

ASSASSINS CREED REVELATIONS

Questions. After three console releases and a scattering of handheld excursions, comics, and novels, Assassin's Creed has a number of unresolved plotlines. Ubisoft has woven a complex string of conspiracies and mysteries into its time-leaping, historical drama. Gamers could be forgiven for feeling little lost, especially since the enigmas link three unique protagonists from three completely different periods of history. It's time for some clarity. Ubisoft is pulling all the story threads together in Assassins's Creed Revelations so players can see the tapestry that is forming beneath. Each of the three heroes – Altaïr, Ezio, and Desmond – will play their part.

THE MASTER players will control the Assassin at the height of his power and skill

BIG GAME, LITTLE TIME

While Assassin's Creed started as an ambitious Ubisoft experiment, its consistent success has turned the franchise into the publisher's prized stallion. The increasing quality of each game has heightened the demand for new installments, but as Brotherhood recently demonstrated, Ubisoft isn't interested in meaningless expansions. Even more than that last game, Revelations is a profound step forward for the series, with surprising new gameplay mechanics, dramatic new locations, and a refined approach to every existing system in the game. At the same time, Revelations is a conclusion – the inevitable wrap of existing story points and character arcs necessary to make room for Assassin's Creed III. At long last, Revelations completes the stories of both Altaïr and Ezio.

Anyone familiar with the tenets of game design knows you can't make something out of nothing. Time, manpower, and money are all needed to make a game, especially a top-tier console release. Creating annual entries for a franchise of this magnitude presents a monumental task, especially if the development duties remain with a particular studio across installments. It sounds crazy, but that's what Ubisoft aims to do with Revelations, which is hitting retail shelves this November.

To meet the rigorous schedule and maintain the quality the franchise is known for, hundreds of Ubisoft employees are working in tandem to craft the game. "Assassin's Creed has always been a Montreal production, and Montreal remains the lead studio," explains creative director Alexandre Amancio. "But this is a huge game. The amount of time and data that goes into all of these systems to build the game is tremendous. So it's a cooperative venture. We have different studios cooperating on different elements of the game."

In addition to the nearly 200 employees on the Montreal team, Ubisoft has enlisted support teams at Ubisoft Annecy in France, Ubisoft Massive in Sweden, Ubisoft Singapore, Ubisoft Quebec City, and Ubisoft Bucharest in Romania. Each team has designated tasks, from multiplayer to exotic gameplay sequences. Taken as a whole, the Revelations staff is one of the biggest teams in Ubisoft history.



THE CROSSROADS OF THE WORLD

ne of the joys of popping in a new Assassin's Creed game is the rich historical backdrop and locations you find within. In the most recent installment, players explored Renaissance Rome. Though thrilling, it followed suit with many familiar visual elements seen in Assassin's Creed II. Revelations leaves Italy in favor of a new area of the world: Constantinople at the height of the 16th century Ottoman Empire.

At that time, Constantinople bore many names. While the western world still applied that moniker inherited from Constantine's time as Holy Roman Emperor, the newly conquering Ottomans started to call the city Istanbul. Byzantium, Nova Roma, Tsarigrad - no matter the name, the metropolis is a melting pot of cultures and ideologies. "It's a city of contrasts. It's a mixture of civilizations. This city was home to every major civilization since ancient times," Amancio says. "It's very crowded and exotic." East meets west, rich meets poor, and religious traditions compete for the attention of the people.

In 1511, Constantinople has had only a few decades under the control of the ever-expanding Ottoman juggernaut. The formerly ruling Byzantines were run out of the city during the transfer of power, but their influence and agents remain behind, among them members of the Templar order. The ruling Sultan is at the end of his reign, and already his sons and grandsons vie for the coveted position. Murder and all-out war are inevitable.

In the game, Constantinople is split into four huge districts along its multiple rivers and hilly terrain. Typically, the cities in Assassin's Creed have been flat," Amancio tells us. "Constantinople is actually built on many slopes. Wherever you are in the city, you get this vista of these imposing monuments."

