FALLOUT NEW VEGAS

The acclaimed post-nuclear role-playing series returns to the west—and to the hands of veteran *Fallout* developers—for another immersive, sinfully gory adventure **by Dan Stapleton**
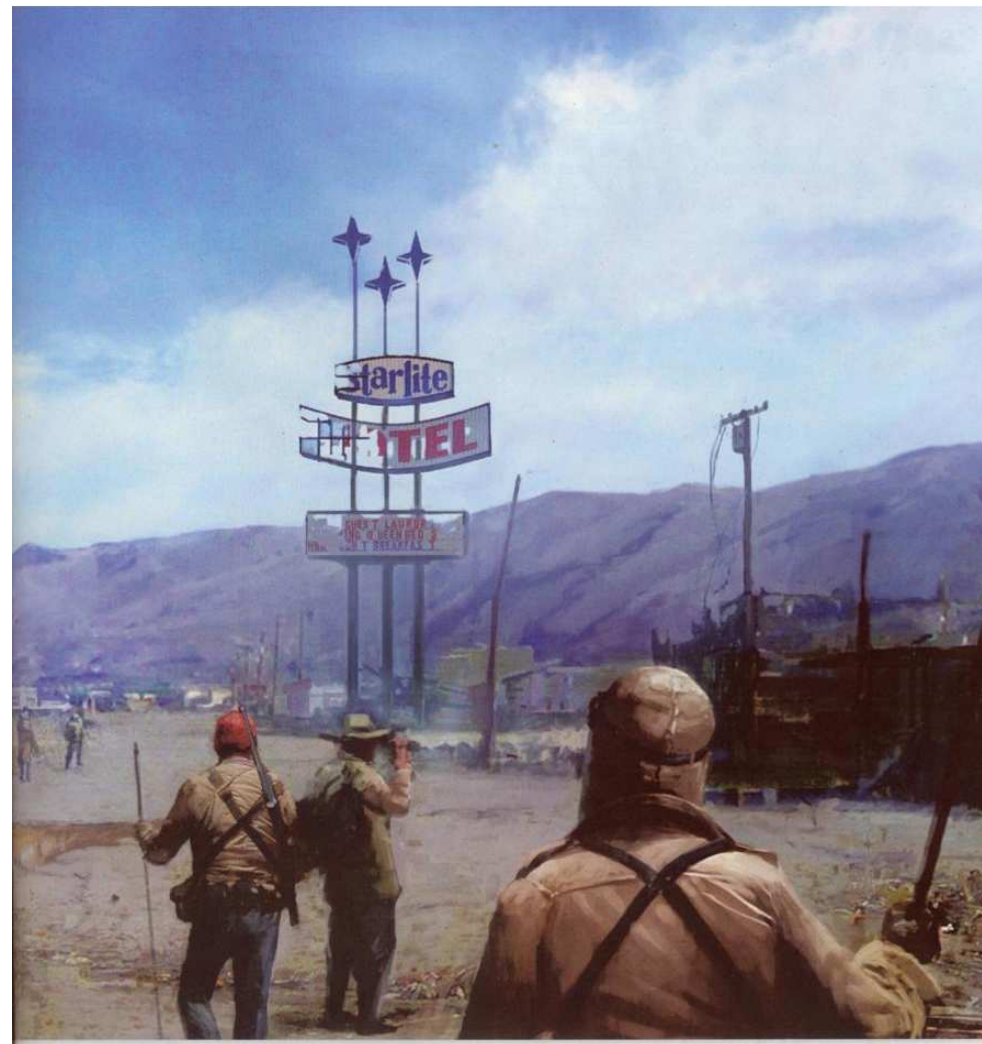
Y ou were a nobody—just some poor schmuck minding your own business as you eked out a meager existence in the post-nuclear Nevada wastelands of the year 2280. That business: schlepping miscellaneous packages from point A to point B for a few caps. So it just isn't very nice when an unknown assailant up and shoots you in the head, steals the mysterious package you were carrying and leaves you to die in a shallow desert grave (a Las Vegas tradition for 350 years).

That traumatic brain injury must've triggered a Phineas Gage–style personality change, because days later you wake up in the town of Goodsprings as a somebody—the adventurous type, ready to take on a huge, dangerous world full of giant venomous scorpions, Gremlin-like geckos, roving slavers, heavily armed super mutants, monstrous deathclaws…and some jerk with a smoking gun in one hand and your package in the other. While you initially set out to track down the molerat-bastard who ganked you and return the favor in glorious, gory slow-motion, the personal quest will soon drag you into a larger series of events that will decide the fate of the Nevada wastes. For better or for worse, it's up to you.

