

Disney sketches sequel to 'Epic Mickey' video game

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In this video game image released by Disney, a scene is shown from "Epic Mickey 2." (AP Photo/Disney)

(AP) -- Warren Spector realizes that he made a mistake with "Epic Mickey," his 2010 action-adventure game starring the world's most famous mouse

Despite his insistence on crafting an interactive homage to the silent cartoons that inspired him to create "Epic Mickey," the veteran designer acknowledges that the game's characters should have actually spoken.

Spector, the mastermind behind such games as "Deus Ex" and "Thief," now is more than fixing that flub with "Disney Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two." He's not only tapped voice actors to portray the game's colorful cast, he's also making the sequel a musical. Jim Dooley and Mike Himelstein, the composer and lyricist who wrote the music for the

upcoming [animated film](#) "Dorothy of Oz," are crafting original tunes for "Epic Mickey 2."

"I'm such a geek about musicals," said Spector at the recent [Game Developers Conference](#) in San Francisco, where he was honored with a lifetime achievement award. "I love the co-op and next-gen stuff, but for me, when a character breaks into song, which they do on a regular basis in this game, it's magic."

That includes Oswald the Lucky Rabbit, the zany predecessor to Mickey Mouse co-created by Walt Disney but lost in a 1928 [contract dispute](#). Oswald returned to Disney's control in 2006 and had a starring role in the first "Epic Mickey." Oswald, who never uttered a word in a Disney cartoon, will be portrayed in "Epic Mickey 2" by veteran voice actor Frank Welker.

"I couldn't be more pleased," said [Walt Disney Co.](#) archive director Becky Cline, who has been uncovering Oswald's past and working with Spector on including more of the rabbit in the sequel. "Once you give a character a voice, it takes it to a whole new level. I can't wait for the public to see it and embrace Oswald the way that we have over the years in the archive."

Oswald is also getting in on the action this time as a playable character who joins the mouse's side in a new cooperative mode. Mickey will again wield a brush powered by magical paint and thinner, while Oswald is armed with a remote control that has the power to command electricity. Spector said the pair will have to work together to overcome obstacles.

"It's drop-in, drop-out co-op," said Spector. "You can sit down at any time with a friend who is playing as Mickey, and you can take control of Oswald. If you're playing as a single player, Oswald will be there every

second of the game. He's not just a multiplayer character. He's a helper, whether you're playing alone or with a friend or family member."

After reintroducing Oswald and weaving his past into the storyline of the first game, Spector hopes Oswald's larger part wins the rabbit more fans. It's an unprecedented virtual push for a Disney character that most adults - let alone children - haven't been watching on TV, wearing on their backpack or taking their photo with at a theme park for the past 40 years.

"We couldn't ask people to care about this guy they've never heard of or no one has ever seen since 1928 in a Disney film," said Spector. "It was unrealistic to expect people to care in the first game, but now we know they care. We hear about it from players all the time. They really, really got into Oswald, which is hugely gratifying. "

The original "Epic Mickey" had a respectable but not spectacular debut when Disney Interactive Studios released it during the holiday season two years ago. It sold 1.3 million copies in North America and landed in the fifth spot on the NPD Group's console sales charts that December, behind such games as "Call of Duty: Black Ops" and "Just Dance 2."

As with the first outing, players' choices will affect what happens throughout the second installment, which is set for release this fall and is again being developed by Junction Point Studios in Austin, Texas. Spector said the sequel's songs and music will change based on whether gamers prompt the Walt Disney Co. spokesmouse to be well-mannered or mischievous.

Other issues Spector is addressing with "Epic Mickey 2" include releasing it for all consoles - not just Nintendo Wii but also the high-definition PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 - and fixing the game's camera placement. The first title's unruly perspective was one of the chief

complaints because several players kept inadvertently sending Mickey jumping to his demise.

"We've had a team working on the camera from literally the day we finished the first game," said Spector. "They'll be working on it until the day we ship the second game. (There have been) over 1,000 specific changes made to the camera. Our goal is that you will not have to touch the manual camera controls even once to play through the main story path of this game."

"Epic Mickey 2" finds Mickey back in Wasteland, a twisted take on Disneyland filled with forgotten characters and theme park attractions. Spector said the mouse will return to a few places he visited during his first trip, but earthquakes and other disasters have changed their appearance. He teased that Mickey would also explore previously unseen Wasteland realms.

"There's always been one part of the (Disney) parks that I've always wanted to get into Wasteland," said Spector. "Frontierland has changed so much since it started. There's so much forgotten history there, so Frontierland is going to get a pretty good exploration this time around, plus some other places that we'll keep secret for now."

More information: <http://www.disneyepicmickey.com>

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