Review: Frozen II’s gorgeous animation can’t quite rise above “meh” soundtrack

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[embedded content]
Idina Menzel and Kristen Bell reprise their voice roles as sisters Elsa and Anna in Walt Disney Animation’s *Frozen II*.
Let it go, let it goooo… Just when that tune was starting to fade from our collective brain, Elsa, Anna, and the gang are back with another mystical adventure in *Frozen II*, the sequel to Disney’s blockbuster 2013 hit, *Frozen*. It’s well-made, fun family fare with gorgeous visuals—we’d expect nothing less from the Mouse House—but somehow it never quite achieves the same emotional resonance of the original.

(Spoilers for original *Frozen* below; mild spoilers for *Frozen II*.)

The first film told the story of two princesses of Arendelle. The elder, Elsa (Idina Menzel), has the power to control and create ice and snow, but she struggles to control it. When she accidentally injures her young sister Anna (Kristen Bell), local trolls heal Anna but caution that Elsa must learn to control her magic. In response, their parents lock them both away. When Elsa turns 21, she’s crowned queen, but a spat with Anna after the coronation reveals her magic. She’s exiled from the kingdom, flees to the mountains, and builds a gorgeous

castle of ice and snow in which to live out her days in isolation. But she doesn't realize Arendelle has also frozen over, endangering the people.

Anna goes off in search of Elsa with the help of an ice harvester named Kristoff (Jonathan Groff) and his trusty reindeer Sven, as well as a snowman named Olaf (Josh Gad). Naturally it all works out in the end because this is a Disney fairytale. *Frozen* earned over $1.2 billion worldwide, making it the highest grossing animated film of all time. It won Oscars for Best Animated Film and Best Song—"Let It Go," the song Elsa sings as she's building her ice castle. It also spawned numerous spinoffs in multiple forms of media (including a Broadway musical), making it one of Disney's most profitable franchises. So of course there was going to be a sequel.

Frozen II is set three years after the events of the original. Elsa has reigned over a time of peace and prosperity for Arendelle, the socially awkward Kristoff is trying to figure out how to propose to Anna, and Olaf the enchanted snowman is just being Olaf, spouting all the fascinating new trivia he's been learning as he ages (instead of melting away like all the other snowmen). But Elsa is restless, and when she starts hearing a mysterious voice singing out to her from the far north, she responds—accidentally awaking powerful elemental forces (earth, wind, fire, and water) in the process. The people of Arendelle are forced to evacuate and take refuge with the trolls while Elsa, Anna, Kristoff, Sven, and Olaf set out for the enchanted forest to find the source of the mysterious singing.

- Back in Arendelle.
  YouTube/Disney
- Flashback to a bedtime story about an enchanted forest.
  YouTube/Disney
- Four stone pillars represent the four elements (earth,

wind, fire, water).
YouTube/Disney

- Queen Elsa hears a mysterious voice calling out to her.
  YouTube/Disney
- Kristoff and Anna, still together.
  YouTube/Disney
- Elsa awakens the elements.
  YouTube/Disney
- The people of Arendelle evacuate.
  YouTube/Disney
- On the verge of a new quest: into the enchanted forest.
  YouTube/Disney
- Anna suspects someone might be following them.
  Walt Disney Animation Studios
- The wind element, nicknamed Gale, brings on a tornado.
  YouTube/Disney
- Elsa makes a magical new friend.
  YouTube/Disney
- Sentient snowman Olaf still around for comic relief.
  YouTube/Disney
- Elsa protects Olaf from harm.
  Walt Disney Animation Studios
- Elsa gets a running start to run across the Dark Sea.
  Walt Disney Animation Studios
- Elsa makes an ice bridge in the waves.
  Walt Disney Animation Studios
- The ice bridge is just not strong enough.
  Walt Disney Animation Studios
- Elsa tames a shape-shifting water sprite.
  YouTube/Disney
- Kristoff, Sven, and a few reindeer friends riding to the rescue.
  Walt Disney Animation Studios
- What new adventure awaits?
  Walt Disney Animation Studios

Listing image by YouTube/Disney

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The hidden gems of Apple Arcade

reader comments

31 with 29 posters participating

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The biggest problem facing games on the App Store has always been one of discovery. If a game doesn’t make it to the Featured section, or if it isn’t a massive hit, you’re probably not going to find it just by casually browsing.

Apple Arcade, with its smaller, more carefully curated library, helps remedy that problem a bit. But with dozens of games included in an Apple Arcade subscription, it’s still hard to find the hidden gems languishing behind those few hyped in the spotlight. In between the *Sayonara Wild Hearts* (which is beautiful) and *Grindstone* (oh, is it 2am already?) are games that you absolutely should be playing, if only you knew to take the time.

Well, friend, I’m here for you with my own tasting menu of hidden Apple Arcade delights. Here’s a sampler of some of the best entries on offer, chosen for their quality, inventiveness, and suitability for playing on a phone. (Though, if you have an Apple TV, I definitely recommend using it for more than Netflix).

Tangle Tower

Red herrings galore stand between you and the murderer. Hint: the painting didn’t do it.
Detective Grimoire and Sally are called to Tangle Tower, a structure as strange as the people who live there, to investigate a locked-room murder. Isolated from the rest of humanity on its own private island, Tangle Tower is home to an extended family whose members don’t necessarily hate each other but don’t particularly love each other, either.

The excellent animation, sharp writing, and exceptional voice acting make interrogating suspects and finding the killer a pure pleasure. The puzzles are a healthy mix of logic (can you use clues to figure out which paintbrush goes where) and observation (lining up magnifying glasses of varying strengths). Some you’ll solve in seconds and others will make you question your life choices, but all feel fresh and blend in well with the game’s surroundings. Best of all, *Tangle Tower* is adapted perfectly to play on a phone, with simple controls allowing for easy navigation, inventory management, and puzzle solving.

Tint

Enlarge / Combine colors and creative thinking to solve *Tint*’s increasingly devious designs.
Take a brush and drag it through some colors to mix them. That’s literally all you need to know in order to enjoy *Tint*, a pleasantly challenging puzzle game with a gorgeous watercolor aesthetic. In *Tint*, you simple connect blobs of paint with targets of a specific color by dragging your finger from one to the other, mixing tones along the way to get the proper shade. To activate a green flower, for example, you’ll have to drag blue through yellow, or vice versa.

The puzzles grow steadily more complex as you work your way through the sketchbook, adding multiple colors and obstacles to each page. If you make a mistake, a quick double-tap gives you a fresh page so you can try again, and hints are there to provide a nudge when you need one. *Tint* is the kind of gentle brainteaser you crave on a quiet Sunday morning as you sip a cup of tea.

Over the Alps

Enlarge / Play spy games via postcards in this thriller set during World War II.

