

GEARS OF WAR 3 ▶ The beginning of the end starts now!



**ROCK
BAND 3**

Go from zero to
hero on guitar

**FALLOUT:
NEW VEGAS**

Mutants hit the Strip!

**ASSASSIN'S
CREED NEXT**

Stealthy sequel revealed

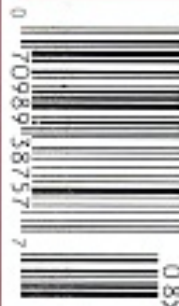
DEAD RISING 2

BOOZE! BABES! BRAIINS!

Blood-thirsty zombies invade Vegas
and only you can stop them!

AUGUST 2010 • ISSUE 112

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION



The background of the cover is a high-angle, night-time view of a city street. A massive, dense crowd of small, purple-skinned, zombie-like creatures is swarming the street and the rooftops of the surrounding buildings. In the lower-left foreground, a large, dark, armored figure (a member of the Gears) is shown from the chest up, looking down at the horde. The figure's helmet has a white visor and a small, glowing light. The title "CRACKDOWN 2" is prominently displayed in the upper center, with the word "CRACKDOWN" in a metallic, blocky font and the number "2" in a large, red, stylized font. Above the title is a large, metallic, stylized symbol that resembles a combination of a peace sign and a city skyline. The overall scene is chaotic and action-packed, with bright orange and yellow light emanating from the crowd, suggesting fire or explosions.

CRACKDOWN 2



Blood and Gore
Strong Language
Violence

XBOX
LIVE

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Vigilantes and night-crawling mutants are tearing Pacific City apart. It's up to you and your friends to bring justice by any means necessary. Unique multiplayer action leaps to explosive new heights in Crackdown™ 2, with support for four-player cooperative campaigns and up to 16-player competitive action.

For exclusive videos, go to
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Xbox LIVE® Gold membership required for online multiplayer.

Letter From the Editor

Greetings from New Austin

The sun's setting over the far mountains, and the vast desert in front of me is falling under a veil of grays and blues. I'm on horseback, trying to get from one end of New Austin to the next. Suddenly, on the side of the road, I spy two dead horses attached to a wagon. A lawman is yelling at me to stop and help him chase down two fleeing fugitives who've just killed his men and his horses. Do I help him? Or do I brush him off and keep on riding?

At this point, I've been grinding away at Rockstar's western opus, *Red Dead Redemption*, for only around to hours, but the feeling of constant peril while I'm clomping around in its giant, lawless world reminds me of another game I hold near and dear to my heart — *Fallout 3*. *Red Dead*'s wide expanse of dangerous, rolling deserts dotted with rare outposts of civilization is just one A-bomb away from *Fallout 3*'s bleak, unforgiving Capitol Wasteland.

So, what does any of my incessant babbling have to do with you? Everything! The fact that two games set in wildly different periods — sci-fi future-fantasy and quasi-fictionalized past — can vividly illustrate and capture feelings of exhilaration and hopelessness is vital. It means that our favorite hobby can successfully take the mechanics of something technical and stuffed with programming language and shape them

into products that convey real immersion and emotion. As gamers, that should make us proud.

Sure, there's always room for pure adrenaline-fueled button-mashers that place the burden of narrative on your rhythm, skill, and interaction — these are the types of experiences we were raised on. But it's a constant thrill to see how far we've come.

Francesca

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

IF YOU HAD to combine two household items to make a zombie-killing weapon, what would you create?

How about combining the constant influx of unsolicited coupon books coming to my house with a high-powered scanner? Doesn't sound too deadly right now, but imagine the savings! And with all that new disposable income, I could fund a bio-engineered super-army to take down the zombies while I chill out at some resort villa in the "safe zone."

Oh no, the staff seems to be multiplying! RUN!



If you had to combine two household items to make a zombie-killing weapon, what would you create?

A laptop computer plus the *Zombieland* DVD might confuse and distract the undead horde long enough for me to sneak up and kill them. You've been outsmarted, brain-munchers!

Corey Cohen
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



If you had to combine two household items to make a zombie-killing weapon, what would you create?

Cigarettes and alcohol — that way I could party with the zombies while also slowly eroding their health. Plus, keeping their mouths occupied with tobacco and booze would prevent them from gnawing on my flesh.

Kevin W. Smith
FEATURES EDITOR



If you had to combine two household items to make a zombie-killing weapon, what would you create?

I'd mix my lawn edger with a pressure washer. I'm pretty neat and tidy, and that would be the best no-mess approach to the slicing, dicing, and cleaning up of disemboweled zombie limbs.

David Cordon
ART DIRECTOR

If you had to combine two household items to make a zombie-killing weapon, what would you create?

I've always believed that my dog could lick anything to death if given enough time, so the zombie apocalypse would probably be a good chance to test that theory. Add a water bowl to keep her hydrated and she's set!

Ryan McCaffrey
SENIOR EDITOR

If you had to combine two household items to make a zombie-killing weapon, what would you create?

A dot-matrix printer fused with a chainsaw. I'm not sure which one makes the louder, more obnoxious sound. Surely one of them would make the zombies' heads explode.

Alaina Yee
MANAGING EDITOR

If you had to combine two household items to make a zombie-killing weapon, what would you create?

I prefer a lazy man's weaponry (see *Meet the Team*, May 2010 issue), so I'd combine a Roomba with a food-processor blade. The result would be both effective and allow me to watch some post-apocalyptic TV.

Taylor Cocke
SUPER-INTERN



Issue 112 • August 2010

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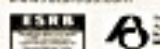
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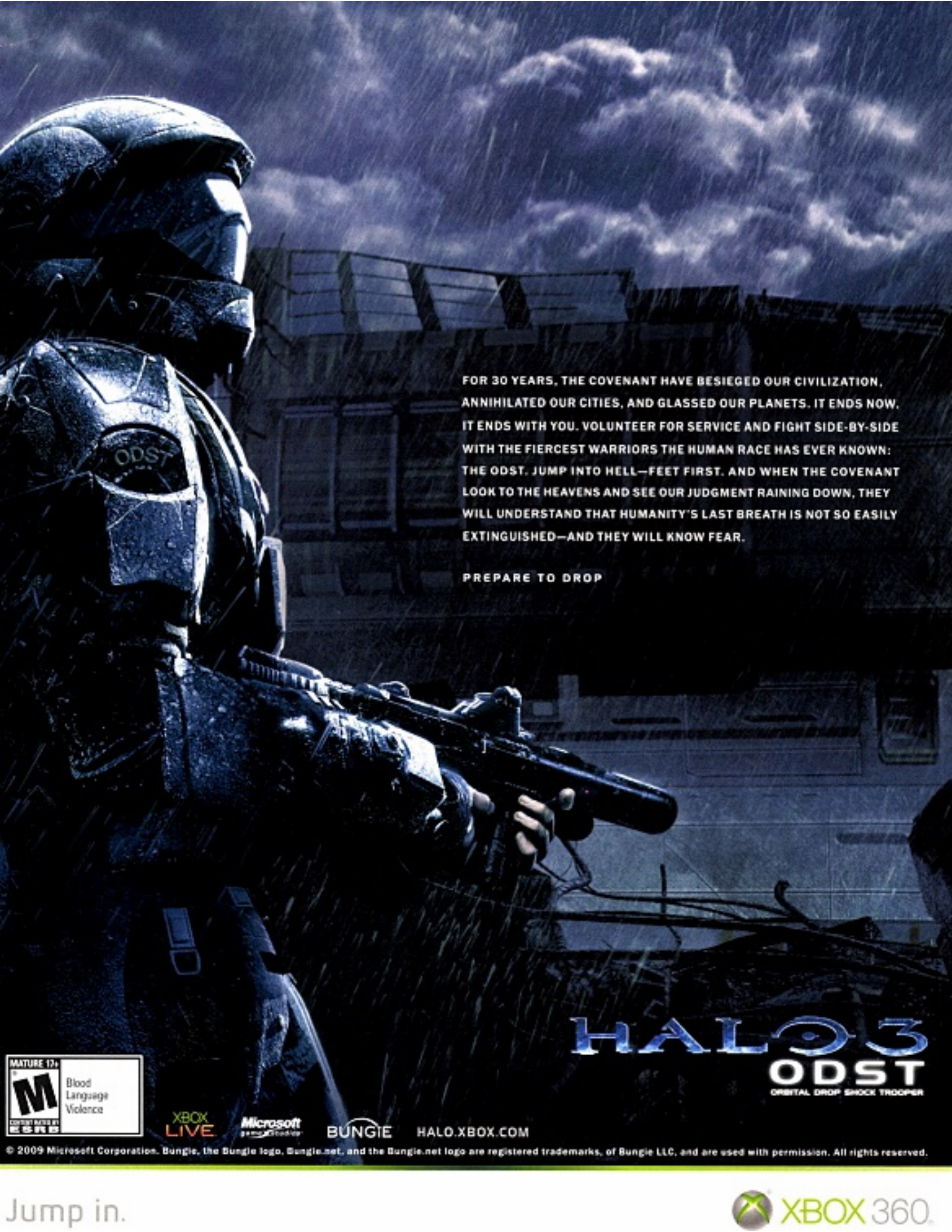
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PREPARE TO DROP

HALO 3

ODST

ORBITAL DROP SHOCK TROOPER



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Jump in.

XBOX 360

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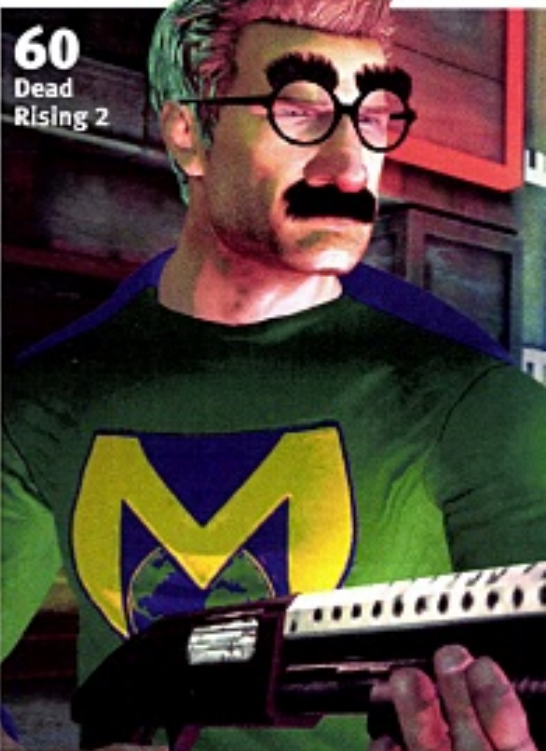
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08

We Heart Xbox



ON THE DISC

- ▶ *Split/Second*
- ▶ *Metal Slug XX*
- ▶ *Rocket Knight*
- ▶ *Beautiful Katamari, Kane & Lynch, Pure, and classics galore!*
- ▶ *Exclusive Gamer Pics for Dead Rising 2!*
- ▶ *Awesome Trailers and More!*



54

Gears of War 3

82
Blur

PLAY IT NOW!

Iron Man 2

Play as Iron Man or War Machine!



WHEN THE NIGHTS BEGIN, THE DARKNESS ENDS

WAGE WAR THROUGH NEWLY ADDED ONLINE CO-OP



Defeat Massive Bosses



**Utilize Over
1 Million Skill Combinations**



Activate Powerful Orb Sparks



Blood and Gore
Partial Nudity
Violence

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Jump in.



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What Was Old Is New Again

Classic Konami favorites *Contra* and *Castlevania* return with fresh 2D XBLA adventures



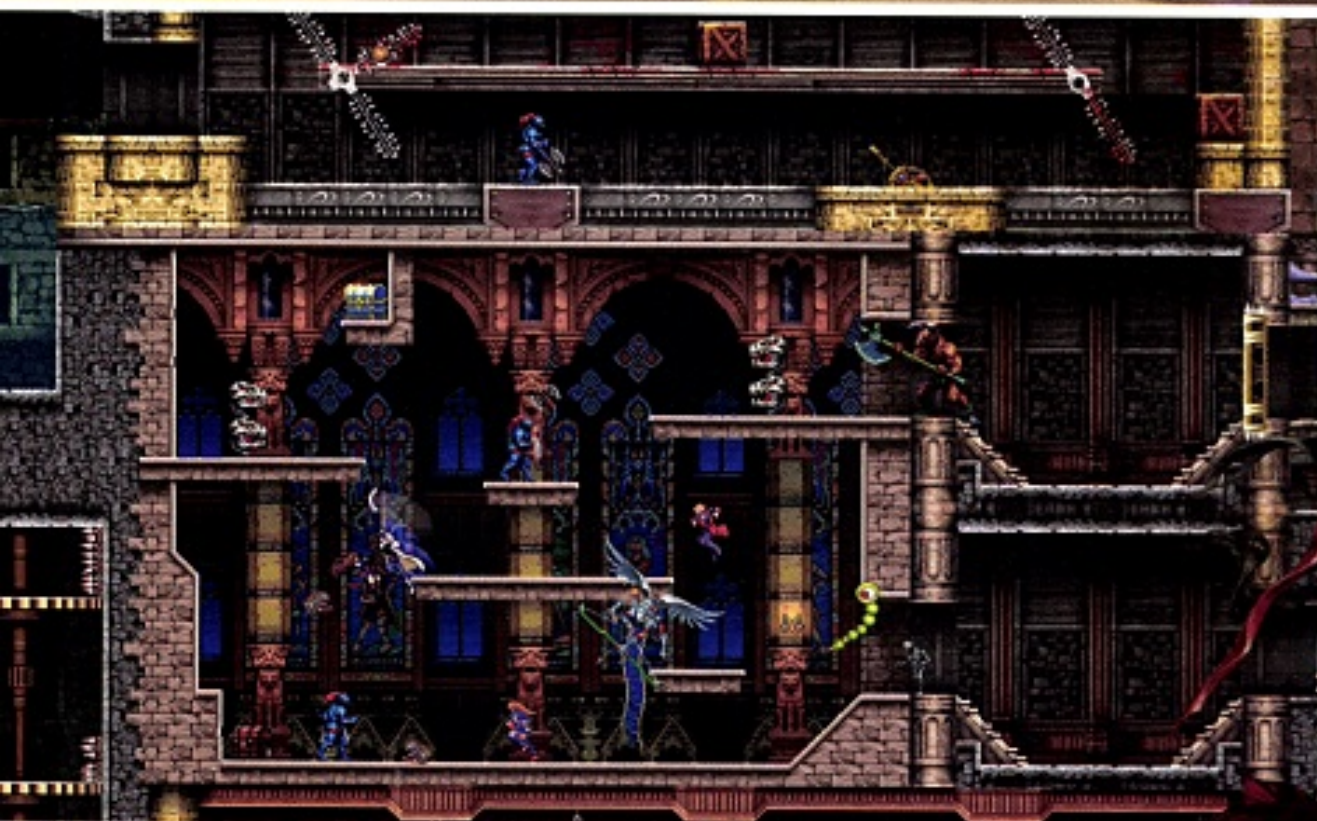
THE FAT PLUMBER seems to be onto something. After Mario found success going old-school for *New Super Mario Bros.* on Wii, the world took notice. Sonic is going back to 2D later this year, and now Konami is getting in on the fun by retro-reviving two of their most beloved classic franchises, *Contra* and *Castlevania*.

While *Hard Corps Uprising* isn't a true *Contra* game per se, "it follows the *Contra* storyline" and is "a loose prequel to *Contra Hard Corps*," according to Konami. With ARC System Works (*Guilty Gear*, *BlazBlue*) handling dev duties, the *Contra*-meets-*BlazBlue* vibe is obvious — and intentional — while an online co-op mode, leaderboards, and insane new boss battles promise to keep the challenge intact.

The new *Castlevania*, on the other hand, is a Dracula-hunter through and through. *Harmony of Despair* is an all-new, sidescrolling 2D title in the vein of *Symphony of the Night*. Adding a bit of twenty-first century flair, though, are high-def visuals as well as six-player co-op and adversarial multiplayer modes (yes, six). *Harmony* also promises levels inspired by areas from previous *Castlevania* chapters that were only available on Nintendo DS (*Dawn of Sorrow*, *Portrait of Ruin*, and *Order of Ecclesia*). Whip it (or shoot it) good!



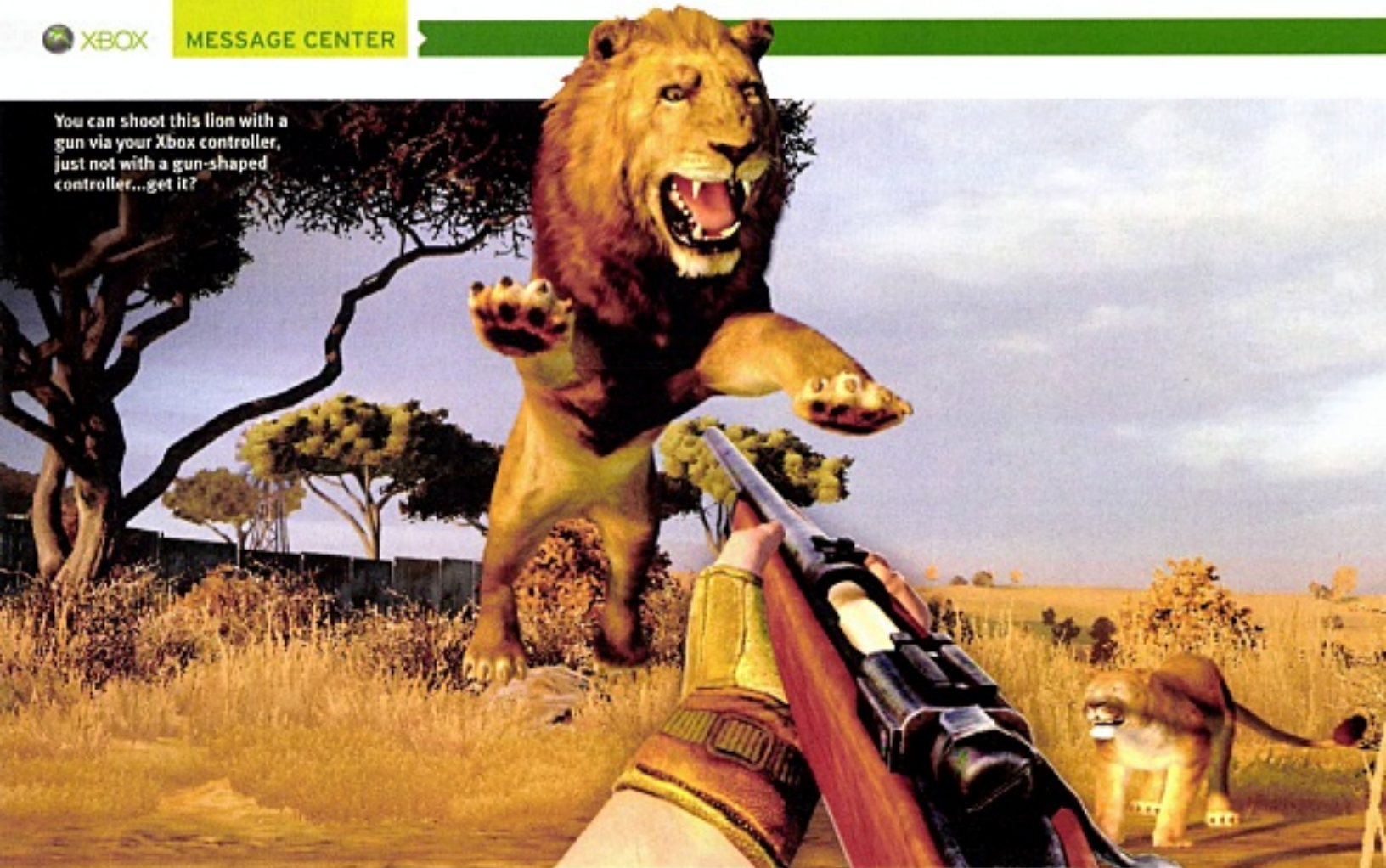
ABOVE: *Hard Corps Uprising* takes the Contra ball, spins, and runs with it in *BlazBlue*-esque 2D.



IT GOES BOTH WAYS: Remember, a big-budget 3D incarnation of *Castlevania* is also on the way — look for *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* later this year.



You can shoot this lion with a gun via your Xbox controller, just not with a gun-shaped controller...get it?



► Leave your firearm at the door

Do any of you remember Nintendo's *Duck Hunt* — the old 16-bit shooter? I was reminiscing with a fellow gamer and wondered if the Xbox 360 will ever have a game with a gun controller. Maybe someone can release one for *Modern Warfare 2*? — **William**

We say: Prepare to enter the rabbit hole! During a demo earlier this year for a hunting title, we asked the presenters why the Wii was getting a gun peripheral for the game but the Xbox 360 wasn't. They told us Microsoft doesn't allow gun peripherals. When we asked Microsoft for confirmation, they wouldn't confirm or deny, but rather told us: "It is our goal to meet the demands of Xbox 360 users while providing a wide array of options to best suit our gaming and entertainment experiences. We offer a diverse portfolio of accessories for gamers to choose from." We'll trust our original source then, but it does seem a little ironic given how popular shooters are on the console.

HAVE SOME
QUESTIONS OR
COMMENTS TO
SHARE?
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◀ IF YOU LIKE THIS LETTER, YOU'LL LOVE...

I'm writing to express my complete disgust at the direction that console gaming is going. The latest *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* (May 2010 OXM) is a mix between *Gears of War* and *Modern Warfare 2*. That's an abomination. Players of *Ghost Recon* and *Halo* are at opposite ends of the gaming spectrum: one group likes realism, the other not as much.

Future Soldier incorporating sci-fi technology found in recent games (cloaking; *Halo 3*, *AVP*) is a reminder

that game companies are after the *Halo*/*MW2* money, so they'll change one of the most genre-defining pioneers in Xbox Live gaming to accommodate that agenda. — **Bennie**

We say: This isn't necessarily the case with *Future Soldier*, but remember that this kind of thing happens in every industry: People see two passionate but separate fanbases and try to merge them. That's why when you walk down the juice aisle at your grocery store, you see Apple-Plum-Nectarine-Pear concoctions. The band Audioslave was



"You may fool 'Xbots' with your propaganda, but what about the rest of the world?"

founded on this very principle. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

We always want to see more publishers taking risks with original new IPs like *Alan Wake*. As in the movie industry, though, you're likely to see more investors betting on something with a higher rate of probable return, like a new superhero summer blockbuster. In today's games industry, first-person shooters already have a large built-in audience. Adding popular elements from other games may not be the most creative approach, but if it's done right, it makes sense. We'd also caution you to try the new *Ghost Recon* before you slam it on its premise alone — it does look pretty good.

THE SHAME MONSTER ▼

I'm writing to complain about your article "OXM Saves Music Games!" (May 2010 OXM) — specifically, the part about "embracing the mainstream." Everything you say here is completely false. It makes no sense to include technogabage in *Rock Band* because, quite simply, it doesn't have any of the instruments! There's no guitar, drums, or bass in any of those so-called "songs." And the vocals? Puh-lease! As you can probably tell, I hate pop music with a passion, and I'm incredibly pissed off about those songs being included in *Rock Band*. Put them in *DJ Hero*, where they belong. — Dylan

We say: One sign of a good artist is that they're able to provoke a range of strong reaction — that you can't be indifferent because you have to feel something. Judging from your (heavily edited) letter here, you're not a fan of Lady GaGa and her ilk, but you do have an opinion about her; how many actual "rock bands" can you say that about these days? Looking at Lady GaGa specifically, she may have received her own *Rock Band* song pack earlier this year, but nowhere in our story did we say she should be in *Rock Band*. (We actually said *DJ Hero* might be a better fit for her kind of pop.)

REAL TIME WITH HALO

What is the "correct" chronological order of all of the games in the *Halo*-verse? And how important is it to play them in that order? Being an RPG fan, I prefer to keep my continuities straight. And

for the most part, I've been able to avoid spoilers for all the games, so many of the plot turns and revelations will be a nice surprise.

Even if it means playing *Halo: Combat Evolved* on Easy, I'd be willing to do it to get through the older parts faster. What do you suggest? Wait for *Reach*, then *Halo: CE*, followed by *Halo 2*, *Halo 3*, and follow it up with some *ODST* for dessert?

— Deke

We say: As far as storyline? The *Halo* franchise unfolds chronologically in this order: *Halo Wars*, *Halo: Reach*, *Halo: Combat Evolved*, *Halo 2*, *Halo 3*: *ODST*, and then *Halo 3*. So if you want to play so you're following the *Halo* timeline, you don't have to wait for *Reach* to drop.

If you want to experience *Halo* as everyone else did, though, and see the real progression in its design, functionality, and artistry, we'd recommend you play the series in the order in which the games were released. Of course, you could just do it the old-fashioned way and jump into whatever game looks the most interesting to you and take it from there! P.S. — Assuming you like the games and their fictional universe, we also recommend watching the *Halo* Legends animated film and reading the *Halo* books and graphic novels. The extended universe is about as compelling as any game supplements we can think of.

Does Lady GaGa belong in *Rock Band* or *DJ Hero*?



▲ XBOT 'TIL YOU DROP

How much did Bethesda Softworks bribe you to write that article about *Fallout: New Vegas* (April 2010 OXM)? Obsidian Entertainment isn't fit to make a *Fallout* game? Bethesda made *Fallout* what it is today? You may fool "Xbots" with your propaganda, but what about the rest of the world? — Sonya

Ryan responds: Hi, Sonya — nice to meet you! From the cheerful tone of your letter, I'd have to guess that you're a member of the delightful *No Mutants Allowed* *Fallout* "fan" site. Am I right? Anyway, let's start with your issue with me saying that Bethesda made *Fallout* what it is today. Of course they did! This isn't even up for debate. Did anyone care about Interplay's 2004 Xbox game *Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel*? No — it was Bethesda's *Fallout 3* that re-established the brand's equity and mindshare after it'd lain dormant for a decade.

You also believe I slighted Obsidian in some way. Um...how? In fact, I was quite kind, citing "Obsidian's high-quality track record" and repeatedly complimenting the improvements they're making over *Fallout 3*. And as for me being bribed? Until you see a fully loaded Tesla Roadster Sport parked in my driveway and the keys to it in my hands, you can rest assured that I'm still working for OXM and OXM alone. (Note to Tesla: if you have a spare car lying around...)

THERE'S AN ACHIEVEMENT FOR THAT ▼

With Windows and Xbox Live now available on mobile phones and how everyone is app-crazy, I was thinking it'd be great if there was an Achievement creator so we could send our friends whatever we could think of! I'd love it if I could send or receive a pop-up Achievement on my phone, with a description and a cumulative score added for something as I go about my day. — Miguel

We say: Somebody somewhere is probably making that app right now, but we agree, Miguel, that sounds pretty awesome. You'd definitely have a better shot at seeing it on the Windows-based phones first, since we're pretty sure Microsoft has the whole Achievement thing on lockdown. We imagine this idea would play out like a text message, except it looks like an Achievement. Think of the possibilities!

Achievement unlocked
5G - Can You Hear Me Now?



Coming soon...
*Mass Effect 3:
The Contemplation.*

▲ SLOW RIDE, TAKE IT EASY

People are getting carried away complaining about commuting in role-playing videogames. They whine all the time about things like having to run everywhere in *Mass Effect* and not being able to fast-travel while indoors in *Fallout 3*. Whatever happened to taking the scenic route? Did anyone ever play *Morrowind* (2002)? I suppose it was a little ridiculous how much time I spent running around finding hidden doors in mountains, but I don't think I minded it as much because the world was so immersive. — Jordan

We say: We think what actually irks people is when they're not given the choice to skip that commuting, the way you can in, say, *Grand Theft Auto IV*, where you can either sit through an entire cab ride in real time or jump from start to finish with a button press. The same principle applies to the elevator rides in *Mass Effect* — a fairly action-packed game that makes you stand still for 30 seconds while your characters ride an elevator. Some might say that making you experience these transitions is part of a game's quirky charm; we say it's irritating. Moreover, in *Mass Effect*, it's inconsistent with the overall gameplay: if you can skip a potentially crucial conversation with

another character by hitting a button, why should you have to endure an elevator ride?

Ultimately, if a game is awesome enough, we'll forgive it for such limitations. But in general, isn't the option to do or skip something the kind of freedom that makes games better?

