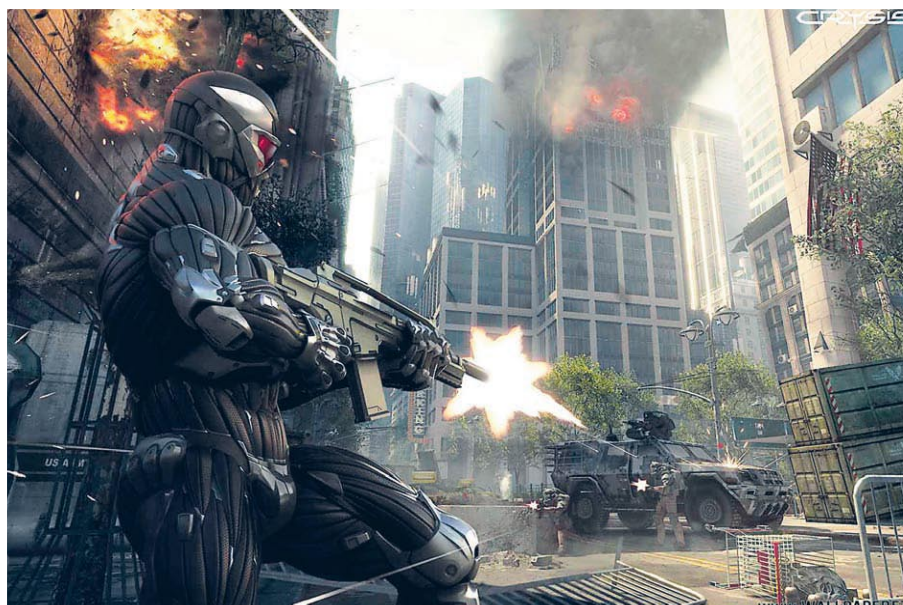


Playing for real

Video game graphics have become stunningly detailed



Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim



Crysis 2



Call of Duty: Black Ops

By **KIRK BAIRD**
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A long-abandoned stone fort with green moss climbing the walls looms over an icy river. Directly behind the fort are soft-green pine trees, while in the distance craggy snow-capped mountains stretch over the horizon. A log lies rotting at the forefront, surrounded by a blanket of brown thick-et. And above it all is a creamy blue-gray sky.

It's a pristine postcard image found within the pages of National Geographic. Only this isn't a nature photo, but a screen grab from the just-released game Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim for the Xbox 360, PS3, and PC.

Skyrim is yet another example of games so beautiful and lifelike that the computer-created images are creeping into real-world domain. There are many titles that push the boundaries of gaming technology, including last year's Call of Duty: Black Ops and the Crysis series.

Now compare the graphics from those releases to the classic era of video games, titles such as 1979's Adventure for the original Atari system, in which your character was literally a square, or ColecoVision's game Smurf: Rescue in Gargamel's Castle, which at the time three decades ago was considered jaw-dropping for its animation.

The steady improvement in design is made with every new generation of games. And just as gamers marveled at the considerable improvement in technology from stark (Pong) in 1974 to cartoon-like (Donkey Kong) in 1981, the graphics evolution has continued unabated, helped along the way by the occasional ground-breaking title such as 1993's Myst and 1996's Super Mario 64.

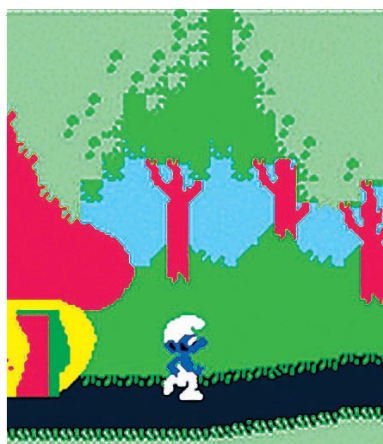
A decade ago, it was the cinematics, the game-controlled narrative linking player-controlled sequences, that pushed the look of gaming consoles and computers. Not anymore, as the actual game play approaches that of movies.

"Simply talking about the visuals ... [games] definitely rival film," said Anthony Fontana, instructor of art at Bowling Green State University, "because the hardware has improved what is onscreen."

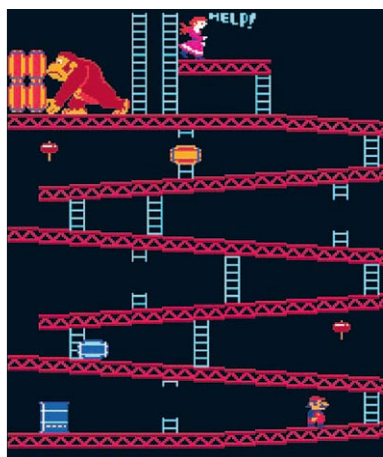
Moving forward, games will only continue to look better. What seemed cutting edge only five years ago now seems antiquated. Compare Skyrim's predecessor, Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, which was released in 2006. At the time, the game was praised by GameSpot.com for its "huge, lavishly detailed world" and "gorgeous graphics to make it easy on the eyes." And while Oblivion remains an attractive world to explore, the game no doubt loses some of its shine when compared to its latest-greatest sequel. Such is the way of next-generation gaming and the march to absolute realism in graphics.

Technology may be kind to these games, but time certainly isn't.

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Smurf: Rescue in Gargamel's Castle.



Donkey Kong



Myst



Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim is a great example of how authentic and realistic gaming graphics have become.