# INSIDER

# FRONTLINE
studios

**ARENA MORTE**

**ARENA MORTE**

The featured article on the challenges and up-side-downs in todays market, - by Brian Dreyer

## DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION

FRONTLINE has recently established a world wide digital distribution network for its product development. In this issue we provide complete line-up of FRONTLINE's games...

## THE DUKE PROJECT

After 2 long years of Duke Nukem development the team is now reworking the assets and looking forward to the release of a sure to be instant classic on PSN...

## SALT LIFE

Triple A salt water fishing simulator designed by the commercial fisherman and endorsed by the salt water industry leaders...

# FRONTLINE INSIDER

## DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION...

**New economy challenges turn FRONTLINE into Digital Distribution power house!**

At FRONTLINE, for the past 10 years we have been developing video games on nearly all the platforms and genres for the publishers, world-wide. We've been involved in large and small projects, and have endured the good and the bad days of the video game industry. The company's main studio in Poland expanded in 2009, powered by talented people, a polished development process, great technology, and a professional organizational structure. We've gained experience developing full games, from initial concepts through prototyping, production, QA and testing, to final submission and marketing activities.

2010 is a turning point in FRONTLINE's history. The business models are changing, and so are we. The corporate strategy for Q4/2010 and beyond is to build a portfolio of several games designed to exploit platform specific features across multiple platforms simultaneously, and suitable for audiences of many Digital Distribution channels.

Our game portfolio includes a variety of genres, from classic and arcade games, hidden object, strategy, simulation as well as hardcore titles. The selection of projects for production is driven by the highest possible capitalization of developed assets and technologies. We have secured distribution contracts with dozens of the industry leading distributors, matching the line-up with our in-house production capabilities that guarantee a constant flow of new titles.

In this newsletter, we present selected projects that will be released by FRONTLINE during the next weeks, months and years. The current line-up includes titles to be released on the following platforms: PC, Mac, XB360, PS3, PSP, Wii, DSi, 3DS, iPhone, iPad, Android, Windows Mobile, as well as browser games.
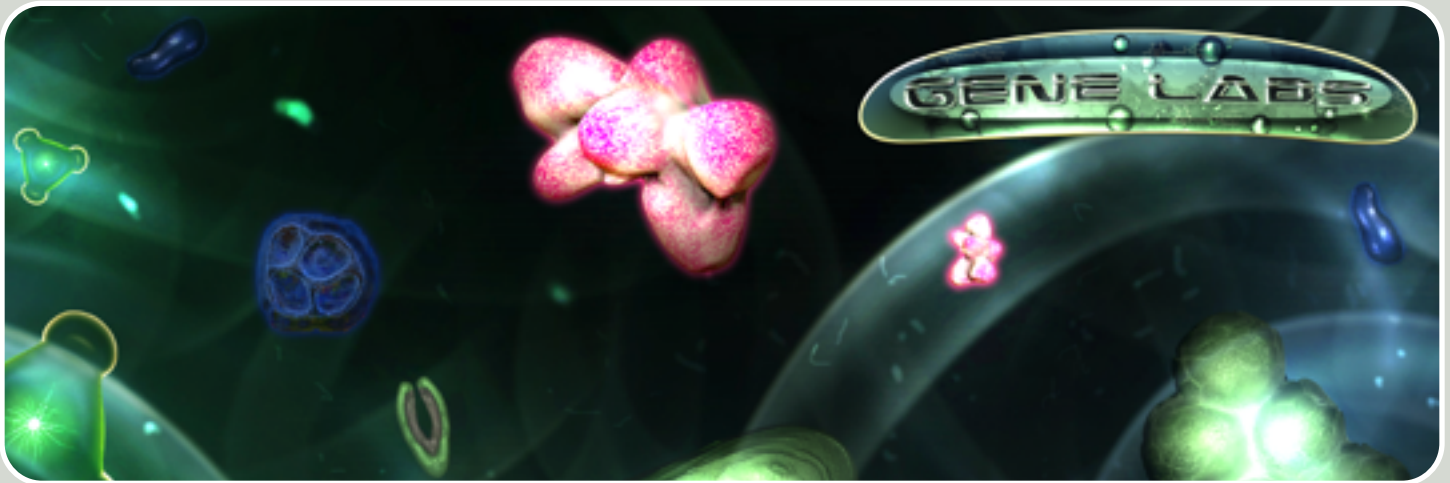
# DANGEROUS ADDICTION... THIS FALL EVERYWHERE!

**The extremely playable and addictive arcade puzzler "Gene Labs" comes this fall to several digital distribution platforms.**

Gene Labs is an addictive arcade puzzle game set in the world of genetic experiments. In Gene Labs the Player impersonates with young scientist who has discovered new virus that is capable of genetically changing any living organism. With the Player's help under the microscope, the virus is spreading among the cells creating new living forms and modifying existing species. The Player gets a chance to use his invention and skills to build new better species of plants, animals, and ultimately the super soldier.

