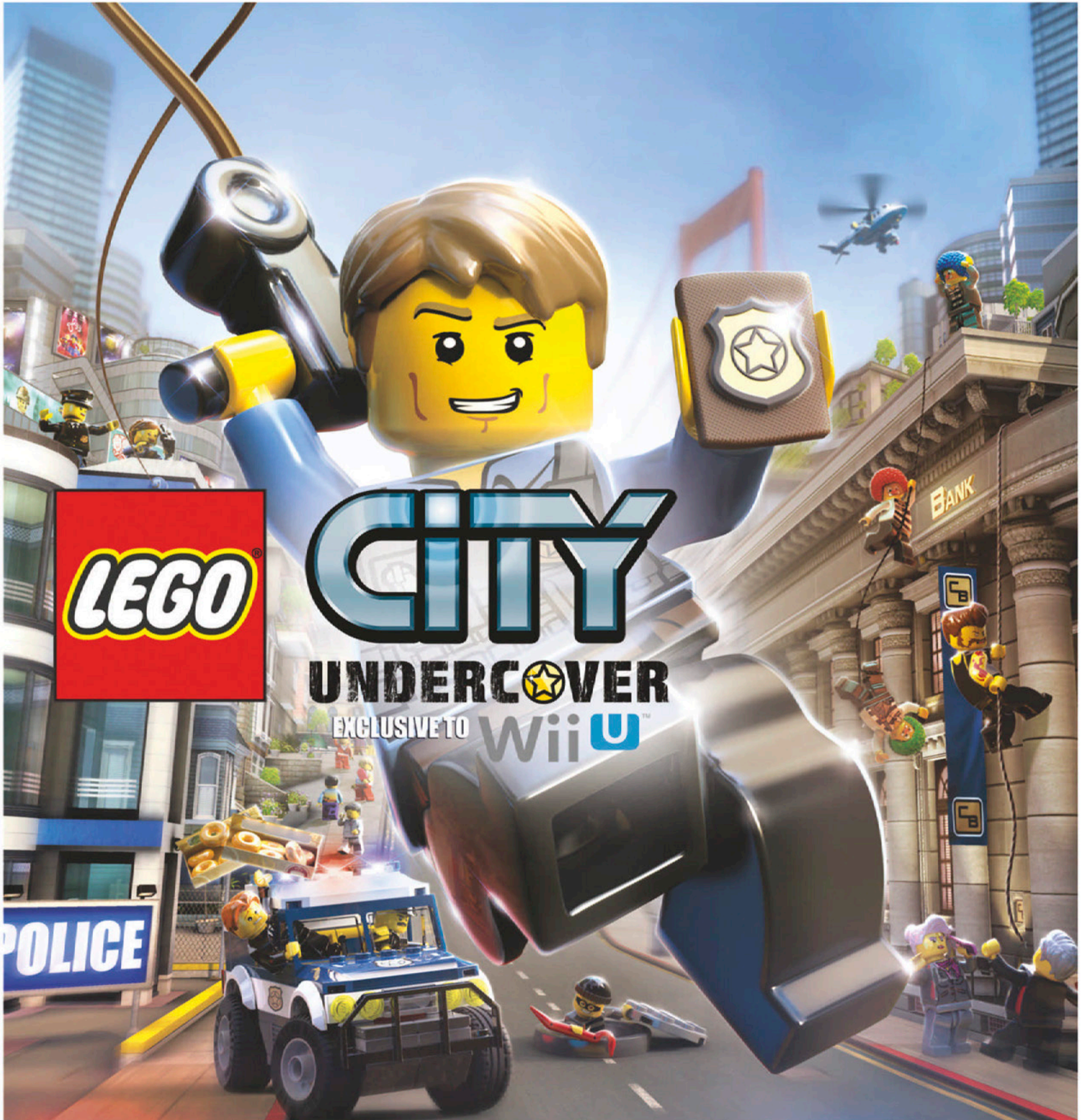


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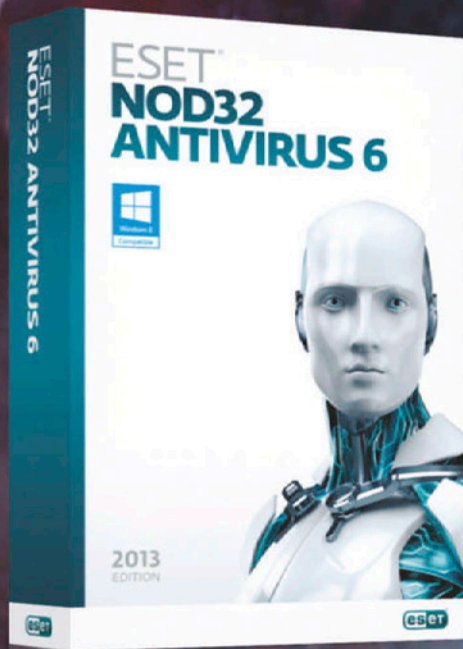


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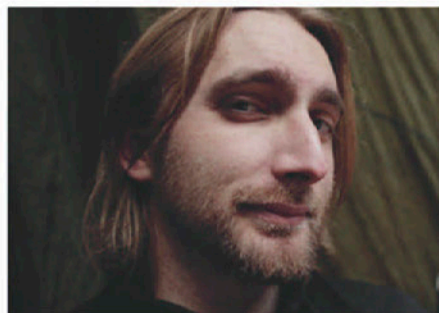
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Welcome.

Never judge a book by its cover, and equally never judge a video game review by a number alone.

Scores. It's always about the scores. Back at the dawn of time video game magazines decided their review ratings should be out of 100, carefully trying to approximate just how much difference a single percent could make between a game and its peers. Outlets have since adopted a ten scale scoring system, and while there's been flirtations with a five star setup similar to movie and music press, the "...out of 10" has remained the norm.

Reviews are opinion. You can disagree or nod in agreement at the points made. But the text leading up to that digit is as important as the digit itself. Six hours or sixty; to expand on the reasons why your favourite game got canned or not takes time and column inches. Is that end number as important as the words that go before it? It's arguable.

We hold that good writing is the core: even if you don't like a particular genre, or know nothing about it, you can be entertained and informed. If you're only flicking through the magazine, we're not doing our job. But equally as important is the fact that a 10 scale is, well, a 10 scale. A score of 5 is the average - not 7 - but that doesn't mean a game's less deserving of your interest or time.

GILLEN MCALLISTER / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



MIKE HOLMES

This month Mike's been steadily working through a list of games near the size of his packing boxes, as our staff writer juggled a house move alongside going GTA in Lego City Undercover, as well as trying out a range of indie titles. He's already struggling to decide where he's going to be spending most of his virtual life when Destiny, GTA V and Assassin's Creed IV are out. Times are tough.

Portable of choice: PS VITA



BENGT LEMNE

Bengt's buried in Google spreadsheets as he readies for GRTV duties with back-to-back reporting from both PAX and GDC this month, and he's been haunted still by calendars as he's tackled an extensive look at what games are due for next-gen, which resembles half hunch and half plain guess. One game he knows he won't be putting in? "Half-Life 3," he says, half-laughing and half-sobbing.

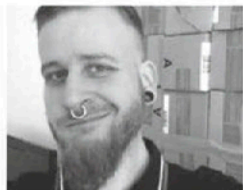
Portable of choice: GAME GEAR



PETTER HEGEVALL

Gamereactor Sweden's reclusive Editor is rarely seen away from his art desk were he's usually pouring over new designs for both this magazine and our website. But the chance to interview BioShock creator Ken Levine was too much an opportunity to pass up. You can read that conversation later on in the issue - there's few writers out there who can illustrate their work as well as write it.

Portable of choice: PS VITA



MARTIN EISER

Martin's running on little sleep the last few weeks, as Gamereactor Germany's Associate Editor has spent much of it wide-eyed and stuck in front of his Nintendo 3DS to work through a packed period of review code. He did manage to break away long enough to write up a hands-on preview with the Star Trek video game after a UK trip (though he admitted that he's more a Battlestar Galactica fan).

Portable of choice: NINTENDO 3DS



LEE WEST

Lee took a huge step this month. He finally parted from his iPad Mini to give the other side a go as part of a report on Microsoft's Surface tablet. He has not forgot his roots though; write-up done the Dane quickly went back to working towards his goal of buying every single game on the App Store and completely filling his iPad. Some dreams can come true. Wish him luck.

Portable of choice: IPAD MINI



DAVID CABALLERO

Gamereactor Spain's Editor is off on a top secret assignment this month for the magazine. But if you see him, you're more likely to hear him talk about his plans in avoiding the sun and blue skies of the outside world in his native country to start digging into the growing pile of games that are slowly taking over his apartment. He won't be drawn on which titles are actually for work purposes.

Portable of choice: GAME BOY MICRO

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Gamereactor.co.uk is part of the Gamereactor video games new network, the biggest in Northern Europe and attracting a global audience. You'll find the latest news and reviews, as well as previews, features and interviews from around the industry. It's also the home of GRTV, our professional HD-quality video section offering trailers, gameplay and video interviews. Gamereactor's on iPad, mobile and Smart TV, but sadly not on Mars. Yet.

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**DEV FRIENDLY**

Sony repeatedly emphasised during its announcement presentation that the PS4 was built with developers in mind, granting studios an easier time with the hardware.

PLAYSTATION 4 OFFICIAL

ANNOUNCEMENT Sony unveils the vision of the future for console gaming, if not the console itself.

➤ **On February 20th In New York, Sony unveiled PS4.** The next-gen console is due before the end of this year - in one territory at least. Having seen a glimpse of what the new hardware will be capable of, gamers everywhere have every right to be excited. It was revealed that the system would hold supercharged PC architecture, which includes an X86 CPU, enhanced PC GPU, with the system memory at 8GB unified memory, and an 8-core processor with powerful GDDR5 RAM, as well as carrying a local HDD for storage. Basically, it's a beast.

The console itself wasn't shown, but Sony debuted the DualShock 4. The redesigned controller comes with new features including a six-axis sensor and touch pad. A new light bar on the top of the unit has three colour LEDs that illuminate to provide information, such as low health, during gameplay. There's to be a built-in speaker and stereo headset jack, while a new "Share" button has been included to improve social connectivity. The idea is that with a tap of the button you'll be able to share gameplay clips and screens with friends, message each other, be it either encouraging sentiments or taunts or - and in a feat that echoes computer tech support - allow us to take over the controls of a friend's session during a tricky section of a game.



We were promised the fastest gaming network in the world, where we'll be able to instantly stream gameplay and demo games before buying them. This cloud-based vision is an aspirational service, but it won't be available straight out of the box.

DualShock 4 will connect to the new Playstation 4 Eye,

which will feature two high-sensitive cameras with wide-angle lenses for a 85-degree field of vision. Using the light bars, multiple controllers can be accurately tracked, and we're also promised that the Eye will be powerful enough to allow for facial recognition. SCEA president Jack Tretton has since revealed that PS4 games will range from \$0.99 and free-to-play to \$60, and remote play is being built into the PS4 architecture - allowing gamers to play any PS4 content on your PS Vita out of the box.



PS4: LET'S TALK SURPRISES

GAMES It wasn't just tech debuting but new titles as well.

Games? Sony had them. First up was Knack, the 3D action game being developed by Crash Bandicoot executive producer (and now PS4's lead system architect) Mark Cerny.

Guerilla Games announced Killzone: Shadow Fall, while Evolution Studio showed us Driveclub, a new team racing game with a distinctive first-person perspective. Braid creator Jonathan Blow was at the PS4 event to announce

The Witness - a Myst-esque puzzler, which will debut on the new console, and we also got a glimpse of Sucker Punch's next title, Infamous: Second Son.

Capcom took the opportunity to announce Deep Down, a new fantasy IP for the next generation, and Square-Enix were at hand to show off a tech demo for their new game engine, as well as announcing that a new Final Fantasy for the system will be revealed at this year's E3.

We also got confirmation that Ubisoft's Watch Dogs would be a launch title on the PS4, Blizzard revealed a strategic partnership that'll see Diablo III land on PS4 (as well as PS3) and former Microsoft darlings Bungie were there to announce that Destiny would also be joining the party. Since the event CD Projekt RED has also confirmed that The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt is heading to the console, while Ubisoft has done the same for Assassin's Creed IV.

KILLZONE: SHADOW FALL (above) sci-fi shooter franchise is go



DESTINY AWAITS BUNGIE ON ITS NEW SHOOTER FRANCHISE

Separate from their appearance at Sony's PS4 event, Bungie teased a few bits of information regarding their upcoming shared-world shooter Destiny.

To be fair, there was more in the way of tantalising artwork than concrete detail: there were few facts about the game revealed.

The broad strokes of the story explains the game's central artwork as a spherical space craft hovers close to Earth - we're in far-flung future territory and humanity is recovering from the brink of utter destruction, with the last known survivors colonising under the watchful gaze of "the Traveller", the spherical white body that rests above the last human city, and the player will take the part of one of the city's Guardians, defending it against alien threats with a mixture of weaponry, gear and vehicles. Player customisation then, is a given. The game is due out on PS4, PS3 and Xbox 360.

i
Titles
What's announced, and who's doing them.

DIABLO III

BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT



Blizzard and Sony's new strategic partnership will see Diablo III appear on PS4. On stage at Sony's press conference in New York, Blizzard's Chris Metzzen proudly revealed their intention to "take over the world," and we believe them. There'll be four player same screen co-op, and they're reworking the controls for DualShock 4. It's a tantalising partnership, and it'll be interesting to see what comes next from the agreement.

THE WITNESS

JONATHAN BLOW



Braid creator Jonathan Blow has been working on The Witness for a long time now, and news that it'll be debuting on PlayStation 4 will be warmly received by fans who like their games indie-flavoured. It came across as a Myst for the new generation, with the emphasis firmly on puzzling and exploration. Perhaps the most exciting thing is its appearance reaffirms the commitment to providing gamers with a variety of gaming experiences on PS4.

