, brutal, scary, and challenging. Making it past the demo's final boss was an achievement in perseverance, and it all serves to sell how dangerous the city of Rengkok can be.

Tomkowicz says Rengkok is a play on the Japanese word for purgatory. The city is home to Heaven, a virtual reality company that creates digital worlds and emulates sensations. It is in the emulation of emotion where Heaven exposes its dark side. Their

creation requires they actually be experienced by somebody first, and the sensations demanded by the consumers sometimes include terror and even death. "That's just the beginning," says Tomkowicz, who isn't ready to share exactly how it all ties into the faceless protagonist's story. She does reveal, however, that the protagonist is looking for his brother, a character he is struggling without.

Ruiner may draw from the established cyberpunk genre, but Reikon is working hard to make sure the game stands out. "Ruiner was never meant to look like any other games, and we didn't want to evoke similar feelings to other games," Szneider says. Despite its oppressive atmosphere, I am eager to explore more of Rengkok later this year. » **Kyle Hilliard**

Atlas Reactor

Turn-based strategy enters the hero-based competitive arena

Trion World's upcoming strategy title seems incredibly ambitious, a blend of everything hot on the Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) scene and turn-based strategy. Atlas Reactor combines character personalities, special abilities, and 4v4 competitive play with fast-paced simultaneous turns, meaning that while the philosophy may be rooted in pure tactics like an XCOM title, gameplay is anything but ponderous and labored. Actions must be taken quickly and deliberately.

Coordinating your turn with random teammates may seem like an impossible affair, but handy arrows and UI elements let everyone know what you're planning. You have seconds, not minutes, to make your choices each turn, and everything plays out in a particular order so that characters can be moving out of the way, attacking, or laying out a huge attack that leaves them vulnerable in any given turn. Many characters also have counters and other skills that leave the field open for some degree of poker playing. Bluffing opponents off of a deadly strike with the threat of devastating countermeasures makes for some compelling mind games, with players guessing and outguessing themselves at every turn.

With unique freelancers (heroes) that all come with sophisticated skill-sets, Atlas Reactor is not unlike a team-based, lightning-fast game of chess. Gameplay is more entertaining with a full group of friends that can coordinate both their characters and actions, but it's fairly satisfying to jump into a random game and try to make things work with all kinds of players and combinations.

With the MOBA scene flooded and many tactical games focusing on single-player affairs, Atlas Reactor is a unique mix of elements that has potential. We'll lock our turns in later this year and see how they play out.
» **Daniel Tack**

Turns happen simultaneously, so there's a good deal of trying to get into the opposing team's heads

» **Platform**
PC
» **Style**
8-Player
Online Strategy
» **Publisher**
Trion Worlds
» **Developer**
Trion Worlds
» **Release**
2016

Dreadnought

A thinking man's intergalactic war

Most space shooters place you in the cockpit of a nimble starfighter or some other X-Wing stand-in. Dreadnought's methodical space battles, on the other hand, have you commanding massive capital ships that turn about as fast as the *Titanic* headed for an iceberg. The result is a thoughtful space shooter than is surprisingly intense.

We recently jumped into Dreadnought's closed beta for several five-on-five battles raging across the orbits and atmospheres of various planets. Most of our encounters took place around the rings of Saturn, and the planet's giant asteroids and other flotsam offered great cover, even for a ship the size of the Empire State Building. When combat gets closer to a planet's surface, finding cover gets trickier. Mountain ranges might shield your ship from a barrage of missiles, but they restrict your view, so eventually you have to rise into the open atmosphere to get a lock on your targets.

Dreadnought features a variety of different ship classes, which you upgrade as you earn experience and unlock new weapons and abilities. My first test run is in a Destroyer-class vessel, called the *Athos*, which isn't the toughest or fastest ship, but it has favorable stats across the board. In addition to a repeater cannon, it is outfitted with a series of special weapons and abilities that operate on cooldowns. The tempest missiles unleash a flurry of explosive projectiles that home in on their target. A salvo of torpedoes do even more damage, but require more aiming. Thankfully, the *Athos* is also outfitted with an energy generator, which comes in handy when my shields run dry.

After a few rounds getting used to Dreadnought's deliberate pacing, I dive into an Artillery Cruiser called *Svarog*. While most of the ships in Dreadnought are slow and plodding, the Artillery Cruiser class is a little faster, but it is also a glass cannon. Thankfully, the *Svarog*'s anti-missile lasers help me avoid obliteration on more than a few occasions. My most successful battles involve using a stationary cloak to disappear and lie in wait for the perfect shot with my primary cannon, which functions a lot like a sniper rifle thanks to its powerful blast and slow rate of fire.

It takes a few rounds to acclimate to Dreadnought's slower shootouts. These methodical engagements, where ships plod through fields of sporadic cover in hopes of unleashing a barrage of hellfire on unsuspecting enemies, reminded me more of deep-sea submarine battles rather than the frantic light shows of traditional space shooters. Thankfully, Yager's take on space warfare is a welcome change of pace, and you might find it hard to jump back into a small starfighter's pilot seat again. » **Ben Reeves**

Yager is planning to have approximately 50 different abilities available at launch, so there will be a good diversity of ship builds
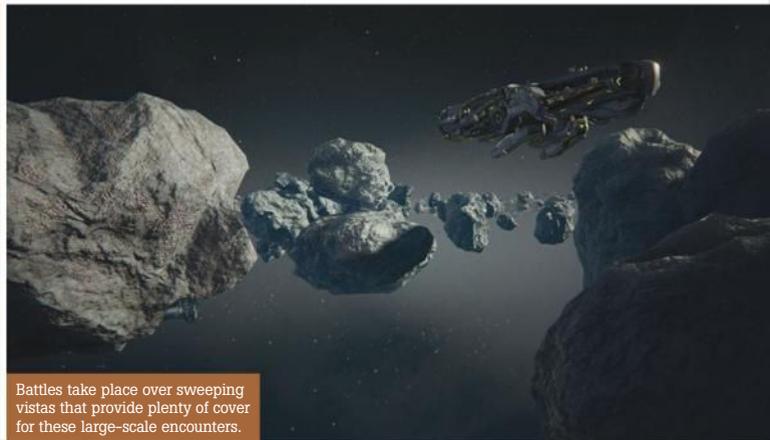
Battles take place over sweeping vistas that provide plenty of cover for these large-scale encounters.

Monster Hunter Generations

Adding a sense of style to the classic formula

It wasn't until Monster Hunter 4 Ultimate (as it was named in the West) that the popular Japanese series started to finally pick up steam stateside. Capcom found balance between the complexity longtime fans crave and the accessibility necessary to grow the franchise. That evolutionary path appears to be continuing with the upcoming Monster Hunter Generations thanks to the inclusion of two new features.

All 14 weapons from Monster Hunter 4 Ultimate return, but this time players can choose from four different styles.

One is the classic play style, but the others emphasize jumping and aerial attacks, counter attacks, and the new Arts.

Hunter Arts are essentially finishing moves. You can take one to three into battle depending on your style, with each weapon offering different options. The meters charge independently, so you can strategically decide when to trigger them. They appear on the touchscreen and are close enough to your right thumb for easy access.

Not only do the styles and arts offer added customization and strategy, but they increased my enjoyment while testing them out. Knocking down a Great Maccao opened the speedy lizard up to the dual blade spinning Blood Wind attack. When the beast sprung forward using its tail as a coil, activating the evasion art kept us out of claw range.

The methodical combat for which Monster Hunter is known hasn't changed. Battle is still as much about strategy as it is about agility. But the styles and arts add an additional dimension to give players a way to hunt on their own terms. » Michael Futter

» **Platform**
3DS

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

» **Publisher**
Capcom

» **Developer**
Capcom

» **Release**
Summer

game informer
GAME OF THE MONTH

82 Overwatch

Blizzard's first new franchise in nearly two decades doesn't disappoint. Overwatch is a fast, fun, first-person shooter with unforgettable characters and vibrant personality. This multiplayer, online-only experience offers a wealth of various playstyles to explore and heroes to master, and is immensely enjoyable whether you're picking it up for a few minutes playing solo or settling in for a night of gaming with friends. A highly accessible romp with plenty of depth under the surface, Overwatch lives up to Blizzard's legacy.