FRONTLINE's first release of Gene Labs on multiple platforms is an arcade version of the game featuring endless game play, power-ups, prizes, and several spores to choose from. Each spore features differentiated characteristics and behavior. The initial release planned for Q4, 2010 include the following platforms:

- DSiWare
- WiiWare
- iPad
- iPhone & iPod Touch
- On Live
- Game Streamer
- Real Networks

FRONTLINE is currently working on an enhanced version of Gene Labs, that will be "hopefully" available soon on PSN (Move), and XBLA (Kinect)!



**Art Style**
Gene Labs art style has been differentiated across many platforms to better fit the audience and platform performance.

**Combat nasty viruses in this addictive and progressive arcade puzzle-like challenge!**
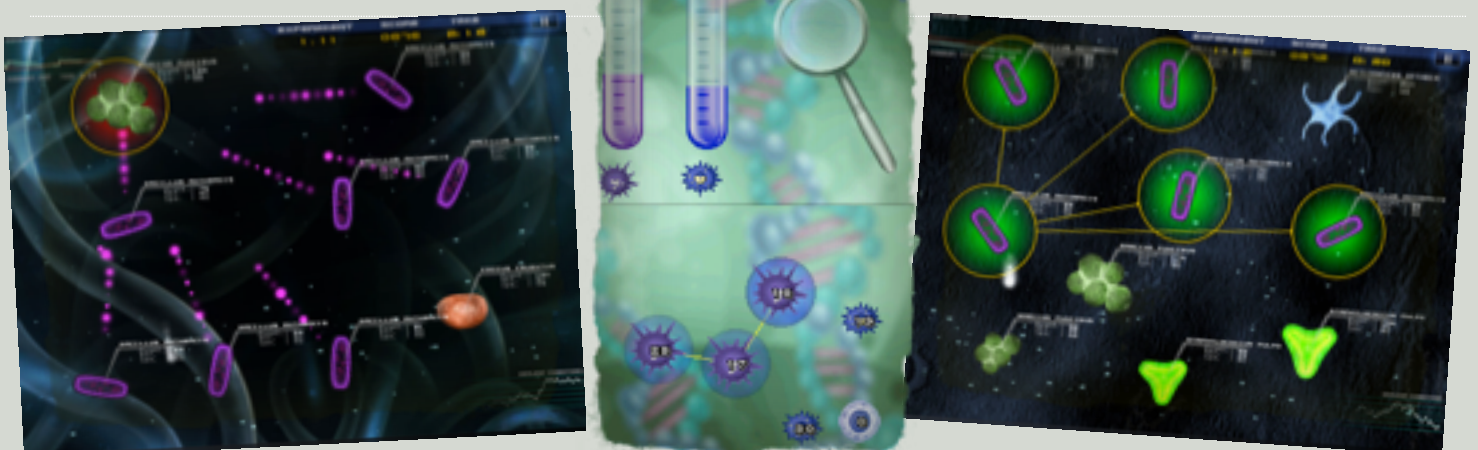


## facebook.com/GeneLabs

The marketing plan for Gene Labs is to build large community of fans on Facebook and other social networks who enjoy playing free Flash version of Gene Labs on Facebook. The plans include Ads build in the free version of the game, as well as special promotions for the fans associated with the Facebook site to purchase a discounted full version of the game.

Following the OnLive marketing campaign for Gene Labs, a social network oriented campaign will begin, that will not only focus on the currently available versions, but also collect a fan base for future ports.
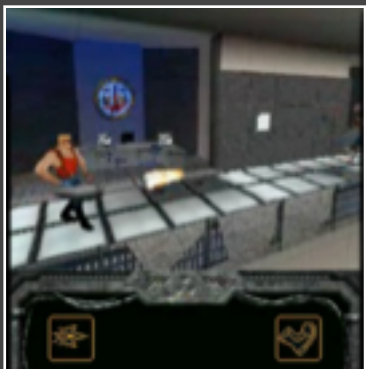
**Gene Labs 2**

to be announced soon!



| PORTING SCHEDULE | ANDROID | WIN MOBILE | PSN | XBLA |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | JAN/2011 Arcade version | FEB/2011 Arcade version | APR/2011 HD version with Career mode and MOVE support. | MAY/2011 HD version with Career mode and Kinect support. |

# EXTRACTION POINT: ALIEN SHOOTOUT







## Duke Nukem - post mortem

Duke Nukem Critial Mass on DS and PSP consoles are not going to happen after all (feel free to ask why!), but fear not - we're still releasing the games. It's just now called "EXTRACTION POINT: Alien Shootout".

"Hail to the..." never mind.

## Action Intense TPP shooter based on Duke Nukem engine...

Nobody was expecting the much talked about cataclysmic disaster scenario to actually happen in 2012... Volcano eruptions, Sun storms and radiation flares, or the great floods were the most popular predictions, but an alien invasion.

After just 3 months of resistance all the great armies of all nations have been either extinguished or dissolved, heavily destroyed by the unequal alien weaponry, unknown to the Earth's defense forces.

There is one guy, who has been waiting for this scenario his entire life... Cam Nash dreamed of a day that he could actually be an action hero. No laws, no rules, just you, your weapon, and the "plague".

