Red Dead Redemption

Bulletstorm
Gears of War 3

Alan Wake
Split/Second
Lost Planet 2
Alpha Protocol

Cât aștept nota, văd ce emailuri au mai dat prietenii

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ACTIVISION + INDIE = LOVE?

Ș tirea care mi-a atras atenția luna aceasta e cea despre organizarea unei competiții indie de către... Activision!

"Activision, typically known for its big budget releases like the Call of Duty and and Guitar Hero franchises, has announced the Activision Independent Games Competition.

This inaugural edition of the competition will comprise of two phases, the first of which invites individuals and teams in the United States to submit their projects. Activision will accept entries, which can be completed or in-development games (as well as concepts and proposals), starting today through August 31st 2010. The publisher will then announce a first- and second-place winner, bestowing $175,000 to the former and $75,000 to the latter to fund further development of their games, in October 2010. The second phase of the competition will begin at a later date, with details on that round forthcoming.

By the end of the competition, Activision expects to have awarded $500,000 to support independent game developers and their projects."
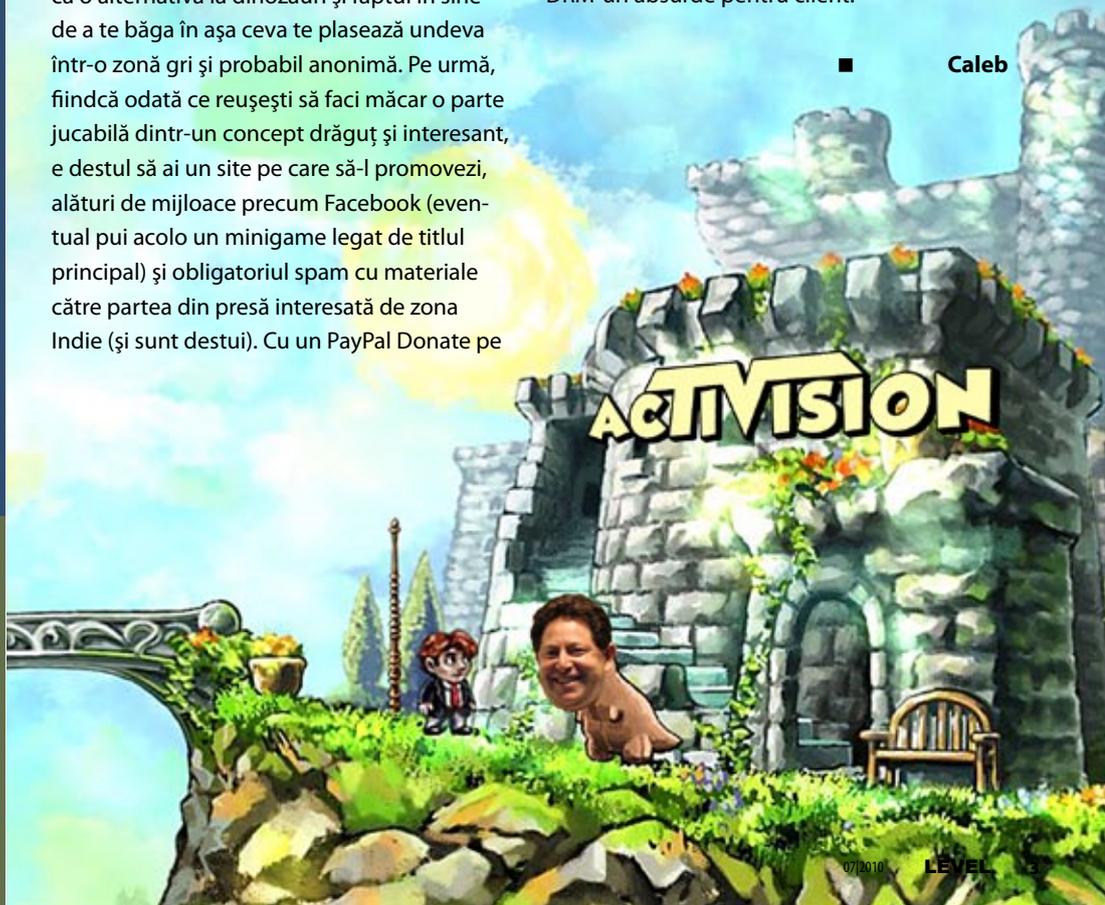
Din punctul meu de vedere, e o porcărie să intri într-un astfel de concurs. În primul rând, fiindcă independenții există tocmai ca o alternativă la dinozauri și faptul în sine de a te băga în așa ceva te plasează undeva într-o zonă gri și probabil anonimă. Pe urmă, fiindcă odată ce reușești să faci măcar o parte jucabilă dintr-un concept drăguț și interesant, e destul să ai un site pe care să-l promovezi, alături de mijloace precum Facebook (eventual pui acolo un minigame legat de titlul principal) și obligatoriul spam cu materiale către partea din presă interesată de zona Indie (și sunt destui). Cu un PayPal Donate pe

pagina ta web mai aduni ceva bănuți și când e gata, poți vorbi deja să-l incluzi pe Steam sau pe Impulse și alte sisteme de distribuție digitală la un preț de până la 5-10 euro, iar dacă e bun, scoți oricum la final mai mult decât oferă Activision în concursul ăsta și îți faci și un nume mai puternic.

La o adică, eu unul sunt mai interesat de jocuri mici, independente, decât de titluri cu buget cât n-au avut toate filmele românești la un loc. Și cred că sunt mulți ca mine. Nu spun că nu mai apar chestii mișto și pe scena mare, dar de multe ori prefer pastiluțele comprimate și adesea mai originale și distractive decât 90% din ce vezi în industria celor mari.

Însă m-au bucurat și exemple de colaborare precum Portal, care n-ar fi putut ieși niciodată atât de fain dacă nu s-ar fi implicat și un mamut precum Valve. Și a propos de Valve, eu unul îi consider cea mai OK entitate de calibru comercial din domeniu, pentru simplul fapt că au făcut o grămadă de jocuri faine și pe de altă pare au făcut accesibile nenumărate titluri la prețuri decente, atât cât a ținut de ei, prin Steam. Păi numai promoțiile de Crăciun și Perils of the Summer au lăsat orice sărăntoc să-și cumpere o droaie de jocuri excelente la prețuri simbolice. Și cred că e și singura soluție de combatere a pirateriei pe PC. Cu onestitate și prețuri decente, nu DRM-uri absurde pentru client.

■   **Caleb**

CUPRINS

26 # RED DEAD REDEMPTION
Vestul Sălbatic aşa cum nu l-am mai văzut şi jucat niciodată.

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O fantezie lovecraftiană demnă de luat în seamă.

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Povestea omului care fugea de întuneric.

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10 ## SPECIAL EDITION

Dus earionsequam fuga. Ectotat moluptatio etur re estende liquis alit, tem at landestrum desendition postecerrum conseribusa es ute vollesto il inus se rehendebis unt aut fugitam quate ommo temporum harcienditis solorupta endiat.

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Nemporrum volorero vel is mossus dolore nient et et quis acepelende precaer spitae con etume odi sus.

                                        ■   KiMO

VERSIUNE COMPLETA

Tiberian Sun nulles re soluptis arunt quosseria debit, senimagnate libusae voluptae nihit, si dollamet liquisit faccatquam everspera.Ut liqui doluptatius. Quid ullupidi ressunt prate.

MOD

Dune Wars nulles re soluptis arunt quosseria debit, **Civilization IV** senimagnate libusae voluptae nihit, si dollamet liquisit faccatquam everspera.Ut liqui doluptatius. Quid ullupidi ressunt prate.

GAMEPLAY VIDEO

Red Dead Redemption nulles re soluptis arunt quosseria debit, senimagnate libusae voluptae nihit, si dollamet liquisit faccatquam everspera.

FILM

Red Dead Redemption nulles re soluptis **John Hillcoat** arunt quosseria debit, senimagnate libusae voluptae nihit, si dollamet.

GAMEPLAY VIDEO

Dark Age of Camelot nulles re soluptis arunt quosseria debit, senimagnate libusae voluptae nihit, si dollamet liquisit faccatquam everspera.

MOD

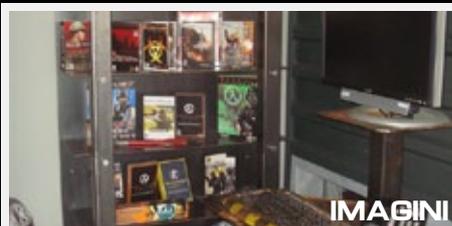**I Hate Mountains** nulles re soluptis **Left4Dead** arunt quosseria debit, senimagnate libusae voluptae nihit, si dollamet.

SOUNDTRACK

Mark Morgan "Vault Archives" soluptis arunt quosseria debit, senimagnate libusae voluptae nihit, si dollamet liquisit faccatquam everspera.

IMAGINI

Redacţia Level nulles re soluptis arunt quosseria debit, senimagnate libusae voluptae nihit, si dollamet.

Cineva spunea că Drakensang e ca o sesiune de pen&paper „patronată" de un DM cu un talent îndoielnic de povestitor, dar un fin cunoscător al regulilor. Eu nu pot decât să-i dau dreptate. În Drakensang cifrele sunt mai importante decât vorbele, iar cantitatea quest-urilor este mai mult decât mulțumitoare. Adăugați la aceasta și posibilitatea de a afla unele secrete și a rezolva anumite conflicte prin dialog și veți obține o oarecare iluzie de libertate. Depinde de voi dacă vă lăsați „mințiți". Câteodată e mai bine așa. Povestea? Se urnește greu, dar spre final reușește să te captiveze îndeajuns de mult încât să nu fii complet indiferent la soarta Aventuriei. Și, ajutată de quest-urile secundare, reușește să te țină ocupat câteva zeci de ore. Apar și ceva dragoni la un moment dat, ceea ce nu poate fi decât un lucru bun. Întotdeauna am fost de părere că un dragon sau doi (yup, și

dragonii sunt un clișeu fantasy... but... but... they're DRAGONS!) pot învior o povestioară fantasy mai puțin vioaie.

Chițibușari cum îi știm, germanii au introdus câteva concepte interesante care ne complică puțintel viața într-un mod plăcut. Rănile, de exemplu. Dacă damage-ul primit de la un inamic depășește valoarea atributului CN (constitution), ne trezim cu o frumusețe de rană. Pe lângă iconița enervantă care apare lângă portretul personajului, rănile au prostul obicei de a influența negativ câteva atribute. Mai mult, dacă un personaj este rănit de cinci ori în luptă și nu este bandajat (sau vindecat cu o vrajă specifică) la timp, nefericitul mușcă din țărână instant chiar dacă bara de sănătate afișează un optimist 50%. Rănile nu sunt singurii ghimpi înfipți discret de producători în coastele firave ale personajelor. Nu mică mi-a fost mirarea când, după o luptă crâncenă cu o haită de amibe gigantice, lucrurile s-au împuțit instant. La propriu. Nu m-a binecuvântat stăpânirea cu un SmellBlaster, dar, mulțumită unor iconițe sugestive, și ele afișate în stânga portretelor personajelor din party, am dedus că aventurierii mei vajnici răspândesc o duhoare neplăcută care-i împiedică pe sărmanii cetățeni să-mi venereze cum ar trebui

gașca de făcători de bine. În limbajul matematicii -X la Charisma. Fiindcă mi-a fost lene să citesc manualul, am plimbat miresmele prin tot orașul, până a dat Dumnezeu și am descoperit un săpun într-un butoi. Aha! Și uite-așa, salvatorii universului au ajuns să care după ei și 100 de calupuri de săpun, pe lângă bandajele sterile, ceaiul diuretic contra otrăvurilor și cele 12 capcane pentru urși. Așteptați-vă și la alte surprize de acest gen.

■　　Ciolan

Drakensang Interview: Class Wolter and Boris Arendt

I sat down with two of the men behind the game – Boris Arendt from developer Radon Labs and Class Wolter from German publisher DTP. Our rambling conversation had no real structure and rolled over all manner of topics, from Fallout 3 and the future of fantasy RPGs to interview etiquette and how tasty the doughnuts were. Check it all out below.

LEVEL: The game has been really well received in Germany?

Class Wolter: Oh, yes. Yeah.

LEVEL: So, what are your expectations in Britain where The Dark Eye brand isn't as well known?

CW: Well, when we started making the game we wanted it to be able to stand on its own because we know that The Dark Eye RPG system the game is based on is only really well known in Germany. On the other hand, there have been other games based on it like The Realms of Arkania series which were published in nineties and were very successful internationally. They won all sorts of 'Best RPG' awards.

So, Drakensang is made to stand on its own and you don't really need to know anything about the background or RPG or lore. All that you need to know is already in the game – if you like fantasy RPGs then you'll enjoy it.

BA: Yeah. The thing was, we wanted to stay true to the license on one hand but we didn't want to alienate those who were fans of the license the game is based on. It's big, you know? The Dark Eye system is in Germany like Dungeons and Dragons is here. While it's cool to give a nod to fans of it though, we don't want to cater only to them.

**LEVEL: You don't tend to see so many fantasy RPGs any more. BioWare for example did

Baldur's Gate but since then it has done Mass Effect and KOTOR and gone very sci-fi. Do you think the RPG market is moving on and leaving fantasy behind?**

CW: No, no. For us, we think it's an opportunity as there's still a big demand for classic fantasy games. Gamers have been in love with these types of games for a long time and they are still in love with them. BioWare has moved elsewhere, but there's still a demand for fantasy RPGs and we see that in the sales figures and comments.

BA: There's a demand for linear, story-led RPGs too. The problem with the open-world RPG approach that BioWare has been toying with is that you can't really tell as dense or as good a story as you have to spread the content very thinly if you have a large world. Most of the time you have this feeling, or at least I do when I play these games, that there's not enough diversity in the environments. I think the open, sandbox RPG style will work someday when the budget is big enough and you can properly fill the space you have. Right now that isn't going to happen with this financial situation though. So, I think sticking to this linear and story-led concept is a better path for us and something that gamers can appreciate.

**LEVEL: Do you think gamers have certain expectations these days in terms of wanting an open

world and multiple paths? Were you affected at all by that?**

BA: Well, I can only really talk for the German players and what we've seen on the forums after the initial release. There are people who want a world simulation where everything is super realistic and super-reactive, which is what Peter Molyneux is trying with Fable 2. I can't tell if someone who might like Fable 2 might like Drakensang because it's such a different style of gameplay, y'know? Just because I play one style of RPG doesn't mean I don't play another style because people have different tastes. Personally, if it's an RPG then I'll play it – though I do have favourites.

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Activision launches own independent games contest

Activision is calling for entries to its new Independent Games Competition, offering development assistance - as well as prestige - to the winning indie developers.

Round one of the contest runs until August 31, whereupon the first place winner will be awarded $175,000 and the runner up $75,000. A second round has been confirmed but not detailed as yet.

The contest is currently open only to US residents, and requires the submission of a design brief, proposed team structure, budget and schedule and, optionally, a gameplay demo. Entries must be in English, and must not have been made in any way public outside of Activision's competition - thus submissions to other contests, such as the Independent Games Festival, will not be accepted.

All finalists will be required to offer Activision first right of refusal for publishing or development, and to feature their logo on a splash screen in the finished game.

Killzone 3 anunțat oficial

După o perioadă îndelungată în care s-a speculat lansarea unui nou joc Killzone, Sony a hotărât să facă anunțul oficial. Așadar, Killzone 3 este în producție și va fi lansat...când va fi gata. Deocamdată nu a fost specificată o dată, dar probabil va fi comunicată într-un viitor apropiat. Acest anunța fost însoțit și de primele screenshot-uri din joc.

Mass Effect - The Movie

Compania Legendary Pictures (300, Watchmen, The Dark Knight, 10.000 BC, Clash of the Titans) a achiziționat drepturile pentru ecranizarea PRG-ului Mass Effect.

Mark Protosevich (I Am Legend) se va ocupa de scenariu, iar producătorii vor fi: Jon Jashni, Thomas Tull (The Dark Knight), Avi și Ari Arad și cofondatorii BioWare, Ray Muzyka și Greg Zeschuk.

THQ anunță Metro 2034

Danny Bilson – Vicepreședinte THQ – a declarat că shooter-ul post-apocaliptic Metro 2033 va avea o continuare – Metro 2034 – ce va fi disponibilă și în versiune 3D.

Mortal Kombat se întoarce

Warner Bros a anunțat că ne pregătește un nou Mortal Kombat. Jocul este realizat de echipa NetherRealm Studios, condusă de Ed Boon,creatorul seriei MK, și va fi lansat în 2011 pentru PS3 și Xbox 360.

Driver

Ubisoft ne pregătește un nou joc al seriei, pe care îl va prezenta la E3.

Bigpoint GmbH achiziționează studiourile Radon Labs

Compania germană Bigpoint a anunțat achiziția studiourilor Radon Labs (dezvoltatoarele seriei Drakensang) care solicitaseră unui tribunal din Berlin declararea insolvenței, prin această preluare numărul angajaților Bigpoint crescând cu 35.

Shogun 2: Total War anunțat oficial

SEGA și studiourile britanice Creative Assembly au oferit un trailer și au confirmat oficial că cel de-al șaselea titlu al seriei Total War va fi lansat în 2011.

Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days renunță la serviciul Games For Windows Live

Kim Krogh – Game director IO Interactive – a anunțat că jocul de acțiune Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days nu va mai folosi serviciul Games For Windows Live, precum titlul anterior, studiourile alegând suita Steamworks.

Decizia a fost luată ca urmare a faptului că modul online co-op al primului titlu Kane & Lynch era dificil de accesat din cauza serviciului Games For Windows Live.

În 2009 piața jocurilor video din Statele Unite s-a ridicat la valoarea de 15,5 miliarde $

NPD Group a publicat un studiu de piață conform căruia în 2009 americanii au cheltuit aproximativ 15,5 miliarde $ pe piața jocurilor video, 10,5 miliarde fiind cheltuite pe titluri noi, iar 5 miliarde pe abonamente, închirieri, expansion-uri sau aplicații pentru telefoanele mobile.

Imaginea lui Jim Raynor va fi prezentă pe avioanele Korean Air

Blizzard Entertainment Korea a anunțat că în urma încheierii unui parteneriat cu Korean Air, imaginea lui Jim Raynor – eroul terran din StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty – va fi reprodusă pe 2

dintre avioanele companiei aeriene.

Interplay anunță MDK 2 HD

Interplay și Beamdog au anunțat că vor lansa în iarna acestui an, pentru PC și Wii, MDK 2 HD, remake-ul jocului de acțiune third-person MDK 2 lansat în 2000.

Insurgency Pack

Ubisoft a lansat pentru PC și Xbox 360, Isurgency Pack, primul DLC pentru Splinter Cell: Conviction. Acesta conține patru hărți pentru modul de joc Deniable Ops și costa 10 dolari sau 800 de puncte Microsoft.

Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands

Ubisoft a lansat oficial în România jocul Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands pentru PC, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 și PSP la sediul magazinului online cel.ro.

Dungeon Siege 3

Square Enix a dezvăluit că Obsidian Entertainment ne pregătește al treilea joc al serie Dungeon Siege. Întreg procesul de dezvoltare a jocului este atent supravegheat de oamenii care ne-au adus primele două jocuri, Chris Taylor și echipa Gas Powered Games.

King's Bounty: Crossworlds

Ucrainenii de la Katauri pregătesc un expansion major (și standalone) pentru King's Bounty: Armored Princess. Împricinatul se numește King's Bounty: Crossworlds și va atenta la timpul nostru liber cu două campanii noi (Champion of the Arena și Defender of The Crown) și cu un expansion masiv pentru campania din Armored Princess (quest-uri, vrăji și unități noi).

Max Payne 3 amânat din nou

Take Two Interactive a anunțat că Max Payne 3 a fost amânat din nou. Jocul ar fi trebuit să-și facă apariția cândva în intervalul 1 august - 31 octombrie 2010, dar producătorii au hotărât să-l amâne pentru anul fiscal 2011, adică intervalul 1 noiembrie 2010 - 31 octombrie 2011.

Red Faction: Origins

THQ a anunțat că în martie anul viitor, postul de televiziune american Syfy va difuza un film de acțiune pilot intitulat Red Faction: Origins. Acțiunea din film, se va desfășura la 25 ani după evenimentele din jocul Red Faction: Guerrilla și îl va avea în prim plan pe fiul lui Jake Mason, Alec, care încearcă să-și răzbune mama ucisă și să-și găsească sora răpită.

The Lord of the Rings Online, free-to-play din toamna acestui an

Warner Bros. a anunțat că studiourile Turbine vor lansa în toamna acestui an un update major pentru MMORPG-ul fantasy The Lord of the Rings Online, odată cu acesta jocul urmând să devină free-to-play. Astfel, conținutul de bază va fi disponibil gratis, urmând să existe și posibilitatea de a achiziționa obiecte virtuale, pachete de quest-uri, expansion-uri sau servicii VIP prin intermediul LOTRO Store.

SE VOR LANSA ÎN IULIE

APB	PC	Realtime Worlds
StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty	PC	Activision Blizzard
DragonQuest IX	DS	Square Enix
Monkey Island 2 SE	PC, X360	LucasArts

Pentru mai multe știri, trailere, screenshot-uri și altele, intrați pe www.level.ro.

ZOMBIE COW'S PRIVATES

Would you like to see Zombie Cow's Privates? We sure would. We'd not only like to see them, but we'd like to play with them once we have. But no! We're not talking about their penises! We're talking about their new winky-themed game, Privates! (NB. We're talking about their penises.)