THE **SCORING** SYSTEM

10	Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.	**5**	Flawed. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.
9	Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.	**4**	Bad. While some things work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunctions or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.
8	Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.	**3**	Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.
7	Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.	**2**	Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.
6	Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.	**1**	Broken like the hearts of Disney Infinity fans

AWARDS

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

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10

» **Concept**
Two teams battle in fast, objective-based matches with a roster of distinct characters

» **Graphics**
The colorful characters and settings are bright, but you can always tell what's going on

» **Sound**
Audio is integral to the gameplay, calling out when ultimate abilities have been activated. Memorable quips from each character flow endlessly, and a spirited score enhances the action

» **Playability**
Incredibly easy to pick up and play, since most characters have only a single weapon and a handful of abilities. However, advanced teamplay and strategy leave plenty of room to grow

» **Entertainment**
Vibrant and endlessly entertaining. Whether you just want to play a few quick rounds or settle in for hours with friends, Overwatch delivers with polished panache

» **Replay Value**
High

Looking To The Future

Overwatch is already an incredible game, but the promise of continued support in the form of maps, modes, and heroes could keep things fresh and interesting for months and even years. With competitive play on the horizon, eSports enthusiasts and skilled teams looking to take their game to the next level should expect new options to suit their needs sometime after launch. However, there are still other things we'd love to see make their way to Overwatch, such as clan/guild support and more robust spectator options.

Overwatch

An epic evolution

As the clock winds down to zero, you backtrack in time to drop a perfect pulse bomb on the enemy position, blowing apart the greedy robot-turned-turret and his teammate, a slick sniper assassin who was too busy tracking her prey to notice your explosive gift. The game heads into overtime as the payload wagon rests mere inches away from the victory point, but your team has just been annihilated by an enormous magical dragon. Then you hear it: "Heroes never die!" As your one chance, your team's Mercy hero activates her ultimate ability and brings your entire group back to life for one last stand. After Mei brings a scientifically sound winter to your opponents by freezing them, victory is yours. Moments like these define Overwatch, including amazing victories and last-second defeats. No matter what happens – win or lose – you're going to have fun. Overwatch may not have a campaign to speak of, but entertaining stories emerge from the interactions with your team and your enemies.

Blizzard's influence on gaming is unquestionable, having redefined and reinvented almost every genre it has set its sights on, including real-time strategy, collectible card games, and MMOs. Wading into first-person shooter waters, specifically the team-based shooter, is a daunting prospect for any company. Even so, Blizzard has done it again, pairing objective-focused play and fast matches that encourage you to pursue objectives rather than kill/death/assist stats.

Overwatch's strength lies in its simplicity and polish, much like Dota 2 or League of Legends. Two teams of six players each do battle on a handful of maps, and modes all boil down to some form of escorting, capturing, or protecting an objective. Other modes may be available, but the game is at its best by keeping things close to the core, with maps everyone knows and easy-to-understand modes. While expectations today may call for a single-player campaign or a wide variety of modes, Overwatch's consistently chaotic gameplay stands on its own, giving players the tools to ensure that no game ever plays out the same. These elements simply form the canvas where players paint a new and unique experience, match after match.

Unforgettable characters are the lifeblood and driving force of Overwatch. Time-traveling Tracer makes quirky British quips as she blinks through the battlefield, while tanky Reinhardt roars as he dunks enemies into dust with his rocket hammer. These personality-driven heroes have unique skillsets that make playing each one different; you're not just embracing the sniper rifle or the rocket launcher, but ability kits that come together to form a hero.

Hero personalities are tied into the gameplay directly, as it's essential to listen for important catch phrases and call-outs to identify when players have activated their signature ultimate abilities. Widowmaker's silky-spiderlike notification that "nothing can hide from my sight" lets you know that you can now see opposing forces behind obstacles, and you won't soon forget the warning that comes alongside Hanzo's deadly, wall-ignoring magical dragon or McCree's cowboy declaration that "It's high noon" (avoid a shootout with McCree at high noon, in case that wasn't obvious). Banter between heroes often reveals more of the lore during matches as rivals and allies interact.

Whether you're slinging Widowmaker's grappling hook or deflecting incoming projectiles with Genji's blades, gameplay changes dramatically from one character to another. Overwatch encourages players to swap characters constantly to deal with the ever-evolving nature of a match. With no restriction on multiple instances of the same hero, you and your friends can assemble a traditional tank/support/damage group and push the payload to victory. But you can also have a lot of fun goofing around with six Roadhogs all trying to land hooks in the enemies on a map where you can pull them down a well.

Overwatch provides a dynamic gameplay experiences that allow anyone to enjoy it immediately, while at the same time rewarding those who seek to become experts. You settle in and learn how to play within mere minutes, but the potential for character mastery and team-centric gameplay go well into hundreds of hours. Whether you're playing solo with random teammates for 20 minutes or looking to become an eSports pro, you're having an amazing time. Important sayings like "behind you" are streamlined into the game with characters saying them outright without need for player input, allowing players who don't want to use voice chat to have access to these critical observations melded directly into core gameplay.

Overwatch doesn't have a campaign or any single-player/offline aspects worthy of note, but its profound ability to provide drastically different experiences with each hero ensures that fresh explorations and hours of renewed enjoyment are a single tap away. Concern regarding content offerings grow when a multiplayer-only experience arrives, but Overwatch's laser focus on providing a polished arena where every game tells its own tale provides many hours of entertainment. In addition, Blizzard is not dividing the community or locking characters behind paywalls, as all future maps and characters will be free.

Overwatch is an amazing experience. It's fresh and consistently fun, with matches that are great in random groups, but astonishingly good when played with friends. Blizzard has taken its masterful art of polishing and perfection to the team shooter, and things will never be the same. » **Daniel Tack**

This review pertains to the PC version of Overwatch. Overwatch is also available on PS4 and Xbox One

Doom

A bloody welcome rebirth

8.75

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

What a difference 12 years makes. In the sizable gap between Doom games, the first-person shooter genre has evolved in myriad ways. Far Cry embraced the freedom of open worlds. Call of Duty set a new high bar for set-piece-driven linear campaigns and deep multiplayer progression. Games like BioShock doubled down on storytelling, while others like Team Fortress 2 abandoned single-player altogether in favor of dedicated competitive experiences. The further these offerings push boundaries, the less modern shooters resemble the game that put the genre on the map. This diaspora ultimately works in favor of id Software's latest Doom title, an unrelenting, kinetic, and obscenely bloody return to form for the first mainstream FPS.

Even though this long-overdue reboot resurrects several traits that made the original two titles so revered, it feels surprisingly fresh. Forget hiding behind cover for prolonged bullet exchanges or following a linear path to your objective while killing endless waves of generic dudes with guns. The Doom campaign eschews these modern trends completely. To survive blood-drenched battles with a familiar array of classic Doom demons, players must embrace constant movement, make on-the-fly tactical shifts, and get up close and personal with enemies for brutal, over-the-top executions.

This gameplay dynamic requires responsive controls, and id Software is up to the task. With no weapon reloads or sprint buttons to worry about (the fabled "Doomguy" protagonist moves in a constant state of hurry), you are free to focus on picking the right weapon for the occasion and artfully dodging incoming projectiles and rushers. The Frenzied combat feels unlike any other shooter on the market, and creates memorable moments that honor the legacy of the franchise. Pulling off a chainsaw kill while near death to recover a treasure trove of health and ammo, laying waste to an onslaught of heavies thanks to a quad damage power-up, or stringing together a series of glory kills to cap a frantic arena battle are the real reasons to play this game.

While the action faithfully adheres to the pace of classic Doom, id incorporates several minor, contemporary design touches help flesh out the campaign experience as well. Exploring rewards players with upgrades that enhance health, ammo, weaponry, and play style. You may even find some clever nods to the series past.

The campaign splits its time between the Mars space station and Hell itself, each of which provides excellently crafted combat arenas. Once id rolls out the last classic demon, Doom settles into a comfortable (if predictable) pattern of simply throwing more difficult waves of enemies into the fray. The battles stay hectic, but Doom could have used a few more wild cards later in the game to keep the experience fresh. The game sprinkles a few boss fights into the mix as well. These offer a decent challenge on higher difficulties, but essentially serve as palate cleansers. A forgettable narrative about scientists harnessing the energy of Hell pushes the action in a forward trajectory, but rightfully takes a backseat to the combat.