LIVE AND LET DOWN

I have *The Beatles: Rock Band*, and have bought every downloadable piece of music so far. So now I'm wondering, what gives? Why did Harmonix stop releasing Beatles DLC? — Mat

We say: We put this question to the folks at Harmonix, who simply told us: "We don't have anything to announce about Beatles DLC at this time." That doesn't necessarily mean Beatles won't have any more DLC in the future, though. The game was a tough undertaking for Harmonix, and given how beloved the band's entire catalog is and how unique the game's presentation was, fans will always be calling for more songs. Side note: It's still kind of miraculous *The Beatles: Rock Band* even exists at all. Seriously.



KOXM PLAYLIST

WHAT'S YOUR favorite custom soundtrack for your favorite



Xbox 360 game? Email your five-song playlist, the game it goes with, your Gamertag, and a digital pic of yourself to letters@officialxboxmagazine.com with the subject line "KOXM Play List."

GAMERTAG MINIATURE SUN
GAME DANTE'S INFERNO



PLAYLIST "RETRIBUTION"

1. "THE EVIL THAT MEN DO"
IRON MAIDEN
2. "NOTHING ELSE MATTERS"
METALLICA
3. "THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST"
IRON MAIDEN
4. "MY SPIRIT WILL GO ON"
DRAGONFORCE
1. "BETRAYAL-FORGIVENESS"
APOCALYPTICA

CHART ATTACK FILLING OUR MINDS AND MAILBOXES

Detailed instructions on how to compost waste from our lovely building-facilities team.

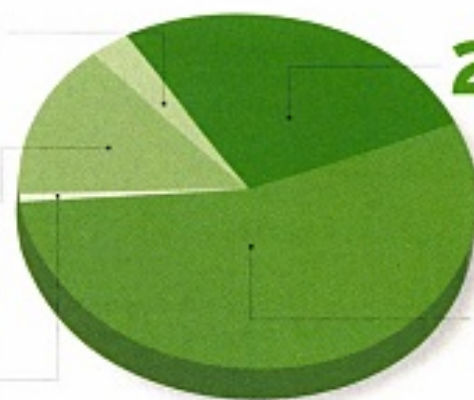
4%

Questioning why game and movie downloads take so long. That's a lot of information to push through your Internet connection at once, but we feel your impatience.

9%

KISS megafans who sent screenshots of the band members created in *Rock Band*. Nice!

1%



24%

62%

Eager young game writers seeking a summer internship at KOXM. Maybe we should start a legit program instead of just using hobos from the nearby train depot.



Theories on where the next *Fallout* should take place, with New York City an overwhelming frontrunner. We're not sure if that's good or bad for New York.

The Art of DESTRUCTION

"A downloadable game that plays like a AAA title." -G4 TV

"We played a few rounds and came away impressed." -IGN



Tactic #14

What Goes Up.
Blow the floor out from under your enemy,
sending him falling below.



Tactic #15

The Mouse.
Create protected vantage points by shooting
bricks out of almost any wall.



Tactic #18

The Handyman.
Make your own entrance through
almost any wall - even inside
buildings.

Breach arms you with dozens of clever new tactics that aren't possible in any other military shooter. Collapse buildings and balconies. Punch holes through floors. Shoot individual bricks out of walls. It's the first game with enough destruction to change the very nature of multiplayer combat.

Coming Soon to Xbox LIVE® Arcade.

BREACH

More intel at breachgame.com



The keyboard peripheral can double as a MIDI keyboard; there's a MIDI-out jack included on it.



Rock Band 3

Tickling the ivories for the first time

• PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUBLISHER: EA/MTV Games • DEVELOPER: Harmonix • MULTIPLAYER: Yes • RELEASE DATE: Holiday 2010 • FOR FANS OF: Fun, keyboards, reuniting the band



It's been a long time coming, but it finally happened. Harmonix, the music game maestros, showed off *Rock Band 3* for the first time — and this third trip back to the stage brings a bag of brand-new tricks with it. Keyboards, an all-new Pro Mode, and a completely revamped interface stole the spotlight and got us ready to bring the band back together.

But before we get the headlines — Pro Mode and keyboards (see the prototype of the peripheral at right) — the Harmonix folks wanted us to know they'd been listening to gamers everywhere. First, there'll be no more wait time for folks to casually drop into a multiplayer band moment: *Rock Band 3* introduces an "overshell," which is always present on the menu screens and lets friends hop into your party, drama-free. There'll be a persistent bar at the bottom of the screen with slots, so if a friend wants to join, they can simply plug in their instrument and scroll through a very unobtrusive pop-up menu

to select Bass, Vocals, Drums, or Keyboards to jump on board. Multiple guitarists and the like can hook up with very little fuss. It's a feature that last year's *Guitar Hero 5* pioneered, and we're happy to see it come to *Rock Band 3*.

Also on deck is a creatively restructured World Tour mode that lets you customize the Road Challenges so you won't feel trapped in a multinit — or, worse, multiweek — commitment. "It's like Band World Tour meets *Mario Party*," says lead designer Dan Teasdale. You'll set up the number of gigs, songs, and other factors so the entire tour could, feasibly, be completed in one evening; there's plenty of replayability with the amount of different tweakable elements.

On your Tour, your stage performances will include interaction with judges and a variable audience who'll effectively dictate objectives for every gig.

Teasdale gave us an example of this, outlining the possibility that perhaps the opening band before you was a "crappy opening act," and now you're forced to play song choruses more accurately or go into overdrive more often to win the crowd back. It's an interesting way to squeeze more experience and rewards into a smaller chunk of gameplay, instead of forcing you into a hurried marathon of performances if you're short on time.

And what about Career mode? *Rock Band 3* covers it in a new way you might





A new little indicator on the band meter shows who's rocking Pro and who's not, in addition to the usual info.

Oh, hello there, Pro Mode guitar! Expect to learn how to pull off specific, real chords. Harmonix claims that focus groups learned basic guitar chops after one hour with Pro Mode.



In Pro Mode, you'll be expected to use the entirety of the keyboard spectrum like a real piano player!



Hi-hat notes indicate cymbal strikes if you're using them on your drum kit.



Three-part harmonies worked so well in *Beetles: Rock Band*, they're back for *Rock Band 3*.



You can use every downloaded track from earlier games in *Rock Band 3*, as well as almost all previous disc songs.



not expect. Instead of merely "grinding songs," claims Teasdale, you'll focus on finishing Career by employing skill. It's a mode aimed at core players: you'll be given hundreds of goals during your playthrough in order to earn more fans. And the more folks you convert into fans, the more rewards open up — like gaining access to the all-important band van in order to reach new venues. In this way, it's not so different from previous Rock Band games, but it's not just about putting in time; it's about improving your game. Harmonix wants Career to make you a better player. And don't fret too much if you're beginner! If you can get your skills up to Medium difficulty on all the different instruments, you should be just fine.

That keyboard was still sitting there through all the talk about Career and Band World Tour. After taking it for a whirl on Medium difficulty on both a Dio track and Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody," we can honestly report it felt great. As beginners, you're only expected to play with one hand on the set of five color-coded keys. (Another color-coded set of keys exists for two-handed playing.) It feels incredibly natural, but if you plan on going to Expert-land, you may want to invest in the Madcatz-made stand. Slinging the keyboard around your neck with the included strap should only be advised for those rocking one-handed controls. Or '80s enthusiasts.

And for the hardest of the hardcore — or those looking to justify the countless hours spent with plastic instruments — Rock Band 3 packs in Pro Mode. Teasdale jokes, semi-seriously: "We're trying to answer the question of 'What's the f***ing point?'" Harmonix hopes that Pro Mode answers this question by teaching you actual chords on guitar, real cymbal gameplay on drums, and serious two-handed playing on keyboards. "You'll be playing actual notes, the real song [on keyboards]," claims Teasdale. Pro Guitar mode, on the other hand will show you chord shapes, which (in conjunction with using the Pro Mustang guitar controller) will contribute to basic skill-set building.

"Pro Mode won't turn you into a virtuoso guitar player," Teasdale cautions. "More like campfire players." Noted. But with all the new tech, gameplay modes, and instruments to learn — no worries. We're here to have fun and it looks like Rock Band 3 is set to deliver it. — Francesca Reyes

TRACKMANIA!

THE FIRST TRACKS announced as appearing in *Rock Band 3* run the gamut of pop, rock, and well, RAWK. While the final song list will include over 80 different choices, and each song includes note charts for the keyboards, we're diving in to see which tracks make those forced piano lessons from childhood worth it — and which ones are best suited for time spent multitasking (like making dinner between brief appearances on stage). Better yet — try those keyboard-lite songs on Pro Mode difficulty!

THANKS FOR THE PIANO LESSONS, MOM!

METRIC

"Combat Baby"

NIGHT RANGER

"Sister Christian"

THE CURE

"Just Like Heaven"

QUEEN

"Bohemian Rhapsody"

SMASH MOUTH

"Walkin' on the Sun"

WHITESNAKE

"Here I Go Again"

HUEY LEWIS AND THE NEWS

"The Power of Love"

SPACEHOG

"In the Meantime"

THE DOORS

"Break On Through"

PHOENIX

"Lasso"

BUMP IT UP TO PRO MODE!

RILO KILEY

"Portions for Foxes"

THEM CROOKED VULTURES

"Dead End Friends"

JIMI HENDRIX

"Crosstown Traffic"

THE VINES

"Get Free"

THE WHITE STRIPES

"The Hardest Button to Button"

DIO

"Rainbow in the Dark"

IDA MARIA

"Oh My God"

JUANES

"Me Enamora"

JANE'S ADDICTION

"Been Caught Stealing"

JOAN JETT

"I Love Rock 'N' Roll"

STONE TEMPLE PILOTS

"Plush"

OZZY OSBOURNE

"Crazy Train"



SMASH MOUTH



NIGHT RANGER



RILO KILEY

THE WHITE STRIPES



STONE TEMPLE PILOTS



abovetheinfluence.com



Power Gig: Rise of the SixString

A new challenger enters the arena of rock

PLATFORM: Xbox 360 PUBLISHER: 745 Studios DEVELOPER: 745 Studios MULTIPLAYER: Yes RELEASE: October 2010 FOR FANS OF: Music games, plastic instruments, air-drumming



The opening guitar riffs of Eric Clapton's classic "Layla" come pouring out of a TV monitor in a small crowded room and before we know it, we're waving a set of drumsticks wildly in the air over a set of colored sensors at our feet. At first, the result ain't pretty — it takes us some time to figure out how to position and hold the left and right drumsticks, and make the drumpad sensors pick them up correctly as we bang on nothing but air. But it's a crazy interesting spin on the usual music game drum kit set up.

And "crazy" is probably the one-word summary that best describes developer 745 Studios' ambitious new take on the music game category with *Power Gig: Rise of the SixString*.

Guitar Hero's latest may be headed in a more fantasy direction, while *Rock Band 3* expands the traditional rock-'n'-roll setup with keyboards (among other features [see pg. 14]), but *Power Gig* — with its upstart-style note charts and new take on plastic instruments — seems like it's staking out incredibly different territory.

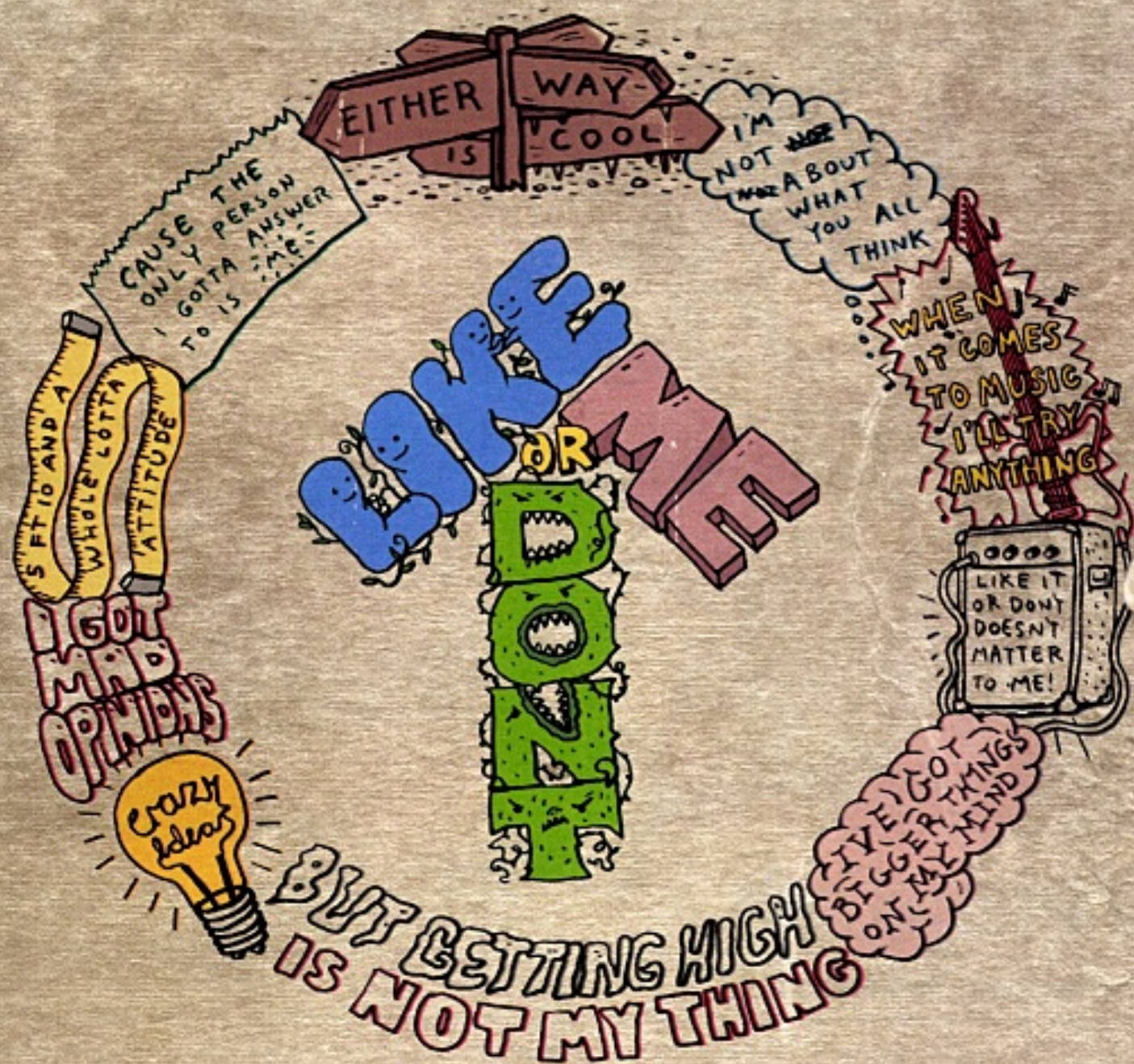
Example #1: The guitar that comes with the game is not just some plastic axe. Plug it into an amp and it turns into a real, six-stringed electric guitar. Thanks to the inclusion of a Chording Mode, 745 encourages you to use the instrument to learn real-life chords, hopefully bridging the gap between gaming's virtual musicians and the real thing with enough persistence.

Example #2: The Airstrike drums. Well, they aren't really "drums," per se, but the effectively

drumless setup — with the small-sized drumpad sensors, a set of "legs" to raise them off the ground just bit, two kick pedals, and the drumsticks — clears the clutter in your living room by not forcing another massive drum kit into the space. But as with the guitar's heavier body and real strings, we're expecting a pretty steep learning curve for anyone stepping up to *Power Gig*'s intriguing challenge. During our hands-on time with both instruments, it was clear we'd need much more time than a quick demo to wrap our heads around how best to tackle this new musical beast.

But with Dave Matthews Band, Eric Clapton, and Kid Rock on board with *Power Gig* and the option for a vocalist to join in, it's a challenge we're definitely up for. — **Francesca Reyes**





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You'll have plenty of chances to pilot battle mechs on top of your arsenal of weapons.

Vanquish

The fast and the furious

• PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUBLISHER: Sega • DEVELOPER: Platinum Games • MULTIPLAYER: No • RELEASE DATE: Winter 2010 • FOR FANS OF: Bayonetta, Gears of War, bullet-time slo-mo



Marcus Fenix. Soap MacTavish. Master Chief. As far as rough-'n'-tumble, testosterone-fueled shooter-game hero archetypes go, these guys are the three spikes on the deified trifecta of steely, gravelly-voiced ass-kickers. The last thing you would ever picture them doing in a fight to save the freedom of mankind is...acrobatic face-pounding flourishes. We'll leave that for Vanquish's badass newcomer Sam. That's right. He's so tough, he doesn't need a last name — for now.

Well, actually, we lied. Sam isn't really a badass; he's just a super-smart, chain-smoking scientist with a crazy futuristic suit that makes

him fast, strong, and, well, badass. In an outer-space tussle between the U.S. and Russia in the wake of a terrorist attack on American soil, Vanquish's hero is called on to bring his high-tech expertise to the battlefield in the form of his self-created, proprietary battlesuit. And after our time tooling around in it, we can say — hand on heart — this is one serious piece of galactic armor.

Part shooter, part super-stylish action game, we started our hands-on time in a quick lead-up to battle. One of Sega's reps leaned in and whispered some advice: "If you play this game like a straight-ahead shooter...you probably won't get very far." We've heard the same line during demos of other games before, but Vanquish

means it. Running and gunning will get you half of the way, but making sure to employ your suit's special powers is crucial.

"AR," or Augmented Reality, is what Vanquish calls the superhuman abilities your battlesuit gives you. What it means to you in the context of the gameplay is the chance to boost-slide on your knees at crazy speeds from cover to cover and turn it into some enemy face-kicking. You'll have all manners of guns and grenades at your disposal (and even mounted turrets!), but using AR lets you quickly duck in and out of combat.

But super speed is only one part of what your powers afford you. Hitting the Left Button allows you to scoot around, but pressing Left Trigger

Using your battlesuit's powers comes in just as handy for evading attacks as it is for offensive maneuvers.



You know that giant mechanical spider boss? This is actually its powerful end form.



while in this jetpack-style mode lets you slow-motion your way into a one-sided gunfight or a face-to-face with an enemy-piloted mech. This temporary reprieve from the fast-paced bullet ballet around you works in context with how you want to play it.

Zoom into a crowd of Russian robots (you and your accompanying troops may be human, but in the section of the game we played, you're fighting a fleet of mechanical Russkies) and, if you hit LT, they'll scatter up into the air from your

high-kick, letting you pick them off with your rifle one by one as they fall. If you stop short of plowing into a crowd and then hit LT, you'll take a stance and slow down the action for easier targeting. Using your Augmented Reality quickly and when it counts helps to stave off depleting your entire AR reserve. Use it too long in one go, and you'll have to wait for it to recharge. The results so far are dizzyingly acrobatic, fast as hell, and hey — it's also got the makings of being a damn fine shooter to boot.

There was no better evidence than in the demo-finishing fight against a giant mechanical spider-like beast. Shooting at its vulnerable leg joints while jet-sliding from cover point to cover point, we briefly immobilized it long enough to trigger AR for some extra time to target and blast its weakest point (its glossy red, deathbeam-shooting eye). Avoiding its attacks and keeping up the fight meant eventually taking it down, closing out our time with *Vanquish*. We still want more. — **Francesca Reyes**

New School

WHO WAS IT that said that there's nothing new under the sun? Someone very wise, because no matter how original something might seem, it's always got its roots in the past. *Vanquish*'s lightning-quick action serves up a fresh twist on the shooter category, but Sam's roots are showing!



VIEWTIFUL JOE
GAMECUBE (CAPCOM, 2003)



P.N.03
GAMECUBE (CAPCOM, 2003)



GEARS OF WAR
XBOX 360 (MICROSOFT, 2006)



BAYONETTA
XBOX 360/PS3 (SEGA, 2010)



VANQUISH
XBOX 360/PS3 (SEGA, 2010)



As you level up, you can improve your handling with certain weapons in a handy skill-tree that unlocks new abilities.

Oh, those darn Redcoats! Always with the meddling and wanting to get swashbuckled!



Pirates of the Caribbean: Armada of the Damned

Choose your own (seafaring) adventure

• PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUBLISHER: Disney Interactive • DEVELOPER: Propaganda Studios • MULTIPLAYER: No • RELEASE DATE: Spring 2011 • FOR FANS OF: *Moss Effect*, swashbuckling



You have some big choices on your plate — deciding the fate of a small but populated island of cursed natives should not be taken lightly. So what kind of ocean-traveling pirate will you be? We recently had a chance to play both sides of *Pirates of the Caribbean: Armada of the Damned*'s good/evil doubloon for ourselves, and both end results were dramatic and promising for the sprawling open-seas RPG.

At the start of the demo, we arrive on a sand-swept tropical island only to be greeted by the resident tribe's shaman — a once-proud leader slowly being taken over by a rather curious curse that transforms its victims into pincered

crab creatures. He begs us to find a gold idol that can save his people. Interestingly, your interaction with the chief can be dramatically different depending on whether you're strolling down the Legendary (framing you as a suave, swashbuckling hero) or Dreaded (casting you in a much more revered, but sinister light) path. As a sprightly Legendary protagonist, your conversation skews much more witty, with plenty

of snarky, Han/Solo swagger and lengthier, more info-packed dialogue. But if you've chosen the Dreaded route, your character will keep chattiness to a minimum and riff on darker tones.

Conversation isn't the only distinguishing trait separating the two camps, however; how you handle your blade and pistol in combat feels incredibly different as well. As a Legendary hero, you'll have a unique set of power moves

If you've chosen the Dreaded route, your character will keep chattiness to a minimum and riff on darker tones.



TRON: Evolution

Dreaming of electric sheep

• PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUBLISHER: Disney Interactive • DEVELOPER: Propaganda Studios • MULTIPLAYER: Yes
• RELEASE DATE: Holiday 2010 • FOR FANS OF: *Prince of Persia* acrobatics, high-tech visuals, anti-virus software



Chasing a neon-clad avatar of Maxim femme fantasy Olivia Wilde through a sparkling, sprawling electrified playground isn't as easy as it seems at first. You've got giant leaps to make between suspended platforms as well as glossy, spit-shined walls to run across in order to even get close to her. And this is just the tutorial for Disney's movie tie-in game, *TRON: Evolution*.

Handling like a high-tech, cyberspace *Prince of Persia*, you have to execute some serious acrobatic moves in order to navigate *TRON*'s strange new world. You'll scale high obstacles with a few simple, rhythmic button presses while wall-dashing across floorless chasms to get around. But you'll also be doing hand-to-hand battle against bots that spawn from cracks in the virus-sieged environments.

Using melee punches, ground pounds, and your handy ranged disc attacks to take down

enemies, you'll also have to make good use of "healing" energy strips along the walls. In one area, we found ourselves in a closed arena of sorts battling a seemingly endless stream of automaton baddies. To recharge our health, we had to wall-run to reach these strips in between beating down cyber-chumps.

But the game's real deal comes when you take to your glowing light cycle and race at breakneck speeds across crumbling tracks, all while juking and shooting at enemies trying to keep up with you. It's *TRON*'s signature sight, and it's glorious. The early version we played didn't have all the fine touches implemented, though, so we're hoping when all's said and done, these scenarios will live up to the techie fantasy of both the old-school and upcoming flick they're based on. With a generous holiday release window, time's on *TRON*'s side, and we're primed to see more. — **Francesca Reyes**



Evolution's story leads into the plot of Legacy (the film). Olivia Wilde is on hand as Quorra, your lovely confidant.



and abilities to call upon. Taking on a set of curse-transformed islanders, you're able to execute the standard heavy and light attacks, even throwing in a pistol shot or two for far-range measure. Expect plenty of flourishes and fancy-pants maneuvers. You'll even be able to use a special curse move that'll leave your opponent dazed and vulnerable to a finishing move with your giant cutlass. If you play as Dreaded, your grace on the battlefield isn't nearly as fancy, but that finishing move is replaced by a super-heavy wham-bam from the anchor chained to your back.

Once we reached the golden idol, we had a choice to make. Do we save the cursed island by returning the statue to the villagers? Or do we squirrel away the precious totem for ourselves to sell back on the mainland for mega-bucks? Your decision opens up a chain of new quests and possibilities, but they'll differ depending on which of these options you choose. We tried both and learned that if we hoarded the idol, the entire island would fall under the curse and any return trips later in the game guaranteed hot, molten, lava-y badness. But go *Legendary* and you're free to come back for newly-unlocked quests from the appreciative native populace. Either way, we're pretty impressed at what's cookin' in the Caribbean. — **Francesca Reyes**

We're actually waiting for *Fallout: New Reno*, where mutated versions of Llonel Richie and Carrot Top perform.



Fallout: New Vegas

What gets irradiated in Vegas, stays in Vegas

• PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUBLISHER: Bethesda Softworks • DEVELOPER: Obsidian Entertainment • MULTIPLAYER: No • RELEASE DATE: Fall 2010 • FOR FANS OF: Gambling, the post-apocalypse



When you're about to enter a casino during the post-apocalypse, the last thing you want to surrender at the door is all your firearms. Who knows if you'll need your handy assault rifle to gun down some errant mutants or nutso military extremists. But as we start our hands-on time with *Fallout: New Vegas*, we realize we have to do just that.

Wandering an abbreviated section of the famed Vegas Strip — complete with drunken 9-to-5ers frolicking in a water fountain — we hop into Tops, a nearby casino, only to be greeted by a clerk behind the front desk. Absolutely no weapons are allowed past the entry point, but

with our Speech skill artificially inflated for demo purposes, we manage to talk our way in with our pistol. The greeter will "overlook" the pistol if you play your cards right, but any bigger guns have to be checked in.

Once you're inside the joint, you're free to ignore any mission markers on your map display and wander the gambling floor. You can lose wads of chips at everything ranging from slot machines to roulette to Black Jack. If you win too many times, though, prepare for the casino's muscle-bound management to swing by and "urge" you to cash out your winnings. We try our hand at various different games, and the Obsidian rep on hand mentions that in the

final game, you can go up to the in-house Aces theater to watch "live" shows if you feel like it — and even pick up some nifty quests in doing so. For example, if you talk to one of the theater managers, he might ask you to keep an eye out for any good performers during your wanderings in the wasteland.

After we cash in our chips, we move to a different area and find ourselves in the desert outside the Strip. We discover a war zone fought over by the rival factions of the Wasteland-protecting New California Rangers (NCR) and the brutal, slave-trading Caesar's Legion. Our goal is to make nice with the NCR at their makeshift military installment, Camp Forlorn Hope.

Virtual Vegas

Fallout: New Vegas isn't the first time gamers have been to the Strip, and it won't be the last. Nevada's jewel in the desert has seen plenty of videogame action.

RAINBOW SIX VEGAS 1 & 2

The city of Vegas wasn't so thrilled that they were the virtual target of a terrorist attack.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

Okay, so technically, this was a fictionally named Vegas in a fictionally named West Coast area, but...



THIS IS VEGAS

Surreal Software's action game, complete with wet t-shirt contests, has yet to surface after Midway sold it off to Warner Bros.



2 DAYS TO VEGAS

A third-person action adventure that looks like it's literally two days from Vegas — as in, New York.



Your Pip Boy wrist PDA is no joke. It'll solve all your stat-managing needs.



Welcome to The Tops casino! Prepare to lose your chips.



Blackjack, slots, roulette — there are plenty of diversions in New Vegas.

If you're rooting against the NCR, you can sneak into the camp if you secure the right uniform, but for this runthrough we're going in with no allegiances, so the coast is clear. You need supplies, and they need help. After talking to the camp's captain, you're sent on a few errands to earn their trust — like visiting a nearby power plant to reroute electricity, as well as assisting the resident doctor tending to injured soldiers. After dispatching a few Fire Geckos on

the path to the power plant and wrapping up an amputation or two for the doctor (thanks to a high-enough Science skill), we find ourselves with a brand-new armed companion!

With our buddy in tow, we're able to take down a nearby Caesar's Legion outpost. Our sights are set on eliminating the head goon in charge, and with some rather skillful ducking, dodging, and weapon handling, we get it done. Afterward, we head back to the NCR camp to reap

the supplies we came for in the first place.