THE WITCHER 3

CD PROJEKT RED



Whilst not a launch title, and not part of the line-up at Sony's big PlayStation reveal, we're still delighted that CD Projekt RED has confirmed The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt as a PS4 title. Powered by the studio's new engine (the same tech that'll give us another next-gen title - Cyberpunk 2077), the next chapter in the series will once again star the silver-haired Geralt and will feature an all new 50 hour storyline and multiple endings.

ASSASSIN'S CREED IV

UBISOFT



The most recent addition to the PS4 line-up is Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag. It's not quite a clean break from ACIII, but there's enough of a shift that it stands apart. In Black Flag emphasis will shift to more nautical matters, with pirates, privateering and exploring Caribbean islands the focal points of the new entry in the Assassin's series. It's a markedly different game than before, and you can read more later on in this issue.

JOURNEY WINS BIG AT BAFTAS

AWARDS Thatgamecompany scoops multiple categories at UK video game awards show

▶ **Has indie triumphed over Triple-A? Does art beat blockbuster?** These were the sort of questions asked after this year's British Academy Games Awards, which saw Thatgamecompany walk away with the most awards for their PSN title Journey, while both another PSN game The Unfinished Swan and episodic adventure The Walking Dead grabbed accolades in other categories.

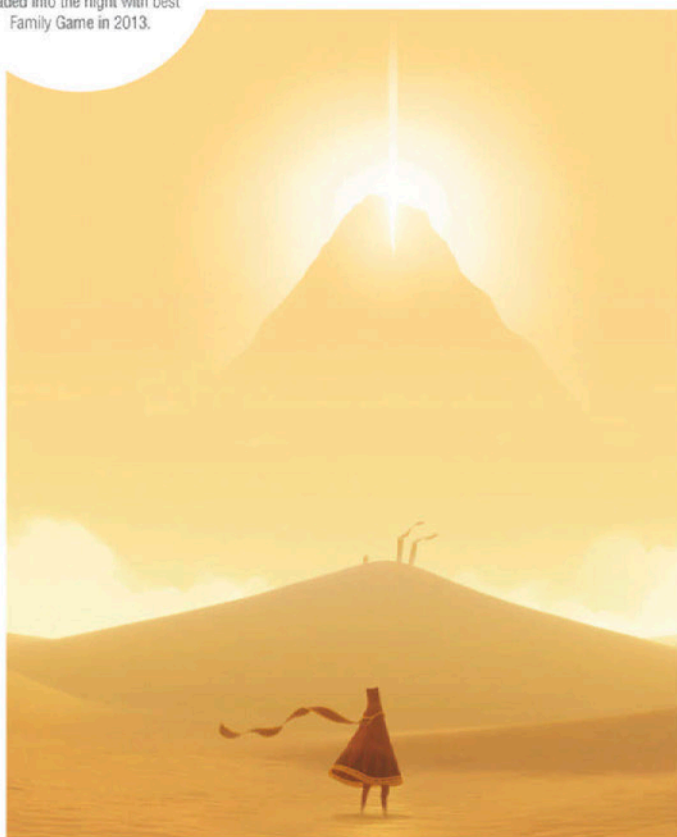
Journey walked away with no less than five awards on the night: wins in Artistic Achievement, Audio Achievement, Game Design, Online Multiplayer and Original Music was nearly a clean sweep of the eight awards it was up for. The Walking Dead bagged the Story and Mobile & Handheld category, while The Unfinished Swan managed to grab Debut Game as well as Game Innovation. The Triple-A wasn't entirely absent. Far Cry 3 beat out Call of Duty: Black Ops 2, Mass Effect 3 and Borderlands 2 for the Action win. But it was Dishonored that got the win in the Best Game section, while XCOM: Enemy Unknown rightly took home the best Strategy title.

In addition to these categories, Valve's Gabe Newell was honoured on the night as he was presented with the Academy Fellowship for "his outstanding and exceptional creative contribution to the games industry". You can read about the show and watch the ceremony at www.bafta.org/games.

OTHER WINNERS

Best British Game went to The Room, beating out Super Hexagon and Need for Speed Most Wanted. Lego Batman 2 headed into the night with best Family Game in 2013.

JOURNEY (below) PSN title continues to win awards



Plus & Minus

Pros and cons of the month.

+ NINTENDO 3DS FINALLY GETS THE GAMES

After a fairly quiet period the handheld's now besieged by titles this month. Some strong games such as the sequel to Luigi's Mansion has us dusting off our portable units.

+ PS4 ANNOUNCED

Both lack of sleep and excited buzz these past few weeks can be blamed totally on Sony who managed to dazzle with a PS4 announcement event that gave the industry a much-needed shot in the arm.

+ NEXT-GEN IS GOOD TO GO

Publishers obviously got the green light as PS4 was made official: we're drowned in press releases confirming titles as PS4-bound, and devs no longer had to gurn the phrase "high-end platforms".

! TOMB RAIDER

Not the game; the reboot's proved to be fantastic. But news reaches us that GK Films is working with developer Crystal Dynamics on a film project. Can the movie version get it right third time round?

- ELDER SCROLLS

The wait is almost over, as the beta invites to join The Elder Scrolls Online start rolling out this month. But the news means we're checking our emails every moment of the day.

- PS4 CONSOLE

We're undecided about the new design of the DualShock but won't pass judgement on it until we get to use it, but no look at the console itself? You tease. We're back to using mock-ups to at least E3 then.



BEST GAMING GOODS

MERCHANDISE With a growing amount of collectables we take a look at what's out there for franchise fans

Video game fans are well supported today. High street shops such as Forbidden Planet and online stores have seen a growing selection of video game tie-ins fill the shelves, both real and virtual. You may have to dig past the mountains of Angry Birds merchandise, but plenty of good franchises are getting serviced with high quality collectables.

The recently released The Legend of Zelda: Hyrule Historia from Dark Horse Comics is a thick glossy tomb of a book, dedicated to the entire Nintendo franchise, from the NES original up to the modern day Skyward Sword, and includes artwork and notes from the franchise's creators. It takes its time looking at each title in turn and even attempts to stitch together the often confusing timeline of the series. You can pick up the 276 page collection for around £25.99 - check your local comic shop or amazon.co.uk to order.

There's a massive trade in artbooks for many series now; Halo, Assassin's Creed, Borderlands and Mass Effect are just a few big names, though it's worth a check first to see if what you're getting is worth the usually high cover price: again, both comic book retailer Forbidden Planet or Amazon are your best bet.

If you want something more stylish on your shelf, then you should check out the Assassin's Creed Roleplay Gauntlet, a £29.99 prop replica of Ezio's hidden blade weapon from the series.

Of course, if you want to celebrate your gaming fandom without killing someone, look to insertcoinclotting.com, for t-shirts, hoodies and bags and play the fun "guess the logo" game with friends.

TEKKEN CARD TOURNAMENT

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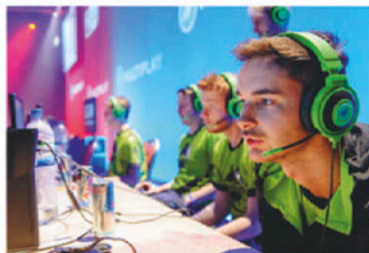
EVENTS The Multiplay Insomnia Festival kicks off this month. Here's what you need to know.

Gamers, unite. We'll be turning the spotlight on forthcoming UK-based events over the coming issues. First up is the Multiplay Festival taking place in Birmingham this month. Grab a coffee, bring matchsticks to prop up those eyelids, and warm up those thumbs in preparation for Insomnia 48.

Taking place between 22-25 March at the Telford International Centre, i48 is the UK's biggest gaming festival. There's a huge selection of things to keep you occupied, so no matter your gaming tittle of choice, the chances are good that there's going to be something there that's right up your street.

The most prominent events are, as always, the tournaments. At this year's event it's no different and several popular games are set to feature. Skilled players can take each other on in favourites such as Team Fortress 2, Counter Strike: Global Offensive, and Call of Duty: Black Ops 2. Shooter fans are well catered for.

FIFA 13 is a more sporting option, but don't expect it to be any less competitive. Then there's the Minecraft booth, as well as an appearance from the ever-popular MOBA League of Legends, and to top it off there's the ESET UK Masters Starcraft 2 Grand Finals. There's to be an Eve Meet once again at this year's event, a now regular



chance for fans of the space-based MMO to discuss their collective obsession.

Things will kick off with the Grand Opening Ceremony - where there'll be plenty of freebies handed out to the assembled crowd, then it'll be down to business. Expect to see the return of the popular i-Series Pub Quiz, a Multiplay

Q&A for finding out more about future events, a costume competition, and this year there's to be a table and card gaming area, so if you fancy bringing your tabletop games with you, there'll be a place to let the good dice roll.

Insomnia looks like the perfect place to let your competitive streak run wild, and play some great games in the process. As such Gamereactor will be at the show to try our hand at some of the events. Hope to see you there.

Check out iseries.multiplay.co.uk for more information.

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MALL TRIP

One scene had us trying to pass through a now-buried mall. A room not more than fifty feet across was filled with Clickers, forcing us to carefully toss bricks to make a pathway through the monsters. It'd be a climatic scene for any horror. Here, it's still the opening act.

THE LAST OF US

PS3

14 JUNE

An hour with Naughty Dog's latest has us wishing for the safety of Crash Bandicoot.

Naughty Dog make the easy uncomfortable and the normal terrifying. This post-apocalyptic thriller emphasises the quiet thunder of survivor brutality as you trek through destroyed cityscapes for supplies and shelter; there's no bombastic entertainment here. No blockbuster bullet counts, superhuman feats. Naughty Dog want you to realise the fragility of the human condition.

Think about it: when was the last time you spent a solid fifteen minutes in one room and facing just four foes? Or when your gameplay retries erred dangerously close to double figures? That your stomach cramped in fear as a zombified form stumbled into view? This was us in our first encounter with the game's nasties; two forms of infected that plague the darkened rooms of decaying buildings. The standard type, with its shuffling movements turned full charge when spotting you, are bad enough. The Clickers, blind mutations that operate on echolocation, are simply unsettling. Naughty Dog let the tongue clicking play out as the only ambient score to these scenes, heightening the horror. Make a noise, any noise, and whatever Clickers are nearby will charge. Be in their grabbing arc and your game will end with their teeth and your neck meeting.

Guns are a rarity, bullets more so. Stealth is good, but success is uncertain

In any other game, these would be bullet sponges for our superhuman protagonist. But while our central character Joel may look like a more-weathered Nathan Drake, he's every inch the worn-out worried human being we'd be. Naughty Dog translate his weariness in every line of dialogue, and his lack of confidence in fighting come any attack.

There's tailored imprecision in aiming a gun that makes missing during any assault a certainty. The Last of Us isn't a game in which you can hide behind a volley of lead. Guns are a rarity, bullets more so. Besides, it takes a full pistol clip to down a Clicker. Stealth is better but no means a certainty for surviving.

Naughty Dog reduce down the soundtrack to the bare minimum, emphasising basic sounds instead. Moaning. Shuffling feet. Quickened breathing. An importance on Joel's hearing that has the studio imagining it as a gameplay mechanic: hold a button and the silhouettes of nearby attackers will be outlined.

You can strangle infected if you sneak up behind them, but as neither type stick to specific routes when shuffling around, even this action is dangerous: any exposure to sight lines or sounds is.

You do have some aids. Fists alone will barely keep a



ELLIE'S EYES

The destruction and massive change to life is emphasised by Joel's talks with Ellie, as he informs her of how the world 'used to be' during their travels.

single attacker at bay, so discarded bottles or bricks can be tossed to distract Clickers, and items can be picked up and combined for makeshift melee weapons and first aids. Note that combinations - say a steel bar, some tape and scissors - break after a while. A great addition - and likely massive hinderance later on - is the fact that Molotov cocktails and first aids share the same ingredients. Likewise torch batteries have a finite lifespan, and we're informed lack of careful use can lead us having to trek through darker areas near-blind later on.

Everything is rendered in a cold, grainy visual style that lacks any gloss or cinematic panning come encountering impressive vistas. Sagging skyscrapers and wrecked streets aren't given any gloss; but it's the throwaway nature of vast wastelands that make it all the more affecting. The developer knows best what to emphasise and when.

Naughty Dog rightly don't linger on those cinematic shots; the player's left to decide if they want to pan the camera or not. It's the right choice. The fixation is on the ground, the moment to moment survival in the dirt. Landscapes have been

drained of any beauty; they're now only indicative of how many more miles there are left to walk. Building architecture now rated by how easy it is to climb, its value now weighed by what rewards and horrors could lie within.

We're somewhat adjusted to a survivor's life come the demo's end. We toss a fiery cocktail into a darkened room full of silent infected while we stand outside in the street under the harsh sunlight. The fire consumes a few, and we unload a shotgun blast at the first runner out the door, before backing up and clubbing the last one with steel bar and cold calculation. Even with a plan, our heart rate's spiked.

We've still to get a feel for the relationship between Joel and Ellie, and how much more there is to the game beyond these - admittedly frantic - stealth-driven moments. But Naughty Dog's earned our trust after a generation's worth of great adventures; even if we know this last one isn't going to leave us smiling. Amazing that one of the most horrific experiences this generation comes from a company that was first known for creating a deranged marsupial. How far we've come.

Gillen McAllister



18
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RAID MODE

Alongside the main story campaign Revelations offers a score-based Raid mode, challenging you to down enemies quicker for Leaderboard rankings.

RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS

PS3 XBOX 360 WII U

24 MAY

Capcom's horror crawls from the 3DS depths onto home consoles.

Revelations echoes Resident Evil 4. That Gamecube best-seller turned multiform blockbuster with a sideways transfer to other formats. However, switching from a lower-powered handheld to machines that are still surprising graphically seven years into their life cycle is a harder sell.

The 3DS game, released last year, sticks closer to classic formula than the other RE title of 2012, Resident Evil 6. But aside from a visual makeover - think HD remake rather than upscaled port - this mirrors the oceanic Resident Evil released on Nintendo's portable console, barnacles and all.

Capcom went for punchy Chapter divides rather than continuous story for Revelations, partly to better subdivide the interweaving cast you control (and the different perspectives and cliffhangers a nod to the television serials it imitates) as well as syncing the play style with the portability and expected gameplay brevity of gamers hunched over the 3DS.