Made in partnership with Channel 4 and the Time Gentlemen, Please! creators, it's a 3D game in which… Waitasecond-whatnow? 3D? Three dee?! Heavens. It's described as a "platform 3D twin-stick shooter", and if I carried on trying to explain it to you, you wouldn't believe me. So here's their own description:

"You lead a teeny-tiny gang of condom-hatted marines as they delve into peoples' vaginas and bottoms and blast away at all manner of oozy, shouty monsters. It's rude, funny, bitingly satirical and technically pretty accurate if you don't count the tiny people or the germs with teeth."

My germs have teeth.

It's probably a good job this is Channel 4, eh? The BBC would have no truck with this botties and ladygardens business. And come on, who isn't dying to play this now? You'll have to wait until the Summer, where it will be free for PC via Channel 4 and E4. Silly old Xbox users will likely have to pay, once again proving that PC gamers live in an idyllic Eden-like fantasy world of endless magical joy.. *(John Walker)*
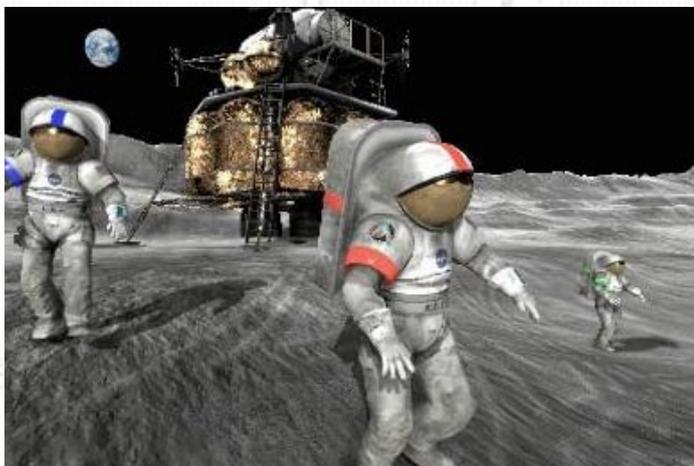
MOONBASE ALPHA SOON

You know that NASA are actually working on Astronaut: Moon, Mars And Beyond? A team-based hard-science space-MMO? Well, that's not here yet – but Moonbase Alpha is. It'll be hitting on Steam on July 6th, and seems to be one-small-step towards that larger vision. The site's a place-holder at the moment, so literally all the information we have is watching the video and wondering…

I have no idea how good this will be, but it's as different as it can get. I'm really looking forward to trying it. I suspect it'll be co-op. Which means that I hope we'll be allowed to accidentally-on-purpose puncture our space-chum's suits and send all their innards jettisoning out. Though the "E" rating makes me suspect it may not actually play to my sociopathic fantasies. *(Kieron Gillen)*

ACE!: ACE TEAM ANNOUNCE ROCK OF AGES

Looking awesome: the next game from the Chilean team who gave us weirdo biff 'em up Zeno Clash. It's called Rock Of Ages and it appears to be a mixture of strategy game and, er, bowling? Two opposing castles attempt to crush each other in sur-realistic rock-rolling warfare with defences constructed turn by turn to defend against the heinous stone attack. If that wasn't enough, Ace Team explain: "your boulder will crash through different periods of classical art, introducing the player to a variety of authentic art styles and music from throughout much of human history." Response from RPS Hivemind? "Oh Wow." "VIDEOGAMES! VIDEOGAMES!" "Yay!" Yeah, that's the stuff. It's out next year via digi download outlets. *(Jim Rossignol)*

CAPTAIN BLOOD

I saw and played the Russian version of Captain Blood about two years ago, and it was looking reasonably polished and proficient at that time, so it's a mystery that the appearance on Wester-nised shores has taken so long. Anyway, it's slated for Q3 this year, and it's kind of good to see this kind of action game looking so healthy. *(Jim Rossignol)*

SPECIAL EDITION

Downward pressure on game prices is a common theme in industry discussions. The situation is fairly clear - with retail price wars further fuelled by the entry of supermarkets and mass-market online retailers, not to mention the continued growth of the second-hand market, games now find their price tags being assaulted on a new front, as consumers find entertainment value in cheaper products on new platforms like Xbox Live Arcade, PSN, Facebook and iPhone.

Retail price wars will eventually yield winners and losers, and prices will rise again; the collapse in consumers' perception of the value of interactive entertainment, however, will take much longer to repair.

There is one bright light, however, in what's overall a somewhat gloomy picture (for publishers, at least - for consumers it's obviously fantastic, and for clever developers it's arguably a golden opportunity) regarding game prices. That bright light is special editions of games - a field which many publishers were slow to exploit, but

which has gradually become a key part of the release strategy for any major title.

Special editions are, quite simply, a way to get customers who would be willing to pay over the odds for your game to do exactly that. Many games have a vocal and dedicated group of core fans who have followed the development of the title for months, if not years - many of whom may be people who enjoyed the developer's previous games, or previous games in the same franchise.

These people are, of course, a minority of those who will end up buying the game, but have always been considered valuable due to their contribution to word of mouth marketing. Now, publishers are realising that they can also make a significant financial contribution to the success of a game.

Consider BioShock 2, which turns up on store shelves next Tuesday. Most gamers, of course, will buy a simple copy of the game in a DVD style case - but for the select few, the game they'll be picking up (either from the store or from a delivery man) will come

in a huge box, replete with a hardback book filled with concept art, a soundtrack CD, a set of lithographs and even a vinyl record of the first game's music.

The fact that only a tiny percentage of those people will own the equipment necessary to play that record is amusing, but irrelevant - it's collectable, and the game's fans are willing to pay extra money to own something unique which is related to their passion.

This is not a revelation which originates in videogames, of course. For years, movie and music companies have produced expensive special editions to capitalise on the willingness of dedicated fans to pay more for something more "special". This has reached new heights as bands have broken away from the traditional record labels which had previously supported them, with major acts such as Radiohead and Nine Inch Nails effectively betting that they can rely on their fans for support rather than needing the financial muscle of a label.

The independently launched albums

which Nine Inch Nails released over the last few years, for example, came in multiple different forms - from digital downloads for a few pounds (vastly cheaper than the usual price of a CD) through to hugely expensive and elaborate special editions, produced in extremely limited numbers and signed by the band members.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, those extremely limited editions sold out rapidly - each one netting easily as much revenue for the group as 100 sales of the digital download version would.

Thus far, few games have gone quite that far - with a few notable exceptions, even the most elaborate special editions aren't even twice as expensive as the normal game. Although special editions have become normal within the industry, they are still approached somewhat tentatively by many publishers.

Afraid to commit to the idea - perhaps with images of unsold stock of baubles and artbooks piling up in warehouses preying on their minds - publishers tend to opt for the safest option, namely a soundtrack CD, a tin case, and perhaps an artbook, coupled with an extra tenner or two on the price.

If anything, this over-cautious approach is actually holding back the true potential of game special editions. Many games, after all, benefit from a stupendously devoted fan-base - often rivalling those of films or bands in their fervour. There is no doubt that certain games, from established franchises or hugely respected developers with cult followings, could easily sell genuinely limited, high quality editions for hundreds of dollars - a potential revenue stream of millions of dollars which is otherwise being left on the table.

Of course, when your game is grossing hundreds of millions already, as in the case of the industry's top sellers, that's arguably not very important. However, the reality is that it's games on the fringes which can benefit most from the culture of special

editions - games whose sales may not be enormous, but whose enormous appeal to a small core of dedicated fans turns them into cult hits.

These games could see a significant upturn in the revenue they generate by releasing expensive, high-quality special editions. In the case of certain niche games, it could even make the difference between breaking even and flopping.

Unfortunately, as appealing as this possibility may be, the present fad for special editions of almost every major game on the market could actually be poisoning the well, at least to some extent. All too many games today are graced with hugely disappointing "special editions" - cheap, poorly made plastic models and flimsy, badly printed artbooks are the order of the day for some publishers, which naturally serves to make consumers wary of further special edition purchases.

A consumer confronted with Bayonetta's dreadful gun model or the spectacularly awful special edition for Batman: Arkham Asylum - both fantastic games with dedicated fan-bases who are perfect targets for good special edition boxes - is a consumer unlikely to pay over the odds for another special edition in future.

Handled correctly and applied

to the right games, special editions can make more money for the publisher and developer while simultaneously delighting your most devoted fans - a win-win situation. To achieve this, however, publishers will need to get genuinely creative - involving the development team in the process of designing the special edition, and crafting

something that's worthwhile, in keeping with the tone of the game, and which fans will genuinely be proud to own.

One can only hope that publishers will recognise the value of doing this before consumers become completely sick of cheap plastic models and the special edition fad ends entirely - another golden egg laying goose casually led into the slaughterhouse.

■ **Rob Fahey**

BUILDING A BETTER ACHIEVEMENT

As anyone who has ever tried to get all the achievement points in an Xbox 360 game can attest to, there will always be those two or three achievements that seem to take up the most time for the worst reasons. Collect a third of the COG tag in Gears of War, and you earn the "Time to Remember" achievement. Find every single flag in Assassin's Creed, and you earn the "Keeper of the Lions Passant" achievement. Visit all the graveyards in Two Worlds, and you earn the - wait for it - "Visited All Graveyards" achievement. An unfortunate majority of 360 games have at least a few of these lazy, needlessly completionist goals that require far more effort than their relatively small rewards warrant. They're the kind of goals that anti-achievement crusaders whine about and achievement apologists grit their teeth and tolerate against their better judgment. So how could developers improve them?

For me, the best Achievements - or at least, the least irritating ones - fall into two distinct categories: those that require essentially nothing more from you than making your way through the game, and those that ask you to engage in an interesting or unusual activity that has no effect on your progression. Problems only arise when achievements both stymie your advancement through a game and require unimaginative, typically repetitive actions.

Most games award achievements for simply advancing the story. You might scoff at getting an achievement for completing basic training in Call of Duty 2 - after all, you have to finish the training just to move on to the next level. But really, is that such a bad thing? Awarding achievements for completing these humdrum tasks may seem like pandering, but they're actually some of the most logical and seamless achievements currently in use.

For better or worse, it's inherently rewarding to get an achievement. Though I'm loathe to admit it, I always feel a bit of excitement when I hear that little "bloop" as the window pops up, telling me how much my Gamerscore has increased - even if it was only for making it to the second chapter. You could easily accuse such achievements of being unimaginative, but they ask so little of the player that it's hard to feel too put off by them. Sure, COD2's "Completed Training" achievement and those like it are forgotten

> ### "For better or worse, it's inherently rewarding to get an achievement."

almost immediately after the pop-up fades from the screen, but they serve a clear and simple purpose: to increase your enjoyment of otherwise unexceptional activities.

Even better, achievements can take advantage of your potentially negative reaction ("I got an Achievement just for that?") and turn it into something interesting. Guitar Hero III's "Blowin' It" achievement gives the player five points for failing a single song 10 times, turning what would have been a disheartening experience into something ironic, funny and oddly consoling. "Blowin' It" does not reward spectacular play, dedication or skill, but pleasantly surprises the player in a way that only an achievement could. You kind of suck, the game says, but here's an achievement for sucking so bad - it happens to the best of us.

In the same vein, Vicious Cycle's Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard grants the player achievements for events as mundane as simply pausing the game, deriving humor from challenging your expectations of what actually constitutes an "accomplishment" in a videogame. It wouldn't be enough for Eat Lead to make an in-game joke about pausing - that innately satisfying achievement pop-up makes these one-off jokes that much more effective. So what if they're not really "rewards"?

On the other end of the spectrum are achievements that reward you for doing something external to the game's progression. The best of these achievements are satisfying on multiple levels: Extrinsically, you're getting achievement points for something that, while perhaps difficult, doesn't take much time or require much repetition. Intrinsically, these achievements deepen your experience of a game by asking you to play with the game mechanics in a way you probably would have never considered in the first place.

The "Costume Party" achievement in Dead Rising, for instance, requires you to put novelty masks on at least 10 zombies. Far beyond the relatively meager reward of 20 Achievement points, Costume Party elegantly encourages you to do something unique with the game's mechanics while letting you feel like you did it of your own volition. Since novelty masks tend to appear in large quantities in Willamette Mall's toy stores, it's easy to mask all 10 zombies in a

Analysis: The Psychology Behind Item Collecting And Achievement Hoarding

You may recall the eccentric Collyer Brothers. Homer and Langley, heirs of one of New York's oldest families, lived in a Manhattan mansion in the first half of the 1900s. There, the two became reclusive, boarding up their windows and accumulating over 100 tons of what most would classify as "junk" until the entire house was packed to the ceiling – anything from bundles of newspapers to the chassis of a Model T to 14 full-sized pianos.

They were compulsive hoarders, and I think there's a little bit of Collyer in all of us gamers. The Obsessive Compulsive Foundation explains that in compulsive hoarders:

"Acquiring is often associated with positive emotions, such as pleasure and excitement, motivating individuals who experience these emotions while acquiring to keep acquiring, despite negative consequences." Sound familiar? The "negative consequences" of chasing after the 120th star in Mario 64 or all 100 hidden packages in Grand Theft Auto III may be more subdued than those of filling your entire house with orange peels and old cans of refried beans.

But game designers know that it's pretty damn easy to tap into this deep-rooted need to collect and accumulate. And like happy suckers we buy into it all the time, some to a greater degree than others.

Item collection has been a staple of video games since Pac-Man swallowed his first cherry. Since then, we've collected stars, coins, rings, nuts, bolts, packages, armor, weapons, Achievements and so on. Games like Call of Duty 4 take exploration out of the collection equation, and use experience points and graphs to indicate how close we are to obtaining that next weapon or Perk.

False Sense Of Accomplishment?

All of this "stuff" is tied to the player, whether it's a high score with your initials beside it, your Gamertag with its high gamerscore, your PlayStation 3 Trophy Room, your save file that says you recruited all 108 Suikoden characters, or your World of Warcraft or CoD4 account that's filled with the best weapons and items. Such accomplishments, as frivolous and intangible as they may seem to outsiders, are meaningful to gamers.

One of the aspects of gaming today that most obviously appeals to our inner hoarder are Achievements. We joke around that video game "Achievements" are a misnomer, because what is it exactly that you're achieving, other than sitting on your ass all day trying to kill 100,000 Locusts in Gears of War 2?

In collecting these digital gems, are we just filling ourselves with an empty sense of accomplishment when, in fact, we've accomplished nothing? Not necessarily, says Dr. Cheryl K. Olson, co-director at the Center for Mental Health and Media at Massachusetts General Hospital Department of Psychiatry, and author of the 2007 book, Grand Theft Childhood.

"People work for intangible rewards all the time," she says. "Money and love, for example. A paycheck may seem 'solid,' but it represents an abstraction. And what's more abstract than earning an 'A' in philosophy?... Small things can be quite rewarding. A smile from a cute girl may be a small thing, but it can make a teenage boy's week."

And the months (for some, maybe weeks) it took you to earn the Seriously 2.0 Achievement in Gears of War 2? "Delayed rewards are often more valued. Over years of formal schooling, we learn to delay gratification," Olson says.

"I'm Better Than You"

The proliferation of item collecting or Achievement hoarding isn't necessarily because we have an obsessive compulsive demon lurking under our skins. Whereas many real compulsive hoarders accumulate real-world items such as old newspapers or lists because they believe they'll need them at a certain point in the future, many gamers chase after the item carrot for bragging rights.

> "Game designers know that it's pretty damn easy to tap into this deep-rooted need to collect and accumulate. And like happy suckers we buy into it all the time, some to a greater degree than others."

Olson said in a survey on young teens and video games, she found that over half of boys (57 percent) and more than one in four girls (28 percent) strongly agreed that that "to compete and win" was a reason they played electronic games.

Gamerscores and Achievement lists that are connected to a community of millions facilitate this need to point out that "I'm better than you". Ultimately, it all plays into chasing that sense of fulfillment. But for others, it really is about accumulating, accumulating, accumulating, sometimes to the detriment, or even the demise, of the hoarder.

Within the walls of his fortress of trash, a paranoid Langley Collyer had booby-trapped a maze of tunnels created from junk throughout his and Homer's mansion. Langley set off one of his own tripwires, sending a mountain of papers on top of him, burying him alive as he was bringing food to Homer, who was blind and unable to take care of himself.

Homer died of starvation -- authorities didn't find Langley's body until three weeks later, just ten feet away from his brother, covered in garbage. So don't feel too bad if you're jonesing for that next sword, star, or Achievement. I suppose you could be worse off. ∎

single sitting, giving you the remarkable sense of glee and accomplishment that can only result from watching 10 members of the living impaired shamble around while wearing massive yellow Servbot helmets. Because it's an achievement rather than an actual in-game objective, you can enjoy accomplishing the task on your own terms. Where mandatory mission objectives grab you by the neck and force you to do a very particular thing if you want to see more of the game, achievements are merely suggestions.

It's a delicate balancing act for designers to craft achievements that are creative, attainable without much repetition and intrinsically gratifying. As mentioned earlier, seven of Assassin's Creed's 44 achievements reward you for finding every single flag in each of the three cities Altair visits. Finding these flags is optional (good) but remarkably difficult (less good), and the act of finding them isn't particularly rewarding by itself (bad). The flags only exist to give you something - anything - to collect. Many of Assassin's Creed's achievements suffer from this malady, but even otherwise imaginative games like Penny Arcade: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness grant achievements for finding randomly hidden trinkets with no in-game utility.

When developers spend a bit of extra energy on

A Break in Immersion

After trekking for what feels like an eternity across a barren, desolate wasteland, you see the Colossus lumbering in the distance. With nothing but your bare hands, you scale its fur-and-rock-covered hide in search of a weak point. As you climb higher, the great beast thrashes violently to throw you off its back. Then you spot it - the sigil at the top of its head, the gargantuan creature's only vulnerability. You draw back your sword, and with one mighty thrust, plunge it into the monster's head. A fountain of inky blood sprays forth from the wound. The colossus trembles - is it really dead? - and hangs in the air for a moment before finally crashing to the ground.

Boop.

Achievement Unlocked: Colossal!

Thanks to the higher powers of choice, this scenario never unfolded. Shadow of the Colossus was a masterpiece of immersion, a flawless recreation of a ruined fantasy world where ancient stone sentinels roamed the land. Its greatest achievement was to make you feel that it was more than just a game - it was a living, breathing place.

But a game like Shadow of the Colossus would never be possible on the Xbox 360.

Like a knowing wink to the camera, the 360's mandatory achievements break the fourth wall, shatter the illusion, suck you out of the game world and place you firmly back on your sofa, pausing only to tussle your hair patronizingly before giving you another daft, mundane task to complete. In an era where games strive be more immersive than ever before, achievements come along and bash you over the head with a placard labeled "You're Playing a Game, Dumbass!"

The fourth wall is the imaginary boundary between the viewer and a fictional world in a movie, play, TV series or any work of fiction. Breaking the fourth wall - having a character acknowledge the fact that they are in a work of fiction - can be a useful technique under

the right circumstances. Think Will Smith's knowing glances to the camera in The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, or Ferris Bueller's asides to the camera in Ferris Bueller's Day Off. (Perhaps I'm showing my age with those two examples, or breaking the fourth wall has fallen out of favor as a comedic device).

This is what achievements do in gaming: they force you to recognize that the world you're inhabiting is a work of fiction. It's a tactic that works fine for some titles. But consider the example of Dead Space, which boasts some of the most atmospheric and immersive environments since Shadow of the Colossus. The creators of Dead Space deliberately stripped away those elements of the interface that could pull players out of the experience - there are no on-screen notifications of any kind and no HUD (head-up display) to give players information on their health or ammo reserves. Your life meter is built into your character's suit, and everything else of consequence appears as a holographic projection within the game world itself. It was a brilliant design choice; there was nothing to break the illusion.

Except for those accursed achievements. For some reason, a notification that I was "A Cut Above" for killing 30 enemies with the Ripper didn't quite mesh with the universe Dead Space had theretofore woven.

Achievement Unlocked: A Step Backward

Achievements are a return to the days when progression and reward in games were pretty much arbitrary. They're the modern equivalent of the high score. [...]They work fine in many games, but just as there is no point to keep-

> "This is what achievements do in gaming: They force you to recognize that the world you're inhabiting is a work of fiction."

ing score in a game like Ico, there are plenty of games that are not suited to this sort of goal-based incentive structure.

The very name "achievement" implies that they are challenging, hardcore, daring you to do something difficult. But some games are not about challenges; some games are not about achieving anything, in fact. What kind of achievement list would Nintendogs have, for example? (Wash your dog 10 times!) Talkman? (Become fluent in French!) KORG DS-10? (Play like Rick Wakeman!) The 100 Classic Book Collection? (Don't fall asleep while reading Hard Times!) By mandating that developers include these benchmarks to evaluate player progress, Microsoft is enforcing a conception of videogames that is both limiting and outdated.

Achievement Unlocked: Vista Home Premium Bought

[...]There's the seed of a good idea in achievements - comparing your progress in games against others is fun and, all cynicism aside, we should welcome anything that helps users get more value from their games. But in their present form, achievements only help to reinforce an image of games and gamers that we need to escape from - meaningless challenges for obsessive-compulsives, contests with no real reward and a constant testosterone-fuelled sense of competition. ■

achievements, however, it can have a profound effect on the final product. Perhaps the greatest achievement set in recent memory comes from Geometry Wars 2. A few of the achievements like "Unlocked All Modes" and "Game Over" are the sort of modest goals that you would reach after a few hours of play regardless of your skill level, while achievements like "Smile" are spectacularly imaginative and satisfying. "Smile" asks you to complete the game's Sequence mode by winning, losing and timing out of rounds in such a way that the

level completion grid looks like a smiley face. It's difficult, totally superfluous and not

deep enough to justify its own play mode in the game itself, but Smile requires such unusually strategic thinking that it's a blast

to attempt after unlocking all the regular game modes.