The famous Hagia Sophia is one of many landmarks players encounter in the Imperial district, a rich area of towering marble buildings, majestic mosques, and opulent citizenry. Nearby, the merchant district of Beyazid houses the historic Forum





of Ox, along with the military Arsenal. Even further west, the Constantin district holds the city's poor; ramshackle wooden buildings spring up from the hills, and mismatched low rooftops present a distinct challenge to free runners. Ancient ruins scattered amid the squalor, like the

forgotten Valens Aqueduct, serve as a potent reminder of the region's storied past. Across the waters of the Golden Horn lies the Galata district. The only part of the city technically in Asia, the Galata district is the most cosmopolitan, filled with varied architectural styles drawn

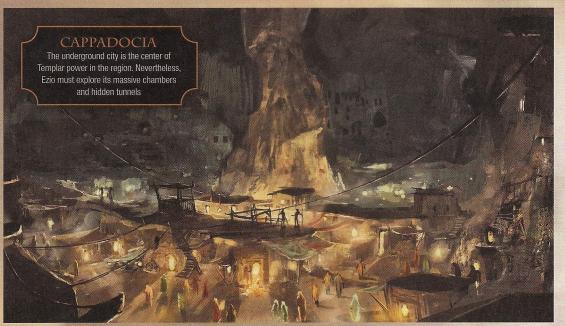
from Italian, Ottoman, Byzantine, Greek, and Asian influences.

We viewed a demo showing the city from high above, and it's huge. "Constantinople is denser than Rome, but it's also bigger," Amancio says.

Though Constantinople hosts the bulk of the action in Revelations, it's not the only location. Nearby is the marvelous underground city of Cappadocia. "This is not a city controlled by a Templar faction – this is a Templar city," Amancio says. "It's like going into the belly of the beast."

Based on real underground cities that can still be visited in modern-day Turkey, Cappadocia is unlike anything else in the Assassin's Creed universe. Ezio must explore the multi-floored tunnels and chambers of this sprawling complex, at the while under the scrutiny of his greatest enemies. "It's massive...Over 10,000 people lived here for over 100 years," Amancio explains. Surrounding the city built into the mountain, a rich open countryside area offers even more opportunities for adventure.

The opening location for Revelations is a familiar one to longtime players of the franchise. Ezio begins the game by making a pilgrimage to the ancient Assassin stronghold of Masyaf. He comes to the Middle Eastern castle over 300 years after we last saw it in the first Assassin's Creed, and it looks drastically different. The surrounding village has crumbled, but the hard stone of the fortress remains. Ezio uncovers a surprise there that fuels the story which follows.







A STORY BOTH NEW AND OLD

zio, now over 50 years old, comes to Masyaf seeking the wisdom left behind by his ancestor, Altaïr. "Ezio travels his ancient order in search of answers. It is always been very reactive about the assasins," Amancio tells us. "He never chose become an Assassin. His family got killed, and he was forced to take up his father's cause. Now, he looks back on his life and onders, 'Did I live the life I always wanted to live?"

The codex pages of Assassin's Creed II need at greater truths that Altair learned in his attributed at greater truths that Altair learned in his attributed in his attributed at greater truths that Altair learned in his attributed arrives at Masyaf to discover it's overruncy Templars. "Through questioning one of the Templars, he realizes that there is this extremely mourtant artifact hidden inside of Masyaf. If the Templars get a hold of it they will be able to beat the Assassins." Unfortunately for both sides, is secret is locked away, and five ancient seals must be brought to Masyaf to breach the interior. The trail of these keys leads Ezio Constantinople.

The subsequent story traces a double path. The first is a race against time as Ezio hunts down the keys once held by his ancestor. Four of them are hidden away, and he must find them before his enemies. The second plotline the fifth seal, already taken by the templars. To uncover its location, Ezio must play a game of intrigue and politics at the highest levels of the city. "The Templars already have one of the keys, so you need to find who the templars are and who is leading them within the city to get the key back," Amancio says.

Arriving in Constantinople, Ezio meets his local counterpart, a man named Yusuf Tazim. A friendly rivalry exists between the two masters, and each has something to teach the other. Another intriguing character Ezio encounters is the forfeit heir to the Byzantine throne, Manuel Palaeologos, an extravagant and mysterious man. Overweight and opulent, he holds intimate ties to the Templar order. Whether his allegance rests with the Templars or his Byzantine roots is something Ezio must discern. Ezio also becomes acquainted with Prince Ahmet, the man currently controlling the city as his Sultan father is away at war, and his nephew Prince Suleiman. The young man will eventually become Suleiman the Magnificent, one of the greatest and most famous rulers in history. In Revelations, Suleiman is only 17, newly installed by his grandfather the sultan as a provincial governor, and not yet the leader he will one day become. "Suleiman notices the wisdom of Ezio,

and learns a lot from him. Ezio sees the potential that this kid is going to be great someday," Amancio tells us.