Few people know the look and feel of the *Fallout* universe better than the team now building RPGs at Obsidian.

Giant mutant geckos, last seen in *Fallout 2*, return in *New Vegas*. Whatever you do, don't feed them after midnight.

Obsidian's Secret Weapons

So, what exactly qualifies Obsidian, a seven-year-old studio with only three RPGs (*KotOR II*, *Neverwinter Nights 2* and the soon-to-be-released *Alpha Protocol*) and two expansion packs under its collective belt, to create the follow-up to Bethesda's *Fallout 3*, *PC Gamer*'s favorite game of 2008? Actually, there's practically no one *more* qualified to make *Fallout* games. Obsidian was founded by Black Isle Studios (developer of *Fallout 1* and *2*) head Feargus Urquhart, who, along with a gaggle of teammates, left Interplay to start his own shop in 2003. Included in the *Fallout: New Vegas* core team are *Fallout 2* designer Chris Avellone, now Obsidian's chief creative officer, *Planescape: Torment*, *Icewind Dale* and *Van Buren* (the codename for Interplay's canceled version of *Fallout 3*) designer Josh Sawyer, now *New Vegas*' project lead, and *Fallout 1* and *2* concept artist Brian Menzie. Few people know the look and feel of the *Fallout* universe better.

"A number of years from the start of the company and Bethesda and Obsidian started talking about working on a game together," recalls Urquhart. "After throwing a number of ideas back and forth, we came to the same conclusion almost simultaneously: What about Obsidian creating a *Fallout* game? It took a while to get things figured out, but in the end it all clicked, and we were off developing *New Vegas*."

Melee combat just got a much-needed dose of interesting: Each weapon has an unlockable unique attack. For a few extra action points, the golf club uses "Fore!" to knock enemies flat.

In with the *New Vegas*

New Vegas is a huge new game world built on the foundations of *Fallout 3*. What was demonstrated at Obsidian's Irvine, California headquarters was an experience that is very similar to the "parent" game, but with a new setting, quests, weapons, enemies and several significant gameplay enhancements—from major overhauls to slight refinements.

Set three years after and 2,100 miles away from the events of *Fallout 3*, the landscape of New Vegas is familiar, yet strikingly different from the grey-and-brown ruin of Washington, D.C. Nevada wasn't as thoroughly nuked as the west coast or eastern seaboard in the apocalyptic U.S.–China war of 2077, and 200 years later, the oppressive haze has lifted from western skies to reveal bright blue with wispy white clouds during the day and dazzling red sunsets at dusk. The Mojave Desert terrain was fairly desolate to begin with (look at the area surrounding Las Vegas on Google Earth—it looks like it's *already* been nuked) but relative to the barren D.C. wastes, its lush green cacti and Joshua trees make it a veritable rainforest by comparison.
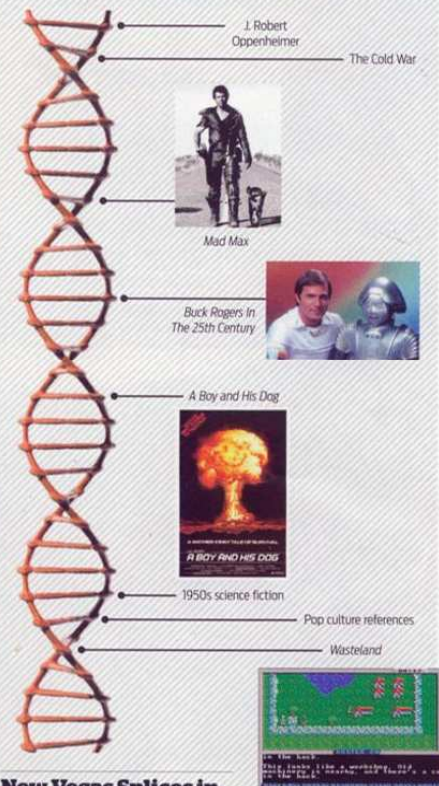
Obsidian wasn't ready to show off the New Vegas strip, but hearing Avellone excitedly describe it paints a picture of a varied and unique area. "It's a very exciting location design-wise. Vegas is like a whole city-wide amusement park. We can play on different themes, different styles. It's fun for the artists, it's fun for the designers…I don't know how much fun it's going to be for the programmers," he says.
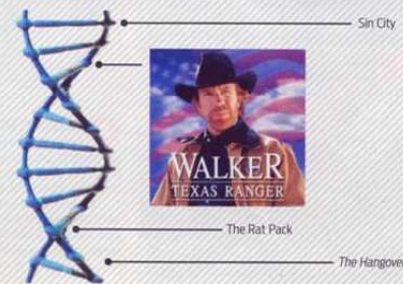
New Vegas is full of memorable landmarks. Make a right at Dinky the Dinosaur.