> "It's a delicate balancing act for designers to craft achievements that are creative, attainable without much repetition and intrinsically gratifying."

Contrast this achievement with those of the first Geometry Wars, which almost universally reward the sheer amount of

Why aren't games about winning anymore?

What is the *deal* with *achievements*? -- asked in my best Jerry Seinfeld voice, of course. (Kids, ask your parents).

Remember when the goal of a video-game was, well, to beat the game? Rescue the princess, piece together the Triforce, kill the big alien monster, defeat all the other fighters. Or maybe, as in the case of Tetris, postpone your inevitable defeat as long as possible and rack up a high score.

When you were at the arcade (again, kids, ask your parents) feeding 10 pence pieces into the machine and you got the chance to put in your initials, the only indicator of your success was a number: your score. It didn't say how few 10p's you used, or how many power-ups you got along the way, or if you found all the secret zones.

But somewhere along the way, winning the game or getting a high score simply wasn't enough.

Maybe it was the advent of online gaming, suddenly being connected to other gamers all around the world. Or maybe it was savvier marketing by game designers, realising that adding side goals increases re-playability. They're like little gold stars that the game gives you so you'll keep playing another five minutes.

Oh! I just got an achievement for playing for five minutes! If I play 10 more minutes, I'll get another one!

Many of the iPhone games I've played include achievements as well, and they certainly make you look at a game differently: This time when I play, I'll go as fast as possible to get a "shortest time" achievement. And then I'll play it slowly to make sure I get all the coins for another achievement. Next I'll work on killing all the bad guys. Usually the achievements are set up so that there's no way you can get all of them your first time through -- they require different types of gameplay and strategy, many of which won't actually move you toward the actual goal of the game.

Zack Hiwiller's spoof "If Mario Was Designed in 2010" sums it up well, playing off the idea that a simple goal like finishing off Bowser and rescuing the princess simply wouldn't be enough motivation for today's gamers.

Armor Games' "Achievement Unlocked" is a little Flash metagame that's purely about getting achievements. The slogan: "Don't worry, metagaming is all that matters." The "game" involves moving a little blue elephant around on a single level, but in the meantime the screen fills up with achievements for everything from "finding the menu screen" to "not moving."

Of course, if unlocking achievements were limited to the world of videogames, that would be one thing. But they're spilling over.

Hiwiller himself had a post titled simply Achievement Unlocked which was, from what I can tell, a video of himself proposing to his girlfriend. The Dallas Video Game Examiner suggested last year you should spice up your resume with videogame achievements.

The most frightening example of real-life achievements, though, has

to be Jesse Schell's talk at the DICE Summit in February. You may have seen this already, but Schell predicts a time (in the not-so-distant future) when technology has become cheap and ubiquitous enough that almost everything we do will be a sort of game.

Brush your teeth? Ten points! Brushed your teeth every day this week? Bonus! You get points for taking the bus or walking, points for paying attention to ads on your TV and having Dr. Pepper five days in a row. Schell ends on an optimistic note about how all of this record-keeping and game-playing might make us better people. But it doesn't change the fact that the world he envisions is one in which our actions are chosen by the points we get for them.

While we're not in Schell's world yet, I know that my perspective can be easily swayed by this idea. Maybe today I'm trying to hit a certain number of pageviews; maybe I want to get my inbox down to zero; maybe I get a little rush every time I can check another thing off my to-do list.

But if videogame achievements can make us ignore the end goal in favour of a little gold star, is there any doubt that real-life "achievements" can distract us from what's actually important in life?

Certainly, incentives can be used to drive good behaviour, but there's no guarantee that companies or organisations able to provide the most effective incentives will be the ones with the most altruistic motives. (And, of course, if I'm the one unconsciously making up my own achievements, I know they're not always going to be what's best for me.)

I'm not saying that achievements in video-games are inherently a bad thing. I'm just saying that perhaps we should take a step back and consider how they make us relate to the world.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to go check off another completed post. Three more and I get a gold star! ■

> "Oh! I just got an achievement for playing for five minutes! If I play 10 more minutes, I'll get another one! "

time you've spent with the game (save for "Pacifism," which subsequently spawned an entire game mode in Geometry Wars 2). Score 500,000 points in one life; collect nine lives; collect nine bombs; earn a times-10 multiplier. These achievements are irritatingly hard to get, yet they require the same skills and strategies it takes to be good at Geometry Wars in the first place - they ask the player to do nothing new, and are generally too difficult to be worth the small reward of 10 or 20 achievement points.

In an ideal world, developers would fol-low Geometry Wars 2's lead. The developers went from offering a slew of difficult, uninteresting and tedious achievements in the first Geometry Wars to giving players new and imaginative ways to play their game in its sequel. They understood that achievements are at their best not when they force players to engage in difficult, mindless, long-term goals that can only be completed by the obsessive-compulsive, but when they surprise us, inspire us or even just make us feel better about things we would have done anyway. Geometry Wars 2 and games

like it understand that achievements are about improving players' enjoyment with - and understanding of - the game itself. And that's worth more than all the tediously gotten achievement points in the world.

■   **Anthony Burch**

SERIOUS BUSINESS

How do developers strike a balance between profit and art-istry? Former Diablo Lead Designer Dave Brevik shares his wisdom.

DAVE BREVIK

Title
Studio Director, Gazillion Entertainment

Previously
President of Blizzard North; Director at Turbine

Worked on
Diablo, Diablo II (Lead Designer, Lead Programmer), co-creator, Battle.net

Favorite Things
Marvel, MMOs, tabletop games, baseball, LEGO

What Dave's playing now
Super Mario Wii, Marvel: Ultimate Alliance, The Beatles: Rock Band

What were Blizzard's early days like?
"A few months before we shipped Diablo II, we tried removing all of the absurd loot in the game to make drops feel more realistic. No longer would that bat drop a halberd and plate legs, they would drop body parts that matched what type of monster it was. In the end, it became a very grue-some game because the monsters were dropping hearts, eyes and other parts. Quite a few employees that felt that we should have left the body parts in and for weeks there were "Keep the body parts" signs all over the office".

Bounced paychecks sparked my first lesson in the games industry. I was fresh out of college—creating a game with two other developers and some management. Several months into development, into executing what we thought were idealistic, innovative, and couldn't-fail ideas, we ran out of money. There are countless nuggets of wisdom that I accumulated in my many years of PC design, coding and management experience, but none more important than this: "Making games is a business."

It's difficult to say this because I consider myself a game-making artist at heart, but there is a very delicate balance between the art and business sides of making games— our true yin and yang. The designer in me would give away everything I do because I am not motivated by money. I have a passion for making games. I want to entertain people through games and spread gaming joy. Unfortunately, the force of this desire alone doesn't pay the bills. There is a reason the phrase "starving artist" exists. If we are going to really be able to create our artworks,

> **"If we are going to really be able to create our artworks, we need to consider and balance it with ... a realistic outlook of what the market wants."**

we need to consider and balance it with financial sensibility and with a realistic outlook of what the market wants. The best games combine them into a whole. Finding this balance between art and business is a very difficult process.

If you focus solely on the artistic side of game-making, it oftentimes means that you will never finish. You will never finish be-cause a game could take forever if you have endless amounts of money. Since most of us don't have that luxury, there is a very real money deadline. In fact, you may end up not finishing because you ran out of money. Ensuring that you can squeeze all of your best-laid plans into this time line creates the balance your project will need. It helps both the artist and the business.

If you focus on the business side, you'll likely nickel-and-dime your customers. Many times I have found myself debating with business-oriented developers who want to add on top of what already exists. The phrase "leave money on the table" gets dropped into these conversations faster than a StarCraft match between me and a professional Korean gamer. Just adding more things to buy on top of a base doesn't mean that the gamers will go for it. In fact, I find that there is a very real perceived value that a discerning consumer will evaluate. If you don't create something of value, the gamers will rise up and paint that scarlet "A" on your game. That means it's game-over before it even starts.

My first game ideas—oh, how I thought they were the best game ideas in the world! Looking back, I'm sure that all 12 people who would have bought those games would have loved them. Considering and analyzing the size of your audience is vital. To really create a game that makes money (which means that you might have a chance at making more games) you need a size-able audience. An audience willing to pay you more than it cost to make the game. As it turns out, the people that fund game development want more money in return. Shocking! In the end, everyone wants their games to succeed. Finding the balance between our pure artistic game concept and the realities of business will be the only way to create the complete circle of yin and yang. ∎

JOCURI BUNE CARE SE VÂND PROST?!

În articolul de luna trecută, ziceam că jocurile bune se vând. Am mai zis asta şi în alte cazuri faţă de alţi oameni. Permanent mi s-a atras atenţia că de fapt nu e aşa. Jocurile bune nu se vând întotdeauna ci din contră, în foarte multe cazuri se vând prost… whatever that means…

Ca să clarific această spinoasă problemă, o să pun două puncte şi nişte bile, că mi-e greu momentan să-mi ordonez prea tare ideile:

- Jocurile bune se vând dacă se ştie de ele. Dacă fac un joc bun acasă, în "dresser", şi-l vând pe holul blocului la demisol, e clar că nimeni nu o să-l cumpere. Eventual dacă sun un prieten pe care probabil că va trebui să-l mituiesc. Aşadar, jocurile bune se vând întodeauna dacă au un marketing bun şi li se face publicitate ţintită.

> **"Un joc bun este de fapt un joc care a reuşit să convingă lumea prin diferite tertipuri ca să-l evalueze după anumite criterii."**

- Presupunem că bat măr nişte amărâţi de emigranţi şi fac cel mai meseriaş simulator de bătut toaca la biserică. Jocul e genial, are un gameplay fun şi e desăvârşit grafic, numai că na, e cam "hardcore", pentru că-ţi cere să fi pasionat de această activitate de tip ecumenic. Ca urmare are un target specific, adică se adresează unui anumit tip de gamer. După ce ai scos jocul pe piaţă, constaţi cu suprindere că ai vândut 100 de exemplare, câte unul pentru fiecare lăcaş de cult cu vederi mai moderniste. Şi na, toată lumea vorbeşte că iată un joc absolut genial care s-a vândut foarte prost. De fapt, e greşit. El s-a vândut foarte bine, având o rată de penetrare de peste 50%. Doar că în rândul unui target-ul foarte redus. În concluzie, jocurile bune se vând bine în rândul celora cărora se adresează.

- Acum, oare ce înseamnă un joc care se vinde bine? Până la urmă, e vorba de nişte proporţii. Prespununând că am investit în total 1 milion de euro într-un joc pe care l-am făcut cu 15 oameni într-un an şi am câştigat încă un milion, oare e bine? Dar 2 milioane? Dar 10 milioane? Dar 150.000 de euro? Oare s-a vândut bine comparativ cu un arcade de bătut toaca cu tematică casual, cu elemente "moneky see, monkey do" şi alte lucruri de-astea revoluţionare care transformă gaming-ul într-o activitate de somanbul, care a adus prfituri

de 20 de milioane şi a avut o echipă de 40 de oameni? Oare nu avem aici o diferenţă de target? Oare nu avem a difernţă de motivaţie? În concluzie, însăşi natura conceptului de "joc vândut bine" este relativă, atâta timp cât ai câştigat bani de pe urma lui, poate chiar sufi-cient pentru un nou proiect.

- Ce înseamnă un joc bun? Un joc care s-a vândut bine? Un joc care este perfect din punct de vedere tehnic? Un joc al cărui gameplay este plăcut în rândul unui target specific? Poate este groaznic pentru un alt target? Oare un joc bun este unul care ia note bune în review-uri? Sau un joc bun este acel joc care intră în istorie şi despre care oamenii îşi aduc aminte după 10 ani cu plăcere? Sau un joc complet obscur care oferă 5 minute de plăcere deosebită? E clar că însăşi conceptul de "joc bun" este atât de relativ, încât nu poţi trage o concluzie. Un joc poate fi cla-sificat drept bun la nivel individual, în funcţie de criteriile alese pentru evaluare. Dacă foarte multă lume alege criterii similare sau este EDUCATĂ să evalueze jocurile după anumite criterii IMPUSE, atunci poate apărea o concluzie general valabilă dar artificială. Dacă peste 20 de ani jocul respectiv va intra în istorie drept jocul cu cea mai inteligentă şi mai agresivă campanie de promovare?! În concluzie, nici măcar nu ştim cu exactitate ce e acela un joc bun, nici ca producători nici ca reprezentanţi ai criticii.

Ca urmare un joc bun este de fapt un joc care a reuşit să convingă lumea prin diferite tertipuri ca să-l evalueze după anumite criterii. Adică eu ca designer arunc în game-play elemente care ţie ca gamer sau critic îţi determină momente de plăcere, momente de relaxare şi scuipiciuri de endorfine. Fac asta apelând la anumite mecanisme psihologice care pleacă de la exploatarea lăcomiei, vanităţii, a nevoii de a fi recom-pensat şi supra-evaluat şi ajungând până la a exploata pasiuni ascunse şi sentimente refulate.

Sună destul de rău pentru că astea

sunt extreme care, culmea, se regăsesc în cele mai mari titluri de pe piaţă – World of Wacraft, Call of Duty, Left 4 Dead, Diablo etc. Alte jocuri adoptă versiuni mai dulci, mai cizelate, cum ar fi cazul lui Portal sau Dragon Age, Mass Efect, unde implicaţiile psiho-logice sunt mai fine şi mai profunde . Unele, care pleacă de la principii şi au scopuri pre-cise, reuşesc să aibă laturi educative foarte interesante, ca de exemplu simulatoarele de zbor, cele economice, city-builderele sau chiar MMO-uri free-2-play-uri gen Dragon-ica, Wizard101 şi Free Realms sau cu plată gen A Tale in the Desert.

Aşadar, ca sa citez pe cineva, perspectiva e totul. Iar perspectiva este uşor de manipu-lat fiind un element subiectiv. ■

SEBASTIAN "LOCKE" BULARCA

Current position
- Lead Game Designer, Fun Labs Bucharest
- Freelance Video Games Journalist

Previously
IT Hardware & Software Specialist, Maurer – Kasper Construct SRL

Worked on
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Favorite Things
Problems solving, Video games, writing, fish-ing and gardening

What Locke's playing now
EVE Online, APB
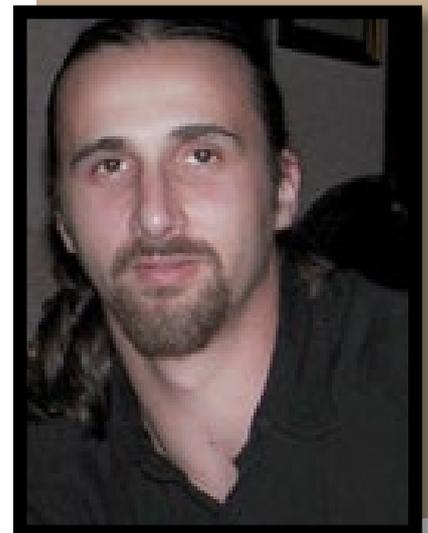
LANSARE NUCLEARA DETECTATA...

STARCRAFT II
WINGS OF LIBERTY

BLIZZARD
ENTERTAINMENT

DIN 27.07.2010

RED DEAD REDEMPTION

X360 **PS3**

As you ride the train west from the northern city of Black-water, you have no idea what's waiting for you in the frontier town of Armadillo at the end of Red Dead Redemption's intro sequence. Conversations between other passengers clue you in to the state of the nation, and a quick look out of the window tells you that the territories are as untamed as they are beautiful. But it's not until you step off the train in the well-worn boots of protagonist John Marston and have to sidestep a drunk staggering out of the saloon that you realize how alive the world feels, and how much fun you're going to have exploring it.

A few hours after disembarking the dusty train that winds into Red Dead Redemption, reformed bandit John Marston meets a smart young journalist from Manhattan. His assignment? To observe life on America's final frontier and dramatise his findings in an article for the well-to-do ladies of New York. His pressed clothes and clean-shaven jawline contrast with protagonist Marston's facial scrawl of stubble and scarring, but beneath appearances, the men share a common purpose: to find gold in the sun-baked Wild West.

The meeting mirrors the wider context of Red Dead Redemption's release. Liberty City with its buffed taxis, resolute skyscrapers and air of affluence may

appear a world away from this arid, adverse wilderness, but peel back the skin and the framework is identical. Red Dead Redemption is GTA: Wild West, a sandbox most familiar, albeit one that, for once, is filled with sand.

Set 50 years after the events of the more light-hearted Red Dead Revolver, Redemption's frontier has become a cat's cradle of political interests, stretched taut by moneyed men in bed with federalised government. The Wild West has grown mild in its old age, and grizzled gunmen with their brutish ways are growing obsolete.

In setting the game in the twilight days of a cliché, Rockstar provides an overarching tension beyond the immediate lives of its inhabitants. Where Grand Theft Auto

IV's Nico Bellic was desperate to escape his heritage, Red Dead Redemption's John Marston clings to it, a man in search of purpose and redemption in a world slipping from relevance.

Cei din urmă ani de sălbăticie ai Vestului

Nevertheless, it's a world that Rockstar San Diego paints with flair and an abundant appreciation for the Western in cinema. Parched canyons give way to tousled plains across which steam trains puff their way, heading off into purplish horizons. A hangman's noose swings in the breeze from a giant rock. Carts teeter along thin cliff paths, while drunks are spat from saloon swing doors into the arms of waiting hookers squeezed tight by corsets and puffy knickers. Campfires flicker, coyotes howl and droves of wild horses gallop to a melancholy whistled melody or the splang of a banjo. A buzzard squawks, a shadow in the noon sky. Videogames can offer windows on forgotten vistas; Red Dead Redemption is a vivid rebuilding of a world lost to time and technology.

But Red Dead Redemption's world exists for more than mere observation. Marston has a score to settle. A reformed bandit, the stoical gunslinger arrives in the Border States hunting a former gang associate who now terrorises the vicinity. When a bid for reconciliation fails, leaving Marston bloodied and half-dead, you must begin to job of reacclimatising the man to life on the frontier, nursing him back to health and gathering a team of hapless characters to help you take down your enemy. As with GTA, you take on smaller errands and targets en route, building fame, notoriety or honour, raising your status in the world as you gather power, weaponry and a posse in anticipation of the endgame showdown.

As ever, Rockstar gives you freedom to roam far and wide from the word go (although you won't be able to cross the border to Mexico until the halfway point), but limits your immediate objectives to a small geography. The borders of your missions expand at a slow pace, hour by hour, ensuring you grow familiar with the dirt

paths and settlements and begin to build a memory map of the world and its sights. In the same way, details about Marston's past and mission are drip-fed. As your territory expands, so too does your knowledge of yourself, as the typically reserved, early-20th-century gunman builds trust and slowly confides in those around him in an incessant stream of cut-scenes, both long and short.

Marea Hoție de Cai

Missions are, as in GTA, assigned by key characters you meet in towns and outposts. These boast the same simple inventiveness that has always marked Rockstar's work out - and for those wearied by years of delivering drugs and stealing cars, the chance to herd cattle in a thunderstorm, act as an accomplice in a snake oil salesman's scam, or shoot rabbits as they try to steal a friend's carrots at night makes for a welcome, often creative change. Of course, as the game progresses, so the brutality scales with it. High-speed horseback shoot-outs in which you can either choose to take out the rider or the animal have never felt so dynamic, and even the simplest of objectives is made interesting by the emergent chaos that ensues.

Key story missions are buffered by a seemingly endless clutch of side-quests and playful distractions. Some of these, such as the games of poker, five-finger fillet, and horseshoe throwing, or the bounties you can take on, exist simply to swell

your bank balance. But very often, you'll be hailed by strangers in need at the side of the road. Stop to inquire as to their predicament and they'll send you on an errand (or spring a trap), one that can often be approached in different ways, and which affects your standing in the community. These might be to convince an old man to part with his property, or may require a more immediate response (such as the hooker set upon by an angry client - "I'm gonna cut you a new hole") but either way, they help to pepper the world with distraction and break up the linearity.

With meta-challenges for hunting and skinning particular animals, collecting herbs and plants and finding treasure, each traipse across the landscape is littered with interactive potential. Where GTA's cities are densely packed with life and story, the wilderness could easily have been too empty in its expanse. By punctuating every journey with

Shooting from mounts and wagons works every bit as well as shooting on foot.

You can save your game anywhere in the wilderness by building a campfire wherever you pull up your horse.

The BLACKWATER LEDGER

MULTIPLAYER

While progressing through the single-player campaign is a case of patiently following the breadcrumb trail of capital letters laid down for you by Dan Houser and the other scriptwriters, here you really are left to your own devices, presented with a clutch of places and tasks to engage in, but with no promise of success beyond that of your own skill and ability. In that sense, Red Dead Redemption's multiplayer is where the game's real open world exists. When playing as John Marston you are only ever free to tell Rockstar's story; here, for the first time, you are free to write your own.