I've always wanted to be a spy. Not a real spy, of course, but the movie kind of spy, fighting with fists one moment and *bon mots* the next. *Over the Alps* provides that kind of spy experience, set against a backdrop of World War II intrigue and told engagingly though postcards sent to your confidant. You play as a British agent accidentally sucked into a web of intrigue when a case of mistaken identity sends you off-mission. There's a beautiful German agent hounding your steps, a set of secret blueprints that could turn the tide of war, and plenty of crosses and double-crosses.

As the story plays out via the text of the postcards, you simply choose how you want to respond by selecting a style of stamp. Will you be charming, tough, amusing, snarky? Your choices will impact those around you: start an argument in the village square and you'll leave a "footprint," making it easier for the authorities to track you down, for instance. But if you use your wiles to slip away, the "distraction" might send them on a fool's errand. England is counting on

you, Agent Smith. Do whatever it takes.

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1622289

How Modern Warfare smooths over the horrors of war

Enlarge / Hadir, how old are you?
Activision and Infinity Ward

reader comments

33 with 23 posters participating

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It’s not that “We need that truck” and “Find a gun” are unusual orders to be given in a video game. Certainly not in a *Call of Duty* video game. The series has always impelled players forward with extended drills of Sergeant Simon Says (“Man that mortar!” “Plant those charges!” “Take out that sniper!”). So normally, I would hop to it reflexively. I’ve called in airstrikes and breached into rooms of uncounted hostiles just because some grizzled green beret barked at me. It’s not that.

What strikes me when playing the new *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* is that the directives are coming from someone who’s 10 years old, tops. He’s telling his sister (no older) to go kill a couple Russian soldiers and steal their truck.

I’m already familiar with these two as adults in the present, where they’re Hadir and Farah, ultracompetent freedom fighters for the nation of Urzikstan. But this is a flashback to what I’m to understand is their first brush with war, when occupying Russian forces gas their village and kill their father.

Mind you, that doesn’t stop them from sneaking through the chlorine fog in gas masks, past troops firing perfunctory bullets into the dead or dying. It’s a gutsy performance. They don’t flinch at the gunshots—in fact, they’ve already killed one soldier by then. As Farah, I stalked that soldier from cover and stabbed at him precisely three times, the fatal number for most video game bosses (Hadir, encouragingly after one thrust: “It’s working!”). At the edge of town, Hadir stops near a transport guarded by two soldiers: “If we run away, they’ll catch us.”

Then, with composure befitting a tier one operator. “We need that truck,” I’m told. “Find a gun.”

Out of the mouths of relative babies, objectives are updated. The gun is graciously signposted—it’s on top of a covered well in the center of the scene. Hadir wants me to call his cell phone to distract the soldiers, grab the revolver, ice them, and steal the truck.

The sequence has the kind of logic that I imagine might appeal to a video game character. But I find that when I shoot one of the guards, the other immediately spots me in the tall grass: Game Over. I fail this routine a couple times before a solution occurs to me: I angle Farah up an incline to line up both guards’ heads behind the handgun’s sights, press L3 to steady her aim, and drop both with a single bullet.

Neither tween acknowledges the double headshot. But the game does: I get an achievement named “Two Birds.”

Double action

Released in late October, *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* is filled with scenes and sequences that repackage the horrors of war in a distinctly video-gamey package. To put it plainly, this edition should be familiar to series veterans.

In the multiplayer mode of 2009's *Modern Warfare 2*, for instance, killing two people with one bullet earned you a prog rock riff and an achievement titled "Collateral Damage." It's both a plaudit for one of the miniature feats of dexterity players can pull off and a fun little nod to civilian war deaths.

I've known a double-kill is a thing you can do with guns in games for at least that long. It's one of the many factoids in my mind's "gun basket," as Kirk Hamilton would put it, alongside the relative merits of red dot and holographic sights. Same goes for where the magazine is located on a bullpup.

On the subject of storage, this rebooted *Modern Warfare* continues *Call of Duty*'s tradition of partitioning itself into

three discrete modes: campaign, competitive multiplayer, and cooperative multiplayer. These distinctions have been an aid to our own tendency as players to compartmentalize things, too. The campaigns bring the clearest authorial intent, but usually these stories clock in at a tidy five-to-seven hours. They're often viewed as an amuse bouche of wartime gravitas before the competitive multiplayer entrée, where mass murder becomes the swaggering *killstreak*, and collateral damage gets you new banner art for your player card.

Infinity Ward design their campaigns in such a way that a well-versed competitive player won't feel inhibited. Both modes run at the same heart-stopping pace, and skills translate between them one-to-one. So does the arsenal, now more foregrounded than ever, replete with weapon modeling modes that take the games' metaphorical status as a showroom for gun manufacturers and makes it literal. Want to know if a rifle features a "slow cycle rate" or "a short stroke piston system?" *Modern Warfare* expects that you do, and it may well be right.

Modern Warfare does reintroduce some friction into the series' patented feedback loop. Its multiplayer stages are rats' nests of back alleys and sneaky sight lines that bog down the flow of movement. I prefer it to the lane-style maps of previous games. It keeps me in the moment, attuned to my surroundings instead of sprinting around to make big, looping attacks on enemy flanks. The guns, which were starting to take on an interchangeable point-and-click precision over the years, now tend to have more dramatically different recoil profiles.

But these changes can hardly rein in a decades' worth of evolution in the name of slick, hypersynaptic ergonomy. The speed of *Call of Duty*, the sensation of being a free camera mounted on a gun, is unchanged, whether you're playing as a hardened SAS operative or a Middle Eastern child.

Perhaps that's why the most effective moments in the campaign

are the scenes just preceding that flashback moment, when Farah is trapped under the ruins of a bombed building and can’t move at all. White Helmets pull her from the rubble and deliver her to her father’s arms, and from there she can only witness the scenes of ensuing destruction in whirling glimpses.

Because as soon as she’s boots-on-the-ground again, she will be comfortably back in *Call of Duty*’s generous possibility space for e-athletes, where even a child who’s never held a gun can steady her aim to within a pixel’s breadth.

That multiplayer, tho

There’s an urgency to *Modern Warfare*’s campaign that’s come undone from any in-fiction justifications. I’m barely told who I’ll be shooting at or why before the game jams my hands full of C4 to plant, molotovs to lob, and remote controlled bombs to pilot. It’s *a lot*. I have the sensation being harried forward, forward… like some kind of Light Brigade cavalryman being ordered on into the fun, “theirs not to make reply, theirs not to reason why.”

Multiplayer neatly solves that problem by nuking any context from orbit. *Call of Duty* doesn't even name its factions "Opposing Force" anymore, let alone "Terrorists," as *Counterstrike* does. Here it's "Coalition" versus "Allegiance," variegated patchworks of nations and military-types, a proxy of proxy wars. They bomb and snipe across a changing series of maps and modes, like the new *Battlefield*-style large-scale "Ground War," or the compact 2v2 series, "Gunfight."