We're told we could've played it the other way around and aligned ourselves with Caesar's Legion by wiping out all the goody-two-shoes soldiers in Forlorn Hope, but we'll save our dark sides when New Vegas ships. For now, we're happy to be playing it at all, and with its refined controls and crazy amount of side quests, it's turning out to be one of the highlights of the coming Fall gaming season. — **Francesca Reyes**

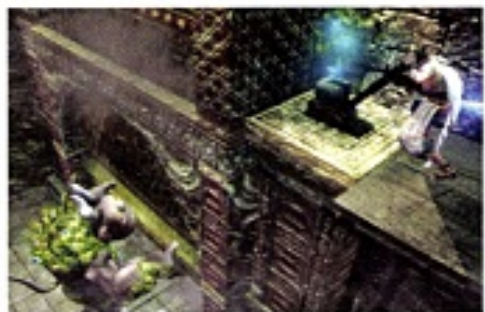


You know who could use a majin right now? The New York Knicks.



OTHER GREAT EXAMPLES OF TEAMWORK IN HUMAN HISTORY

- Peanut butter and jelly
- Danny Glover and Mel Gibson
- The 2004 Boston Red Sox (a.k.a. "The Idiots")
- Jack and Meg White (a.k.a. The White Stripes)
- Batman and Robin
- Sleep and alarm clocks
- Xbox Live and credit cards



Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom

Get by with a little help from your massive friend

• PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUBLISHER: Namco Bandal • DEVELOPER: Game Republic • MULTIPLAYER: No • RELEASE DATE: Summer 2010 • FOR FANS OF: *Shadow of the Colossus*, *Prince of Persia*



In most current Xbox 360 games, teamwork is defined by uttering something like "Cap that dude while I cut this guy's throat!" through a headset. But this isn't the case for the upcoming open-world action-adventure *Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom*, which uses a doting, giant sidekick to help your character along in his fantastical journey.

The full details of the quest that your main character, Tepeu, embarks on weren't fully divulged to us during a recent demo. But from what we gather, Tepeu (a thief who bears an uncanny resemblance to a certain prince of Persia) escapes from a prison and links up with a majin; together the pair set out to defeat a force of darkness that's overtaken the land.

By the looks of the giant majin accompanying Tepeu, you'd think he'd be strong enough to dismiss the help of a puny convict. Apparently though, this majin isn't what he once was, and you as Tepeu have to help him regain his full abilities as you progress through the game. On his end, the majin can absorb the dark magics that have taken over the kingdom, so it's a win-win scenario for both of you.

Majin's fairytale-like narrative reveals itself gradually, with cryptic clues spilling out during stylish cutscene flashbacks. The heart of the gameplay is in solving combat and environmental puzzles with the aid of your furry friend, whom you have at your command. In one scene, we found little else but a catapult and some scattered rocks in the middle of a castle's courtyard. We

had to figure out the best way to execute the rock shots with the contraption. Turns out, your hulking buddy comes in handy for the catapult, but your character is often given little direction. According to a Namco rep, *Majin's* guiding principal asserts that you should work smarter, not harder.

As compelling sidekicks go, this majin has tons of potential. Towering over you like a "roided-out Sesame Street character, he's got a deep, bellowing voice, glowing yellow eyes, a goofy manner, and some sort of fantastical garden growing from his back.

We were promised epic boss battles and told some 30 hours of gameplay lay in store, but *Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom* already looks like a winner — especially if you have kids or are just one at heart. — Kevin W. Smith

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Nothing like busting out some goblin blood during a noontime break!



Arcania: Gothic 4

Xbox goes goth — without the black eyeliner

• PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUBLISHER: JWood Entertainment • DEVELOPER: Spellbound Entertainment • MULTIPLAYER: No • RELEASE DATE: Fall • FOR FANS OF: Gothic 1 & 2, Two Worlds, D&D



Talk about trying to make a good first impression for the console audience! For a new decade and a jump over to the 360, the popular PC Gothic role-playing series gets a new developer, an eye-grabbing front title, and a fresh protagonist, whom we'll call "Nameless Human Hero 2."

Plot-wise, your character — a lowly, goat-eared, sheep-herding islander — returns from an excursion to find his village ransacked and its people massacred, including his fiancée. (Braveheart much?) In a twist, the perpetrator of these horrendous crimes is none other than "Nameless Human Hero 1" from the previous Gothic entries (continuity!), who has risen to power and been consumed by corruption!

The ensuing open-world, quest-heavy revenge story takes place across three different islands that look immense enough to get lost in, although developers said the total terrain is roughly 70% the size of the previous Gothic title (and roughly the same square footage as Oblivion's Cyrodiil). In Arcania, transport stones, boats, and your own two hairy legs are the primary modes of transportation, as horseriding and mounts are not an option.

In one scene, we explored a richly detailed village with blacksmiths at work and merchants hawking goods. Equipped with an axe (many weapons are available, ranging from swords to bows), we tested the game's open-world possibilities by swinging our blade at a harmless passerby — only to completely miss the mark.

Turns out, you can't go all medieval-GTA-style on innocent civilians. Instead, you'll have to settle for targeting your fury at the game's creep-tastic creatures, which run the gamut from gargoyles to giant lizards. One notable addition to combat is the ability to seamlessly transition from casting spells on enemies to sword-wielding — a feature from missing previous Gothic games. In fact, the melee/range/magic attack system reminds us a lot of Fable.

What really stood out in our demo were the hilly, scenic landscapes; they included monstrous, rocky mountain ranges and seemingly endless oceans. The Arcania weather report will encompass everything from thunderstorms to fog, but developer Spellbound suggested traveling up to the mountains on a good day

RECAPPING THE GOTHIC SERIES

● GOTHIC 2001

Developed by Germany's Piranha Bytes, the single-player Gothic debut put you in control of a male convict we'll simply call the "Nameless Human Hero 1," who resided in a quest-happy, medieval fantasy world neck-deep at war with evil orcs. Through in-game decisions, your character could choose different career paths (such as warrior, archer, or wizard), changing up your experience every time you played it. Gothic was a huge hit on PC, and lauded for its immersive, interactive environments and breathtaking landscapes.

● GOTHIC II 2003

Equally revered by fans and critics, it followed the saga of "Nameless Human Hero 1," who returned to do battle with the orcs, dragons, and demons.

● GOTHIC III 2006

Things hit a snag for the series when Gothic III received a mixed response, with many saying it seemed bloated, rushed, and buggy. In short, too much content and not enough testing time.



is perfect for a little sunrise watching. The area's beauty is only half-visible, though — you can explore a mysterious and extensive underground tunnel system with flaming torch in hand.

All told, you're looking at a ballpark minimum of 30 hours in Arcania, but if you're

hell-bent on completing all the quests and earning all of the Achievements, you might as well start growing facial hair in solidarity with your character. Gothic's first visit to our beloved system will have you vacationing in Arcania for quite a long time.

— Kevin W. Smith



Saw 2

Shall we play a game?

• PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUBLISHER: Konami
• DEVELOPER: Zombie Studios • MULTIPLAYER: No
• RELEASE DATE: Fall 2010 • FOR FANS OF: Self-inflicted torture, puzzles, dark places



Ever woken up in the middle of a dirty, abandoned warehouse with a modified bear trap on your head? One that's ready to snap shut unless you dig beneath your eye with a scalpel and get the key to unlock it? No? Ever wanted to try? For horror gamers with a mind for puzzle-solving and button-spamming, here's your golden ticket back into the nightmare world of gory survival, with a sequel set in the interim between the first two Saw movies.

As the son of original hero Detective Tapp, you've stepped into psycho-killer Jigsaw's playground at the start of *Saw 2* — and there's no easy way out. Just like the first game, you'll come up against both brain-teasing and skill-based puzzles like the aforementioned, cringe-worthy bear trap. During our hands-on time with the game we learned the unpleasant truth: in order to carve out that key, you have to pay attention to three screens in the background. Each one displays different words on it: Fear, Survive, Freedom. A Y-button prompt appears above each screen at various times, so mashing it when it's over, say, "Freedom" increases your chance of getting out. But hit Y while it's over "Fear" and you might not like the results. Unless your name's Jigsaw, that is.

— Francesca Reyes

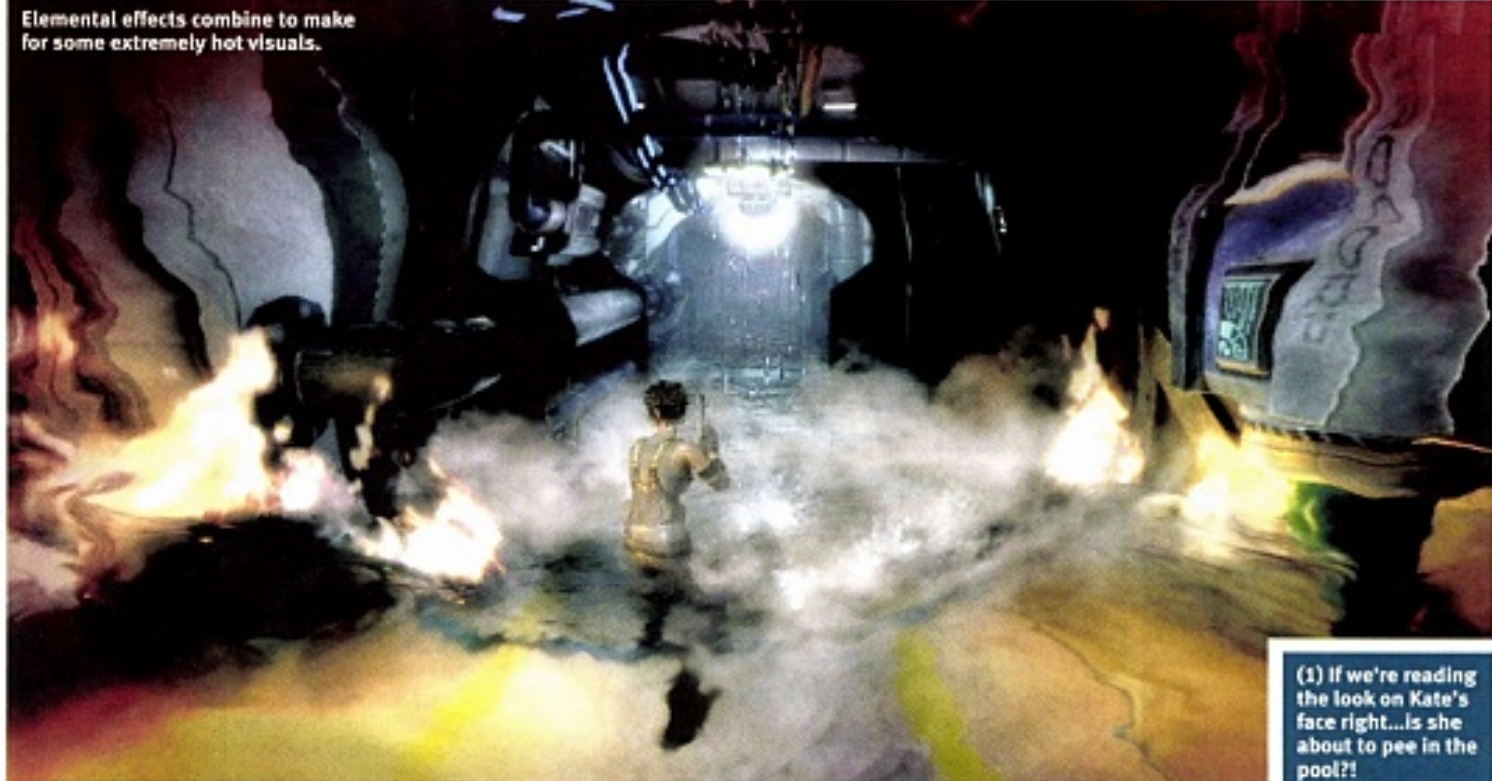




Insert Coin: Live Arcade

We get wet and wild with upcoming XBLA releases

Elemental effects combine to make for some extremely hot visuals.



(1) If we're reading the look on Kate's face right...is she about to pee in the pool?!

(2) Yep, she's guilty. Look at her running away from the warm spot.

(3) On a serious note, *Hydrophobia* is set to be an episodic series.



Hydrophobia

PUBLISHER: Microsoft • DEVELOPER: Dark Energy Digital • MULTIPLAYER: No • RELEASE DATE: Summer 2010 • FOR FANS OF: Water, puzzles, water-based puzzles
ON THE CABINET: Come on in, the water's fine...

OUR 25c: We've all had rotten days at work, but few of us have endured days as bad as the one Kate Wilson does in *Hydrophobia*. A systems engineer on a city-sized luxury cruise liner called the *Queen of the World*, her shift begins with a bizarre cult wresting control of the ship, several breaches to the hull, and her plummeting in an elevator to the very bowels of the boat. Of course, for gamers, this is where things get very interesting indeed.

And by "interesting," we mean "gorgeous." *Hydrophobia* is one of the best-looking and most sophisticated XBLA games we've seen yet. Developer Dark Energy Digital has created an astonishing fluid-dynamics simulation, which means when water rushes down the corridor, it does so realistically, carrying crates, debris, and the occasional enemy with it.

The rules of engagement constantly change, so depending on how prepared you are, you can use that to your advantage. For example, burning oil sits on top of the water as you'd expect (blame BP?), and by shooting out a window, you can direct that burning oil towards an enemy. Another neat trick is to shoot out an electric cable from the roof so that it drops into the water, electrocuting any enemy unfortunate enough to be waist deep in the wet stuff.

Hydrophobia's emphasis is on a true physical representation of the world, so if a room is filled with water and a window is damaged, you'll see the cracks spiderweb their way across the glass, which eventually shatters when the pressure mounts. Your greatest tool is logic, because the game world reacts to your actions exactly as you'd expect.

But for a slice of the first episode, you won't be acting at all. Kate is very much a reluctant hero, and her early priority is simply to survive both the hostile environment and the armed interlopers. You don't get a gun right away, though you'll be kept busy during this section trying to negotiate the corridors of the ship — often completely submerged ones — and solving a few gentle puzzles.

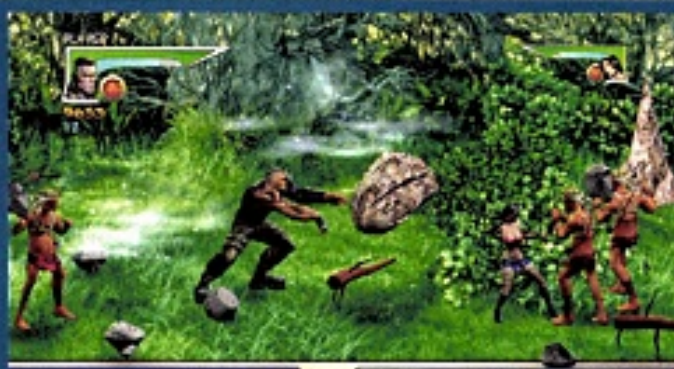
Hydrophobia looks set to take the baton from *Shadow Complex* as 2010's essential XBLA title. Though it won't necessarily compete with the *Call of Duty* of this world, it holds its own incredibly well against full retail releases in both the visuals and mechanics departments. If it keeps its glossy, polished edge throughout, we're ready to ride the wave. — **Mike Channell**

HYPE LEVEL:





Comic-style onomatopoeias accompany attacks in the game.



Beware the hand! It swoops in to draw fresh enemies on the screen.



Unbound Saga

• PUBLISHER: Microsoft • DEVELOPER: Vogster Entertainment • MULTIPLAYER: Yes • RELEASE DATE: Summer 2010
 • FOR FANS OF: *Streets of Rage*, *Final Fight*, mocking comic clichés • ON THE CABINET: It ain't easy being hand-drawn



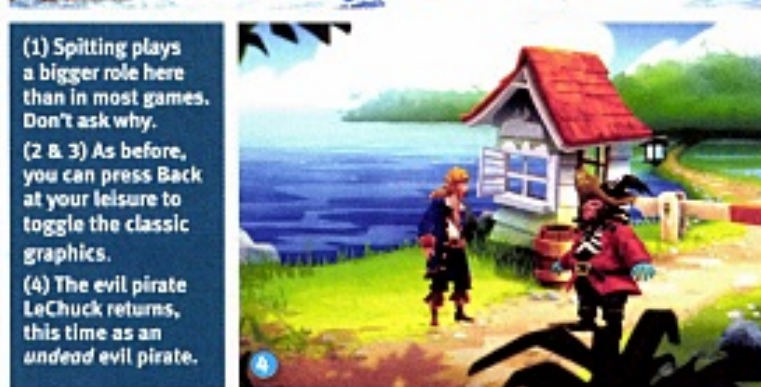
OUR 25¢: *Unbound Saga* couldn't be a better fit for a service with "Arcade" in its name, as this throwback beat-'em-up takes its cues from old-school brawlers like *Final Fight* and *Double Dragon*. But what may really set *Saga* apart from those past hits — aside from the glossy HD visuals and online co-op/competitive play, of course — is a unique, comic book-centric style and storyline.

After three decades of weathering the comic strip industry's various ups and downs, fictional comic book hero (and *Unbound Saga* protagonist) Rick Ajax (with that name, he must be fictional) is ready to throw in the towel, triggering one last adventure to escape his 2D hand-drawn ink-and-paper prison and confront its creator.

Much like Sega Genesis classic *Comix Zone* (also on Xbox Live Arcade), *Unbound Saga* depicts Ajax and partner Lori Machete battling through comic-like panels, and in this case, you'll actually see a human hand appear on the screen to draw in enemies while you fight. Plus, you can swap between the two at any time during combat, and upgrade their skills extensively between missions.

We're hoping the colorful characters and one-of-a-kind premise will topple any potential tedium from the button-mashing action, and make for a stellar online co-op pick this summer. — Andrew Hayward

• HYPE LEVEL:



The Secret of Monkey Island 2 Special Edition: LeChuck's Revenge

• PUBLISHER: LucasArts • DEVELOPER: LucasArts • MULTIPLAYER: No
 • RELEASE DATE: Summer 2010 • FOR FANS OF: Remakes, adventure games, men of low moral fiber • ON THE CABINET: A monkey in our dreams



OUR 25¢: "Wow, you're loaded!" So goes the mocking taunt of Scabb Island pirate Largo LaGrande as he hangs you from your ankles over a bridge and robs you in *Monkey Island 2*'s opening moments. It's also the most apt description of the second *Monkey* remake.

Now that we've played the classic adventure sequel's special edition, we're more excited than ever. It looks better (everyone animates a tad smoother), plays better (the new direct control option lets you almost play the game one-handed via RT and the right thumbstick), and it's loaded with fan-service extras. Toggle on the creator commentary and, during select scenes, press RB to hear Ron Gilbert (*DeathSpank*), Dave Grossman (*Sam & Max Save the World*), and Tim Schafer (*Psychonauts*, *Brütal Legend*) share stories of the game's development with the same wit that permeates their 20-year-old classic.

And just like last year's first *Monkey Island* deluxe package, you can press Back anytime to switch to the original 1991 graphics and sound, but now you also have the option of hearing the special edition's voiceovers paired with the old-school visuals. We thought we'd dig this, but it just seems...anachronistic. Is that going to stop us from laughing our booty off through every second of this still-hilarious adventure? Not a chance. — Ryan McCallfrey

• HYPE LEVEL:



Does our young hero's silhouette remind anyone else a bit of Calvin, sans his stuffed tiger Hobbes?

Limbo

• PUBLISHER: Microsoft • DEVELOPER: PlayDead Studios • MULTIPLAYER: No • RELEASE DATE: Summer 2010
 • FOR FANS OF: Black-and-white, puzzles, purgatory • ON THE CABINET: Stuck in the middle with you...



OUR 25¢: Limbo isn't a pleasant place. Besides the rotten trees and giant spiders intent on spiking you through your mid-section, someone's scattered mantraps everywhere. Mantraps that can snap the unwary in two and cause their heads to fly off in amusing ways.

It is, however, a beautiful place. Entirely presented in black and white, *Limbo* is a game inspired by German Expressionism and Film Noir; it shows a sharp focus on what's up close and a more hazy finish on what lies beyond. What's more, you'll often hear nothing apart from the patter of your footsteps, the wind blasting through the trees, and perhaps the odd suspicious crack or howl from the undergrowth as you trot over the simple landscape.

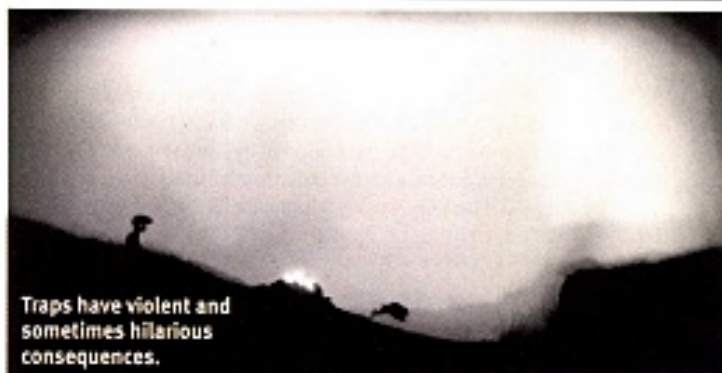
Sure, it sounds pretentious — but the ultra-violence inflicted on your character when you fail at puzzles keeps affairs from getting too art house. Instead, it's a truly absorbing but haunting world to wander through. Developer PlayDead is even studying ways of awarding Achievement points outside of the main game, just so that your

entrapment within Limbo has no interruption whatsoever.

The premise is a simple one: "Unsure of his sister's fate, a boy enters Limbo." The control scheme is even simpler: move with the analog stick, and use the A button to flip switches as well as grab and drag. The game is a sequence of puzzles that includes pulling corpses into hungry mantraps, outthopping rolling boulders while cocooned in a spider's web, and (later on) fiddling with magnets, revolving screens, and giant whirling cogs all too eager to chew up your flesh.

We're slightly concerned that by the close of its four-hour running time, *Limbo* could get a little bit too frustrating — but even at this stage, it appears to be a game that future generations will mention in the same breath as *Braid* or *Portal*. The day it hits XBLA this summer, you should turn your phone off, shut the curtains, and embrace the beautiful nothingness of being neither here nor there. — Will Porter

• HYPE LEVEL:



Traps have violent and sometimes hilarious consequences.



How can you not dig Limbo's stylized visuals?

AS AN AMERICAN

YOU CAN MAKE A COMMITMENT.

FULFILL A COMMITMENT.

BREAK A COMMITMENT.

THERE ARE BIG COMMITMENTS.

SMALL COMMITMENTS.

COMMITMENTS YOU NEVER

WANTED TO MAKE IN THE FIRST PLACE.

YOU CAN EITHER FEAR COMMITMENT

OR EMBRACE IT.

AS AN AMERICAN AND
A MARINE CORPS OFFICER

YOUR COMMITMENT WILL IMPACT

THE FUTURE OF THIS NATION.

FEW CAN BE MARINES.
EVEN FEWER CAN LEAD THEM.
CAN YOU?



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DarkStar One: Broken Alliance

Breaking barriers for console space sims

• PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUBLISHER: Kalypso • DEVELOPER: Gaming Minds • MULTIPLAYER: No • RELEASE DATE: July 2010 • FOR FANS OF: *Freelancer*, *Wing Commander*, the year 2006



Space flight simulations sowed their oats on PC, but the genre hasn't seen the same kind of continued success on consoles. So *DarkStar One: Broken Alliance* — a part of a four-year-old PC title — should have the market cornered when it launches this July and delivers a combination of ship-based combat and other intergalactic interactions as hero Kayron Jarvis hunts his father's killer.

Though the game was originally designed for a mouse or joystick, your ship — the *DarkStar One* — maneuvers nicely in first-person view

using the 360's analog sticks. Meanwhile, you use the triggers and other buttons to fire on (or communicate with) other ships and perform various in-flight tasks. In the early missions we tried out, the objectives typically ranged from blasting enemies and protecting allies to securing cargo and transporting it from one galaxy to the next.

From the main ship hub, you can take on escort missions, read galactic news bursts, upgrade your vessel's armory, and even buy and sell various goods for fun and profit. *Broken*

Alliance promises a 30-hour campaign where your mission choices determine your in-game role and personality, which gives players and meticulous completists good reason to explore every corner of the galaxy.

DarkStar One doesn't exactly fit the part of a top-shelf 360 title, and the version we played still had a few bugs to iron out in transition from PC, but considering the complete lack of competition, we'd guess that interested parties won't mind a few caveats while living out their space cowboy fantasies come July. — **Andrew Hayward**



Rain can even lead to driving lines; follow behind someone else in the inclement weather and let them create dry strips of track for you to drive faster on.

F1 2010

Slip-'n'-slide

• PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUBLISHER: Codemasters • DEVELOPER: Codemasters Birmingham • MULTIPLAYER: Yes • RELEASE DATE: September 2010 • FOR FANS OF: Pit stops, raindrops, open tops



When even Codemasters itself admits to us that Formula One (F1) racing is seen as "dry and dull" in the US, getting the attention of American gamers with a 360 adaptation of the sport seems like a fierce uphill battle. So how do they wage their war? Simple: by making a Codemasters-quality racing game.

F1 2010 follows the impressive digital racing heritage of *Dirt* and *Grid* and borrows the same slick EGO graphics engine, making everything interactive (even the menus). The game's front end — where you can set up races, configure 12-player multiplayer events, or tweak your car down to the wing settings on your spoiler — is presented as the back lot of a racetrack, where you can go into your trailer and talk to your agent about your career progress, chat with reporters about how you're doing, and more.

Keys in hand, we got in a few hot laps on both wet and dry track. Remember those insane rain effects we told you about a

couple issues back? The ones that dynamically cause puddles and affect the track itself? Not only are they gorgeous, but we'd advise you to hit the pits and put treaded tires on your open-wheeled wonder, lest you start hydroplaning along the asphalt (yes, seriously).

With controller in hand, we can tell you that these cars are appropriately unforgiving — which should delight the hardcore F1ers out there. But for the rest of us NASCAR-lovin' Americans, numerous levels of driving assists are available so we can sit back and just marvel at the pretty graphics. — **Ryan McCaffrey**



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Front Mission Evolved

Big bots blissfully blow up buildings

• PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUBLISHER: Square Enix • DEVELOPER: Double Helix/Square Enix • MULTIPLAYER: Yes
• RELEASE DATE: September 14, 2010 • FOR FANS OF: *MechAssault*, *Front Mission*, rocket skates



What is it in our gamer DNA that makes us yearn to strap our digital selves into giant robot suits and blow the snot out of other giant robots so much? Ever since *MechAssault*, we've had an insatiable urge to trash trucks, buildings, and fellow mechs...er, Wanzers, as is the case in *Front Mission Evolved* — an action-heavy take on the strategic PlayStation series. We had a chance to hop in the cockpit of a Heavy Assault Wanzer for a mission, and *Evolved* made it feel good to scratch the big-bot itch again.

Though it features a story penned by *Final Fantasy XIII* director Motomu Toriyama*, we weren't much interested in the battles over orbital tethers (which power low-orbit space commerce). Or the near-future sci-fi musings of the five global superpower factions doing the fighting. Instead, we were far keener on opening up the left- and right-shoulder-mounted machine guns and missiles (press the gamepad triggers and shoulder buttons, respectively) to lay waste to any opposing force that dared cross our path.

Funny enough, the down-and-dirtier we got with *Front Mission Evolved*, the more it reminded us of *MechAssault*. These three-story-tall death machines move very quickly, can overheat their weapon banks when used in excess, and they even have jump jets (activated by clicking in the right stick). You even pick up red, green, and blue power-

ups from fallen foes, just as you did in the Xbox classic. Adding a little more zip to the Wanzers' step, though, is that the boosters strapped to the bots' boots can also aid their lateral movement, meaning they can skate around the battlefield as if they're wakeboarding.

An X button-based dodge move also helps keep the action frantic; you can strafe left or right to avoid incoming missiles after you've been target-locked. Meanwhile, a *Call of Duty*-style recharging health system turns your Wanzer from a flaming, near-critical wreck into a shined-up, good-to-go battle machine in mere seconds if you stay out of harm's way long enough. Heck, there's even a bullet-time mode called E.D.G.E. that turns the screen gray and lets you slow down time for a few moments to tear up your rivals.

Finally, in a welcome move that's more *MechWarrior* than *MechAssault*, you'll be able to fully customize your Wanzer and its loadout, which should make the multiplayer modes all the more interesting — as if we weren't already amped up enough for a high-quality giant robot game. — Ryan McCaffrey





Shaun White Skateboarding looks kinda-sorta-maybe-almost a little cel-shaded.

Shaun White Skateboarding

What *can't* the Flying Tomato do?!

PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUB: Ubisoft • DEV: Ubisoft Montreal • MULTIPLAYER: Yes • RELEASE DATE: Fall 2010 • FOR FANS OF: Skate, Shaun White Snowboarding, Olympic gold medalists



In a non-air-conditioned meeting room on the outskirts of Paris, the lights go out. Electric blinds grind noisily closed, blocking all the internal windows. A projector flicks on, and a man's face fills the far wall. "We were thinking," he booms through the too-loud speakers, "What happens that makes you lose passion and fit into mundane society?" Um, we have a few guesses.

As Ubisoft begins to show us *Shaun White Skateboarding*, the contrast between our presentation and the product couldn't be starker: SWS, we discover, is a game built around a hugely idealistic view of skating, in which a board and a cavalier attitude about compound fractures can bring vibrant color back to a suffocating urban existence. And it's not messing around with metaphors either. Maps start off gray and dreary, dotted with terrifying corporate structures, and pulling off tricks blasts vivid hues into the city like emotions returning color to Pleasantville.

Dry fountains are turned into bitchin' half-pipes, statues are replaced by mushrooming skate shops, and glum, suited office workers are transformed to whooping t-shirted youth. Do well enough and you can start crafting your own rails — sparking neon lines you guide from one point to another. By the time you've finished, the place looks like a Bollywood finale.

It's a surprise, then, to discover that Ubisoft is striving for authenticity. The graffiti is done by real street artists, the branded bits you unlock are all accurate, and of course, there's the input of carrot-topped frontman Mr. White, who apparently spends his time grinding rails when he's not throwing himself off mountains on a snowboard. He's providing monthly consultation to ensure that the physics-based skateboarding is true to life, and has crafted the 80-odd tricks to be genuine to fans and believable to newcomers.

Other numbers reeled off include five huge districts, more than 200 collectibles, and over 40 side-missions for the 10-hour story that ties

the whole thing together. In this, you play as your own character — it's all about expressing your own identity, albeit through the purchase of branded clothing — but White himself will be playable at certain points.

Chuck in eight-brah multiplayer on the maps you create and there's enough stuff to win the baggy-trousered crew over, even if they don't dream in rainbows. With the *Tony Hawk* franchise languishing and *Skate* carving its tech-focused groove, Ubisoft's idealistic approach could win it some friends. All that remains is to see how it handles, which we'll discover later in the year. — Mike Channell



Pulling off tricks blasts vivid hues into the city like emotions returning color to Pleasantville.

Driver: San Francisco

An out-of-body driving experience

• PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUBLISHER: Ubisoft • DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Reflections • MULTIPLAYER: Yes • RELEASE DATE: Fall 2010 • FOR FANS OF: Joyriding, driving games, odd plot twists



There's something weird going on during our demo of the newest game set in the *Driver* universe. No, it's not that Tanner, the series' undercover cop hero, returns with longtime partner Tobias Jones. And it's not that the game's action plays out against the beautiful rolling hills and curvy streets of San Francisco for the first time.

It's the moment during our demo in which creative director Martin Edmonson abruptly pauses the action, pops out of the Dodge Challenger GT's dashboard view, and takes the camera to a bird's eye perspective of the surrounding streets. Spotting a sparkling Maserati, he clicks a button and voila! He's in the driver's seat of the Italian wonder! After a minute

behind the wheel, Edmonson teleports back up to the high view, cruises at low altitude over the streets of SF, and continues to hop in and out of other cars on the fly. As exhilarating as it all seems, we're scratching our heads. What does this mechanic have to do with Tanner's ongoing tussle with arch-nemesis Jericho — the one that spills over from *Driver's* climactic cliffhanger ending, where Jericho shoots Tanner in Istanbul?

Edmonson explains to us that all this car-hopping is due to Tanner lying comatose in a hospital. We know this as players, since the start of the game fills in these story details — but poor Tanner hasn't a clue. We're seeing the world through his unconscious, bed-bound brain. Yes, it sounds a little strange — hokey, even — but when the world is your joyriding oyster, and it's

all running in a buttery-smooth 60 frames per second, who cares?

And this out-of-body free rein explains how missions work in *Driver: SF*. As you pull out to an overhead view of the city streets, you'll be able to gain even greater distance until you can see the entire map of San Francisco and its surrounding cities. Choose to dive down to select any car on any street, and you'll (in a roundabout way) "possess" the owner of the vehicle — and any errands or mission objectives they may have on their plates. It's a wildly implausible premise, but from what we've seen of the game's open-world style of gameplay thus far, it's rubberneckingly irresistible. We look forward to seeing more of how all of this madness works, because we're hopelessly intrigued already. — **Francesca Reyes**



Driver: SF's oddball car-swapping feature can't be used willy-nilly. You'll need to first unlock it, then manage it as a resource so you don't use it all up in one go.





Who needs Aragorn when you have two pals helping you bring the pain?



Cave troll seeks soft, squishy human for strictly physical relationship.



This Legolas-like is actually a mage who can cast protection spells.

Lord of the Rings: War in the North

How far down the Hobbit hole will you go?

PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUB: WB Interactive Entertainment • DEV: Snowblind Studios • MULTIPLAYER: Yes • RELEASE DATE: 2011 • FOR FANS OF: Co-op role-playing, slaying orcs and trolls



You've got a bit of a problem. You're a dwarf, for one. Second, you just got tailed by a dragon-riding Ring Wraith deep into the damp, moldy undergrowth of a forest called Mirkwood. But before you can draw your last breath as the hooded horror from J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy universe descends, two friends — an elf and a mage — stride in to take up arms at your side. Disaster averted.

This is one of the central and oh-so-alluring tenets of Snowblind Studios' (*Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*) ode to leggy archers and mystical creatures in *Lord of the Rings: War in the North*. As an action-oriented RPG that allows you to wander the land cooperatively with up to two friends over Xbox Live, this is no mere hack-and-slash. *War* relies on teamwork through and through, whether your buddies are computer-controlled or human.

For instance, each of the game's unique races (elf, human mage, dwarf) possesses their

own unique beneficial abilities. The elf, as an example, is a master tracker — which makes spotting the brutish, boar-like Warg's footprints a snap. And this means quite a bit in the context of the game, as spotting a Warg means that batches of roaming enemies can't be too far behind. The dwarf, on the other hand, can sniff out secret doors and treasure chests like Scooby-Doo after a Scooby snack. And we all know that collecting loot (managed in an inventory system suspiciously similar to *Dragon Age's*) is the life's blood of any good RPG, and here it's in our best interest to make like a Hoover and collect anything not nailed down.

But it's the combat that'll truly test your gaming mettle. In a tense battle against

an especially grumpy cave troll, the mage juggled firing off a few spells at the baddie's hulking frame and casting sanctuary spells to keep his pals protected. The elf could stand back and rely on ranged bow attacks, but the dwarf? Well, let's just say that close-range battle axe swinging got him into direct tussles with the cave troll. In one instance, the Snowblind staffer demoing the game had to mash buttons, quick-time-event style, in order to wrest his dwarf free from the creature's damaging grasp.

There's a lot of sexy nerd appeal in *War in the North's* co-op RPG trappings, including a *Mass Effect*-esque conversation wheel for dialogue, and we're eager to go hands-on with the three-person fellowship for ourselves; we haven't been back to Middle-earth in far too long.

— Francesca Reyes



Deus Redux

The legendary RPG/FPS series goes back to the beginning for its Xbox 360 debut — to a time when man first fused himself with machine. *By Matt Cabral*

• PLATFORM: Xbox 360 • PUBLISHER: Square Enix • DEVELOPER: Eidos Montreal • MULTIPLAYER: TBD • RELEASE DATE: 2011

Adam Jensen, protagonist of Eidos Montreal's upcoming *Deus Ex* prequel, *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, crashes through a glass ceiling — Batman-style — just before hitting the floor and summoning a dome-like force field around his crouched body. A group of gun-toting bad guys quickly surround this mysterious threat-from-the-sky, unloading clips into him with shoot-first-ask-questions-later abandon. The barrage of bullets bounce off the shield, killing all comers in a slo-mo, cinematic display to rival the best moments from *The Matrix* films. Okay, Eidos Montreal, you got our attention.

BIG SHOES TO FILL Let's catch-up: *Human Revolution* is the third entry in the cyberpunk, conspiracy-riddled, first-person shooter/RPG hybrid franchise that became a PC-gaming phenomenon with 2000's legendary *Deus Ex*. Unfortunately, the highly anticipated 2003 follow-up and Xbox debut, *Invisible War*, fell quite short of the lofty mark set by the original. The producer, David Anfossi, is very aware of the delicate task of re-engaging old fans while still also attracting a generation accustomed to genre-defining shooters such as *BioShock*. There's also the added pressure of Eidos banking a lot on this franchise — this big-budget title is being developed in a brand-new, state-of-the-art studio. "It's challenging," Anfossi confesses, "but we're keeping all the series' core pillars [such as] story, combat, stealth, RPG elements — which include hacking and social interactions — that will

appeal to the hardcore gamer, while presenting them in a spectacular way that will be rewarding for new players to explore and experience."

Built on a highly modified version of the *Tomb Raider: Underworld* engine, *Human Revolution* is set 25 years before the original game in the year 2027. It's aiming to create an original experience built around these pillars rather than break new ground in gameplay. In fact, Anfossi isn't shy when discussing the development team's influences from other titles. "I won't hide the fact that when we decided to use tactical combat and a cover system we looked at *Rainbow Six* — why reinvent that? For the inventory management system, we looked to *Resident Evil 4*, and for stealth you may see some of *Metal Gear Solid*. We're taking these systems from other games, but we're putting them together in a unique way."

“WE’RE TAKING SYSTEMS FROM OTHER GAMES, BUT WE’RE PUTTING THEM TOGETHER IN A UNIQUE WAY.”

Deus Ex: Human Revolution producer David Anfossi







In the future, all subways will require automatic weapons.



BAROQUE MEETS BLADE RUNNER

Human Revolution's visuals blend cyberpunk style with Renaissance influence

While the new *Deus Ex* liberally borrows gameplay mechanics from some of this generation's best titles, art director Jonathan Jaques Belletete is making sure its visual style is unlike anything we've ever seen. He's hoping that mixing the series' staple cyberpunk aesthetic — which shines in the *Blade Runner*-like environments — with a Renaissance-era influence will leave an imprint on players' minds the way *BioShock* did. One of the coolest examples of an equally influential sci-fi style is Jensen's sunglasses. The slick specs don't have a nose bridge or arms; instead, retractable lenses emerge from small frames attached to his temples. They sort of make Neo's shades look like a clunky pair of BluBlockers.

WE CAN REBUILD HIM... While borrowing from the best is hardly a foolproof plan, *Human Revolution* is much more than a patchwork of other titles' mechanics. In addition to the twisty narrative and free-form, open-ended play that encourages experimentation (save for some boss showdowns, the campaign can be completed without using lethal force), its defining feature is its augmentation upgrades. Players can outfit Jensen with cybernetic enhancements (a.k.a. augmentations or "aug") that customize everything from his stealth skills to his hacking abilities. You'll really see this shine in combat skills, which brings us back to our eyes-only demo. Specific gameplay details were scarce, but the unscripted awesomeness we saw definitely told us what to expect when Jensen's fate is in our hands.

Before we witnessed the jaw-dropping moment when Jensen generated his bullet-deflecting shield, we actually watched him take out two enemies — simultaneously — by delivering blade-outfitted elbows to their chests. (In fact, Jensen was flashy enough that he probably

would've sent an envious Ezio back to da Vinci for an *Assassin's Creed* tune-up. Far less stealthy (but equally effective) was a move that saw Jensen drive an augmented fist through a concrete wall, then come back with a lifeless henchman in hand. The game is played primarily from a first-person perspective, but when using cover or performing certain kills, Jensen can be seen in full cinematic third-person glory.

We got an especially eye-popping taste of this towards the end of our demo. After dropping those shield-shooting enemies to the floor, Jensen faced a spidery mechanical menace whose relentless heat-seeking rockets forced him to blast his way out a window with some C4. His evasion was short-lived, though, as a towering mercenary — sporting a grenade bandolier that could choke an ox — called Jensen a "boy scout" and transformed a beefy arm into a Gatling gun. And then...fade to logo. Damn you, teasing developers!

You're not a true cyberpunk unless you wear all black, cool sunglasses, and make entrances like this.



THIS IS NOT JUST ABOUT POINT A *to* POINT B THIS IS FOR ALL THINGS 4-WHEELED *and* FAST

IT'S FOR THE RACERS, TUNERS, *and* DRIFTERS THE PAINTERS, DESIGNERS, *and* THE DREAMERS

BECAUSE THIS IS MORE *than* PIXELS AND POLYGONS THIS IS ALUMINUM AND CARBON FIBER

THIS IS NOT A SIMULATION

IT'S AN *invitation.*



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Jump in.

XBOX 360

(Not Your Typical)

Gaming



Clans

We've all seen groups of gamers feverishly teaming up to play *Halo* and *Call of Duty*, but how about a clan formed around rap-rock act Limp Bizkit? Or ones devoted to *Uno*? It's time to get familiar with some very specialized gaming groups hanging out on Xbox Live.

Words by Kevin W. Smith. Illustrations by Gary Locke.

Limp Bizkit Gaming Clan

THROUGHOUT HIS ROCK career, Limp Bizkit frontman Fred Durst has shown he's a savvy marketer, but is it just pure coincidence his group's upcoming album, *Gold Cobra*, bears the same initials (LBGC) as his gaming clan?

"There are no coincidences," Durst tells us from his phone while driving around Los Angeles. Indeed, the red-baseball-cap-wearing singer says he even has a (still untitled) song on the album about LBGC and playing games online.

The idea for the LBGC evolved through Durst's adventures over Xbox Live, which he says he logs on to for about four hours a day. Not too long ago, word got out in the Limp Bizkit community that Durst was playing *Halo* on Live under the Gamertag "Evan Jealous," a character he created. Interest in his online habits grew. Durst didn't know many gamers in his immediate circle and saw an opportunity to form a gaming clan free of the annoying chodes that can turn up in multiplayer lobbies the world over.

"It was more about the tone of the community," Durst says. "It didn't matter if you liked Limp Bizkit, just that you felt the same as we did about obnoxious people and you wanted to be around pleasant people. And the majority ruled."

Durst launched thelbgc.com in February with the help of Irish website designer Barry Flood, whom he met over Live. Flood now runs the site, which has almost 1,000 registered members (identifiable with an "LBGC" in their Gamertag); all of them go through a screening process before they're made official.

"We're not the best clan out there," Flood says. "We're more about just getting a good community of gamers together."

Durst says he wants to eventually play with every member of LBGC, but the 100-person limit on his 360's friends list makes it difficult to keep up, so he often boots any inactive friends. If you do get a chance to play with Durst in any of his current favorites like *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* or *MLB 2K10*, members of the LBGC say—go ahead, have at him. "He's just one of the guys," Flood notes. Other members of Limp Bizkit, like drummer John Otto, are also hardcore members of the clan. Durst admits to switching his Gamertag regularly for fun—even if many of you wouldn't believe the same guy from the "Break Stuff" video just made you respawn.

"You can't really convince people that you're you, so I don't try to," Durst says. "If they start talking s*** about Fred Durst, I start talking s*** about Fred Durst."

UNO CLAN

Don't worry; Wisconsin's Crystal Lynn Stover doesn't take her two-person clan, "Beauty and the Beast," too seriously. How could she? It's an Uno clan! Yes, the longtime card game and Live Arcade hit has devoted clans on the site GameBattles.net.

Stover started the doubles-Uno clan Beauty and the Beast about six months ago with her boyfriend/beast, whom she met over Xbox Live and now lives with. The clan is lodged in the top 10 in GameBattles.com's Uno standings, among some 600 other ranked clans with names like "Draw 4 All Day" and "Green Cardz." Stover says she plays Uno mostly to kill time when she's not busting heads in her more serious clan, "DevineexStealth," which is devoted to Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter 2.

That doesn't mean Beauty and the Beast's Uno games aren't heated, complete with trash-talk and arguments. "You'll get teams that have codewords for what colors they're using," she describes. "If it's green, they'll say, 'Got any trees?'" Even when Beauty and the Beast wins an Uno match, the other team will often contest the victory. "It can get yucky at times," she reveals.

What's the key to becoming an Uno champion? Stover doesn't have one, declaring, "It's just luck, really."



US Military Gamers

VIDEOGAMES HAVE BEEN a common pastime for members of the armed forces, but Terrell Pakeman found that most of the dominant military clans seemed to be for PC gamers. He wasn't a fan of Live matchmaking's "unruly nature" and figured there had to be a whole untapped world of vets just like him who were just looking to have fun on Xbox 360.

So last September, Pakeman, an Air Force vet, decided to launch US Military Gamers, usmilitarygamers.com, in hopes of meeting more console players who share the same bond. "We all took the same oath," Pakeman says. "When you start playing with them, it's like you already know them."

Not surprisingly, the 100-plus-member clan tends to gravitate toward military-based games such as *Modern Warfare 2*, *Gears of War*, and *Halo: Reach*. However, Pakeman doesn't believe that having experienced actual military combat gives you a leg up in, say, *Modern Warfare 2*.

US Military members might be recognized by a "UFGM" in their gamer tag, but it's a mostly non-competitive clan, and it's even open to civilians. Just don't lie and say you've been in the military if you haven't, Pakeman notes, as it's not really too hard to find out if you're lying.

Members are free to chat about almost anything on the clan's internet forums, but they don't exist for recruiting purposes. "We don't glorify going into the military," Pakeman tells us. "We try to serve as ambassadors."



2old2play

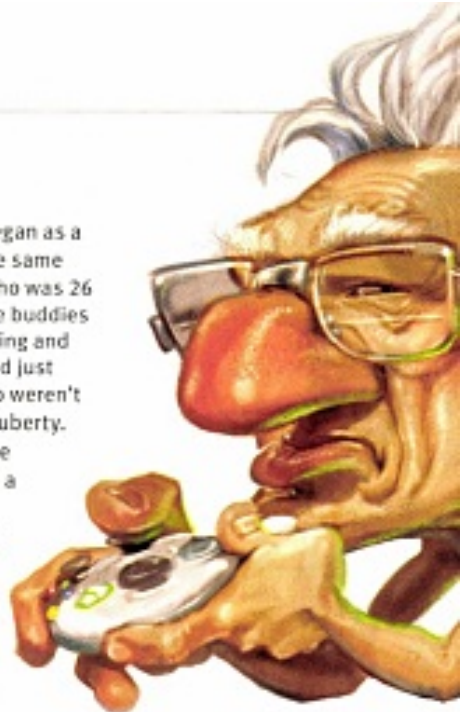
STARTED IN 2005, 2old2play began as a forum for a gaming clan of the same name. Founder Joel Albert, who was 26 at the time, says he and some buddies had grown sick of all the cursing and name-calling on Xbox Live and just wanted to play with folks who weren't still experiencing rushes of puberty. "Gaming's not supposed to be stressful; the point is to have a good time," Albert says.

The clan's site, 2old2play.com, grew through word of mouth and has since turned into a hub for gaming clans featuring players 25 and up. "Most people that are 25 are out of college," Albert explains. "So they have some sort of responsibilities."

Marcie McIndoe, 34, says she discovered 2old2play when she was housebound and on maternity leave with her first child three years ago. She found clans through 2old2play that let her socialize on their forums, shoot dudes in the face, and generally let her hair down. "It was this wonderful compromise," she tells us.

McIndoe is now a leader of "The Cabal" — a mostly social, all-female clan on the site with about 12 active members — and also belongs to "2old4BS," a co-ed clan that plays *Rainbow Six Vegas*.

If you go on to 2old2play.com and register, you'll find a number of older-skewing 360 clans, including "Old Man Mafia" and the "Pension Plan Commandos." You might think clans of older gamers would catch flak from the younger generation, and that's true, says Albert, although maybe not for the reasons you think. Around once a week he gets a profanity-laced email from a gamer who's too young to join. "If we let in one 18-year-old..." he explains.



"You can't really convince people that you're you, so I don't try to," Durst says. "If they start talking s*** about Fred Durst, I start talking s*** about Fred Durst."



OTHER UNIQUE CLANS TO CHECK OUT

ABLEGAMERS

ablegamers.com

A great community for gamers with disabilities

PMS CLAN

pmsclan.com

Female gamers, unite!

BUDDY SYSTEM GAMING

buddysystemgaming.com

A place for good sportsmanship in gaming — imagine that!

SOLDIERS OF GOD

soldiersofgod.forumotion.com

If you prefer your gaming with a side of Christianity

DRUNK OLD GAMERS

drunkoldgamers.com

Pretty much what it sounds like

SMURFS OF WAR

smurfsofwar.com

Seems mostly PC-based, but still... WTF? ☹

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Band *of* Brothers

Somewhere in this bustling marketplace is a killer. It could be anyone — a courtesan, a monk, a nobleman. Whatever form he's taken, I have to find and execute him. This must be done quickly, as someone else is busy hunting me. In *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, every step I take has to be just right.

By Jon Hicks





When in Rome, make sure to turn around every 10 seconds...or else.

This is the *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood* multiplayer experience, one of several surprises that Ubisoft recently sprung on us — starting with the fact that it was going to do another *Assassin's Creed* a mere year after the last. *Brotherhood* is still set in Renaissance Italy, and it's still built around the vengeful, noble Ezio, who continues to slink through crowded medieval streets and stab bad guys for the good of humanity.

It all feels so familiar, our initial reaction was that *Brotherhood* is being done in haste: a rapid knock-off to quickly bank some cash. Turns out, this is a more advanced sequel than *BioShock 2*'s Rapture refit. Besides the multiplayer, the setting is newer and larger, the enemies more powerful, and the hero older and more capable. And this time, Ezio's got backup.

Unusually, the runthrough we were given didn't include any glimpse of the single-player game. Instead, Ubisoft wanted to talk details: Ezio's older now, in his forties, and still rolling with the same crowd. Leonardo da Vinci is returning, as is legendary manipulator Machiavelli — playing a bigger role this time, we were assured, after his fleeting cameos in previous installments. More surprisingly, death-Pope Rodrigo Borgia is also back, having recovered from the end of *Assassin's Creed 2*.



Man, no one likes a backstabber! Look me in the eyes when you slice me up!

ROGUES GALLERY

MEET ROME'S
MOVERS AND
SHAKERS



EZIO

A little older and more tired, but now the master assassin. He has to teach his skills to a new generation and get Rome smartened up.



RODRIGO BORGIA

No, he's not dead, although Ezio will no doubt wish he'd taken the chance when he had it. Rodrigo is still Pope and still evil.



CESARE BORGIA

Son of the Pope and Ezio's nemesis: he's a fearless army man who will put up much more of a fight than the molycoddled victims of AC2.

"MACHIAVELLIAN": The Italian Renaissance diplomat that made spotty appearances in *Assassin's Creed 2* is known for his duplicitous nature. So much so, he's become an adjective!



This answers one of the more obvious questions — how, exactly, do you continue Ezio's story when he's already killed the most powerful man in Europe? Ubisoft's accurate-but-unsatisfying answer is to point out that Ezio didn't actually kill him. He'll have cause to regret that, as Borgia swiftly returns to his corrupt ways, now aided by his son, Cesare, introduced as a younger and tougher enemy who won't be as easily toppled as the fretting bureaucrats of the last game. Borgia's daughter Lucrezia also stars, and others will be announced in time.

TEAM EVISCERATE The unpleasant Borgia clan represents a bigger threat than anything you've faced before. To meet it, Ezio now has his own guild of Assassins — the Brotherhood of the title. Over the course of the game you'll recruit a team and use a chessboard-style interface to send them off on missions. By choosing the tasks they do and the weapons they have, you're able to customize their abilities and then call upon them in combat, to the extent where you'll just be able to point at someone you want to get rid of and one of your protégés will magically appear from the crowd to gut them.

If you'd rather do it yourself, you can employ Brotherhood's improved fighting system. Ezio has fresh moves that can be chained



LUCREZIA BORGIA

Raised around her father's debauchery, she was taken under her brother Cesare's wing.



LEONARDO DA VINCI

The natty-hatted genius will be reprising his role as a Renaissance-era version of Q07's Q.



MACHIAVELLI

The man whose name became a term for devious behavior is appearing in a larger role this time around.



DESMOND

The hoodie-wearer of the future reappears — and so will Lucy, in "major events that bring Desmond to unprecedented places."



One bad thing about stealthy tighropes and sun: casting a shadow.

Getting lay of the land — the foremost assassin tactic.



What are you looking at? Oh, right, the mask.

together to dispatch multiple enemies. Ezio's foes have been emboldened so they wade in and cause trouble rather than the AC2 goons' approach of staring him down beforehand. "The players that take the upper hand will win fights and get rewarded, both viscerally and visually, by doing so," says designer Patrick Plourde. "Our motto is strike first, strike fast." Very fast; if you start a combo, you'll go into a rage mode that will link together insta-kills until an enemy interrupts your flow.

The entirety of *Brotherhood* is set inside the walls of Rome, which is split into five distinct districts and range from the high-rolling, Templar-controlled luxury of the Vatican to the poverty-stricken medieval section. Without your upgradeable home villa available as a hub anymore, the entire city of Rome becomes your stomping grounds. You can spend your cash on improvements that unlock new groups and new missions, and enable the city to grow and flourish as your brotherhood does.

You can casually knife someone in passing, or drop on their head like a murderous Spider-Man.

The other change is more practical: to enable you to cross these vast distances easily, you can use horses inside the city. "We just really liked the horse," Ubisoft told us. "Because the city is so big, and we have these huge environments, we thought this is the game where we want to push the horse. And you'll also be able to pimp your horse."

Ubisoft wouldn't reveal any details on the nature of this equine bling, or say much about how the horse actually works in town, save to say it'll be handled with the same fluency as Ezio's rooftop acrobatics. This extends to being able to slay someone while on horseback — even if the targets are on horseback themselves.

COME DIE WITH ME And so to the multiplayer...The starting point is the Animus-filled Templar lab that Desmond and Lucy scurried through at the start of AC2: this is the training ground where the Templars learn the tactics of the assassins. As with *BioShock 2*'s multiplayer, it doesn't appear to directly connect with the single-player storyline, although Ubisoft was evasive. "There is a point in the single-player with Templars, but I can't reveal what that is," hinted an Ubisoft rep. "It's going to be something that you might not foresee or imagine, so I can't really discuss it." Hmm.

Also like *BioShock 2*'s multiplayer, the test-area setup justifies contrivances that wouldn't fit into single-player: smaller maps set in cities like Florence and San Donato as well as Rome, and new character models rather than just playing as Ezio or Altair. There are eight of these, although only four are being revealed right now, and the same models are repeated

Ezio has more help in this game, but you'd never know it here.



PERIOD PIECES

MULTIPLAYER
MURDER TOOLS



THE CLAW

An early video teased the different weapons; they're allied to the different character models in multiplayer. This fetching hook is sported by the nobleman character.



THE AXE

Hardly subtle, but then it's wielded by a blood-stained executioner. Early indications are that it's best used by people good at running away and hiding after each use.



THE DAGGER

Ideal for the classic spine plunge, Ubisoft has shown this being used by the slap-headed and rather miserable-looking monk.



THE SYRINGE

The creepily masked doctor's weapon of choice, it seems to be used much like Ezio's wrist blades: one swift stab and your target goes down.



THE FAN

Wielded by the sultry courtesan and tipped with blades, it's the craftiest weapon we've seen: a casual flourish around the shoulder blade is all it takes to finish someone off.



Rooftops are again a huge playground for you to chase opponents on.



extensively in each level. The result is an enclosed space in which a lot of (mostly) identically dressed people mill around, failing to act nonchalantly, until suddenly someone gets stabbed.

In the one mode we tried, "Hunter," you spawn in motion, wandering along within a group of computer-controlled characters. A rough compass pointer and a distance readout indicates where your target is. Meanwhile, a number reveals the total number of people who are after you; there's always at least one, and this number increases the more successful you are, to the point where the best assassins end up spending more time running than killing.

Points are awarded generously for a successful hit, sparingly for a successful escape, and removed for the professional faux pas of stabbing an innocent. This is surprisingly hard to avoid, not because the A.I. is flawless, but because it's (perhaps intentionally) not. You'll see somebody break into a brief sprint but then resume strolling, or stop at a corner and then turn back. Is that an opponent, or a bot feeling spontaneous? You can't be sure.

