

AP critics pick the year's best video games

December 19 2013, by Derrik J. Lang



This publicity photo released by 2K Games/Irrational Games shows the character, Elizabeth, in a scene from the video game "BioShock Infinite." (AP Photo/2K Games/Irrational Games, File)

The top 10 video games of 2013, according to Lou Kesten:

1. "BioShock Infinite" (Irrational Games, for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC): The latest adventure from provocateur Ken Levine asks tough questions about the bloody path of American history. And it doesn't provide easy answers—indeed, the more you learn about its setting, the flying city of Columbia, the loopier it gets. No other game this year bent my brain as much.

2. "Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag" (Ubisoft Montreal, for the PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Wii U, Xbox 360, Xbox One, PC): Stealth and swordplay have always been at the core of this series, but "Black Flag" adds a stirring new element: engrossing sea battles, as you and the crew of your pirate ship romp across the Caribbean of the 1730s.
3. "Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch" (Studio Ghibli and Level-5, for the PlayStation 3): The Japanese studios behind movies like "Spirited Away" and games like "Dragon Quest" collaborated on this sprawling epic about a kid transported to an alternate universe. It provides all the pleasures of a deep role-playing game with the charm and humor of great anime.
4. "Tomb Raider" (Crystal Dynamics, for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC): Video-game icon Lara Croft gets an origin story, as the shipwrecked heroine fights for survival on an island full of goons. As teenage Lara evolves from helpless to deadly, you can't help but think this kid's got a bright future.
5. "The Last of Us" (Naughty Dog, for the PlayStation 3): This journey across a post-apocalyptic United States presents one nerve-racking confrontation after another—but it will be best remembered for the smartly written, subtly acted relationship between its protagonists, a bitter survivor and the lively young girl he's sworn to protect.
6. "Gone Home" (The Fullbright Company, for PC): Remember that feeling of returning to your childhood home only to realize you don't really know anyone who lives there? That's the mood captured by this sweet, sad yet hopeful mystery, told entirely through the things a family has left behind.
7. "Device 6" (Simogo, for iOS): This witty mystery reminded me of the classic text adventures of the 1980s—except now, you have to rotate

your iPad to follow along. The elegant design, with just a smattering of pictures and music, makes the creepy story all the more effective.

8. "The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds" (Nintendo, for the Nintendo 3DS): Nintendo opens up the magical land of Hyrule—and its darker twin, Lorule—with a looser storyline that invites more exploration. It's the most challenging "Zelda" in years, and the most rewarding.

9. "Peggle 2" (PopCap Games, for Xbox One): The killer app for Microsoft's new Xbox One turns out to be ... a juiced-up pachinko game. But fans of the original will get exactly what they were hoping for: a game so addictive that, even after bouncing through 120 new levels, you want more.



This video game image released by Ubisoft shows a scene from "Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag." (AP Photo/Ubisoft)

10. "Final Fantasy XIV: A Realm Reborn" (Square Enix, for PlayStation 3, PC): This massively multiplayer online game was so poorly received in 2010 that its publisher pulled the plug and rebuilt it from the ground up. The result is nearly a miracle: a lush online world so compelling that even anti-social gamers can enjoy it.

The top 10 video games of 2013, according to AP Entertainment Writer Derrik J. Lang:

1. "BioShock Infinite" (Irrational Games, for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC): A breathtaking journey to a kingdom in the clouds, "Infinite" is equally as wondrous as it is thought-provoking. A first-person shooter that philosophizes about such topics as racism, nationalism, religion and fate shouldn't work, but this imaginative piece of fiction does on every level.

2. "Grand Theft Auto V" (Rockstar Games, for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360): Los Santos, the cheeky rendition of Los Angeles, depicted in "GTA V" is a crowning achievement in virtual world construction—an explosive, fully realized, sin-filled, self-loathing playground for the game's trio of despicable anti-heroes to do their bidding. The heists are really, really fun, too.

3. "The Last of Us" (Naughty Dog, for the PlayStation 3): Who knew the end of the world could look so good? This sweeping survival epic's visually stunning rendition of post-apocalyptic America and its completely unique take on zombies is enhanced even further by intricate performances from Troy Baker and Ashley Johnson as unlikely travel companions.



This publicity photo released by Crystal Dynamics/Square Enix shows a scene from the video game, "Tomb Raider." (AP Photo/Crystal Dynamics/Square Enix)

4. "Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag" (Ubisoft Montreal, for the PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Wii U, Xbox 360, Xbox One, PC): After last year's sleepy Colonial America-set installment, "Assassin's Creed" refreshingly plunged into pirate politics with this entry, proving the aging historical stealth series still has new tricks up its sleeves, besides just a pair of hidden blades.

5. "Tomb Raider" (Crystal Dynamics, for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC): Lara Croft, shipwrecked and stripped of everything, transcends her status as merely a busty [video-game](#) vixen in this intense origin story. Her harrowing expedition across the lethal Yamatai island is grueling, desperate and exactly what the character—and gamers—needed.

6. "The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds" (Nintendo, for the Nintendo 3DS): A few daring innovations on the long-running "Legend

of Zelda" formula resulted in one of the most captivating adventures starring everyone's favorite elfy hero, Link. His ability to pop on and off walls added a new depth to the puzzles, and made a serious case for playing in 3D.



This photo provided by The Fullbright Company shows a scene from the video game, "Gone Home." (AP Photo/The Fullbright Company)

7. "Gone Home" (The Fullbright Company, for PC): There just aren't enough games as emotionally gripping—or as beautifully ordinary—as this voyeuristic coming-of-age story that casts players as a college student who's returned to her family's empty house after traveling abroad. "Gone Home" is more than just a mystery set in the 1990s. It's interactive poetry.

8. "Animal Crossing: New Leaf" (Nintendo, for the Nintendo 3DS): Realistic. Thoughtful. Edgy. Stressful. Those words do not at all describe "New Leaf," an unabashedly silly town simulator that turned out to be a

relaxing, fantastical treat—and a digital reminder of how simple acts like catching up with neighbors and plucking apples from trees can be oh-so-rewarding.

9. "Papers, Please" (3909 LLC, for PC): It sounds like the worst idea for a game ever: play as a paper-pushing immigration inspector tasked with approving or denying folks entry into an oppressive country. Yet indie designer Lucas Pope crafted a provocative, pixelated tour de force with his "dystopian document thriller" where morality and gameplay collide.



This video game image released by Sony shows a scene from "The Last of Us." (AP Photo/Sony)

10. "Disney Infinity" (Avalanche Software, for the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, Wii U, Nintendo 3DS): Taking a cue from "Skylanders" and "Minecraft," Mickey Mouse and his cartoon militia daringly marched onto the toys-meets-games battlefield and triumphed by inspiring the imaginations of young and old with a deft combination of physical and

virtual playthings.

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