The game benefits, in a small but noteworthy way, from one successful attempt to capture the horror of war: the soundscape. Rich with booms, pings, and chattering fire, the audio environment plays devilishly with the rattle and spark of the visual environment, sending you ducking and whirling and thinking every explosion and whistle of a bullet was meant for you.

And the levels themselves, now dense with detail, have made it more difficult to pick out targets from the surroundings, rewarding patience and punishing carelessness. But fidelity (visual or otherwise) will only benefit these games if it can force them to slow down all the way to the point where players don't rack up body counts in the high hundreds—where the violence is forced to be fully considered, instead of just providing a new sheen for realistic weapons of war.

When it was revealed that *Modern Warfare* would include white phosphorous as a killstreak reward, there was a smattering of outcry. White phosphorous stands out for its gruesomeness, and for its prolonged, scarring effects, even as it resides in a gray area of international law.

Certainly there was already nothing humane about the gunships and bombing runs that populate the killstreak catalogue. But the inclusion of white phosphorous is glaring because until now, white phosphorus has had no effective PR. While spec operatives and .50 cal rifles, and even AC-130 gunships, have been treated to kind mentions in recent media, not many

storytellers have been willing to cast the horrors of white phosphorous in a positive light.

But the US has likely used white phosphorus in attacks, and so it must be due for image rehabilitation. Games can play an outsized PR role in this, and this attempt to sublimate white phosphorous into that pantheon must be seen as part of that effort. It *should* bother us, even if we've already accepted so much.

Listing image by Activision and Infinity Ward

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1604885

Ars talks fighting games with Guilty Gear creator Daisuke Ishiwatari

Enlarge / Daisuke Ishiwatari takes the stage at ArcRevo 2019 in Irvine, CA
Arc System Works / Aurich Lawson

reader comments

19 with 12 posters participating, including story author

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A little over 20 years ago, when Daisuke Ishiwatari created *Guilty Gear*, popular fighting games like *Street Fighter* or *King of Fighters* tended to have a similar premise: gather the

strongest warriors in the world and pit them against each other in a test of skill. Daisuke wanted a fighting game that was less grounded in the real world and reflected the wilder possibilities of manga and anime. (*Guilty Gear* was less grounded in a literal sense, too: characters could practically fly about the screen with mid-air moves, later leading to people referring to this style of anime-based fighters as "air dashers.") His vision was a war-torn future, full of magic, man-made bioweapons that turned on their creators (the eponymous Gears), and a diverse cast of heavy-metal-inspired characters players could choose from.

Guilty Gear games are both very difficult to master and also very rewarding for those who put in the hours of study. If fighting games are music, *Guilty Gear* is jazz, free form and technical, allowing players to improvise and develop their own styles and personalities. It's beautiful in motion but difficult for outsiders to follow, and the hardcore reputation has led to many feeling intimidated about learning or following the games.

In summer 2019, a new *Guilty Gear* game was announced, and Daisuke began hinting that this time around, the game would be simpler and more accessible. He wanted more players to pick up the game, more people to be able to follow along with tournaments and play. That perhaps comes as welcome news for those curious about the game but put off by the effort required to learn. The long-time player base, however, expressed consternation. Was the game they know and love going to be dumbed down? Was the freedom of expression they adore going to be removed?

Last weekend's ArcRevo World Tour in Irvine, California, was the final stop of a world tour for *Guilty Gear* and other Arc System Works games. There, the public got a first hands-on with a beta the new game, titled *Guilty Gear Strive*. I played a few sets but not enough to give detailed impressions (look for that in a later article when I get more time with it). I

did get to sit down with Daisuke and talk about where he sees the series going, how to balance making the game accessible for new players while still keeping the hardcore happy, and what he thought about the state of fighting-game netcode.

You can watch the announcement trailer below, featuring the first six characters revealed for the game, and get a sense for how the game looks in motion (in a word, gorgeous) before reading Daisuke's thoughts.

[embedded content]
(This interview was conducted through a Japanese translato and has been lightly edited for clarity).

You've been working on* Guilty Gear *for over 20 years. As the original creator, can you talk about what the game means to you now? What keeps it fresh and interesting to you as a creator?

For me—and this is gonna be kind of fighting games in general, and I think *Guilty Gear* is definitely part of that—in the PlayStation One era it was really kind of an extension of action games. And in fact, internally, we would call games like fighting games, what we know of them as now, more of like a "battle tool." It's like a tool, a programming tool, specifically for the battle portion of something. But nowadays, I really feel fighting games have turned into a tool to connect people and to make friends. So like here, the reason I am able to come to the US right now, we have people from around the world gathered here trying to make friends and building a community. I think it's a tool to connect people, especially with the Internet and networks evolving the way they have. So that's kind of what I think keeps it fresh for me.

As the arcades becoming less relevant in Japan and the home audience becomes the primary focus for fighting games, does that affect how you think about developing* Guilty Gear*?

I wouldn’t necessarily say what I’m doing is related to the arcade’s performance. Really what it was for me was when I went to a lot of overseas events because of *Guilty Gear’s* rising popularity. I saw a lot of fans who were, of course, not Japanese. And then these fans would then come to Japanese events and meet other people. And the way they were making friends to me was really kind of the purpose and the big motivator of how I felt this was a tool to connect people, not necessarily what was happening with the arcade.

When designing a new* Guilty Gear*, how do you think about the balance of bringing back old characters versus making new ones?

Especially for the existing characters, when we consider the balance, like with Sol or Ky, I think people have a way they imagine they’re supposed to be played, a way that they feel that they’re designed to be played. And when we make a completely new *Guilty Gear* like this one, I think we need to both shift and kind of reset that mindset. So it kind of opens up the possibility of, well, maybe Sol could be played like this, or maybe he’s more of a character that would do those type of things. With a new game, it’s a reexamination of all the existing characters and then adding other ways to play the

game in addition. So that's how we maintain overall balance.

Was it tempting to throw the old characters out, like Capcom did with* Street Fighter III*, when it was Ken and Ryu returning and everyone else was new?

Incidentally, *Street Fighter III* is one of my favorite fighting games. And I wouldn't necessarily say we're going to that extent. Kind of the approach for this is—let's say you take Ryu, the protagonist of the story, something we imagine a lot of the players are going to pick. And he was kind of really based around his shoryuken [Ryu's dragon-punch uppercut]. So the idea is, well, what if we take that away from his toolkit? And I'm sure most of the conversation would be "No, it's impossible, etc." But at least posing those questions and seeing what they might lead to is kind of the process we're going through.

Guilty Gear *players are very passionate about the game, and some have been playing for 20 years. What do you think keeps them playing it?*

That might frankly go a little bit beyond my understanding of human psychology [laughs]. What we are creating is a very honed and a very fine-tuned game, stuff for the true mania of the world. I think the people who are able to follow that development and evolution are the ones who are naturally attracted to it.