The campaign steals the show, performing at a level the other modes can't match. The straightforward competitive multiplayer recalls the glory days of arena shooters like Quake or Unreal, largely relying on the rush of circle strafing duels to keep players engaged. The standard fare of modes varieties and cosmetics-driven progression check off the boxes of a fully featured experience, but unlike the campaign, it feels generic.

The final pillar of Doom is an ambitious creation tool called SnapMap. This beginner-friendly toolset allows players to quickly design single-player, cooperative, and multiplayer challenges. The tutorials do a great job of coaching, but ultimately the pre-fab options at players' disposal limit creative freedom. Instead of designing your own spaces from scratch, you are forced to use templates, and they dreadfully lack diversity of settings. I haven't found many compelling experiences available to play thus far, which is to be expected considering the community is still playing around with the feature set. SnapMap may lead to some interesting gameplay experiments, but its limitations will likely turn off the serious modding scene.

Driven largely by its successful single-player campaign, Doom is a welcome return to form for the genre-defining franchise. By sticking to time-worn traditions in all the right places and deftly employing some modern flourishes, id has rediscovered what made this demon slaying series so successful. Multiplayer and SnapMap don't reach the same heights, but shooter fans shouldn't miss this bloodthirsty romp through Hell. **» Matt Bertz**

» **Concept**
Bring Doom back to its high speed, ultra-violent basics and inject it with some smart modern design flourishes

» **Graphics**
Whether you're playing HD or 4K on a high-end PC, the id Tech engine capably renders the frantic action at a good framerate. The demonic landscapes of Hell look like they're ripped straight from '90s metal album covers

» **Sound**
When the double bass drums start pounding and the metal riffs start shredding, you know it's time for a demon slaughter

» **Playability**
The controls hold up well to the kinetic pace, and id enables hotswaps of weapons and mods to keep you running and gunning

» **Entertainment**
The campaign is a glorious, bloody return to form for the godfather of first-person shooters, but the multiplayer and SnapMap don't match it

» **Replay Value**
Moderately high

Odin Sphere Leifthrasir

New life for an old favorite

8

PS4 • PS3 • Vita

» **Concept**
An underappreciated PS2 gem gets an array of tweaks and improvements

» **Graphics**
Vanillaware's gorgeous visuals have been improved, and the signature style shines through in the characters, enemies, and environments

» **Sound**
The dialogue often sounds stilted, but the soundtrack is still solid

» **Playability**
Combat is fast and fluid, and the crippling slowdown that marred the original release is nonexistent

» **Entertainment**
The changes add a fun modern edge to combat and progression. However, the storytelling and repetition are more noticeable problems in today's gaming landscape

» **Replay Value**
Moderate

Nostalgia is one of the main draws of remastered games. Retaining the original mechanics while making visual improvements and adjustments lets fans relive the experiences they already love. That's the approach taken by high-profile remasters like God of War III, Grand Theft Auto V, and the new Tomb Raider – but not Odin Sphere Leifthrasir. Vanillaware has significantly redesigned the action and its underlying systems, so even though the graphics are gorgeous and familiar, Leifthrasir feels almost completely new.

If you didn't play the original 2007 version of Odin Sphere, you won't have anything to measure Leifthrasir against, but that's okay. You can play the included Classic Mode if you want a full understanding, but all you need to know is Odin Sphere tells a story inspired by various myths, and you witness events (sometimes even the same events) from the perspectives of five protagonists. I remember the narrative being one of my favorite parts of the original, but it has not aged well. The structure is interesting, but beyond that gimmick, the dialogue and plot weave a decent-but-conventional fairytale that leaves you to fill in a lot of blanks yourself. While that's disappointing, the story still adequately sets up the action, which is where this remaster shines.

Vanillaware draws on its experience with later games like Muramasa: The Demon Blade and Dragon's Crown to reengineer Odin Sphere's combat, transforming it into a fast, diverse, and entertaining affair. You move from zone to zone on a larger map, encountering groups of enemies in 2D, side-scrolling areas. How exactly you confront those enemies depends on where you are in the story, since each character has different attacks and skills. You may want to launch into a flurry of aerial attacks, use a potion to create a toxic cloud, or do a blade spin to shred the opposition. Regardless of who you are controlling, the action is smooth and responsive. It isn't exactly strategically demanding, but I still got a thrill when a well-planned combo went off without a hitch.

Beyond your standard attacks, you also invest in various skills as you level. A passive damage boost gives you an advantage when striking from behind, while weapon skills can send you into a blur of magically fueled slashes. These factors further differentiate the characters; the fairy queen Mercedes has abilities focused on ranged attacks and keeping enemies at bay, but once you finish her campaign, you move on to Oswald the shadow knight (my favorite of the five), who has skills focused on enhancing his berserk mode. The fun of discovering how these abilities shape each character's approach to combat dulls the pain of starting from nothing when a new story arc begins.

The battles may feel different, but the characters tread dangerously familiar territory in other ways. Each campaign simply remixes the same elements in different sequences with minor tweaks; level types, basic enemies, and bosses are recycled to exhaustion. Even the progression feels the same, since the bulk of your levels are gained through the cooking system. Though you learn some new recipes with different characters, you're generally gathering the same ingredients to make the same dishes to earn experience. Plus, despite the unique combat skills, a lot of abilities overlap among characters. The repetition doesn't deflate all of the fun, but it makes the process feel less rewarding.

Some of the same issues were also present in the original PS2 release, but Leifthrasir is an enormous evolution as a whole. With so many annoyances fixed (see sidebar), this feels like the game Odin Sphere was meant to be. The presentation is top-notch, and the action is fast-paced and satisfying. I still got the sense of an older game at the core of the experience, but the updates more than justify revisiting this stylish and unique adventure. » **Joe Juba**

What's Different?

If you played Odin Sphere on PS2 and are curious about some of the specific changes, these are the most significant alterations. It isn't a comprehensive list, but these tweaks improved the experience the most for me.

- New skills and leveling system
- Better inventory system
- The POW meter does not deplete with normal attacks
- Improved performance (and no slowdown during critical fights)

- Alchemy is more varied and flexible
- Cooking during stages (not just between) to raise your level
- No more managing multiple forms of currency
- Grinding not required

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt – Blood And Wine

Another superb outing in a vicious land

9.25

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

"You really want a happy ending, don't you?" This line is said to Geralt as he tries his best to solve Blood and Wine's complex murders. As we know in the world of the Witcher, a happy ending rarely happens. This isn't a fairytale, but the desire to see Geralt rise above the worst circumstances and change things for the better was still with me the whole way, especially since CD Projekt has billed Blood and Wine as the last tale with Geralt at the center. The good news is CD Projekt crafted a wonderful expansion for his sendoff that captures the series' trademarks: unexpected twists, tough choices, and intense battles. With its vast new area and involved plot, Blood and Wine feels like a full game; don't expect a simple side story with a few sets of quests scattered about. It feels on par with the quality and creativity of Wild Hunt, and I loved it.

Blood and Wine takes place in a new and exciting region: Toussaint. It reminds me of Tuscany with its architecture and vineyards. Wine is ever-present. It's almost always a talking point; you find bottles scattered about, and your headquarters is on a vineyard. While the citizens of Toussaint are proud of their craft, they're not too joyous about a mysterious beast that's been murdering knights. Geralt goes on the case to track down the monster and discovers that, as usual, things are more complicated than they appear.

The main narrative is full of twists that I won't dare spoil. Let's just say it captures betrayal at its finest, and my head was spinning about who to trust and what impact my decisions would have in the long run. As in the past, your choices affect the world around you. Sometimes they are as grand as a character living or dying. Others are small, like whether someone appears at your headquarters or gives you a discount.

Blood and Wine features an abundance of side quests, and they are extremely clever and fun, rarely feeling like filler. One had me tracking down a culprit who castrated a statue. Another was a commentary on the ridiculous bureaucracy at a bank. You also encounter new places of interest as you explore, such as vineyard infestations and knights errant in distress. These don't feel all that different from previous points of interest, but do allow you some extra things to do in the world for experience. I had one that put me on an interesting side quest where statues came to life. You can romance someone, but it's poorly done and feels forced. Geralt only spends a few moments with the main love interest, and his previous interactions with her make it seem like he wasn't fond of her. Still, the majority of the expansion is teeming with creativity, from side quests to fairytale-inspired areas to the monster design.