Perhaps of greatest importance, Ezio finally meets a woman who gives him pause from a life of wooing the beautiful ladies of Italy. Sofia Sorto is a bookseller in the heart of Constantinople, an immigrant from Venice hoping to bring learning to the great city. The recent invention of the printing press has made books proliferate, and Sofia has an insatiable hunger for finding and sharing knowledge. To her, Ezio is a handsome gentleman with curious interests. To Ezio, Sofia is a glimpse of what his life could have been had it not been consumed by vengeance and murder. He feels an increasing connection to the young woman. Even so, he cannot bear to tell her of the dark order he leads.

One other central character helps Ezio during his quest. In Revelations, the seals Ezio seeks are far more than old keys. They are relics of the forgotten first civilization - discs that carry the memories of Ezio's last ancestor to hold them - the legendary Altair. Just as Desmond uses the Animus to peek into Ezio's life, Ezio uses the seals to glimpse the events of Altair's life. A coincidence? Perhaps. Regardless of their bearing on the existence of the Animus, the seals serve as opportunities to learn about the life of Altair, and for players to once again inhabit the role of the first Assassin's Creed hero. Through sequences scattered across the breadth of Revelations' story, playable Altaïr

levels give us a deeper understanding of that character's life. "Since Ezio is actually living Altair's memories, Ezio is learning a lot about his own life through Altair's perspective," Amancio explains. "He gets to see this incredibly devout Assassin. It gives him perspective on his own life."

AHMET The rightful heir to the Ottoman Empire, his father and brother fight even now over the

line of succession

SULEIMAN
A young man of 17, he will
one day become Suleiman the
Magnificent, one of the most
famous leaders in history

SOFIA SORTO

Not every character in Assassin's Creed is based on written history. Ezio's love interest is based on this Albrecht Durer painting, *Portrait of a Young* Venetian Woman

MANUEL PALAEOLOGOS

The would-be Byzantine king still has ties to the Templar order, but his loyalties remain unclear





NEW TOOLS OF THE TRADE

ach of the previous games has introduced new weapons and equipment into the assassin's arsenal. However, few have had an impact on every element of gameplay like the new hookblade. Ezio comes to Constantinople unaware of the innovation, which has already become commonplace among the Assassins of the city. "Yusuf is a bit surprised when he mentions the hookblade and Ezio doesn't know what he is talking about," Amancio says. This new device revolutionizes Ezio's approach to both navigation and combat.

The hookblade attaches to Ezio's existing hidden blade mechanism. Its curved end acts as a grabbing implement, and with it Ezio can use ziplines scattered across the city of Constantinople as a fast track between rooftops. As he slides along these ropes, he can drop onto unsuspecting enemies, assassinating from above. Ezio can still grab hanging flowerpots and swing around the corners of buildings, but with the hookblade, he can grab the pot and use it like a trapeze to send him hurtling across the street. As he ascends buildings, he can use the hookblade to slingshot himself up a sheer surface at far greater speeds than his arms alone could allow. In the demo we saw, Ezio clambered up a four story building in a matter of seconds using the hookblade. "It makes free running more fluid, faster, and more fun. It speeds up navigation by about 30 percent," Amancio claims.

The hookblade has equal utility in combat. Brotherhood refined the fighting formula with chained kills, which helped make Ezio feel even more lethal than before - but they still needed to be initiated defensively by countering an enemy. The hookblade adds an offensive component to Ezio's repetoire by letting him reach out and pull enemies into a combo. "It gives you a new tool to actually start a fight," Amancio says. "It allows you to be more proactive in the fight. It also allows you to bypass a fight." With a tap of a button, Ezio will reach out with the hookblade and latch onto an enemy. With a deft acrobatic flip, Ezio catapults up and over the unsuspecting foe, and the hero continues his sprint without breaking stride. "It makes combat and movement one. It simply