> *"The high-level concept is to make it look easy, make it easier to spectate. But by no means does that mean that we're shaving away level of depth."*

If I was a long-time player who was worried that the game is changing too much, what would you say to me?

I think in a lot of interviews and when we speak with the public, the words "simple" or "simplified" or "accessibility" have been tossed around a lot. That's not necessarily the

intent of the development team. I think that's just, in the limited language and vocabulary that exists, the only way that we were able to describe what's actually going on. That's certainly not the dev team's intent or my intent. I think it's very important to kind of understand the difference which feel we like we really do, in terms of what makes our games different from other company's games. So the high-level concept is to make it look easy, make it easier to spectate. But by no means does that mean that we're shaving away level of depth. That's not our solution to make it easier to watch. That's a big topic of discussion for the development team.

To follow that up, if I'm a new player, not a* Guilty Gear *player, what's your pitch to me? Why should I play your game?

Because we're dealing with a video game, I believe that it's impossible to convince someone or pitch someone strictly verbally to bring them onto the side of playing *Guilty Gear*. I don't think there's any amount of explanation or pitches that's going to work. My suggestion would be, as they walk past, they see the game play. And they'll want to play it. I think that the old style of Arc System Works games and how we made them would fail in that department. Especially because it's overly complex, the HUD is overwhelming, you can't tell what is happening on the screen. A large part of our current development philosophy is simplifying it for the spectator. Making it look really fun, and that's the thing I think that's going to attract players.

Guilty Gear Strive's name is a bit of a visual pun; being the fourth game in the series, the IV in the logo is highlighted.

Not just* Guilty Gear*—you've been thinking about fighting games for 20 years. ArcSys is also making games like* GranBlue Fantasy Versus *and* Dragon Ball Fighterz*. How do you get more people to not be scared of trying fighting games?

I think there are a lot of people who just by looking at a game, with it being a fighting game, will say, "Nah, I don't do fighting games." You really can't explain it to someone and expect them to want to play something. It's kind of related to the previous question as well. My job is, I feel, is to show people that it's accessible. It's like, "Oh, well, I think I could do what that guy just did on the screen." So while they're spectating, give them the perception that "Oh, this is more possible than I thought it was."

You said in a 2018 interview with Destructoid that "*Dragon Ball Fighterz *was developed based on the lessons learned through previous* Guilty Gear *and* BlazBlue *titles." Were there lessons from those games that informed the new* Guilty Gear*?

I would probably say "no," at least with respect to the gameplay aspects. Each director and person overseeing their project has their own policy, if you will, on how they want to sculpt the game and shape the experience. So in terms of that infusing itself back into *Guilty Gear*, I would say there isn't much. If anything, it's more the experience of the game itself, like lobbies for example, or match-making. We'll share that type of information, the stuff that isn't related to once you enter the game, the overall experience. And that is something that they'll say, "hey, you know I tried this kind of style and it worked" or "this wasn't very effective." And that kind of information we share.

> *"If you ask me personally, I'm the guy who definitely errs on the side of hardcore."*

The big hot topic in the fighting-game community now is rollback netcode. I interviewed French Bread battle director

Kamone Serizawa earlier this year at Evo, and he said that adding rollback netcode to his company's game would require a "super programmer." What is the ArcSys response to the demand for rollback netcode?

Where we are right now at ArcSys, in terms of rollback netcode, is we haven't really arrived at the conclusion that we'll need a super programmer as much, as the engineering team is kind of divided, actually. There are some that say this would be really good and others that say, you know, implementing this wouldn't really work with the *Guilty Gear* system. And it makes sense for a game like *Street Fighter*, but how *Guilty Gear* is designed—this wouldn't really fit the bill. So we're actually right in the middle of investigating on the engineering team how that might look.

[The current game, *Guilty Gear Xrd*, used delay-based netcode, which creates generally inferior results to rollback netcode. For more on the differences, and how rollback works, you can check out our deep dive. Here's a video clip from that article showing how the frame delay can fluctuate.]

Guilty Gear Xrd changes the input delay on the fly to hopefully avoid needing to pause the game and wait for inputs. Sometimes the fluctuations are small, and sometimes they can get out of control.

Another big conversation in the fighting game community right now, partially because of the new* Guilty Gear*, is the topic of chip kill [dying when you have no health left and are hit by a special move even when you are blocking] and how chip kill has been taken out of this build of* Guilty Gear*, even though there are defensive tools to mitigate it, and it feels too simple. You are a* Street Fighter: Third Strike *fan, and the big famous moment in that game, Evo Moment 37—the Daigo parry versus Justin Wong—only occurred because of the threat of chip kill. What's the thinking behind removing it?

Again, nothing you see in this game is completely locked in.

So to your point, it’s still in a very experimental stage, and really, we’re kind of testing a lot of different angles. If you ask me personally, I’m the guy who definitely errs on the side of hardcore. So I love these complex mechanics and systems, and you know, with everything kind of going into a lot of network-based fighting and communities, we accept the input queue, like pre-inputs [referring to modern fighting games having a larger input buffer, making button timing less strict] which you didn’t need in the arcades. And that’s something that I personally kind of like. So I think there’s definitely two schools of thought with regard to this. But you know, we’re always trying to balance the hardcore experience versus the easy-to-spectate side of things. We’re experimenting—we’re taking surveys and seeing where the consensus is going to be. It’s just one experiment for now.

The beta build of *Guilty Gear Strive*‘s UI is not “close to being final whatsoever,” and it shows.

How final is the user interface right now? Is it very, very early? Is it too early to talk about? Are there things that are being tried that might stay?

With respect to the thought process behind the interface, what I had told our UI design team was that I want something that, again, goes back to the very high-level philosophy and concept of being easy to spectate and watch. It’s kind of become *Guilty Gear’s* identity, but the very complex HUD, you know, it’s very intricate and very detailed. We’re trying to deviate from that a bit and see what a different approach might be. With respect to the version you see right now, I don’t think that’s close to being final whatsoever. But to kind of explain the thought process or the inception of that, it is to make it

easier to watch for the viewer.

The one question I will ask, then, and then we can leave the UI topic since it's unfinished: what is the thinking behind having the character portrait move with the life bar?

With the *Guilty Gear* interface, especially with *Guilty Gear* players—I don't know where this was done, but I read an article or a survey that found that *Guilty Gear* players compared to other fighting games have a tendency to look all around the screen at any given time. They have the most eye movement of any other fighting game. We thought this was because there is a lot of vital information scattered across screen. So one thing we're trying to do—and to their credit, this is probably what makes *Guilty Gear* players *Guilty Gear* players, they're able to look around and absorb all the information and make decisions—but with that said, we're trying to reduce the number of focal points on the screen at any given time. So this is, again, another experiment to bring everything toward a more single focal point.