Bosses are more frequent and exciting than in the previous Hearts of Stone expansion. Not much has changed with combat, but you do have a new mutation upgrade system that gives you new abilities and bonuses in battle. These are extremely powerful, and I found them worthwhile to spend the time unlocking. Once I got the freeze upgrade for my telekinesis power, bosses went down much faster. These abilities require hefty investment, since you need the right materials and at least three skill points to unlock them. My only big gripe is toward the end of the game it feels like wave after wave of enemies are hitting you without much to break up the chaos. Some late bosses have ridiculously overpowered attacks that can kill you with two consecutive hits, but these flaws are minor compared to the excitement that comes from knocking out these vicious foes.

Blood and Wine is an example of an expansion that takes advantage of providing top-notch new content. The whole expansion is an adrenaline rush, reminding me of the intense pacing of Wild Hunt's final act. It also has plenty nods to Geralt and his friends that longtime fans are sure to enjoy. You never know when a past character may make an appearance or be mentioned. The world has so much depth and excitement; Blood and Wine is a great way to spend your last days as Geralt. » **Kimberley Wallace**

» **Concept**
Take Geralt on an adventure to track down a beastly murderer in the new region of Toussaint

» **Graphics**
Toussaint, a gorgeous, inviting land untouched by war, is inundated with unique monsters

» **Sound**
The voice actors are well-suited for their roles, driving emotional scenes. A lot of the soundtrack is from the base game, but that's not a bad thing

» **Playability**
The controls haven't changed, so navigating the world and fighting baddies simply requires reacquainting yourself with the mechanics

» **Entertainment**
Blood and Wine is an impressive expansion that tells a captivating tale about betrayal and love

» **Replay Value**
Moderate

How Do You Access Blood And Wine?

Like the previous expansion, Hearts of Stone, Blood and Wine is a standalone story. You can use your Witcher 3: Wild Hunt save, but it's recommended you're at least level 30, or you can choose to play with a new game mode that provides you with a Geralt of that level with unallocated skill points. Once you access the expansion through the main menu, a new quest appears with a marker guiding it to the quest board to select it. From there, you are transported to Toussaint.

Battleborn

Ill-conceived action

6

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

» Concept
Guide a kaleidoscope of characters through an unintelligible universe-saving mission, and then drill down into arena-based competitive matches

» Graphics
Characters look great, but the brightly colored environments, constant explosions, and choppy animation style makes the action hard to interpret, especially at close range

» Sound
Audio design and music is weirdly distant, and the constant banter and quips rarely hit with the humor they're shooting for

» Playability
Numerous characters and their disparate powers are rewarding to master, but the core shooting and melee elements fall flat

» Entertainment
A varied playable roster isn't enough to salvage a lackluster campaign and clumsy combat

» Replay Value
Moderately low

Battleborn has big ambitions. It includes over two dozen characters with unique powers and gameplay. A lengthy campaign explores a universe of planets and cultures. Three objective-based multiplayer modes attempt a strategic competitive experience that combines first-person shooting and hand-to-hand combat in a MOBA-inspired playground. Unfortunately, the implementation of most of these features fails to meet the high aspirations of the concept, and is further hamstrung by moment-to-moment gameplay that is chaotic, imprecise, and unresponsive.

Gearbox has a strong instinct for distinct and varied characters, and Battleborn continues that trend with an entertaining roster of playable heroes. That variety is the biggest selling point. The heroes are unusual and mostly entertaining to discover, and homing in on the playstyles that work for you is satisfying. Like in MOBAs, any given mission or match sees your character fully level up, and the choices you make help further specialize your approach to combat. Consistent play unlocks new cosmetic and mutation options, as well as game-changing gear loadouts, ensuring further investment, and I appreciate the steady pace of progression.

While I enjoy the varied play, I can't say the same for the repetitive and banal dialogue that both the heroes and their adversaries spout ad nauseum throughout the plodding storyline. The characters have the smug, self-satisfied attitude of bad '90s cartoon stars, with endless sarcastic quips and lame jokes to back it up. A slick animated intro reminiscent of Peter Chung's *Æon Flux* lends hope of some stylish action, but as soon as we enter the meat of the campaign, coherent and entertaining storytelling begins to dissolve. The plot never goes anywhere, despite the ostensibly epic setup about fighting to survive the end of all things and save the last star in the universe.

Your progress through the narrative is hampered by the litany of missteps that characterize the eight-mission campaign. While level art and design are colorful and interesting, the action and objectives within those levels are tedious. Enemy A.I. is virtually non-existent; I saw one boss blindly walk around a pillar for three minutes as we whittled away his health bar. Endless wave-based defend and escort objectives crop up in virtually every mission, which is boring at first and excruciating by the end. Combat balance is all over the place, with long stretches of overly simplistic fights, followed by sudden escalations into crushing difficulty. I'd enjoy the challenge, except a single failed objective (or losing all your lives) ends the mission and, if you're playing in a public team, dissolves the group.

Cooperative online play for up to five works well, but I'm disappointed by the lack of drop-in play options, especially since missions often take a long time, and you can't take a break part way through and return later. I appreciate the inclusion of two-player splitscreen options, but the mode is plagued by miniscule onscreen text and no adjustments to the aspect ratio, resulting in a full third of the screen dominated by mini maps. Public cooperative matchmaking also sees some bad ideas, like the inability to directly select which mission you want to play for all but the final episode, allowing you only to vote on three random options.

Competitive play fares better, despite a painfully slow process for getting into a match. Incursion directly cribs from the established framework of MOBAs, in which two opposing teams of five work to assault enemy territory and overtake defenses, even while escorting minion groups to aid in the attack. Meltdown is a variation on the theme, in which the focus shifts specifically to getting the minions to a particular spot on the field, which leads to focused skirmishes around the happily toddling robots. Capture is the nod to more traditional first-person shooters, in which the holding of three zones around the map is the key to victory. These three PvP modes each have a high learning curve, and it was a long time before I was able to appreciate some of the strategic elements at play.

Even when I finally tapped into a character or two that I enjoyed, or found a competitive match with some engaging give and take, my dislike of the core gameplay remained. No matter the ranged character, shooting feels stiff and unsatisfying. Little beyond a ticking health bar communicates that you're damaging a foe, and when you're getting hit, it's hard to tell where the damage is coming from. Melee fares far worse. Run up to foes and wildly swing in their general direction, and the onscreen action becomes an indecipherable mess of explosions, slashes, and effects. This is exacerbated by a choppy animation style, a clash of onscreen color, and strangely flat sound design. On a fundamental level, combat feels disconnected and awkward.

I enjoy Gearbox's work on games like Borderlands, and I was cheerfully enthused by the studio's willingness to try something different with Battleborn. The chaos of battle and goofy tone of the team's latest creation may work for some players, and even as of this writing Gearbox is actively patching balance and matchmaking issues that may improve the experience. But after many hours, many characters, and many matches, I can't recommend something that so completely failed to click. I applaud the ambition, but not every grand venture ends with triumph.
» Matt Miller

Homefront: The Revolution

Time to raise the white flag

4

PS4 • Xbox One • PC

With a story penned by Hollywood director and screenwriter John Milius, the original Homefront was an ambitious military shooter rendered mediocre by technical limitations, dated graphics, and a lack of distinguishing features. A few regime changes later – which include both the series' developer and publisher – and Homefront: The Revolution returns with some novel additions including a unique take on the open-world format and on-the-fly weapon customization. Unfortunately, developer Dambuster Studios failed to slay Homefront's true enemy; an unending litany of glitches, A.I. failings, and performance issues do indeed differentiate Homefront from other shooters, but for all the wrong reasons.

Homefront: The Revolution reboots the series' already dubious premise with an even more absurd explanation of America's downfall: In the near future, the U.S. government sees fit to start buying all of its military equipment from the technological powerhouse that is North Korea, which then renders our defenses useless by disabling all of our electronic devices via a hidden backdoor. Once you play through the lackluster intro, you're free to start taking back the city of Philadelphia one district at a time. Unfortunately, it doesn't take long for Homefront: The Revolution's fundamental problems to arise.