In a technical achievement that boggles the mind, the game's slow-motion Dead Eye state is present in all multiplayer modes. Abandoned camp fires in Free Roam mode allow you to restore your Dead Eye gauge fully. Otherwise, you'll need to amass kills for the privilege.
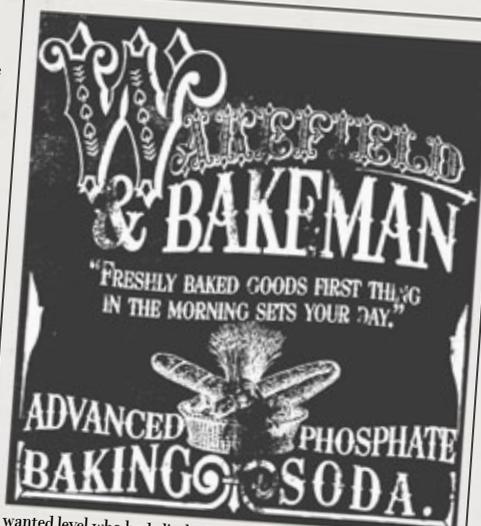
Select multiplayer from the main menu screen and you'll be deposited in Free Roam mode, a rock-for-rock replication of the single-player world, albeit one that can be inhabited by up to 16 players. Ostensibly, this acts as a giant lobby leading off to Deathmatches and Capture the Flag games. But there's far more to do here than merely access the other game modes.

It's in Free Roam mode that you can posse up with other players, sending invitations to anyone else on the server to join you and ride together. Once you have some backup, you're in a good position to engage in some of the structured play offered by Free Roam, taking on one of the eight bandit encampments scattered around the map. Here you'll face overwhelming numbers of outlaws as you try to flush them out, blow up their supplies or complete other tasks.

Aside from the loosely-structured play offered by Free Roam mode, you're also free to engage other players in battles around the world in even more loose terms, and it's here that the purely player-driven stories begin to emerge. For example, I engaged in a protracted 20-minute shoot-out with another player with a high

WAKEFIELD & BAKEMAN

"FRESHLY BAKED GOODS FIRST THING IN THE MORNING SETS YOUR DAY."

ADVANCED PHOSPHATE BAKING SODA.

wanted level who had climbed onto the roof of a bank, and from that position was terrorising the area. Climbing the side of the building and timing runs between cover in order to inch closer to his position was a taut, exhilarating experience, as memorable as any of the set-pieces laid before John Marston.

In another moment, a friend and I tracked a solitary player high into the snowy mountains, dismounted and found the spaghetti western turned Enemy at the Gates, as we sniped and flanked him from behind trees.

These memorable moments, cultivated in the sandpit of Red Dead Redemption's endlessly compelling world, provide the unique, player-specific talking points largely missing from the set narrative of the single-player game. Only the restrictive 16-player cap grates, as you'll need to make a concerted effort

to encounter other players when so few are scattered across such a huge expanse of land. Raise this and Red Dead Redemption's Free Roam mode would feel every inch the MMO.

Clearing bandit camps and tracking and killing other 'wanted' players earns your character experience points, which feed into a Modern Warfare-style ladder of levels and unlocks. As you increase your online level, so you unlock new modes of transport, weapons and avatars. As with Infinity Ward's hugely influential multiplayer structure, there are 50 ranks to climb, along with Prestige-style bonuses if you choose to start again from Level 1 once you reach the top.

While you'll gain handfuls of experience points in Free Roam mode, most levelling will be done in the combative modes proper: Deathmatch, Goldrush (in which you grab bags and return them to your base) and Hold Your Own, a variation on Capture the Flag. These are available for single players or teams and can be accessed at any time simply by hitting the back button and selecting one from a drop down menu.

In Gold Rush mode it's possible to carry two bags of gold to a resource point at once, but at the risk of vastly reduced speed, leaving you open to attack.

Every competitive match starts with a Mexican stand-off, with the last man standing free to run off and take up a strategic position while the rest of the players respawn. Our fear was that the poor cover mechanic and snap-to-aim system would result in unsatisfying combat, but in reality each competitive mode is tight and rewarding, with thoughtfully-constructed maps (pulled from the main world) with excellent cover and choke points and design that encourages player flow around each.

With Rockstar's promise of Expert Aim-only rooms, new modes, maps and an extensive co-op campaign on the horizon, Red Dead Redemption's multiplayer is a triumph, bettering that of GTAIV in almost every regard (aside from breadth). Well-balanced between structured play and free-form playpen, the multiplayer offers a perfect counterpoint to the single-player story.

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side-quest offshoots, Rockstar ensures the game world is just as packed as Liberty City, while still maintaining that visual sense of isolation and loneliness that is so crucial to the Western.

Your primary mode of transport across the world is by horseback, the animal fast proving itself to be a far more flexible and dynamic mode of transport than a hi-jacked car, able to comfortably negotiate any type

of terrain. When you gain access to a lasso it's possible to harness any wild horses you come across by chasing alongside them and hurling your rope over their neck. What should, by rights, be a fiddly task is made straightforward, as simple as lining up a moving headshot with your reticule, and then easing the animal to a standstill. Once reigned you can mount the horse and, following a short mini-game of sorts in which

In multiplayer, the entire map is your playground.
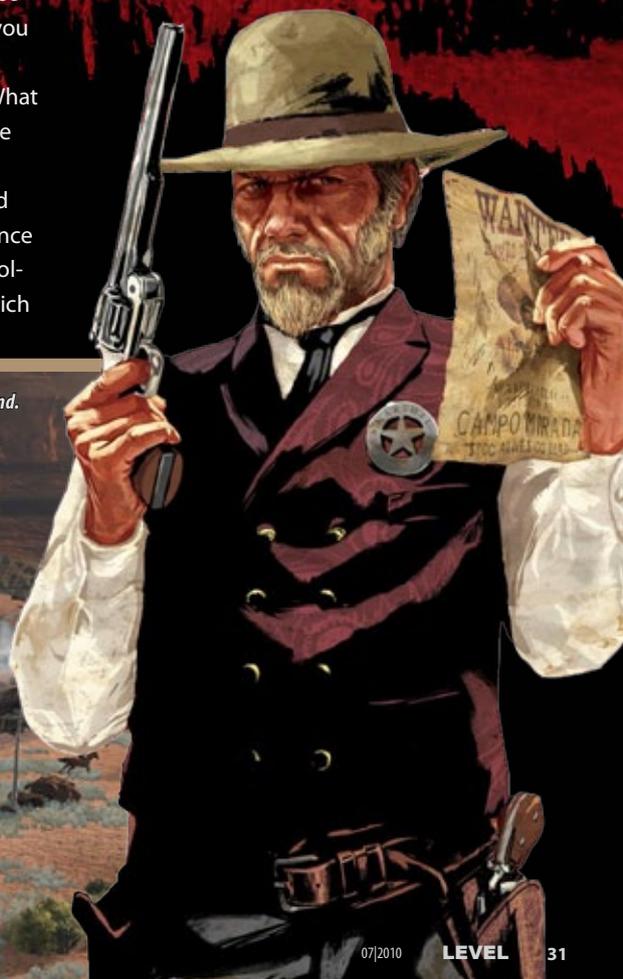
you attempt to ride out the horse's bucking by altering your balance, the animal is yours to ride.

Despite the temptation to chop and change between horses (different breeds offer different levels of obedience, speed or stamina), there are benefits in sticking to a favourite, as in time you build loyalty which results in stamina bonuses, allowing you to run at full pelt for longer before tiring the horse. As you begin to clock up the miles together across, hill, canyon and stream, you form a bond - and this relationship between protagonist and transport, the kind alluded to in the great Westerns, is undoubtedly one of Red Dead Redemption's greatest successes.

Forget to tether your horse when stopping in a town and you need only whistle and the stallion will come running, the kind of convenience that even the most technologically-advanced vehicle in Grand Theft Auto must stop short of. Hog-tie a bandit and you can roll him onto the horse's hindquarters and carry him across the world. By the end of the game there will be no doubt in your mind: without the need to feed, water or rest your virtual animal, horses are better than cars.

However, by the end of the game you will be left with other, less enthusiastic feelings too. While Rockstar San Diego triumphantly matches the storytelling of Rockstar North, redacting their cinematic influences with finesse and imagination, there is still an occasional roughness to the ground-level interactions that can grate.

DECLARATIILE MARTORILOR

Let me start off by saying that I was not a fan of the Grand Theft Auto series, so I was very hesitant to pick this up. This game has everything I imagined a game could be. I'm not going to write a huge review and pick it apart, but I will say this, the gunplay, the voice acting, the story are all top notch. It's been a long time since I have invested in a game for this long. I'm just glad I am not completely finished with it. Bring on the DLC! **(Cody B.,** *Metacritic***)**

———————

If you're looking for a visually impressive and rich single player game this is it. If, however, you're looking for a great co-op or multiplayer game I'm afraid to say that the free play posse mode has almost no depth and is buggy beyond belief. Players get booted constantly in private matches, sometimes you can't see your friend, animals disappear, horses fly around and worst of all the world is a horrible shell of its single player richness. Gone are the mini games, most of the population and any random missions, the train is absent, there aren't interesting adversarial free play (like kidnap missions then again there isn't even the lasso for that matter) and outside of a few gang hideouts there's nothing that requires a collaborate effort. Furthermore, while there are a set of challenges you can only accomplish these individually, which takes the fun out of hunting or doing survival challenges as a team or group. I love the single player campaign, but am really let down by the untapped potentially of a fully fleshed out free play multiplayer mode. **(Nate B.,** *Metacritic***)**

———————

Is it perfect? No. But is it outstanding? Without a doubt. Red Dead Redemption effectively captures the feel and atmosphere of the Wild West (at least as Hollywood and Clint Eastwood have portrayed her). Throw in a refined formula based off of Rockstar's other sandbox games (GTA, namely) and you have what is nothing less than an evolution on the genre, as well as what can finally be considered the great western game. **(Brandon A.,** *Metacritic***)**

———————

An utterly beautiful game. The comparisons to Grand Theft Auto are fair only in the vein that the open-world genre has never looked more beautiful or contained more things to do. Other than that, I think reviewers are just comparing their level of awe to when they first played GTA IV. Yes, it's that good. **(Ryan J.,** *Metacritic***)**

———————

Finally, a western themed gamed that hits all of the notes and strikes a perfect harmony. Graphically, the world of RDR is

PETERSON & CONNOR

JUNIOR SAFETY BICYCLE MOUNTED RIFLE

30 inches expand   closed   inches

designed with more detail than has been seem to date - the attention paid to color, lighting, texture, and mood are simply jaw dropping. Getting the ambiance of this gritty and beautiful place so perfectly sets this game apart from most. On top of the striking artistic value, the game itself is damn fun. The core missions are varied and entertaining while serving to move the main plot along. At the same time, the many side missions help to fully enrich the RDR world as a whole. Besides being prettier than previous GTA style games, gone are the difficulty spikes that plagued previous games. I also felt that the save points were managed better than previous games. GTA IV raised the bar for open-world, sandbox style games with interesting characters and story. Red Dead Redemption has push that bar even further. This game is a MUST own. **(Kevin S.,** *Metacritic***)**

———————

I nailed this game, JUST done 100%, pretty easy but I reckon that it will take most people more than 18 hours (like i did). The story of this game reminds me of stories my Grandad told me when I was younger. I especially like the mexican poncho's, (Clint Eastwood FTW) This game has some strong sexual themes which I like and that add to the games story. The grahics in this game are especially good, but the character animations generally dont support the voice acting. I suggest this game to anyone who liked GTA 4 or/ and Clint Eastwood. **(Bom B.,** *Metacritic***)**

———————

Deci e fantastic jocul, am jucat ieri doar 2 ore si nici nu stiu cand au trecut. Vreau sa zic ca a fost super tare sa vanez coioti noaptea pe luna plina si cerul instelat, calare pe cal, in departare auzindu-se alte impuscaturi =3 **(viezure,** *forum Level***)**

DESTAINUIRI DIN GASCA

The Western is a genre as transcendental as romance, and as quintessentially American as apple pie and hand guns. It is also the rock against which many a game has broken itself. Why then, from a genre as seemingly simplistic and intrinsically rooted in the struggle of good versus evil (the stuffing of many a good game), has it historically been so seemingly difficult to construct a great game?

Red Dead Redemption succeeds where so many others have failed; by focusing on what makes Western movies so unique: setting and character. As with a good Western film, there is much more to it than that, but those are the important bits. The gunplay, the gambling and the jingle-jangle-jingling of your spurs are all there, and certainly add their spice to the pie, but there are plenty of games in which you can shoot things and gamble - and some do it better. Where Red Dead Redemption shines is in creating a uniquely-Western sandbox (literally) for you to trot around in and giving you plenty of genre-true (if not realistic) experiences. **(Russ Pitts, *Escapist*)**

———————

As open world games featuring a man on a mission often do, Red Dead Redemption's story has its ups and downs, multiple climaxes and teases that manipulate as much as they sometimes frustrate. But Redemption concludes in a fascinating way, just one of many surprises, not the least of which includes an affection for virtually living in the old west. Progression and techno- logical advancement, a packing in of more and more and more is what video games teach us to appreciate. The whittling down of gameplay due to a technological and temporal back step is what makes Redemption a more believable, more absorbing world to visit.

Having already immersed myself in dozens of hours of Red Dead Redemption's world, I'm hungry to return, itching to complete my untended quests, adventure through its still mysterious lands and explore the bad side of John Marston. Having barely scratched the surface of its multiplayer—there's so much to unlock and experiment with—I'll be losing myself in its sublime world of hoodlums, peasants and drunkards. I don't think I've engaged in a single bar fight, being a good outlaw and feeling good about it, an oversight that I'll soon correct. **(Michael Mc-Whertor, *Kotaku*)**

Faimă şi (dez)onoare

Marston runs awkwardly on the ground and, for all the fluidity of the horses, you only need to take a tumble off an unfore-seen ledge for the game to come grinding to an abrupt, awkward halt. Combat, so often the weak point in Rockstar's output, is solid, with a Dead Eye bullet-time mode combining with the ragdoll physics to create the kind of iconic shooter-keeling-from-a-rooftop images that define the genre in film.

However, the cover mechanic, which sticks Marston to the nearest rock or wall, feels sticky and outdated, while the expec-tation that you wrestle with the camera, reticule and steering during horseback shootouts is simply too tall at times. Prob-lematically, once your sense of curiosity at what lies over the next hill dissipates, you'll find every 10-minute gallop across the landscape tiresome and over-familiar, and so will begin to rely heavily on the game's various fast-travel options (via train, carriage or campfire teleport).

The very best Western films enjoy a rapid fire of crisp, purposeful scenes to link the action. It's a format that works well when packed into 90 minutes of imagery delivered at 24 frames per second. But stretched out over 50 hours, the intensity of the Western form is necessarily diluted, resulting in pockets of intense excitement, linked by long, meandering treks across - admittedly wondrous - scenery. Red Dead Redemption has fully subscribed to the Housers' vision of a blockbuster videogame: a string of cinematic set-pieces and flawed yet endearing characters nestled within an orthodox narrative structure, seasoned with generous pinches of extra-curricular tasks.

Rockstar's skill in creating a believable, functioning world with a distinct, coherent and consistent atmosphere is peerless. The broad-brush vision is masterful. No game has done sunsets and fiddles, stirrups and stubble with this assuredness. And while the script may fall short in its cinematic inspira-tions - the comedy of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid or the gravitas of Unforgiven, for example - the gap has been closed. Yet in the details, there's a roughness that niggles, the execution lacking the grace and fluidity of contemporaries who perhaps reign in the ambition and scope in favour of depth and polish.

The result is an exceptional Rockstar game, one that successfully re-clothes the Grand Theft Auto framework in an exciting, distinct and expertly realised scenario. But just how satisfying the formula remains after the exuberant destructiveness of Red Fac-tion: Guerrilla, or the joyful, ad-hoc player stories born in the freedom of Just Cause 2's playpen, is increasingly under scrutiny. And even within Rockstar's own canon, there is little here for that smart young journalist to inform Liberty City about that it didn't already know.

■　　**Caleb**

BUNE:
▸ cel mai bun joc western, punct.
▸ personaje şi voci excelente, regie bună şi muzică a-ntâia
▸ mai multe decât aş putea spune

RELE:
▸ o puzderie de bug-uri, din cele mai diverse
▸ controlul în spaţii înguste
▸ vreau mai mult, să curgă DLC-uri!

Presentation: 9/10. A powerful story and remarkable characters. Tons of depth, but it doesn't quite have the perfect polish that most Rockstar games exhibit.

Grafică: 9/10. A few visual hiccups are the only downside to this incredible looking game. Fantastic art direction.

Sunet: 10/10. Superb voice acting and a wonderful soundtrack.

Gameplay:10/10. Great variety, great combat, and a great multiplayer mode.

Lasting Appeal: 10/10. Online or off, there are more than enough excellent reasons to keep coming back.

Calitate/preţ: 10/10. Jocul costă aprox. 250-270 lei, dar vă va ţine ocupaţi atât de mult timp, încât va merita orice preţ, ba chiar mai mult de atât. Una din cele mai bune achiziţii pe care le-aţi putea face.

CONCLUZIE: De la prezentarea superbă a mini universului west-ern, animaţiile cailor, atmosfera autentică, misi-unile antrenante, puzderia de activităţi opţionale, personajele memorabile şi povestea interesantă până la încleştările intense şi parteneriatele în multiplayer, Red Dead Redemption m-a cucerit într-un mod pe care nici nu mi-l puteam imagina. Are şi probleme, însă părţile bune le fac să pălească. Dacă nu l-aţi jucaţi, meritaţi împuşcaţi.

10

Gen Action/Adventure **Producător** Rockstar San Diego / North **Distrbuitor** Rockstar Games **Ofertant** GameShop.ro **ON-LINE** www.reddeadredemption.com

ALAN WAKE
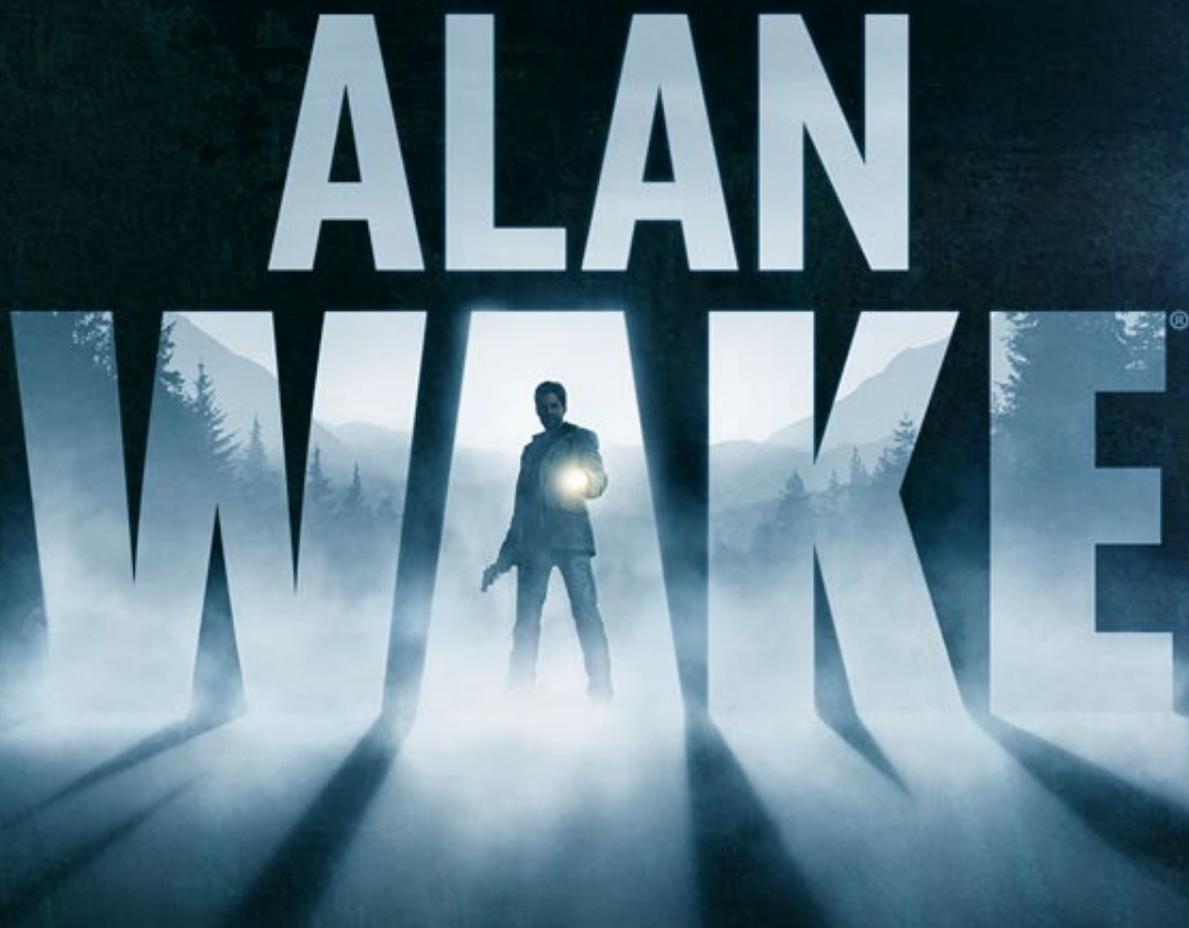
"It's ready when it's ready." Developers must love being able to say that. It means they're so rich and successful they don't have to worry about trivialities like release dates. The publisher will wait patiently for them to hand over the finished product, and won't dare bang on about seasonal purchasing trends in the meantime. It suggests they've risen above the situation of most developers.

Remedy Entertainment doesn't fall into that category. Extensive research suggests the studio never used the phrase "when it's ready" exactly, but all the same, it's been five years since Alan Wake was announced, and you can bet development began some time before then. Remedy even had the luxury of nine months just for polishing.