Last question, and then I think I've probably taken enough of your time. When* Guilty Gear Xrd *first game out, it was very cutting-edge with regards to doing 3D graphics that looked like hand-drawn sprites. That was taken a little further with* Dragon Ball Fighterz*, which almost looks better than the source anime. With the new* Guilty Gear*, the engine is obviously being taken a step further. What sort of things are you exploring visually that you couldn't do before?

That’s a very interesting and good point that you bring up because I agree with you that *Dragon Ball Fighterz* and even *Granblue Versus* are kind of evolution of what we’ve done with *Xrd*. So if you take that expression and then crank it up to 11, that’s what you’re going to get. With that said, you know, it’s already been done. So there’s no point in *Guilty Gear* going back to that point, and we needed to find a new form of expression, something else that we could do. Unlike *Xrd*, where we relied heavily on anime-type expressions, the big reference point has been live-action movies. We’re really trying to push the seamless experience really hard. So we won’t suddenly cut to the character’s face; [instead] we’re trying to make all the camera movement dynamic and seamless. That I think is a huge step in our visual expression and experimentation.

Thank you very much for your time!

Guilty Gear Strive is currently expected for release in late 2020.

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1604559

EverQuest lead producer and designer Brad McQuaid has passed away

Enlarge / The original promotional art for *EverQuest*.

reader comments

43 with 42 posters participating, including story author

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Brad McQuaid, the lead developer for the groundbreaking massively multiplayer online (MMO) game *EverQuest*, has died, according to an update from his development team. He was 51.

Details about the circumstances of his death have not been shared publicly, other than a mention that he passed away in his home. The Twitter account for *Pantheon*, McQuaid's project at the time of his death, and Visionary Realms, the company behind it, tweeted out the following announcement:

> *It is with deep regret we share that Brad McQuaid passed away last night. He will be deeply missed and forever remembered by gamers worldwide.*
>
> *Thank you for bringing us together through your worlds. Rest in peace @Aradune.*
>
> *VR offers our deepest condolences to Brad's family.*

McQuaid worked as a game programmer and designer starting back in the late 1980s, but he is most well-known for his role as lead programmer, producer, and designer (at various times) on *EverQuest*, the 1999 massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) that defined the genre to this day. *EQ*, which adapted the DikuMUD formula from text games for a 3D persistent graphical virtual world, was a breakthrough moment for MMORPGs. Its success codified that model for the genre as other, different ideas of what MMORPGs might look like (such as those posited by *Meridian 59*, *Underlight*, or *Ultima Online*) largely faded into memory.

McQuaid was involved in designing some of the very first raids as we know them today, and his work had significant influence

on later games like *World of Warcraft*, *Final Fantasy XIV*, *The Elder Scrolls Online*, *Destiny*, and many more.

He later went on to co-found Sigil Games, which developed and launched the hardcore MMO *Vanguard: Saga of Heroes*. The game found a niche audience seeking demanding, group-oriented content—a focus of McQuaid's work over the years—amidst a market of increasingly casual and solo-friendly MMOs. Most recently, McQuaid was working at Visionary Realms on the above-mentioned *Pantheon*, which marries that model to some newer game-design ideas. *Pantheon* is still in development.

Visionary Realms communications chief BenD shared these notes on the *Pantheon* forums:

> *Brad was a visionary, a mentor, an artist, a trailblazer, a friend, a husband, a father. He touched thousands of lives with his dreams and concepts. He changed the landscape of video games forever. He will be deeply missed and forever remembered in life and in Pantheon.*
>
> *Thank you, Brad, for bringing us together through your worlds. Rest in peace, Aradune.*
>
> *All of us at Visionary Realms offer our deepest condolences to Brad's family and during this most difficult time, we kindly ask that you respect the privacy of Brad's family.*

McQuaid's passing resulted in an outpouring of mourning and memories from other notable online game developers such as Raph Koster (*Ultima Online, Star Wars: Galaxies*), Damion Schubert (*Meridian 59*, *Star Wars: The Old Republic*), the *EVE Online* team, and former Sony Online and *EverQuest* boss John Smedley.

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1604819

Hugh Laurie captains a sinking space cruise ship in teaser for Avenue 5

reader comments

75 with 59 posters participating

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[embedded content]
Hugh Laurie stars as Captain Ryan Clark in *Avenue 5*, a new comedy series from HBO.
Passengers and crew aboard a luxury spaceship find themselves in grave danger in *Avenue 5*, the new "space tourism" comedy series from HBO. Judging by the first teaser, the show looks like it could be a sharp, witty addition to the cable giant's slate of programming.

Clearly there's an appetite for space-based comedy in Hollywood these days, as Netflix teased its own comedy series, *Space Force*, earlier this year, with three major vets of TV's *The Office* on board, including Steve Carell as both a co-creator and a star. Netflix has yet to release many details about the series. All we know is that "The goal of the new branch is 'to defend satellites from attack' and 'perform other space-related tasks'… or something," per the *Space Force* teaser text. "This is the story of the men and women who have to figure it out."

We don’t know much more about *Avenue 5*, but it also boasts some serious comedic chops. The series is the brainchild of Armando Iannucci, best known for creating the stellar HBO comedy series *Veep*, which won multiple Emmy awards over its seven-season run. And before he was Dr. Gregory House in the US, Laurie was best known across the pond for yukking it up as one-half of the comedy duo in *A Bit of Fry and Laurie* (with Stephen Fry), as well as his hilarious turns in *Jeeves and Wooster* and the various *Blackadder* series.

- Meet the good ship *Avenue 5*, offering luxury cruises in space.
- Hugh Laurie stars as Captain Ryan Clark.
- He’s aided by Iris Kimura (Suzy Nakamuras), an associate owner of the ship.
  YouTube/HBO
- On the bridge of the *Avenue 5*.
  YouTube/HBO
- Passengers indulge in a fitness class.
  YouTube/HBO
- Josh Gad plays billionaire Herman Judd, who owns *Avenue 5*.
  YouTube/HBO
- An opulent room.
  YouTube/HBO
- Something has gone wrong down in engineering.
  YouTube/HBO
- The head of customer relations, Matt Spencer (Zach Woods) tries, and fails, to reassure the passengers.
  YouTube/HBO
- Spike Williams (Ethan Phillips) is a former astronaut turned womanizing alcoholic.
  YouTube/HBO
- A daring space walk.
  YouTube/HBO
- Space suit chest bump!

YouTube/HBO

Avenue 5 is set roughly 40 years in the future, when private spaceflight, aka space tourism, is totally a thing. The titular space cruise chip is modeled after today's luxury ocean liners, complete with fine dining and regular exercise classes. But then the ship experiences major technical difficulties, putting everyone aboard at risk, while the crew scrambles to solve the problem while keeping the passengers from panicking.