EXTRACTION POINT: Alien Shootout is a Third Person Perspective arcade shooter game, where the main goal is to shoot everything that moves! The Player must search the levels for the Alien Teleporters and Incubation Chambers to destroy them, as the aliens use these devices to clone more soldiers and transport their troops around the world.

The action takes places in several locations around the globe, including:
1) Brooklyn, NY
2) Manhattan, NY
3) Area 51 - secret US Army facility
4) Los Angeles
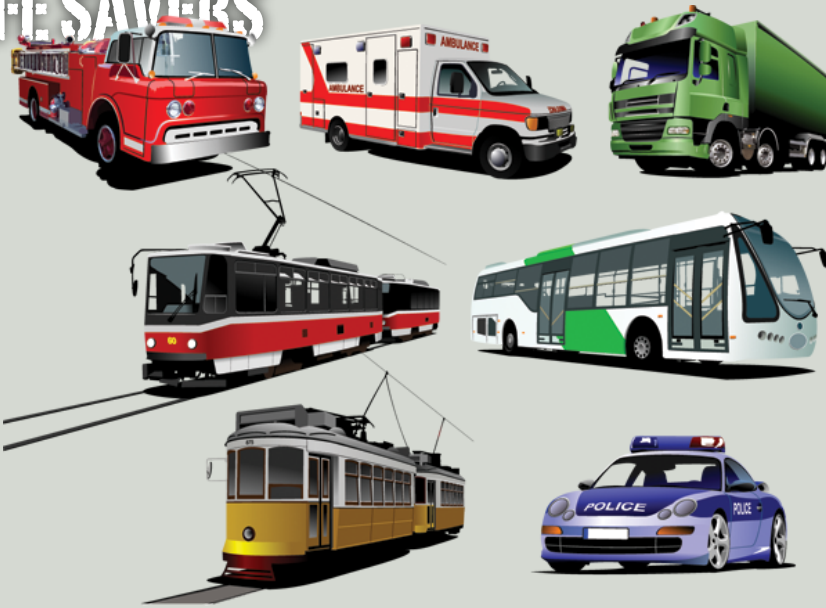5) Tokyo (Geisha Park)
6) Washington

**KEY FEATURES:**
- Advanced physics and model destruction system that let you demolish environments with stunning visual effects
- Full array of regular and alien weapons
- Trophies, power-ups, and secrets to find and unlock on each level
- Strong characterization and unique behaviors of the enemy troops

COMING SOON:
- PSN Store in Q4/2010 for the PSP
- 3DSiWare version available in Q2/2011

# LIFE SAVERS

## The game of tactical and skill driven mixture, easy to learn but hard to master.

**LIFE SAVERS** is a tactical-arcade game based on an advanced path drawing mechanics. The Player selects the emergency response unit and drags it towards location on the city map, where the incident took place. The controls are very intuitive, as the Player slides his finger over the touch screen or, depending on the platform, uses the mouse or motion controller to draw the best path to the destination for the emergency unit to follow.

The variety of different incidents that occur in a city (in random sectors) provides a great tactical aspect to game play. The Player must smartly guide all the emergency units to avoid traffic, and react to all incidents as quickly as possible. A burning car left without attention can quickly turn into massive fire spreading over several buildings, and causing numerous casualties. Also, there is a need to smartly distribute a reasonable number of units to respond to each emergency call.

The goal of the game is to keep the city up and running as long as possible for points and prestige! There is limited budget for new units, and the more people saved the more budget bonuses collected after each in-game month.

**KEY FEATURES:**
• Endless game play
• 5 different city environments
• Addictive game play combining multiple units of different features (Police, Firefighters, Paramedics)
• Rich and appealing special effects
• Rewarding prizes, medals and bonuses
• Leader boards
• Intuitive controls and game play mechanics

| LIFE SAVERS - RELEASE SCHEDULE | IOS | PC & MAC | NINTENDO | PSN |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Q1/2011 iPhone iPad iPod Touch | Q1/2011 OnLive Game Streamer Steam Real Games | Q2/2011 3DSiWare WiiWare | Q2/2011 PS3 MOVE, HD version |

The Path Drawing game play mechanics proved to work really well for the finger controlled devices. Following the success of the Flight Control games, we are putting together the Valet Parking game, featuring virtually endless game play!



## Don't scratch my ride dude!

Valet Parking is an arcade-strategy game based on path drawing mechanics. The Player, as a Valet Parking Supervisor must manage the incoming and outgoing traffic, and avoid collision of the cars on the parking lot.