The translation doesn't sting as much as you'd think. Our re-run through Chapter 4 clocks in at thirty seconds shy of thirty minutes in the concluding grade screen time. Other Chapters are shorter, some longer. It's only in retrospect do you perhaps realise how little you've done: walked through a few rooms, shot a handful of zombies. Feel your toes curl up inside your shoes once too often.

Because unlike RE6, there's genuine unease in

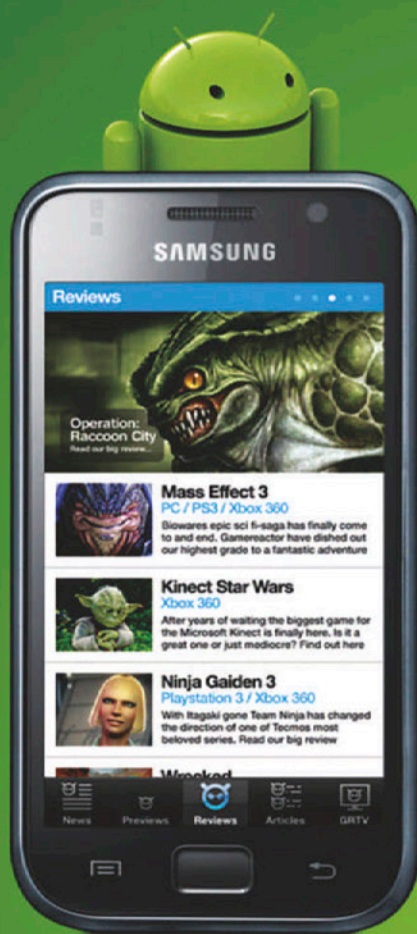
the slow-burn sections of Revelations as you explore the interior of huge cruiser turned biohazard outbreak. Gloomy tight corridors and sparse ammo still make you as edgy on a Samsung 32 inch TV as you were on a 3.5 inch 3DS screen. There's still bullet-storms when you're flexing Redfield's muscle in a co-current story, as Capcom dual-wield the action and survival elements of their horror series as cast and story criss cross. It's a well-designed split and is evenly paced.

Visually, this is an odd mix. The central character models are as good as anything from the home console entries, but not environments and enemies. Enlarged, plain walls and rooms look sparse and lacking the heavier details you'd expect at this point of a generation cycle. Not every location suffers the same problem, but you're reminded of the heritage of the game rather than being fully absorbed in your exploration. Likewise the albino mutations, gross white zombies coloured so to stand out against the gloom and make for easier aiming of body parts on the 3DS, look bland on their TV debut, and the bigger picture unfortunately robs these encounters of their claustrophobic menace.

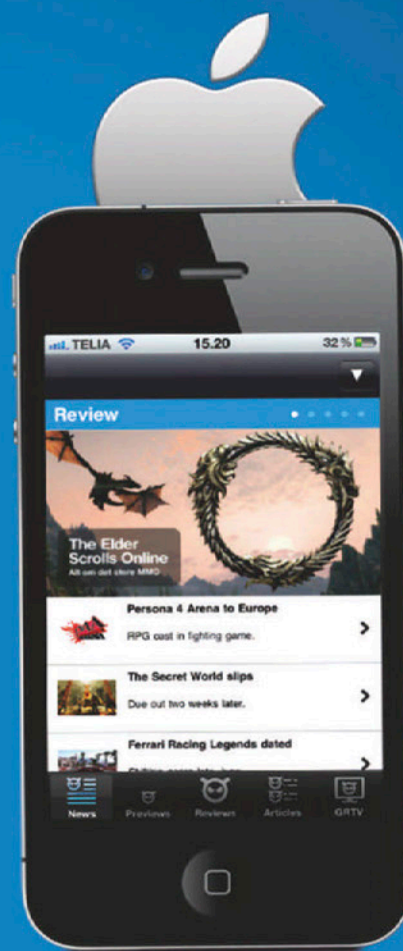
The 3DS original is still brilliant, but with a year passed, we'd be expecting this re-release to offer a more budget friendly RRP - retailers currently have it on pre-order at a penny shy of forty pounds. There's still a strong Resident Evil adventure here, but is it worth the price?

Gillen McAllister

There's genuine unease in the slow-burn areas as you explore the ship



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Android **APP**



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iPhone **APP**





PIRATES | ASSASSIN'S CREED

Black Flag

ASSASSIN'S CREED IV

Ubisoft's time-travelling franchise has taken us to many new horizons. With *Black Flag*, it's promising to take the best of the previous entries as it sets sail for uncharted waters...

Black Flag isn't a Brotherhood or Revelations. That 'IV' in the title denotes new character, new location, new historical setting... and also a few other changes from the Assassin's conventions. But it's not entirely separate from what's went before. To hijack the series' own lexicon, IV's shares some DNA strands with ACIII.

The pre-announcement leaks spoil some of the surprise: Assassins turned Pirates. Creed on the High Sea. Given sailing was one of the strongest elements of ACIII, the idea of that side-quest expanded into focal point for an open world game, with cities to freely sail to, islands to find, ruins to explore and ships to plunder is definitely tantalising. That the multi-studio teams behind the new project, three years in production, are aiming for seamless transitions between land, sea, ship or underwater exploration, excites. And let's get that format question out of the way: it's confirmed for PS4 as well as Xbox 360, PS3, Wii U and PC. The UK release date? November 1.

IV abolishes the usual AC time-skip cycle with era and lead. We're at the opening of the 18th Century in the West Indies at the formation of the Pirates Charter. The game stretches over the course of a decade, and adds to the twisted family tree of the ACIII Kenways as we play Edward, father to ACIII's Haytham. Edward, in keeping with the franchise's faces entwining with historical fact and influencing important events, is one of the most feared pirates alongside the likes of

Blackbeard, and has dual citizenship in both piracy and the Assassin's order - a split that will play a major part in the story.

What that story is exactly, Ubisoft are keeping quiet. We know it'll have something to do with the formation of the Charter, as Pirates come together to set up their own democracy and clash with other empires looking to rule the seas. The studio touch on several key figures of the time and their vastly different tempers, so there's a suggestion these Captains will be protagonist and antagonist alike. Somewhere in the middle of this cast of cads and crazies stands Ubisoft's newest addition.

There's the distinct feel that the newest Kenway leans more towards the Ezio Auditore character school; words such as 'cocky', 'selfish' and 'rebel' flash up on screen as the newest hooded figure to the brotherhood is revealed. Ex-Royal Navy turned privateer. Carries four pistols and two swords. If you're going to sail the world with someone, it better be with someone interesting. Taking Haytham's confidence and mixing it with a brazen Italian's edginess sounds like a good start to us.

An emphasis on character flair is a good thing. While pointedly dismissing any fantastical elements to their pirates interpretation, by way of a barbed dig at Disney's Depp-helmed franchise, Ubisoft do paint them as being larger than life.



GAMEREACTOR.CO.UK

Accurate though previous games were in their rendering of historical faces, if you were untutored in history those characters lacked presence. Their mark on the world may have been great, but that wasn't translated on screen. The pirates look like they'll command our attention every second they're present. Engaging. Terrifying. Names such as Blackbeard flash up on screen. We warm to them already.

The game will contain fifty locations dotted across the seas, with a split of 60/40 between land and sea missions. Places that'll include major cities such as Havana, Kingston and Nassau - rooftop running and street assassinations haven't been dropped into the ocean - as well as a whole heap of smaller fishing villages, forts, plantations, jungles. Travel to these areas is as simple as sailing to them. A spyglass will let you search the horizon for landfall. Simply plot a course, draw up anchor when you're there, and jump off the side. you'll also be exploring under the sea as well as above it, gameplay clips showing us Edward diving down to salvage wrecks, and

dodging sharks. It promises the sort of errant exploration that made *Far Cry* and *Wind Waker* so enjoyable - a bigger, more diverse take on ACIII's *Frontier*.

Ubisoft spent a lot of their hour-long reveal presentation talking ships. Your own vessel, the *Jackdaw*, will be fully upgradable during the course of the game, which is key to surviving the larger clashes at sea. You'll have to fill out your crew from trading ports or discovering castaways. Training the spyglass on distant ships will break down their cargo manifest, strength and make on screen, allowing you to judge whether you'd survive an encounter.

Attacking and boarding them is dynamic, even before factoring in the diverse weather system. Again, Ubisoft promise the entire sequence, from spotting, through chase, attack and boarding, will sail through without a load cutscene in sight. Happier dodging trade ships for fear of engaging military vessels? Go harpooning instead as you hunt down whales.

Entry into this life of adventure is again through the modern day and the well

It's the errant exploration that made *Far Cry* and *Wind Waker* so enjoyable



known Animus system. However as per Assassin's Creed III's ending, Desmond's story is over. Due to the circumstances that happened then, the eyes into the past are now our own - we are now privy to and able to take part in, the process.

This suggests a few things: either accessing past lives is now being treated as much entertainment as a concert or vacation is...or it's inferred that we're a new pawn in the same game - as corporations try and filter through the past's secrets for today's gain.

There's a lot of potential here, but equally as many questions. From gameplay we see, Edward's body language, movement, dual-blades and attack patterns suggest our control methods won't be far from the overhauled system in ACIII. Is there enough of the new to resuscitate gamers jaded by franchise burnout? The studio talks of this extracting the best of the franchise's previous games - but does that mean this is more of a Best Of than fresh start?

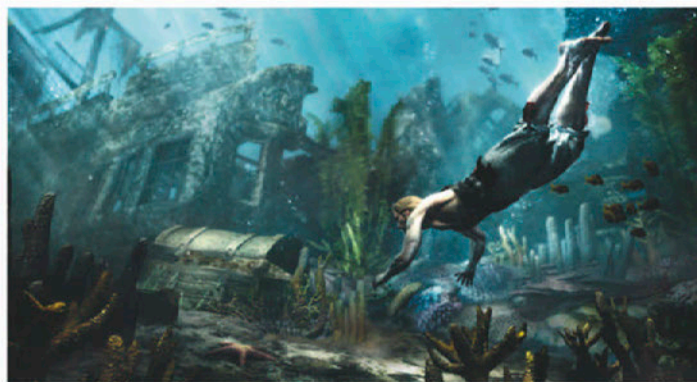
We sold on ACIII, but sailing was one its strongest parts. Experiencing the life of a buccaneer...even without the rum? We'll toast to hope and good fortune to come.

Gillen McAllister



WHALING

Sure to upset Greenpeace is the option to go hunting the sea's biggest beasts, with whaling one of the many obvious opportunities that a life at sea offers. Imagine ACIII's hunting scaled to the size of an entire ocean.

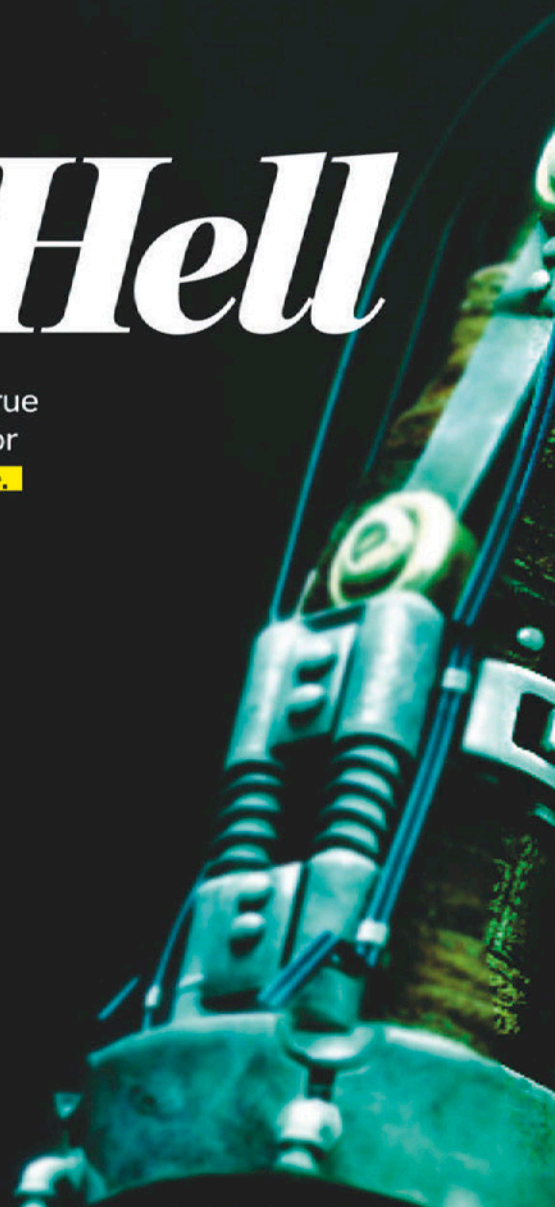


MULTIPLAYER

It's back, though only a few pieces of artwork, showing new character models and towns have been shown so far. Surely a life of piracy offers clashes amid the waves, or some cooperative plundering of fleets?

Between Heaven & Hell

The original **BioShock changed the action genre.** With the game's true sequel, BioShock Infinite, about to take us to the skies, Gamereactor travelled to Boston to talk to **the man behind the vision: Ken Levine.**





BioShock Infinite lands on store shelves in a few weeks. It's been a long time in coming: the development has felt like an eternity. In the countdown to the release of one of this year's biggest games, I travelled to Boston and spent a few days with Ken Levine to try and find the secret behind Irrational Games' unique perspective on the action genre.

It's a snowy and cold Boston that greets me as I step off the plane following a nine hour flight. Downtown is deserted and the cab driver informs me of the snowstorm that crippled the city three days earlier. It's a city with a storied past, one that is even more palpable as the roads remain quiet and with snow piling up along the streets. I'm in town to visit Irrational Games, the studio responsible for the best action game of 2007 – BioShock, and now they're finally ready to invite us to the evolution of the series – BioShock Infinite.

My journey through Irrational's broken-down utopia of Rapture was a memorable one. A captivating, intelligent story with intricate narrative themes that told a tale of the perils of capitalism, science and an elitist society below the surface of the sea.