In addition to Laurie, the cast includes *Silicon Valley*'s Zach Woods as Matt Spencer, head of customer relations—who does a very bad job reassuring passengers when the trouble starts. "This is a safe space," he says. "Emotionally. Physically we're obviously in terrible danger." Josh Gad (*Frozen 2*) plays smarmy billionaire Herman Judd, who owns the *Avenue 5* and pretends to be a man of the people, when he's frankly quite the snob.

Making Captain Ryan's job even more difficult is Karen Kelly (Rebecca Front), a bossy passenger who apparently is on board under false pretenses, having used her sister's (nontransferable) ticket. Rounding out the cast are Suzy Nakamura as Iris Kimura, an associate owner of the ship; Lenora Crichlow as second engineer Billie McEvoy; Himesh Patel (*Yesterday*) as stand-up comedian Jordan Hatwal, performing on the *Avenue 5*; and Ethan Phillips as former astronaut Spike Williams, whose boozy womanizing ways are bound to cause tensions.

Avenue 5 is coming to HBO in January 2020.

Listing image by YouTube/HBO

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1603785

Half-Life: Alyx: What we know about Valve’s upcoming full-length VR game

Enlarge / Yep, it’s real—and here’s what we know so far.

reader comments

100 with 86 posters participating, including story author

Share this story

For a certain class of video game fan, no news could be bigger than today’s: *Half-Life* is back. In VR. As an entirely new game from the series’ creators at Valve.

We’re here to connect the dots between what has been announced, what has been rumored, and what we’ve heard from well-placed sources. Rise and shine, *Half-Life* fans. We have a lot for you today.

Months of rumors, then a TGA leak

We should probably begin with the game’s name, as revealed in a leaked Game Awards 2019 presentation and confirmed hours later by an official post from Valve. *Half-Life: Alyx* is a brand-new game in the *Half-Life* universe designed exclusively for PC virtual reality systems (Valve Index, Oculus Rift, HTC Vive, Windows Mixed Reality).

This is, in fact, the oft-teased “VR game” mentioned by Valve over the past few years and the one we had been told to expect by the end of 2019. Today’s leak includes a revised release window of March 2020, which our sources indicate is likely—but also subject to change due to the phenomenon that fans call “Valve Time.”

Today’s announcement has confirmed a hard truth: Valve’s game development teams still cannot count to three. In *HLA*‘s case, it’s because this is a prequel, not a sequel. And it’s a full single-player campaign of brand-new VR content, though our sources can’t confirm how long the game will actually take to beat.

The game’s name confirms what has been loudly rumored for months: that you will play this game from the perspective of Alyx Vance, a character introduced in 2004’s *Half-Life 2*. Instead of stepping forward in time, *HLA* will rewind to the period between the first two mainline *Half-Life* games.

For those who have lost track of the series’ timeline, the original 1998 game saw the Black Mesa research institute loose an alien race (the Combine) onto our planet. The sequel picked up an uncertain number of years later, with a network of researchers and resistance fighters working to take out the Combine’s invasion and domination of Earth, in spite of a human-fronted organization that capitulated to the Combine’s control.

Both of those games starred Gordon Freeman as a silent protagonist. This new VR game mixes things up by putting you in Alyx’s shoes, years before the events of *HL2* and before Freeman’s return to the series’ universe. (This won’t be the first time an official *HL* game wrested control from Freeman; the 2001 expansion pack *Half-Life: Blue Shift* starred the first game’s beloved security guard Barney.) We’ve gotten an indication that the game’s testing period hasn’t shown any parts of Alyx’s body in place of your own, beyond a pair of

hands. But that could very well change.

Grabbity Gloves?

Half-Life 2 was arguably the gaming world's first major "physics adventure," since it revolved around a clever Gravity Gun system that let you pull and toss all manner of items big and small. We've gotten some indication that *Half-Life: Alyx* follows suit.

A data leak from Valve's Source 2 game engine, as uncovered in September by Valve News Network, pointed to a new control system labeled as the "Grabbity Gloves" in its code base. Multiple sources have confirmed that this is indeed a major control system in *HLA*.

How do they work? We've gotten hints that they might more accurately be described as "Magnet Gloves," in that they let players magically point to and attract distant items to your hands. Instead of having to walk all the way to an object in VR or bend over to grab something from the floor, *HLA* players will have a handy point-and-snag system. And we're told that these are spiritual successors to *HL2*'s Gravity Gun, in terms of revolving around realistic physics. Maybe that means we can, or cannot, grab certain items due to real-life physics systems or obstacles.

However this system works, it seems to both favor the newer Valve Index controllers (which strap to users' knuckles and leave fingers free to move around) and offer concessions to older controllers like the HTC Vive wands. Valve has already announced plans to support all major VR PC systems for its next VR game, and these new gloves seem like the right system to scale to whatever controllers you bring into VR.

But we also get the sense that *HLA* is a serious showcase for Valve Index's "Knuckles" controllers. We hear that most every object in the game's world has been designed to be touched and

manipulated by hands, both in terms of realistic physics and how real hands move through virtual objects. The best public information we have to this end is a recent DigiPen presentation from a Valve developer. Ever wondered how doors are constructed in VR? Valve developer Kerry Davis went on for over 30 minutes on the subject, and our sources indicate that this scrutiny went into every single hand-manipulation system within *HLA*.

Our sources have told us not to expect one iconic weapon in *HLA*, however. Each of these sources mentioned that a virtual crowbar was tested at one point in the game's multi-year development but was eventually scrapped. To be clear: we don't have conclusive evidence that the crowbar won't eventually appear in the game in one way or another. (If Valve plans to upgrade the game with a physical crowbar purchase, my sources sure haven't heard of it.)

Intentionally vague confidence…

After getting over my initial shock that a new *Half-Life* game exists, I've come to be astounded by another likely outcome: that this new game will be a masterclass example of how to build an adventure game around the unique features of virtual reality hardware.

> *Valve's VR game design teams share the same frustrations with been-there-VR'ed-that quests.*

I have played quite a few VR quest and adventure games since home VR headsets began launching in 2016. Some have employed compelling mechanics but have run out of fresh ideas all too quickly. Others have slapped familiar combat and puzzles into a VR headset in ways that would have worked just as well on a flat TV screen. And still others have made VR users sit or stand around waiting for dialogue or long, boring walks to transpire.

What I know about *HLA*, at this point, has me convinced that Valve's VR game design teams share the same frustrations with been-there-VR'ed-that quests and that *HLA* won't repeat their mistakes. The little bit I know about hand manipulation in the game has me *tingling* with excitement.

Plus, as Valve's first game built from the ground up to tap into the company's long-in-development Source 2 engine, I'm hopeful that we're in for a whole new caliber of facial animations and world details in a VR game—much like how *Half-Life 2*'s use of the first Source engine blew gamers away in 2004.

Whether we're in for a game that earns the *Half-Life* namesake, on the other hand, remains to be seen. Will it actually be long enough in terms of a satisfying single-player campaign? Will its plot's mysteries, as staged between two major games in the series, be sold in compelling sequences seen from a VR perspective? Will we get a VR robot dog as a pet?