WORKING TITLE

The goal of the game is to run a profitable Valet Parking business. Each car parked on a lot generates revenue. The customers who get the car pulled out from the parking lot on time are satisfied, so they usually tip the Player. However, no payment, and insurance penalty occurs when the Player demolishes or scratch a car in the collision.

| VALET PARKING | IOS | PC & MAC | NINTENDO | PSN |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Q1/2011<br>iPhone<br>iPad<br>iPod Touch | Q1/2011<br>OnLive<br>Game Streamer<br>Steam<br>Real Games | Q2/2011<br>3DSiWare<br>WiiWare | Q2/2011<br>PS3 MOVE, HD<br>version |

# GALACTIC SIEGE

## VISUALLY STUNNING, MULTI-MODE SPACE SHOOTER.

Galactic Siege is an arcade space shooting adventure that features a compelling story-line with visually stunning gameplay. This pick-up-and-play space flight action title is rich with special effects and multi-mode game play, and strives to put a new twist on a classic and winning gameplay.

The Player pilots a space ship armed to-the-teeth with a variety of hi-tech upgradeable (light RPG like load-out) weapons into battle across 17 levels, pitting his skills and wits against a dastardly & cunning race of Alien terrorists. The cutting edge visuals and tight gameplay produce an explosive combat settings and a huge, open immersive real-space environment. Galactic Siege doesn't want to get itself bogged down with the minutiae of flight control. Rather, it just throws the Player into an outer space barnstorming action-adventure. Semiautomatic speed controls and a user friendly targeting system allow the Player to immediately get on with the exciting combat and excellent DLC potential. There's also enough freedom for the Player to combine turbo or backward thrusts to produce a dizzying displays of agility, to engage the enemy. This game is currently in production.

| GALACTIC SIEGE | PLATFORM | TIMESCALE | GENRE | AUDIENCE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | DSiW | NOV/2010 | TPP Space | Teen |
| | PSP-Go | JAN/2011 | Shooter | |
| | iPhone | JAN/2011 | | |
| | iPad | JAN/2011 | | |
| | PC (DD) | MAR/2011 | | |

## Cool "learn by playing" stuff for the younger audience!

*"Aspiring artists and gamers looking to flex their creativity can treat their Wii Remote like a paint brush and create unique works of art in Let's Paint. The single-player "I Play" mode lets players create their own piece of art, fill in pages of a coloring book, or take on the "Paint Blaster," "Connect the Dots," "Picture Puzzles," and "Shape Matching" mini-games. Gamers can also join a friend for multiplayer action in "Paper Soccer" and "Tic Tac Toe" mini-games."* ~ Christopher Brown, All Game Guide

The WiiWare release of Let's Paint in Europe, as well as the DSiWare version (NOA and NOE) are scheduled for January 2011.

Following Let's Paint on Wii and DSiWare, we are going to develop an enhanced version of the product, that will include activity books, music books, pre-school math and word games. All kind of learn by playing activities for little children, exploiting the potential of touch screens, as well as Move and Kinect.

**KEY FEATURES:**

- FREE HAND PAINTING
- ACTIVITY BOOKS
- COLORING BOOKS
- MUSIC GAMES
- READING / WORD GAMES
- PRE-SCHOOL MATH
- SCULPTING
- ARCADE MINI-GAMES
- NATURAL CONTROLS
- GREAT REPLAY VALUE
- EDUTAINMENT FEATURES
- 20+ HOURS OF GAME PLAY LENGTH
- TARGET AUDIENCE: 3-9
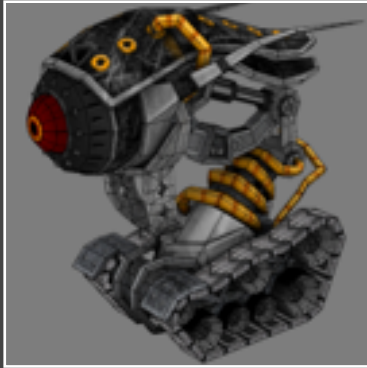- 8 MAIN GAME MODES
- 24 MINI-GAMES

# LET'S PAINT
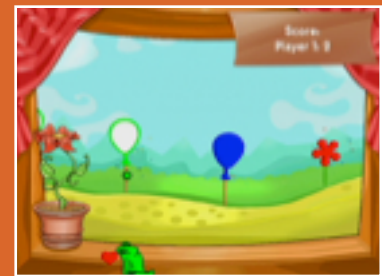


## Play Together...

Parents and their children can work and play together.
Using the Wii Remote, Stylus or hands kids will solve puzzles, paint pictures, draw, read stories and play music by using simple motions and gestures.

# MECH WARS

MECH WARS is a fighting-puzzle game, where the Players must use tactical approach and arcade skills to eliminate all the opponents in the tournament based one-on-one duels. The game environment is a futuristic Sci-Fi world, where the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence went out of control, and led to nearly complete extinction of the human race.

Endless war has become an entertainment for soulless machines. For the human race, the only hope to bring peace on Earth is to win the Tournament with the human controlled Mech Bot.

## PLAYABILITY, that's what matters!

The game play mechanics behind the Mech Bot battles is based on very addictive and fun pixel puzzle game. The Player selects the attack and defense sequence by rotating holographic objects that finally form (charge or load) selected weapon. The weapon must be fully charged before each fire or block.