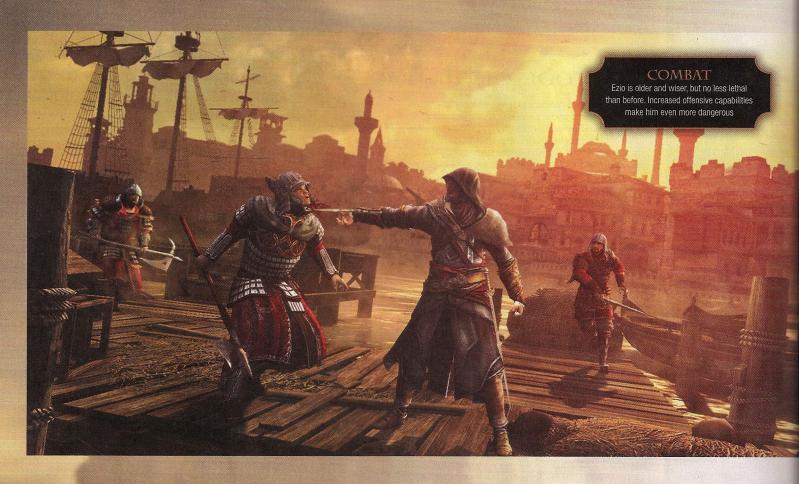
gives more choices to the player," Amancio concludes.

Ezio also has another set of new tools that have a wider importance within the game's economy and progression. Ezio can now make bombs. "Through exploration and purchasing, we wanted the player to experiment with a simple crafting system," Amancio says. "Every permutation of ingredients gives you something useful, but it depends on your style of play and the situation you find yourself in." Amancio claims that over 300 types of bombs can be created with varying effects and strengths. One might cause a flash to distract guards. Another creates a massive smoke cloud, replacing the smoke grenades of previous entries. A third type scatters caltrops behind Ezio, serving as a chasebreaker to halt pursuing enemies.

A slightly modified control scheme takes these two major new elements and integrates them into the combat paradigm. The hookblade replaces the empty hand button on the right side of the face buttons (B or circle). Meanwhile, projectile weapons and bombs are mapped to the upper face button (Y or triangle). As a result, secondary weapons are now at the player's control. You can swing your sword in a wide arc to drop one enemy, tap a button to fling a bomb to the ground or fire your gun, and then finish by using the hookblade to grab your next victim. You're in greater control of the action.

Meanwhile, the eagle vision that was once on that upper face button has evolved into a more potent eagle sense. Ezio is wiser now than he once was, and uses more than his eyes to perceive his surroundings. These evolved instincts let him gather snatches of conversation from a distance, or listen for the rapid heartbeat of his nervous target. "Eagle sense lets you focus on a character and see where he's been," Amancio says. "You'll get an approximation of where he will go. If you're able to detect the path a guard will take, you can run ahead, set a bomb, and create a trap or an ambush." This unusual sixth sense is becoming increasingly important within the franchise, and series devotees will want to watch how it develops moving forward.





A WAR FOR CONTROL

s the Assassin's Creed Revelations story unfolds, players will be confronted by a new gameplay system that challenges Ezio's role as a master assassin and mentor to his followers. The war between the Assassins and Templars spills onto the streets of Constantinople, and extends across the breadth of the Mediterranean region.

"We really liked the Borgia Towers in Brotherhood, where you got to take over the city from the Templars," Amancio says. "We started with that, and then completely revamped the system to create something new." Within the city, the conflict centers on control of several distinct areas, each governed from an Assassin's Den. To gain one of these dens, you must tackle unique assault scenarios to bring down the Templar presence. These offensive strikes have more variety than the repeated attacks on Borgia Towers seen in Brotherhood. Once obtained, these hidden dens are your bases of operation within Constantinople; control a den, and you can upgrade all the buildings in that region, including the den itself, which adds more ziplines across the rooftops. You can also change the character of the guards from openly hostile Byzantine Templars to neutral Ottoman troops.