I'd love to assure readers that we won't have long to wait to learn the answers to these questions and more, but, you know, Valve Time is a thing. We'll temper our excitement as much as we can with zero assurances of a true release date until the game is in both our literal and virtual hands, and we at Ars will keep you posted as soon as Valve lets us fake like Alyx for the sake of an *HLA* preview.

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1603743

Rocinante crew ventures into

worlds beyond the Ring in The Expanse S4 trailer

reader comments

118 with 43 posters participating

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[embedded content]
When SyFy unexpectedly canceled its award-winning science-fiction drama *The Expanse*, Amazon Prime snapped it up.
Fans of sci-fi series *The Expanse* have been patiently awaiting the much-anticipated fourth season. That wait is almost over. Amazon Prime just dropped the first full-length trailer for the new season, featuring the intrepid crew of the *Rocinante* venturing into exploring the many worlds beyond the Ring.

As we reported back in July when the first teaser dropped, *The Expanse* is based on a series of novels by James S.A. Corey (the pen name for writing team Daniel Abraham and Ty Franck) that explore interplanetary tensions that are breaking out all over a solar system—mostly between Earthers, Martians, and "Belters"—long since colonized by humans. Part mystery, part political thriller, part classic space opera, *The Expanse* has earned almost nothing but praise from critics and its devoted fans alike, not just for its gripping storytelling, but also for its excellent use of accurate physics. The third season earned a rare 100% score on Rotten Tomatoes (seasons one and two earned 76% and 96%, respectively).

So it was something of a shock when SyFy cancelled the series, citing "restrictive distribution arrangements," specifically,

just first-run linear rights in the US. Fortunately, Amazon soon stepped in to save the show.

Season 4 is supposedly based on *Cibola Burn*, the fourth novel in the series, and it marks a new narrative direction as the crew of the *Rocinante* explores new worlds beyond the Ring Gate on a mission for the UN. Apparently, the access to thousands of Earth-like planets has "created a land rush and furthered tensions between the opposing nations of Earth, Mars and the Belt." The ship's first stop: Ilus, a colonial world where a dispute over the planet's rich natural resources has broken out between Royal Charter Energy (RCE)—the corporation that claimed rights to the world—and the first settlers there.

- UN Deputy Undersecretary of Executive Administration Chrisjen Avasarala (Shohreh Aghdashloo) has a mission for the crew of the Rocinante.
  YouTube/Amazon Prime
- The scattered remains of the UN's first failed mission.
  YouTube/Amazon Prime
- The Rocinante crew arrives on Ilus.
  YouTube/Amazon Prime
- They are greeted by corporate security officer Adolphus Murty (Brun Gorman), who is hostile to the Belter refugees.
  YouTube/Amazon Prime
- The Belter refugee camp.
  YouTube/Amazon Prime
- The Belter refugees obstinately refuse to leave Ilus.
  YouTube/Amazon Prime
- A mysterious swarm.
  YouTube/Amazon Prime
- A tiny robot might be protomolecule tech.
  YouTube/Amazon Prime
- Holden (Steven Strait) warns that the artifacts are starting to "wake up."
  YouTube/Amazon Prime

- Don’t touch that artifact!
  YouTube/Amazon Prime
- Space laser battle!
  YouTube/Amazon Prime
- What mysterious worlds lie beyond the Ring?
  YouTube/Amazon Prime

This full-length trailer fleshes out a few more details. Via narration in the distinct raspy voice of Chrisjen Avasarala (Shohreh Aghdashloo), UN deputy undersecretary of executive administration, we learn that the UN initially sent a ship out to Ilus to control the situation. “The mission did not go as planned,” Avasarala dryly observes, as we see images of a hole ripped in the ship’s side and the ship crashing, scattering pieces across the planet’s desert-like terrain. The *Rocinante* crew is charged with finding out exactly what is going on in this world beyond the Ring, with instructions to evacuate the Belters and themselves immediately if the situation warrants.

They are greeted upon arrival to “New Terra” by Adolphus Murty (Burn Gorman), chief of security for RCE, who is none too friendly toward the Belter refugees: “There is no version of this where we leave these squatters and murderers in possession of this planet,” he says. The refugees are equally defiant: “This place is our only hope. We’re not giving it up.”

Complicating matters is the onset of mysterious swarms—similar to dust storms, only composed of what appear to be tiny robots. “That’s protomolecule tech,” *Rocinante* Captain Jim Holden (Steven Strait) observes. (*Expanse* fans may recall that an alien civilization created the protomolecule, which featured heavily in season three.) There’s also evidence that various alien artifacts on the planet are “waking up,” perhaps in response to something Holden has done. “I opened those gates, so I’m responsible for anything that comes through,” he says. Now, the crew must figure out how to turn off whatever it is he has turned on.

Season 4 of *The Expanse* debuts on December 13, 2019 on Amazon Prime.

Listing image by YouTube/Amazon Prime

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1603359

Logitech’s $100 Adaptive Gaming Kit finishes what Xbox’s XAC started

Enlarge / The four button types included in the 12-button Logitech Adaptive Gaming Kit bundle, along with one of its two “hook-and-loop” mounting boards.

reader comments

9 with 9 posters participating

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Last year’s Xbox Adaptive Controller (XAC) heralded a new era of gaming accessibility, but not necessarily in conclusive fashion. What Microsoft’s specially engineered slab of a controller delivered in options and openness, particularly for gamers who can’t use standard gamepads, the device lost in clarity.

The $99 XAC only comes with two useful buttons for standard PC and console games, and Microsoft said that was by design so that special-needs gamers could attach preferred buttons and

control options into an array of 19 plugs. This was great news for anybody familiar with the wild world of accessible gaming or who already owned extra attachable buttons. But trouble arose, accessory-maker Logitech says to Ars Technica, when XAC's good press and popularity drew new, confused people into the fold—and into official Microsoft Stores, to boot.

"We talked to Microsoft retail—to people in the Microsoft Stores—and they kept telling us, 'We don't know what to recommend to people,'" Logitech Product Manager Mark Starrett tells Ars Technica. "People buy an XAC, then ask, 'What [buttons] should go with this?' The guy at the store can't assess the needs. The caregiver doesn't know [from a gaming standpoint], either."

Turning "variable" into a constant

- Comes with everything seen here. One of the mounting boards is rigid, while the other includes multiple folding points, like a standard tablet cover.
- Add and remove whatever button-label stickers you want.

That changes this week with the Logitech Adaptive Gaming Kit, which is a $99 bundle that begins answering that basic question for Logitech's estimated "80%" of special-needs gamers. Logitech offered Ars Technica a pre-brief about the bundle before shipping us a sample set, so we cannot speak to its build quality or whether it's a worthy purchase.

