

At E3, game makers introduce more diverse heroes

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Gamers experience "Mafia III," an upcoming action-adventure video game developed by Hangar 13, at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles on Wednesday, June 15, 2016. (AP Photo/Nick Ut)

After introducing the world to several new female heroes at last year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, story-driven game makers at this week's gathering of the interactive industry are uncharacteristically putting more racially diverse protagonists front and center in their games.

From an Indian-American space dweller in "Tacoma" to a biracial Vietnam War veteran in "Mafia III," the heroes and anti-heroes appearing on the massive posters and screens across the Los Angeles Convention Center represent more ethnicities than have been showcased in the past.

"We wanted to tell a very different 'Mafia' story this time," said Christoph Hartmann, president of "Mafia" publisher 2K Games. "That meant getting away from classic 'Godfather' fare with a bunch of Italian characters. Once we decided to set the game in New Orleans in 1968, it just made sense for the character to be an African-American war vet."

For decades, when players haven't able to pick their own protagonist's skin color or background, the interactive medium has mostly focused on telling stories of white leading men and women, relegating characters of other ethnicities to villainous or supporting roles. That's changing.

"At the end of the day, this is the group that we're interested in seeing on screen," said Karla Zimonja, co-founder of "Tacoma" developer Fullbright. "It's always more interesting to pay attention to things that don't get a lot of attention in media. This is a direction that hasn't really been explored in video games, so we wanted to explore it."



A display for "Watch Dogs 2," an upcoming open world action-adventure third-person shooter video game developed by Ubisoft, is seen at the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles on Wednesday, June 15, 2016. (AP Photo/Nick Ut)

A look at E3's newest stars:

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LINCOLN CLAY, "MAFIA III"

"Mafia III" is heading South to a locale inspired by New Orleans in the '60s following installments centered on Italian-American gangsters in open-world versions of New York, Chicago and San Francisco spanning the '30s to the '50s. The unflinching crime world saga focuses on Lincoln

Clay , a biracial orphan and Vietnam War vet, as he battles for control of the city's black mafia. He'll face off against the police, Italian mobsters and the Ku Klux Klan along the way.



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ALEX HUNTER, "FIFA 17"

A real—not virtual—black man stepped on stage at Electronic Arts' E3 presentation and introduced himself as Alex Hunter , a humble English chap with dreams of bending it like David Beckham. "FIFA 17" players

will guide a computer-generated version of Hunter in the soccer series' first-ever story mode. From picking a team to conducting post-game interviews, Hunter's future is in players' hands.

AMY FERRIER, "TACOMA"

The follow-up to Fullbright's voyeuristic family drama "Gone Home" casts players as Indian-American space-faring free agent Amy Ferrier . She arrives at her new assignment on the space station Tacoma to discover its diverse six-person crew has disappeared. Ferrier, who originally hails from California, must rely on Tacoma's augmented reality system to retrace their steps and find out what happened.



Attendees line up to enter the Electronic Entertainment Expo at the Los Angeles Convention Center in Los Angeles on Wednesday, June 15, 2016. (AP Photo/Nick Ut)

MARCUS HOLLOWAY, "WATCH DOGS 2"

Aiden Pierce, the gruff vengeance-seeking Chicagoan from the original "Watch Dogs," has been replaced with Marcus Holloway , a more upbeat African-American vigilante hacker in the San Francisco-set sequel. During a demo of the Ubisoft game, the Oakland-born anti-hero breaks into a crooked politician's penthouse all while jamming to Eric B. and Rakim's "Don't Sweat The Technique."

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