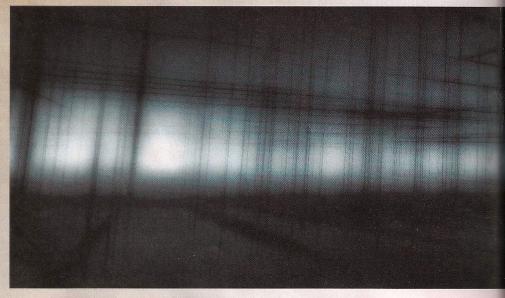
However, your control can slip away. As your notoriety builds, you'll draw attention to the Assassins and increase the chance of a Templar attack on your den. They'll try to retake the area, and you must defend it against assault. To halt the advancement yourself, you can become a general to your troops. If you're too busy to be bothered, you can hop into any of your currently controlled dens around the city and send some minion assassins to deal with the problem. Like assassin missions in Brotherhood, the better-trained assassins have a greater chance of success. If you're ready to lock down a region of the city and be assured it will never come under threat, install one of your master assassins to control that den. You'll never need to worry about

it again. "Imagine playing a huge chess game across the map of the city," Amancio says. "It's an organic experience. It's not something you play just once, but something you could play again and again throughout the city."

The popular assassin leveling mechanic returns in Revelations, but it now ups the level cap from 10 to 15 and takes your understudies from Assassin to Master Assassin. Your followers now feel more like true, fleshed-out characters. You can still customize each character's specialties and visual aesthetic, but as they reach higher levels they'll come to you with unique mission requests.

With more capable followers taking orders, you can

reach out across the world to continue the quiet war against the Templar order. "Many cities across the Mediterranean can be controlled by either the Assassins or the Templars," Amancio says. You'll send your troops out to these cities to win each city district by district, which could result in everything from monetary rewards to bomb ingredients unique to a certain city. "Instead of sending your assassins on random missions to level them up, they're defending the city, and subsequently defending the entire Mediterranean through the same sort of gameplay," he says. "That's what has them progress." A new, as-yet-undisclosed gameplay mechanic allows you to be as involved or hands-off with these exchanges as you desire.



A MORE REAL WORLD

ven as the gameplay expands in exciting new directions on the streets of Constantinople and beyond, the team is equally intent on crafting a more immersive presentation. A whole branch of the team is focused on the strategy, which tries to bring a more cinematic expression to the moment-tomoment action, particularly during scripted moments or linear gameplay sequences. "We want players to be playing the story, not being told the story. So we really focused on mixing narrative and play," Amancio explains. We saw some of what he is talking about through a demo of Ezio fleeing from Templars along the exterior of the Masyaf fortress. As he tumbles off a ledge, the camera follows him down in a highspeed arc. Rushing across a collapsing rope bridge, the camera instead pans to the side as we see Ezio scramble to safety. As he runs along the edge of a sheer cliff, the camera shifts back to show a group of Templar archers let loose their arrows, which scatter against the hard rock around the hero. Combining cinematic camera work with set-piece action sequences, the climactic moments of Revelations feel impactful and engaging.

This more immersive world is further developed through the living events of the city. As Ezio moves among the populace, random tasks now pop up to replace more contrived side missions available in previously entries. A robber might hold up a merchant or a girl may cry for help in an alley. Players can choose to become involved in these activities or continue on

The exotic gameplay sequences like Leonardo's flying machine return, but are now designed to feel more organic to the flow of the story, almost like boss encounters created out of unique gameplay scenarios. Factions return as well, though at least one of them has been replaced and the others redesigned to feel more useful and exciting. Ubisoft is also adding a new collection of platforming-oriented side missions akin to the Lairs of Romulus or Assassin's Tombs, but these new missions are built around a famous and as-yetundisclosed historical figure. We expect them to benefit from the expanded cinematic focus the team is bringing to all the linear gameplay areas.

Beyond more involving action sequences, the team is exploring some new facial performance technology to help bring the Assassin's Creed characters to life. "We've re-thought the way we capture performances



from actors," Amancio says. The new technology, called Mocam, is an intriguing amalgamation of traditional animation and performance capturing methods and the fascinating new style of performances on display in games like L.A. Noire.

Mocam enables developers to capture the actual facial motions of an actor using a helmet with a single lens affixed in front of the face. The camera attunes itself to that particular actor by having them exhibit various emotions one by one. Afterwards, when those emotions appear during performance of a scene, the computer recognizes each and transplants them onto an in-game character. Animators then go in and adjust the expressions by hand to set the performance exactly as desired.

This emotion recognition software is combined with a related technology that captures dozens of different real-life faces and then mixes and matches the different features of those faces to create new individuals. The result is an in-game crowd of unique citizens, all of whom can exhibit surprisingly lifelike emotions. The Mocam technology is also significant because, unlike some recent innovations in the field, the actor can look entirely different from the in-game character model, and yet the integrity of the performance is maintained.

