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CES 2008 Preview: Fun and Games

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Vegas may be tops when it comes to craps, blackjack and baccarat, but the host of CES comes up a bit short when it comes to full-on video games—at least compared to E3 and the Tokyo Game Show. That's not to say that CES 2008 will be a game-free zone, however; newfangled input devices, red-hot mobile games, new flight and sports simulators, and a pair of much-anticipated titles from the gaming Jedis at LucasArts are set to take center stage.



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The gaming experts at Kotaku say they're expecting much more in terms of gaming out of CES 2008; in fact, they're estimating that about 65 percent more floor space will be devoted to games this time out. That's the good news; the not-so-good news is that the big gaming names at CES will be relatively modest, at least according to Kotaku's count, including Commodore Gaming, Red Lion Interactive, War Machine, and InterAction Laboratories. Bummer—although at least you can count on Microsoft and Sony to be pushing the latest Xbox 360 and PS3 games at their respective booths. Also, remember that Bill Gates made his Xbox 360 IPTV announcement at last year's CES keynote, so hey...you never know.

Anyway, expect some of the biggest gaming titles for 2008 to be on display. The one I can't wait to see? Star Wars: The Force Unleashed, the first next-gen "Star Wars" game, which takes place between Episodes III and IV—right around the time Darth Vader and his minions were building the dreaded Death Star. The developers at LucasArts will be showing off Unleashed (versions for the PS3, Xbox 360, and Wii are set for release in the second quarter of 2008) to the press at a suite on the Strip, along with a new, non-"Star Wars" title dubbed Fracture. Be there I shall.

Gaming accessories such as mice, joysticks, and dedicated gaming keyboards are always big at CES, but one of the coolest input devices set for the show is, in fact, a headset. The Vuzix VR920 virtual reality goggles—which sense the position of your head and let you "look" around a game in real time—are already available for the PC, but the Xbox 360 version will be making its debut in Vegas. The gamers at Ars Technica had a blast with the PC version of the VR920, so I'm eager to try the 360-optimized headset at the show. No word yet on which games (Halo 3, please?) will work with the goggles.



Mobile gaming is also set to make a splash at CES. Cell phone-based games will be getting their own pavilion on the show floor, and titles such as the mobile version of Guitar Hero—a red-hot item at the fall CTIA in San Francisco—will surely be making the rounds.

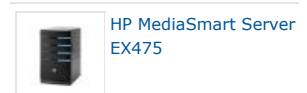
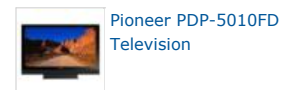
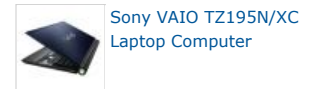
Simulators of all sorts always draw a crowd at CES, and the 2008 edition of the show won't be an exception. Among the contestants this time out: DreamFlyer, a "full-motion" flight simulator complete with combat controls, throttles, and pedals galore. Flight attendant not included.

We'll have much more for you come January 7, when the show floor finally opens. Lock and load!

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