

# Metal Masters **Avenged Sevenfold** Set To Conquer Mobile Games

by Matt Helgeson

**T**he popular metal band Avenged Sevenfold is familiar to gamers thanks to the prominent placement of songs like “Beast and the Harlot” in the Guitar Hero games and a gonzo post-credits performance in Call of Duty: Black Ops II. Now, lead singer M. Shadows is spearheading the development of **Hail to the King: Deathbat**, a rock-infused dungeon crawler coming to iOS and Android in late spring.

## What's your background as a gamer?

I was the same as most people. My grandma bought me a Nintendo and I remember having Duck Hunt and Mario. From then out, I was limited by my parents to only play a certain amount of time because all I wanted to do was play games. I used to ride my bike down to the local arcade back when they had actual arcades. As I got older, I took a break but got back into it when I got my Xbox 360. I had all the Nintendo systems up until then, but that's when I got into first-person shooters and started playing in a clan.

## What clan do you belong to?

The Apostles. It's in Call of Duty. We still play. We competed in the MLG. We did really well; we had two teams, one ranked 17th and one ranked 49th. That was for Call of Duty: Black Ops II. When the next Call of Duty comes out and it gets competitive again, we'll do it again. The Infinity Ward ones are a little different. When Treyarch puts out another game we'll get into it again.

## What was the genesis for Hail to the King?

Basically, I was writing a triple-A game. Two summers ago, I spent the whole summer writing it. Someone I look up to a lot in the gaming world is Mark Lamia, the president of Treyarch. I was telling him about the game, and he said, “You know, Matt, that's a \$200 million game you want to make.” He ran me through the process and said, “If you really want to get into this you should start on something smaller and learn the ropes and see what being a lead on a game is really like.”

I went back and said, “You're right, the band is my first priority anyway.” Then, I went to Southeast Asia and saw everybody on their mobile devices on a bus ride to the hotel, and I thought, “What if we did an Avenged Sevenfold game, a mobile game?” I started thinking about the imagery we've created through album art, song titles, and artwork we've used, and I thought there could be a story there. I started jotting stuff down and brought it to the band and they said, “Yeah that's awesome. Let's do it.”

## The game looks like a Diablo descendent.

### Was that one of your inspirations?

At first, it was going to be more of a three-dimensional thing, but the way the virtual controls are it's just so out of control. It's really hard to use both your thumbs on virtual sticks with buttons at the same time on a touchscreen. We tried ideas with different camera angles. That's what we ended up on, which we felt had the most cohesive controls. We looked at the mechanics of the game and figured out that this is what works best for our control scheme.

## What areas of the game are you focusing on?

I actually wanted to focus a lot on the storytelling and the puzzles. I'm a huge fan of Zelda; it's my favorite gaming franchise of all time. We didn't want it to be a pure hack n' slash. I'm not a really big fan of just sitting there and hacking at things and leveling up. You do have that aspect in the game. You can get more powerful weapons based on a coin system. All your swords correlate with the magic that you can use. [But] It's not about hacking your way through it; it's about being smart while fighting. It's a little bit deeper and there is a big story, so dialogue, NPCs, and side quests push the story along.

## What role do you play in development?

At this point, I go in two or three times a week and sit there for about 12 hours. We go through the levels and enemies. I have builds sent to my house daily. I [look at] the weapons, how the characters look, how the game plays, the life system, how much swords cost. I have friends who work at video game companies and I'm sending them PC builds. They're sending me back feedback about things that are overpowered.

## How are you incorporating the imagery, lore, and music of Avenged Sevenfold into the game?

What we wanted to do was, when you fight bosses, you get an instrumental version of some of our big songs. For example, the song “Nightmare.” That's the first level of the game.



M. Shadows

photo: Colin Douglas Gray



When you fight the boss, you're fighting to an instrumental version of that song. The theme music for each level is written by us and is organically real instruments, but we've layered 8-bit sounds on top of it. It has a throwback to the old Contra and Castlevania music. The game has eight original songs and nine old tracks that are instrumentals.

## Does it feel like it's starting to come together in the way you hoped?

It's really awesome. I love playing through it. One of the craziest things to me [is] watching others play it. They do things you'd never expect them to do. [It's] cool and fulfilling. 💎