DESMOND'S JOURNEY

t's only been a few months since Brotherhood released, so in the interest of avoiding spoilers, we won't discuss the specifics of its conclusion. Even so, some general details are revealed here, so skip this section if you're trying to avoid anything about the ending.

Players who completed that last game know exactly how Desmond ended up in a coma. That surprising turn of events leads to the most mysterious and intriguing component of Revelations - a new game within the game that tracks the unusual experiences of Desmond within his own subconscious as filtered through the Animus machinery.

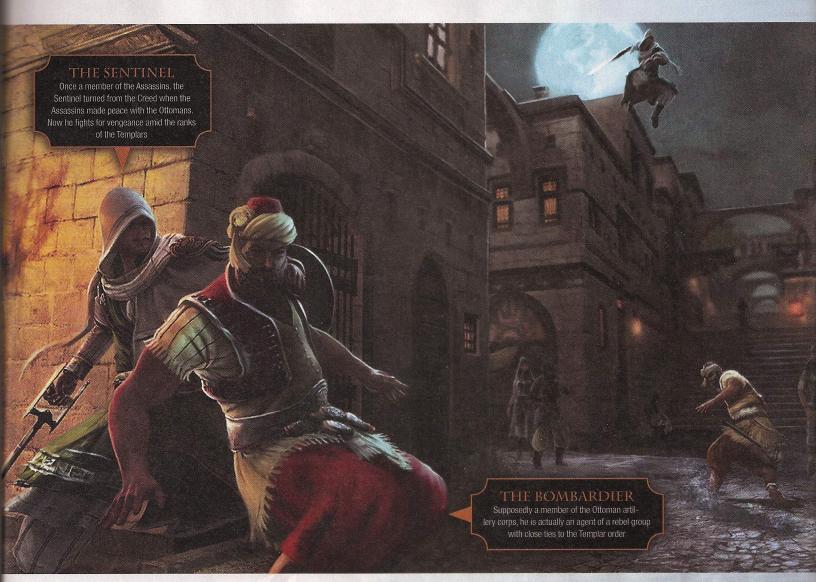
After extensive exposure to the Animus and the shocking events at the conclusion of Brotherhood, Desmond's mind couldn't take the strain anymore. His conscious mind shatters, leaving the Assassins who find him little choice but to place him back inside the Animus where the machine's infrastructure might keep his mind active. There, Desmond slips behind the White Room that serves as the Animus' loading space into a sort of safe mode - the Black Room. "Desmond can access a lot of his memories through this programming back door," Amancio details. Here, we finally have the chance to learn Desmond's backstory. The levels you play in this surreal mindscape are a combination of Desmond's fragmented life memories and the futuristic architecture of the Animus.

Journeying through these unusual levels of the mind, the player controls Desmond in a brand new way. "The actual gameplay is something entirely new to the franchise," Amancio suggests. Through this physical manifestation of a programming space, gameplay draws heavily on symbolism to create narrative-fueled puzzle sequences. Players literally help to shape the world around Desmond as he gains control of the environment of his own thoughts. Through the manipulation and creation of geometry within that game world, Desmond seeks to reintegrate the splintered layers of his subconscious. "In order to wake up, Desmond must fix his fractured mind," Amancio says. "To do so, there's a key moment in his history - an alignment between Desmond, Altair, and Ezio. That key moment - that nexus - is the way out into a waking state."

Desmond isn't the first individual to be overwhelmed by the intrusive nature of the Animus. Before him, Subject 16 lost his way within the machine. Will this new Black Room gameplay allow us to explore more than Desmond's subconscious mind? Only time will tell.









Assassin's Creed has developed a devoted following in the years since its first release. After pouring dozens of hours into the story, gamers are itching for Ubisoft to address some major questions. Who is Subject 16? What's the status of Lucy, Shaun, and Rebecca? What happened to the first civilization? What is the link between the two mysterious voices from that civilization, Juno and Minerva? What happened to Altaïr? How are Altaïr, Ezio, and Desmond linked, and why are they so important? Where is the last temple? All of this and more will be unveiled, according to creative director Alexandre Amancio. If he stays true to his word, fans will finally have what they've waited for so long to receive: Answers.