# SALT LIFE

## Ocean Hunters - the ultimate salt water fishing and spearfishing sim adventure!

SALT LIFE: Ocean Hunter is a First Person Perspective fishing game, simulating real salt water sport fishing and spearfishing activities. The game features comprehensive coverage of the most popular fishing spots around the globe, and corresponding fish species that can be found in these world-wide locations. The game play is based on the in-game economy, and commercial fishing realities as well as sport fishing tournaments.

The seasonal fishing tournament is an additional opportunity to wing big credits and other prizes! The Player can decide at any time to sign up for an upcoming event. After depositing the participation fee, the Tournament starts (Single and Multiplayer Tournaments!), and the winner takes the big stakes and occasionally gets additional prize from the sponsors.

spearfishing: "cold steel in a face"

### Game Play Overview

The Player starts with a basic boat, that can barely make an off-shore trip in choppy weather. Begin with a basic set of fishing and scuba diving equipment, and work your way up. During the game play the Player can review Salt Water Fishing Guide to learn more about the particular fish in the region, the best fishing technique, bait, and fishing regulations. Each keeper can be sold in the marina to earn more credits for equipment upgrades, better boats, and so on...

The game play mechanics is based on a daily plan - the Players must find a way to plan their fishing trip most effectively, analyzing the weather conditions, and select the proper equipment for the job. Depending on the game mode, the in-game time runs in general 4 times faster than real time.

### Key Features:

- Realistic graphics
- In-game economy
- Multi mode fishing (Angling, Bottom Fishing, Trolling, Spearfishing, etc)
- Career Mode
- Tournament mode (Single and Multiplayer)
- Gear upgrades
- Gear, Bait & Tackle shop
- 6 Fishing boats
- 12 most popular fishing spots world-wide
- Over 40 fish species (different 3D models)

*Fishing-Move Accessory Concept*

### Designed by the Pro

**SALT LIFE: Ocean Hunters is designed by professional fishermen and spear-fishermen. The project is endorsed by commercial fishermen organization, and the SeaDogs Dive Center, specialized in underwater hunting.**

**PLATFORMS:**

- PS3
- XB360
- PC & Mac
- iPad & iPhone

**TIME SCALE**

- 10 months

# OCEAN HUNTERS

## The Greatest Show on the Balance Board Earth!

CIRCUS WiiWare is a compilation of different Circus Acts the Player must perform on Balance Board. The game features cartoon design, funny animation, and lots of special effects that reward the players during their performance.

**KEY FEATURES** (full version):
- 10 Circus Acts to master
- 2-Player Cooperative Mode
- Double Controller game play experience - Balance Board + Wii Remote and BB + DTP + Nunchaku
- Controller configuration reflects real life circus acts experience
- Appropriate Wii oriented 3D cartoon art style
- Play as human-like clowns and animals

The activities include:
- Juggling
- Tide Rope Walking
- Human Cannon
- Elephant Obstacle Course
- Ring of Fire
- Seal Toss
- Panda Dance Challenge
- Turtle Drag Race
- Tug-o-War
- Trampoline Trick Challenge

WiiWare version is to be released in Q4/2010, and the 3DSiWare version is scheduled for Q1/2011 release.



# CIRCUS







### WiiMote & Balance Board

- Full Balance Board support across 10 of the most popular circus shows;
- Balance Board & Wii Remote combined gameplay for 1 and 2 Players and additional Nunchaku support;
- Realistic physics and feel

# Transform your Home into a Spooky Haunted House!

Convert your Nintendo 3DS to the ultimate Ghost Hunting and Capture Machine! The game has been exclusively designed for Nintendo 3DS platform to exploit the 3D stereo camera and 3D display, motion sensor, gyro sensor, mic and Touch Screen.

**KEY FEATURES:**

• Seek-out, locate, capture and trap Ghosts and Goblins in full 3D mode

• Progress and unlock additional weapons, devices and traps to hunt down new demons

• Transform YOUR home into a real haunted house

• Co-op mode, play with a friend, both hunt, capture and trap spooks together

• 2 game experiences in 1 with a full featured Single Player mode and real world Ghost Busting

• Full use of the 3DS's Stereo CAM, 3D Display, Gyro and Motion Sensors, Microphone, Touch Screen and Slide Pad

| GHOST HUNTER 3DS | CONTENT | ART STYLE | CHARACTERS | TIME-SCALE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | **Story Mode**<br>• 5 Haunted Houses<br>• 20 scary missions<br>• 16 weapons and traps | Where Nintendo style meets Scooby Doo. | 12 different types of ghosts, goblins, and demons, plus 4 boss monsters | 3DS version scheduled for Q2/2011 release |

[ 13 ]

# RED PRISON







## The other features include:

• Background animation (for instance a rat running away, or patrolling prison guards)

• Animated comic book / slideshow cut-scenes with English VO narration

• Russian Voice Overs of the NPC characters

• 10 mini-games

• 30 levels

• 5 soundtracks

• Multiple revenue channels: Online/ Browser & Facebook, PC & Mac downloadable, OnLive, iPad, iPhone, Android, Wii / WiiWare, DSiWare, 3DS, as well as XBLA and PSN.