BioShock managed to convey the sort of atmosphere and tension you'd wish all action games could manage, and it still stands as one of the highlights of this generation. It was an experience full of subtle clues and nuances, silly in places, and a clever narrative that moved away from the all too familiar trappings of Hollywood influences. BioShock was one of very few games capable of capturing the imagination of both core gamers and sceptics new to the medium. Largely thanks to the

“A desire to return to the premise of System Shock 2 always remained”

Levine on how the concept of BioShock was born

homogeneous design kept through the game that made us think of Gotham City, the art deco movement, and some of the most exciting architecture the previous century had to offer. Players were given moral choices that had a major effect on what transpired towards the end of the adventure. Step by step, room by room, we explored a city-sized tomb whose tragic history made for one of the most emotionally loaded and dreadful places in gaming. The ending, including *that* twist and the final hours of the adventure was amongst the best this writer has experienced. BioShock transformed the action genre, and faced us with the haunting realisation that most action games still underestimate their audience and feed them clichés. Six years on and Irrational Games have spent every day working on and thinking of new ways to captivate and immerse their fans with the sequel and spiritual successor.

That takes us to Ken Levine, the enthusiastic head of Irrational Games and the creative director of BioShock and BioShock Infinite, who sits waiting for us in a conference room at Irrational's modest offices. He appears to have just woken up, wearing a hoodie with his hair standing in all directions. I'm stopping by the office on a Monday, apparently a national holiday (President's Day) and the entire team is at home with family and friends. Not Ken Levine. He's still in the office, along with the title's art director and lead writer. They're here to talk about BioShock Infinite, the concept and the vision for the game they've been working on for such a long time. After starting out by showing a brief trailer, some early concept images, they start talking about many interesting anecdotes from the past nine years working on BioShock games, touching on their vision and approach as well as their hopes and ambitions with Booker's trip to the skies.

BioShock Infinite begins in a rowboat. A couple of people dressed in yellow raincoats are discussing their decision to take former Pinkerton agent Booker DeWitt to a lighthouse in the middle of the night. Waves hit the sides of the boat, and rain limits the visibility ahead. Booker watches as the lighthouse emerges from the fog as the boat approaches the small island. A few minutes later and he is strapped into some sort of rocket ship, screaming at the top of his lungs as he is taken to a city in the clouds. The gold-adorned city floats thousands of feet above the lighthouse and Booker - and I - take it all in with a deep breath. Columbia is one of the most inviting and gaming worlds I've encountered. The complete opposite of the inhospitable Rapture. BioShock Infinite is set in 1912, and the sleek Victorian design of the era oozes from every inch of the beautifully crafted city. Walking along the promenade taking in the lush flower displays, and the skies surrounding the floating city gives you a liberating feeling - and Columbia comes across as the perfect utopian city. But it's not long until the pretty surface is soiled by what lies underneath as the seedier side

of the city rears its ugly face. A carnival crowd, full of men and women dressed in wonderful clothes, finally and cruelly illustrates how everything is not as it seems in the city. Racism, facism, and nationalism are three topics covered in BioShock Infinite. Religion and politics are also themes. The self-proclaimed prophet and saviour of Columbia, Zachary Hale Comstock, radiates a strong belief in industrialist ideals and religious fervor. Within an hour of starting the game you will realise Columbia is a city of unrest. Civil war is brewing. It's not the peaceful and beautiful utopian society it appears, but rather a floating Death Star capable and ready to take out targets on the ground below.

There is more to Columbia than what first meets the eye. Irrational make use of the same brand of storytelling found in the original BioShock, where exploration is the key to finding the answers to all the questions that arise during the first hour or so of the game. The war between the Founders and a group of rebels called Vox Populi grew in importance the further we got into the adventure, and exceptionalism appeared to take the place of objectivism. Booker decides to rescue Elizabeth, the girl whose name was scribbled in a mysterious letter he opened as he was sitting in the boat as he travelled to the lighthouse. It's the start of an exciting journey.

GAMEREACTOR How was the concept of BioShock born?

KEN LEVINE After System Shock 2 we chose to take a different route as a company. This is because the game was not very successful. We were working on Freedom Force, Tribes and then developed SWAT 3. More commercial titles that allowed us to grow and develop both on an individual level and as a studio. The desire to return to the basic premise of System Shock 2 - mixing RPG elements and action - always remained with us and there was an ambition to tell a more far-reaching story. I honestly do not remember exactly how the discussions started, but I remember that we decided early on that the game would take place in an elitist utopia on the bottom of the sea. Early on the art style was more modern and Rapture was a city based on realism. We talked a lot about how we could make a city on the ocean floor credible and at an early stage, someone in the team pointed out that it had to exist inside a large glass dome so the pressure of the water could be evenly distributed over a large surface. It was not until a few months into the process that we moved away from the realism as part of the design and began to look at different eras and themes.

GAMEREACTOR How did you proceed with the concept?

KEN LEVINE We began to build Rapture and during the process it became an increasingly ambitious game world, as we all were curious to explore and learn more about it. We started to show an early BioShock concept for various publishers but interest was weak, at best. There were publishers who liked the idea but no one wanted to spend hundreds of millions on BioShock and I don't think I would be exaggerating if I said that we were looking for financing and a publisher for two years. When 2K Games finally got to see our early demo, they did not just focus on the idea of working with Irrational Games; they also put a bid on the studio that we simply could not refuse.

GAMEREACTOR It helped change the climate in the action genre and is regarded as one of the best games of the generation. How do you look at it in hindsight?

KEN LEVINE That a game so different thematically and story-wise is such an ambitious action game would sell five million copies was not something any of us had anticipated. At the same time I look to myself as a gamer and a fan to see I simply craved an action game that not only challenged me as far as mechanics go but also mentally. Many of today's games makes the assumption that players are stupid and need constant pointers and straight forward tools, something we at Irrational don't agree with, quite the contrary. BioShock proved that millions of gamers were dying to get their hands on something more. And I really hope that BioShock Infinite will surprise gamers in a similar manner to the first game.

GAMEREACTOR We recently covered a number of defections from the studio, and the delay of BioShock Infinite - which led to many of our readers expressing worry at the potential turbulence within Irrational. How do you see the situation?

KEN LEVINE You know as well as I do that there must always be different types of personalities within a company for it to work. There will always be those who simply do not want to stay that extra hour each day to hone in on that special texture, sequence or audio file. And it's not something that only affects Irrational that people find new jobs wanting to try their luck elsewhere. As for the delay, we tried to be honest and clear with the fans and explain exactly why we chose to delay the game by four weeks. We simply wanted to polish our product a little bit more before we felt completely finished with BioShock Infinite. And after working for six long years on the

**STRONG CONTRASTS**

In *BioShock* (bottom), the player was an observer on a visit to a game world consisting of death, destruction, and whole horde of crazed residents. In *BioShock Infinite* (top), you visit instead a bright, open and colourful world packed with life and activity. You're also involved in the game's story in a completely different way, creating strong contrasts between the games.

project it really felt essential to add another month to really polish it.

GAMEREACTOR Are you satisfied with the final result?

KEN LEVINE It doesn't matter what I think. That much I have learned in all these years. I can sit here and talk about how happy and proud I am of this section, and that part, but in the end it's just fans' opinions that matter. The same applies to the delay and defections that we just spoke about. I was initially going to go out via Twitter to inform fans of what was happening within the company, but changed my mind at the last second because it really does not matter what I say on Twitter. What matters is how good the game is when it is released and how well it is received by all those who have been waiting for Bioshock Infinite for years.

GAMEREACTOR What was the toughest challenge you took on?

KEN LEVINE When we developed System Shock 2 and BioShock, I was terrified to let the player interact too much with NPCs. That's why we chose to tell most of the story through audio files player found around the game world. In BioShock characters were locked in and you interacted with them and talked to them behind glass walls which made it much easier for us not to break the illusion.

GAMEREACTOR The illusion that you are 200 metres under water?

KEN LEVINE Yes, and the illusion of exploring a city that has been destroyed and of fighting for your survival. Keeping the player invested in the story and not allowing small mistakes to ruin that connection is difficult - few games manage to pull this off, in my opinion. When we developed BioShock we spent months just making sure things did not repeat too much or that the exact same thing happened twice. If an AI controlled character you ran into repeated the exact same thing, it would break the illusion that it is actually a person you are talking to and that's when you stop caring. That's when you stop being emotionally involved with the characters and the story we're trying to tell.

GAMEREACTOR With BioShock Irrational Games were labelled a "smart developer". Is this something you agree with?

KEN LEVINE I've had this question before and do not really know what to say about it. It's flattering but nothing we aspire to. We want to develop personal, powerful gaming experiences that challenge the player on several levels. We know that gamers are smart, we know that many games look down on their audience and we really don't want to do this. Irrational Games is genuinely interested in the characters, relationships and the narratives we are trying to convey. If that is what makes people look at us the way they do, according to you, then we're obviously doing something right.

GAMEREACTOR Would you respond in the same way as millions of gamers look upon your role as creative director? As one of the gaming industry's most interesting visionaries?

KEN LEVINE There are two versions of Ken Levine. That one guy who talks passionately about his game projects, who responds to fans questions and thoughts on Twitter and actually tries to be honest and transparent to both players and the press. Then there's that Ken still not taken enough time off to go on honeymoon with his wife even though several years has passed since they tied the knot. He is working

"She originally was silent and had no impact on how Booker saw Columbia"

Levine on how much the character of Elizabeth changed during the course of development

around the clock, ignoring migraines, coming home late at night and is in a bad mood and is so tired he can barely stand up in front of you. They are two different people and I just know that I want to do my best as a creative director, then I'll take a vacation and go away with my very patient wife.

GAMEREACTOR BioShock was released in 2007 and was a huge success. Irrational Games were not involved with the direct sequel, but instead began work on BioShock Infinite. Why was this?

KEN LEVINE We all felt that we wanted to move on. Revisiting Rapture did not feel fresh, we know that we would never be able to captivate players the same way returning to the same game world where they had already spent fifteen hours, and therefore we opted for another direction with Infinite.

GAMEREACTOR How did it feel to let go of Rapture to a newly established studio?

KEN LEVINE It felt like the right choice and a safe one. I had a certain overview of the development and knew from the start that 2K Marin comprised of talented people who would do something great with BioShock. It's all about give and take in a case like this. 2K Games gave us the opportunity to develop the game that no one else wanted to invest in, and it had been crazy for me to object to BioShock 2 and tell our shareholders that they would simply have to wait six years for the next game in the series. In the end, BioShock 2, a really great game, improved a lot of things from its predecessor and offered several interesting innovations.

GAMEREACTOR When did you decide on replacing a city on the bottom of the ocean with a city in the skies?

KEN LEVINE The idea was born after BioShock shipped in 2007. The first decisions on Infinite that was taken was that the game would take place in a floating city, and that the story would play out during the early 1900's. The following six years have been a desire to challenge ourselves and make a game that builds on what we did in the first title. I was terrified before with the idea to open up the world, build a gaming city full of life, movement, dynamics, and allow the player to constantly interact with a computer-controlled sidekick. The idea scared the hell out of me, and throughout the first half of production Elizabeth was a silent character that had not a particularly big impact on how Booker looked at Columbia.

GAMEREACTOR She wasn't able to speak at all?

KEN LEVINE No, she was designed as a mute character. She made gestures and stayed in the background. As I mentioned, I was scared shitless of the whole idea, as AI controlled characters is one of the most challenging things you can do. We realised early on, however, it did not work as intended and we had to start to look at making Elizabeth a much larger part of BioShock Infinite. That's when we had to start the hunt for an actress who could breathe much needed life into the character.

GAMEREACTOR AI controlled characters are often criticised by players, who deem them stupid or silly. And escort missions are often excruciatingly painful. If you're scared shitless of this, why did you tread into these foreign and treacherous waters?

KEN LEVINE We wanted to tell a more personal, emotional and powerful story than in the first game. Games that have managed to give real life to artificial intelligence are wonderful and stay with you forever. Failure to build that emotional bond between the player and the characters in the game makes it impossible to get players invested in what you're trying to say - the gaming medium is still at an infant stage as far as effectively telling a story goes. In recent years, we've even taken a step back to focus more on basic mechanics rather than storytelling.

GAMEREACTOR Story and storytelling is a hot potato again, thank goodness. Last year's surprise hit, The Walking Dead, was a good example of this.

KEN LEVINE Definitely. The Walking Dead did an amazing job of creating believable, human relationships between the characters and grabbed a hold of us and did not let go until the fifth episode ended. Basically it's a simply-structured game with simplified gameplay and cinematic approach. But in the end, it was wonderfully put together.

GAMEREACTOR You talked about the fact that AI controlled characters in games rarely work out, but surely Alyx Vance in Half-Life 2 is an exception to that rule?

KEN LEVINE She is of course one of the few exceptions and in my opinion the very best example of when artificial intelligence serves a purpose. Ninja Theory did a good job with the girl in Enslaved too, but for us Alyx has been some sort of yardstick we're measured against.

GAMEREACTOR Noted. On a personal note my relationship with Alyx, as bizarre as it seems, is... wonderful. I think of her quite often. I long for her and hope to see her again. Although she's just... a bunch of polygons. She is nothing and yet so much - for me.

KEN LEVINE Exactly. This is what I hope we accomplished with Elizabeth. We have worked incredibly hard to try and build an artificial intelligence that you as a player will build a real relationship with. BioShock Infinite is all about Elizabeth. Everything is about her, and it has been a very challenging to create her. A big part of the problem



ELIZABETH

The protagonist of Infinite isn't Booker, the agent sent into Columbia that the player takes control of, but the imprisoned girl Elizabeth, who at the beginning of the adventure is locked in a huge golden tower and guarded by a giant mechanical bird. Booker is asked to rescue the girl, a job he misjudges as he doesn't expect the amount of problems he quickly encounters.

is that while creating an advanced AI model that allows for thousands of different human reactions and interactions, it was also about finding the right actress - which we happily did. Courtnee Draper has been brilliant in this process that in many ways must have been mentally exhausting and at times really frustrating.

GAMEREACTOR How do you mean?

KEN LEVINE Usually when you record voices for a game you fly a voice actor in for a few days, hand them a script and put them in a recording booth. We chose to work differently in order to capture all those feelings and create that human dimension that I talked about earlier. Courtnee worked a total of over 30 full days recording the voice of Elizabeth and we asked her to visit places in her head and that must have been exhausting. Some of the best and most memorable moments of this development have been my sessions in our sound studio with Courtnee and Troy Baker.

GAMEREACTOR I played the first three levels and was disappointed that you can activate a compass to see exactly where you need to go. Was this a requirement passed down from the publisher as a means to allow for a wider audience?

KEN LEVINE Not a requirement. A conscious choice on our part and a request from a lot of players that were annoyed with the lack of guidance in BioShock. It's not about a compass or some kind of flashing default arrow in the corner of the screen. The pathfinder in Infinite is not activated until the player consciously makes the decision to activate it. The reason why we chose to include it was all the feedback we got after the first game, from people who got stuck back at the restaurant at the very beginning. Lots of players told us that they got stuck there and were looking feverishly for the way forward for as long as 90 minutes before they finally made it out. Obviously that was a failure on our part.

GAMEREACTOR Anticipating what players will do has got to be one of the most challenging aspects of game development...

KEN LEVINE That is correct. The biggest problem is that many gamers behave quite differently in a game than they would ever would in real life. There are of course those who carefully take in everything in a new game world before they start exploring, but at least as many kicks the first character they meet in the face and shoot wildly at anything that moves even before the actual game is meant to begin. This is something that will never change as the entire entertainment form is about to testing limits. In order to predict how players will react to different things in the game world, we must test portions of the game on a variety of different people before moving on to the next chapter. When we showed a demo at a game show a couple of years ago, the reactions to Elizabeth was not at all what we had hoped for. A lot of people hated her, which caused a great deal of panic. I personally didn't understand from where these feelings came, and therefore we launched a small investigation to try and understand the reasons. The sequence began with an event where Booker almost drowned, and he washed up on a beach minutes later, running into a dancing, laughing Elizabeth. We realised only after all the reactions that players hated Liz as she laughed and was glad when the player just seconds prior almost perished. Thus we reshaped the introductory sequence to this section so that Elizabeth is now helping Booker out of the water and saves him from drowning. Everything in this game is ultimately about the relationship between Booker and Elizabeth and we've obviously learned a lot through this process.

GAMEREACTOR Rapture was a dark, evil and scary place full of death. Columbia seems happier, more colourful, bright and vivid. Is it heaven and hell you've chosen to portray?

KEN LEVINE I'd rather not go into that. I do not want to ruin the experience for you or for your readers. As you noticed during your playtest Columbia is full of mystery, much like Rapture. Exploration is important in BioShock and of course we want the player to peel away one layer at a time to ultimately discover what lies buried beneath the surface. But yes, BioShock Infinite is in many ways the opposite of the first game. In BioShock the player was a nameless observer, lost and trapped in a large cemetery where all normal life has ceased to exist, and where hope was already long lost. In Infinite, the player is very much involved in what is happening, one no longer observes from the outside, but you're rather an active part of everything that happens. We have switched out the dark cemetery at the bottom of the sea with an idyllic, bright and beautiful world high above the clouds where the sun always shines. They are opposites and at the same time there are similarities and commonalities. If you look at Andrew Ryan and Comstock, they are on the surface radically different. One of a fascist atheist, a capitalist and objectivist. The other a religious nationalist with racist messages. At the same time, they are very similar. Both are driven by their own convictions. Both believe they have all the answers and that they're always right.

GAMEREACTOR What is the message you are trying to convey with the game?

“Players will have different perceptions of what Infinite is”

Levine talks the message behind Infinite

KEN LEVINE You'll see when you play it. I want to be careful here so that I do not reveal too much. I would also point out that we hope and believe that different players will have different perceptions of what Infinite is, and what is said from a thematic perspective throughout the game. At the end of the day I want my narrative to be subtle. Once again we're back to the tired notion of looking down on gamers claiming they're immature and lack intelligence. That's a mistake we'll never make. In BioShock, we used Little Sisters and Big Daddies as objective pillars inside of a failed capitalist dream. The violence was considered a little too much by some, especially as far as cold-blooded murder of children goes, but for us it was merely a narrative tool to convey a greater idea. With Infinite we have once again chosen to work with a variety of themes that will affect players in different ways. The press have described the game as dealing with everything from religion to nationalism, exceptionalism, racism and politics, but beneath the surface there lies a great idea and I'm looking forward to reading how this is received. Columbia is only beautiful on the surface, and by now you will have understood that it's basically as much about racism as The Dark Knight is a film about superheroes. It's more framing than the actual core of the game, and I can promise you that you'll never see a game world like the one we've just finished.

GAMEREACTOR What are you most proud of in the game?

KEN LEVINE I think we succeeded with several things. The level of ambition is incredibly high and Elizabeth feels like a natural extension of the few, well, former AI helpers that existed in the game world. In Infinite we once again tackle themes that usually don't exist in games and I hope we will make the players think about, care for and feel with our characters. Elizabeth is alive, she is driven by dreams, desires and motivation, and we have put incredible amounts of money and time to make her as real as possible. There is far too much tired narrative and too many pointless stories in today's video games and I look forward to a time when we as game creators no longer look towards Hollywood to try to copy what they do and instead become innovative and aware of all the benefits and opportunities available to us in games.

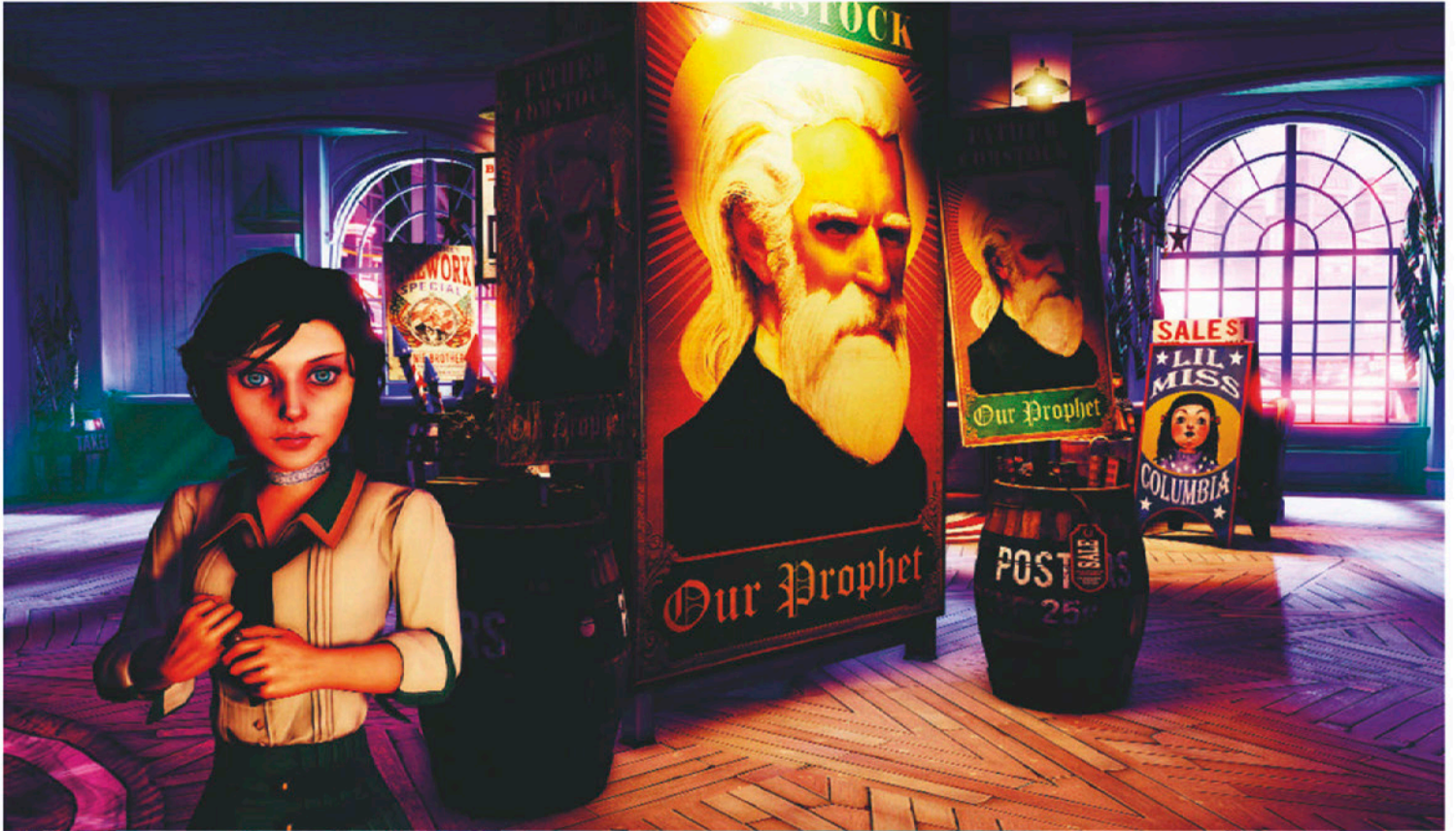
Petter Hegevall

THE REVIEW: Given the sheer size of BioShock Infinite, we wanted to make sure we've seen everything the game has to offer before giving you our verdict. Head to www.gamereactor.co.uk on March 25 for the definitive review of one of this year's biggest games.



BAPTISM

To visit Columbia requires that you allow yourself to be baptised in the river of sins. Rebirth, cleansing and a second chance are consistent themes of BioShock Infinite.



THE DEATH STAR

Columbia looks like a peaceful and pleasant place to start with, but the player only has to scratch the surface in order to understand what actually happens far above the clouds, and what this floating city actually is. It's a flying weapon of mass destruction that sails across the world destroying cities below.

**POLICE HANDS-ON**

The Wii U's innovative controller is put to good use, with it being used to scan surroundings, identify suspects and chat with your donut-eating colleagues back at Police HQ.

Lego City Undercover

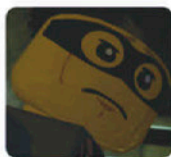
WII U TT GAMES

Genre ADVENTURE Publisher NINTENDO Release 28 MARCH

Chase McCain is a man of many talents. Lego City Undercover's central protagonist almost immediately showcases his ability to deliver cheesy one-liners. He starts as he means to go on; it's an unrelenting stream of puns, gags and sarcastic quips. Whilst some may fall flat on adult ears, there's plenty of smirk-enticing moments that more than make up for it. Undercover's target audience, the kids, will undoubtedly love it.

There's a Pixar feel to the story and script. It clicked for us during the scene where McCain learns Kung Fu by listening to headphones, before engaging a part-time plumber in a Matrix-inspired fight. Kids might not have a clue about the source material, but it's silly enough that they'll love it nonetheless, and grownups will appreciate the succession of nods to classic films and iconic characters.

There's no movie license to attract in additional fans, but Lego City is strong brand in its own right, and there'll be appeal here from those with the accompanying Lego sets. When considered in that respect, it doesn't feel like a risky proposition. While adults will find plenty to enjoy, Undercover's firmly aimed at a younger audience, and we've no doubt that the game will hit home in that demographic.

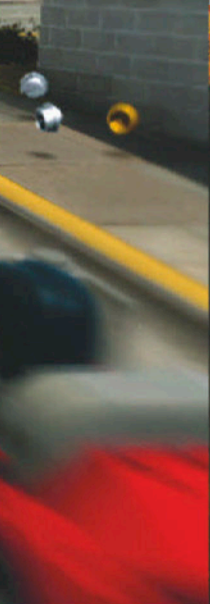
**STAR-STUDDED**

TT's resume includes several Lego games based on iconic franchises, the most prominent of which include Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Harry Potter, Pirates of the Caribbean, Lord of the Rings as well as offerings featuring characters from both DC and Marvel (although the latter is due out this year).

One of Undercover's selling points is the open-world environment that hosts the action. It's not huge, and familiarity soon starts to sink in as you explore the world around you, but there's still plenty going on to keep you occupied outside of the main storyline.

Once fully unlocked the map size might not increase, access to its challenges does, as throughout the game you unlock new costumes that grant you the abilities required to reach some challenges that are unavailable at first. There's eight different costumes all told, ranging from a burglar's outfit complete with crowbar and environment altering gun, to a farmer costume that allows plants to be watered so they grow up walls, and gives a projectile-firing chicken that doubles up as a glider.

Early Lego games were, at times, painfully linear and simplistic, and although the puzzles here aren't particularly taxing, switching between the various costumes is essential in order to make progress. It keeps the puzzles interesting, even if some of the solutions are quite clearly signposted.



LOOKING AT U
 The Wii U might be the latest console to hit the market, but visually speaking the difference between Undercover and previous Lego games on other formats is negligible at best.

Undercover draws plenty of inspiration from titles such as GTA, but there's other influences that can't be hidden. At times you'll be climbing and free-running like Ezio, or gliding down from lofty perches like Batman in Arkham. Some of the platforming was quite tricky too, and even if it frustrated at times we were grateful of the challenge it presented.

UNDERCOVER DRAWS PLENTY OF INSPIRATION FROM GTA, BUT THERE ARE OTHER OBVIOUS INFLUENCES

Unlike other open-world games, and as you'd expect from a Lego game, the violence is turned right down. Combat is all fisticuffs, with enemies removed from the fray via a pair of hastily administered handcuffs. Driving around and taking out pedestrians is another non-lethal pursuit, with blocky citizens leaping out of harms way whenever you stray too close to the curb. There's a nice mix of transport options, ranging from



TALKING BLOCKS

There's plenty of Lego games to choose from, but a major shift was the recent introduction of fully voiced characters. It makes a huge difference, allowing TT a chance to explore storytelling in a variety of interesting ways. Whilst grunts worked for Star Wars, where the story was already well known, it just wouldn't have worked for Undercover.

cars and bikes, to boats, horses and helicopters.

Moving Chase McCain around the San Francisco-inspired city is straightforward, and assistance comes from the Wii U GamePad. A map offers directions at a glance, and other characters regularly appear here to offer guidance and help during the various missions. The controller is used to scan, take pictures and record audio; it's well implemented and simple to use.

The game comes to life because of the characters, and the voice over work is very good. Some of the one-liners are genuinely hilarious, and they're delivered in a way that'll appeal to both youth and experience. The soundtrack is solid, taking further inspiration from the parodied films that inform the story.

It's commendable that the fun is maintained through the twelve plus hours of campaign. Beyond that there's a wealth of content that'll keep players coming back. Like other games of a similar ilk, there's a

plethora of challenges to be found dotted around the map. Perfect if you're looking to keep the kids entertained during the holidays.



Mike Holmes



LEGIONS OF DOOM

The enemies of the game are well varied, with each type having their own fighting style that you need to adapt your tactics to.

God of War: Ascension

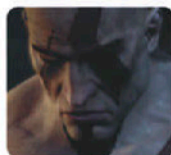
PS3 SONY SANTA MONICA

Genre ADVENTURE Publisher SONY Release 15 MARCH

I'm covered in blood and my enemies have fallen at my feet. Anger fills every cell in my body. Neither gods or titans can stop my revenge, and all who try, will suffer just as much as the demons that lie slaughtered on the ground in front of me. Such grand-standing is expected as Kratos' mythology-gutting celebration continues in God of War: Ascension, a predecessor to the original series and now with multiplayer included.

With its extremely beautiful environments, crisp animations and a relatively deep combat system Ascension continues the proud God of War tradition. Sony Santa Monica's experience with the angry god has us playing the most polished experience to date, even if the fierce cries of Kratos have by now got somewhat tiring.

Ascension's prequel status means a time travel backwards as we see how Kratos earns his classic angry expression. The game director Todd Papy has stated that Ascension will show the more human side of the otherwise in-human Kratos, and let the player understand what he was emotionally going through come the original trilogy. It's a deeper characterisation that is very nearly realised during the course of the game's campaign.

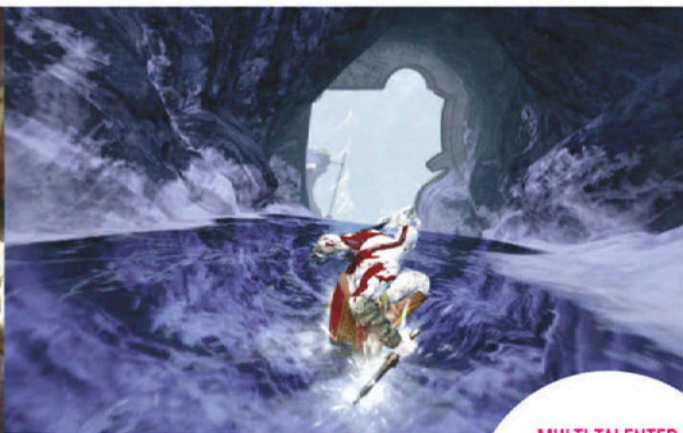


THE RISE OF WAR

God of War is one of Sony's premier franchises, with the wrathful Kratos first showing up on the PS2 back in 2005. The trilogy was concluded with the PS3 God of War 3 back in 2010, and Kratos has also starred as part of the iconic cast in PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale.

Kratos must break his ties with Ares, the god of war in Greek mythology, and he can only do that by defeating the three Furies. It's another bloody revenge tale, but the deeper emotional focus allows the story to breathe; it's a great victory for the series, as, other than the broad strokes, the story has never been a priority before. Kratos has had a bad reputation in the video games world as an extremely one-sided character and therefore this is a step in the right direction, finally adding some depth and something meaningful to the frantic action.

In his relentless pursuit of the three Furies, Kratos travels to different parts of Greek mythology including the oracle of Delphi, and like before adds a grandeur to the classic stories with a God of War flavour. The game's story is still nothing particularly striking, despite the more serious approach to the series protagonist, and the insane action undermines the serious tones as the game trying to hit it. It is commendable that the developer has tried to create a more humane image of Kratos, but the truth is that he is not strong enough of a



MULTI-TALENTED

It'll be no surprise to players of the previous games, but Kratos splits his time between slaughtering foes, puzzle solving and platforming. Versatile fella.

character that you want to expend too much energy in exploring his dark past.

The God of War series has, since its birth in 2005, been one of the most visually impressive game series on the market, with expansive, extremely detailed environments and foes, and every frame of each entry into the franchise has



GODS OF WAR

The multiplayer element of Ascension is built around the flavouring of the usual competitive matches with myth-based upgrades. Up to eight players can fight solo or in teams to claim dominance on a series of different locations drawn from the series.

both in relation to colours, as well as environmental and character design. The gigantic environments also return in a big way, and you get to both to explore enormous mountain ranges and fight epic battles on top of huge statues and at the bottom of the sea.

The game's shouldered a multiplayer mode into proceedings; there's an opportunity to personalise your own warrior and there's a whole separate challenge in throwing your fighting spirit into online battles. It's something we'll be investigating further in the weeks to come post-launch, so check on the website for a follow up article on God of War's entry into the multiplayer royale.

God of War: Ascension has a lot to prove. With the PS4 due later this year, it feels that this is the console's visual swan song, and the question obviously arises whether this prequel is the right way to mark Kratos departure from this generation. Fortunately with a mix of magnificent boss battles, a tight combat system, wonderful visual style and great audio it continues in the tradition of the series rather than spoiling the legend. It's a twelve hour epic that once more roars quality.



Magnus Groth-Andersen

IT'S COMMENDABLE THAT THE DEVELOPER TRIED TO CREATE A MORE HUMANE IMAGE OF KRATOS

screamed quality. How does Ascension match what's come before? Quite brilliantly actually, for God of War: Ascension is one of the most visually stunning games I've ever played.

The series' third chapter is often seen as one of this console generation's most beautiful titles, but Ascension is able not only to provide a technically superior outing, but also deliver an expressive and more saturated experience,



NUTTY PROFESSOR

Returning with Luigi on the ghost trail is Professor E. Gadd, who as before trains and guides the player on their adventure. Nicely, his communication device is a Nintendo DS.

Luigi's Mansion 2

3DS NEXT LEVEL GAMES

Genre ADVENTURE Publisher NINTENDO Release 28 MARCH

The name's the same, but the experience is much different. Luigi's Mansion's debut as a Gamecube launch title had a lot of interesting ideas, but it's taken just over a decade for Nintendo to approach the concept - puzzle adventure as Mario Bro. turns ghostbuster - again. Luckily what was once a left-field choice for one format's launch title becomes one of another console's best adventures.

Even more amazingly the game's not even created by Nintendo. Next Level Games, partly responsible for the Mario Striker series and who have worked closely with the company for many years, claim development duties here, yet the game feels every inch a game built in the bowels of the Japanese giant's development studios.

The basic concept is the same; you explore haunted locales with flashlight in hand to spot ghouls, and use vacuum cleaner-turned-ghost busting kit to grab them. You solve puzzles, collect money. Luigi, despite having the experience now of battling spooks, is still as nervous and anxious as first time round. The big difference is the sequel's much bigger than the original. That took under six hours. Here? You can happily hit fifteen hours chasing ghosts.

That's fifteen hours of incredibly varied content. The game's split



DARK MOON

A new Nintendo console's release historically came with a new Super Mario Bros., so the original Luigi's Mansion was perhaps unfairly slated even before its release in 2002 as part of Gamecube's launch line-up. It was fairly decent though the play length of around six hours - a lot lower when you knew what you were doing - didn't help matters.

between five mansions, exploration of which is subdivided into multiple missions, and new areas opening up with the right key or equipment at hand. Tackling ghosts is easier this time round; there's seven basic spirits versus the multitude of the original, but there's much more variation to the gameplay as well as a really interesting set of bosses, all of which makes for an entirely different approach to the game than before. Something that benefits those fifteen hours; the experience doesn't feel drawn out.

Luigi's also an entertaining companion to be with during the course of the game. He's scared sure, but the fact that he's still heading in to take out ghosts is endearing. That the fella is clumsy and obviously quivering with fear makes for amusing, yet appealing, viewing.

Luigi's adventure is actually one of the finest and most entertaining titles for the Nintendo 3DS. The game does everything right. The mix of humour and ghost hunting will appeal to a wide audience, the 3D effects are good enough to warrant you pushing that slider all the way to maximum,



GHOSTBUSTERS

Luigi's Mansion 2 comes built with a four-player multiplayer mode as your team ascends a ScareScraper mansion, cleaning out each floor of ghosts in turn.



battery life be damned, and the soundtrack sings - you'll be whistling the main theme long after the game's finished. The difficulty increases as an even pace, and no puzzle is so brain-meltingly tough that it can't be resolved. Dedicated players will find there's plenty of secrets to explore for...and this is all without mentioning the multiplayer.

LUIGI'S ADVENTURE IS ONE OF THE FINEST AND MOST ENTERTAINING TITLES FOR THE CONSOLE

Built for up to four players, with three modes and difficulty settings, and available either as local or online, it's a surprisingly fun diversion. You have to explore rooms and capture ghosts as a team, clearing areas before the timer runs out, with collectable upgrades either benefitting the group or just the single player. Speed mode has you rushing to find a switch, while Dog mode has you using your torch to



FRIENDLY SPOOK

Yes, we meet ghosts, there are dark locations and thunderstorms. Some of the ghosts even look pretty aggressive. But it's all wrapped in a cartoon-like sheen, and the only one getting frightened is Luigi. Nintendo exorcises any spookiness by injected a not inconsiderable amount of humour.

follow the tracks of ghosts hidden around the level.

If you've got the choice, it'd be best playing the game on the XL version of the handheld. The heavy use of the stick during ghost hunting, as you have to wrangle a spook into your containment unit, leads to some intense sessions, as well as sore thumb come their end. And those sessions length is the only real criticism of the game. Some missions clock in at around forty-five minutes long - too long for a handheld title. It'd be less of an issue if you could save during a mission. But you can't, and quitting early will see you lose all your progress. Obviously you can close the unit lid to set it to sleep mode, but it doesn't quite cut it. It's something to think about if you're prone to carrying the console with you on trips rather than staying at home to play.

And it's a minor criticism. Honestly, before I started playing I'd already formed the opinion that this was going to be solid title, nothing more. That was a mistake. This is one of the finest titles for the system. Hopefully it doesn't take Nintendo another ten years to make a sequel.

9

Martin Eiser



GAME SWITCH

The connectivity between the two versions goes beyond the name: you'll be able to share game saves between Wii U and 3DS so you can carry on either at home or on the move.

Monster Hunter 3 Ultimate

3DS WII U CAPCOM

Genre ACTION Publisher CAPCOM Release 22 MARCH

Monster Hunter's opening sets the template for the rest of the game.

A local fishing village is under attack by a monster. Getting the go-ahead from your Hunter Guild, you take down the beast, reap the XP, and head off into the wild for your next takedown. That's the cycle. Rinse, repeat.

It's a game built more for teams of adventurers than the lone wolf, as not only does the rock, scissors, paper dynamic between monster and hunter weapon types enforce the need for variety to quicken downing foes, but it also forestalls the grind in tackling the boss fights that are the highlight of the game. It's not uncommon to be hacking at the shins of some vast behemoth for over twenty minutes on your lonesome. Time to invest in some friendly comrades-in-arms, and the game supports online and local multiplayer for both the Wii U and 3DS versions (though you'll obviously need a few 3DS units to get a local party going).

IT'S NOT UNCOMMON TO BE HACKING AT THE SHINS OF SOME VAST BEHEMOTH FOR TWENTY MINUTES

Exploration reveals just how big the game's locations are; each area is divided into sub-sections, and that some monsters wander freely amongst them means there's a dynamic feel to tracking down your chosen target. It isn't a beautiful world; that this is a HD conversion of a Wii title shows in the visuals, but there's a great degree of detail in the environments to at least translate a rich atmosphere to wherever you travel. The rendering of



HUNTERS UNITED

The Monster Hunter series debuted on the PS2 in 2005 and the franchise soon saw multiple expansions as well as handheld versions expand the series. It shifted from PS to Wii with the third game, *Monster Hunter Tri* in 2010. *Ultimate* is an updated take on that title. But while we're just getting *Ultimate*, the fourth game is already due this summer on 3DS, though currently it's for Japan only.

ice caves, deserts, mountain passes is done well enough to make you want to keep exploring, to see what's round the next corner or section.

Sadly the game also feels dated in its mission structure. Only being able to have one mission active at a time is an oversight when stacking quests is considered the norm for adventures and RPGs. It doesn't help that the quests are fairly similar, so you find you're trekking through the same areas multiple times to perform roughly the same task.

At least there are numerous mini-quests to chip away at the grind. Fishing, business sim, crafting...the last is a particularly important and deep part of the game, and scavaging the lands for components to craft new items becomes a major diversion.

If you want a break from adventuring and focus on fighting, there's an additional Arena mode letting you pick a pre-made character to square off against foes one on one. It's a good spot to perfect dodging and parry techniques that are essential for long-term survival on the battlefields.

There's a few other niggles as well. The camera can be temperamental and the menu system can be a confusing affair at times. It's an outdated game. But...but it's got an undeniable charm that for some is enough to transcend these issues. Charm that'll be enough for some to stick with it.

Stefan Briesenick



ROTOLLA

iOS PRIOR STUDIOS

Genre PUZZLE Publisher PRIOR STUDIOS Release 16 FEB

The influences are easy to see. Rotolla is what'd result if Tetris and puzzler Super Hexagon had a love child.

The key components from both games have been grafted into the DNA of Rotolla. The falling blocks of Tetris. The eye-melting hexagonal madness of Super Hexagon. Fused together they make for a very playable game, even if it not on the same level as the games that inspired and informed its design.

Simply put, different coloured blocks fall from the central point of a hexagon, dropping down and resting on the periphery of the shape. Each side has

THERE'S ENOUGH HERE TO ENJOY, BUT PERHAPS NOT QUITE ENOUGH TO LOVE

two slots waiting to be filled. As more blocks fall the shape fills in, until eventually progress is blocked and the game is over. Blocks remove themselves from the equation when lined up horizontally or vertically with a block of the same colour. A tap on either the left or right of the screen spins the descending blocks, whilst pressing the screen underneath accelerates the speed of descent.

It's a simple formula, and at first, when the pace is slow, it feels entirely unremarkable, but once a suitable rhythm has been found, and the pace has been upped, it make for a moreish and playable experience. There's an undeniable challenge, a flying-by-the-seat-of-your-pants feel to the action. Disaster is never far away.

There's a thumping soundtrack, created by ex-Silent Hill composer Akira Yamaoka. For the most part it's catchy stuff and worth sticking on the headphones for the first few rounds. Rotolla is fun, but it's not a modern classic. It's not as fun as those games that it's influenced by. It certainly would've benefited from a couple of different modes and customisation

options: there's enough here to enjoy, but perhaps not quite enough to love.

7

Mike Holmes



CONNECTIONS

Integration with Origin means the game requires a network connection to play. However, you can buddy up with friends to build cities and share resources together.

Sim City

MAC PC MAXIS

Genre STRATEGY Publisher EA Release 07 MARCH

Sim City is huge. The game is of a scale and level of detail that is almost overwhelming at times. The amount of data and info about your town and its inhabitants is breathtaking. There is a bazillion things to take into consideration, and more possibilities than most players will ever get around to trying out in their time with the game. A region may consist of up to sixteen cities, and you can be the mayor for all of them. It's enough to make your head spin.

All the same it remains accessible. You are only ever presented with a small sample of the vast sea of data, and the data is presented on a strictly need to know basis. And even though the possibilities are almost endless, it is easy and elegant to carry them out. Click, click, click. Build, build, build. The game is simple and intuitive, and you always have an overview of what is needed in your chosen city.

Roads are the glue that holds everything together. They're not just traffic arteries, but also work as power lines, water pipes, sewers and almost every other form of infrastructure - you do not assign land to

EVEN THOUGH POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS, THEY'RE EASY AND ELEGANT TO CARRY OUT

residential, commercial or industrial zones, but instead you assign the sides of the roads. Buildings must be placed by a road, as it's the road intensity (how many cars it can hold) that determines whether small family houses eventually develop into skyscrapers or not.

City size can appear small, filled out in an afternoon. It feels a little cramped when you first start experiencing these space issues. But you control up to sixteen cities depending on which region you have chosen, and that's the whole point. Varying natural resources and terrain makes the different city locations suitable for different specialties. One location is perhaps an obvious location for

extraction of raw materials and heavy industry, while another one is better suited to a focus on education or tourism. One city cannot satisfy every need.

The game encourages specialisation and coordination between your cities. Sims commute both for education and work, and excess capacity in everything from medical care to waste disposal can be sold to nearby towns.

And this is where the real challenge lies. The narrow framework means that if you want to reach the top, you need to have a clear plan from the beginning, and need to think about the very long term. Maybe it sounds more like a chore than fun, but the fact remains that (Sim City) is a joy to play.

The amount of detail is simply staggering. Property value and population density is displayed with elegant graphs directly in the game world. You can zoom in on each Sim and see what they're doing. And everything's presented in the humorous style that has been synonymous with Sim games

Sim City is an exceptionally well-designed and well presented pleasure where everything runs like clockwork. You will be immersed in the game right away, and everything is so intuitively put together that you're never in doubt about what to do and what your options are. It is an ambitious

game - but there's still a feeling of unfulfilled potential, even though the package is terrific.

8

Rasmus Lund-Hansen



UPGRADE ME!

Mirror of Fate may try new things but it does stick to the tradition of weapon and item upgrades - such as the grappling hook - that grant you access to new areas of the map.

Castlevania

3DS MERCURY STEAM

Genre ADVENTURE Publisher KONAMI Release 08 MARCH

Caring for a long-running franchise is not to be taken lightly. Especially given the tricky intertwining storylines of Castlevania. Spanish developer Mercury Steam are no doubt pleased to have been given what appears to be a carte blanche to use whoever they want from a rich cast of characters, regardless of what era these characters originally belonged to. In Castlevania: Lords of Shadow - Mirror of Fate, a bridge of

EVEN IF THE ENVIRONMENTS ARE VARIED I RARELY GET THE SENSE OF EXPLORATION

sorts between the first Castlevania: Lords of Shadow and the upcoming sequel, you're given the pleasure of playing as both Simon Belmont and Alucard. It's entirely possible some fans will take issue with how Mercury Steam treat the subject matter. I'm not opposed to all kinds of episodic storytelling, but I feel that Castlevania isn't best served by dividing the game into three acts. Even if the environments are as varied and beautifully drawn as ever, spanning catacombs, strange factories, tall towers, and underwater passages - I rarely get the sense of exploration - even alternative routes are fairly straight forward. But Mirror of Fate remains a good game as, at its core, there's

that distinct Castlevania feel. It's just not one of the highlights of the series. Finding new abilities to test out as you battle one of many and often difficult enemies is not something I'll ever grow tired of, and the linear approach is a positive for handheld gaming, as it can be enjoyed in shorter bursts.

In its 2.5D splendor, Mirror of Fate is visually pleasing by 3DS standards, even if the frame rate dips at times. The orchestrated score also compliments the game well, as it has more in common with this new visual style than with the music found in the older games in the franchise. It's dark and pressing, elegant at times, and rarely distracts you from the action on screen.

While the semi-linear structure doesn't allow the game to live up to its full potential, I do appreciate the attempt at innovation: I'd

rather see more daring attempts like this than be stuck with the predictability of the older titles.

7

Chrisofer Olsson



BIT. TRIP PRESENTS RUNNER 2

IOS XBOX 360 PC PS3 WII U GAJIN GAMES

Genre PLATFORM Pub AKSYS GAMES Rel 26 FEB

This is a platforming delight. Its beauty comes from an elegant simplicity, and a variable challenge that offers gamers of all abilities something substantial to get their teeth stuck into. There's a plot in there somewhere, and the game is narrated by Charles Martinet (the voice of Mario), but these factors play second fiddle to everything else the game has to offer.

Players sprint through each stage, all the time dodging a variety of obstacles

IT MAY LOOK TOO CUTESY FOR SOME, BUT DON'T BE FOOLED. IT'S ROCK HARD

that are attempting to halt forward progress. If anything breaks your stride it's back to the beginning, or the nearest checkpoint, and the pattern repeats once again. Sometimes several times over.

At first it's not that tough, but later stages get much more tricky. Before long you'll be jumping, ducking, blocking and leaping in quick succession. Speed boosts throw you forwards, and plentiful enemies create hazardous obstacle courses. The new 2.5D visuals are charming, and for the most part they really set the tone. They may be a bit too cutesy for some, but don't be fooled, they don't reflect the game's difficulty.

Fans of the original might bemoan the introduction of checkpoints, somewhat lessening the initial challenge, but the change makes the game more accessible, and those seeking a sterner test can still easily find it. In fact, we can't remember a game that has caused as much red-faced fury as Runner 2, though we blame ourselves rather than the game itself.

All of the various strands coming together - the fiendish challenge, the art style, the rhythmic music - makes for an intoxicating experience. Don't miss.

9

Mike Holmes



BACK TO BUSINESS

Puzzle-based tombs are hidden around the island, though entrances are easy enough to spot. Physics-based puzzles within are easy, but definitely enjoyable.

Tomb Raider

PC PS3 XBOX 360 CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

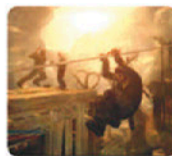
Genre ADVENTURE Publisher SQUARE-ENIX Release 05 MARCH

This reboot is a darker take on the archaeologist's origins. It's nowhere near the lightheartedness of Uncharted, but far from the sadistic torture feature headlines would have you believe. For all the talk of this being a realistic survival story, there's enough jarring leaps of logic that'll disrupt your enjoyment if you think about them too much. Best then to ignore, and instead think of this as an 18-rated version of Temple of Doom. A comparison that has further merit since Tomb Raider keys into classic Indiana Jones storytelling by keeping the line between myth and reality carefully undefined until the game's end.

The line drawn through your journey across the island, two massive hub-like areas aside, is fairly linear, but the game successfully masks the fact with environmental design that feels wholly natural. Each area may have a clear

THE ISLAND'S LAYOUT SEEMS THE WORK OF THE NATURAL WORLD, NOT CAREFUL STUDIO DESIGN

central path and only a few jutting side areas or routes, but these weave through caves, up cliffs and along pathways, all of which seem the work of the natural world rather than the careful build of a level designer. And there's still that Tomb Raider spirit of panning the camera round each new area to work out how to get to higher locations. There are multiple secret areas, though exploration's more an optional extra than an integral part of the adventure - yet embracing it



GROUP SURVIVAL

Tomb Raider joins the many franchises that have had multiplayer crowbarred in. The team-based matches, pitching survivors against scavengers aren't too bad, the small maps built with vertical play in mind and each area has a lot of personality, and there's XP skill upgrades to work towards. However the sometimes floaty feel to jumping in SP is all the more obvious here, and the cover system doesn't equate well when in group situations.

is important to getting the most out of the game. Collecting salvage is essential to affording weapon upgrades for your primary foursome of bow, pistol, shotgun and machine gun. Because Lara spends as much, if not more, time gripping a gun as she does a ledge. Tomb Raider has a heavy investment in gun battles and automated cover mechanics refine the flow of firefights brilliantly, though enemy AI is sometimes just plain daft.

Equally so is the aggressive showcasing of what a dire place this island is with repeated scenes of body-covered caves and blood-filled rivers. The gore factor is so heavy and high that you don't so much become desensitised to it - which is the likely aim - but instead end up ignoring it. The studio would have more pointedly put its message across by reducing these moments massively and thereby retained the potency of their impact.

There'll be disagreement with the direction Lara Croft has taken. Puzzles are low-key, gunplay is as much a component to the game's foundations as exploration and platforming. Yet the combat mechanics feel unique - quite the feat given the swamped genre Tomb Raider finds itself returning to - and they're always

engaging, and the island's a blast to explore. The change has been a controversial one, but it's also revealed as the right one.

Gillen McAllister

PLAYSTATION 3

Even with PS4 announced, there's plenty the PS3 has to offer: a huge collection of stone-cold classics along with Blu-ray playback. The system's paid-for PS Plus service offers digital games for free.

Price £229.99 Manufacturer Sony Release March 2007

1

UNCHARTED 2: AMONG THIEVES

Genre ACTION Developer NAUGHTY DOG Publisher SONY

Cinematic blockbuster that doesn't scrimp on gameplay.

2

GOD OF WAR 3

Genre ACTION Developer SONY SANTA MONICA Publisher SONY

Action epics don't come bigger or more brutal than this.

3

LITTLE BIG PLANET 2

Genre ADVENTURE Developer MEDIA MOLECULE Publisher SONY

Build your own game with the most extensive custom editor ever.

4

JOURNEY

Genre ADVENTURE Developer THATGAMECOMPANY Publisher SONY

Mesmerising PSN adventure with a co-op experience like no other.

5

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

Genre ACTION Developer ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS Publisher EIDOS

The sequel may be bigger, but the original's tighter in every respect.

6

BATTLEFIELD 3

Genre ACTION Developer DICE Publisher EA

EA's FPS with large-scale multiplayer conflicts does war right.

7

RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Genre ACTION Developer ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO Publisher ROCKSTAR GAMES

Rockstar's Western with a sandbox world you'll lose yourself in.

8

BIOSHOCK

Genre ACTION Developer IRRATIONAL GAMES Publisher 2K GAMES

A disturbing trip into the ocean depths in this story-driven FPS.

9

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

Genre ACTION Developer KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS Publisher KONAMI

It may be more movie than game, but Kojima's opus has to be played.

10

HEAVY RAIN

Genre ADVENTURE Developer QUANTIC DREAM Publisher SONY

Trend-setting psychological thriller. Ignore the plot holes and enjoy.



TRY OUT OKAMI HD

While there's a wealth of digital titles tailored specifically for PS3, this port of a PS2 title shouldn't be dismissed. On original release it was classed as a Zelda-beater, and the years since hasn't aged it at all. The HD take only helps highlight the uniqueness of the visuals.

PS VITA

The portable PlayStation's still trying to find its feet, but front and rear touch control, along with online functionality makes this a handheld with a difference.

Price £217.99 Manufacturer Sony Release February 2012

1

GRAVITY RUSH

Genre ACTION Developer SCE JAPAN STUDIO Publisher SONY

Gravity-defying adventure that's a true original.

2

LITTLE BIG PLANET PS VITA

Genre PLATFORM Developer TARSIER STUDIOS Publisher SONY

Portable version of the franchise that loses nothing in the move.

3

RAYMAN ORIGINS

Genre PLATFORM Developer UBISOFT Publisher UBISOFT

No multiplayer, but it's still an amazing single-player platformer.

4

UNCHARTED: GOLDEN ABYSS

Genre ACTION Developer SCE BEND Publisher SONY

Another great outing for Nathan Drake and a poster child for Vita.

5

WIPEOUT 2048

Genre RACING Developer STUDIO LIVERPOOL Publisher SONY

Celebrate Studio Liverpool's life with this amazing futuristic racer.

6

VIRTUA TENNIS 4

Genre SPORTS Developer SEGA M3 Publisher SEGA

Sega's court action works both as a quick fix and for longer play.

7

PLAYSTATION ALL-STARS BATTLE ROYALE

Genre FIGHTING Developer SUPERBOT ENTERTAINMENT Publisher SONY

Cross-platform play lets you duel on the street or on PS3.

8

SOUND SHAPES

Genre ACTION Developer QUEASY GAMES Publisher SONY

Headphones are a must for this music-propelled platformer.

9

SUPER STARDUST DELTA

Genre ACTION Developer HOUSEMARQUE Publisher SONY

Classic twin-stick shooter with plenty of modes to fire through.

10

TALES FROM SPACE: MUTANT BLOBS ATTACK

Genre PUZZLE Developer DRINKBOX STUDIOS Publisher DRINKBOX STUDIOS

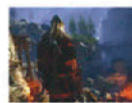
Side-scrolling adventure as you eat enemies to conquer the world.

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TRY OUT BLUR

Arguably the definitive arcade racer as Bizarre's fusion of pure racing skill and authentic car design - trademark of their Project Racing series - hammered into Mario Kart's arcade slick competitive multiplayer and overlaid with the neon glow of Geometry Wars. An overlooked classic.



TRY OUT THE WITCHER 2: ASSASSINS OF KINGS

With the third in the series just announced, it's the perfect time to acquaint yourself with this dark action-RPG. Gamers looking for a strong story and branching narrative need to indulge in one of the finest role-playing titles without "Elder Scrolls" in its name. A mature take on the fantasy genre that treats nothing with kid gloves.

XBOX 360

Microsoft's console offers App-style video streaming options alongside a comprehensive game catalogue, and Xbox Live Gold grants online multiplayer.

Price £179.99 Manufacturer Microsoft Release December 2005

PC / WINDOWS

The platform is the home of indie games, and thanks to the extended life-cycle of the current generation of consoles, if you're looking for next-gen visuals, PC's the way to go.

Price Various Manufacturer Various Release 1971

1

MASS EFFECT TRILOGY

Genre RPG Developer BIOWARE Publisher EA

The sci-fi epic that'll swallow your social life and make you shed tears.

2

RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Genre ACTION Developer ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO Publisher ROCKSTAR GAMES

Rockstar's Western offers the most engaging open world this gen.

3

HALO 4

Genre ACTION Developer 343 INDUSTRIES Publisher MICROSOFT

Great campaign, evolving co-op, involving competitive multiplayer.

4

GEARS OF WAR 3

Genre ACTION Developer EPIC GAMES Publisher MICROSOFT

The other big sci-fi franchise exclusive. Blockbuster entertainment.

5

FORZA MOTORSPORT 4

Genre RACING Developer TURN 10 Publisher MICROSOFT

It lacks Horizon's sandbox world, but this is a more focused racer.

NEW

6

TOMB RAIDER

Genre PLATFORM Developer CRYSTAL DYNAMICS Publisher SQUARE-ENIX

Not a Lara laughs in this tense remake, but it's a rival for Uncharted.

7

BORDERLANDS 2

Genre ACTION Developer GEARBOX SOFTWARE Publisher 2K GAMES

As good solo as it is four-player, this sixty-hour shooter opus is epic.

8

DMC: DEVIL MAY CRY

Genre ACTION Developer NINJA THEORY Publisher CAPCOM

Reboot done good, with expansive combat and bleeding cool.

9

THE ORANGE BOX

Genre ACTION Developer VALVE Publisher VALVE CORPORATION

Half-Life 2, Portal and more: the best value FPS bundle on console.

10

GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED 2

Genre ACTION Developer BIZARRE CREATIONS Publisher ACTIVISION

XBLA gem with Leaderboard support that makes other titles jealous.

1

THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

Genre RPG Developer BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS Publisher BETHESDA SOFTWORKS

Steam Workshop integration makes PC the best place to play Skyrim.

2

GUILD WARS 2

Genre MMORPG Developer ARENANET Publisher NCSoft

GW2 redefined the MMO genre in one fell swoop.

3

CIVILIZATION V

Genre STRATEGY Developer FIRAXIS GAMES Publisher 2K GAMES

Strategy games don't come much finer than this.

4

MINECRAFT

Genre MMO Developer MOJANG Publisher MOJANG

If you want to experience Mojang's modern classic properly.

5

TEAM FORTRESS 2

Genre ACTION Developer VALVE CORPORATION Publisher VALVE CORPORATION

Valve's shooter is silly, fun, and it's free-to-play.

6

TOTAL WAR: SHOGUN 2

Genre STRATEGY Developer THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY Publisher SEGA

Scope and scale makes Total War unmissable.

7

PLANETSIDE 2

Genre MMOFPS Developer SONY ONLINE Publisher SONY ONLINE

Hundreds of players fight on persistent maps.

8

XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN

Genre STRATEGY Developer FIRAXIS GAMES Publisher 2K GAMES

Save the planet from alien invasion. Outstanding reboot of a classic.

9

WORLD OF GOO

Genre PUZZLE Developer 2D BOY Publisher 2D BOY

The indie game that started a revolution.

10

DIABLO III

Genre RPG Developer BLIZZARD Publisher BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

Incessant clicking has never been so much fun.

**TRY OUT TANK! TANK! TANK!**

Namco Bandai's title rightly belongs in the garish colours of an arcade cabinet. Instantaneous thrills didn't translate into long-term depth, and this became one of the weaker launch titles. The publisher's since turned the game into a F2P title; so it won't cost you a penny to at least try out.

**TRY OUT THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY**

The excellent soundtracks of the current Final Fantasy titles dusted off and put together in an action-rhythm title? What's really surprising is that it has taken this long for Square-Enix to create such a game. Leaderboards and tougher difficulties make this as much about skill as enjoyment.

NINTENDO WII U

The newest console on the block offers unique control via its tablet-like GamePad, and a game launch line-up that mixes Nintendo's own with the best of third-party.

Price £259.99 Manufacturer Nintendo Release November 2012

NINTENDO 3DS

After a sporadic launch window, the handheld's settling down to a healthy start in 2013, with plenty of games due. Here's ten of the current best.

Price £139.99 Manufacturer Nintendo Release March 2011

- 1 **ZOMBI U**
Genre ACTION Developer UBISOFT MONTPELLIER Publisher UBISOFT
Undead FPS adventure that's only possible on Wii U.
- 2 **NEW SUPER MARIO BROS. U**
Genre PLATFORM Developer NINTENDO Publisher NINTENDO
The plumber goes high-def and brings multiplayer with him.
- NEW 3 **LEGO CITY UNDERCOVER**
Genre ADVENTURE Developer TT TALES Publisher NINTENDO
Lego does GTA, and tackles a wealth of movie parodies.
- 4 **TRINE 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT**
Genre PLATFORM Developer FROZENBYTE Publisher ATLUS
Beautiful side-scrolling puzzle adventure for non-Mario fans.
- 5 **SONIC & ALL-STARS RACING TRANSFORMED**
Genre RACING Developer SUMO DIGITAL Publisher SEGA
Much more than a Mario Kart clone, with plenty of challenges.
- 6 **BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY – ARMORED EDITION**
Genre ACTION Developer ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS Publisher WARNER
Engrossing title as the Dark Knight cleans up Gotham.
- 7 **TEKKEN TAG TOURNAMENT 2**
Genre FIGHTING Developer NAMCO BANDAI Publisher NAMCO BANDAI
Namco's popular fighting franchise gets some Ninty extras.
- 8 **DARKSIDERS II**
Genre ACTION Developer VIGIL GAMES Publisher THQ
Dark fantasy adventure with plenty of action and platforming.
- 9 **FIFA 13**
Genre SPORTS Developer EA CANADA Publisher EA
EA's massive sports title transfers onto Wii U.
- 10 **NINJA GAIDEN 3: RAZOR'S EDGE**
Genre ACTION Developer TEAM NINJA Publisher TECMO KOEI
Proving the Wii U can do bloody action as well as family fun.

- 1 **SUPER MARIO 3D LAND**
Genre PLATFORM Developer NINTENDO Publisher NINTENDO
Quality Mario title that unlocks its real challenge halfway through.
- 2 **THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME 3D**
Genre ADVENTURE Developer NINTENDO Publisher NINTENDO
Remake it may be, but this action-RPG hasn't aged a day.
- NEW 3 **LUIGI'S MANSION 2**
Genre ADVENTURE Developer NEXT LEVEL GAMES Publisher NINTENDO
Fantastic fifteen hour adventure with the other brother.
- 4 **SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV: 3D EDITION**
Genre FIGHTING Developer CAPCOM Publisher CAPCOM
The launch title is still the best fighter on the system.
- 5 **MARIO KART 7**
Genre RACING Developer NINTENDO Publisher NINTENDO
Good range of courses and online action gives good karting.
- 6 **KID ICARUS: UPRISING**
Genre ACTION Developer PROJECT SORA Publisher NINTENDO
A triumphant return for the lost Nintendo icon.
- 7 **STAR FOX 64 3D**
Genre ACTION Developer NINTENDO Publisher NINTENDO
Another remake, but Nintendo's space shooter is also flawless.
- 8 **RIDGE RACER 3D**
Genre RACING Developer NAMCO BANDAI Publisher NAMCO BANDAI
Consider this a 'best of', with classic tracks and great tunes.
- 9 **TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: SHADOW WARS**
Genre STRATEGY Developer UBISOFT SOFIA Publisher UBISOFT
Strategic take on Ubisoft's military shooter.
- 10 **PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE MIRACLE MASK**
Genre PUZZLE Developer LEVEL-5 Publisher NINTENDO
The puzzle-solving professor is back. Thinking caps on.

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**TRY OUT NBA JAM**

The basketball franchise transfers onto mobile with a version that emulates the digital take released in recent years. The virtual pad controls work extremely well, with hold and swipe mechanics letting you easily chain together moves on court. Including a fully-fledged career - as well as challenges and multiplayer options makes for a permanent fixture on mobile.

**TRY OUT BROKEN SWORD**

This remastered release of the first in the point & click adventure series loses nothing with the resize onto the mobile screen. Great voice-work, visuals and solid puzzles make this a better thriller than some Kindle eBooks.

IPHONE & IPAD

Apple's gaming platform is great when it comes to variety. In the last few years, iOS games have undergone a massive evolution from simple mini-games to titles you'd expect on consoles.

Price Various Manufacturer Apple Release June 2007

ANDROID

iOS rival packing a lot of features. A wider range of mobile specifications can make it a jungle out there, but there's still plenty of great titles.

Price Various Manufacturer Various Release September 2008

1**MODERN COMBAT 4: ZERO HOUR**

Genre ACTION Developer GAMELOFT Publisher GAMELOFT

FPS that's emerged from COD clone to a format killer app.

2**JOE DANGER TOUCH**

Genre RACING Developer HELLO GAMES Publisher HELLO GAMES

Fantastic and frantic stunt racer that lives up to its big brothers.

3**MIGHT & MAGIC: CLASH OF HEROES**

Genre ADVENTURE Developer TAG GAMES Publisher CAPYBARA GAMES

Great pocket-sized RPG with great characters.

4**THE WALKING DEAD**

Genre ADVENTURE Developer TELLTALE GAMES Publisher TELLTALE GAMES

Heartbreaking and harrowing episodic story. Brilliant.

5**PLAGUE INC.**

Genre STRATEGY Developer NDEMIC CREATIONS Publisher NDEMIC CREATIONS

Morbid strategy title that's constantly being updated.

6**ORDER & CHAOS ONLINE**

Genre MMORPG Developer GAMELOFT Publisher GAMELOFT

New additions have pulled us back to this WoW clone.

7**RAVENSWORD: SHADOWLANDS**

Genre RPG Developer CRESCENT MOON GAMES Publisher CRESCENT MOON

Mini-version of Skyrim? That'll do for us.

8**ARC SQUADRON**

Genre ACTION Developer PSYONIX STUDIOS Publisher PSYONIX STUDIOS

Space shooter with high score tables and combos.

9**HUNTERS 2**

Genre STRATEGY Developer RODEO GAMES Publisher RODEO GAMES

Xcom meets Space Hulk, and a year later, we're still playing it.

10**BLADE LORDS**

Genre FIGHTING Developer PLAYSOFT Publisher PLAYSOFT

Japanese-inspired fighting game with great atmosphere.

1**ANGRY BIRDS STAR WARS**

Genre PUZZLE Developer ROVIO ENTERTAINMENT Publisher ROVIO ENTERTAINMENT

Star Wars licence mixing the best of Angry Birds Space.

2**ARCANE LEGENDS**

Genre MMO Developer SPACETIME STUDIOS Publisher SPACETIME STUDIOS

Simple yet entertaining MMO with a lot of loot.

3**MODERN COMBAT 4: ZERO HOUR**

Genre ACTION Developer GAMELOFT Publisher GAMELOFT

How to fit a 'proper' shooter into mobile or tablet form.

4**TRIPLE TOWN**

Genre PUZZLE Developer SPRY FOX LLC Publisher SPRY FOX LLC

Delightful and very different puzzler from the norm.

5**PITFALL!**

Genre PLATFORM Developer ACTIVISION Publisher ACTIVISION

Temple Run clone that's faster than the original.

6**MEGANOID 2**

Genre PLATFORM Developer ORANGEPIXEL Publisher ORANGEPIXEL

Simple yet hardcore platformer in the old-school fashion.

7**SUPER HEXAGON**

Genre ACTION Developer TERRY CAVANAGH Publisher TERRY CAVANAGH

Mesmerising puzzler with runs measured in the seconds.

8**WHERE'S MY WATER?**

Genre PUZZLE Developer DISNEY Publisher DISNEY

Disney puzzler's one of the best brain-teasers on Android.

9**TEMPLE RUN 2**

Genre ACTION Developer IMANGI STUDIOS Publisher IMANGI STUDIOS

The classic gets a sequel. We're back to high-score hunting.

10**RAYMAN JUNGLE RUN**

Genre PLATFORM Developer UBISOFT Publisher UBISOFT

Unbelievable design and addictive platform gameplay.

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CLASSIC

Super Metroid

Nintendo's SNES sprawling sci-fi adventure is a 'perfect game', says People Can Fly's **WAYLON BRINCK**

"For me, absolutely Super Metroid," says the Gears of War: Judgment art director. "It's such a rich universe. The mechanics are so varied but so well tuned and they're all internally consistent. There's so much player agency in how you explore the world, what order you tackle things in. Your first playthrough can be sixteen hours, but you can get it all the way down to two hours. So it's like endlessly replayable. I think it's one of the most...you know the concept of a 'perfect game'? I think it's as close to a perfect game for something that's so large in scope as you can possibly get."

PLAY IT

While you can trawl eBay and resellers to track down a copy alongside a SNES to play it on, the easiest way is through the Wii's digital Virtual Console service for £7. Bargain.



Luigi's Mansion 2™



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GHOSTS!

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PUZZLES!

Solve perplexing puzzles to uncover tantalising treasure!



GADGETS!

Stun ghosts with your new tools and capture them with your Poltergust!



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Play together online or locally to clear the Scarescraper of phantoms!

"IT'S STUNNING AND ONE OF THE BEST-LOOKING GAMES WE'VE SEEN ON THE 3DS SO FAR"

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GO undercover and save LEGO CITY

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