A number of games deliver compelling first-person shooting with a controller. Homefront isn't one of them. The gunplay is sluggish and inexact, making even perfect headshots unsatisfying. Navigation doesn't fare much better; vaulting over objects feels stilted and breaks your flow of movement, and the

hit detection for grabbing onto ledges is spotty, often requiring multiple hops for your character to recognize a climbable surface. These basic problems feel like they belong to a bygone generation.

The same is true for one of Homefront: The Revolution's biggest stumbling blocks: the framerate. Despite a hefty day-one patch designed to improve performance, Homefront's framerate frequently stutters, and on some occasions felt more like a slideshow than a video game. The best shooters aim for a solid 60 frames per second – Homefront is lucky to claw its way to 30, and rarely stays there for long. The performance issues don't just kill the already shaky gunplay – they also gave me headaches during prolonged play sessions, something I have never experienced in my many years playing shooters.

These fundamental flaws are disappointing, because there are some interesting elements at play in Homefront. The shift to an open-world setting was undoubtedly the right call for the series. The large zones you travel through contain plenty of personality and open buildings to explore, and taking on the KPA forces demands novel hit-and-run tactics. Customizing your guns in the heat of battle also works well, though being limited to two primary weapons meant I hardly touched a number of alternate guns. These features instill a sense of gameplay freedom that military shooters often lack; I would have enjoyed them if it weren't for the perfect storm of other problems.

All of Homefront's shortcomings are compounded by a relentless barrage of glitches, which are more oppressive than the occupying KPA forces. You can't go 30 seconds without seeing

something downright embarrassing. For starters, the game freezes for several seconds every time you complete an objective, acquire a new mission, or exit out of a weapons locker. Getting stuck in the environment is an uncommon but ever-present threat, as is enemies spawning right in front of you.

Some bugs have to be (not) seen to be believed: Once, I witnessed an entire roomful of characters disappear into thin air. Another ally stood around brandishing an invisible rifle. Yet another charged across the battlefield as just a floating head and pair of hands. The list is endless, and while some of these bugs are entertaining, I was less amused by losing an hour of progress when two of the four rotating autosave files glitched out and caused the game to load indefinitely. The standalone co-op mode is equally riddled with bugs, on top of being saddled with blind weapon crates, one-use consumable items, and an overly grind-heavy progression system that saps the fun out of casual play.

Despite all the technical problems, I still managed to finish Homefront's campaign, but I can't say I had fun. All of the game's ambitions are undone by its flaws, offering only the rare glimpse of what could have been. Dambuster has already stated it is committed to improving the game with additional patches, but given everything that's currently wrong, the studio faces a greater uphill battle than Homefront's desperate underdogs.

» **Jeff Marchiafava**

This review pertains to the PS4 version of Homefront: The Revolution. The game is also available on Xbox One and PC

» **Concept**
Reboot the Homefront series with a new open-world format and a ton of problems

» **Graphics**
The visuals might be impressive if it weren't for frequent texture pop-in and a stuttering framerate

» **Sound**
Aside from a few bad voice actors, the sound design is one of Homefront's most stable components

» **Playability**
The gunplay is loose and sluggish even before you factor in the subpar performance

» **Entertainment**
Homefront's few smart concepts are crushed under the weight of constant glitches and other problems

» **Replay Value**
Low

Uncharted 4: A Thief's End

One last grand adventure

9.5

PS4

» **Concept**
Nathan Drake's final adventure is as emotional as it is exciting, a true testament to Naughty Dog's storytelling and gameplay skills

» **Graphics**
A work of art. Few details are spared in making the characters and world come to life

» **Sound**
Nolan North and Troy Baker make a great team, and are almost always cracking wise. The score is also used expertly for tension and drama, sometimes drowning out all sound to heighten a moment

» **Playability**
The awe factor of the world blowing up around Nathan Drake isn't what it once was, but the combat is better, and the exploration offers more gameplay and discovery

» **Entertainment**
The best Uncharted yet. It hooks you emotionally early on and keeps you locked in place as the thrill of the hunt for a lost treasure takes shape

» **Replay Value**
Moderately high

The Grim Reaper's scythe rarely falls upon treasure hunters. The earth collapses beneath their feet, arrows fly from walls, and giant boulders give chase, but these adventurous souls cannot be stopped until they locate an ancient secret. Their expeditions are brimming with rollicking fun, but their stories always end the same way: They live another day, and one less treasure is lost to the world. But unlike Indiana Jones (who is still chasing myths and legends at age 73) and Lara Croft (who is turning back the clock), Naughty Dog has said Uncharted 4: A Thief's End is Nathan Drake's final chapter. The subtitle alone paints an ominous picture for the famed hero, but what is it hinting at? Does he die? Disappear without a trace? Retire atop a mountain of gold?

That question turns A Thief's End into a ticking time bomb of a narrative. As this story unfolds, we see Drake's entire life come into frame. We get to know him intimately; we know what he's sacrificing and what drives him.

Drake has settled down and appears to be content living out the rest of his days working 9 to 5 and heading home to see Elena. The unexpected arrival of his older brother Sam, who was believed to be dead, pulls Drake back into the treasure-hunting game. He is reluctant at first, but Sam's life hangs in the balance, so he has no choice.

It's a hell of a story that shifts between Uncharted's patented "everything is suddenly exploding and everyone is yelling" design to the slow and heavy emotional tone of The Last of Us. There's clear inspiration from The Last of Us in Uncharted 4, and it's a better game because of it.

While Nathan and Sam are front and center for most of this journey, one of the most interesting characters to follow is Captain Henry Avery, a dead pirate who we only learn about on pieces of paper and riddles scrawled on cave walls. He's written remarkably well by Naughty Dog. Avery has concocted the mother of all treasure hunts, which ends up being a fascinating reflection of a pirate in his prime, and a fun breadcrumb trail to follow.

The adventuring spirit is alive and well in this installment, and the revelations at the end of it all are fantastic, as they show the great lengths Avery went to protect his treasure.

A Thief's End doesn't have that big, iconic set piece moment like the previous Uncharted games did (i.e., the train on the cliff, the boat capsizing, and the cargo falling out of the plane), but succeeds as a collection of smaller "I can't believe we survived that" sequences with houses crumbling, armored vehicles exploding, motorcycles racing dangerously, and Naughty Dog's artists pulling out all the stops to make every second of action look as chaotic and beautiful as possible. However, the excitement they deliver has diminished over the years. The thrill of a platform falling apart as soon as Drake lands on it doesn't get the blood racing as much – it's an expected element that, by the fourth installment, seems fairly commonplace.

The action may feel somewhat routine at times, but the feeling of exploring lost worlds is heightened in this chapter. The environments are much wider, sometimes offering multiple traversal solutions. In past Uncharted games, I just ran forward, following the linear path laid out before me. In this game, many of the environments made me pause, analyze my surroundings, and figure out how I could navigate them.

Drake's new grappling hook enhances the exploration, and is often tied to harrowing platforming sequences. It's also flat-out fun to use.

The platforming is as briskly paced as it's been in the past, and is often done with the world exploding around Drake. But again, this element has lost some of its magic with time.

Some of the environments are so vast that they take on the illusion of open worlds, giving the player even more freedom to explore, often with a vehicle. These areas change up the pacing nicely and embrace the essence of adventure in a slightly different way. Since Drake is often with Sam (or other characters), light team-based gameplay is periodically thrown in (think The Last of Us).

Drake's hand-to-hand fighting is greatly improved, giving each punch a cringe-inducing (but satisfying) smack. The gunplay is still a little loose, but the enemies are smarter now, which means Drake either has to rely on stealth more (which works well), or strategically pick off targets before they advance or flank. Combat never feels like a thrown-in chore. I enjoyed all of the encounters and found them surprisingly empowering, especially when the grapple swing is used to launch Drake onto a foe.

A Thief's End is the best Uncharted yet, delivering a story I didn't want to end, and an adventure that concludes with a hell of a payoff. The "wow" factor of the world exploding under Drake's feet has diminished in the years following Uncharted 2, but those moments are still effective, and a true showpiece of the developer's exquisite craftsmanship for world and gameplay design. All four of Naughty Dog's games culminate in A Thief's End in a fitting and cohesive way that fans should appreciate. I hate seeing Drake go (especially when he's in his prime), but I'd rather see him go out on top like he is here than be tasked to find a crystal skull or some other poorly fabricated MacGuffin decades from now. » **Andrew Reiner**

Stellaris

Space race relations

8.25

PC

» **Concept**
A rich strategy experience where you explore the galaxy, settle on new home worlds, and ultimately dominate the universe

» **Graphics**
Stellaris exhibits some dynamic lighting effects, and the space battles look like impressive fireworks displays, but you rarely get close enough to notice fine details

» **Sound**
The main theme is a sweeping epic, but the soundtrack lacks variety overall

» **Playability**
The UI is clean and easy to navigate, and you always have a few ways to accomplish any task, so you never feel lost in a sea of menus

» **Entertainment**
A series of small tasks makes Stellaris easy to jump into, but hard to put down without completing that "one last thing"

» **Replay Value**
High

Outer space has always been a tantalizing place. Our universe is so vast and unexplored that it teases the imagination and fuels our science fiction. This dream of discovery is what pushed us to send rockets into the sky and put people on the moon. Stellaris taps into that same itch to explore the unknown. Like space itself, Paradox's new strategy sim is big, complex, and easy to get lost in.

At the beginning of the game, Stellaris drops players onto a single point on a galactic map and asks them to explore – and then tame – the unknown by building fleets of science ships, mining stations, and combat cruisers. At the start, you choose your galaxy-conquering race from a nice range of reptilian, avian, and fungal aliens. Selectable traits influence everything, from your species' breeding speed to its overall heartiness, which helped me feel like my race of highly evolved cats was distinct from any other feline species the game might have auto-generated somewhere else in the galaxy. These traits also influenced my strategy for conquering the galaxy, as my species' natural agrarian skill made it easy to grow food, so I rarely had to worry about starving masses.

Thankfully, it doesn't take long to start exploring the galaxy and claim new planets for your empire. I had the most fun with Stellaris in the opening hours as I constantly uncovered new relics from extinct precursor races, reverse engineered abandoned space probes,

and battled aggressive spaceborne crystals. Even Stellaris' smallest randomly generated maps feel vast thanks to a wealth of mineral-rich planets and asteroids scattered across every solar system. I never grew tired of constructing new mining and research stations to exploit the universes' riches, or terraforming a harsh alien world to establish a new colony.

As you continue to explore, your expanding borders push against other alien races and the galaxy starts to feel a bit smaller. I appreciated the wealth of diplomacy options, and I tried to befriend several other races. However, some aliens are stubborn, and no matter how I negotiated for border access or how favorable I made my trade deals, diplomatic relations eventually broke down and I was forced into war. Unfortunately, combat boils down to a numbers game; you make sure your military fleet's attack rating is higher than your enemy's, and then you point them at the alien homeworld.

I found it relatively easy to make sure my combat cruisers were always outfitted with the latest tech, but the game doesn't clearly outline the progression of new technologies. Instead of a tech tree, you're presented with three different technological research options. After you research one, three new tech options pop up. This means after you develop ion cannons, you might have the option to develop the next tier in that technology, or that option might not cycle into the random

rotation for several hours. This random technology selection always keeps you on your toes, but I wish I had a better carrot to pursue while advancing my society scientifically.

Stellaris' early game is full of exploration and promise, and the small nuggets of fiction I picked up after discovering an abandoned research station or dissecting the corpse of a space giant helped draw me into the fantasy that I was truly exploring the unknown. Unfortunately, the game eventually settles into a grind as you either try to convince neighboring aliens to become your vassals or slowly build up an army to forcefully take over their worlds. The rewarding moments are still there, but they're spaced out significantly. Taking over the galaxy turns out to be a lot of work, but it's a worthwhile mission for would-be explorers. » **Ben Reeves**

Total War: Warhammer

A fantastic fantasy diversion

» **Concept**
Take the massive battles and settlement strategy of the Total War franchise and inject them with Warhammer factions

» **Graphics**
Combat looks fantastic, from trolls casually batting smaller units aside to magic lighting up the battlefield

» **Sound**
From greenskin grunts to salty dwarven war cries, an immersive sound suite enhances conflicts

» **Playability**
The strategy elements may be complex and overwhelming (especially for newcomers), but an extensive tutorial process and comprehensive advisor option help ease players in

» **Entertainment**
If strategy games and massive battles are your thing, this is an excellent and entertaining choice that effectively captures the strength of its source material

» **Replay Value**
High

The Total War franchise has popped out all sorts of entries from various time periods and historical backdrops. Throwing history to the wind and embracing a classic fantasy franchise in Total War: Warhammer is an inspired effort, breathing new life into a series that was feeling weary under the weight of legions of axemen, spearmen, and trebuchets. With a smorgasbord of diverse units and a magic system at the forefront of the classic economy-driven war for territory and control, the series has never felt so fun.

The more historically focused strategy fans may turn up their noses at the embrace of Warhammer factions, but it works out wonderfully for creating conflicts and strategies that wouldn't work in the traditional human-versus-human confrontations. Insane flying creatures and units make their first appearance in the series, monstrous and terrifying beasts, and magical artillery do an excellent job shaking up the formula. The various factions have considerable differences beyond legions of unique units, and play differently off the battlefield as well, taking advantage of things like underground travel, necromancy to fuel armies in an instant, or corrupting the very lands around their holdings. This is all handled with a pomp and zeal that doesn't make sense in any sort of historical context; nothing beats laying waste to a settlement with terrorgheists, a Luminark of Hysh, or an Arachnarok Spider.

Each campaign and skirmish differ significantly and allow for all kinds of new approaches to each situation, like using hordes of the dead to overwhelm opponents or casting magic to crumble armies in mere moments. Unique units, abilities, and mechanics add faction flavor and diversity – a major draw that keeps me coming back to master the four available factions.

Longtime fans of the franchise shouldn't worry that things have been dumbed down or changed to facilitate the more fantastic approach. If anything, this entry has even more depth. Your management skills are continually put to the test with settlements and provinces, legendary lord and hero units, and technology trees. You must also keep the diplomacy engine running outside of the massive, series-defining battles and quest encounters.

With all kinds of faction-specific abilities, bonuses, and rules, keeping up with everything going on can feel slightly overwhelming, even if you're already a seasoned strategy game veteran. However, an expansive advisor option keeps you in the know through your first campaign and beyond, if you still need assistance. While tons of new mechanics and important info is constantly thrown at you, the game does an incredible job keeping you informed, even if it feels a little off-putting at times to be halting the action and reading up on new things.

While the time-consuming campaigns can devolve into long slogs, they can be rewarding as well. Seeing things change over the course of time (Chaos faction units may even show up to rain on the party!) and taking over the world is always a pleasure. For those who want to get right into the mix, a nice variety of "instant action" quest battles are available outside of the campaign, loading you up with units and placing you in the thick of combat. Multiplayer bouts are also available, and a nice 1v1 or 2v2 is your best bet for a quick and dirty tactical battle.

In addition to nailing the function and flavor of the Warhammer fantasy, this is also one of the more technically sound Total War releases. Sometimes it can take time after launch to iron out the quirks and glitches, but I experienced almost perfect performance during my approximately 40 hours with the title, with no crashes or major errors.