Still, based on my testing and research since the XAC launched, I'm already compelled to applaud Logitech's launch, at least in terms of apparent value and usability.

The crux of the Adaptive Gaming Kit is a suite of 12 discrete buttons that connect via XAC's 3.5mm ports. It's easier to parse them as a list:

- Three round buttons, 2.6-inch diameter

- Three round buttons, 1.4-inch diameter
- Four “light-touch” buttons
- Two “variable” triggers

Most articles about XAC’s launch included photos of these kinds of buttons, with the idea being that users with various disabilities or needs would buy each one a la carte to add more functionality beyond the XAC and a nearby default Xbox One controller. But it doesn’t take long to reach a $99 spending threshold at 3-4 buttons, which barely covers the entirety of a standard game’s functions. On a sheer price level, Logitech has done the right thing. Target XAC users will likely need no fewer than four discrete buttons, so you’re saving money compared to the rest of the fray by going with Logitech’s set.

On top of that, Logitech includes two hook-and-loop boards and relevant connecting cables in this bundle. XAC users will likely want to mount extra buttons onto these kinds of boards so that they can remain more stable while near a controlling body part of choice: a foot, a fingerless hand, even a head. And they’re a perfect freebie bonus for a set that’s already reasonably priced.

To top all of that off, the included “variable” triggers play nicely with XAC’s pair of analog 3.5mm ports. Most 3.5mm controller accessories only offer binary “on/off” switch functionality. That’s fine for most controller functions but not for one that Logitech identified as a popular genre for special-needs gamers: racing.

“If you look around the [special needs] market… I haven’t successfully found a good variable trigger replacement,” Starrett says. “If you wanted to use gas and brake in *Forza*, stuff like that, there was no solution. Just binary digital buttons. So we include two of those in the kit. I’m a racer, and so are a lot of people we met. They want to play these games and struggle with this insane, 100% throttle thing.”

From 200 joysticks to 99 dollars

Logitech says this project began on the side when Microsoft began asking for loaner joysticks a few years ago to test a secret project. (Starrett says they gave more than 200 joysticks to that aim before finding out what the XAC actually was.) Logitech's design team was looped into the shape, connection protocols, and launch plans for the XAC ahead of its launch, but the team didn't realize how many steps were left open for potential buyers, in terms of additional buttons, until after launch.

"I'm not gonna blind-read [the Xbox team]'s positions, but they don't make a lot of peripherals traditionally," Starrett says. "They make their controllers and consoles. They don't want to be in the peripheral business at this level, I don't think. Meanwhile, we're very expert in this area. We've done many things with Microsoft, we've supported their platforms for years. It was a natural thing [to team up on an adaptive controller bundle]. They might've gone and made one themselves if we hadn't said, 'We're going to do this and work with you.'"

Hence, Microsoft handed Logitech its Rolodex for special-needs gaming researchers and experts, including the UK non-profit Special Effect, a rehab center at Mt. Sinai Hospital, and XAC engineering lead Bryce Johnson. From that point on, Logitech spent the next year designing the controllers while "shaving down the profit margins" to get the bundle's price point to $99. The resulting bundle is now on sale at logitechg.com and at most American Microsoft Store locations; it'll come to European Microsoft Stores "if not day one, then shortly after."

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1602407

Frank Miller inks deal for a Sin City TV series based on his neo-noir comics

Enlarge / Mickey Rourke played tough guy Marv in the 2005 film, *Sin City*, and its 2014 sequel, *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For.*
YouTube/Miramax

reader comments

38 with 28 posters participating

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We're getting a TV adaptation of *Sin City*, Frank Miller's series of neo-*noir* comics inspired by crime pulp fiction, Deadline Hollywood reports. Miller just inked a deal with Legendary Television for the project, and apparently a similar agreement is close to completion with Robert Rodriguez, who collaborated with Miller on the film adaptions of the comic series in 2005 and 2014. The agreement comes with a first season guarantee, pending a partnership with one of the major networks or streaming platforms. Given that Miller wants the series to rate a hard "R," streaming seems the most likely option.

Miller cut his teeth in the 1980s on Marvel Comics' *Daredevil* series and DC Comics' *The Dark Knight Returns*. A longtime fan of film *noir*, especially the films of James Cagney and Humphrey Bogart, Miller wanted to bring that same tone to *Sin*

City, an anthology of stories set in the fictional Western town of Basin City (aka Sin City). The series art was noteworthy for its unique aesthetic, drawn almost entirely in black-and-white, with occasional bright splashes of color (red, yellow, blue, or pink) to highlight certain characters. And Miller drew on classic pulp fiction for the writing as well.

Almost every inhabitant of Sin City is corrupt, from the police department to the wealthy Roark family dynasty, with different factions carving out niches in the overall hierarchy. Miller has said he wanted it to be "a world out of balance, where virtue is defined by individuals in difficult situations, not by an overwhelming sense of goodness that was somehow governed by this godlike Comics Code." So we get stories, or "yarns," about one man's brutal rampage to avenge his lover's killer; gang warfares; and the hunt for a disfigured serial killer targeting young women. The yarns aren't necessarily connected, but they all take place in the same fictional world, and various characters recur in different stories.

Enlarge / A mesmerizing Eva Green couldn’t save *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For* from critical and box office failure.
Dimension Films

The 2005 film adaptation, *Sin City*, focused mostly on the first, third, and fourth books in the series (*The Hard Goodbye, The Big Fat Kill*, and *That Yellow Bastard*). From the start Rodriguez sought to remain true to the source material; the only writing credit is “based on the graphic novels by Frank Miller.” He also brought Miller on board as co-director to ensure the film had the same distinctive look as the comics: mostly black-and-white, with splashes of bright colors here and there. Since the Director’s Guild of America refused to grant full directing credit to both men because they weren’t part of an established team, Rodriguez famously resigned his membership to preserve the dual credit.

That gamble paid off when *Sin City* premiered in 2005 to critical acclaim and box office success, grossing $158.7 million worldwide. It was a finalist for the prestigious Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival that year, winning the Technical Grand Prize for its striking visual style. Alas, the

2014 sequel, *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For*, fizzled at the box office, earning a meager $39.4 million globally against a $65 million production budget. It was largely slammed by critics too, who found the visuals less striking the second time around, and the story slow and repetitive, although the stellar cast received praise.

It's early days yet for the planned TV series' development, so we know very little about the details. But when rumors of a TV adaptation surfaced in 2017, Deadline noted, "The intention is to be a far departure from the films, introducing original characters and timelines within the Sin City universe." Since Rodriguez is likely to be involved again, chances are he'll be looking to tell fresh stories from Miller's comic *oeuvre*, rather than retreading the same narrative ground of the two film adaptations. Television is a very different medium, arguably better suited than film to Miller's anthology format. Let's hope it preserves that distinctive neo-*noir* look of the films, at least.

https://arstechnica.com/?p=1602913