## Better Dead than Red

### Project Overview

Red Prison is an advanced "Hidden Object Game" with a twist. The game is enriched with several mini-games, special effects and features. The game is based on "Unity Engine", featuring PC and Mac as the core platforms, with a porting plan to iOS, and possibly other formats. The marketing plan includes launch of the browser based online game site, where potential customers can play 1-2 levels for free, then pay to unlock full game.

### Target Audience

The market research shows clearly that Hidden Object games are most popular among woman age 25-45 - that's why the main heroine of Red Prison are women. The game controls are very user friendly, and the story line has been designed to be thrilling and intriguing mostly for woman. Also, the seamlessly increasing level of difficulty makes the game playable and fun even for the first time gammers. Anticipated ESRB age rating is T (Teen).

### Story Line

The story begins from a playable Tutorial level where the Player is being told a story about 5 prisoners that seem to have nothing in common, except they are willing, ready and hopefully able to escape from terrible Russian prison. The Player controls each of the characters separately. As it turns out that all those prisoners directly or indirectly were connected in one way (think film franchise "Saw").

### Key & Unique Features

One of the most visible features differentiating Red Prison from other similar titles is the art style, where realistic graphics is polished with artistic filters to reflect the atmosphere of Russian prison.

The light & shadow effects, wet wall reflections, shining metal / hint effects and weather effects in composition with balanced ambient sound effect create very unique, and moving atmosphere.

The game play experience and high replay value are achieved by a multi-plot Story Line that is based on separate play-through for 5 characters. In the Single Player mode the Player can toggle in between 5 characters to achieve common goal - survival and prison escape. In the Multiplayer mode 5 different friends can play together in full sync Co-Op mode to escape.

## ARENA MORTE - A Premortem

I really like postmortems, especially the big-budget, console title ones where there's commentary from different team members like the Executive Producer, Producer, Lead Designer and so on. There are always things that went well and things that did not. Honestly, I think most people, rightly or wrongly, enjoy the negative part more.

After all if it's a great game that's being dissected, it's fascinating to know where they screwed up. So, let's leave the positive and the 'We got really lucky when…' comments aside and in the spirit of constant improvement just focus on the negative.

From a what went wrong perspective, the common denominator seems to be surprises; There are always bad things that happen during the development process that were not planned and so all we can ever really do is mitigate the risks.

Risk mitigation involves everything; people, Tech, art, budget, internal processes, leadership, talent, and goals.  With that, we should outline the essential early steps in creating a concept and a new title (IP) that addresses what a good postmortem really should look like after the game is done. I call this a "Premortem", that's what we're doing with "Arena Morte".

**STEP 1 – What's the Team's Interest, what games do they like to play and why.**

For us, the studio's experience and history has been an interesting one. While successfully in business for almost 10 years now, we've been stuck doing mainly budget projects to keep the internal workflow steady.

Obviously not happy what comes with this territory, i.e., there's never enough time, never enough money, rarely a true focus on quality from the publisher. It doesn't take an MBA from Harvard to determine that the ROI won't be good.

The Team is an entirely different story; talented people, solid technology and art skills, some CVs with AAA credentials and a universal desire to make better, more meaningful, and most importantly more fun games. So now what? Well, we just need some time, a reasonable advance and something cool to work on. This was my challenge.



# BRIAN'S BLOG
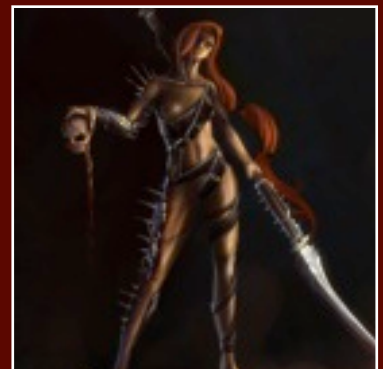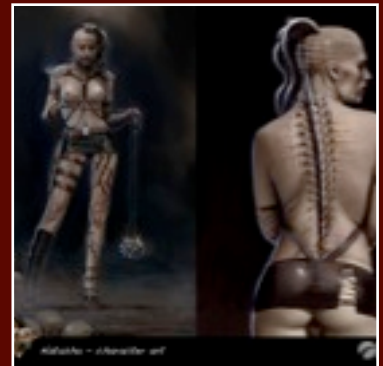






## ARENA MORTE production

Currently the production of Arena Morte is on hold till year end when the company plans to reveal final Story Line written by John Zuur Platten. The production will re-launch on January 10th, 2011.

## Premortem - STEP 1...

We had some solid concepts, some art and other assets to show but after endless pitching and good old fashion business development it became obvious that we need a demo. For a publishing contract today the concept demo has become even more important given the cost and competition in the market today.

The demo has to be polished; successfully showing the new game's unique and compelling features with a high level of quality. The bottom-line here is that the chances of securing a publishing partner are about as likely as winning the State Lottery without a great demo. There's simply going to have to be a demo that works and we're going to have to fund it.

So now that we're talking about real internal investment, it's time apply some process. Before spending a dollar, the first high-level question the executives should ask is; "What sort of game should we make?" Traditionally the direction of this conversation usually goes towards what the market needs.