How you slay your mark depends on style and equipment. Basic killing is the same as the single-player — you can casually knife someone in passing or drop on their head like a murderous Spider-Man. There aren't any guards, but with seven other barely-trained killers around, the bigger issue is getting away without tripping over anybody.

Escape is made easier by "chase breakers" throughout the map, which temporarily delay anybody on your tail. Gates slam shut, buttresses snap off, and suspended platforms crash to the ground, buying you valuable seconds to get out of sight. Once you are, take cover: you can still use single-player

tactics like sitting on a bench or diving into a haystack, and because you're identical to plenty of people in the level, you can just blend in with a nearby crowd.

The better solution, though, is to use a specific ability. You can temporarily assume another disguise, magically transform all the characters around you to match yours, or spook an identical person to make a run for it in the hope they'll draw attention.

Customization is the mantra, and we're promised plenty of character models in the final game, too: more will be revealed further down the line, complete with their own weapons (see boxout) and animations. Playing against other people means it'll be different every time.

It doesn't seem to have occurred to Ubisoft that *Brotherhood* might be thought of as a mere expansion. Yet to call it *Assassin's Creed 2.5* would miss the mark. *Brotherhood* looks like a comprehensive addition to one of the biggest franchises going. We can't wait to see more. ☺

ENJOY RESPONSIBLY: During our 8-player session, we ended up coming in second place, slipping from first place after stabbing one too many innocents by mistake.

PLATFORM: Xbox 360
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Epic
MULTIPLAYER: Yes
RELEASE DATE: April 2011



World War

Fenix is down – but certainly not out. We head to Epic to meet the Lambent, jump in a Silverback, and finish



Forget *Halo* and Master Chief; *Gears of War* is rapidly becoming the game that defines the Xbox 360 — and an entire generation of shooters. It's an unashamed balls-out feast of triceps and testosterone that positively reeks of man-sweat, and revels in machismo and machine guns like no other third-person actioner before it. Oh yes, we love us some *Gears*.

Given its platinum-selling pedigree of adrenaline-pumping action, it's a little surprising to see the trilogy's finale open on such a somber note. Humanity and the Locust Horde both have their collective backs against the wall. We discover that Adam Fenix is alive and being held hostage by the Locust Queen. Chairman Prescott has gone AWOL and the COGs have been disbanded. Marcus' best bud Dom Santiago — having recently euthanized his beloved Mrs.-turned-mummified she-husk, Maria — is a dead man walking, more concerned with watering his radishes than kicking Locust ass. Oh, and an entirely new threat — the Imulsion-soaked Lambent — have crawled up from the scorched earth intent on all-out genocide. The end is in sight, and those days of Lancer buzz cuts and joyful curb-stomping seem but a distant memory... *By Rob Taylor*

Three

Games in North Carolina
the fight in *Gears of War 3*.





Human or Locust: it doesn't matter. The Lambent just like killing things.



CLIFF HANGER

Design director Cliff Bleszinski knows what his audience yearns for, and gut-wrenching tragedy and self-pity ain't it. Despite an evident hankering to create a sci-fi spectacular that delivers pathos as well as particle cannons, *Gears* has always been about getting down and dirty with your Lancer and size-15 stompy boots — so it's not long before we've recruited our three co-op buddies (Jayson "Jace" Stratton from the *Gears* comics and uptight-officer-turned-sexy soldier Anya are joining Marcus and Dom this time 'round) and are thrust right back into the blasting groove. The opening salvo against the Lambent — Locusts that have been mutated by excessive Imulsion exposure — occurs on a retro-fitted naval carrier called "Raven's Nest," where we saw evidence of some exciting new mechanics thrown into the shooter mix.

For one, the freakish Lambent pose a radically different combat threat than their humanoid Locust forbearers. The pint-size Polyps are an irritating, scuttling tribute to *Half-Life*'s headcrabs. The Drudge, however, offer clear and present danger; they're able to evolve into several different forms with a variety of fun features. We saw them sprout extend-o-arms able to fire over and around cover, spew Polyps from their trunks, and transform into illusion-breathing snakeoids that slither around your feet. These SOB's will even rush you and blow up in your face when they're about to kick the bucket. In short, they compromise cover, which keeps you moving and under constant pressure. And so the Lambent freshen up the gameplay for sure, and (combined with the four-player co-op) lend skirmishes a frenzied, breathless feel.

SWAP MEAT



DOESN'T IT SUCK when you run outta ammo for your favorite weapon and have to hoof it around the map with that weak-ass pistol you just can't f-ing aim? Epic agrees, so in *Gears 3* you'll be able to swap weapons and donate ammo with your co-op pals — and even some NPCs. So in the screenshot above, if Marcus and Jace aren't happy with their respective loadouts, a couple of button presses will let them trade until they're armed with their fave gear. It might seem trivial, but it promises to make shooty action even more seamless. Other new moves include doing flying kicks out from cover and turning cowering defense into kickass offense in a flash.

This Drudge has mutated into a scary three-thing. Blast its arms.



Destructible cover is all the rage in *Gears 3*. Get ready to run...



These stalks are the Lambent equivalent of Emergence Holes.



Multiplayer arenas — like this Thrashball stadium — look incredible.



ART ATTACK

These slick concept shots illustrate just how amazing new additions to the *Gears* universe (such as the Silverback, the Locust Siege Beast, and the Savage Grenadier) will be. The Silverback, a heavily armed exo-suit that also transforms into a near-invulnerable shield wall, will add an invaluable dose of firepower to humanity's ranks; we're dying to go toe-to-toe with a Brumak in one. The Siege Beast is a living trebuchet capable of inflicting heinous damage. And that Grenadier — well, he's a bit feral these days, thanks to his society collapsing after the Hollow flooded. (Think back to *Gears 2*'s climax.) Spare us the sob story, you ugly tool!





DRUDGE MATCH

Hardcore Gears fans will already know that the Lambent are a genetic aberration of the Locusts, spawned from an overexposure to Imulsion. That doesn't mean they're buddies with their ancestors though; the Lambent are focused on wiping out every living thing on Sera. They'll even sacrifice themselves to take Marcus and friends down, like this kamikaze Drudge here. It's survival of the fittest, and all bets are off when it comes to picking a winner...

GREEN PARTY

Gears of War loves a bit of rust — Bleszinski's "Destroyed Beauty" motif was a license to go fairly berserk on the grays-and-browns front. Gears 3, however, is set in the scorching summer, meaning there'll be green everywhere and even the occasional blue sky to admire. With advances in Unreal Engine 3 tech (including the ability to render lush jungle environments), don't be surprised to see battles spilling into entirely new, ultra-pretty visual territory.



FLAME WAR

Humanity might be clinging on for dear life, but we've still got an arsenal of death-dealing gear to help kick alien ass. At the top of the class is the One Shot (a.k.a. the Elephant Gun), an ultra-powerful rifle able to down a shield-bearing Boomer in — you guessed it — one shot. Gears traditionalists will also appreciate the Pendulum Airlancer — an older model of our all-time fav — that swaps subtlety for extra power and that chainsaw attachment for an old-school bayonet. Then there are the new executions, which show off a genuine flair for the sick — whether you're snapping necks with the hinge on your new sawed-off Ghasher boomstick, stuffing grenades down foes' necks before kicking them into their fleeing buddies, or shoving your flamer into downed enemies before BBQing them from the inside out!

And there's so much more to come. Expect dedicated servers that'll reduce the lag that plagued Gears 2 down to practically zero, the *Lost Planet* 2-licious Silverback exo-suit to help take down larger Locusts and Lambent, and a combo-tastic Arcade mode that trades the somberness of the campaign for old-fashioned, high-scoring fun. In short, expect everything you've ever dreamed of. Gears 2 was undoubtedly bigger, better, and more badass — but Gears 3 is simply on a different plane of existence. Instead of merely consolidating, Epic is on a mission to end their trilogy on the kind of high that'll make all other developers' efforts — Bungie's included — look like child's play. ☺

GIRL POWER

You'll probably recall Anya Stroud from previous Gears entries; she's the bookish comms officer that likes to indulge in some eyelash-fluttering exchanges with Marcus. Now that the COGs have fallen apart, Anya lets her hair down and swaps out her headset for a Lancer. The four-player co-op promises to make battles truly chaotic. Throw the Lambent /and Locusts into the mix and some of the battles have more potential madness than anything we've ever seen in Halo.



Fans of big guns (er, who isn't?) will delight in the fresh additions to Gears' arsenal.

We've already mentioned the One Shot and Pendulum Airlancer, but you'll also discover the Hammerburst (a sniper rifle capable of absurdly long-range takedowns), the Digger Launcher (whose organic grenades burrow in the earth before popping up to cause carnage), and Flame Grenades (Molotov Cocktails dangling from rope). And there are more to come.



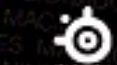
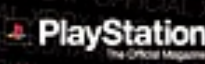
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JULY 21-25, 2010
BOOTH #4445



By Corey Cohen

Creeping Death

As Dead Rising 2 slowly shuffles to release, we play a big bloody chunk of it. Gory details inside!

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Blue Castle Games
RELEASE DATE: October 2010
FOR FANS OF: Gore, zombies,
weapon-making



NORMALLY, when we're running around in a crowded casino, it's in a desperate search for low-stakes blackjack. But not today. Amid the flashing lights and the clink of slot machines, we're trying to navigate a sea of ambling bodies without being touched. Because those bodies — upright, mobile, ravenous bodies — are zombies. And if they get their hands on us, we're gonna lose a hunk of flesh. »

LIFE  \$2,000

ZOMBREX 0

Short Sighted

ABC Chuck the Role Model

Tastes Like Chicken

5 KILLS

ABOVE/BELOW: Co-op play lets two Chucks fight side-by-side — and individually customize their looks. Wonder what Katey thinks of these outfits?



The host of *Terror Is Reality*, TK, is appropriately flashy. You'll learn something interesting about him in Case 2.





WE'RE WORRIED...but only for a moment. Then we start grabbing anything and everything in our surroundings. A garbage can? We hurl it and knock down two ghouls. Guitar hanging on a wall? Caves in at least five undead skulls. Poker chips? Well, those just bounce harmlessly off a puzzled attacker, but at least we get a laugh out of it.

It's all the tension and madcap violence that fans of zombie lore — and the first *Dead Rising* — have come to expect. In Vegas. And we haven't even gotten to the really good stuff...

FORTUNE FAVORS THE BOLD

So, who are you, and how'd you end up in Vegas — er, Fortune City — anyway? As the opening cutscenes reveal, you're former motocross champ Chuck Greene, who's come to this gambling mecca to compete in *Terror Is Reality*, a reality-TV show where contestants slaughter zombies with chainsaw-sporting motorcycles (something you'll try here in a fun, playable sequence). Chuck isn't competing for thrills; he's doing it to earn cash to buy his daughter, Katey, some Zombrex — the drug that's keeping her from turning her into a zombie from the bite she incurred long ago.

When undead hordes somehow storm the *TIR* arena, the survivors are forced to take refuge in a safehouse that — at least in the game's first three Cases (i.e., multipart missions), which we played for this story — serves as the game's central hub. Here, as in the first *Dead Rising*, you'll save

your game and talk to fellow survivors whom you've escorted to safety. You'll also check up on Katey, whose comments about Mega Man and being a burden to you are pretty endearing (if a tad hokey), while reinforcing the father/daughter bond that didn't exist in the first game.

While in the safehouse, still near the beginning of the game (Case 1), we decide to try one of the two main features new to *Dead Rising 2*: cooperative play. It's jump-in/jump-out at any time, so with a quick button-press, we bring up a menu from which we can invite a friend. Rather than being a whole new character, Player 2 is simply a second Chuck in an orange (not yellow) jacket; it's not ambitious, but playing alongside an identical twin does seem weirdly consistent with the game's goofy, tongue-in-cheek style.

CHUCK CHUCK GOOSE

Our first mission is to find a reporter with possible info on the *TIR* uprising, so we head for the Fortune City Hotel. To get there, we have to wade through a mall area that's full of zombies...and then through the Americana Casino, where we get our first taste of blood-spattering combat as only two zombie-slayers can deliver. As our Chuck chops up ghouls with a fire axe, the other Chuck cuts them clean in half with a broadsword ripped from a wall. Before we know it, we're mobbed by separate groups of undead, but we both fight our way free and



CASE ZERO Our sad run through DR2's prologue DLC



Like *Dead Rising 2*, *Case Zero* puts you on the clock, giving you frequent updates about how much time you have left (in this case, before the military arrives and to give Katey Zombrex).

It's a year or so before the events of *Dead Rising 2*, and you're stuck in Still Creek, Nevada — a small town about 40 miles outside of Fortune City. Population: hundreds of zombies and a few humans, who — for the moment — include Chuck Greene and his daughter, Katey.

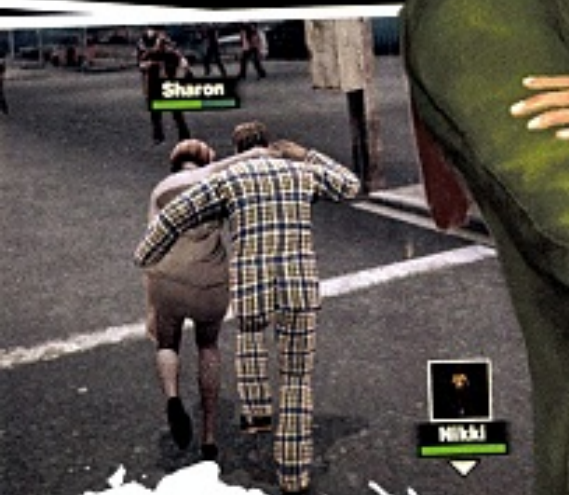
That's the scene at the start of *Case Zero*, the downloadable content set between *Dead Rising* and *Dead Rising 2*. Besides introducing you to Chuck and Katey, it debuts many of the mechanics found in *DR2*, including building combo weapons in a maintenance room, Combo/Scratch cards, and the two new save slots. Moreover, it establishes Katey's need for Zombrex (the drug that keeps her from turning into a zombie) and Chuck's willingness to do whatever it takes to save her.

Within the first few minutes of our runthrough, we learn that Katey needs Zombrex by 8 p.m. that evening (she needs it every 12 hours in *Case Zero*, versus every 24 hours in *DR2*), so we have to roll. Inside our initial safehouse — a barricaded gas station/junkyard — we use a maintenance room to make a spiked bat (baseball bat + nails), and then we head into town.

Before long, our search for Zombrex uncovers other possibilities. We learn that the bridge out of Still Creek is blocked with wreckage and zombies, and we need to find a way to escape. After bringing a broken-down motorcycle to our safehouse (in a cart that can bowl over zombies — sweet!), we're told it needs four missing parts scattered about town; once we find them, we can (presumably) use the bike to flee the area before the military arrives and takes Katey into quarantine.

In between these plot revelations, of course, we do some major zombie slaying, using anything we can find: a machine gun, a chef's knife, a pipe wrench, a fire extinguisher (freezes the undead so you can shatter 'em)... you name it. Inside a maintenance room, we assemble an I.E.D. (nails + propane tank), which shreds a crowd of corpses when it blows up, and a Drill Bucket (power drill + bucket), a device we slip onto a zombie's head to witness it being ground to pulp. We rescue a few survivors, too, including Dick, whose pawnshop has some handy items, and Sharon, a hungover partier trapped in a former military encampment across town.

Unfortunately, by the time we get Sharon back to our safehouse, it's too late to get Katey some morning Zombrex (which we could've bought at the pawnshop), and the



ABOVE MIDDLE/BOTTOM: After meeting Nikki and Tia in a bowling alley (where, yes, you can bowl), you find and rescue their friend Sharon.

upthunkable happens: she turns into a zombie! Choosing to stop *Case Zero* here gives us Ending C — surely the chumplest, most premature and teary-eyed ending available. But it's also a reminder that, as with *Dead Rising*, having different endings will certainly encourage multiple playthroughs.

Whatever conclusion you get, you're bound to level-up Chuck by the end of your game (he can reach level 5), and you can import your level into *Dead Rising 2* to start the game with boosted attributes. *Case Zero's* price and exact release date are still TBD, but what we played was enough for us to know...we're not stoppin' till we reach level 5!



Stacey, the leader of a help-the-zombies group (C.U.R.E.), is a trusted pal.

head for the exit doors, as the two players need to be fairly close together to enter a new area.

Before reaching the hotel, we visit the other key addition to *Dead Rising 2*: a maintenance room. Sprinkled throughout Fortune City, these rooms let you combine two items found in the game world to create a unique, often hilariously devastating special weapon. The options are pretty staggering: during our playtime, we crafted about 15 of these armaments — everything from a lightsaber (gems + flashlight) to the Defiler (fire axe + sledgehammer) to a Freezer Bomb (dynamite + fire extinguisher) — but we suspect the number of possibilities is way more than that. This system is definitely a great way to inject even more variety into a world that's already hugely interactive, and it's a sure bet that these combo weapons will prove to be the highlight of the game.

Using the resources at hand, one of us crafts an electric rake (car battery + leaf rake) while the other builds a portable mower (2x4 + lawn mower). Poor zombies: we decimate a nearby pack with our new implements — slashing away until, like every weapon, they eventually break. It's about that time that Leon rides by...and we know we're in trouble.

BECAUSE THE REAL MONSTER IS...

As in *Dead Rising*, the bosses here are typically humans — evil opportunists, psychotic nutjobs, and so on. Leon is somewhere between those extremes: a fellow *Terror Is Reality* contestant, he's looking to bolster his rep by killing motocross legend Chuck Greene. Unfortunately, these bosses are also very tough. We triggered Leon's appearance sometime in the last few minutes, and even with our combo weapons, we would've had a hard time taking him down. Without them, we're toast, and he runs us both down in short order.

The "game over" screen is a good opportunity to get another peek at *Dead Rising 2's* save/load system, which, regrettably, is fairly close to the first game's. No checkpoint-saves or autosaves here; you manually save at bathrooms placed throughout the city, and when you die, you can either restart the game at your current player-level, or reload your last manual save. You get three save slots this time (as opposed to just one in *Dead Rising*), but the system still feels artificially cumbersome. And in this case, it's annoying, too: Because we haven't saved for a while, we're going to have to backtrack quite a bit when we reload.

With my co-op partner choosing this point to make a strategic exit, I continue on through the rest of Case 1, where Chuck eventually meets up with the reporter, Rebecca, who's much sexier in person than she was in a TV clip. Double entendres fly left and right; she's clearly a possible love interest — well, her and/or Stacey, a demure friend who guides you from the safehouse and watches Katey when you're gone.

SECRETS OF THE DEAD

Blue Castle's president spills his guts about the game's design

OXM: What were your goals with the combo weapons, and what are some of your favorites?

Rob Barrett: We were looking for a way to build on the first game's mantra of "Anything and everything is a weapon." The results are so devastating and hilarious that the whole combo-weapon system is central to the PP [experience-point] mechanic. Just like players who took lots of photos in *Dead Rising* could level up faster, players who use combo items will always be gaining more PP.

I really encourage people to discover all the combo items to see how truly twisted our weapons team is. I like the knife gloves. The tesla ball (bingo cage + car battery) is great, too: If you can lure enough zombies into a tight pack, the arcing electricity is very effective.

Bonus tip: All combo weapons are made from two items, with one exception. A hint for that three-item weapon: It involves a wheelchair.

OXM: Why just a tiny tweak to the save system?

Barrett: I think we're fully accommodating the

feedback from the fans. The complaints had more to do with the single save slot than anything else: people were caught with save games that were impossible to advance from. We have more than one save slot now. Using the restrooms, on the other hand, was something that many fans liked — [having to reach a toilet] added to a sense of dread. I think it's great.

OXM: Why do co-op games have two Chucks instead of a second character?

Barrett: A huge part of *Dead Rising* is letting players express themselves with play styles, preferred weapons, and outfits. If I took the time to make my specific Chuck look a certain way, I'd be really disappointed if I looked different when I joined another game.

OXM: The game seems to lean more toward comedy than horror. Why?

Lars: I think *Dead Rising 2* offers a unique balance [between the two]. You can play it as a straight-up action game if you keep your

motorcycle jacket on and use only kickass base weapons, but I prefer the kids' superhero outfit, a dinosaur head, and an electrified rake. Chuck racks up a higher body count than most action-game heroes, but I know those other [guys] won't be kicking ass in a mini-skirt and tube top...

OXM: The portion of the game that we played (Cases 1-3) was set mostly on the equivalent of Vegas' Strip. Will we go outside this area in later Cases — to, say, a machine-gun range or a sand-buggy course?

Barrett: The whole game is set within Fortune City, but it's a big place. The outside area with the park in the middle is the biggest area, and it has plenty of vehicles to mess around with. Each casino has its own visual theme, so the diversity is amazing. As for a machine-gun range, who needs a range when an outbreak is going on? The whole world is open to machine-gun fire. The bigger question is, "How many other items can I duct-tape to a machine gun to create something completely chaotic?"



(Hmmm...classic good-girl/bad-girl choice for Chuck?) Your goal of finding evidence to exonerate Chuck — he's been framed for the zombie assault on *TJR* — is a failure, but at least you have a new ally for future Cases.

DEEPER MYSTERIES

Predictably, Cases 2 and 3 — which we'll keep vague to avoid more spoilers — begin to expand the scope of the game. You'll battle armed adversaries beneath the city, engage in a motorcycle chase (zombies flyin' all around as you hit them) where you land your bike on a train, and try to stop thieves from looting casino vaults. An unexpected bathroom brawl with an insane (and wickedly fast) survivor proves one hell of a boss fight, and that was just one of many side missions we could've chosen.

As far as your new character, we got a good vibe from Chuck. The weight of being a single father gives him a compelling edge, and his motocross background is clearly being put to use in various bike-chase portions of the game. Heck, he can even strafe while using guns, something we wish

Frank West could've done in the first go-round. We miss snapping pics with Frank's camera (Erotica!), but earning extra experience points (PP) by scoring kills with combo weapons seems like an acceptable — and really, a damn fun — tradeoff.

After playing three of the game's seven total cases (which, we're told, are followed by a final portion called "The Facts"), we're pretty happy with how *Dead Rising 2* is shaping up. Having been away from it for just a few days, we're craving it like Katey craves a pricey tube of Zombrex. You can save us anytime now, Chuck. Anytime now. ☘

Will Work for Braiiiins

Try as they might to destroy us, these are the hardest-working bad guys in video games

You'll usually find them in giant clusters, doing all the dirty work for a stronger, smarter boss. As much as we enjoy kicking their asses by the truckloads, we wonder if it's time for some of these nasties to re-examine their careers. We play guidance counselor and assess the life choices of some of our favorite villains to see which should keep up the fight and which should call it a day.

By Kevin W. Smith

ZOMBIES

RECENT WORK: *Crackdown 2*, *Dead Rising*, *Dead Space*, *Left 4 Dead/Left 4 Dead 2*, *Call of Duty: World at War*

CAREER HIGHLIGHT: Claiming Las Vegas after *Dead Rising* and *Fallout 3*

STRENGTH: Goal-oriented. You can decapitate them and cut off their arms, but as long as their heads are intact, you can't keep a good zombie (or hundred) down.

WEAKNESS: Appearance. Maybe it's not their fault they crave flesh, but do they always have to show up looking like Gary Busey after a Mardi Gras bender? Every day is not undead casual Friday.

OUTLOOK: Solid. Games need a constant stream of bullet fodder, and there's none better than expired human-shaped targets. Bonus: They're zombies! Your bottom line doesn't suffer from unnecessary budget spent on A.I. programming!

CATCH THEM NEXT: *Dead Rising 2* (October); *Dead Space 2* (2011); *Dead Island* (TBA)



NAZIS

RECENT WORK: *Wolfenstein*, *Call of Duty: World at War*

CAREER HIGHLIGHT: Mecha-Hitler, *Wolfenstein 3D*

STRENGTHS: Branding. The Nazis cornered the historical-nemesis market by combining a flamboyant, recognizable brand-identity with a brutish, genocidal intolerance that was nothing short of pure evil.

WEAKNESS: Relevance. These goose-steppers aren't what they once were, and now garden-variety terrorists are making a strong bid to be the quintessential new videogame bad guys for this century.

OUTLOOK: Weak. Killing Hitler never really gets old, but we've pretty much had our fill of World War II games at this point. Though synergy with Zombies may stave off early retirement.

JOB ALTERNATIVE: Game tester. Nazis were so ruthless and dogmatic, if they set their sights on eliminating bugs in games rather than extinguishing members of the human race, we'd never see another "online update" again.

CATCH THEM NEXT: *Ruse* (September)



INSECTS

RECENT WORK: *Last Planet 2*, *Risen*

CAREER HIGHLIGHT: Mothra, in *Godzilla: Save the Earth* (Xbox) — nothing beats the mother of all bug monsters.

STRENGTH: Teamwork. Nobody likes bugs, so the most logical thing in games is for these pests to work like a team with a clear hierarchy to weaken the opposition. If that doesn't cut it, just super-size them, like the giant Akrid in *Last Planet 2*.

WEAKNESS: Education. We're not currently aware of any education programs for fledgling bugs wanting to progress in the workplace. This usually means they're not the smartest enemies to exterminate.

OUTLOOK: Fair. They're not going anywhere. Post-apocalypse survival is guaranteed, along with Keith Richards and newly inducted, armageddon-proof Justin Bieber.

CATCH THEM NEXT: *Arkania: Gothic 4* (August); *The Dark Eye: Demonicon* (TBA)



SHARP TURNS

RECENT WORK: *Forza 3*, *Blur*, *Split/Second*, *MotoGP 09/10*

CAREER HIGHLIGHT: Making you wipe out...repeatedly

STRENGTH: Consistency. No matter how much you glance ahead on your map, some racetracks' curves are so sharp that you just have to be prepared to either bang into a wall at 200 mph or spend time restarting.

WEAKNESS: Redundancy. Even novice drivers can adapt to certain bends in the road after several attempts. Time to mix it up a little!

OUTLOOK: Strong. Games like *Split/Second* are redefining the idea of racetrack obstacles (oh hey, Falling Building), but Sharp Turns will always be a driver's worst enemy.

CATCH THEM NEXT: *Test Drive Unlimited 2* (Fall 2010)

ALIENS

RECENT WORK: *Mass Effect 2*, *Aliens vs. Predator*, *Alien Breed*

CAREER HIGHLIGHT: Forming the Covenant in the *Halo* series

STRENGTH: Malleable. The great thing about aliens is that they're blank slates. They can look like monsters or like humans. And if developers are smart, they can make E.T.s really intelligent so their game can spin off into a whole new direction that covers the entire politico-ecosystem of alien civilization. We smell FRANCHISE.

WEAKNESS: Transportation. It's always a case of us humans either having to travel billions of light years to get to them or vice versa. Telecommuting is not an option.

OUTLOOK: High. Lucky for galactic interlopers, Bungie created a little series called *Halo*. Plus, anything can be "alien," including man. So, they've got that going for them.

CATCH THEM NEXT: *Halo: Reach* (Fall); *Crysis 2* (November); *XCOM* (2011)





NINJAS

RECENT WORK: *Just Cause 2*, *Ninja Blade*, *Ninja Golden II*, *TMNT: Turtles in Time Re-Shelled*

CAREER HIGHLIGHT: Shredder (of *Ninja Turtles* fame)

STRENGTHS: Commitment. If you're a ninja, you've studied martial arts, have cat-like maneuverability and agility, and are rarely seen without your proper attire.

WEAKNESS: Inter-office communication. If ninjas are supposed to be so stealthy and cunning, why do they always jarringly attack at once like a bad metal band hitting its chorus? Clearly, someone didn't get the memo.

OUTLOOK: Mild. Ninjas don't have the crossover appeal of, say, Zombies or even Insects. If they're in your game, then most likely the hero's a ninja, too. Otherwise, they simply don't make much sense.

JOB ALTERNATIVE: Starbucks barista. If ninjas ran fast-paced coffee spots, their speed would ensure shorter lines and more time for enjoying the soothing, seasonal music compilations.

CATCH THEM NEXT: *Deadliest Warrior: The Game* (Summer)

Better Know a Zombie

There's no right or wrong way to build a videogame zombie. Here are some of the best interpretations we've seen.

1.

BOOMER

Left 4 Dead 2

Developer Valve went the extra, ultra-grotesque mile by giving Boomers the ability to puke bile as a means of attack.

2.