VATS is back, but you still can't target the groin…

DNA of Fallout

The genetic makeup of *Fallout*'s darkly humorous universe is influenced by dozens of sources. Here are just a few:

- J. Robert Oppenheimer
- The Cold War
- Mad Max
- Buck Rogers In The 25th Century
- A Boy and His Dog
- 1950s science fiction
- Pop culture references
- Wasteland

New Vegas Splices in...

- Sin City
- Walker, Texas Ranger
- The Rat Pack
- The Hangover

Fallout Travel Log

Las Vegas is just the latest location to get the *Fallout* treatment. Here's where we've been so far

2 FALLOUT 2
Migrating northward, *Fallout 2*'s map stretched from Mt. Whitney all the way up to Klamath, CA, near the Oregon border.

3 VAN BUREN
The *Fallout 3* that never was. This canceled game (known by its internal code name) was to have taken place in a wide area stretching across parts of Nevada, Colorado, Arizona, Utah and New Mexico.

4 FALLOUT: TACTICS
Unlike the pure RPGs, *Fallout: Tactics* followed a more linear path across a narrow corridor of the Midwest as the Brotherhood of Steel spread across the country.

5 FALLOUT 3
When Bethesda took over the franchise, it abandoned the notion of a huge map travelled as a red dot in favor of a contiguous first-person world. The geographical area shrunk to just Washington, D.C. and the surrounding area.

1 FALLOUT
Covering Black Isle's home turf of Southern California, the *Fallout* map stretched from Mt. Whitney (the presumed location of Vault 13) to the Mexican border.

6 FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS Chris Avellone explains how Obsidian settled on the location for the new game. "We recognized that one of the strengths of *Fallout 3* was that so much of the game revolved everything around Washington, D.C. That's your signature city. And to be honest, adventuring in post-apocalyptic D.C. is interesting. You're like, OK, I get it, I know what D.C. is like in the real world, I'd like to see what it's like in the real world when mutants are running around in the streets.

"So, if we have a western version of *Fallout 3*, what's a key signature city that people will immediately get when they hear the title. And also, what's interesting to us? So individually, Vegas came up for a number of people without a community discussion about it. That kept coming up. So we said, OK, if within this small sample group that city keeps coming up, and we understand why, that's the city to use."
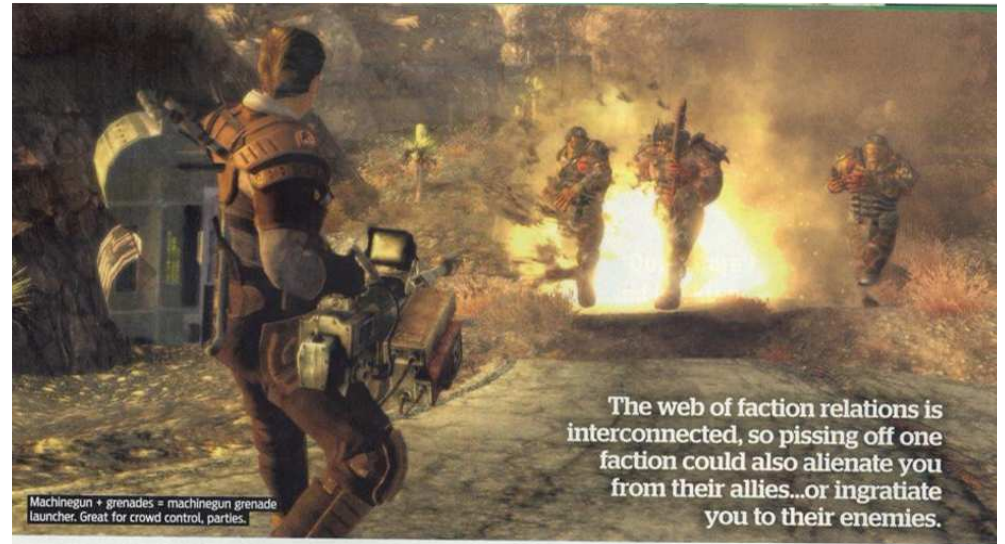
Machinegun + grenades = machinegun grenade launcher. Great for crowd control, parties.