While this is logical, it can be dangerous to focus too much on a market niche and it's better to save this sort of discussion for later. My idea was to focus on what the Team thought was most interesting, what kind of game do they want to make and why? After all, they are the ones doing the heavy-lifting.

Much to my disappointment, yet not completely unexpected, the responses were all over the place, from MMO's to Facebook, they were sort of stuck on the marketing thing. One day it occurred to me that during lunch breaks and after hours most of the guys played fighting games.

And not just played them, but were virtually obsessed with them, most notably "Street Fighter IV" with all the smack-talk and interaction you'd expect. So I did what any good Executive would do… I told them to get back to work! Just kidding obviously, I actually interviewed them a bit and it became obvious that we need to do a fighting game.

## STEP 2 – Get a short list of synopses and include something to convey the feel, usually concept art.

For us, the prospect of doing "Street Fighter X" is a bit too, shall we say aggressive? There's a lot behind the curtain that make this franchise so successful and the loyal followers simply will not tolerate a… western version for lack of better description. But the interviews revealed some interesting takes on the genre of the fighting experience. So next we just let their minds wander a bit.

Most will tell you to leave the creative people alone, let them create and that's a unique and subjectively individual thing. I agree with this but the cats eventually need to be herded. Carefully (key-word!) we collected high-level ideas and kept it high-level and fun to encourage more ideas and participation. This also helps to get the group to buy-into the over-all direction of the game being formed. The herding process sort of ended when we eventually asked for a short list of synopses.

Our thinking here is that if the game is going to be great, it has to be articulated at a high-level in writing, not just random collection of thoughts. This is a bit of an over simplification of a very complex exercise, mainly that there is a human interaction component at work here and there has to be an adult in-charge of this cat herding activity. There are tons of books and theories about this topic and it really is critical, generally speaking, to interact or communicate with individuals in a manner in which they are most comfortable communicating and interacting.

## STEP 3 – Focus on game play features.

Video games are interactive (key-word!) entertainment. Making a great game means emphasizing this interaction; a painfully obvious yet frequently forgotten step in the early development process. The traditional approach to making the interaction better is to make it different. That is, have the player do something he/she's never done before; take the player to a new place to do new things, to visit new worlds in a tactical sense.

I agree with this to a degree but my experience tells me that it's not very logical or practical to bet too much on the farm here. To me it has almost always made more sense to focus on the new games features which are at the heart of the interaction.

Given that the player's interactions in the game are most important, focus on what the player is actually doing at all times is essential or again focus on features. Story, characters, environment alone are just not enough.

Features basically come down to two different categories; in-game mechanics and generically new content for the game. We looked at all of this early in the concept process but focused more on player-interactive features that have been done before (hacking and slashing) and making them feel brand new.

We took a methodical look at past, present, and likely future features in this genre. We looked in detail at other sources such as movies, comics and books to come up with a list of what we think are compellingly new or significantly improved game play features that we'd like to do… after all, we're gamers.

**STEP 4 – Visualize, get a qualified writer, check the tech and make the "Go/No-go" decision. If no-go, review what likely went wrong and start over.**

By this time we have a generally good idea of what we want to do with this concept, IP and demo, including the work-in-progress name – "Arena Morte" (sometimes having a name early gives a concept a reality on which to build from). The next step was to do some of the nuts-and-bolts stuff.

That is, with a feature approach list it was time to find that property's art vision, its soul if you will. We started to put together character and environmental concept art that everyone liked. This, too, helped give the feature list more life, meaning and purpose, and provided a visualization stage. Much like a game is nothing without features, great features are meaningless without characters, substance, and story.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and say, never (dangerous word!) do a video game story that involves characters without someone skilled at writing about characters. Fortunately we found John Zuur Platten through our friends at Union Entertainment. John loved the character look and concept work, as well as the general direction we were going in, and with John, the rest was pure magic.

In a fairly short period of time he was able to go beat-by-beat through a few stories that will truly captivate the player… I'm not going say any more; you'll have to play the game when it comes out. I will say, however, that the story and character arcs will be such that the player will want to know more.

Another core issue is technology. Visualizing the game's soul can be the most fun part of the development process, but you have to ensure the tech is there to make it come to life.

We obviously needed to do some work to make sure the features we love are do-able in such a way that it works well, gels together and are fun for the player; technology is a big part of this. That is, it can't be just good enough, these features make or break the players experience and it has to be 100% verified f-ing (bad word!)

cool. We work in a world where anything is possible and sometimes the anything sucks.

We evaluated every possible tool we could get our hands on and I'd put Krystoff Malinski and Dominic Libek up against anyone in the industry when it comes to evaluating tech. I love these guys and they have a history of making our own tools so I know they're going to be tough and detailed critics when it comes to picking tools.

## STEP 5 – Focus on features and the player.

Now we're doing a demo project plan so that the demo can achieve a few things; show 90 to 100% of the features we selected, show some art skills (while art is not really important for the demo, we've got something to prove here) and maybe most importantly do this in such a way that it does not send us into Chapter 11. Regarding art, we believe expressing some art vision in a demo is essential for the pitch process when you consider that publisher executives generally will 'get it' quicker with some high-quality eye candy; we have two characters in the demo that will be near complete. The character art decision centers around the fact that the game's story is one of the key features and it will be much easier to pitch if there's more than just concept art and visual targets.