CHAINSAW MAJINI

Resident Evil 5

For the most part, zombies don't carry weapons, but every now and then...

3.

ZOMBIE THING

Two Worlds II

When the undead aren't a key part of the game, you get this...thing.

4.

PROFESSIONAL ZOMBIE

Left 4 Dead

When regular suburban townfolk become zombies, they often don't have time to change out of their office attire.

5.

NAZI ZOMBIE

Call of Duty: World at War

Two evils combine for the ultimate undead Nazi killing force.



HUMANS

RECENT WORK: *BioShock/BioShock 2*, *Red Dead Redemption*, *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, *Modern Warfare 2*

CAREER HIGHLIGHT: Atlas (from *BioShock*) — your underwater puppeteer since 1960.

STRENGTHS: Synergy. Unlike Nazis, Ninjas, and Zombies, generic humans adhere to no specific grouping, making them versatile team members. Whether they're a soldier in a ski mask or a common street thug in facepaint, the best thing about being a human baddie is the confidence that they are not alone.

WEAKNESS: Loyalty. In games, no good henchman defies orders, making them susceptible to easy betrayal from overlords...who are also usually human.

OUTLOOK: Fantastic. The world needs evil, and we humans are usually the first to step up to the challenge, despite tending to be mowed down by the thousands. We are our own worst enemies!

CATCH THEM NEXT: *Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* (TBD), *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (November), *I Am Alive* (2011) ☞



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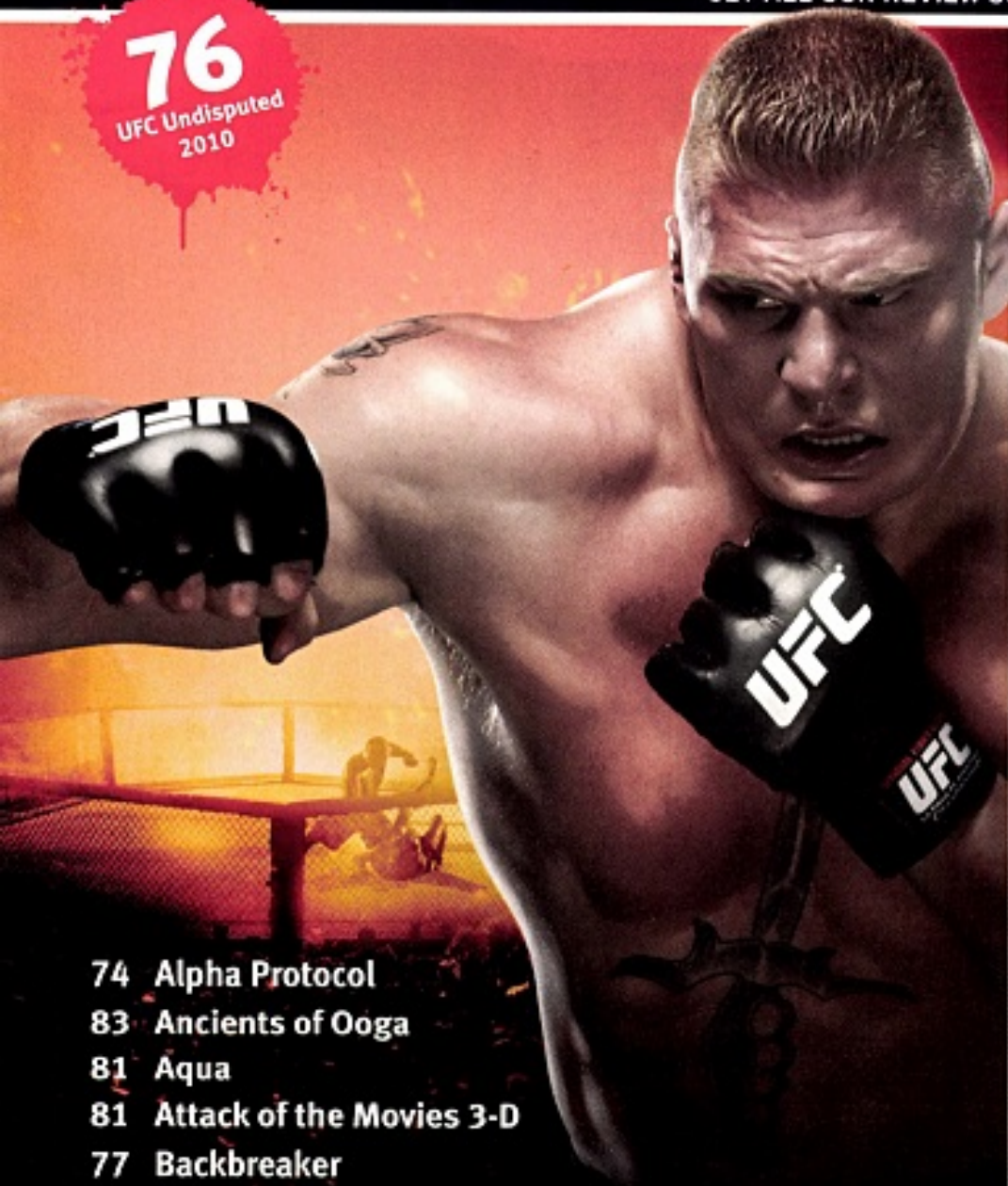


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Xbox Now



THE VERDICT

How do we determine review scores? With a special quantum microscope that measures game quality at a subatomic level, of course! It's a flawless process, but we always get questions about it, so here's how to interpret the results:

11: Perfect **MECHA GODZILLA'S CHOICE**
The unicorn. Will never happen. Never.

10: Classic **EDITORS' CHOICE**
One of those rare and very best of games. Every Xbox gamer simply must buy it and play it, regardless of whether they're a fan of the genre.

9.0 OR 9.5: Awesome **EDITORS' CHOICE**
Very impressive. One of the best games around. May have a few minor problems, but they're small and very easily tolerated.

8.0 OR 8.5: Great
A great game and an A-list title, but it either has niche appeal, suffers from minor technical or design issues, or has peripheral problems like a crummy interface.

7.0 OR 7.5: Good
Has a lot of good things going for it, but there's a big problem or two — something that limits its appeal or gets downright annoying. Could also be a game that aims low but hits surprisingly high.

6.0 OR 6.5: Decent
An adequate game with something interesting to offer, but it has some truly significant issues. Otaku won't mind much, but the rest of the world will.

5.0 OR 5.5: Mediocre
Very unspecial and average in the worst sense of that word. You can't pound it for being terrible, but it's hard to find something that makes it worthy of recommendation.

4.0 OR 4.5: Deficient
It has some very serious flaws and problems, but you can play it if you're interested. It works and does what it sets out to do, but it probably never aimed that high in the first place.

3.0 OR 3.5: Wounded
It has some crippling problems and is poorly conceived and designed. You can imagine someone wanting to try it, but not that many people, and they all should rent before they buy.

0.0 - 2.5: Broken
Just really bad. Lacks a single redeeming quality, and/or it's busted to varying degrees in its design, quality, or basic functionality. No gamer of any stripe should bother.



Red Dead Redemption, page 72



Alpha Protocol, page 74



"Do you wanna know how I got these scars?"

Red Dead Redemption

How the West was won

• PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games • DEVELOPER: Rockstar San Diego • ESRB: Mature • MULTIPLAYER: 16 on Xbox Live • ACHIEVEMENTS: Sparse • COST: \$60



Cowboys don't rule the videogame world — yet. *Red Dead Redemption*, which showcases how effortlessly cool they are, may very well change that. The game's mysterious protagonist, John Marston, mixes Clint

Eastwood grit with a streak of humanity that makes spending several hours in his company a hugely engrossing experience.

As Marston, your mission is deeply personal: track down an old friend from your outlaw days, Bill Williamson, and kill him. Marston's journey takes place in a vast expanse that encompasses a hefty chunk of classic Wild West America, plus a sizeable portion of Mexico. While you'd expect one prairie to look very much like another, areas are impressively varied, spanning everything from red-sand deserts to swampy riverside settlements.

As a twist, the story takes place at a time when the lawlessness of the region is rapidly becoming trampled by the onward march of civilization — and that fact is lurking in the subtext of every cutscene. As a result, we found the approaching death of the Wild West an added pressure as you play — pretty soon Marston won't be able to get the vigilante justice he's looking for, so you're all the more intent on ensuring he settles his quarrel. These kinds of nuances are detectable only because the characters are both beautifully written and flawlessly performed.

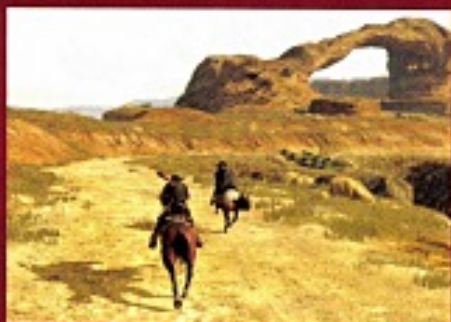
And though the days of the untamed frontier may be coming to an end, you'll still find loads

of classic Western action. *Red Dead*'s missions are like a greatest-hits collection of legendary cowboy scenes, letting you pull off daring jailbreaks, ride runaway mine carts, and leap onto speeding steam trains. Central to all this action is an enormously satisfying shooting mechanic. Aiming is a combination of crisp free-aim and a snappy lock-on system that lets you dispatch enemies efficiently. You have a fine selection of weapons, and each one handles beautifully; we particularly like the pleasing crack as you unload a rifle or repeater, and we love hearing the spaghetti-Western ricochet sound during fraught shootouts.

Red Dead Redemption feels as much like a living world as Liberty City does.

MY HORSE AND ME

Forget *Barbie Horse Adventures*; this is how you do digital horseplay



TRANSPORT WITH A BRAIN

Hold A as you ride with another character and you'll match their pace. Horses will stick to the road while you're aiming so you can line up shots. You also have to work hard to walk them over a sheer cliff.

WHISTLE STOP

As long as you haven't recently killed your horse and it hasn't been stolen, you can tap up on the D-pad to whistle for it. It'll gallop toward you, and if you time your tap of the Y button properly, you'll hop into the saddle as it's running.

SPURRED ON

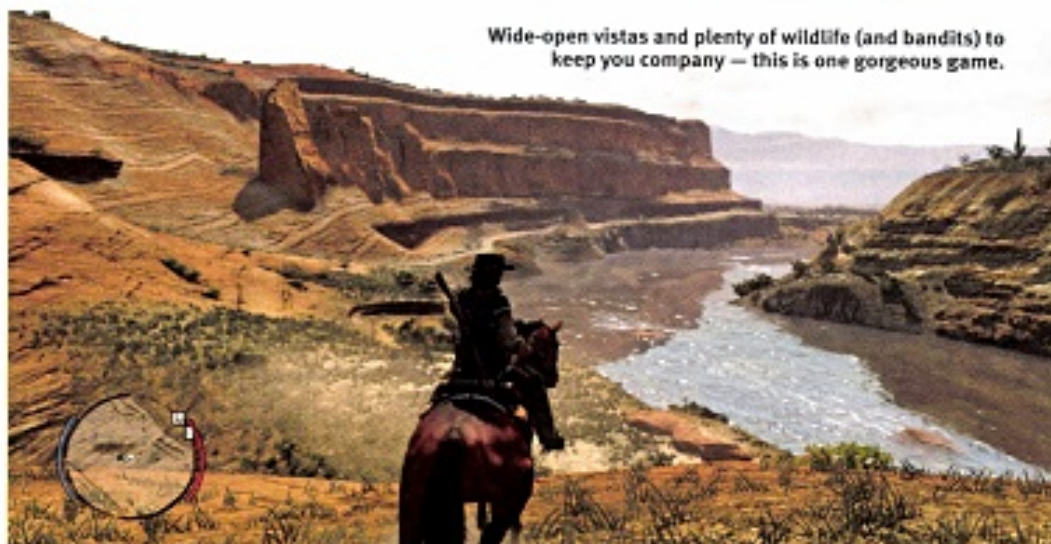
Tapping the A button causes you to dig in your spurs, but be careful not to overdo it, as your horse will get grumpy, slow down, and eventually throw you. Finding the perfect rhythm is far more organic than with GTA's cars.

GLUE FACTORY

Of course, if you do accidentally murder your horse by galloping headfirst into a ravine and you're feeling particularly unsentimental, you can always skin the poor animal. The sight of a fleshy flayed horse is pretty rotten, though.

To add even more variety, you'll have the opportunity to intervene in mini-scenarios as you ride around, such as stopping horse thefts or joining shootouts that randomly appear as you roam the area. Occasionally, you'll receive offers from less savory types, too — say, to help steal a carriage — giving you a chance to exercise your moral judgment. It's these moments that make *Red Dead Redemption* feel as much like a living world as the more heavily populated Liberty City, perhaps even moreso.

If there's one thing that truly grates in *Redemption*, it's that you spend the bulk of the game trying to intercept Bill so you can put a bullet in his melon. In exchange for help finding him, you're forced to perform errands for a number of flaky individuals. The problem is, these folks regularly promise information and then don't deliver it — something that frustrates



Wide-open vistas and plenty of wildlife (and bandits) to keep you company — this is one gorgeous game.



Settle marital disputes the Old West way in *RDR*'s multiplayer modes.

Marston, who nevertheless returns to them like a kicked puppy. You'll share his aggravation after a while. But when the game does accelerate toward its conclusion, however, it's utterly gripping and memorable.

We should be able to say the same about its multiplayer component, but it comes up a bit short. The "lobby" is the entire game-world, so any time you connect, you're dumped into New Austin with groups of strangers, where you can posse up and collectively undertake activities and gametypes — like *Duel*'s awesome two-person gunfights — in each town. Regrettably, we'd typically try to storm a fort with a friend or two, only to have random players shoot us in the back for our trouble. (Thank goodness for the private-match option.) Also, *Redemption* is sadly lacking any out-of-the-box co-op modes, à la *Grand Theft Auto IV*'s "Hangman's N.O.O.S.E."

Lucky for gamers, then, that these gripes never shortchange any of the fun to be had. Without question, *Redemption* is a truly epic resuscitation of the Western theme in games. Moreover, it's easily the best gun-slinging game we've ever played. Anyone who dismisses it as *Grand Theft Horsey* is missing out on a rich, beautifully realized portrait of rough-'n'-tumble life on the plains, filled to the brim with intriguing, amusing characters. — Mike Channell and Ryan McCaffrey

- ♦ Beautiful world and characters.
- ♦ Responsive gunplay in classic Western scenes.
- ♦ Plot progression can be annoying at times.
- ♦ Will we have to wait years for another great Western? We doubt it.



VERDICT
9.5



Alpha Protocol

Gee, that outfit doesn't say "I'm a secret spy!" at all, Mike...

PUBLISHER: Sega • DEVELOPER: Obsidian Entertainment • ESRB: Mature • MULTIPLAYER: None • ACHIEVEMENTS: Secretive • COST: \$60



This ambitious modern-day espionage role-playing game follows quite a curve over its 15-hour duration. While most games start strong and then peter out, or go from bang to lull to explosive finale, *Alpha Protocol* does neither. It's overly verbose, slow, and cumbersome before finding its groove in the middle chunk, but then it succumbs to its worst attributes in the final chapter. Should you stick with it? Will you want to?

Probably, but you'll have to suffer through some annoyances to reach the payoff. As espionage expert Mike Thorton, you're a new recruit in *Alpha Protocol*, a deniable-ops U.S. government

agency so secret that not even our other deniable-ops agencies know about it. You've been dispatched to Saudi Arabia to investigate an apparent terrorist attack, where a surface-to-air missile brought down a passenger airliner. As in most RPGs, you can choose from a selection of classes, including a combat-heavy ass-kicker, a gadget guru, or a stealth maestro. We opted for the stealth option and made it through the entire game without killing a single person (though we caused hundreds of concussions). *Protocol* also does a laudable job of allowing you

to be whatever kind of Thorton you want when conversing with others: a cocky smooth-talker, an all-business badass, or a total prick.

These conversations are a definite highlight as you unravel the game's plot twists. Unlike in *Mass Effect*, you have a limited amount of time to choose your response; sometimes it's presented as a general emotion, while other times it's a direct indicator of what Mike will say. Each of the many characters you meet has a unique personality, and you

You'll have to suffer through some annoyances to reach the payoff.





Unlike most games, you can complete *Alpha Protocol* without killing a single person if you so choose.



Even when alerted, your foes are dumb as posts.

react pretty differently to each one — whether it's the hilariously jerkwad-ish Steven Heck or the stoic "Albatross." You build a legitimate relationship with everyone over the course of the game, reaping the benefits of your friendships (or the cold shoulders of folks you antagonized) in the game's finale, which doesn't quite impress so much as satisfactorily conclude.

Unfortunately, the foundation for these conversational delights is a thoroughly mediocre and often frustrating set of gameplay mechanics. Inspired mission design — including a sneaky boat infiltration and a combat-free sequence where you ID targets through the scope of a sniper rifle — is undermined by downright

horrible enemy A.I. Foes not only lack peripheral vision, but also keep to methodical, easily predicted patrol routes; even when alerted to your presence, they'll often forget where you are after a minute, despite having just seen you on the other side of a room with only one exit.

The gunplay is equally clunky, and it's especially painful when each operation's climactic boss encounter takes your stealth options from you, forcing face-to-face confrontations with your target. (Damn you, your knives, and your teleporting, Brayko!) And the aforementioned final mission is one long, sigh-worthy gauntlet of these boss fights. In the middle of these controller-tossing moments, when we felt like bashing the game, we found ourselves fixating on its unacceptably ugly graphics. This can't be the same Unreal Engine that powered *Gears of War* and *Mass Effect*, can it?

The array of upgradable skills and riveting dialogue kept us coming back, though, and they elevate *Alpha* above the bad game it could've been. We just had to dig a little deeper than we'd like to get to the good stuff. — Ryan McCaffrey

- ◆ Compelling conversations and story.
- ◆ High-quality voice-acting.
- Rough gameplay mechanics; ugly graphics.
- 7 Will more games give conversation options that let us tell people to "f--- off"?



They may look innocent, but these cute characters can play some mean baseball.



Backyard Sports: Sandlot Sluggers

Swinging for the kids

• PUBLISHER: Atari • DEVELOPER: HB Studios
• ESRB: Everyone • MULTIPLAYER: Four-player co-op
• ACHIEVEMENTS: Harder than expected • COST: \$30



Like last year's *Backyard Football '10*, *Sandlot Sluggers* offers kid-friendly sports with its share of irritating quirks.

This baseball version certainly makes good on the big-head/small-body, neatly animated style that's defined the franchise. For its low price, that might be enough. But issues — such as animation burps that keep your fielders from reacting when told to throw to a base, as well as difficulty switching to a nearby fielder when a slow grounder sits in the infield — occur often enough to overshadow the simple pick-up-and-play control scheme.

You can play five mini-games in multiplayer competition, but only two are worth the effort. The Story mode is good kids-vs.-bullies stuff and surprisingly challenging; a key tactic is earning fun power-ups to aid a particular pitch or at-bat. That's about the only strategy here, which is no surprise, but it does mean these sluggers could be in the forgotten toybox in less than a season. — Alex Clark

- ◆ Family and kid-friendly throwaway fun.
- Frustrating control and animation issues.
- Three of five mini-games will get one play and no more.
- 7 A Booger Ball power-up that slimes the screen? Really? That's just gross.





The cage dynamics in bloody action.

The color change when a harsh blow lands makes it 10 times more exciting.



UFC Undisputed 2010

Still king of the cage

PUBLISHER: THQ • DEVELOPER: Yuke's • ESRB: Teen • MULTIPLAYER: 2 on Xbox Live or same system • ACHIEVEMENTS: Mixed • COST: \$60



The first official UFC game in over five years, last year's *UFC 2009* (OXM rating: 8.5) hit like a Chuck Liddell uppercut, scoring with critics and selling millions of copies cross-platform. Naturally, THQ and Yuke's are back for round two, but they haven't just tacked on a new number: *UFC 2010* remains a fierce competitor to EA's upcoming MMA game and a champion in its own right.

Last year's effort established an incredibly solid new type of fighting game, depicting mixed martial arts as never before. And the developers have built extensively on that foundation, adding heaps of variety to the clinch, submissions, and strikes, with slicker (and fighter-specific) transitions between them. They've also placed more importance on position and posture, while adding a surprising amount of overall depth to the core fighting mechanics. The ability to work off the cage walls is our favorite new feature: shoving an opponent against a wall and unloading strikes on

him is a crucial part of UFC's reality, and now it's hard to imagine the game functioning without it.

There's so much to learn that even if you're familiar with *UFC 2009*, you should go through the new tutorial to reacquire yourself with the fighting system and its many additions. As in last year's game, you'll find nearly 30 minutes of lessons, which hints at *UFC 2010*'s main drawback: it's almost too dense. Dedicated players will master it over time, but with so many different ways for a fight to play out, you'll sometimes feel lost early on—in nearly every position. (Starting on lower difficulties helps a bit.)

When you eventually get a handle on the ever-deepening combat, you'll find loads to do outside the standard exhibition modes. You can enter tournaments; relive or redefine classic fights (like Ortiz vs. Belfort or Liddell vs. Evans) in the revamped Ultimate Fights mode, which now attaches special victory conditions to each bout; and play through title-chase and title-defense modes. Online-multiplayer bouts are better, too,

with far more options and even the inclusion of online fight teams where you and your pals join together to amass a great collective record. On top of all that, the game's career mode manages to tell more of a story, the create-a-fighter system has more body variations, and the updated roster stands at 100-plus fighters, with new biggies such as Kimbo Slice and Frank Trigg.

Like the best sports-game sequels, *UFC 2010* delivers more, more, more. Even if that "more" occasionally feels like almost too much, the game successfully achieves the goal of making its predecessor obsolete. — Henry Gilbert

- Improves on an already-impressive formula.
- Much richer online experience.
- Learning curve is still very steep initially—like the sport, it's not for amateurs.
- Why does the PS3 version have three exclusive fighters when the 360 has none?





RayStorm HD

Charge your laser somewhere else

• PUBLISHER: Square-Enix • DEVELOPER: Taito
• MULTIPLAYER: 2 on same screen
• ESRB: Everyone 10+ • ACHIEVEMENTS: Predictable
• COST: 1,200 Microsoft Points (\$15)



Blasting a nondescript lot of semi-futuristic tanks, jets, and mechs wasn't exactly gaming nirvana when *RayStorm* hit the PlayStation in 1997, and this tepid Arcade revamp does surprisingly little to make it relevant in even a retro way. A mighty new unlockable ship with unlimited homing missiles joins the original underpowered trio, but even this rookie becomes a bit of a bore to haul through eight stages of modestly challenging but style-deprived screen crawls.

While your main gun unloads a never-ending torrent, you'll use your alternate weapon — a devastating laser — to lock on and annihilate a bunch of targets simultaneously. In classic shoot-'em-up style, you'll walk a tightrope between prolonged risk and increased points, and that tense balancing act might save *RayStorm HD* for some folks. They'll be in the minority, though, because even the hardest bosses are just plain dull, and even fully upgraded weapons lack modernized visual punch. — Cameron Lewis

- Secondary lock-on system rewards risk-taking with greater score bonuses.
- Ships sometimes move like they're dipped in molasses.
- Dreadfully drab enemies and bosses.
- Was it really worth reviving?



VERDICT
5.0

Backbreaker

Proof of concept...and not much else

• PUBLISHER: 505 Games • DEVELOPER: NaturalMotion • ESRB: Everyone
• MULTIPLAYER: 4 on same system or 2 online • ACHIEVEMENTS: Same old • COST: \$50



It's hard to decipher NaturalMotion's motives behind *Backbreaker*, their NFL-licensed—less, almost-full-price gridiron game that (economically speaking) has zero chance of toppling *Madden*. Are they going for a David-versus-Goliath upset in the gameplay department? Or are they just trying to get EA's attention in the hopes that the *Madden* makers will license the Euphoria physics-based animation system that *Backbreaker* is built on?

Well, let's put it this way: we would love to see the Euphoria tech incorporated into *Madden*. You've truly never seen videogame football behave this realistically. Unlike in *Madden*, no two tackles are ever the same, and contrary to the ragdoll-physics system of many action games, athletes' legs don't suddenly turn to jelly when they're brought down. In *Backbreaker*, hits have an almost tangible impact.

Regrettably, though, a number of problems plague the rest of *Backbreaker*'s football

experience. In an apparent effort to highlight Euphoria, the camera is locked behind the player you choose to control, making defense tough to manage. Also, every down is automatically instant-replayed, slowing the pace to a crawl, even when you hit the Skip button. And when you manually activate replays, your options are extremely limited.

Worse yet, the athletes control like they're on a foosball table — the right stick-based passing is awkward, turnovers are far too prevalent, the playbook is thin, the menu system in League mode is convoluted, and various A.I. weirdness leads to frustration. (Dear A.I. teammates: please stop roughing the kicker when he's trying to punt us the ball!)

Not all is lost, though. The Tackle Alley mini-game is fun, and watching tackles happen just never gets old. Are you listening, EA?

— Ryan McCaffrey

- Gorgeous, realistic tackling animations.
- Wacky camera and controls.
- Various in-game quirks and gaffes.
- If replays follow every single play, can we at least have good replay controls?



VERDICT
5.5



The camera and right-stick passing controls feel pretty cumbersome.



Defense is a bit tricky, especially when you switch athletes and suddenly have no idea where you are or what's happening.





Earthworm Jim HD

Still groovy after 16 years

• PUBLISHER: Gameloft • DEVELOPER: Gameloft • ESRB: Everyone 10+
 • MULTIPLAYER: 4 in cooperative mode (Xbox Live or same console)
 • ACHIEVEMENTS: Generous • COST: 800 Microsoft Points (\$10)



First released during the mascot-dependent 16-bit days, *Earthworm Jim* was a luscious-looking, super-unique take on the tired platformer. The variety of animations, atypical level design, and nearly nonsensical humor made it a welcome departure from comparatively bland *Mario* and *Sonic* copycats. This HD update is functionally identical to the original game, but the once-beautiful backgrounds and sprites look positive *amazing* here — a stunning tribute to how arresting classic games can still be.

But it's not just about the looks. *Earthworm Jim* definitely holds up as one of the most inventive and downright strangest sidescrollers ever conceived. One level you're shooting, jumping, and cracking your worm

body like a whip; the next you're racing through an asteroid field, chasing a crow in a spacesuit. You'll even bungee-jump with a booger, as well as guide a dog through an obstacle course. In short, every level offers a new gameplay quirk and a fresh visual style that almost defies explanation.

All the ornate design does get in the way sometimes. Occasionally, you'll wonder which way to go because it's not clear what's part of the background and what's an interactive piece of the level. You'll also grimace at the immeasurable cheap hits that sap your life away, leading to frequent (and frustrating) deaths. Luckily, this update has a new save feature, even if it does make an already short game that much easier to complete.

Minor issues aside, *Jim* is still a blast. And with generous Avatar rewards, plus a four-player co-op mode with new levels built just for this remake, you'll find plenty of reasons to dig up this lost gem. — Brett Elston

- Brilliant music, animation, and design.
- New cooperative levels are a fun distraction.
- Still full of cheap hits.
- Not a long game by any means.
- Why has this series been missing-in-action for so long?



VERDICT
8.0

Doom II

Aging like fine wine

• PUBLISHER: Bethesda • DEVELOPER: id Software/Nerve Software • MULTIPLAYER: 4 on same screen or Xbox Live
 • ESRB: Mature • ACHIEVEMENTS: Sweet Avatar awardables! • COST: 800 Microsoft Points (\$10)



In the crowded, competitive, technologically advanced first-person-shooter genre, a 16-year-old game should *not* hold up this well, no matter how good it originally was. But *Doom II* is magic in a DOS bottle, and its secret gameplay concoction remains potent today.

How is this possible? It comes down to three things. For one, your weapons feel perfect — bolstered by the double-barreled shotgun that made its debut here. Also, its monster menagerie is as freaky as ever: we love how these hellspawn hate each other as much as they loathe you, and how stray fireballs from one foe will cause another to attack it. Furthermore, because you can't look up or down — or jump — DeathMatch is more about smarts than about skill, making every round a mental chess match.

A new nine-level episode, *No Rest for the Living*, has been added to the original 32-map *Hell on Earth* classic for this XBLA release. It

feels like canon, and it definitely assumes you've played a lot of *Doom* in your day, pulling no punches as it throws the entire kitchen sink at you with abandon. By the end of each area you'll have left a massive trail of corpses in your wake, having been creeped out along the way by the knowledge that the switch you just hit released something nasty...somewhere.

Only a bit of lag in the otherwise fun-as-ever multiplayer modes on Xbox Live mellow the buzz. But when you finish the game and unlock the Doom Marine's space armor for your Avatar, you'll feel better. — Ryan McCaffrey

- Newly added episode is a challenging blast.
- Multiplayer still rocks — and includes split-screen!
- Online play is prone to lag.
- How does this game hold up so well? We can hardly believe it.



VERDICT
8.0





Shrek Forever After

Better than you'd think, but not by much

• PUBLISHER: Activision • DEVELOPER: XPEC Entertainment • MULTIPLAYER: 4 on same system
• ESRB: Everyone 10+ • ACHIEVEMENTS: Passable
• COST: \$50

It's rare to see a kids'-movie game that actually tries to be good, and for a while, *Forever After* keeps it up. A Gauntlet-style co-op romp for up to four players, it runs Shrek, Fiona, Donkey, and Puss in Boots through seven big, imaginative (if drab-looking) stages filled with sometimes-clever puzzles tailored to each character's special abilities. Donkey kicks, Shrek lifts heavy objects, Fiona lights things on fire, and Puss climbs and jumps, and you can switch between them on the fly if fewer than four people are playing. There's also very basic, floaty combat, which you'll engage in pretty frequently and often to muted, 30-second loops of pop-punkish music from the films.

Forever After sports a few neat touches, including puzzles that involve shifting between the movie's dark, crappy alternate universe and the sunnier one Shrek normally inhabits. But ultimately, the game is hamstrung by long, dull stretches; a strangely lifeless, washed-out presentation; and multiplayer that's too chaotic. If you're looking for something to play with kids, though — and you've exhausted the *Lego* games — you'll find some easy fun here. — Mikel Reparaz

- Smart, mildly enjoyable environmental puzzles.
- Unlockable abilities offer a reason to revisit finished levels.
- Bland combat and presentation.
- How many times can you hear Perry Gripp's "Do You Like Waffles" before you crack?



Deathsmiles

Teenage witches, but no Sabrina

• PUBLISHER: Aksys • DEVELOPER: Cave • ESRB: Teen • MULTIPLAYER: 2 on Live • ACHIEVEMENTS: Uneven • COST: \$50



In a campaign that lasts under an hour, we managed to lodge jillions of bullets in a zombie cow, an evil tree, and a saint who's tied to the ground, *Gulliver's Travels*-style. Yup, *Deathsmiles* is one wacky shoot-'em-up — but it's also incredibly deep and rewarding.

The game's scoring system is so complex, we were barely able to scratch its surface, much less learn to use the various counters and power-ups to get the most out of it when blasting our way through goth-inspired worlds. Moreover, you can shoot left and right; there are multiple levels of

weaponry; you have a familiar (in some modes) that you control with the right stick; and you'll face loads of enemies. If you get overwhelmed, you can call in a pal for some co-op support; it's fun, although the game's easily beatable solo.

Bottom line: You'll need dozens of playthroughs to get a handle on everything that's going on, and *Deathsmiles* is addictive enough to keep you replaying. At \$50, it's a pricey proposition to be sure, but for hardcore shmup fans, this game is more than worth the investment. — Taylor Cocke



- Deep, complex scoring system.
- Absolutely beautiful art design.
- Solid leaderboard support.
- A bit too hardcore for anyone but shmup fanatics.
- Do people (not killed by the Joker) really smile when they die?



VERDICT
8.0

Metal Slug XX

Once more unto the breach, dear friends

• PUB/DEV: SNK Playmore • ESRB: T • MP: 2 on Live or same screen • ACHIEVEMENTS: Unclear • COST: 1,200 MS Points (\$15)



Despite never really evolving in any major way, this series has remained a favorite of old-school-shooter fans for about 14 years now, and it's easy to see why: its goofy-yet-bloody, 2D run-and-gun play — however dated — is always mindlessly fun. *Metal Slug XX* continues the tradition, albeit with six playable characters, beautiful animation, and a series of extra mission-based challenges masquerading as a "training" mode. You'll also find a host of weird "Slug" vehicles, including a high-jumping ostrich and a giant robot with steam-shovel hands.

Like developer SNK's other *Slugs*, *XX* has loads more personality than most 2D shooters, with screen-filling bosses, surprisingly expressive enemies, and more than its share of interesting ways to die. But it's also really short, with a rapid pace and infinite continues that ensure most players will breeze through its arcade mode in about an hour. It also lacks some of the best elements from earlier games, such as contagion-spreading zombies. Still, it's intense, destructive fun while it lasts, especially with two players. — Mikel Reparaz



- Beautifully animated visuals and the option for two-player playthrough.
- Packs tons of variety for a 2D shooter.
- Breezes by way too quickly.
- What, no blood-puking zombie transformations?



VERDICT
7.0

Toy Story 3



Thinking too far outside the toy box

PUBLISHER: Disney Interactive Studios • DEVELOPER: Avalanche Productions • ESRB: Everyone 10+ • MULTIPLAYER: 2 in split-screen co-op • ACHIEVEMENTS: Do-able • COST: \$60



From *Cars* to *Finding Nemo*, Pixar's claim to fame is personifying little things in big ways. *Toy Story 3* is no exception.

From first moment to last, it'll draw you right back into your childhood with fuzzy stuffed dragons, Fisher Price-esque cows, a menu in the form of a board game, and all of those lovable toy characters.

Though the design is unimaginably precious, the actual gameplay doesn't reach the same level of passion. The game is split into two parts: an episodic story mode and Woody's Roundup, an open, customizable world. Staying true to the characters and the world around them, the story mode loosely follows the plot of the movie, complete with cutscenes and a narrative by Hamm the piggybank. But as far as gameplay, each level in this mode differs

wildly from the next. One level, you're battling aliens on a runaway train as Woody. Soon after, you're in Buzz's shoes, dodging electric bolts in Zurg's fortress. Rather than creating a fun, diverse universe, this gameplay variety show just leaves you bored and confused, wondering what the heck you just played. Worse, you have to consistently rely on built-in hints and tutorials to guide you.

The other half of the game, Woody's Roundup, offers a more grounded experience with plenty of time to dig your spurs into your surroundings. Fulfilling quests and collecting treasures around town lends you the resources to construct additional buildings, purchase toy residents, and doll up your townspeople with fashion items. Even though most quests are rather mundane — like giving citizens tinfoil hats, or moving cows from one corral to another — policing your town

and unlocking new areas is entertaining and addictive. The only issue is that you'll run out of quests and unlockables in less than four hours.

Creative and full of heart, *Toy Story 3* just overreaches. The execution doesn't live up to its more grandiose conceptual design, creating the type of platformer that makes you frustrated with the game, not your performance. Its Pixar charm makes it well worth trying, but it never reaches the level of brilliance that you hope it will.

— Meghan Watt

- ♦ One of the most charming and creative movie-based games...
- ...though it doesn't live up to its potential.
- ♦ Irritating platformer-type gameplay.
- ♦ Why isn't Woody voiced by Tom Hanks?



VERDICT
7.0



On the interactive main menu, each story-mode level has its own board-game piece.



Attack of the Movies 3-D

Terrible in any dimension

• PUBLISHER: Majesco Entertainment • DEVELOPER: Panic Button Games • MULTIPLAYER: 4 on same screen only • ESRB: Teen • ACHIEVEMENTS: Challenging • COST: \$30



We'd say that *Attack of the Movies 3-D* is well-named, but not for the reason you might think. This dreary rail shooter is an attack — an assault, really — on your wallet, your patience, and possibly your soul. And if you play it with the 3D mode turned on, it's an all-out declaration of war on your eyeballs.

The premise could've been promising in capable hands: you shoot your way through six action sequences loosely inspired by movies like *Terminator* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, each ending in a boss battle. Movement is automatic; you just control the crosshairs with the analog stick and target baddies and power-ups.

The execution, however, blows. Levels are repetitive and short (lasting six to nine minutes apiece), and with no secrets or surprises in the environment, replay value is minimal. Worse, 3D mode — played with included old-style (red/blue) 3D glasses — makes the game harder to play, and it's so headache-inducing that you'll get more enjoyment from the game's holographic box cover. The sole comfort is that you can invite three friends to share the misery with you. Or better yet, don't.

— Chuck Osborn

- Supports up to four players.
- 3D mode is optional.
- Less than 60 minutes of uninspired gameplay for \$30.
- Why make a lightgun game for a system that doesn't have lightguns?



VERDICT
3.0

Aqua

Making calm waves in the Arcade pool

• PUBLISHER: Microsoft • DEVELOPER: Games Distillery • MULTIPLAYER: 2 on same screen only • ESRB: Everyone 10+ • ACHIEVEMENTS: Simple • COST: \$60 Microsoft Points (\$10)



Crisp, steampunk-inspired art design fuels this twin-stick shooter, an intriguing mix of oceanic environments, story missions, and lightly strategic combat.

As a captain and engineer in the Emperean Navy, you'll command a vessel on the high seas, sinking enemy ships and subs across 10 episodes (about three hours total). Over time, you can equip your ship with new features and weapons, and even recruit four support ships that accept simple commands. Most missions

involve clearing foes, or protecting ships or bases from enemy attack, but a few tricky boss battles demand patience and pattern recognition.

Aqua's combat and controls are quite good, and yet it feels a bit sleepy, even if the campaign does grow more interesting as you progress. The two-player co-op/competitive modes are decent diversions, but without Live support, they're minor additions. Still, *Aqua's* strong visuals, colorful characters, and nifty shooter-play make it a good snack between bigger releases. — Andrew Hayward



- Excellent art design and sharp in-game visuals.
- Naval combat is solidly executed and satisfying.
- Brief campaign lacks thrills and excitement.
- Where's the online play?



VERDICT
7.0

Batman: Arkham Asylum

Game of the Year Edition

Is 3D worth a second look?

• PUBLISHER: Eidos/WBIE • DEVELOPER: Rocksteady Studios • ESRB: Teen • MULTIPLAYER: N/A • ACHIEVEMENTS: Regular • COST: \$50



With 3D movies bringing in big bucks, game makers are eager to cash in. But until everyone owns a 120Hz stereoscopic 3D-compatible TV and a game console that supports it (which the Xbox 360 doesn't), the best you'll get on a standard TV display right now just might be the GOTY edition of *Arkham Asylum*.

Using special anaglyph-glasses tech pioneered by Triviz, the 3D effects — such as the burst of floating leaves in the Batmobile's wake, or the way the Joker's leering head seems to pop out of the screen — are far more pronounced and natural than those seen with classic red-blue

glasses like the ones bundled with *Attack of the Movies 3-D* (left). Though they're muted, you can actually see colors besides red and blue, and the effects are far less headache-inducing. And if you're not a fan of 3D, you can play *Arkham* (OXM rating: 9.0) in its original non-3D edition.

Is it worth upgrading if you already own that version? Probably not, especially since you get only four extra challenge maps and still don't get the "play as the Joker" maps from the PS3 release. Considering that the GOTY edition is \$10 more than the original game's current price, let your need for 3D be your guide. — Chuck Osborn



Blur

Turn your lead foot into racing gold

PUBLISHER: Activision • DEVELOPER: Bizarre Creations • ESRB: Everyone 10+ • MULTIPLAYER: 4 on split-screen, 20 on Xbox Live or System Link • ACHIEVEMENTS: Taxing • COST: \$60



With a full field of 20 drivers bashing the hell out of each other, *Blur* may seem like a simple-minded mix of licensed vehicles, colorful projectiles, and collateral damage. But there's a refined method to the madness, and it turns *Blur* into an expertly balanced arcade racer that no motorhead should miss.

Just know this: your earliest moments are guaranteed to be a bit disappointing if you start in career mode. The graphics are slick and the controls are accessible, but you have only three event types: ordinary combat races, checkpoint trials, and destruction circuits. Nine rivals won't engage in showdowns until you complete arbitrary demands, and thinly veiled grind quests — as well as showing off to earn "fans" (read: experience points) — do little to pick up the slack.

Add another live human being to the mix, though, and *Blur* reveals its true nature. This sucker is built to emphasize the social nature of competitive racing, and it goes a lot deeper than thumping your chest in public via Facebook and Twitter integration.

You can always take your first baby steps by issuing friendly "I bet you can't do this" challenges to your pals in career mode. But hop into online multiplayer, and a new world of frenzied mayhem and addictive progression cracks open.

The secret lies in the interplay between the eight equally useful power-ups that litter every undulating track and rapidly respawn. Watching sedan-sized meteors barreling around tracks will drop your jaw — and that's just for starters. Bolts that temporarily hobble enemies can also

destroy incoming Shunt missiles. The blast radius of a Barge (a powerful energy burst) might knock rivals off cliffs, or clear an unavoidable mine. Most crucially, Shock calls down lightning in front of the leader, so early bouts with Lady Luck seldom determine the outcome of a race.

And the longer you play, the better it gets. As you complete *Modern Warfare*-style challenges and climb the ranks, you'll earn new paint jobs and minor upgrades (such as extra health slots) for your cars. Drift your way to free Nitro boosts, drop power-up decoys that explode on contact, and lots more. Best of all, because the upgrades broaden the possibilities without making anyone a god, veterans can't just mop the floor with every newcomer. And even if you do get your rear fender handed to you, you'll still love every crazed minute. — **Cameron Lewis**



Futuristic weapons give races a sci-fi flavor.



Battle local pals in turbulent split-screen matches.



Shunts send victims flying through the air.

- ♦ Beautifully balanced vehicles, power-ups, and modifications.
- ♦ Endlessly fun online-multiplayer racing filled with possibility and progression.
- ♦ Lackluster single-player career; must unlock the same cars separately for career and multiplayer.
- 7 Why are the spectator cameras so incredibly zoomed-in?





Things on Wheels

Needs jumper cables

• PUBLISHER: Focus Home Interactive • DEVELOPER: Load Inc. • MULTIPLAYER: 2 on split-screen, 4 on Xbox Live • ESRB: Everyone • ACHIEVEMENTS: fussy • COST: 800 Microsoft Points (\$10)

Shortly after reviewing this game in our February 2009 issue, we learned we'd mistakenly received a non-reviewable copy, and that *Things on Wheels* was actually still in development. Even weirder: nearly 18 months later, the game feels largely the same.

Whatever billionaire turned his palatial estate into a playground for these R/C cars forgot that racing games live and die by their handling and physics. The vintage, muscle, and sports cars in *Things on Wheels* offer mildly differing characteristics, but usually they feel like you're steering a fish on wheels. Oversteer just a little, and you'll squeal to a near halt. Nudge a boundary, and you may end up facing the wrong way.

Many of the game's 20 circuits feature decent jumps, crossovers, and branching paths. But it's hard to wage exciting vehicular war when the levels have only four color-coded power-ups and the offensive options only slow things down. No wonder the multiplayer lobbies are already deserted. Want a cheap R/C racer? Try *Mad Tracks* instead. — Cameron Lewis

- ♦ Moderately attractive world of shiny floors and towering furniture.
- Poor handling, and physics are aggravating.
- Unreasonably shallow power-up selection undoes strategizing.
- 7 Why are Gamertags hidden in ranked online matches?



Ancients of Ooga

We think we're gonna puke

• PUBLISHER: NinjaBee • DEVELOPER: NinjaBee

• ESRB: Everyone 10+ • MULTIPLAYER: 2 on split-screen • ACHIEVEMENTS: Frugal • COST: 800 Microsoft Points (\$10)



The simple Oogani people got a bit too comfortable scarfing intoxicating slugs, and the hangover has come due. Their leaders lie dead, and Booli meanies have enslaved the survivors. Good thing you can possess the Oogani's gangly Play-Doh-ish bodies and resurrect their godlike chieftains.

Ancients of Ooga's 50 sidescrolling stages are bright 2.5D mazes of levers, gates, ladders, and beasties. You'll double-jump between platforms, trigger switches to free comrades, and assume control of various allies — mechanics reminiscent of NinjaBee's diverting 2006 platformer *Cloning Clyde*. *Ooga's* colorful crew is skinny, but these dudes are voracious, bottomless pits. Instead of fiddling with an inventory system, you wolf down everything from juicy fruits and rotten eggs to gemstones and fellow tribesmen. Stuff your face with almost anything, then puke it up onto sacrificial altars or at the feet of quest-givers. Such culinary lunacy gives the game plenty of

personality. Sadly, though, all that engaging absurdity doesn't keep the hit-the-switch simplicity of the puzzles from wearing thin. You'll tire of it well before you reach the final anti-climactic powwow.

Each of the seven tribes has distinctly offbeat strengths and weaknesses. For instance, Stoners can't swim, but they can ricochet off walls and through burly Booli thugs like angry pinballs. Fire-lings, on the other hand, can breathe fire and walk on molten floors. But for every memorable level that lets you race around on a four-legged mount or detonate walls with exploding chickens, you'll find two levels that devolve into maddeningly predictable collect-a-thons. Offline-only co-op could have provided a social crutch if splitting the screen didn't gut-punch the framerate and make navigation unnecessarily painful.

Ancients of Ooga's best moments make it well worth sampling. Just don't be surprised if it somehow feels like less than a meal despite its 10-hour playtime. — Cameron Lewis



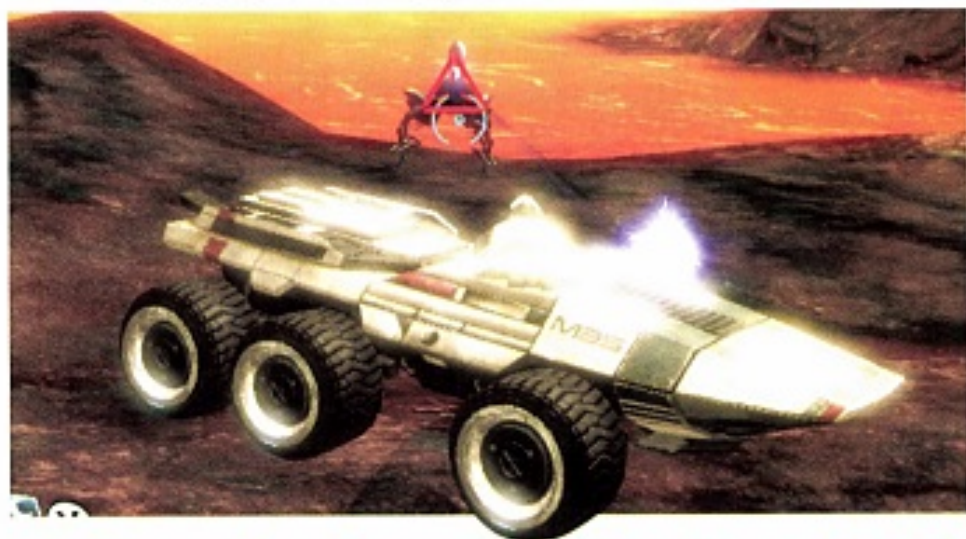
Eating a hot pepper can give you fiery breath, which comes in handy for freeing a tied-up buddy.



- ♦ Lots of cool special abilities as well as objects to gobble and barf.
- ♦ 50 colorful levels full of goofy attitude.
- Disappointingly simplistic puzzles; crippled offline-only co-op.
- 7 What sort of inter-dimensional digestive tract can handle a dozen melons?



◀ The Back Button



A Cure for Compulsive Looting?

I've always admired gamers who take the shortest possible route through an action game or RPG. You know, the critical-pathers, the speed-runners — folks who not only ignore side missions, but also stay right on the main road in every campaign mission, with no needless deviation.

I'm the exact opposite of that. I'm a connoisseur, an explorer. In games like *Borderlands* and *BioShock 2*, where extra gear and ammo are everywhere, I'll search for them in almost every container in every building. In *Mass Effect*, after beating all open sidequests, I actually did drive the Mako around every planet to get all the ore. Was it fun? Hell no — it was torture! But like a hoarder recluse, I couldn't stop myself.

I've even found myself inventing ridiculous motives for pillaging. In *Fallout 3*, as I raided a Super Mutant stash, I'd imagine one of those growly knucklenuts opening his favorite desk for a Stimpak and then shouting "Nooooo!" — while on his knees, looking up, fists clenched,

of course — when he realized it'd been swiped. When I made the mistake of sharing this vision with staffers Fran and Dave, they laughed themselves silly...not that I blame them.

Is being an item-hoover bad? Well, besides the fact that it takes you longer than most people to finish a game (though you see more of it), I'm not sure. Is it curable? Who knows — but I do know that games like *Alan Wake* are like a rubberband-snap on this addict's wrist. I started off scouring every dark, dimly lit corner in the game, only to realize that there's just way too much empty land, even for me. Many of the thermoses and secret boxes are in fairly obvious places, and the better-hidden collectibles don't justify searching that much woodland. Especially when Taken are afoot.

So thanks, *Alan Wake*: you give me hope. And if I can't stop myself? Well, I can always become a game tester and get paid to pry in every little corner of a game. Hmmm... — **Corey Cohen**



WHAT'S THE SCORE? ▶

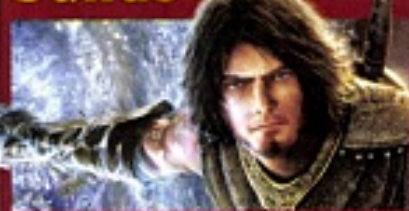
GAME	ISSUE REVIEWED	PLATFORM	SCORE
Green Day: Rock Band	July 2010	Xbox 360	7.5
Iron Man 2	July 2010	Xbox 360	3.5 ▲
Skate 3	July 2010	Xbox 360	8.5
Split/Second	July 2010	Xbox 360	8.0

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Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands



Even with an underwhelming story and limited scale (you're confined to a giant castle), the newest *Prince* is awash in charm and spectacle. Bolstering the beautiful visuals is an assortment of clever new powers, including the ability to freeze water and restore crumbled pillars and

platforms. The focus on acrobatics and puzzling evokes some of the series' finest moments, and it's filled with sword-swinging and time-rewinding fun.



VERDICT
7.5

Alan Wake

We like our mysteries creepy, riveting, and dark — and this 360-exclusive "psychological action thriller" (as its developers call it) delivers on all counts. As author Alan Wake, wandering the town of Bright Falls in the wee hours, you must fend off possessed townsfolk whose only weakness is exposure to light. Battling shadowy figures with a flashlight, flares, and bullets does grow repetitive, but the tense atmosphere and a stunner of an ending make *Alan Wake* a winner.



VERDICT
9.0

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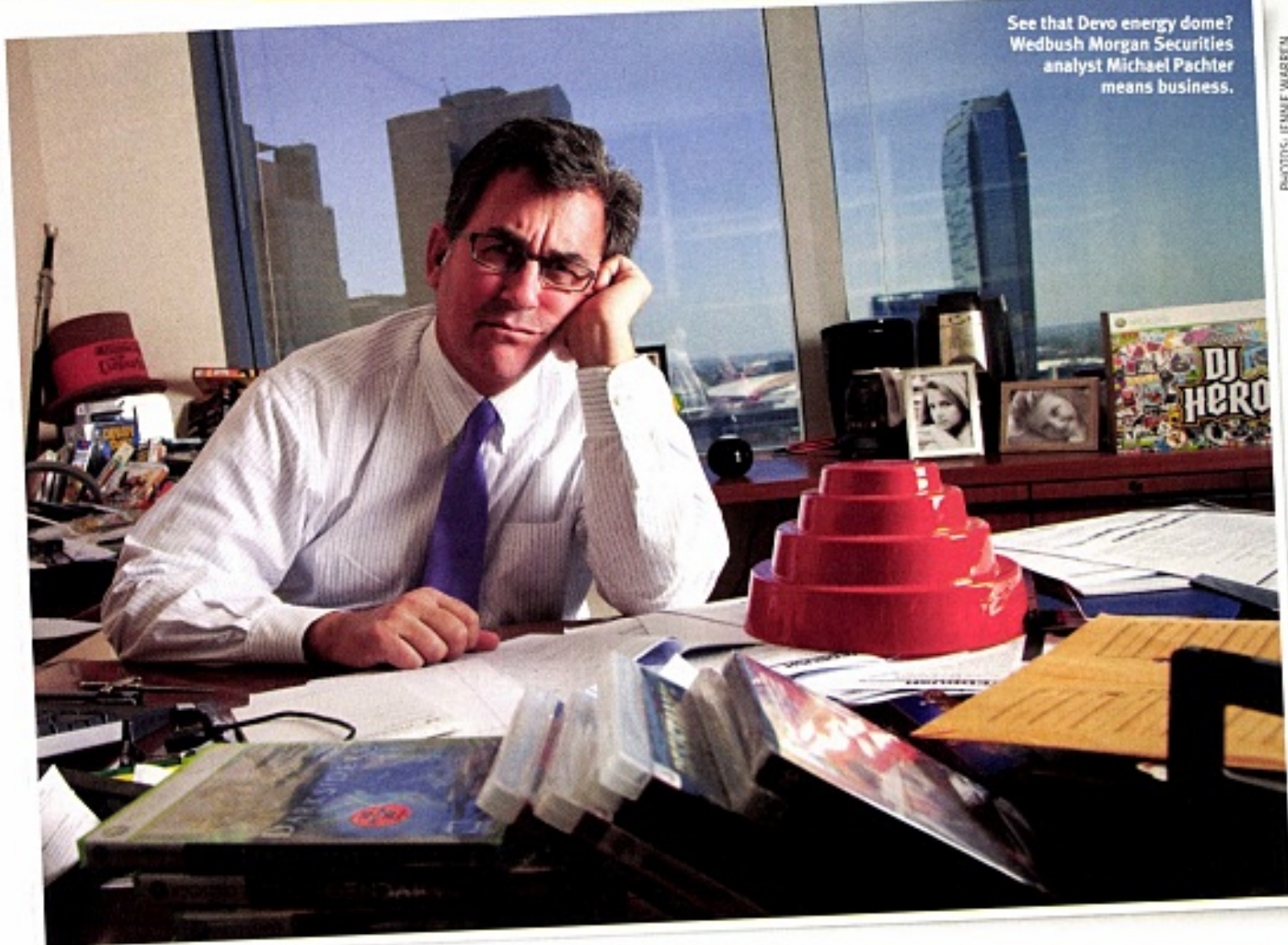
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See that Devo energy dome?
Wedbush Morgan Securities
analyst Michael Pachter
means business.

PHOTOS: JENNIE WARREN



Pay to Play It!

Analyst Michael Pachter says the days of free multiplayer over Xbox Live are numbered

By Kevin W. Smith

If you're like most gamers, you're probably reading this in between throat-ripping sessions of *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* multiplayer. The game's developer, Infinity Ward, says Xbox Live users have already invested 1.75 billion hours playing MW2 within six months of its release.

Xbox Live subscription fees and social life aside, those billions of hours in multiplayer matches have come at no additional expense to players. Videogame-industry research analyst Michael Pachter says that's going to change, since game publishers are busy figuring out business models that will charge you for online multiplayer across both Live and PlayStation Network.

"Fall 2011, I think *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* is a subscription game," Pachter told us from his Los Angeles office. "It'll probably still have a single-player campaign and some free online multiplayer and co-op — enough to hook you."

Pachter, one of the games industry's most high-profile analysts, says he's heard directly from Activision that the company wants to start charging you directly to put some bullets in the head of xXHaLoLuVeRxx. And once Activision is successful, all the other game publishers will follow suit, he explains.

We caution that the answers below are, of course, Pachter's opinion. But it's one worth reading and knowing about — especially if you're one of the 25 million people or so who have played *Modern Warfare 2* online, keeping it at the top of Xbox Live's most-played charts.

“

PUBLISHERS RESPOND

We followed up with some of gaming's heavy hitters for their take on Pachter's predictions.

EA SPOKESMAN:

"We have nothing to offer on the subject."

ACTIVISION SPOKESMAN:

"Activision has no intention to begin charging gamers to play multiplayer. The company is always looking to increase community enjoyment of the multiplayer experience, and right now is squarely focused on supporting *Infinity Ward's* Modern Warfare 2 map pack offerings this summer."

MICROSOFT SPOKESMAN:

"We're unable to provide an official comment."

”



Pachter claims any extra fees will be reinvested into each game.

OXM: Where have you been hearing that Activision is going to start charging for online multiplayer?