The web of faction relations is interconnected, so pissing off one faction could also alienate you from their allies...or ingratiate you to their enemies.

There goes the neighborhood

The map, which is similar in size and density to *Fallout 3*'s, is controlled by numerous factions battling over the irradiated scraps of Las Vegas. From the west comes the New California Republic, a large and powerful but bureaucratic government that sprung up from Shady Sands (the first town you come across in *Fallout 1* a century earlier). From the east comes Caesar's Legion, a merciless group of slavers. In between are the Brotherhood of Steel, scattered but tough-as-nails super mutants (remnants of The Master's army from *Fallout 1* and *Fallout 2*'s Mariposa experiments), various gangs, caravan traders and isolated communities of folks just trying to survive.

And each of these groups has its own opinion of you, based on what you've done for (or to) them lately. "The Karma system is mostly the same as in *Fallout 3*, but checked less often," says Sawyer. "Mostly, we rely on reputation, because that's what people know. Karma is just a general indicator of how much of a sonofabitch you are. If you murder people in secret, your reputation doesn't go down because no one knows you did anything, so you can maintain a good reputation but your karma has tanked really heavily. Karma does influence some things, but reputation is usually what most people in the world base their opinions of you on."

In a demonstration of the early game, the town of Goodsprings came under attack by Powder Gangers, a band of escaped prisoners known for blowing things up with stolen gunpowder. Rounding up a posse and helping the townspeople make a stand against the bandits earns you acceptance among the townsfolk and bonuses like store discounts. Joining up with the attackers makes anyone left alive in Goodsprings hate you—they'll either attack you on sight, hire mercenaries to track you down, or offer tribute to buy their safety. The web of faction relations is interconnected, so pissing off one faction could also alienate you from their allies...or ingratiate you to their enemies.
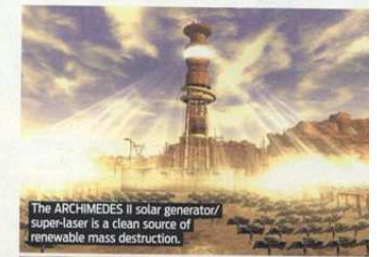
The ARCHIMEDES II solar generator/super-laser is a clean source of renewable mass destruction.

Chris Avellone's Top Fallout Memories

Obsidian's creativity guru recalls the moments that make *Fallout* great

FALLOUT: "You could talk down The Master at the end and go, 'I've gathered all the scientific research, I've talked to these people, I'm a smart guy. Good speech, now I'm going to tell you what's absolutely flawed about your plan.' And that moment that you are absolutely right was one of the most satisfying moments I've ever had in a game."

FALLOUT 2: "There's one option in the end of *Fallout 2* where you can use your speech skill to scare the Enclave guards into joining your side and helping you shoot your way out. It's a funny conversation where you use your speech skill to downplay all the horror that's about to happen. You say 'You know what, they're going to drop a bomb on this place and have us all executed,' and they say 'What? What's going on?' And you say 'Yeah, there's only one way out of here, but...' 'What, what is it?' 'Well, you'll have to join me...'"

FALLOUT 3: "Coming out of the Vault: That immediately made me understand what the gameplay experience was like. As soon as I got outside I could see at least three cool things I wanted to go explore immediately, and I knew that was going to keep happening, and that got me excited. Also, the first two dungeons I hit immediately got me excited because of the context. I like the idea of adventuring in a huge grocery store filled with raiders. That takes the real world and drops the *Mad Max* firmly on it."

The ruined roads are reminiscent of the D.C. area, but most everything else feels unique and western.

Around the Town

1 The Nevada desert gets even harsher in the optional Hard Core mode, where dehydration becomes a factor, ammo has weight and stimpacks heal over time.

2 NCR Rangers are the roaming badasses of New Vegas. They wear modified LAPD riot gear as armor and pack some heavy firepower.

3 Sawyer credits mods with inspiring the weapon modification system, which allows you to strap on DIY additions to your guns to increase damage, ammo capacity, accuracy, rate of fire and more.

4 Raul the Ghoul is the first companion character revealed. With him in your party (which will now allow two or three members) you'll start to pick up clues that he's more than just a simple mechanic.

5 The look of the New Vegas strip is based on 1950s Las Vegas casinos, converted into a fortified city.