Total War: Warhammer is one of the best Total War games I've ever played, and fans of either franchise should find themselves with a winner here. Those looking for more historically rooted fare may find the fantasy over the top, but plenty of solid strategy lurks under the magic and mayhem. » **Daniel Tack**

Kirby: Planet Robobot

Playing it safe

8

3DS

» **Concept**
Kirby embarks on another platforming adventure while stealing enemy abilities, but this time he has a mech suit

» **Graphics**
Sweet and colorful visuals haven't changed much since 2014's Triple Deluxe, but the robotics and machinery have changed the aesthetic in a notable way

» **Sound**
The music is upbeat, poppy, and in line with a game starring the equivalent of a pink balloon. I particularly enjoyed the jazzy Kirby theme remixes and chiptune music of the later levels

» **Playability**
Kirby moves well, and jumping in his mech suit doesn't slow him down, despite more than doubling his size

» **Entertainment**
Planet Robobot feels a lot like Kirby's last outing, it's never boring (and the final few hours have some unexpected and exciting surprises)

» **Replay Value**
Moderate
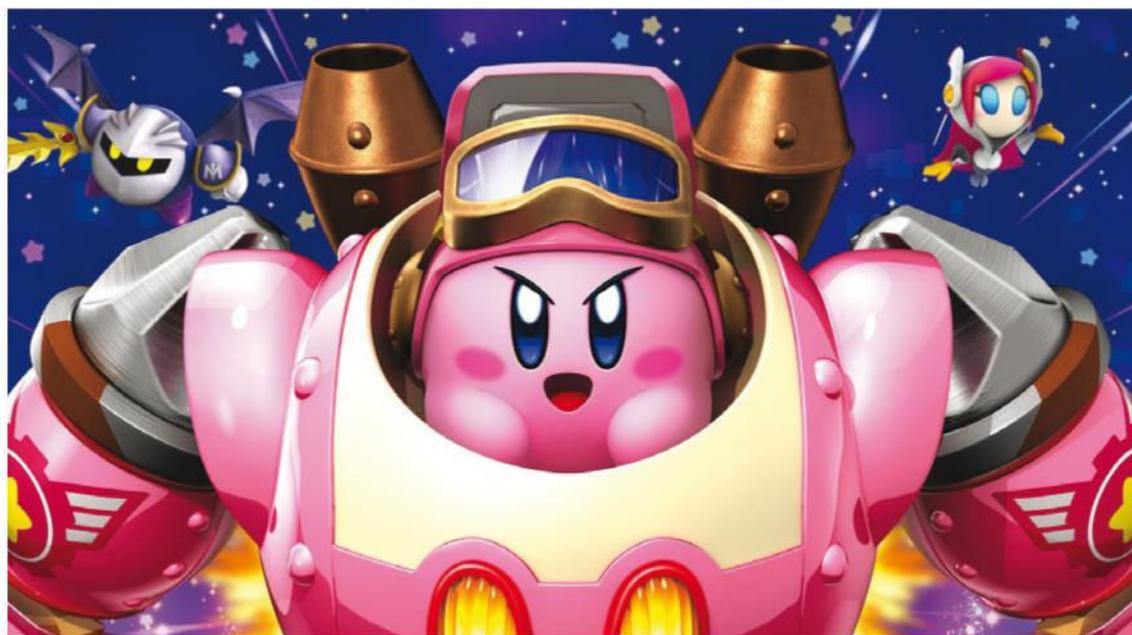
Kirby's homeworld is constantly getting invaded and attacked by outside forces, interrupting his naps and important sky-staring. Planet Robobot is no exception. This time, the invaders are robot aliens seeking to destroy all organic life, and Kirby has to defeat them by borrowing some of their technology, but also relying on the old standby of stealing powers by ingesting enemies. This Kirby is not a radical new direction for the hero, but it's a well-designed platformer with some new mechanics – and a particularly compelling final few hours.

Planet Robobot plays it safe by not feeling particularly distinct from Kirby's previous platforming adventures. You still make your way through short platforming levels and swallow up enemies to steal their abilities. It was a fun formula when it premiered on Game Boy in 1992, and the core has not changed much, with only small experiments layered on top. In 2014's Triple Deluxe it was stereoscopic 3D flourishes. For Robobot, it's a mech suit.

Kirby moves just as well inside his suit as he does on foot, which keeps the platforming pace thankfully consistent, regardless of your state. Kirby can still borrow powers while using his mech, and I had fun playing with their destructive capabilities to open up secret areas and lay waste to enemies. Taking the suit into boss fights is rare but rewarding, since those battles play out more like focused dismantling rather than just depleting hit points.

Kirby is not the only 2D platformer to jump the player between the background and foreground as well as scroll left and right, but among those that do, Kirby does it the best. I often turned on the stereoscopic 3D to get a better perspective on the action between the planes. Jumping between the front and back to grab collectables, or remote controlling a character in the background and Kirby in the foreground simultaneously is fun, and is a good use of the 3DS' mostly underused stereoscopic capabilities.

Two extra modes are included alongside the main campaign. Kirby 3D Rumble gives you full 360 degree control of Kirby in a series of small 3D arenas taking on waves of enemies. The added campaign is brief, but entertaining enough to make me wonder if a whole Kirby game could support this kind of gameplay. Team

Kirby Clash is a cooperative mode that can be played locally, and is a big improvement over Triple Deluxe's multiplayer battle mode. You and friends can choose between a collection of classes (i.e. stolen powers) to take on bosses together, and you level up and get stronger as you make your way through. These modes aren't destinations, but they're fun distractions that add value to the overall package.

Planet Robobot is entertaining, flows well, and never overstays its new mechanics…but occasionally feels like a retread with a mechanical theme. It does differentiate itself, however, with an ending that takes a surprising leap from the established Kirby norms for an engaging climax. The game extends past its final boss with completely different gameplay that works as a great finale. Planet Robobot doesn't move Kirby forward in any significant way, but it's a well-made platformer that's worth completing. » **Kyle Hilliard**

8 | Atelier Sophie: The Alchemist Of The Mysterious Book

Platform PS4 **Release** June 7 **Rating** T

Atelier Sophie improves on an already fun and engaging formula. The better progression and deepening of its signature alchemy system makes it one of my favorite entries in the long-running series.
— Kimberley Wallace

8 | King's Quest – Chapter 3: Once Upon A Climb

Platform PS4, Xbox One, PC **Release** April 26 **Rating** E10+

The series continues to be charming and funny, and this chapter's comparatively smaller scope results in more focused puzzles. I groaned at a solution after thinking about things too hard a couple of times, but overall it's tricky but fair. — Jeff Cork

9.25 | Hearthstone: Whispers Of The Old Gods

Platform PC, Mac, iOS, Android **Release** April 26 **Rating** T

Whispers of the Old Gods succeeds on multiple levels, shaking up the competitive scene with a variety of new deck types to experiment with and combining flavor and mechanics to create interesting fun new cards.
— Daniel Tack

8 | Stephen's Sausage Roll

Platform PC, Mac **Release** April 18 **Rating** NR

The concept is simple, and many levels look like they should be easy to solve, but after only a few seconds rolling sausages around these tiny mazes, I realized that even the earliest puzzles require unconventional thinking.
— Ben Reeves

5.75 | The Climb

Platform Rift **Release** April 28 **Rating** NR

Being in VR adds a level of believable mobility where you can track and admire the progress you make by pausing and looking around. Unfortunately, the impressive vistas were not enough to keep me from dreading the next ascent. — Kyle Hilliard

7.75 | Alienation

Platform PS4 **Release** April 26 **Rating** M

While you're doing plenty of alien massacring here, the interplay of class abilities, complex weapon upgrades, and ever-escalating challenge and rewards are what keep you coming back. — Matt Miller

8 | The Walking Dead: Michonne – Episode 3: What We Deserve

Platform PS4, Xbox One, PS3, Xbox 360, PC, Mac, iOS, Android **Release** April 26 **Rating** M

I'm disappointed this post-apocalyptic tale took so long to find its footing, but the third installment serves as an entertaining and moving finale. — Javy Gwaltney

reviews archive

STATE OF THE FINE ARTS

A tour of the National Videogame Museum

Back in early April, the National Videogame Museum opened its doors for the first time in its new permanent home of Frisco, Texas. Housed in a 12,000-square-foot building that used to produce rockets for space shuttles, it is the first museum in the country dedicated solely to the technological innovations and mechanical oddities of the video game industry. We spoke with National Videogame Museum co-founder Sean Kelly about the history of the museum, how a video game museum ended up in Texas, and Atari's obscure mind-reading controllers.

interview by Ben Reeves

The National Videogame Museum was sort of born out of the Classic Gaming Expo, which you helped run. How did you guys decide to spin a museum off of a classic gaming expo?

I don't want to make it sound like we had this vision that nobody else in the world did, but all three of us [Kelly and co-founders Joe Santulli and John Hardy] were doing our own thing before we got together to do a group thing. All three of us had each decided individually that there was more to the video game industry than just something cool that we liked to participate in. It was an important part of American or even global culture, and it was important for us to understand what happened.

The stories behind the scenes were the things that we were hoping to preserve, and that's why it was so important to us that we tracked those guys down. One of the interesting/annoying things that we found back then was that most of those guys didn't care. They had done something so important in our view, but they didn't really get it. "Yeah, we threw that stuff out five years ago, it didn't mean anything to me. It was just a job." We missed out on a lot of those guys and their contributions and the chance to preserve their contributions by just finding them a little bit too late.

That was the point of Classic Gaming Expo. We did that show every year, and every year our collection grew and our museum display grew and the show grew. In about 2009, we decided that we needed to give this display someplace that people could come and view it anytime they wanted.

How did you settle on Texas?

We set up our museum at DICE in 2012 in Las Vegas, and at the DICE exhibit we were in a small room. This one guy was in there hanging out, and he came up to my partner John and said, "This is great, I love this! Do you guys want to do a museum? I've got the perfect place for you!" We had heard those kinds of stories many times at many different shows, but 99 percent of the time it's just someone BSing. But this guy happened to be [Gearbox CEO and president] Randy Pitchford.

Quite honestly, we didn't really know who he was. We were much more classic gamers, and in a lot of ways John and I enjoy the hunt and the preservation side of it more than we do the playing side of it. Any available time that we do have, we like to spend hunting

things down or reading about the history – things like that. Neither of us knew who Randy Pitchford was, so we kind of brushed him off as another one of those standard crackpots that we see all the time.

But he was just about to move his headquarters from Plano [Texas] to Frisco [Texas], so Randy said, "Listen, I want you guys to come down here and check out the area. I'm going to make some introductions, and I think that it would be good for you." We did. We went down to Frisco, and Randy introduced us to the mayor of Frisco and the city council and some of the dignitaries in the area and things like that.

Leading up to this, we had contacted a few cities and municipalities and whatnot, trying to find a home for the museum, but our kneejerk reaction was Silicon Valley. That seemed to be the place that it should be, since Atari was born there. But we hadn't had much luck – a couple of conversations, but most people didn't really get it or they weren't into it. But when we came down to Frisco, Frisco got it right away. "This is a great idea, we want you here. Whatever we have to do, we have to make this happen."

Why did you call it the National Videogame Museum and not the National Video Game Museum? Is there a significance in making Videogame one word?
The explanation is pretty simple, really. We want "videogame" to be a word. We think it has become its own class, its own thing, and it's big enough to warrant its own place in a dictionary. If "videophone" can be a word, surely "videogame" can be a word.

Do you feel like the museum kind of rose up and took the place of the Classic Gaming Expo or do you think that the museum could host something like that in the future?
Yeah, it's exactly something that we've had in mind. The problem with doing something like that in Las Vegas is that you're trying to run a small show in a sea of eight million other things to do. It was tough over the years in Las Vegas. It was tough to get a crowd, tough to grow a show. You look at something like the Portland Retro Gaming Expo or the Midwest Classic in Milwaukee, and some of those shows have grown steadily over the years, but both of those shows have embraced all of video gaming, whereas the Classic Gaming Expo was pre-Nintendo.

Maybe that was the mistake; I don't know. That was what we felt was the most important, and we probably should have raised the cutoff year over the years, but we never really did. It was mainly pre-Nintendo, which was the area that we were most well-versed in.

Are you planning any rotating exhibits, or anything in the future for people to look forward to if they're taking a trip out there?
Lots of things like that. One of the plans that we have is that we're going to redo the NWC [Nintendo World Championships] at the museum. We have what we call the Head-to-Head Hall, which is a setup with 10 TVs and 10 consoles that are there every day, and what consoles are in those spaces we change out from time to time. In the same place, we might do something like The History of Madden, so start with the first Madden on the Sega Genesis and go all the way to the Xbox One. We thought about doing a giant multiplayer Halo 1 in that area, on a local Halo 1 network. We've got a lot of fun things planned.

In the space itself we have three different areas that we call flexhibits, which we can change up for different events or different ideas. One of them currently is being used for when Randy moved his office from Plano to Frisco, he decided that he was going to completely redo his office. His office in Plano was really kind of cool – there was a lot of history in there and vintage stuff. He had a giant shelf there that covered one wall that was the history of Randy Pitchford. When he moved his office, he asked, "How'd you like to rebuild my office in one of the spaces in the museum?" We did that. It's kind of a temporary exhibit, but it was fun. We had Randy's desk, Randy's computer, Randy's monitor, Randy's shelf full of virtually everything that he and his company has ever worked on. It was kind of cool, because that's the office that Borderlands was born in.

So you have an exhibit called Randy's Office?
Yeah, that's what it is. Some of the guys are finishing up the little pop-up notes explaining exactly why this is in his office and whatnot. They're also printing up a full-sized standee of Randy standing in his office. He draws inspiration from the weirdest things, so it's really cool.

Do you have any rare artifacts at the museum or any particular

highlights that you want to call out? Do you have a favorite museum piece?
We have a lot of really rare stuff in there, but most of what makes it rare is the fact that nobody knows what the heck it is. For example, one of the more interesting pieces that whenever I'm walking people around the museum I always point out is the Atari 2600 Mindlink controller. What the Mindlink did was that it was a headband, and it wrapped around your forehead. Supposedly, what Atari was telling people was that the Mindlink controller would be able to read your mind and you'd be able to control the game on the screen with your thoughts. Obviously, that wasn't possible, because that tech can't even be done today. But, what it did do is that you would wrinkle your forehead in certain ways, and it would pick up the movement in your skin. I always point out the Mindlink controller, people always get a kick out of that.

We have a mockup of the Sega Neptune, the only one in the world, the Sega Genesis with the built-in 32X. We have the Atari Graduate computer, which is a computer that was supposed to plug into the top of the 2600 and turn it into a computer. It was never released by Atari, and there's only one of them in the world, and it's in the museum. There are some interesting Pong systems. We have a Doctor Pong, that was a tabletop arcade Pong machine that was sold to doctors' and dentists' professional buildings as a way to keep kids occupied while they were waiting for their appointment. Only three Doctor Pongs have ever been found, to the best of our knowledge, and we have two of them. We don't really display our software libraries, but we have a complete NES collection, complete Genesis collection, complete SNES collection – I think we're almost complete on PS1.

How did you first start amassing this collection? Did you have a

day job that you used to fund this massive collection?
Two things. [Laughs] First of all, back in those times, it wasn't really all that expensive. If you think about it in those terms, the mid to late '90s, my parents were living in California, and I would go out to visit my parents and hit the flea markets out there, and I would ship bags back to myself, literally dozens and dozens of boxes of stuff that I'd picked up at flea markets for pennies. This wasn't just Atari Combat cartridges or crap, I would pick up prototype cartridges that are worth hundreds and hundreds of dollars today. It was easier to amass a collection back then. To try to do it today, it would cost a bloody fortune. The other part of it is that both Joe and I own independent video game stores, and we specialize in vintage games. I've been here for 13 years, and any time something interesting came into one of our stores, I snatched it up and added it to our collection. Trying to build this type of a collection today would be outrageous. You couldn't do it.

Why do you think it's important to preserve video game history?
There are two museums in the country that pay homage to nothing other than carrots. The carrot. Video games are larger than the movie and music industries combined [sic], and both of those have multiple places where you can go and see or read about their histories. But the video game industry had nothing – nothing that was dedicated to just the video game industry. And video games are a huge part of not only American but global popular culture. Over a billion people play video games on a regular basis. How can you not have something serious, something real, something tangible, something where people can go and see how something that has become such a big part of their lives came to be? That's what we show at the museum. ◆

The Villainous History Of Call Of Duty

Are you a Call of Duty lore expert? Do you know every betrayal and plot thread by heart? Prove it by matching every villain here to their respective game. **by Javy Gwaltney**

ENTRIES

A
Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

B
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

C
Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3

D
Call of Duty: Black Ops

E
Call of Duty: Black Ops II

F
Call of Duty: Black Ops III

G
Call of Duty: Ghosts

H
Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare

1. Gabriel T. Rorke _____

2. Jonathan Irons _____

3. Lt. Gen. Shepherd _____

4. Vladimir Makarov _____

5. Raul Menendez _____

6. Imran Zakhaev _____

7. Nikita Dragovich _____

8. John Taylor _____

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