So has it been worth the wait, or should Alan Wake have stayed in bed?
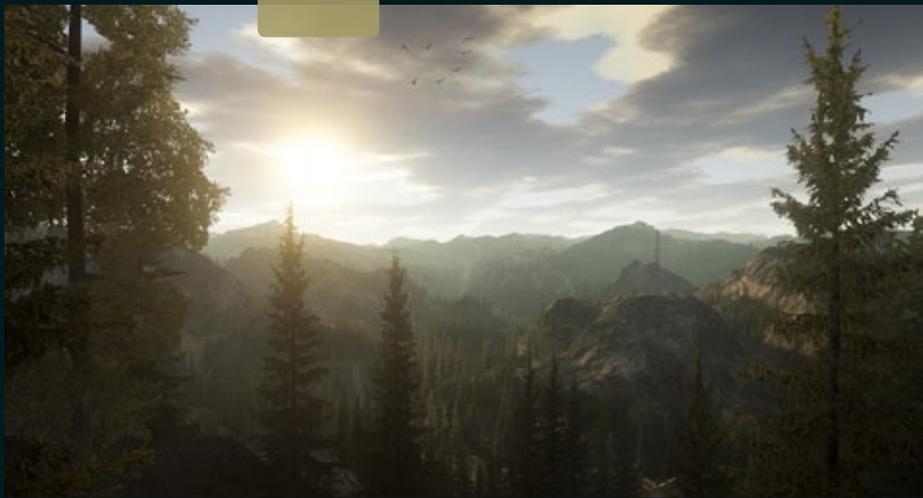
Ask the titular character that question and you'll probably get an answer in the affirmative. Alan is a best-selling thriller author who suffers from writer's block. He decides to take a holiday in a bid to clear his head. And how does Alan choose to get away from it all, do you think? By spending a fortnight in Rio, drinking pina coladas by the pool? Or by visiting a tiny, rainy Pacific Northwest town inhabited by hilarious simpletons and frightening weirdoes, where the only available accommodation is an ancient log cabin in the middle of a haunted lake?

Alan is accompanied on this jolly holiday by his wife, Alice. She sets the cause of female videogame characters back 10 years by being afraid of the dark and mewling like a kitten with a broken leg whenever the lights are off. Knowing this, Alan should probably have picked a nice hotel rather than a cabin powered by a generator in a shed at the end of the back garden. Needless to say, within about 12 minutes of arriving in the town of Bright Falls, Alice goes missing in mysterious circumstances and Alan embarks on a quest to find her.

Standing in his way is an army of zombie-like enemies known as the Taken. These are people who have been possessed by a dark force and turned into homicidal maniacs. Some have scythes, some throw axes, but all have a nasty habit of appearing out of nowhere and attempting to hack Alan to death.

Lumina de la capătul lanternei

The good news is they're repelled by light. Our hero takes advantage of this, using one hand to point his torch and stop them in their tracks while shooting with the other. Streetlamps create safe havens for Alan, pools of light which protect him from the Taken and instantly fill up his health meter. He can also ward off enemies using flares, flare guns and flash grenades.

The combat system works well. It requires you to multi-task and think tactically, particularly when facing several enemies at once. Often you find yourself flicking both torch and gun between multiple targets, trying to defend and shoot and back away all at the same time. Other times, and with increasing frequency as the game progresses, you'll decide it's easier just to chuck a flare and leg it. Not so much running and gunning, then, more running and running some more.[...]

This game really wants to be a film, preferably one based on a Stephen King novel. This is apparent from the opening cut-scene, where a camera sweeps over gloomy pine forest. There's a melodramatic voiceover which begins, "Stephen King once wrote that nightmares exist outside of logic..." and ends, "My name is Alan Wake. I'm a writer." The influence of David Lynch is obvious too, in everything from the game's setting to the songs on the soundtrack. Once again, this isn't the first videogame to take inspiration from movies. But there's a difference between paying homage and making subtle references versus the wholesale lifting of well-established clichés.

Take the cast of characters, for example. All your old favourites are here - faceless hitch-hiker, mysterious woman in black, earnest local sheriff, over-zealous FBI agent, creepy psychiatrist, nutty old lady who might just be the only person who knows what's really going on etc etc etc.[...]

Alan himself is no fun at all. Physically he's a bit of a weed. He jumps like there are eight-year-old girls either side of him turning a rope, can't climb over anything more than waist-high and moves at an irritatingly slow pace. He can sprint, but only for a few seconds before he is reduced to a wheezing, shuffling mess. [...]Exposition also takes place via the manuscript pages Alan finds littered about wherever he goes. [...] The pages describe what's been happening to Alan or, in many cases, hint at what's about to happen. The problem is this often ruins the dramatic tension. Having read a sentence about hearing the sudden roar of a chainsaw, it's neither surprising nor scary when a chainsaw-wielding enemy looms out of the darkness 60 seconds later.

That's not to say there are no chills and thrills in Alan Wake. Environments are suitably spooky and there are a fair few moments that make you jump. But as the game progresses the environments start to look awfully similar, and the scary bits become predictable. For example, it's a pretty safe bet you're about to encounter a huge horde of enemies when you find a large pile of batteries and an unlimited supply of revolver ammo, so there's no sense of shock or terror when you do.

Meanwhile in the forest...

A familiar pattern emerges within a few hours. Your mission is always to get from point A to point B, defeating enemies, picking up ammo, collecting manuscript pages and kick-starting generators along the way. Alan's lack of jumping and climbing skills means there's little in the way of exploration to be done and levels are generally linear. There is only a handful puzzles, and all of

The world of Alan Wake is one of fear and tension - a place where it's perfectly acceptable to be afraid of the dark, because if you're not, you'll be enveloped by the evil forces that dwell just beyond your field of vision.

It's more thriller than horror, but Alan Wake still has its share of scares.

Alan Wake is one adaptable author.

them are of the "find out how to get over there so you can make the red switch go green" variety. [...]

Despite all this, it's hard not to feel sorry for Alan Wake (the game - it's easy not to feel sorry for Alan Wake the character, with his melodramatic disposition, endless blathering and silly conviction that the best thing to do when your wife goes missing isn't to just call the police.) Remedy has worked hard to produce a polished game, one with impressive visuals and a new take on combat. On those fronts it's succeeded. Had Alan Wake been released three years ago, it would have been easy to recommend the game as a solid, polished action-adventure.

Ultimul capitol

The genre has moved on since then. Games such as BioShock have shown how compelling and original storylines can be told in innovative ways. The likes of Uncharted 2 have offered up not just lush visuals but diverse locations and varied gameplay. With Heavy Rain, Quantic Dream broke the rules of game narrative and forced the player not only to think before pulling the trigger, but to feel.

By comparison, Alan Wake is tired and derivative. Everything about it feels dated, from the linear level design to the red-green switch nonsense to the visual stylings (surely not even J Allard has attempted the hoodie-with-jacket combo since 2005). There are plenty of fancy cut-scenes, dramatic voiceovers and cinematic

camera angles, but even when Alan Wake does a good job of pretending to be a film you just feel like you're watching a really bad film. That's particularly true when it comes to the ending - without spoiling anything, let's just say you're left thinking, "You mean I kick-started all those generators for *that*?"

All the same, there's a weekend's worth of fun here for action-adventure fans who aren't too bothered about innovative concepts and varied gameplay, and don't mind a lot of repetition. Alan Wake is an accessible, undemanding game with a neat

combat mechanic and decent visuals. It's just not a very original game, it's certainly not an exceptional one, and it's a shame it wasn't ready a few years ago.

■ **Caleb**

alternativa

CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH

Ei, așa, de-al naibii ce sunt, vă voi recomanda un adevărat shooter survival horror, care se desfășoară la rândul lui într-un decor marin: Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of he Earth. Acolo, frate, nu te plictisești ever, duci lipsă de toate, de la muniție până la aerul din plămâni și la sănătatea mintală. Inclusiv valoarea artistică a elementelor vizuale este ridicată, iar povestea, simplă, dar genială, inspirată din opera lui Lovecraft, nu te deranjează cu locuri comune sau pseudofilozofii.

* LEVEL APRILIE 2006

BUNE:
▸ **atmosferă reușită, sunet, voci și muzică excepționale**
▸ **gameplay original, tensionat**
▸ **motorul narativ**

RELE:
▸ **Alan Wake**
▸ **lipsit de momente memorabile**
▸ **plin de clișee**
▸ **sperieturi ieftine**

Presentation: 10/10. Television-style episodic structure works well with the nature of the story and action. Quality of writing is uneven.

Grafică: 9/10. Stellar lighting effect and environmental design foster an atmosphere of authenticity to make the scares and thrills more affecting.

Sunet: 9/10. While voices sometimes overlap and not all acting is of the same quality, the soundtrack and effects have a significant effect on the game's powerful mood.

Gameplay: 9/10. Interesting storytelling mechanics and a fast and responsive combat system to keep play entertaining. The infrequent jumping sections feel underdeveloped.

Lasting Appeal: 9/10. It's not a long game. If you like, play through on Nightmare to get a few more details and to get a better sense of the combat.

CONCLUZIE: Un proiect care durat mult să se concretizeze, dar nu în formatul ambiţios open-world dorit la început, ci într-o formă mai convenţională, lineară. Inovaţiile aduse de gameplay-ul antrenant, sunetul excelent, povestea captivantă mai ales prin felul în care este spusă şi amestecătura de influenţe aduc un tribut măgulitor genurilor horror şi thriller, care vă va ţine lipiţi de fotoliu până la capăt, în ciuda defectelor evidente.

8

ACHIZIŢIE: pentru cele cca. 15 ore de joc, preţul de aprox. 300 de lei cu care se găseşte la noi e destul de piperat, dar daca il găsiţi mai ieftin, nu mai staţi pe gânduri, jocul merită.

Gen Action/Thriller **Producător** Remedy Entertainment **Distrbuitor** Microsoft Game Studios **Ofertant** GameShop.ro **ON-LINE** www.alanwake.com

Ancient Trader

The average title on Xbox Live's Indie Games service stays on the 15-strong New Arrivals list for all of 10 days - if it's lucky - before it's forced to give way to a clutch of new releases, commonly involving Avatars, with most of a fairly low quality. It's an extremely short shelf-life, only ever extended should it sell enough copies to make the Top Downloads list, or be scored highly enough by its players to earn a spot among the coveted Top Rated selection. Why Ancient Trader should sit on an identical star rating to, say, The Impossible Avatar Getaway 2 is hard to fathom, because this terrific turn-based strategy certainly doesn't deserve to float among the flotsam in the Browse All section.

Its distinctive visual style is, naturally, the first thing that impresses. Artist Petr Vcelka, one of just six names listed in the credits, has taken inspiration from 16th- and 17th-century cartography - most obviously, Abraham Ortelius and his Theatrum Orbis Terrarum (the first modern atlas) - and crafted some beautiful, imaginative and exceptionally detailed art across the game's ageing, weathered maps.

The creatures that you'll battle as you flit from port to port are all hugely characterful creations, ranging from oversized crustaceans to bizarre leviathans of the deep. Subtle animations bring them all to life and as you cross the oceans, you'll see dolphins leaping out of the water, whales briefly surfacing for air and clouds gently circling over unexplored areas. Upgrade your ship and it gradually transforms from a single-sail skiff to an almighty galleon with golden leonine figurehead.

It's decorative, then, but never at the expense of functionality or clarity. Information is clearly presented, and charmingly so. Your current movement limit is represented by huffing wind clouds behind your sail, while icons indicating the three commodities of tea, spice and fruit are piled up neatly in your ship's hold. Everything's laid out so logically and accessibly that you can happily skip the 'How To Play' section and figure out what's going on within minutes of your first game.

The ultimate objective - at least, in the default game mode - is to collect three sacred artefacts so that you can tackle the Ancient Guardian, a monster so huge and

There's a touch of the mysterious Orient about the incidental music, and the sound effects are evocative.

Wise players will give more powerful monsters a wide berth until their ship has enough cannons and crew to safely sink them.

fearsome its name warrants capitalisation. Naturally, even if you can afford the items in question, your ship will be woefully underequipped to take on such a behemoth, so you trade and upgrade your way to success. Buy cheap, sell for a hefty profit, and hope you don't bump into any sea monsters or your trading peers as you sail between los puertos (the game quite rightly insists on the Spanish term; it sounds that bit more exciting than its English equivalent).

If your boat is moored, you're safe, but finish a turn on the ocean wave and you might come under attack, at which point you play a simple card game to find out whether or not you lose money to a rival or cargo to the hungry mouth of a sea beast. The highest-numbered card will win each round, unless it's drawn against a colour it's weaker than; the stronger hue gets a two-point attack bonus.

It's classic rock-paper-scissors, only in this case it's swords, cannons and, er, bigger cannons - or heads, tails and claws for the monsters. Admittedly, the outcome against a similarly-able opponent can rest on an initial lucky pick, which perhaps seems a little unfair, but then the punishment is rarely unduly severe, with barely a handful of gold coins changing hands or perhaps just two or three crates of fruit lost to Davy Jones' locker.

It's sometimes worthwhile taking a detour, not just because the artefacts are spread across all corners of the map, but because you'll often find some useful stuff floating around, from treasure chests to crates from the various wreckages that the roaming monsters have left in their wake. Whirlpools act as teleports, gusts of wind blow you double the distance on your next turn, while messages in bottles clear away clouded areas to reveal previously hidden ports. You'll be offered the chance to take on side-quests when you drop anchor, though the monetary reward for doing so is often meagre recompense for the effort required, and only worth taking on if you were already planning on a spice run in that direction.

Despite the various wrinkles, it's a fairly simple-minded game, and the size and layout of the maps in each of the three difficulties rarely makes a significant difference to the basic flow, instead merely extending the number of turns required to finish off your aquatic foe. That said, the AI provides a decent challenge and it has the decency to get its turn over with in just a few seconds.

Its leisurely pace might make it an unlikely candidate for Live play, but online multiplayer is included, though larger maps can require a time investment some may not be prepared to

The attention to the minutiae of these made-up maps is remarkable.

give. Ancient Trader is arguably better suited to online rather than hot-seat play thanks to the secrecy factor; while you can check the wealth of your opponents and the artefacts they possess at any time, their tactics remain a mystery. It's a pity there's no mid-game save option, but sensible players will restrict themselves to the faster-paced modes on the smaller maps, not least because it means you can squeeze more games into a single sitting.

Though not as feature-packed as full-fat XBLA titles like Risk: Factions or Catan, Ancient Trader deserves the opportunity to do business with the big boys rather than risk getting washed away with the shovelware tide. That a game so elegant and accomplished should have to be dredged up from the depths of Indie Games is worrying; if a title of this quality can so easily slip the net, what other undiscovered treasures remain submerged?

■ **Chris Schilling**

Gratuitous Space Battles

Gratuitous Space Battles' raison d'etre is probably best implied by its own title. Its primary purpose is to provide fans with as much epic space battling as they can handle. While there are games out now that can bring hot fleet action to the table, but their ship combat is - for better or worse - couched in far too much game. Extra elements like diplomacy, economics and online virtual worlds "distract" from seeing metal death machines explode in poetic fashion.

Its core concept is straightforward: take two fleets, jam them full of heavily armed ships, and throw them at each other to slug it out. There's no need for complex objectives, scripted events, base-building, mission briefings or even an overarching fiction. It's all about blowing sh*t up...in space!

At first glance the game is relatively simple, and blends elements from real-time strategy and tower defense. Unlike most RTS games though, Gratuitous Space Battles actively prevents the player from micromanaging combat. In fact, once the ships are under way, all you can do is sit back and watch the fireworks. The game's depth lies primarily in the steps leading up to the actual encounter.

Players must design the ships that will fight for glory in the depths of space. Thankfully though, they won't need a degree in CAD or space engineering to get going, and the process mainly consists of selecting one of many pre-designed ship hulls and deciding which snazzy space components go where, balancing power needs with crew

requirements and other attributes, like weight.

Once all the ship designing is over, the only remaining task is to assemble a fleet and deploy it based within a preset budget. Finishing battles under budget earns bonus "honor points" which can be used to unlock more parts, playable races, and ship hulls. Basic AI "orders" can be assigned to govern ship behavior. Once combat is underway however, it's all hands-off, with the player only capable of controlling the camera and speeding up or slowing down time. Victory is determined by everything you did before contact.

For a title designed to run on low-end computers, Gratuitous Space Battles brings a lot of flash and thunder to every battle. Presented from a top-down perspective, precisely detailed ships send off swarms of missiles and rockets, and fire shiny glowing death rays, burning off bits of enemy hull armor and breaching hulls in an utterly satisfying manner. Fighters maneuver across the field, wheeling about and performing strafing runs in the face of larger ships' point-defense systems and fast firing lasers. Rather than the quiet, intense dogfights of shows like Battlestar Galactica, the game channels the space warfare of Babylon 5, Star Wars, and Legend of the Galactic Heroes, all lumbering capital ships, huge explosions and dramatic slugfests.

However, the game's greatest asset isn't so much its technical prowess or innovative design (though it has both), but rather its clever, tongue-in-cheek sense of humor. Every ship component

comes with a descriptive tooltip written with a knowing love of geeky cliches and tropes, crafted to draw giggles and winks from any fan of science fiction.

Perhaps the game's greatest flaw is a lack of balance in the single-player mission mode. It's far too easy to just ignore frigates and fighters, settling to drop large mass of heavy capital ships, eventually winning by way of attrition. It doesn't feel as rewarding to use complex AI routines, diverse ship selections or elegant formations, making it harder to learn those new tactics that keep sessions fresh, especially once multiplayer comes in.

The real joy of Gratuitous Space Battles' multiplayer is the resemblance it bears to old-school "snail-mail chess" games. Players can construct their own customized fleets and post them up as "challenges" that others can test their own setups against. There's a great feeling that you get when your complicated, subtle formations and sublime ship designs flatten an enemy fleet, as if to say "Hah! Is that the best you could come up with! What kind of grand admiral are you?!"

In the end, for all its talk of being "gratuitous," Gratuitous Space Battles is actually quite a lean, mean game with a unique premise and singularly charming personality. If you're even marginally interested in seeing heavily armed tin cans tear each other a new hull breach with beam lasers and torpedo missiles, give it a try.

■ **Josh Tolentino**

Breathe Deeper: p0nd

Wow. Just wow. Wake up with several people having contacted us about the wonder that is P0nd. This is a short artistic meditation on beauty and life via zen-like one-button breathing controls. In its five minutes, it'll show you exactly what's so wonderful about this medium of ours. If you play nothing else today, play this.

> I delight in the smalle things,
> the shape of a leafe,
> the curl of sunlight on the grasses.
> I set out before dawne, one foot afore the other,
> to see what wonders the day might holde.

p0nd kicks things off with this little pensive lyric, immediately sending the warning bells of pretension ringing in my ears. In all honesty, I have no idea what the hell p0nd is. Is it art? Is it a pisstake? Is it just an example of the wandering mind in game form? Who knows.

There's not much I can say about this game without ruining the entire experience, short that it is, but one thing I will say is this: keep an open mind. It's another one of those visually interesting mood pieces that has a firm concept at the beginning before shaking things up in extreme fashion towards the conclusion. Just as I was beginning to find myself sucked in by the presentation and the atmospheric piano tinkling, the game made me laugh so hard that the water I'd been drinking came out of my nose.

Give it a playthrough and I'm pretty sure you'll see what I mean.

■ **Kieron Gillen**

PRODUCĂTOR The Peanut Gallery **ON-LINE** http://www.rjlayton.com/pond/ **DOWNLOAD** www.gamersgate.com **PREȚ** €9.95

Loved

It's been a while since we've had a cerebral short-form indie platformer we could throw our weight behind with an unreserved recommendation. It's a bit – as its creator Alexander Ocias says "confrontational" – but in a good way. It's got the sort of meaningful choices interlaced through it which Fallout fans are always crying out for, has a genuinely oppressive atmosphere and at least a couple of killer endings depending on which way you choose to go. As a meditation about control and free-will – which is what I'm going to say it's about – it's really quite excellent. Also, jumping. I've played it a couple of times already, and I suspect I'll go back for another one to try a few more choices.

■ **Kieron Gillen**

PRODUCĂTOR Alexander Ocias **ON-LINE** http://www.alexanderocias.com/loved.php **PREȚ** Freeware

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Wake Up: Coma

Coma's been around for a little while now, but I've only just picked up on it from *Alice Wonderland* and it's actually a quite lovely little platforming adventure which goes heavy on the graphic style and atmosphere. Alice says it makes her want to replay Machinarium and warm-up for Limbo, and I can't disagree with that. Well, I could, but I'd be a churlish knave. It features the best player-propelling anus I've seen for a while.

■ **Kieron Gillen**

PRODUCĂTOR Thomas Brush **ON-LINE** http://www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/541124 **PREȚ** Freeware

NEPTUNE'S PRIDE

On the borders of my galactic empire's scanners I see a fleet of over 100 ships on a battle course for Arcturus, an undefended star of mine. I glance around to see if there are any fleets I can use in defense, but there aren't - my forces, though greater than my enemy's, are scattered among the many star systems I control. I will be forced to watch, helpless, as my enemy's fleet unflinchingly marches towards my helpless star... over the course of several hours.

What I just described wasn't some epic space-empire management game. It was Neptune's Pride, a free-to-play browser game that isn't even finished yet, founded by former Irrational Games developer Jay Kyburz.

And it's everything a browser game should be. The game itself is deceptively simple - as the leader of a civilization, you control a number of stars and fleets. Each star has three ratings: economy, a measure of how much income the star generates for you; industry, or how many ships the star will produce; and science, which contributes to improving your technological levels. The quality of the star determines how expensive it is to improve these ratings, with each additional level in a field costing more than the last.

The only way to move ships between stars is to form them into a fleet for a small amount of money. These fleets are the "armies" that you use to attack or reinforce specific planets. The combat is simple - there is only one type of ship, and the number of ships in your fleet is more or less equivalent to the "hitpoints" of your army, with your attack corresponding to your weapons technology and a small bonus for being the defender. The fleets can only move a specific distance, meaning that to move over larger distances you'll need to hop between different stars. The game makes this easy with a simple waypoint system, allowing you to

chain up movements that may take days to play out. Keep in mind, though, that once a fleet is on its way, its course cannot be changed until it lands at a star, so you'd best be sure you want to launch that assault.

In terms of technology, there are four different areas of research: weapons, or how damaging your fleets are; speed, which determines how quickly they move; range, which allows your fleets to move further in a single "jump"; and scanning, which allows you to see enemy fleets and the defenses of enemy planets at a further distance.

Every 24 hours, you receive income based on the total economy rating of all your stars. At any point during the day you can use this money to improve your stars, create fleets, trade technologies and stars or send a gift to another player. You can also send messages at any point using the simple and clean in-game mail system, which allows either one-on-one conversations or messages between multiple players.

What makes the game different, though, is that unlike most browser-based strategy games of this type it doesn't boast thousands of simultaneous players in the same game - the free games are set at 8 players. And that's also what makes the game so great, because at no point is any one player too powerful to completely disregard every other player.

Some can hope that their superior strategic abilities will win the day, but in reality the most devious bastard will usually be the victor. Alliances shift and change with the leaderboard, as there can be only one winner per game. Someone in first place will often find themselves facing a coalition of every other player in the game. Technological trades are tentative, because there's nothing stop-

ping the other player from not holding up his end of the bargain - except the threat of your battleships. Why become embroiled in an unnecessary war, especially when you've just convinced another player to help you in a war against your larger foe?

Even more so when you don't even plan on attacking your foe until he's committed all his ships to the war with your "friend."

It's this social facet that goes on behind the scenes that really brings the game together. Neptune's Pride only requires your active attention for a few minutes a day, but this only makes the diplomacy that much better. The machinations your mind can come up with over the course of a day often turn out to be much deeper, even with the simpler tools at your disposal, than the sort used in faster-paced games of this nature.

So how crafty are you, really? Will you promise that leading player an alliance, only to rush his undefended flank at the last moment? Or will you be feeding your real friends the tactical information they need on the alliance you're only nominally in? Because in the end, it doesn't matter how you got to first place - just that you got there.

■ **Andy Rose**

Dark Age of Camelot: Re-Review

Returning to an older MMORPG is always a somber and almost depressing prospect. The slight hints of anticipation are usually punctured with desolate hunting zones, entrenched veterans and an overall feeling of neglect. In Dark Age of Camelot however, things are a little different. Herein lies a game of activity, event and life even after an almost decade long life span. It is genuinely inspirational to see a game of such age still have crowds of players populating hubs and various activity driven destinations. With this however, comes a price, DAoC is no longer the MMORPG experience it once was, the game is now busied solely with PvP, and while this is by no means a terrible thing, anyone looking to find virtual life in these lands will find little else.

Camelot, it is a Silly Place

It is worth noting that for its time DAoC was revolutionary- a leap in terms of the genre. In retrospect we can now see how much the Mythic developed game influenced future titles, one quick glance at its attributes: three individual factions, a workable questing system, Realm versus Realm combat; All of these elements can be found in games today and in essence, DAoC is possibly one of the most important MMORPGs ever created and furthermore, because of all of these features it helped introduce, its game play isn't quite as decrepit as you may think. While the game does not have all of the bells and whistles of newer games, DAoC is still very easily playable. The environments are still imaginative and unique; dungeons are still a joy to venture into and player versus player dominance is still the ultimate pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

Running at 1280X800 and with all the graphical settings turned up, this is one fine looking oldie. The game runs smoothly and after some time you will begin to forget that you are playing a game almost a decade in age. Textures are refined, character models and animations look satisfactory and overall the game looks entirely pleasant.

A Mere Flesh Wound

My time through DAoC initially was very pleasant and I have to say I was very impressed by what I had seen, however, things start to take a left turn as soon as the tutorial is over. Once you have chosen your starting point the game becomes painfully top heavy, of course this is true for any older game but in DAoC it seems that the developers have given up on giving new players the adventure that is the journey to the level cap. It took me all of five days to reach level 50 with a mixture of questing, solo grind and also grouping with level 50's. The overall point of the game is no longer to experience the lands of Albion, Midgard or Hibernia; it is simple to reach level 50, equip the latest and greatest armor, and get stuck into PvP.

When Tribes go to War

Player versus Player, Realm versus Realm. Putting aside my issues with DAoC, this is an element were it does excel. Crowds of players constantly gather by frontiers and battlegrounds and with regular interval, lands are won, contested and defeated. Again I must state my surprise but at the gates to the various PvP engagements, an overwhelmingly huge number of players congregate, the activity is amazing; enter one of these zones and these too are full with players simply guarding the perimeter, if you want active PvP, this is your game.

Finally is the age old concern of joining an already advanced game; you cannot shake the feeling that you are just too late to get into proceedings. Players now have the best armor sought through raids and countless hours of "scale" farming to obtain "dragon armor" and it can feel very daunting to get into. This is an inevitable problem and one that is still very difficult to overcome. The Player versus Player element of DAoC however remains still to this day one of the most enjoyable experiences around.

Love All the People

My struggles through the game were constantly helped by random passers by offering me help, kind word and more often than not coin. My constant badgering of the advice channel was answered with unwavering generosity and many players would take the time out to come and meet you and guide you to whatever task. The community shows the type of kindness you rarely see in this genre, rather than the stereotypical "are you local?" veterans, DAoC proudly bolsters one of the best communities around.

Departing Words

In honesty, Dark Age of Camelot is a very mixed bag; overall the game is surprisingly pleasant, refreshing and very good for its age. The Player versus Player is still hugely entertaining and the game is still active (even if it is just one server). The problem for me however lies in its survival path; the game has changed into something different, something less adventurous and ultimately less immersive. You cannot help but wonder why doesn't the developer simply start every character at 50 and make the game about gathering gear for your character rather than concerning yourself with a short leveling stint.

If you love PvP and can put up with a purely one dimensional experience then absolutely try this game out. If you are however looking for an immersive MMORPG with great PvE, then ultimately this is not the game for you.

■ **Adam Tingle**

DIABLO II ™

The original Diablo went gold **on the day after Christmas in 1996, after a grueling four-month crunch period. We hadn't put any thought into what game to do next, but as most developers can probably relate to, we were pretty certain we weren't ready to return to the Diablo world after such a long development cycle. The only thing we were certain of was that we wanted to avoid another crunch like we had just experienced. Diablo II went gold on June 15, 2000, after a grueling 12-month crunch period.**

After Diablo shipped, we spent about three months recovering and kicking around game ideas for our next project, but nothing really stuck. The idea of returning to Diablo began to creep into the discussions, and after a couple of months of recuperation, we suddenly realized we weren't burned out on Diablo anymore. We dusted off the reams of wish-list items we had remaining from the original, compiled criticisms from reviews and customers, and began brainstorming how we could make Diablo II bigger and better in every way.

Diablo II never had an official, complete design document. Of course, we had a rough plan, but for the most part we just started off making up new stuff: four towns instead of the original game's one; five character classes, all different from the previous three; and many new dungeons, vast wilderness tile-sets, and greatly expanded lists of items, magic, and skills. We wanted to improve upon every aspect of the original. Where Diablo had three different armor "looks" for each character, Diablo II would use a component system to generate hundreds of variations. Where Diablo had "unique" boss monsters with special abilities, Diablo II would have a system for randomly generating thousands of them. We would improve the graphics with true transparency, colored light sources, and a quasi-3D perspective mode. Level loads would be a thing of the past. The story would be factored in from the beginning and actually have some bearing on the quests. We knew creating this opus would be a big job.

Diablo II is still Diablo

We kept less than one percent of the code and art from the first game. We rewrote the graphics engine, changed all the character classes and skills, shifted and expanded the setting, reworked and added to the magic items, brought back only a handful of our

favorite monsters, and designed a ton of new gameplay elements, such as running, hirelings, left-click skills, and random unique monsters. Both Diablo and Diablo II provide a constant source of simple pleasures, many of which are perhaps too basic and obvious to mention in evaluations and reviews, but which are fundamental to their success. We used the term *"kill/reward"* to describe our basic gameplay. Players continually kill monsters and get rewarded with treasure and experience. But the rewards don't stop there. We offer a steady stream of goals and accomplishments to entice the player to keep playing. There's always a quest that is almost finished, a waypoint almost reached, an experience level almost achieved, and a dungeon nearly cleared out. On a smaller scale,

we tried to make every single action fun. Moving around inventory items produces pleasing sounds. Monsters die in spectacular fashion, like piñatas exploding in a shower of goodies. We strove for overkill in this sense, in that players are constantly on the

> *"Released on June 29, 2000, Diablo II was built on the foundation established by the original Diablo, which combined classic role-playing game design philosophies and fast-paced demon-killing action."*

verge of something great - only a few mouse-clicks away from a dozen interesting things.

Diablo II retained Diablo's randomly generated levels, monsters, and treasure. This obviously allows for better replay potential, but also serves to make each player's game his or her own. Players feel an ownership of their own game experience in that they

are actively generating a unique story. It's enjoyable to tell friends about what you have just done in the game, knowing for sure that they have not done the same thing. Simply following an online walk-through won't help them accomplish goals without effort.

Finally, Diablo and Diablo II are easy to play. We used what we call the "Mom test": could Mom figure this out without reading a manual? If we see new players struggling with how to sell items, we look at how they're trying to do it and make that way work too. We strove to make the interface as transparent as possible. You want to open a door? Left-click on it. Want to move to a target location? Left-click on it. Want to attack a monster, pick up an item, or talk to a non-player character? Well, you get the idea. It's amazing how many games have different controls and key

combination for all these actions when simpler is always better.

Character skill tree

Our most revolutionary new idea was the character skill tree. For a character to attain more powerful skills, he or she must master pre-requisite skills. The ability for characters to branch into different areas of the skill tree, and to choose a level of specialization in each skill along the way, provides truly unique characters. The general idea was taken from the tech trees many strategy games employ. In strategy games, players advance by researching new technologies, which

in turn open up further avenues of research. We adapted this to have our characters advance by choosing a new skill or strengthening an old

" The development of Diablo II is a remarkable success story. We got the opportunity to make the game we wanted to make - and the game we wanted to play."

skill every time they gain an experience level. Characters can generalize by choosing a wide variety of skills, or specialize by allocating many skill choices into a small group of skills. We also created a strategy element

of choosing skills you might not use, just so you can get to one further up the tree later. The longevity of Diablo II will be enhanced by the endless strategies that can be debated and experimented with.

Launching the new Battle.net

The success of Battle.net after Diablo's launch created a new challenge for us. When Diablo was released, Battle.net was a new online service. Basically, we were able to ramp up as more customers joined the service. When Diablo II shipped, Battle.net had millions of users. The level of anticipation was higher than for any of our other games. We spent count-

less hours preparing for Battle.net's Diablo II debut. We teamed with the best ISPs in the word, and conducted months of internal and external beta testing. We ramped up bandwidth and hardware. We beefed up the Battle.net, quality assurance, and support service teams.

In some respects, we are victims of our own success. We underestimated sales, but we also underestimated the allure of playing on the Battle.net Realms. By solving the cheating problem in Diablo and enhancing Battle.net with new features - such as the ability to see everyone's characters in the chat room - we seem to have attracted a larger share of Battle.net players than with any of our previous titles.

The Final Word

Many more things "went right" than could fit in that section. Our internally controversial plan to tell a separate but parallel story through our cinematic sequences seems to have succeeded, and the workman-ship and quality of these sequences has set a new standard. Our marketing and PR departments did a fantastic job building customer awareness and creating a frenzy of interest. Diablo II's music is outstanding, and along with an amazing array of sound effects, contributes hugely to the atmosphere of the game.

The development of Diablo II is a remarkable success story. We got the opportunity to make the game we wanted to make - and the game we wanted to play. Diablo II turned out to be a great game, one that many of us still play every day. Initial sales figures are phenomenal, and reviews have tended to be better than those of its predecessor. We have gained a lot of experience that should help us make even better games in the future.

The only major downside to Diablo II's development was the inhuman amount of work it required. A yearlong crunch period puts a huge burden on people's relationships and quality of life. Our biggest challenge for the future is figuring out how to keep making giant games like Diablo II without burning out. As a start, we are hoping our experience will help us do a better job scheduling and managing the workload. We also believe that taking the time to make better tools will make things easier at the end of projects.

■   **Carl Salminen**

Titlu 2010: A Doua Odisee

Autor Arthur C. Clarke

Colecția Nautilus

„Nimeni nu scrie mai bine decat Arthur Clarke despre extraterestri enigmatici si artefactele lor. Stilul prozei sale are o precizie aproape stiintifica si, cumva, reuseste de fiecare data sa teasa o poveste completa, dar fara sa spulbere misterul.”

Library Journal

„Elocvent în descrierea locului Omului în Univers și debordând de aventuri spațiale, romanul este o realizare monumentală și o lectură obligatorie pentru fanii vechi și noi ai lui Arthur C. Clarke.”

Interzone

„Este incitanta, misterioasa, tulburatoare si chiar profetica. Viziunea lui Clarke asupra viitorului este fantastica si cutremuratoare.”

Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine

„Ca si in cazul lui 2001: Odiseea spatiala, Arthur C. Clarke ne starneste imaginatia cu o

carte accesibila si celor neinteresati de stiinta, gratie atmosferei de autenticitate care ne determina sa ne intrebam: «Oare chiar s-ar putea intampla asa ceva?»”

Los Angeles Time

„O călătorie impresionantă prin sistemul solar, o continuare remarcabilă a legendei 2001: Odiseea Spațială.”
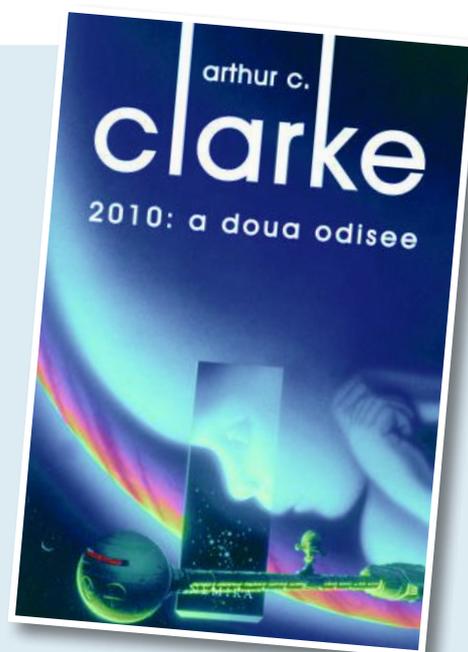
Carl Sagan

„Clarke demonstreaza ca nu exista nimic mai eroic si mai specific uman decat batalia intelectuala dusa impotriva universului vast si indescifrabil [..] si straluceste de asemenea in abilitatea de a zugravi realist detaliile unor progrese stiintifice care, deocamdata, ne sunt inaccesibile.”

Publishers Weekly

„2010: A Doua Odisee ne incită în continuare imaginația cu întrebarea: Ce ar putea însemna pentru noi evoluția post-darwiniană în viitorul apropiat?”

Locus

„Din toate punctele de vedere, o con-

tinuare pe măsura capodoperei 2001: Odiseea Spațială. Un lucru aproape imposibil, ținând seama de standardul impus de prima carte și de expunerea mediatică formidabilă de care s-a bucurat.”
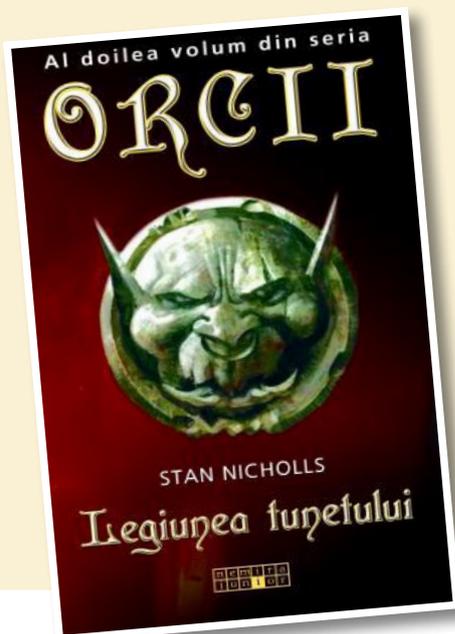
The New York Times Book Review

Titlu Legiunea tunetului

Autor Stan Nicholls

Colecția Nemira Junior

Legiunea tunetului este cel de-al doilea volum din seria Orcii.

Razboiul a aruncat taramul Maras-Dantia in haos. In timp ce armatele isi strang randurile, Stryke si banda sa de orci se refugiaza din calea tuturor. Destinul orcilor trebuie salvat, si totul depinde de obiectele magice legate de originea raselor stravechi – uniunea celor cinci totemuri ii poate elibera pe orci din sclavie. Dar pe masura ce luptatorii lui Stryke cad unul cate unul prada unor dusmani de cosmar, pentru semintia orcilor si pentru Maras-Dantia se apropie sfarsitul.

„Ce obtii cand combini o ceata rebela de orci, cinci obiecte ciudate ale caror puteri sunt necunoscute si o vrajitoare paranoica, insetata de razbunare si pasionata de rituri sangeroase? O poveste deosebita despre magie, creaturi fantastice si rase mitice!”

Todd Richmond, SF Site Reviews

„Renasterea stralucita a legendei orcilor, aceasta cenusareasa a genului fantasy.”

Barry Forshaw, Starlog

CÂȘTIGĂTORII
LUNII MAI

Cei cinci câștigători ai concursului NEMIRA, ediția mai 2010, ce a avut ca premii **cinci romane Cartea cimitirului** de **Neil Gaiman**, sunt următorii: **Maxin Iuliana** din Chișoda, **Lica Grațian Tiberiu** din Craiova, **Agarafini Cristian** din Tulcea, **Popa Cornel** din Cotești și **Cojocariu Bogdan** din Botoșani.

Info: Câștigătorii sunt rugați să contacteze redacția la adresa de e-mail emanuela.negura@3dmc.ro sau la numerele de telefon 0268.415.158, 0268.418.728

Această rubrică este sponsorizată de Editura Nemira.

Tales of Monkey Island Deluxe Collector's Edition (DVD)

Max: The Devil's Playhouse, desktop wallpapers and fun forum avatars, DVD slip case designed by Monkey Island art legend Steve Purcell), and these extras:

- A previously un-discovered new card from the Voodoo Lady's deck
- Gulf of Melange Map
- Commemorative button from Guybrush's Trial of the Century
- Drink coaster from Club 41
- Piratey piece of eight coin

Regarding the episodes, the ones in the DVD have some more bug fixes, simple disc check copy protection (it has no online activati on), and Chapter One replaces the voice of LeChuck with rerecordings done by his original voice actor (Earl Boen), replacing Adam Harrington's original dub used only for the first episode.

They all come in a glossy cardboard box, maybe just a bit thicker than your average shoebox. The tarot card is exlusive to the package (it doesn't come with the other tarot cards sold seperately). The card and pin are nice. The other side of the coaster has a gigntic logo and copyright information. However, comparing this to the opposite side of the Soul Train token from the Sam&Max Season Two case file (which has an entirely different design from the front, something that could very well be a part of the coin in-universe) makes this release feel like it was designed by a marketing committee. There was a reason we got trinkets for Sam and Max. It came from a question of how to capture a feeling from a bygone era. The Tales Deluxe Edition lacks any of the respect or individual care of the cheaper Case Files. We get two knock-offs, both of which have opted out of a real opposite side for a logo. We get a map that showed promise, but a botched and lazy execution made the thing feel like a broken promise taken physical form.

■   **Cristan**

PRODUS Joc Ediție Colecție **PRODUCĂTOR** Telltale Games **OFERTANT** www.telltalegames.com/monkeyisland **PREȚ** 26$ (fără TVA) + transport

Those loyal fans who have been playing Tales of Monkey Island for several months can now opt to upgrade their series to the ultimate DVD collector's package in standard or deluxe edition. The Deluxe Edition includes the DVD (containing the complete five episode season of Tales of Monkey Island, highlight reel with commentary from Telltale design team, production art gallery, five fan-created "I Wonder What Happens" video collection, two Tales of Monkey Island official trailers, preview of Telltale's next game, Sam &

Bioshock 2 Subject Delta Action Figure

Subject Delta has been brought to life with this beautiful figurine with stunning detail and quality. He stands proud and tall, you can change his arm to either the drill or his standard arm and he is the perfect replica of delta from BioShock 2. It's identical to the game character and the paint job is immaculate. He looks great, very sturdy and solid and a must have for BioShock 2 fans.
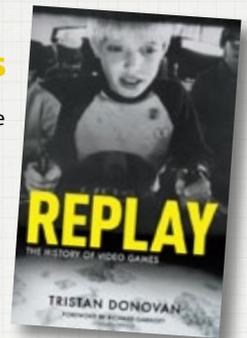
■   **amazon**

PRODUS Figurină **MĂRIME** 7" **PRODUCĂTOR** NECA **OFERTANT** www.amazon.co.uk **PREȚ** £11,29 + transport

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Replay: The History of Video Games

This is the best single general history of videogames that I've ever read and I can't think of a reason that you shouldn't go and order a copy of it immediately. The reason why it's the best are laid out in the second paragraph of the book, where he answers the question why write another book about this stuff anyway. In short, the aim was a history of videogames rather than the videogame business, with an eye on the world stage. In this 500 page volume – 350 pages of history, 150 pages of gameography and Hardware Glossary – he does exactly that. Really, this is fine detail. And in the detail where it matters, the book is extremely fine. Best of all, it's a history of games not written solely by the marketing budget or accepted wisdom.

Bravo! And encore! We should lob Donovan into cryogenic storage so we can thaw him out in 50 years to write write part 2.

■   **Kieron Gillen**

PRODUS Carte (paperback) **NR. PAGINI** 516 **EDITURA** Yellow Ant **OFERTANT** www.amazon.co.uk **PREȚ** £12,33 + transport

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Bioshock 2 Big Sister Action Figure

The Big Sister has about 16 different points of articulation; the figure comes with an attachable (or detachable) little sister cage/oxygen tank. Unlike previous figurines, the attachable item actually attaches nicely, and can hold on easily, although made it a little hard to push in the first time. The level of detail is great.Both with and without the attachment, it can hold its weight if standing straight. It stands at about 5.5 inches tall (including the attachment) or 5 inches (without) and is surprisingly light for how durable it is.
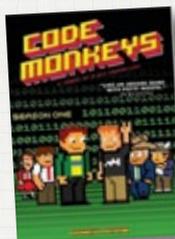
■   **amazon**

PRODUS Figurină **MĂRIME** 7" **PRODUCĂTOR** NECA **OFERTANT** www.amazon.co.uk **PREȚ** £14,27 + transport

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Code Monkeys: Season 1 (2007)

Originally airing on the G4 network, Code Monkeys revolves around a crew of video game developers in the 80's, and the crazy hijinks that ensue when they get a new boss in the form of the gun-toting, money hungry Texan Larrity. The main characters the show revolves around are sissy-boy Jerry and the wisecracking Dave who are among a crew that also features a role-playing nerd and the lone black employee. What follows involves the crew tangling with Hitler's descendants, taking a trip to prison, and getting the chance to make a game based on Steven Spielberg's E.T. (one of the absolute best episodes of the whole series). Overall the show as a whole is very enjoyable, with enough old-school video game references to make any gamer smile.

PRODUS Serial TV (animație) **NR. EPISOADE** 13 **PRODUCĂTOR** G4TV **OFERTANT** www.amazon.com **PREȚ** $17,99 (fără TVA) + transport

■   **amazon**

Nobody Leaves Nintendo, Nobody!

A If you think working as a designer for Nintendo sounds like a sweet job...you're probably right.

Speaking with Edge, Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto says "One particular difference I should point out with Nintendo is that I am in charge of the
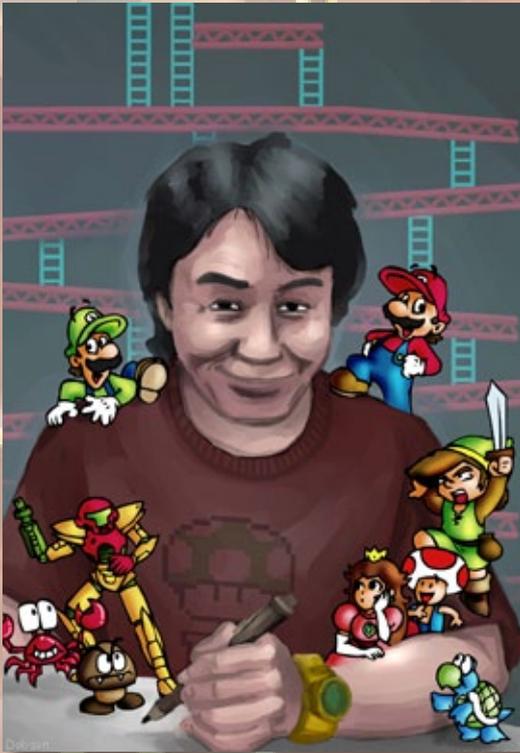
EAD division and very few people have ever left that division. Very few people have ever left Nintendo at all, actually. Nintendo is unique in this respect."

So there's a large group of people who have been there for decades? Yup. "For many years now, at any one point I have been in charge of 500 to 1,000 people, but quite a few of them have been working with me for nearly 30 years. And it's not uncommon at all for people stay at Nintendo for ten years or 20 years, and yet they are still looked upon as the young developers in the company! Nintendo is an unusual company, I guess."

I'd like to see other companies survive for 30 years, let alone retain a number of the same key employees for that stretch of time.

Chun-Li Apparently I have a type...

I just took the "What kind of guy should I date?" quiz and the result is Green Guy With Electric Powers.

4 minutes ago via Quiz Creator · Comment · Unlike · Take this Quiz

Blanka likes this.

Blanka I like my chances.
a few seconds ago · Delete

Write a comment...

Street Fighters Find Facebook

It's taken them long enough, but the World Warriors of Street Fighter II have finally found their way onto Facebook. And what are they doing? What everyone else does: flirt and play Farmville. Dorkly have put together this highlight reel, showing what would happen were the likes of Ryu, Ken and Balrog to actually take to the popular social networking site. We find that Cammy is popular, Dan is not popular, Guile is a douche and Bison...needs to get out more.

In The Future There Are Only Incredible Case Mods

A t first glance, I thought this was a statue. Maybe, if I was lucky, some constructive Warhammer 40K cosplay. Turns out, no, it's something even better: a bipedal PC case mod.

Yes, inside the belly of this Dreadnought is not the mind of a fallen hero, but a personal computer. Which, yes, is useful, but Lord knows how anyone gets any gaming/work done with this thing around, since it's not only quite tall (for a computer), but it lights up , has a spinning chain gun and even speaks.

Transportation Strike Delays Battlefield Bad Company 2 Patch

A transportation strike in Romania, of all things, is being blamed for a delay in the next Battlefield: Bad Company 2 patch on the PC.

In a thread on the EA UK forums, DICE producer Barrie Tingle confirmed the patch has been sent to EA Europe's QA department in Romania, but it isn't being worked on because the testers can't get into the office. "Transportation companies are apparently on strike, so they can't get to work," Tingle said.

Master Chief Goes Victorian with this Halo Steampunk Helmet

There is something inexplicable about the innate allurement of modern utilitarian objects adorned with Victorian design elements. After the mechanical "steampunk" style Xbox 360 controller, now, thanks to Christophe, we have the pleasure of seeing something Halo-related redesigned in the same popular trend. A project that, from visualization to fruition, spanned almost two months, this Halo steampunk helmet was more than worth both the time and effort. Christophe used plumbing PVC pipe and four layers of acrylic and spray paint as the tangible materials, but he says the recurring theme was failure and then numerous retries until something worked. Thankfully he stuck with it though because I'm pretty sure Master Chief could go diving in this thing.

A Still Intact Steampunk Xbox 360 Controller

Some people love the pseudo-Victorian mechanical look while others simply enjoy things that lean toward the impractical side. Luckily fans of both camps will adore Minister Morbid's newest creation. Featuring real leather, custom buttons, and an antique wood finish, this steampunk-style Xbox 360 controller is fully functional and can be yours for a teeny tiny investment of US $120. Fair warning though, if you use the guide button even semi-frequently, you may want to pass because the only way it can be accessed is through the insertion of a skeleton key.

Red Dead Redemption As A Pulp Novel

Kelvin "Rocketraygun" Chan produced this awesome pulp novel cover for Rockstar Games' Red Dead Redemption, featuring the Western open-world game's hero John Marston and promising a quick tale about the outlaw for just 25 cents. Chan says she based her image of Marston on actor Karl Urban (The Lord of the Rings movie series, recent Star Trek reboot).
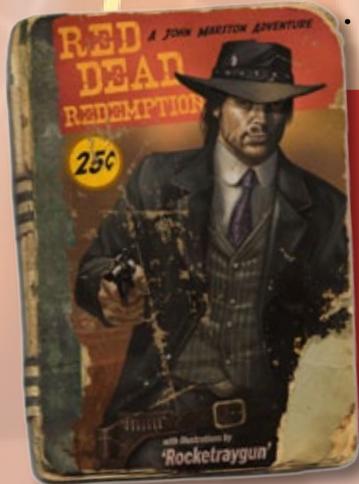
mini games

Ramps

Când viața ți-a rezervat statutul de bilă rezidentă temporar într-un tub, nu poți să te plângi că ești unul dintre ăia norocoși. De fapt, situația ta e cam albastră, pentru că un individ dubios ține morțiș să deschidă mereu și mereu tubul, să se uite la tine cum pici fix în lava de dedesubt și apoi să urle ca un apucat că nici de data asta n-a nimerit-o, plus ceva despre înscrierea jocului la Facultatea de Transporturi-Ginecologie.

Ramps e un joculeț pe cât de simplu, pe atât de fain: ai o bilă captivă, ai un Pahar al Făgăduinței, te privește strict personal cum faci ca drumul tub-Pahar să dureze mai puțin de 40 de ani.

Știu, pe Moise nu l-a grăbit nimeni, el a încercat poteci prin deșert cât a avut chef și n-a cârtit unul în front. Acum, între noi fie vorba, tu te-ai certa cu un tip care lansează atacuri teroriste pe bază de șapte plăgi și are și un ditamai ciomagul în mână? Mă gândeam eu.

Nu dispera totuși, primești ajutor. Nu e mană picată din cer și nici un buton de „I'm with stupid/skip level", dar e destul cât să treci la nive-lul următor. Fiecare puzzle vine cu o rampă-două (sau trei), pe care le plantezi în spațiu după cum te taie capul, le stabilești unghiul de înclinare, dai drumul bilei și... și o iei de la capăt, că ai calculat aiurea înclinația ultimei rampe. Din când în când, programatorii își bagă coada și-ți plantează și câte un obstacol în drum, fie el o linie cu proprietăți de perete sau o gaură
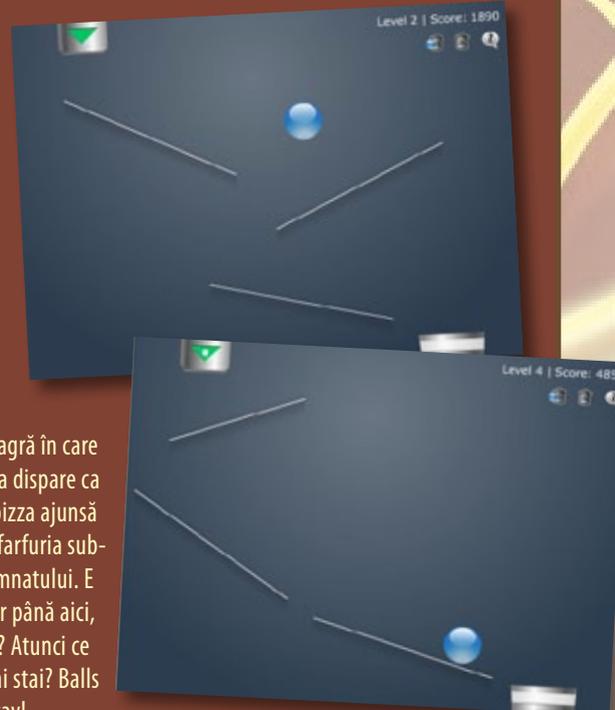
neagră în care bila dispare ca o pizza ajunsă în farfuria subsemnatului. E clar până aici, da? Atunci ce mai stai? Balls away!

■ **Jack the Ripper**

http://www.flash-game.net/game/3011/ramps.html

GiantBomb.com

Giant Bomb is a collection of dudes who freakin' love video games. Our editorial team has collectively played and written about video games professionally for over 30 years, and they're not looking to quit anytime soon. I mean, what else could they do at this point, really?

Giant Bomb reviews games on a five-star scale that does not include half-stars. We feel that this benefits our reviews for a number of reasons. Five-star rating systems are a widely accepted standard outside the field of video games, from Amazon.com to The Source, and we feel that the pervasiveness of the five-star system makes it more intuitive for the reader.

It also helps avoid the hair-splitting that can occur within more granular rating systems. A score is designed to provide the most basic at-a-glance information about a game for those considering making a game purchase--it is not there to justify/attack anyone's entrenched position on the relative value of one video-game franchise, developer, publisher, or hardware manufacturer versus another. While fundamental issues such as graphical performance and gameplay originality will almost always be factors in determining a final score, it ultimately comes down to how worthwhile the reviewer found the whole experience to be.

■   **giantbomb.com**

Applied Game Design
http://bbrathwaite.wordpress.com/about/

Applied Game Design is primarily the blog of Brenda Brathwaite, but features several other authors who also happen to be game designers including Ian Schreiber and John Sharp.

Brenda Brathwaite is a game designer, artist, writer and game developer who entered the video game industry in 1981 at the age of 15. She worked with Sir-tech Software for 18 years on the Wizardry series and later the Jagged Alliance series among others before moving on to work with Atari on Dungeons & Dragons.

Since her days at Atari, Brenda has worked with a variety of companies, including Electronic Arts, Cyberlore, Firaxis and numerous companies in the social media space. She is presently Creative Director at LOLapps.

Brenda served on the board of the IGDA until July 2010 and is presently on the advisory board for the International Center for the History of Electronic Games at the Strong Museum of Play and the advisory board for Game Developer Magazine. In 2009, *Train* won the coveted Vanguard Award at IndieCade for *"pushing the boundaries of game design and showing us what games can do."*

She was named one of the top 20 most influential women in the game industry by Gamasutra.com in 2008 and of the 100 most influential women in the game industry by Next Generation magazine in 2007. Nerve magazine also called her one of the the 50 artists, actors, authors, activists and icons who are making the world a more stimulating place.

■   **Brenda Brathwaite**

Fan To Pro - The Blog of Professional Geekery
http://www.fantopro.com/

The blog for geeks, fans, otaku, and other creative people who want to use their hobbies and passions in their careers.

Fan To Pro is a blog about how people can apply their fannish and geeky interests to their jobs and careers. Our goal is to help people find out how to do what they love not just on the side, but every day of their lives!

To that end this blog focuses on:

* Reporting, commenting on, and analyzing on the geeky and fannish career news you need to stay aware of.

* Providing help to geek career seekers with advice, exercises, and techniques.

* Reviewing books, websites, and other useful resources that you need.

* Keeping you up to date on career trends, pitfalls.

* Finding resources that you need in your career.

* The occasional heartfelt, therapeutic rants we all need to hear.

If you're on the hunt for a gaming job, this site's for you. It offers tips on finding and keeping jobs, as well as ways of surviving the industry with your sanity intact.

■   **Brenda Brathwaite**

How Good Video Games Become Bad Movies

ARE YOU ADAPTING A RECOGNIZABLE GAME?

IS THE LICENSE CHEAP?
DO YOU LIKE VIDEO GAMES?
DO YOU HAVE A BUDGET?
DO YOU HAVE SELF-RESPECT?
HOW ARE YOU FINANCING THE FILM?
EUROPEAN TAX LOOPHOLES
HIRE UWE BOLL.
DO THE SCREENWRITER, DIRECTOR, AND ACTORS LIKE VIDEO GAMES?
THE MOVIE WILL GET CANCELED.
"OH GOD, I'M SORRY!"
DO YOU CARE THAT HE'S A MONSTER?
HOW INVOLVED IS THE VIDEO GAME COMPANY?
NOT AT ALL
VERY
A LITTLE
DIRECT TO DVD.
BOX OFFICE POISON.
GOOD MOVIE.
DID ENOUGH RUBES BUY THIS CRAP OVERSEAS TO MAKE A SEQUEL?
DID THE MOVIE MAKE ENOUGH FOR A SEQUEL?
THANK GOD.

Please print off and distribute to Hollywood film executives

The Duck Hunt Dog Found In Sweden

LEVEL 1
TIME 56
NEXT
LINES 5
SCORE 346

so that's where Tetris block come from

the long strange trip from Pong paddle to motion-sensed human as chronicled by Scott Johnson with *ExtraLife*

mini games

Crazy Ball

Freddy e o făptură indefinibilă de gelatină, la care natura a găsit de cuviinţă să adauge, ea ştie de ce, o gură, doi ochi şi o poftă nebună să joace baschet printre profesionişti. La început a fost simplu: a intrat pe teren, şi-a susţinut cauza şi a fost angajat pe loc… ca minge de antrena-ment. O lună mai târziu, a cerut să fie mutat măcar pe banca de rezerve a juniorilor, şi de-atunci au apărut discuţiile.

Antrenorul principal i-a susţinut cauza în faţa echipei: Băieţi, merită o şansă, că are suflet de jucător! Uitaţi-vă şi voi: înălţime

– sufletu', dexteritate – sufletu', joc de picioare (cu tot cu picioare) – sufletu'!

Din păcate, căpitanul de echipă n-a fost convins: Yo, man, albii nu ştiu să sară! Şi bunică-mea sare mai sus decât el! În zadar a replicat Freddy că el nu e alb, ci crem, şi că poate deveni verde sau albastru la nevoie. Matahalele alea pricepeau jocul culorilor doar în alb şi negru, iar blo-bul nostru a înţeles că situaţia sa devenise cât se poate de maro.

În disperare de cauză, Freddy a apelat la spon-sorul echipei, doar-doar va găsi ceva înţelegere. De început, a început bine: omul l-a primit, l-a ascultat cu atenţie, i-a zâmbit încurajator şi a încheiat

întâlnirea cu un hohot isteric de râs. Râs cu lacrimi, semn că există totuşi puţină compasiune.

Supărat, blobuleţul s-a întors în teren, şi-a luat rămas bun de la jucători, a aş-teptat răbdător să vină femeia de serviciu să-l răzuiască de pe jos (iar s-a aşezat tâmpitul ăla de pivot pe mine!) şi pe-aici ţi-e drumul. Dacă nu are loc în NBA, atunci îşi va face el echipa lui, liga lui, campionatul lui. A găsit minge, a găsit alţi doritori, a găsit oameni dispuşi să apese pe săgeţi/ WASD cum tre-buie şi acum ţopăie de nerăbdare în aşteptarea următorului meci: Chicago Blobs vs Utah Jelly.
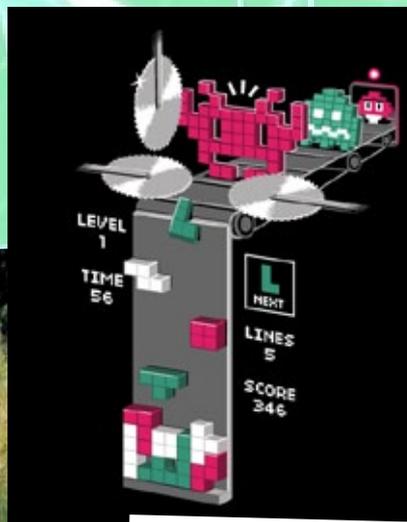
■ **Jack the Ripper**

http://www.flash-game.net/game/3011/ramps.html

10 MOST UNREALISTIC VIDEO GAMES WEAPONS

We love the weaponry from the virtual world of sci-fi FPS games, from the most hi-tech guns to fighting robots, flying rockets and chainsaws. If it kills, maims, creates explosions we are for it. But whilst we are ripping off the head of opponents and satisfying our on-screen blood lust , we often ignore how unrealistic and impracticle these weapons are. Innovation in the gaming industry has revealed weird and interesting weapons designed to kill, maim and destroy virtual enemies.

So let's take a look at the best contenders for the most unrealistic weapons in video games.

■   **Cristan**

10

MODEL: **The Snark**

PRODUCĂTOR: **Half Life**

DESCRIERE: The Snark, also known as the Squeak Grenade is a small, red and round creature, with single green eye and a pincer-like mandible. It lacks intelligence and is just out there to kill, no matter even it's the person who actually threw it. That's because it kills everything except it's own kind. It bites the target, and within 20 secs explodes into a spray of acid. Need I say its near to impossible to be in real?

9

MODEL: **The Keyblade**

PRODUCĂTOR: **Kingdom Hearts**

DESCRIERE: Don't just go by the picture if you haven't played the game and used the tool. The keyblade acts just like a sword and is very efficient in slicing, dicing,shooting magic fireballs and opening all manner of locks even if that meant unlocking the door to the other world. And its even got a keychain. Couldn't be better replica of a real life item used as a weapon to combat the heartless and nobodies. Great news is that all of us own one already, may be could try using it this way!

8

MODEL: **The Boomerang**

PRODUCĂTOR: **The Legend of Zelda**

DESCRIERE: The boomerang in the game is capable of not only taking out the enemies but also collect the items that those Tektites and Leevers leave behind. It even gets an upgrade part way into the game, letting the player to unleash that bad boy giving a pain in the ass.

7

MODEL: **The Bio-Sludge Rifle**

PRODUCĂTOR: **Unreal Tournament Series**

DESCRIERE: The bio Sludge rifle squirts out mildly corrosive goop around the battlefield in varying quantities, insert toilet humour joke here. As you press the trigger, primary fire launches a series of small, green blobs which stick to anything or explode on contact with another player. The secondary fire button allows to store additional quantities of goop while depressing the secondary fire button and causesa more fatal effect killing instantly. Don't miss out what a bio-rifle enthusiast has to say, "Away with your tactical nukes and lightning guns and shock rifles. Take them from my sight, for I shall be using the futuristic incarnation of the world's worst super-soaker. Fear me ." Couldn't me more absurd.

MODEL: Cloud's sword

PRODUCĂTOR: Final Fantasy VII

6

DESCRIERE: Its 8 foot length speaks for its bulky weight and imagine swinging the beast in a room ,over your head and all over your body. Even if you are a WWF champion, this will indeed be near to impossible deal, leave alone fighting any opponent.

MODEL: BFG9000

PRODUCĂTOR: Doom

5

DESCRIERE: The gun shoots a plasma powered bolt of FTW that could liquefy, disintegrate and vaporize any human, beast or demon in one brilliant pull of the trigger, now that's a little indigestible. Also the gun would not only be heavy and bulky , but requires great power to actually get into action. Just found a writer quoting the same "it does consume enough energy to power Disneyland for a week." Now that's an eyebrow raiser.

MODEL: Hornet Gun

PRODUCĂTOR: Half-Life

4

DESCRIERE: Also known as the Hive Hand, this is the only gun you can get in a video game that will fire hornets. I am thinking of creating my own video game where you will be able to use a mouse cannon. The rate of fire is pretty puny and the damage that these buzzy critters do is very little. It can produce an infinite amount of hornets and doesn't really explain the science behind it. I wont be proposing this weapon to the Pentagon.
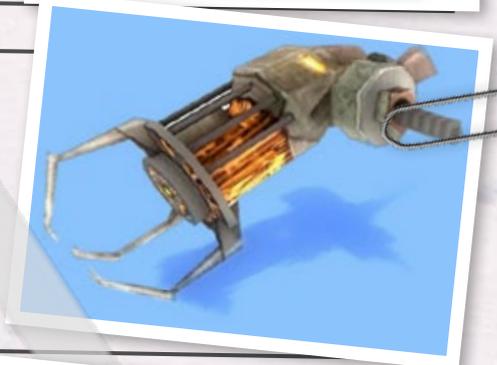

MODEL: Gravity Gun

PRODUCĂTOR: Half-Life 2

3

DESCRIERE: As the name suggests, the gun helped the player to pick up, smash or throw seemingly unmovable objects out in the air. Imagine having done that in reality, picking up a car, flying it in the air and then throwing it down on your enemy. A perfect scene for a science fiction movie and just apt for a video game play only.

MODEL: Clawdovic Cacadoos Vulgaris

PRODUCĂTOR: Serious Sam II

2

DESCRIERE: I have heard about human bombs, but not a parrot bomb delivery system. I am sorry to confess I did giggle hearing about the parrot bomb initially. You have to train your parrot to carry a payload of high-yield explosives hanging 'round its neck and then set it off toward the enemies for an explosive finale, the animal right activists are sure to catch you hard.

MODEL: Shrink Ray

PRODUCĂTOR: Duke Nukem 3D

1

DESCRIERE: Miniaturize your target and squash it under your boot like a dung beetle. Want to shrink yourself and hide out from the foe, there is a mirror at the rear for the same. But that's only possible when you are behind the screen of your console or computer as an animated character, and certainly not in the real world.

CHAT ROOM

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■ **LEVEL Team**

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Level iunie 2010

Un numar standard, daca se poate spune asa, adica specialele si review-urile (impreuna cu indie/retro/free) fac toata revista, stirile si preview-urile sunt acolo ca sa fie (rarele exceptii, cum ar fi Fallout: Vegas-ul lui Ciolan sunt... rare), iar rubricile hardware & lifestyle sunt in plus.

Articolele lui Ciolan si Caleb mi-au placut cel mai mult. Marius Ghinea a scris putin si nici jocul nu i-a dat ocazia sa se desfasoare, iar ncv ar trebui sa scrie mai mult, un singur articol pe numar nu e mare lucru. Iar Locke... luna trecuta am vrut sa scriu la feedback ca imi plac mai mult articolele lui de cand scrie mai putin, dar m-am luat cu altele si am uitat. Ei bine, luna asta a scris mult mai mult si mi-a confirmat impresia. Se vede diferenta intre un articol scris cu placere, despre un joc ce-l pasioneaza (Distant Worlds, Lord of Ultima) si un articol scris "la norma" (Settlers, SC2). ■ *Cristan*

Luna asta, trebuie sa recunosc. Eu, fan declarat Caleb nu am fost multumit. Nu-i nimic sigur se revanseaza luna cealalta. Mi-a placut Ciolan, asta mi s-a parut a fi luna lui.

Sa incep cu un lucru multumitor luna asta, coperta. Mi s-a parut geniala, una dintre cele mai bune coperte din ultimele luni. Culorile sunt bine alese, imaginea printului este edificatoare. Editorialul este scurt si la obiect, reflecta cam ce s-a intamplat mai important luna asta in industrie. Gamedev - Lara stie ce scrie, e profesionista, s-a documentat pt articole, a expus lucruri pe care oricine pasionat ar trebui sa le stie, macar pt cultura generala a fiecaruia. Preview New Vegas - Ciolan este genial, am citit cu foarte mare placere articolul, m-a facut sa astept jocul cu sufletul la gura, chiar daca inainte nu-mi inspira decat un *meh*. Prince of Persia - am asteptat cu mare interes acest articol. Insa m-a cam dezamagit, in primul rand prin numarul paginilor. Apoi, parca jocul nu i-s-a potrivit lui Kimo. Parca numarul trecut a fost mult mai bine cu B:BC2. Flotilla - slab, nu mi-a placut. Nu te iert Caleb, am asteptarile cele mai mari de la tine. The Misadventures of P.B. Winterbottom - mai bun decat celalant articol, se vede ca iti plac indie-urile. Insa nu mi-a placut faptul ca ai zis ca pretul ii spala pacatele. Pai cum sa i le spele? Are pacate sau nu? Ce daca e indie? SSF4 - Acelasi Caleb, aceeasi lovitura imparabila, aceeasi placere de a-l citi incurabila; intr-o pagina a cuprins tot ce trebuia despre joc. Sonic - ceva a lipsit, nu stiu ce, cred ca graba e de vina. Lifestyle - am inteles ca filmul e o porcarie si cartea e buna, deci si-a atins scopul.

Concluzia ar fi ca a fost un numar mai bun decat cel trecut, chiar daca jocurile au fost inferioare calitativ. Ce nu mi-a placut am expus mai sus. ■ *madalinw*

Nu stiu cum sa va spun, stiti doar ca eu sunt cel mai negativist om, cel mai pesimist cititor etc, dar numarul asta a fost ok. Felicitari din partea unui critic (negativist). ■ *rulzmaker*

Mulţam de feedback. Şi eu m-am delectat citind articolele colegilor care v-au plăcut şi vouă. Şi unele care nu v-au plăcut, ha. Cu ale mele, sorry; nici eu n-am fost mulţumit de ce-a ieşit sub linie şi cu siguranţă că lipsesc mai multe. A fost grabă mare, sunt liniştit măcar că n-am scris umplutură în condiţiile astea. Sonicu' avea de ce să fie pe patru pagini dar am fost presat de timp şi n-am apucat să-l fac cum îl gândisem, de fapt. Adevărat şi cu Flotilla, I need 2 relax. Luna asta, Level Up, it's a promise.

■ *Caleb*

Ce mai joacă lumea

The Whispered World - Adventure extrem de bun, sunet si grafica ce mi aduc aminte de copilarie. Probabil acesta va reprezenta jocul anului pentru mine. Ma mir ca topicul sau este gol. Se pare ca lumea nu se mai satura de grafica megaextra si gameplay 0.

Still Life - alt adventure bun pe care nu am apucat sa-l joc la vremea sa. Foarte frumos si el. ■ *vishu*

Knights of the Chalice - am jucat vreo 24 de ore in total si aproape l-am terminat, sunt la ultimul boss pe care habar n-am cum sa-l inving ca pare indestructibil. ■ *FuzzyFuzzball*

Eram dupa colt cu pistolul cu amortizor in mana, pregatit sa-i las pe jos cu cate un glont in cap, dar cei 2 luzari, "paznici" ca ei fiind zeci, carne de tun sau de evitat dupa gust sau chef au inceput o discutie sub lumina stalpului langa care se aflau. Ca pe o ultima dorinta i-am lasat sa si-o termine. Unul din ei ii povestea celuilat despre pasiunea lui, psihologia omului ajuns infractor ca si ei, despre factorii sociali si mai ales familiali care duc spre aceasta cale. Dupa generalizari paznicul numarul 1 chiar a inceput sa aplice teoria pe persoana lui, specificand ca a avut o viata grea si o familie destramata dar ca asta nu e neaparat o scuza pentru faptul ca a ajuns sa pazeasca activitati ilegale si rele care reprezentau obiectivul misiunii mele. Dupa ce au terminat de vorbit i-am impuscat si desi pana atunci omorasem o gramada ca ei, uitandu-ma in jos la cadavrul lui, am avut un sentiment special, avand in vedere ce spusese el

cu cateva secunde inainte sa trag. Sunt pe cale sa termin No One Lives Forever pentru a treia oara. Nu prea am jucat FPS-urile ultimilor ani dar pot sa afirm linistit ca acesta e unul dintre cele mai bune ever. Greu gasesti un joc imbibat de creatori cu atata pasiune, umor, stil si atentie. Cu fiecare pas, foc de arma sau replica sunt si mai fermecat. Merita tot respectul Monolith pentru acest joc. ■ *ola small dickie*

Max Payne 2: The Fall Of Max Payne. Nu l-am terminat niciodata si m-am gandit ca e cazul. De fiecare data cand l-am jucat m-am blocat la misiunea cu prostul ala cu costum cu bomba. Escort missions are the BOMB. ■ *brutalistu*

Ce mai citește lumea

Cicatricea de C. Mieville. Mi s-a parut grozava, la fel ca si Statia Pierzaniei. Am mai citit si The City and The City dar nu mi-a placut, mi s-a parut fara "substanta" cartea, ca sa zic asa. Pe cand cele doua carti, amintite anterior, citite din seria Noul Crobuzon au fost grozave, foarte bine scrise si ideea geniala. Sunt curios ce impresie imi va lasa si ultima carte a trilogiei si anume Consiliul de Fier, carte de care au auzit ca ar fi mai slaba decat primele doua.. ■ *walftub*

Seria **Rama a lui Arthur C. Clarke.** Aceasta serie, impreuna cu **"Orasul si stelele"** si **"Sfarsitul copilariei"** mi-au creat un puternic sentiment de uimire despre ce se poate gasi in spatiu, pe care de atunci nu l-am mai regasit in alta parte (e drept ca nici nu am mai citit prea mult). ■ *Visan Cosmin*

Coperțile cititorilor

(Aki)

(2012)

Ce s-a mai întâmplat în redacția Level

Noaptea târziu la birou...

Pauzele mici și dese.

Decât camera de relaxare.

Mica noastră arhivă de jocuri.
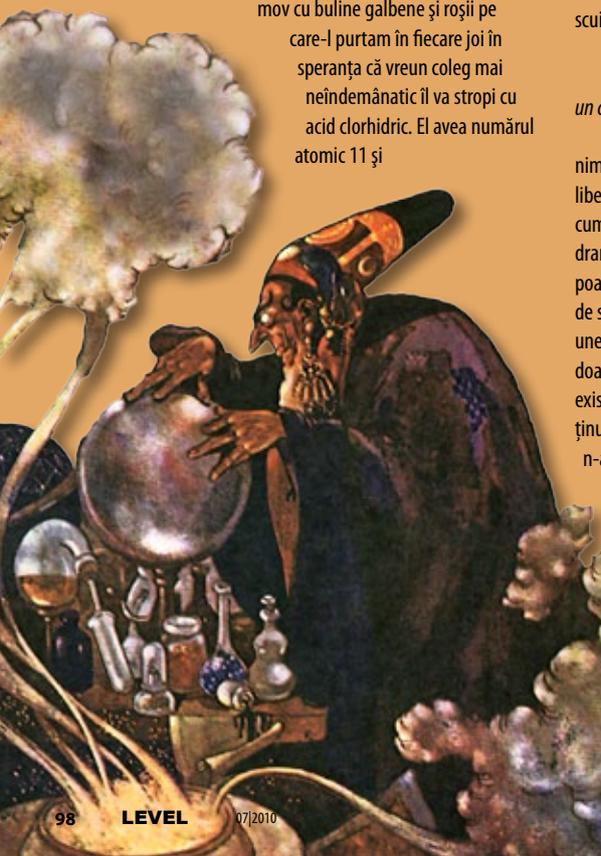
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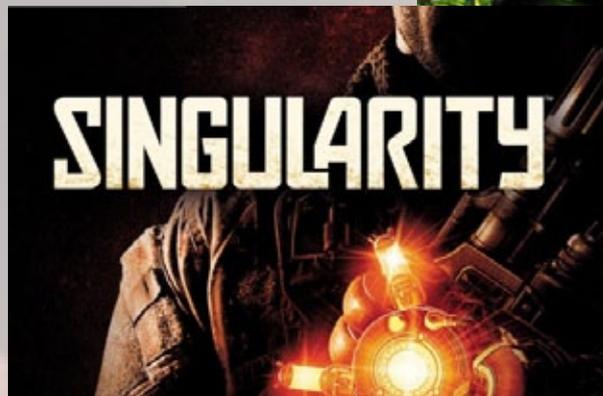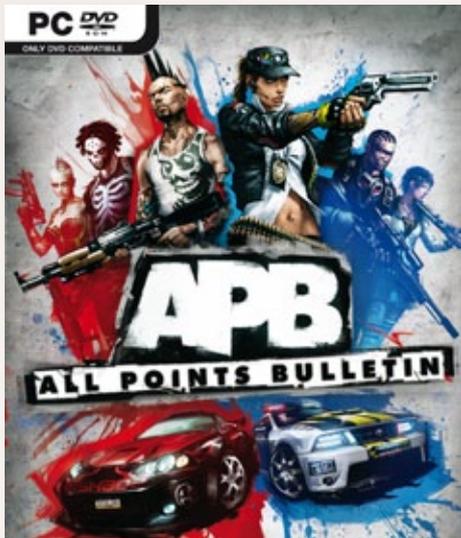
Na belea...

Ne-am cunoscut în primăvara lui '94. Eu eram un puști dolofan de treisprezece ani și aveam un pulover mov cu buline galbene și roșii pe care-l purtam în fiecare joi în speranța că vreun coleg mai neîndemânatic îl va stropi cu acid clorhidric. El avea numărul atomic 11 și zăcea trist și singur într-un borcan, acoperit de o carapace dură și rece de staniol.

"*Tovarășa*", am întrebat eu sfios, "*cine e?*".

Tovarăşa de chimie, o domnișoară bătrână și acră a scuipat cu ură două cuvinte.

"*E Sodiul!*"

„*Sodiul ... Şi ce-a făcut Sodiul? De ce-l țineți închis ca pe un criminal?*"

Între noi fie vorba, deşi trecuseră ani buni de la evenimentele cutremurătoare din iarna lui '89, n-am apreciat libertatea decât atunci, în primăvara lui '94, când am văzut cum este ținut sodiul. Și tot atunci am realizat adevărata dramă a Sodiului. Sodiul nu există liber în natură. Sodiul poate exista doar sub formă de combinații chimice deosebit de stabile. Acea substanță mândră, potentă, care conferă unei flăcări culoarea galben (culoare nobilă, rezervată doar familiei imperiale în China antică), nu are dreptul la existență decât ca sclav al compuşilor. Sodiul este controlat, ținut în lesă și exploatat de elemente (clorul, mare țăran, n-am suportat niciodată clorul) care într-o lume perfectă n-ar fi demne nici să-i pupe tălpile.

„*Reacționează violent cu apa*", mi s-a răspuns pe un ton care lăsa să se înțeleagă că oricine reacționează violent cu apa ar trebui închis pe vecie.

Tensiunea se măsoară în volți și apa, se știe, întreține viața. E de înțeles cum o minte măruntă ar ajunge la concluzia, logică pentru ea, că sodiul este inamicul vieții și trebuie încarcerat în sticlă și staniol sau înrobit de compuşi. Aveam un bunic mai petrecăreț de felul lui, care și el reacționa violent cu apa. Atât de violent încât mi-a pierit cheful de glume și n-am mai încercat niciodată să-i schimb sfertuleţul din buzunar cu o jumătate de apă. Cu toate acestea, bunicul iubea viața. Reacționa violent cu apa, dar iubea viața. Când nu se războia cu apa, bunicul mă ținea pe genunchi și povestea scurtele lui aventuri pline de haz de la Festivalul Vieții din munții Tatra. Însă nimeni nu vrea o lume în care Sodiul îşi poate ține nepoții pe genunchii oxidaţi și nimeni nu este interesat de poveştile lui.

N-am mai întrebat nimic, deşi eram curios de ce pe tovarăşul de istorie, un carmolist notoriu care ura două lucruri: apa și elevii, nu l-a îmbrăcat nimeni în staniol şi nici nu l-au îmborcănat după ce s-a uitat urât la noi când l-am servit cu limonadă la o reuniune. Eh ... tinereţe gânduri creţe. Eram doar un copil pe-atunci şi - blestemată clipă! - n-am încercat să-mi ascund admiraţia. „Câtă putere dumnezeiască zace în Sodiu", am strigat într-un acces nestăvilit de extaz mistic. În acel moment am ştiut că i-am semnat condamnarea la moarte. Ca o Furie, tovarăşa de chimie s-a repezit asupra Sodiului, l-a scos din borcan, i-a smuls veşmintele de staniol şi l-a dat pradă apei. Într-un ultim act de sfidare supremă, înainte să-şi dea obştescul sfârşit într-o cacofonie de şuierături şi pocnete, Sodiul a spart singurul pahar Erlenmeyer scăpat ca prin minune din mâna golanilor de-a opta. Cu ochii împăienjeniţi de lacrimi, am rememorat momente cutremurătoare din istoria neamului românesc. Oare cum ar fi fost dacă Horea i-ar fi semănat mai mult Sodiului şi, înainte să moară, ar fi sfărâmat roata cu şira spinării. Sau dacă nobilul Crişan, care mai şi purta numărul 11 în echipa de ţurcă a răsculaţilor, s-ar fi spânzurat nu cu nojiţele de la opinci ci cu intestinele pulsânde ale temnicerului? Adio nobil metal alcalin. Tu m-ai făcut ceea ce sunt azi...

■   CioLAN

FORUM.LEVEL.RO

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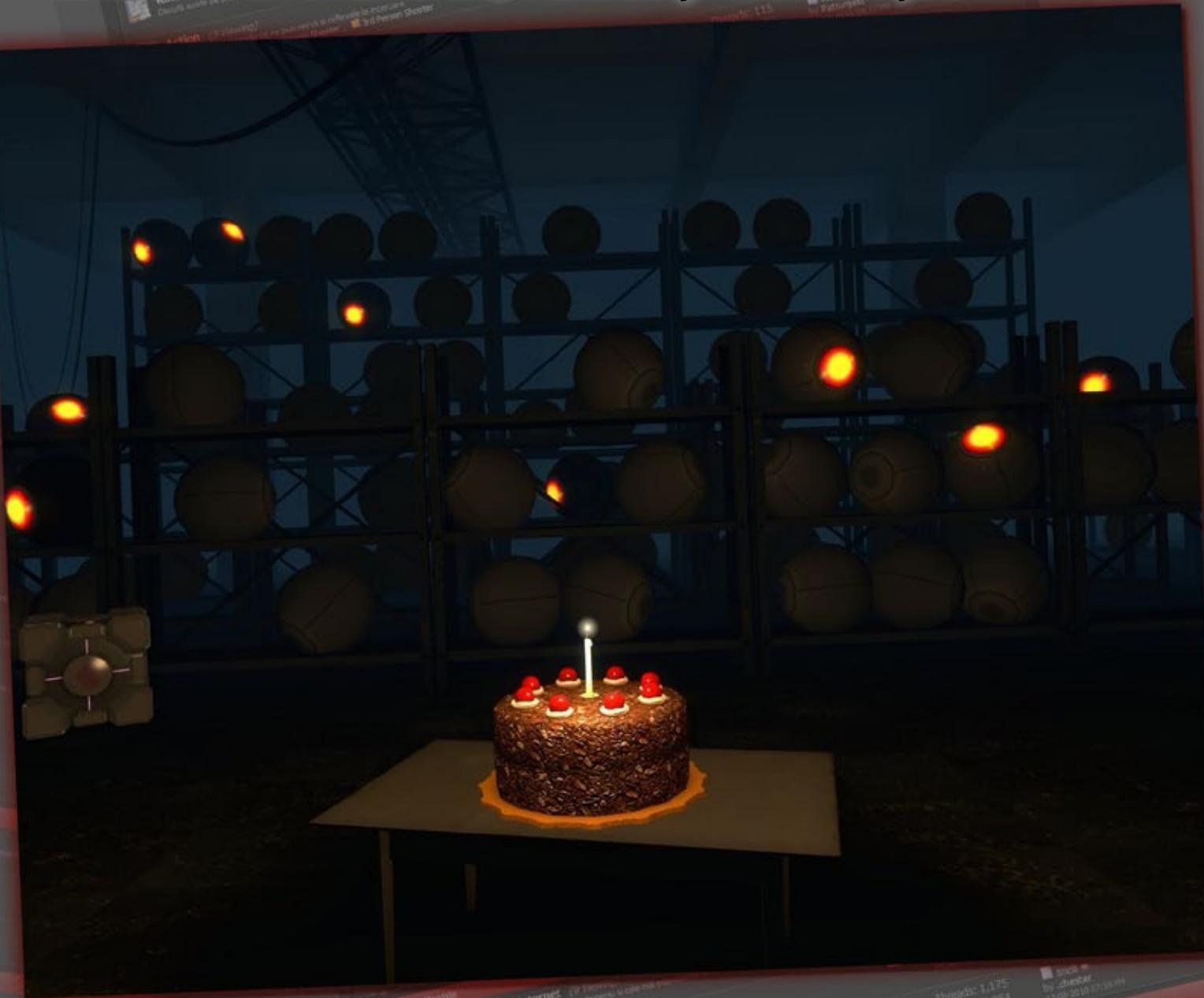
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