Pachter: I've heard it directly from Activision for three years. They said it with *Call of Duty* and they said it with *Guitar Hero*. Now *Guitar Hero* is fading. The [brand] that's fading, it's hard to increase the price. But the one that's growing, Activision has said repeatedly, "We intend to monetize all of this gameplay." EA has said it a bunch of times, too; they just haven't said how they're going to do it. It's going to happen — it's just a question of who figures out the right business model and when. That's why I said not this year, but next.

OXM: Do you think publishers underestimated the popularity of multiplayer when it came to Xbox by not charging from the get-go?

Pachter: I think the publishers really were skeptical when they started, and now they're all convinced that's the way to go. Gamers are naive if they think publishers aren't going to charge for [online multiplayer].

OXM: Multiplayer has been great for gamers. What are some of the side effects they might not know, from the business side?

Pachter: Publishers didn't do well last year. None of them made a ton of money, and they're all about making money... no activity is free. The more you consume, the more you pay, whether it's ad-supported or direct pay. I don't really get why people have this sense of entitlement that all this stuff should be free. Frankly, I don't think the publishers are nefarious. I don't think they intended for this stuff to happen. But now that they see it, they're going to exploit it.

OXM: Where do you think this will lead?

Pachter: The math is pretty compelling. If you believe 8 million people are playing *Call of Duty* on Xbox Live, that means probably another 4 million are playing on PlayStation Network. If 12 million people are playing, what if you captured only 2 million of them (in a subscription) at \$15/month? That's \$360 million incremental per year, so why wouldn't you start high?

And what are the other 10 million players going to do? They're going to be pissed, and then what? They're going to go buy another game. They're not going to stop buying games. They may boycott Activision for a week, but they're

going to go buy *Battlefield* or *Medal of Honor* and try it online, until EA says, "We're charging for that." Then they'll go buy the new Bungie game and play it online, until Activision charges for that. It's just the way it's going to go.

OXM: So, you think Activision will start charging first, and then all the other publishers will follow suit?

Pachter: Nobody is in this business for charitable purposes...Activision isn't just going to take your money and bank it. They're going to use it to build a more immersive, more addictive environment for online gameplay so you want to play even more. They're going to reinvest it. They're not stupid. The biggest change in gaming in the last 10 years is that online multiplayer has extended the life of games, giving gamers hours and hours more to do. And yet the price of a game from 1995 to now has gone up \$10 — BFD.

OXM: Do you think the first company to charge for multiplayer will take an image hit?

Pachter: I suppose that anyone who does anything not-free takes a hit. It's not like people universally adore Sony for doing PlayStation Network for free; they just don't comment on it. But god save Sony when they start charging for it. [Editor's note: Pachter believes Sony will eventually begin charging for at least some aspect of PSN.] People don't actually bash Microsoft for charging for Xbox Live, but god save them if they raise the price.

OXM: What do you think a consumer can expect as far as a business model? Will it just be tacked onto the price of Xbox Live, or will customers have to pay Activision directly?

Pachter: Activision probably can't charge directly unless they're on the PC. I don't know how they can get around letting Microsoft collect for them. My guess is, there'll be an incremental subscription. I think they're going to say, if you want Xbox Live plus *Call of Duty*, it's \$100/year. And I think when people sign up for it, it'll be "click the button to charge your credit card."

OXM: How onboard do you think Microsoft will be if companies start doing this?

Pachter: I think Microsoft's all over this. They'll make more money, too. If they get to collect their 30 percent, what do they care if Activision makes \$300 million a year?



Will charging a fee for online multiplayer change the way you play games?



Agree with him or not, Pachter remains one of the most quoted analysts in gaming.

OXM: If major publishers start charging for multiplayer, will that lead to a sort of niche industry for the smaller publishers who don't charge?

Pachter: Can anyone make a free-to-play online multiplayer experience that's as good as *Call of Duty*? I guess you can, but it costs a lot of money.

OXM: What would you say to people who say that free multiplayer helps build a community around the game, maintains people's interest in the franchise, and leads to more DLC and game purchases down the road?

Pachter: All that's true, but who cares? Okay, it maintains interest in the franchise and allows you to sell a million or two map packs 3 times at \$15 apiece. It allows you to sell 6 million \$15 map packs and make \$90 million — or it allows you to charge 2 million people \$15/month and make \$360 million. If you're going to do all the work, why not get paid for it?

OXM: If and when multiplayer fees do happen, do you think that'll change gaming forever?

Pachter: Gaming was changed forever when someone came up with the brilliant idea to make online gameplay free. Online gameplay got bigger and bigger and publishers and developers tried to outdo one another and give

you more and more robust gameplay. And that got more and more expensive to do. Next thing you know, people are spending more hours and buying fewer games. And the publishers are spending more to make the game and making less money.

No consumer seems to lament that, but the fact is, we don't have 3DO anymore, or Midway, or Acclaim, or Interplay. We barely have Atari and Eidos. So publishers went out of business because the gamers are like, "Screw it, nobody deserves to make money, just give us more stuff for free." Well, you can't do that. Somebody has to pay for all this content.

OXM: How do you like being an analyst making these kinds of predictions that ruffle feathers?

Pachter: The guys that don't care for what I have to say aren't the people who pay me. So f*** them. They're not my boss. I get paid well to help investors make decisions about stocks. I couldn't care less if anyone follows my "advice." This isn't advice; it's what I think is going to happen, and the reason I think it's going to happen is, it makes logical sense given what I know about all the players in the industry who make the decisions. I'm just telling you what I think is going to happen. You're free to disagree. ☺

SECOND OPINIONS

We ask two other analysts about multiplayer fees

"Players are going to have more choice than ever. Are they going to have to brace themselves for the fact that EA might very well start charging for games of *Madden* or specific player stat updates? Inevitably. Does it mean it's going to be that way completely in the future and we're not going to vote with our wallets and change that? Not necessarily."

SCOTT STEINBERG
HEAD OF VIDEOGAME CONSULTING FIRM
TECHSAVVY GLOBAL

"There's been such a conditioning over the last five-plus years that when you buy the box, you have access to online. What's changing now, except that they want more money from my pocket? I think the consumer is going to puke on that idea pretty good...unless you can roll out some value proposition where you're continually piping new content into the game that's really exciting. If that's the case, maybe [publishers] can pull it off."

MIKE HICKEY
VIDEOGAME ANALYST AT JANCO PARTNERS

LiveSpace

Xbox Live is full of nice people looking for a good game — folks with manners who are good sports and want to meet more people like themselves. That's where LiveSpace comes in. To count yourself among their ranks, send an email to letters@officialxboxmagazine.com with the subject line "LiveSpace," and include the following information:

GAMERTAG: Yours, of course

ACHIEVEMENTS: Which specific Achievements do you take the most pride in having earned? What made them special?

WANTS TO PLAY: Which games do you currently own that you'd like to play with other people on Xbox Live?

Hi, My Name Is: Your first name, where you're from, and your hobbies — gaming-related and otherwise. Basically, tell us more about the gamer behind the tag.

hiredn00bkiller

Achievements: I'm most proud of getting "Let Sleeping Rockstars Die" (*Grand Theft Auto IV*) because killing one of the developers is cool, and of nabbing 1,000/1,000 in *Sherlock Holmes vs. Jack the Ripper* while renting it.

Wants to Play: *GTA IV*, *Battlefield 1943*, *DJ Hero*, *Shaun White Snowboarding*, and *Stoked*

Hi, My Name Is: Matthew, from Toronto, Canada. I like snowboarding, BMX, and taekwon do, and anything that involves teamwork or just having fun.



DEAFHAWK36

Achievements: Getting every Achievement in *The Orange Box* was awesome. The *Portal* challenges were the biggest test of my gaming patience.

Wants to Play: *Halo 3: ODST*, *The Orange Box*, *Splinter Cell Conviction*, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*, and *Left 4 Dead 2*

Hi, My Name Is: Jess, from Spokane, Washington. Been playing *Halo* since fifth grade and still love it. I'm in a gaming clan (armtheflag.com), and I have a collection of duct-tape-and-cardboard guns from *Halo* and *CoD*.



lommy lom

Achievements: I'm happiest about "Finish the Fight" (*Halo 3*) because I beat the game on Legendary while I was deployed in Iraq.

Wants to Play: *FIFA 10*, *Gears of War 2*, *Tiger Woods 10*, and, of course, *Modern Warfare 2*

Hi, My Name Is: Kevin. I'm 25 and in the U.S. Army. I have three children and a beautiful wife who tolerates my addiction/hobby. My 3-year-old son is hooked like daddy.



Jooma TWF

Achievements: A high point was earning *Left 4 Dead*'s "Stand Tall," "Akimbo Assassin," and "Dead Baron" at the same time. So was snagging "Tank Burger" (*Left 4 Dead 2*) with only one other person helping me.

Wants to Play: *Army of Two*, *Left 4 Dead*, *Left 4 Dead 2*, and *Resident Evil 5*

Hi, My Name Is: Elyse, from Washington. I'm not constantly online (school piles on the homework), but I'm always willing to put others before myself. A word of warning: I will scream when blindsided by a zombie.



The 20 Most Anticipated Xbox 360 Games*



- Halo: Reach**
An uber-popular brand, and the game's recent beta test drew millions of players. No surprise to see *Reach* atop the list.
- Gears of War 3**
A formal unveiling on *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* certainly helped put *Gears of War 3* at the front of gamers' minds. And, of course, it's the second-biggest 360-exclusive license.
- Call of Duty: Black Ops**
- Fable III**
Another huge sequel, no doubt drawing even more attention for being one of the first AAA games slated to include Project Natal functionality.
- Madden NFL 11**
- Medal of Honor (2010)**
- Dead Rising 2**
- Fallout: New Vegas**
- Guitar Hero 6**
- Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood**
- Rock Band 3**
- F.E.A.R. 3**
- The Sims 3**
Despite a limited presence on Xbox, *The Sims*' mainstream popularity has folks eyeing this high-profile port, which wasn't in last month's Top 20.
- Ghost Recon: Future Soldier**
- Crackdown 2**
- Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II**
- Dead Space 2**
The first game nabbed critical praise but modest sales. Extensive press coverage of its follow-up — which already looks plenty promising — bodes well for *DS2*'s sales.
- EA Sports NBA Elite 11**
- NCAA Football 11**
With college-football season still a few months out, it's reasonable that an NCAA title would slip a few spots since last month. We predict a rise in the ranks as September approaches.
- Max Payne 3**

*Source: GfK Research. Games are Xbox 360 titles scheduled to release July 1, 2010, or later. Polling period was May 2, 2010, through May 15, 2010.



Kill *Halo*? Not even silver bullets, wooden stakes, and marriages to Jesse James could do that.

► Inbox

TALKED Themselves into thinking that upcoming sci-fi first-person shooter *Crysis 2* is a “*Halo* killer,” did EA. In a recent interview with website IndustryGamers.com, EA Games label president Frank Gibeau called Crytek’s face-melting first-person shooter “a product that would squarely go after what Bungie built.” If you’re talking about graphics, sure, we’ll give you that one — *Halo: Reach* is pretty, but *Crysis 2* is the best-looking girl at Xbox 360 High School. Leave the hyperbole to the “professionals” (a.k.a. *us*), okay?



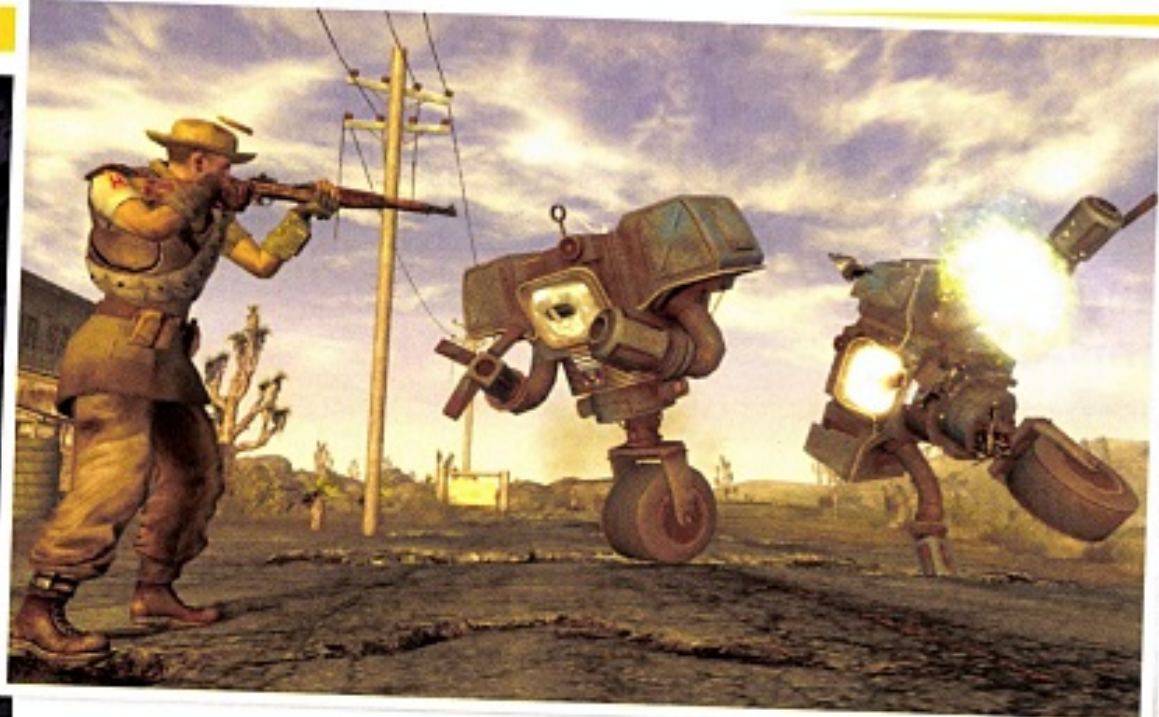
COMING To the Xbox 360 exclusively is, well, not *Fable III*. A PC version of the upcoming action-adventure sequel was outed by...the game’s own boxart. Yes, it didn’t take Sherlock Holmes to put two and two together when Microsoft released the *Fable III* box art adorned with the phrase “Only on Xbox 360 and Windows” atop the packaging.

Microsoft had to fess up and confirm the PC SKU one week later, when they also confirmed an \$80 Collector’s Edition that will contain physical playing cards, a coin tchotchke, and an extra in-game quest, region, Boxer dog breed, and outfit...wait, did they say Boxer? Staff Boxer-owner Ryan just bought 17 copies!

CLOSED Was the entire Hollywood Video chain, bringing down videogame subsidiary Game Crazy with it. A staggering 19,000 people will lose their jobs across the entire company, which includes the Hollywood Video outlets. Hopefully this newly available glut of knowledgeable videogame staff will infiltrate other gaming retail chains: we’re a bit tired of being asked if we’d like to pre-order everything from *Halo* to *Hannah Montana: Music Jam* every single time we set foot in one. We’ll get our *Hannah Montana* fix when we’re good and ready, dammit!

CRYSTAL BALL

What will motion-controlled bowling be like without *anything* in your hand? The Ball swears we’re going to find out very soon...Where’s *Grand Theft Auto* going after Liberty City? The Ball thinks Rockstar won’t mess with a proven thing and will return to Vice City...Is more of *Monkey Island* on the way to Live Arcade? Yes, says The Ball, but not from where you might think.



Bethesda didn't want Interplay making a *Fallout* MMO, fearing it would ruin the franchise's newly bankable name.

Apparently, "back-office stuff" can include suing the people behind your successful franchise.

▲ DROPPED Their lawsuit against Interplay, did *Fallout* publisher Bethesda. The once-great videogame house, now just a shell of its former self, is pressing forward with a *Fallout* MMORPG, which was the subject of the lawsuit. (Bethesda was trying to stop it from being made.) Interplay can now continue work on the game, code-named *Project V-13*. Of course, Interplay is still looking to get Interplay in a counter-suit against Bethesda, but the results of that litigation remain to be seen.

▼ TRIED To sign Bungie before Activision beat them out, did EA. "We had extensive conversations with them, but could never really figure out a deal that made sense for both of us," EA Partners head David DeMartini recently revealed. "It just didn't come to fruition." It would seem that EA only offered them the moon, while Activision countered by promising Bungie the moon and the stars. It's *Cosmic Economics 101*: You can't ignore the significance and value of a cluster of red dwarves.

▼ DEPARTED Ubisoft did Clint Hocking, one of the company's top creative directors. The man who headed development on *Splinter Cell*, *Chaos Theory* and *Far Cry 2* is seeking a new challenge in his career. "I am proud — beyond measure — of the hard work that I [sic] and my colleagues have done here," he wrote in his farewell blog entry. Oh, we are too, Clint. We're such unabashed *Chaos Theory* fans around here that we actually commissioned a 12-foot-tall bronze statue of you. You're welcome to admire it in our lobby the next time you visit.



▲ RESIGNED His post as president of LucasArts, did Darrell Rodriguez. The story, confirmed by news blog Kotaku, notes that several members of the executive team are departing with him. Lucasfilm's Jerry Bowerman will serve as the interim boss while a permanent replacement is sought. This would normally be the part where we'd playfully mock Rodriguez for some crazy decision he made during his tenure, but we're talking about the man who greenlit not one, but two remakes of *Monkey Island*. For that, he gets carte blanche from us.

► CHARGING For online play — starting with *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11* — is EA. Before you freak out and storm the company's Redwood Shores headquarters with pitchforks and torches, however, know that the \$10 fee will apply only to secondhand (i.e., used) copies of their games. A code will be included that will allow free access to those who purchase EA titles new. "If the original access code has been redeemed and fans wish to get access to the online content," the company explained, "you can access a free seven-day trial or additional Online Passes will be available for \$10." Translation: "If you're a BAD, BAD PERSON who gave all your money to GameStop instead of us, we'll still find a way to milk you dry! HAHAAHAHAHA!"

SPEAKING Of Golf, outspoken pro linksman John Daly is starring in an upcoming 360 videogame. Dubbed *John Daly's ProStroke Golf*, it promises an "authentic golf videogame experience." That may be true, but for a guy like Daly who's obviously not in, uh, peak physical condition, is it a good idea to put your name next to the word "ProStroke"? Then again, it's better than Tiger Woods adopting the *ProStroke* moniker. Hey-oooooooooh! Speaking of Daly, has anyone ever seen him and *ESPN Baseball Tonight* analyst John Kruk in the same place at the same time? We're just sayin'...

EXPRESSED Its heartfelt love for its employees, did Activision, the behemoth publisher whose reputation has taken more hits in recent months than Lindsay Lohan by the Hollywood press machine. "We treat our developers extremely well," Activision COO and CFO Thomas Tippl promised the *Los Angeles Times* in the wake of the Infinity Ward exodus that saw studio heads Jason West, Vince Zampella, and more than 35 others leave the *Modern Warfare* maker. "We have an independent-studio model that provides them a lot of creative freedom while we take care of the back-office stuff so they can focus on making games." Apparently, "back-office stuff" sometimes includes suing the founding masterminds behind your most successful franchise.



The OXM Dashboard

A channel-by-channel guide to the newest and coolest stuff on Xbox Live

Our new section for Xbox Live Marketplace junkies!

The Stars of Summer

This year's Summer of Arcade is here, and Microsoft has unveiled its dazzling selection of the hottest downloadable titles to hit Marketplace since 2009's blowout! Check out this amazing lineup and start cherry-picking your friends now — there's a lot of co-op and multiplayer this time!

Castlevania: Harmony of Despair

Developer: Konami

The fang-bearing crew that puts the mooney cast of *Twilight* to shame returns to XBLA with an all-new, six-player ode to 2D action-platforming. For more on *Harmony of Despair*, see page 8.

Lara Croft: Guardian of Light

Developer: Crystal Dynamics

Two-player co-op in a world filled with crumbling temples, giant spiders, and some seriously P.O.'ed warriors. You and a buddy shoot and scour for collectibles while puzzle-solving environmental obstacles as a team.



Limbo

Developer: PlayDead

This moody, lethal platformer — about a boy trying to rescue his sister from...you guessed it...limbo — has the potential to be 2010's artsy darling for all of you thoughtful (and skillful) gamers out there. Spotlighted on page 32.



Avatar Alert!

Dress up your Avatar with clothing and props from Avatar Marketplace! Some of our more recent faves take a turn for the weird...



ALAN WAKE
Barry's Jacket
(160 MS Pts. [\$2])



ALAN WAKE
Alan Wake Dressup
(320 MS Pts. [\$4])



LOST PLANET 2
Gordiant prop
(320 MS Pts. [\$4])



RED DEAD REDEMPTION
Lasso prop
(240 MS Pts. [\$3])



Monday Night Combat

Developer: Uber Entertainment

Looking like a bite-sized, third-person *Team Fortress 2*, Uber's shooter goes tournament-style with its arena-based system of character classes (six in all) and team-based multiplayer for in-game money and prizes.



Hydro Thunder Hurricane

Developer: Vector Unit

Prepare to booooooost your way to the finish line as the breakneck water-sporting arcade classic *Hydro Thunder* gets a revamp. This brand-new version boasts slick visuals and eight tracks of hyper-racing — power-ups included!

NEW! AVATAR INDIE GAMES

Want to give your custom Xbox 360 Avatar a workout? The Indie Games channel is full of new offerings that let you do just that — at affordable prices, too!



BABY MAKER EXTREME

Developer: Stegersaurus Games

Price: 80 MS Pts. (\$1)

A button-mashing, shotput-style game that challenges you to see just how far you can launch your fetal-positioned Avatar across an entire hospital floor.



AVATAR ONSLAUGHT

Developer: SniperED007

Price: 80 MS Pts. (\$1)

Strafe and shoot water balloons at encroaching Avatar enemies to keep them from crossing the line. Watch out for their return fire! Multiplayer included.



AVATAR AQUARIUM

Developer: DigitalDNA

Price: 80 MS Pts. (\$1)

Strictly for relaxation and to see just how weird the Indie Games channel can get, this entry lets your Avatar swim in an aquarium. You heard right.



AVATAR NINJA

Developer: Milkstone Studios

Price: 80 MS Pts. (\$1)

Sidescrolling test of your dexterity. You have to rhythmically press the A button to keep your Avatar running, while hitting other buttons to jump, duck, and more.



AVATAR CANNON

Developer: Lighthouse Games

Price: 240 MS Pts. (\$3)

How far across an African savannah can you cannon-launch your Avatar? Past rhinos and snakes? Silly fun that plays a bit like *Baby Maker Extreme*, but with fewer birth jokes.



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Thursday
July 1
**Battlefield:
Bad Company
2**



OXM Versus

Once a month we set aside the piles of work and pick up our controllers just for fun, and you're invited! Look for Alaina OXM, Corey OXM, David OXM, Francesca OXM, Intern OXM, Kevin OXM, and Ryan OXM on Xbox Live at 7 p.m. Eastern/4 p.m. Pacific on the following dates, and be ready to play these games!

Thursday
July 29
**Red Dead
Redemption**



**Fresh
meat!**

Make new staffers Alaina and David your first victims!

Enjoy us anytime with KOXM!

NEED MORE OXM? Well, we need more of you, too. So tune in to KOXM Radio, our weekly (free!) audio podcast, and let's help each other out! Each week we discuss the latest Xbox happenings, make fun of them, and then make fun of ourselves. Oh, and we also have regular developer interviews, no-holds-barred analysis, and community interaction with you in our toll-free, 24/7 KOXM Voice Mailbox. Go ahead, call us! Just dial 1-877-404-1337, extension 696.



NEED MORE REASONS TO TUNE IN? How about our exclusive interviews with the likes of Bungie (*Halo: Reach*) and LucasArts (*Monkey Island Special Edition 2: LeChuck's Revenge*)? Our weekly shows are roughly an hour long and, as always, totally free! Subscribe now on iTunes (just search for "OXM" or "Xbox" in the iTunes Store), on Zune Marketplace, or on our podcast website, located at <http://oxmpodcast.podbean.com>. You'll be glad you did.

THE OXM REPORT

Taking a break between games? Check out The OXM Report, our free, instant videos on the Inside Xbox channel on Xbox Live. You'll find senses-shattering Q&As with the makers of *Call of Duty: Black Ops*, *Crackdown 2*, *Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light*, and more. You can even scroll through the archives and see interviews you missed! Don't miss out: click those slides and let the streaming goodness begin!



Lust in Translation

Games with adult content often aren't as adult as we'd like

Sex sells, and this old adage is especially relevant to the games industry, whose audience is full of young males. It's no surprise that video games featuring buxom ladies with lots of contours and little clothing are a common staple, and as far as I'm concerned, that's okay. I have no problem with a video game throwing in some hanky panky to sell a few more copies. I'm a guy, I'm a gamer, and digital shaggy is just dandy.

But I'd love if developers would stop patronizing us by claiming that the sex in their games is an important plot device. As video games strive to be taken seriously by the mainstream, erotic escapades have become quite common. *Mass Effect*, *Dragon Age*, and *Alpha Protocol* — as well as PS3 games like *Heavy Rain* and *God of War III* — all have them. The common thread linking them, apart from T&A, is the fact that each game's developer claimed coitus was integral to the game. In none of these cases is that true.

BioWare is a champion of the sex scene, with producer Mark Laidlaw claiming that it helps build bonds between characters and creates "an extra layer of care." And yet, the studio's ham-fisted attempts to portray meaningful intimacy are matched only by the vapid way in which the sex scenes are earned. In *Dragon Age*, for example, you woo a character to bed not by natural and spontaneous interaction, but by completing very game-like objectives. You have to make in-game choices that the desired character agrees with, or give them gifts to raise an Approval statistic. In essence, the allegedly realistic relationship has been boiled down to a transparent algorithm — little more than a mini-game for which a badly animated, cheesily directed, PG-13 sex scene is the reward.

What's more, once you've achieved intercourse, that's it. You've "won" at relationships, and you don't have to deal with the character anymore. Except for maybe a stat increase or other token in-game reward, there are no narrative consequences for getting someone in the sack. Thoroughly meaningless. The sex exists not as an integrated piece of *Dragon Age*'s story, but as its own self-contained game, an objective to be met and forgotten. So much for that extra layer of care.

Alpha Protocol has similar troubles. Obsidian's Nathan Davis once told me that the game's sex would be satisfying but "tasteful," when what he apparently meant was "nonexistent." Alpha's hype made a big deal about romancing women, but yet again you simply grind statistics until the woman of your choice comes a-calling, and when she does, the game hints at sex before the screen fades to black. You can't even be sure anything actually happened. Hardly the crucial example of human interaction that developers like to promote.

Meanwhile, *Heavy Rain* creator David Cage has claimed that the game's sex scenes are important to the story, and they've been touted as artistic. But I found them disturbing, rushed, badly placed, morbid, and inappropriate — not a sign of maturity.

Developers pretend that sex for sex's sake isn't the aim of the enterprise, but I have yet to see a full-on sex scene in a video game that didn't look shallow. If it hasn't been included for the sake of male gratification, it's there to try to give the duplicitous appearance that a game is more adult. Personally, I'd prefer a sex scene to be for gratification rather than a false and shallow show of maturity. At least it's intellectually honest to admit you're just trying to turn gamers on.

That's why I respect games like *Bayonetta* more than games like *Dragon Age*. *Bayonetta* doesn't hide behind "art" to justify sex. Platinum Games wasn't trying to fool anyone: It wanted to sell as many games as possible, so it gave us T&A. It's not insulting us by pretending that *Bayonetta* is a deep character with a profound message behind her wriggling hips and increasing nudity.

Developers have two choices: they either need to fully integrate sex into a game, complete with tangible implications and narrative impact, or they should just admit that it's sex for sex's sake. Either approach is fine by me. But trying to have it both ways — lazy half-measures, backed up by pretentious backslapping — is dishonest. Even a gratuitous game like *Dead or Alive Paradise* has more integrity than that. — **Jim Sterling**

Currently the reviews editor at *Destructoid*, **JIM STERLING** is a video game reviewer, raconteur, and editorial gun-for-hire who offers colorful commentary and (sometimes) controversial opinions to gamers who appreciate a sideways look at the industry. ♦



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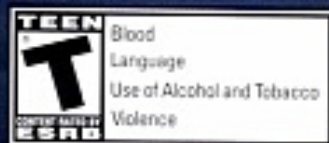
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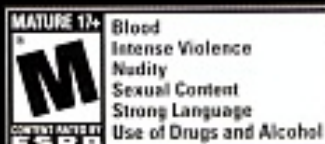
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