However, the key here (and everywhere I suppose one could argue) is the player's experience influenced by the demo's feel. The player is our god. So again, features are key as we will have plenty of suspense and several "WTF" moments.

Before we hand this off completely to the Lead Designer and Programmer, and while we're starting the demo's production, we're still thinking about the player. That is, we've compiled this great list of what could go wrong with tech, tasks and so on, but 'features and player' is what the 'Premortem' is all about. If this is done well the postmortem will be fun.

## STEP 6 – Design with the features to make the game wow the player.

Ok, the Leads are ready to do their thing but this concept needs some high-level executive direction.

These are my basic commandments for designers:

1.     Features – tattoo these features on the inside of your eyelids, make them beyond cool, this is your most critical objective.

2.     Don't ever let technology prevent you from creating what you know needs to be in the game.

3.     You own getting the art you need to ensure coolness. I don't care if you use crayons, get feelings from the team and draw them something; anything that resembles a story board is good.

4.     Prototype crazy-stupid ideas, and celebrate them publicly always in a positive (key word!) way, stupid is gold.

5.     Think player rewards and achievements without being too formulaic, not that formulas are bad, just think before you act.

6.     Money-shots – every 'level' or significant game play segment needs at least one "whoa" moment.

7.     As always, interact with the team in a manner in which they are most comfortable communicating and interacting.

8.     Have fun – unlike most people on planet earth, we get paid for making  freakin' video games!

Design is probably my favorite part of this process. Maybe because it's a team sport, or maybe it's the escape of reality one experiences by putting themselves in the game. Whether the player's character is the hero or the villain or just fantasying what it would be like and feel like to actually be in the world that's being created is all just very cool.

This is where "the rubber meets the sky" and when all cylinders are firing, a good postmortem is sure to follow. With that, I'm going to repeat what I said earlier because it's so fundamental to success in our business given that making games is a team sport; in design, as in all areas, it is critical we deal with individual team members in a manner in which they are most comfortable communicating and interacting.  This requires a "Coach" that can always be aware of this rule and micro-manage this rule.

# BRIAN'S BLOG



Death Angel concept
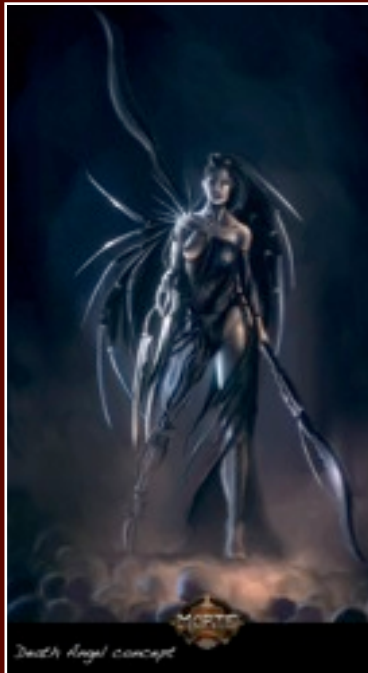


## STEP 7 – This is a business, never forget that and start from day 1 thinking about marketing and value.

The business side of making games is not to be taken lightly by anyone in the building. While I'm presenting this near the end of this article, it's really something the executives must do constantly throughout the production process. That is, when the game is being pitched early, having a thorough competitive analysis can and does help guide the creative as well as business development. Also, while some today don't like to even use the word 'genre' if you're looking for publisher support, the publisher will use the word, so you should too. This is still a good way to eventually guide a publisher discussion and deal with questions such as, "How is this different than Street Fighter?" With the genre discussion comes value proposition. From a business perspective every game needs a value proposition, but prepare to discuss the polar opposite of value which is the 'R' word – risk.

When the publisher conversation has gotten to risk mitigation, you are dealing with an interested publisher. Not only is a development advance risky but the follow-on marketing spend is also painful. Consider always that the publisher is spending today's dollars for the opportunity to get a return 2-4 years later once the game is released and profitable.

The marketing aspects here are normal part of the expense of developing a console title. So, while the publisher owns marketing, today marketing is as much (arguably more) about viral as it is spending money on traditional marketing spends and both are needed. Marketing is an expensive cost, so it's a risk. If the game's look and feel lends itself well for traditional and viral marketing, make that case during the pitch process.

As the developer for "Duke Nukem: Critical Mass" we were blown away by our publisher's marketing tactics while at GDC in San Francisco when Deep Silver had put urinal pads in all the men's rooms with "Duke-isms" on them. Then at the popular watering-hole (Jillian's) across the street, every cocktail napkin and coaster in this fairly large establishment had a Duke-ism on them such as, "When all else fails, I don't. – Duke." Now that's some good stuff and by the end of the event there were even several Urinal Pads… uh… missing.

FULL ARTICLE: