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The #1 Videogame Magazine **MONTHLY**

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**NEW! FOR
PS2, XBOX, &
XBOX 2**

The Godfather



THE GAME

A WORLD EXCLUSIVE YOU CAN'T REFUSE

March 2005 Issue 189

ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA



Ruthless cops. Vicious criminals. Petty thieves. On the brutal streets of London, they all speak the same language. Learn it. With a game this real, your life depends on it.



LEARN TO SPEAK GETAWAY

Get lost or I'll hurt you!

How was I supposed to know she was a snitch?

I've got some stolen goods. Want to take a look?

You wanna go to jail? Guy in the corner looks like a cop.

Give me the money, you jerk.

You better not be lying or I'll fix that pretty smile of yours.

MATURE 17+
B
Blood
Drug Reference
Intense Violence
Nudity
Sexual Themes
Strong Language
ESRB



LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
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ONLY ON PLAYSTATION.

PlayStation 2

*...and they better not
get blood all over the
trunk of my car!*

*Make sure they're armed
to the teeth. Guns, brass knuckles
...the works.*

The London underworld comes to life with three new playable characters. Steal cars and motorcycles. Explore 25 miles of authentic locations. And experience both sides of a bloody gangland war. The only thing you won't have time for is a cup of tea.



the
Getaway
Black Monday

speakgetaway.com

VICTORY DOESN'T CARE HOW YOU GET THERE.



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Over 500 cars from every automotive era will test you. Up to 100 of the world's most elite tracks will challenge you. Hordes of interactive spectators will judge you. The rest of the pack will pick apart whatever's left. Contenders and champions, prepare to be separated.



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PlayStation 2



GRAN TURISMO[®] 4
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PlayStation 2



LIVE



PUSHING THE EDGE
IS NEVER FAR ENOUGH



PROJECT: SNOWBLIND



"Unprecedented stream of battlefield chaos"

- Play

"Sheer graphical beauty"

- OPM



"Unabashed balls-to-the-wall action"

- XBN

"All those weapons mean the possibilities are up to your imagination"

- Electronic Gaming Monthly



"The Future of War"

- Game Informer

"Multiplayer shines in Snowblind"

- PSM



BLOOD
VIOLENCE



PlayStation 2



THE SQUAD IS YOUR

Chaos has erupted throughout the galaxy. As leader of an elite squad of Republic Commandos, your mission is to infiltrate, dominate, and ultimately, annihilate the enemy. Your squad will follow your orders and your lead, working together as a team – instinctively, intelligently, instantly. You are their leader. They are your weapon.

A dynamic action scene featuring several Republic Commandos in a dark, industrial environment. The central figure is a Commando in white and red armor, holding a blaster and gesturing forward. Other Commandos in various armor colors (black, silver, blue) are engaged in combat, with bright orange and blue energy effects from blasters and lightsabers illuminating the scene. The background shows a complex structure with metallic surfaces and glowing lights.

STAR WARS
REPUBLIC
COMMANDO

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— GamInformr Online

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Blood and Gore
Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

Game Experience May
Change During Online Play

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Mid-Size Truck**

265-hp V6

The All-New 265-hp Nissan Frontier



SHIFT_power



LETTERS

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E-mail: EGM@ziffdavis.com, lubby

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COVER STORY:

THE GODFATHER

We waited till his daughter's wedding day to ask, but we got it. The classic mafioso epic hits consoles at the end of this year, and we got the scoop. Find out if Sonny shows up and how the gameplay's going to work out. We have the details, and it's giving us one big orange-peel smile.

30 **HANDS ON THE PSP**
They let us get our grubby mitts on some PSP games in exchange for our two cents



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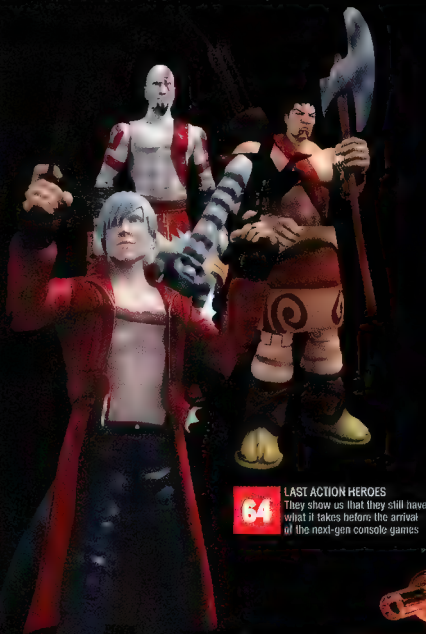
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The guys behind *KOTOR II* answer our questions



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2004 GAME OF THE YEAR AWARDS

The staff debates which games were best—and takes a look at 2004's worst games



editorial



Several years ago, this doofus applied to be a writer at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. He brought with him a bona fide journalism degree

and fantastic writing samples from established newspapers. But that's not enough for us—this guy needed to prove he knew videogames, too. We sat him down in front of a TV and had him play *Ridge Racer* (PS1) to show us what he had, and what he had made for great office water-cooler story material for years to come—the dude held the PS1

controller with both thumbs on the D-pad! He even asked us how he was supposed to hit the gas button when he needed both hands to steer. Well, the guy got the boot (only after we forced him to play a few more games for our sadistic viewing pleasure—we had a few laughs watching him attempt to play mainstream puzzle game *Bust-a-Move*).

My point? Just because you can string a few words together doesn't mean you can work at *EGM*—you have to know your games, too. While you may not agree with some of our opinions, rest assured they're based on something reasonable. How reasonable? Well, that's

discussion for the message boards and our therapists, but you should feel confident that we know our s***, and we'll always give a million percent (why stop at 110?) to serve you best.

To celebrate this I-couldn't-think-of-another-thing-to-write-about editorial, I asked everyone to show just a tiny bit of their hardcore-gaming side on the staff page. See our nonsense on pg. 18.

And in case you weren't around last issue, we've killed off the Tricks of the Trade section. Why? 'Cause 1UP.com one-upped us with something better: cheats.1up.com. Check it out.

—Editor-in-Chief, Dan "Shoe" Hsu

"ONE CANNOT HIDE FROM THE HIDDEN"

Japanese proverb

"(TENCHU) FATAL SHADOWS REDEFINES THE STEALTH GENRE."

GameDaily



PlayStation 2

SEGA



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FATAL SHADOWS™

LIVE BY THE CODE.
OR DIE BY IT.

staff

with their powers combined, they can defeat any last boss

the review crew



DAN "SHOE" HSU, Editor-in-Chief
Shoe once dedicated five hours to finding one last Blue Mage spell in *Final Fantasy X*. He wandered the ocean until he found a specific monster to attack him with a specific power. And Shoe didn't even eat or use or needing that spell....
1UP.com Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com
Now Playing: Halo 2, *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection*
Fave Games: Just about everything

MARK MACDONALD, Executive Editor
After blowing a fuse in his Chicago apartment late one snowy winter night, Mark unplugged his fridge and moved his dreamcast and TV to the kitchen to play *Phantasy Star Online*.
1UP.com Blog: Unlike everyone else on staff here, Mark doesn't half-ass his blog—he ignores it completely.
Now Playing: *REK, Ridge Racers (PSP), Zelda: The Minish Cap*
Fave Games: Action, Adventure, Shooters



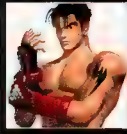
JENNIFER TSAQ, Managing Editor
Jennifer once abandoned her bedroom altogether and took to sleeping on the couch so she wouldn't have to be separated from the TV, her PS2 controller, and her hopeless addiction to *SSX Tricky*. (See kids! [Unemployment isn't all bad...!](#))
1UP.com Blog: ejennifer1UP.com
Now Playing: *Champions: Return to Arms, MarioWare Touch! Fight*
Fave Games: RPG, Rhythm Action, Action Sports

CRISPIN BOYER, Senior Editor
How's this for hardcore: Crispin spent a month dressed as arcade-chai mascot Chuck E. Cheese for his birthday parties just to save up for a Nintendo Entertainment System. It was worth all the hyper kids and near death from heat stroke.
1UP.com Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com
Now Playing: *Shadow of Roma, Resident Evil 4, Halo 3*
Fave Games: Action, Adventure, RPG



SHANE BITTENHAUSEN, Previews Editor
Shane's most hardcore moment? Maybe beating *Castlevania (NES)* without dying...or the 300-plus hours spent on various *Phantasy Star Online* iterations. Nah, he's going' with the time he got his hyperare *Dracula X* for the PC Engine autographed.
1UP.com Blog: egmshane.1UP.com
Now Playing: *Jam with the Band, Ridge Racers, Resident Evil 4*
Fave Games: Action, Adventure, RPG, Fighting, Karaoke

DEMIAN LINN, Reviews Editor
Despite Google-search evidence to the contrary, Damian is convinced that he's the only person ever to solve hypertext top-scoring shooter *Zaner for NES*.
1UP.com Blog: egmdeamian.1UP.com
Now Playing: *Phantom Dust, Winning Eleven 8, Halo 2, World of Warcraft (PvC)*
Fave Games: Action, Hockey, Fighting, Racing



BRYAN INTIHAR, News Editor
Bryan was a model college student until his import copy of *Tekken 3* arrived. He cut class for a week to translate the arcade version's strat guide, then turned his dorm buddies into obsessed fans who first thought it was called *Tekin 3*.
1UP.com Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com
Now Playing: *Godsworld Stranger's Wrath, Resident Evil 4*
Fave Games: Action, Adventure, Sports

The Contributors

- EGM gadgetman **Shawn Smith** proves that size does matter: his mouth with a roundup of projects that'll make your games larger than life.
- Our man **Evan Shamon** visits the don and comes out with both kneecaps intact for our *Deadfall* cover story.
- Addressed by kids who watched *Frodo* and elkos who watched *Reservoir Dogs*, Michael Madden talks with Marc Salfzman on a desert island.

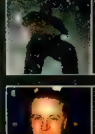
Guest Reviewers



ROBERT ASHLEY
Sounding time in airplanes, malls, and *Pocket Kingdom*.



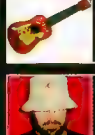
JOSHUA CAIN
Josh's internship taught him the wonders of solving game tapes.



CHE CHOU
Unemployed, Chou now wanders the streets armed with only a PSP.



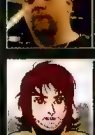
JON DIDLAK
Jon lives in Chicago and reviews games via satellite.



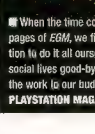
SHAWN ELLIOT
EGM editorial alum Shawn is happy to come home.



GREG FORD
Greg receives his paycheck, and takes his kidney off eBay.



KEVIN GIFFORD
No Pikachu ukulele for Kev this Xmas. Dav'n parents!



PATRICK MAURO
The bearded guy plays soccer and feeds kind of European.



JAMES MILKIE
Katami
Damacy—grazed Miykman travels I try way of ball.

CHRISTIAN NUTT
Swiped up in an unexpected tide. Or maybe that was Xenogears.

JUSTIN SPOER
Working on a novel kept Justin from shaving this month.

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"Phase
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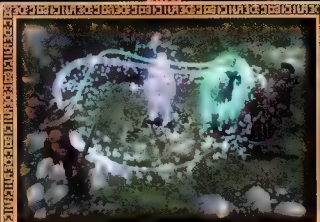
IT IS TIME TO RETURN TO THE GLORY OF BATTLE

A woman with blonde hair styled in a high bun with green floral accents is shown in profile, looking towards the right. She is wearing a black bikini top and a wide, ornate, metallic-looking belt with intricate designs. The background is dark and industrial, with various mechanical parts and tools visible, including what appears to be a large, curved blade or component. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the woman's physique and the textures of her clothing and the environment.

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Letters

cheaters, episode III, and post-apocalyptic fishing



■ You kids with your WORDS and your computer mail and your hippity hops....

Child's Play

You guys just got me in trouble. Your latest "Child's Play" article [EGM #187, in which kids play the classic games of yesteryear and let us know what they think of them] had me sitting at my desk in the office laughing my butt off. Eventually, my boss came over to see why I was laughing and saw me reading the article. That got me a nice lecture. I could've surfed the Net in peace if it weren't for those dang kids!

—David

Book of the Covenant

Several months ago I played *Halo* for the first time and instantly became hooked. The more I played, the more obsessed I became. After buying a whole bunch of *Halo*-related stuff, I found that I really enjoyed the novels, in particular the first and third books, which were written by Eric Nylund. Will

Eric be writing a novel for *Halo 2*?

—Josh Kober

We're guessing yes, but nothing is confirmed. Nylund has spoken on record about the possibility of penning another

around Raccoon City in *Resident Evil 3* wearing a tube top and miniskirt. However, I'm a female gamer who also has the tendency to drool over digital characters. In fact, *Resident Evil's* Albert Wesker is my dream guy: tall, strong, and the cutest

a lawsuit or a criminal record, but in a game there are no real ramifications. Although I find it quite enjoyable to beat others by cheating, I believe it is wrong to do so in a ranked game [in *Halo 2*]. In an unranked game with friends, I like to watch

"The feeling of doing things not meant by the developer just gives me a sense of satisfaction."

—Timothy G., proud cheater

Halo novel, saying, "You never know what the future holds, but I'd like to." And we know you're not the only one who'd like to read it.

Digital beefcake

I recently read a letter in your February 2005 issue entitled *Nerdy Blues*, which pointed out how girl gamers frequently write in to voice their disgust toward guys drooling over pixilated women. Now don't get me wrong, I too have complained more than once about Jill Valentine running

yellow eyes. Sure, he's evil and a murderer, but he's still hot. And nothing beats Dante with his slick red coat, chiseled features, and kick-ass attitude in *Devil May Cry*. What I'm trying to say is that guys aren't alone with your little "digital obsessions." Some girls are just too embarrassed to admit it.

—Audrey Tesch

Now that Audrey's broken the ice, we'd like to hear from a few more female gamers on this topic. Get a crush on *Metal Gear Solid 2's* supercute Raiden? Can't keep your eyes off Link's tight tights? Don't be shy, ladies, let us know which gaming hunks get your motor running.

Cheaters playing fair

Why would I cheat? Because I can. Why don't I? Because it's wrong. I love taking apart games, often more so than actually playing them. The feeling of doing things not meant by the developer just gives me a sense of satisfaction. Using these cheats to beat others is just another dynamic. It's a different type of adrenaline rush than beating someone fair and square in a free-for-all skirmish.

Being subversive is addictive. If you take advantage or exploit in real life, you end up with

their anguish, knowing they'll figure out a way to get me back. I'll gladly use cheats when they don't do permanent damage.

—Timothy G.

A different morality

I don't own a cheat device, but as far as I

CONTACT EGM

Carrier pigeons, smoke signals, string and Styrofoam cups, messages in bottles, and the Pony Express won't cut it. Contact us at EGM@ziffdavis.com or

EGM Letters

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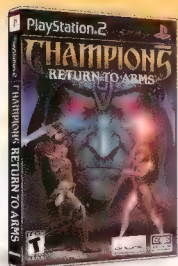
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■ Plus, he could totally kick Jude Law's ass.

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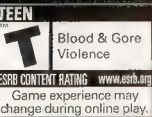


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PlayStation 2



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Sasquatch Watch

The hunt for the hairiest resident in San Andreas continues, and our intrepid readers have hit us up with another batch of compelling photo evidence. John Currie braved *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas'* backwoods in a monster truck to bring us this first shot (above), while Hunter Hooper captured a picture with remarkably similar composition (right). Perhaps the creature is drawn to these massive vehicles out of some strange "monster" bond?



It's quite the photo, isn't it? I got the best of them, though.

bugs go, why not exploit them? Everyone has an equal opportunity to exploit these game glitches. Just because my opponent has some silly moral code and does not use it isn't my problem. If you want morally, go to church.

I think the main reason gamers use cheat devices is to knock the chip off the shoulder that 99 percent of all high-ranking players have [in *Halo 2*]. In most online games I've played, the veterans refuse to share tips or give advice and treat newbies with a condescending attitude. Maybe the high-ranked players are afraid of added competition? This can cause frustrated new players to resort to cheating. And of course the cheaters don't care about the lack of respect they get, since the satisfaction of taking down some high-ranked player's

score more than makes up for it.
—Johnny LaRue

Sharing ideas

In another magazine, a reader asked for a company's address so he could ask questions and give suggestions about past

Capcom's typical response: "The research and development department in charge of reviewing all outside game submissions is not accepting consumer game ideas." Sorry, Arlo, but in addition to numerous legal problems, the harsh truth is that nobody wants to hear your

Till the next Episode

Your preview of the *Star Wars Episode III* game in *EGM* #187 called *Attack of the Clones* "a film only *Episode I* apologists could love." Knock it off, will ya! Ever since *Episode II* came out, you guys have been knocking it, and I'd like it if you could

Maybe we'll stop making fun of *Star Wars Episode II*...once *Episode III* is out.

and future games. They gave him the info. Do game companies actually respond? They should! I'd love to contact Konami, Capcom, or EA and let them hear some of my ideas.
—Arlo Limage

idea of having Mega Man and Simon Belmont team up to fight classic *Bond* villains in 2D. To send feedback, however, or ask about upcoming games, look for an e-mail address on each company's website.

please stop now. Sure, the stilted acting of Hayden Christensen and Natalie Portman turned some of the most important scenes in the movie into *The Young and the Jedi*, but would everyone stop whining about that like it's all there is to it?
—Sam W.

GAME DESIGN-O-RAMA

Got proof that game design is best left to the pros? Send your concept (with art) to EGM@ziffdavis.com, subject: design-o-rama



REEL CHAMPIONSHIP

The ultimate sport of kill or be killed has reached new heights! When the Earth's entire supply of largemouth bass was depleted, fishing society went into a downward spiral. Fishermen were left with only one viable prey—each other. Use power-ups like the irresistible stink bait to lure your enemies into certain doom before striking with weapons like the deadly tri-barb hook and double-bladed rowing oar! Commit aquatic manslaughter aboard postapocalyptic Jet Skis and motorboats! If fishing wasn't a contact sport before, it is now.
—Austin Thresher

Bad karma

I felt so lucky after finding \$86 dollars one night working at the theater. So I went off after work and got myself a brand spanking new copy of *Burnout 3: Takedown* and picked up a new light-green controller for my lovely Xbox. So what happens the next morning when I'm playing my new game? My power supply explodes! The Xbox actually started releasing smoke and my room started to stink like melted plastic. I couldn't believe it, but instead of getting angry, I realized this was karma and called customer support. Since my warranty has expired, I'm going to be spending about the same amount of money I found on repairing my Xbox. Guess I wasn't so lucky after all.
—Casar Moreno

Well, Sam, it won't be all that long until *Star Wars Episode III* is released, and if it's anywhere near as crappy as *Episode II*, we can start making fun of it instead. >



■ "If you just remove Jar Jar, *Episode I* isn't really all that bad—BHAHAAGHHH!"

THEY MAY HAVE AN ARMY.

THEY MAY HAVE AN ARSENAL.

YOU HAVE THE
ULTIMATE WEAPON.

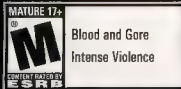
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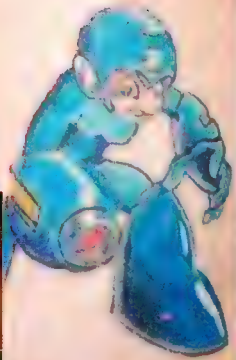


PlayStation 2



KONAMI

www.konami.com/gc



An even sweeter tat would be the in-game graphics from *Yar's Revenge*.

Er, unless it actually turns out to be good. (You can't tell, but we're rolling our eyes here.)

Color me game

I would like, if I may, to toss my hat into the EGM Tattoo Club ring. I have not one, but two tattoos based on videogames. The first

we're wondering if some of you guys aren't going under the needle just to get in the magazine....

You do not belong in this world!

That *Castlevania* DS game sounds pretty cool, but why doesn't it use the microphone

"You could cast spells by saying words [in the DS' microphone]." —Jared Thorbahn, with a decent idea

one is of Mega Man. *Mega Man 2* for the original Nintendo Entertainment System is one of those games that I look back on and think, "Man, they got it all right."

My second is taken from the mini comic book that was included with *Yar's Revenge* for the Atari 2600. The moment I saw it, I knew that it would be my next tat.

—Nelstone

along with the touch screen? You could cast spells by saying magic words or something. For example, you would say "Falbo" to cast a fireball. You could switch it over to manual, of course, if you're in public and don't want to look crazy.

—Jared Thorbahn

Oh please, that's like...wait a second...that actually is a pretty good idea. But why the hell would you yell "Falbo" to shoot a fireball?

Judging by how many photos of game-related tattoos we're getting lately,

POST OFFICE

Ranting and raving from our message boards, boards.1UP.com (look for *Electronic Gaming Monthly's* forums)

Welcome to the next level! Visionaries on the 1UP.com message boards look into the near future to see what the next wave of consoles will bring to gaming.

Yamcha: "Will another graphics update really do it? It will probably just cause games to have longer development times. What the game companies need to do is take a step back, look at the current state of games, and change the way we play them."

el_crazy_monkey: "The next step for console gaming should involve perfecting the online features with the consoles."

Omega_X: "What will come out of the next generation is being able to play

with hundreds, if not thousands, of players at one time. Something like *Halo 3* with this power would really put the concept of a galactic war into proper perspective. Just think about it!"

Mr. Reality: "Sony is the one who made gaming cool for the mainstream. Maybe it can surprise us again and do something great."

SolSamurai: "There were more create-a-player features than ever before during this generation, and I expect upcoming consoles to take it to a whole new level. Freedom to play the game exactly how you want—looking and playing in the style of your choice—is going to be big."

Wedge79: "I expect more sequels, sequels for sequels, and on the off

Give me more crap, please!

Every time I receive a new issue of EGM, I hurriedly turn to the back to see what the demons of crappy gaming have churned out for Seanbaby to "review" this month. After reading through that single page of hilarious bliss, I'm always somewhat disappointed as I halfheartedly flip through the rest of the mag. Nothing else comes close to Seanbaby's back-page torture. I'd like to see "The Rest of the Crap" doubled in size, maybe taking the space away from the crossword puzzle (like anyone has enough time away from playing *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* to work on that thing). Everybody wins. The readers get more of the hilarious material we love, the editors get to revel in

Seanbaby's agony even more, and Seanbaby...well, OK, not everybody wins, but we're the ones who matter, right? —Bziomek

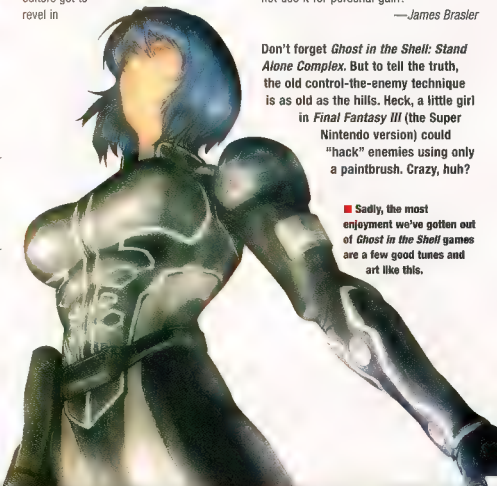
You know something Bziomek? You're right. Starting next issue we'll periodically be expanding Seanbaby's section in the back of the mag.

Can't hack it

It seems that games are starting to copy the hacking technique from *Metal Arms: Glitch in the System*. Now, *MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf* and *Scrapland* are both using this idea. Can't the game developers ever admire an innovation and not use it for personal gain? —James Brasler

Don't forget *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*. But to tell the truth, the old control-the-enemy technique is as old as the hills. Heck, a little girl in *Final Fantasy III* (the Super Nintendo version) could "hack" enemies using only a paintbrush. Crazy, huh?

Sadly, the most enjoyment we've gotten out of *Ghost in the Shell* games are a few good tunes and art like this.



chance, an original title. But hey, what can you do?"

What's next for the DS? 1UPers talk about future games they'd like to see on their spanky new dual screen handheld.

TheMitch: "I'm waiting for a good RPG of some sort and a good real-time strategy game. I'm hoping to see some solid *Lord of the Rings* titles."

RegularX: "A lot of people [are] pulling for ports. But for me personally, I'd like to see some fresh new games that really take advantage of the DS' features, but not just for novelty's sake."

GeemrGamer: "I think the DS could do some cool stuff with almost any genre

RPGs could obviously have all the menus and options on the touch screen. Or maybe they could use the touch screen to look on to enemies (like *Rez* or something)."

manicvln: "A *Monopoly* game with wireless multiplayer for up to eight players! Bottom screen: throw dice, buy houses and stuff. Top screen: 3D animations of purchasing properties, going to jail, moving pieces.... That would be da bomb!"

STAR WARS KNIGHTS of the OLD REPUBLIC THE SITH LORDS

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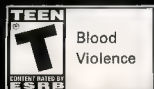
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PlayStation 2





press start

gaming news, previews, golden showers, and other stuff

PSP'S U.S. DEBUT

Sony's powerful new portable to hit America in March

The PlayStation Portable (PSP) is undeniably hot—its stunningly sharp screen and nearly PS2-quality graphics represent a quantum leap over what gamers usually expect from portable gaming. Sony Computer Entertainment America President Kaz Hirai didn't mince words when recapturing on the unit's impact at the recent PSP: The Debut event in Las Vegas: "PSP will elevate portable entertainment out of the handheld-gaming ghetto, and Sony is the only company that can do it... Dare I say, the baton has been passed."

And it's not just a call to arms against Nintendo's Game Boy monopoly. With the ability to display digital photos, jam out with MP3s, and play full-length movies, the PSP directly assaults a cadre of devices, including Apple's successful iPod. "It's the first product to legitimately deliver on the convergence mantra," muses Hirai.

Most of the attendees at the PSP debut weren't there to look at Hirai's (admittedly pretty) vacation photos or hear him clumsily banter with rapper Xzibit about downloading mash-ups—they wanted the facts about the machine's impending U.S. launch. That crucial information remained oddly elusive. On the subject of a firm date, Hirai offered only the vague, "For North America, we will most likely release the PSP in late March of 2005." Hirai made no mention of a price (\$199 remains the best guess) nor of an exact number of launch titles.

Thankfully, a large contingent of playable titles helped to offset the bizarre lack of concrete launch details. *EGM* put 118 games to the test, and all of these will conceivably hit store shelves along with the system. Read on to find out which ones should be worth your valuable gaming dollar. >

—Shane Bettenhausen

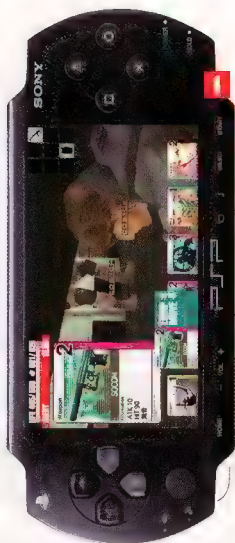


"PSP will elevate portable entertainment out of the handheld-gaming ghetto."
—Sony Computer Entertainment America President Kaz Hirai

Ratings Key

What games should you preorder along with your PSP? Use our handy guide to separate the system sellers from the launch losers. Look for these icons next to the games: The more red "petals" you see, the better the game seems to us at this stage in development.





- PSP Games**
- 1) Metal Gear: Acid
 - 2) Wipeout Pure
 - 3) Need for Speed Underground: Rivals
 - 4) Hot Shots Golf
 - 5) Code of Arms
 - 6) Age of Empires: The Age of Kings
 - 7) Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix
 - 8) FIFA Soccer

PSP



GAME WASN'T PLAYABLE AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE, BUT WE DID FIND OUT THAT IT WILL FEATURE FOUR EXCLUSIVE CITY LEVELS: LAS VEGAS, KYOTO, ATLANTA, AND SANTA CRUZ...

WIPEOUT PURE



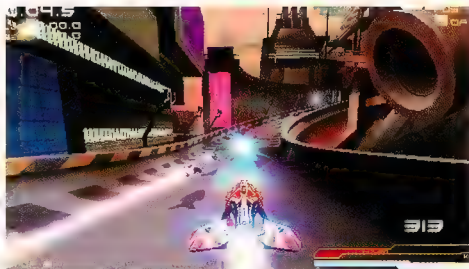
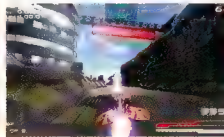
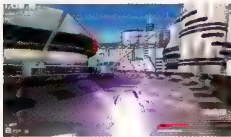
Sony CEA • March 2005

The futuristic PlayStation racer that dropped jaws way back in 1995 opts for a repeat performance in this portable incarnation. "We wanted to keep it very close to the hardcore spirit of the original PS1 *Wipeout* games," says Associate Producer Ryan Eames. "We've even revamped four classic tracks from the older games."

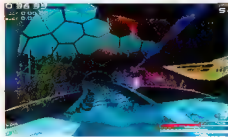
Nobody's going to complain about a return to the series' breakneck speed, stylized graphics, and pulsing techno beats, but *Pure* isn't merely a refresh. With

12 all-new tracks, several new ships, and select new weaponry (including the Disruptor, a risky weapon with one of 16 random effects), this feels more like the next-gen *Wipeout* sequel that PS2's disappointing *Wipeout Fusion* should've been. Even better—it's one of the few titles that controls naturally with the PSP's oddball analog nub.

Pure can also hang with the PSP's best multiplayer racers, offering slowdown-free eight-player wireless races.



Imagine this blazing by at lightspeed as thumping drum 'n' bass tunes assault your senses.



Nothing says "dick-ass" like blasting a big rig for historical accuracy.



TWISTED METAL: HEAD ON

Sony CEA • March 2005

Sony's popular car combat franchise careens onto the PSP, shedding the gritty visual style of its previous installment, *Twisted Metal: Black*, in favor of a look closer to that of *Twisted Metal 2*, the series' best-loved PS1 entry. But the developers may have taken that desire to emulate a 9-year-old title a bit too far: With bland, empty levels and slightly choppy visuals, *Head-On* looked a bit ragged.

Of course, graphics aren't everything,

and fans will easily slide back behind the wheel of the game's 14 vehicles, blasting all comers across 18 environments (some new, some revamped from past games.)

Gameplay hasn't changed much, but a new upgrade system (defeated opponents drop power-ups for armor and machine guns), some quick 'n' easy minigames, and eight-player wireless versus combat should elevate this beyond its PS1 forerunners.



GOING ONCE, GOING TWICE, SOLD!

"I shudder to think what [PlayStation Portable] will cost early on eBay," said Sony America Chief Executive Howard Stringer to Newsday.com. Well, he didn't have to wait too long to find out. In the days following the PSP's launch in Japan (December 12, 2004), units were selling for ridiculously high prices on popular auction sites like eBay and Japan's Yahoo Auctions. Value Packs (which included a PSP, a carrying case, headphones, an AC adapter, and a 32MB memory stick) were going for as much as \$900 a pop.

psp playstation value pack ship from mytl ridge race

Item has ended for US \$900.00 (6529# is the winner).
Another buyer used Buy It Now to purchase the item immediately. Learn



Sold for	US \$900.00
Ended	Dec-23-04 17:47:06 PST
Start time	Dec-22-04 06:47:36 PST
History	1 bid (US \$400.00 current)
Buyer	6529 (1)

Getting a PSP early cost some serious ducaats.

GTA, MIDNIGHT CLUB PSP BOUND

Rockstar won't be left out of the PSP hoopla, as two of its biggest franchises—*Grand Theft Auto* and *Midnight Club*—are heading to Sony's handheld. While the publisher's latest car-jacking simulator takes you back to Liberty City (the setting for *GTA3*), Rockstar's racer will be based on the third console installment, *DUB Edition*. Look for both games on shelves sometime this spring.





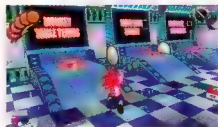
APE ESCAPE

Sony CEA • March 2005

Sony's original monkey-trapping platformer makes the simple leap from PS1 to PSP, filling the all-important cutesy-platformer void. "It's really an enhancement of the first *Ape Escape*," explains Associate Producer Shawn Torrin Rettig. "We've improved the graphics and added two all-new minigames, Ping Pong and Obstacle Course."

Two-player wireless minigames provide some goofy thrills, and the graphics are a tinge better, but this PSP *Ape Escape* loses one of its most crucial

gameplay aspects—dual-analog control. "Obviously, it's different," admits Rettig. "But through button toggles, we've basically been able to re-create that analog experience." Eh, we're not so sure....



SPIDER-MAN 2

Activision • March 2005

Get all misty-eyed and nostalgic for summer 2004's hottest flick: Doc Ock's maniacal hubris...Peter Parker's crippling self-doubt...that weird girl's pointless "chocolate cake" scene. Surprisingly, this is a port of neither the PS2 nor Nintendo DS title. "We borrowed Treyarch's PS2 *Spider-Man 2* engine and built a different game around it," explains Associate Producer Juan Valdez. "At least three-quarters of the game is brand new."

If you've played either of the console *Spidey* movie games before, you'll be

instantly at home with the controls—punching, kicking, webbing, and swinging come off without a hitch. You'll even spot some moves new to this version, like the ability to throw enemies into the air and a supersticky new "web net" that cocoons multiple foes.

The linear level design feels a tad limiting if you're used to the console game's sandbox environs, but it's actually intentional. "We wanted to create nuggets of gameplay that were fun if you were playing with Spidey on the bus," says Valdez.



ATV OFFROAD FURY

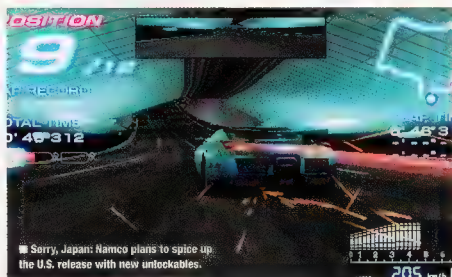
Sony CEA • March 2005

The *ATV Offroad Fury* series has stealthily become one of the PS2's best-selling franchises, and not just to hillbillies on four-wheelers—the games skillfully blend traditional racing thrills with wild *Tony Hawk*-style trickery. Simple to pick up, arduous to master, and a blast to play for even just a few minutes, this should be a perfect fit for the PSP.

Sadly, the demo version we played was a mess. It's basically the recently released *ATV Offroad Fury 3* for PS2 hastily shoved into a rather uncomfort-

able space. Choppy, sluggish graphics leech any sensation of speed, and unrefined control renders the game nearly unplayable with the PSP's analog nub—you'll be oversteering and bouncing around the track like an ATV champ after downing two cases of Pabst Blue Ribbon.

All hope isn't lost, though. The developers still have a few months to get this working right. With smoother visuals and tighter control, this racer could easily hang with the likes of *Ridge Racer*, *Wipeout Pure*, and *Need for Speed*.



RIDGE RACER

Namco • March 2005

It wouldn't be a Sony hardware launch without an appearance from Namco's long-running arcade racer. This PSP version waxes nostalgic, offering up plenty of cars, tracks, and tunes from the various *Ridge Racers* from years past. It's thrilling to see locales from oldies such as *Rave Racer* and *R4* updated with smooth, beautiful PSP visuals.

Gameplaywise, it's largely familiar territory here—successfully drifting around corners now builds up nitro boosts, but the fundamental arcadey "feel" of *Ridge*

Racer remains fully intact.

Another ace up this old-timer's sleeve: Unlike its two-player launch rival *Need for Speed Underground*, *Ridge Racer* allows for eight-player wireless matches. ▶





Nothing prevents you from slaying spiders like a disreputable snowglobe.

UNTOLD LEGENDS: BROTHERHOOD OF THE BLADE



Sony Online • March 2005

In a sea of predictable ports, *Untold Legends* stands out as one of the only original PSP games. It's a bit surprising, as developer Sony Online could have easily brought its successful *EverQuest* and *Champions of Norrath* series to Sony's fledgling portable. "The *EverQuest* brand is really much more of a PC license,"

explains Producer Nicholas Blythe. "And we wanted something that would really sing to the console audience."

Despite its apparent newness, *Legends* basically plays like *Champions of Norrath*: it's a real-time hack-n-slash RPG in which four players can wirelessly join forces to slay dragons, plunder caverns for magical

equipment, and hurl magic.

Attractive graphics, plenty of cool doodads to discover, and the promise of near-infinite replayability (107 areas to explore, plus randomly generated dungeons) help to balance out the somewhat rudimentary combat. *Legends* should prove to be one of the meatier PSP launch offerings.



NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND RIVALS



EA Games • March 2005

From its urban nighttime setting to its heavy customization and glorious sense of speed, *Rivals* distills the *Underground* home games into portable form. This is no mere port, either, boasting 10 new tracks to host your 20 fully customizable cars. A solid eight play modes exist, too, with minigames

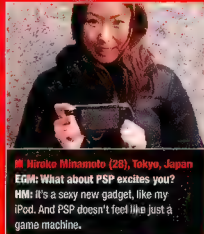
like Drift Attack (a series of drifting obstacles) and Nitrous Run (unlimited nitrous boosts) debuting in this version.

Rivals certainly looks fantastic, but it doesn't get everything right. Four players can compete in any mode, but only in a turn-based, pass-the-PSP fashion. Because

EA figures instances of PSP owners gathering to play will be rare for now, only two people can compete wirelessly at the same time. (Namco's *Ridge Racer* allows eight players to race via Wi-Fi.) Also, *Rivals'* analog control feels a little oversensitive at this time and could use some refinement.

PSP HITS JAPAN

Sony's PlayStation Portable launched in Japan to much fanfare on December 12, a mere 10 days after Nintendo's DS arrived on the scene. Due to hardware shortages, initial sales figures were a bit weak when compared to DS, but the excitement surrounding the launch completely dwarfed that of Nintendo's effort. Thousands of gamers lined up as much as 24 hours in advance to be among the first to get their hands on the sexy new handheld. Several stores reported lines of over 300 people waiting all night; the Shinjuku branch of Yodobashi Camera, one of Tokyo's famous electronics outlets, had over 1,500 people queued up by the time it opened its doors at 6 a.m. We also hit the crowded streets to chat about PSP with some of these anxious gamers.



Minako Minamoto (20), Tokyo, Japan
EGM: What about PSP excites you?
HM: It's a sexy new gadget, like my iPod. And PSP doesn't feel like just a game machine.



Yoshiaki Sasaki (21), Tokyo, Japan
EGM: Which PSP games did you buy?
TK: Vampire Chronicle (dubbed Darkstalkers here), Minna no Golf Portable (Hot Shots), and Lumines.



Andrew Altkin (20), Toronto, Canada
EGM: What do you plan to use your new PSP for?
AA: Games first, definitely. Then music... Movies are a distant thing. >

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RP
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PlayStation 2

namco

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PSP LINEUP: QUICK HITS

Don't end up with a stinker in your sexy new PSP



Coded Arms

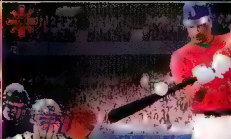
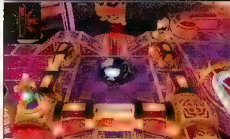
Konami — Arguably the best-looking PSP game yet, Konami's first-person shooter has this killer genre sewn up. We can't wait to try its wireless deathmatches...

Darkstalkers Chronicle

Capcom — This 2D fighter's showing its age, but it's still a solid offering for two-player fisticuffs. Shame the single-player mode gets dull so quickly.

Dynasty Warriors

Koei — Entirely predictable port of the popular PS2 hack-n-slash cash cow. It's still a fun romp, but plain-Jane graphics and the lack of multiplayer drag it down.



Mercury

Ignition — This clever puzzle game sports some impressive looks but gets dull quickly. Perhaps the planned motion sensor will up the fun quotient.

MVP Baseball

Sony CEA — *MVP Baseball* for PSP looks and plays almost exactly like console gaming's premier hardball franchise, right down to the minor leaguers.

NBA 2005

Sony CEA — Ah, 98er Sports...how we've missed you. OK, not really. This passable hoops offering isn't offensive, but it pales next to EA's dapper *NBA Street Remix*.

NBA Street Remix

EA Big — Looks nearly as phat as its console cousins, but except a slight learning curve—the button layout makes Gamebreaker moves harder to control.



Metal Gear Acid

Konami — While it's not the stealth-action blockbuster we all secretly desire, this unique blend of tactical combat, strategic card play, and colorful *MGS* characters still impresses. Konami hasn't offered us an English version to dabble with yet, but the

Japanese one gave us a good feel for the slick graphics, challenging gameplay, and unbelievably weird story. In fact, we're wondering if the plot (in which possessed puppets hijack a senator's plane) might get changed before its U.S. release.



NFL Street 2 Unleashed

EA Big — Extra teams, new fields, and new minigames make this full-featured handheld edition even more attractive than its PS2 papa. Impressive.



Tiger Woods PGA Tour

EA Sports — Deep character customization and excellent use of the analog nub make this a solid, grown-up alternative to Sony's *Hot Shots Golf*/launch title. **A-**



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Java Games



TOP RINGTONES

EG59551 - Ja Rule	New York 1,2 Step	EG59407 - Ludacris	Get the F*** Back
EG59474 - Ciara	Thief's Theme	EG51731 - Snoop	Nuthin but a G Thing
EG51710 - Maroon 5	Verminion	EG51732 - Snoop	Gin and Juice
EG59530 - Nas	Bossman	EG59541 - Lil Jon	I Don't Give a F***
EG59433 - Slipknot	American Idiot	EG59405 - Chingy	Balla Baby
EG59552 - Beanie Man	1 Hate Every...	EG50343 - Coldplay	The Scientist
EG52243 - Green Day		EG59553 - Jay-Z	La La Lo
EG59436 - 3 Days Grace		EG59528 - John Mayer	Daughters

Most Wanted Ringtones

EG51726 - 2Pac	Americaz Most Wanted	EG59535 - Karn	Alive
EG52107 - 2Pac	Hail Mary	EG59537 - Limp Bizkit	Nookie
EG51793 - 2Pac	Me Against the World	EG50406 - Linkin Park	Faint
EG51789 - 2Pac	Hit Em Up	EG50218 - Linkin Park	In the End
EG51725 - 2Pac	California Love	EG50875 - Linkin Park	Numb
EG59479 - Aaron Lewis	Outside	EG50064 - Linkin Park	Som... I Belang
EG52032 - Blk Eyed Peas	Where is Love	EG59524 - Mana	Mariposa Traicionera
EG52101 - Blk Eyed Peas	Fly Away	EG52251 - Maroon 5	Harder To Breathe
EG59443 - B. Paisley	Mud on the Tires	EG52322 - Maroon 5	Sunday Morning
EG59550 - Bubba Sparxxx	Ugly	EG59491 - Method Man	All I Need
EG59457 - Clipse	Hot Damn	EG59538 - Mobb Deep	Shook Ones Pt2
EG50194 - Coldplay	Clocks	EG59539 - Nas	Street Dreams
EG50043 - Coldplay	In My Place	EG50639 - Nelly	Hot in Here
EG50909 - Coldplay	Moses	EG50658 - R. Kelly	Ignition
EG59459 - DMX	Ruff Ryders Anthem	EG59492 - Simple Plan	Jump
EG51730 - Dr. Dre	Let Me Ride	EG51737 - Snoop	Who Am I?
EG52080 - Hoobastank	The Reason	EG51733 - Snoop	Murder Was the Case
EG59484 - Incubus	Drive	EG50606 - The Cure	Lovacats
EG50927 - Jay-Z	Change Clothes	EG51557 - The Cure	The End of the World
EG51564 - Jay-Z	Encore	EG59468 - Tribe Called Quest	Can I Kick It?
EG59542 - Jay-Z & R. Kelly	Get This S	EG59498 - U2	Pop Muzik
EG59406 - Jay-Z & R. Kelly	Big Chips	EG59499 - Wu-tang	Bring Da Ruckus



Her Secrets

Send **HS** to **25000**

Pick-up Lines

Send **PL** to **25000**



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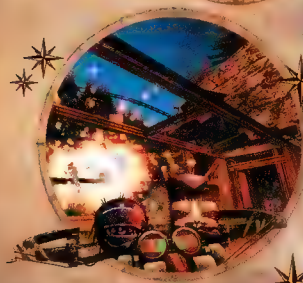
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"A shooter unlike any you've seen before!" — Electronic Gaming Monthly
 "One of our most anticipated titles of 2005." — Official XBOX Magazine

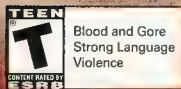


You've got no past.



This here's a diff'rent kinda shooter.
 Switch back 'n forth 'tween first
 n' third person dependin' on
 if yer gunnin' or brawlin'.

Shoot Hivin' ammo like Fuzzles,
 Boombats and Sting Bees at yer enemies,
 each with a powerful world of hurt.



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And, from the looks of things, not much future.

ODDWORLD STRANGER'S WRATH

Welcome, friend. Heard yer that bounty hunter with the mysterious past. Ya hit town ta collect bounties, make moolah and free the land from tyranny. Better keep that double-barrel'd creature crossbow loaded 'cuz ya gotta blast yer way through a pack of outlaws 'n filthy minions if yer gonna clean up around here. Hitch up yer boots, Stranger, it's time ta make a name fer yer'self.

At general stores everywhere. Yer hunt begins at eagames.com



Challenge. Everything



Illustration by Barry Wong

THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN

EA snags the NFL license, sending its competitors to the sidelines

Don't bother waiting for this fall's reviews when deciding which professional football game to buy—that choice has already been made for you. After receiving bids from several game publishers, the National Football League and NFL Players Inc. granted Electronic Arts—the company responsible for both the *Madden* and *NFL Street* series—the exclusive rights to create games (for consoles and handhelds) using NFL teams, stadiums, and players for the next five years.

This news didn't sit too well with the other football game makers. Sony Computer Entertainment America, whose *NFL GameDay* series sat out last season

but planned on a comeback in '05, were "shocked and dismayed by the NFL and NFL Players Inc.'s decision and long-term implications of that decision for console platforms." Take-Two Interactive, copublisher of the wallet-friendly *ESPN NFL 2K* series, called the exclusivity agreement "a tremendous disservice to the consumers...limiting their choices, curbing creativity, and almost certainly leading to higher game prices." An EA spokesperson tells us that the company has no plans to raise the cost of its football titles.

So what's next for Sony and Take-Two? Both say that they are reevaluating their gridiron franchises and will have more info in the months to come.



Changing Playbooks

This fall, Midway will bring to all major consoles *Blitz Playmakers*, a pigskin title that isn't bound by the restrictions of the NFL license. Like the short-lived ESPN TV series that inspired the game's subtitle, *Playmakers* explores the dirtier side of pro football. So don't be surprised if your quarterback turns out to be a steroid-raging cokehead.

Controversy awaits off the field, too.

GRUDGE MATCH

We've got jungle fever



DONKEY KONG JUNGLE BEAT

BEATING A DONKEY IN THE JUNGLE

You might not think a monkey-lifestyles Cube game and flogging a beast of burden would have much in common. But that's just because you haven't read this month's Grudge Match yet. So let's get to it.

TOOLS



Whackable electronic bongos

Reeds, canes, lead pipes

Advantage: **DKJ**



ASK THE AUTHORITIES



ESRB says it's A-OK for everyone

Advantage: **DKJB**

PETA says they're shutting us down.



REWARDS

Grab enough bananas and you'll unlock some new levels

Makes a kick-ass story. Literally

Advantage: **DKJ**

RISKS



Sore palms

Advantage: **DKJB**

Donkey retaliation



REPLAY VALUE



You can always collect more bananas

Advantage: **DKJB**

Kinda tapers off once the donkey keels over



WINNER: DONKEY KONG JUNGLE BEAT

Weighing the pros and cons of these two combatants (and taking into consideration that we're superwusses around live animals), *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* is looking better all the time.

NEWS TIDBITS ABOUT MONSTERS, BOTH BIG AND POCKET-SIZED



Uh-Oh, Somebody's Angry Again

Mr. Green Games will return to consoles (PS2/XB/GC) this summer in *The Incredible Hulk*. The game drops Marvel's antihero into a *Grand Theft Auto*-esque "sandbox" environment where he can smash his way through the city proper and use almost anything as a weapon. No word yet whether Hulk goes friendly with prostitutes for a health boost.

Catch This

After the lackluster performances of both *Pokémon Colosseum* and *Pokémon Channel*, it appears all you trainers will get the game you've actually been waiting for. In a recent Japanese gaming magazine, Nintendo revealed a fully 3D *Pokémon* RPG for GameCube. No U.S. release has been announced, but we'd be shocked if you're weren't catching 'em all by the end of the year.



FORGET WHAT YOU THINK YOU KNOW

Resident Evil reinvents itself as the series moves in a terrifying new direction. U.S. agent Leon Kennedy has been tasked to look into the abduction of the President's daughter and his investigation has led him to a mysterious location in Europe. As Leon encounters unimaginable horrors, he must find out what is behind the terror.

resident evil

EVIL HAS EVOLVED

- Fast paced, edge of your seat action.
- Fantastic 3D graphics and effects – never has Resident Evil looked so good...or so terrifying.
- New behind the back camera view allows for intuitive movement.
- Cunning enemies use their abilities to team up and attack the player en mass.
- Commandeer vehicles... but don't expect a safe ride.



MATURE 17+
M Blood and Gore
Intense Violence



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DONKEY KONG JUNGLE BEAT

Platform: GameCube
 Publisher: Nintendo
 Developer: Nintendo Tokyo
 Release date: March 2005

Eat to the beat

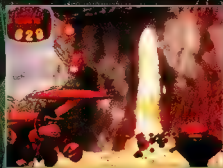
If you have *Samba de Amigo*, maracas lingering under your bed, a vintage NES Power Glove gathering dust in the closet, and the \$200 *Steel Battalion* joystick still on layaway, you're probably the kind of sucker who went gaga for Nintendo's *Donkey Kong GameCube* bongo drums. Hey, we all fall prey to silly peripherals that really only work with one game at some point...but you're actually in luck—Nintendo is readying a second bongo-controlled game, *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat*.

Video game beatniks will be surprised to find that, despite using the drums, *Beat* is not a music game—it's a platformer. "The bongos offer a new, unique way to play a game like this," explains Team Nintendo's Stephen Ward. "It's definitely different, and it takes a few minutes to get the hang of the controls." Less adventurous gamers might chicken out and opt for a GameCube controller, but it's worth the effort to hit the skins. It's not terribly complex, really: You guide Nintendo's legendary gorilla through side-scrolling stages, pounding enemies, hoarding bananas, and generally flailing away at your drum set like a maniac. Here's a quick guide to how your rhythmic expressions translate into gameplay...

—Shane Bettenhausen



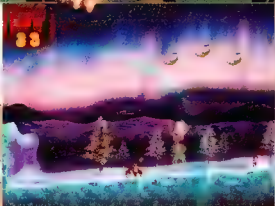
(Above) News flash: Monkeys love bananas. In *Jungle Beat*, the more you collect, the more new stages you'll be able to unlock.



DK DRUMMING 101

Running

Make your ape shamble to the left or right by simply pounding the corresponding drum. Beat it faster to pick up the pace.



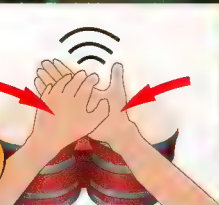
Jumping

Jumping requires you to hit both drums simultaneously. This takes a little getting used to, so be sure to master it before leaping over any lava pits.



Clapping

Clapping your hands (or hitting the sides of the drums) makes DK clap his hands, which can stun enemies, activate various environmental objects, and collect bananas.



Pummeling

Some of *Jungle Beat*'s bosses engage Kong in *Punch-Out* style boxing brawls. Dodge their attacks, then let loose with drum-bangin' fury to fall them.



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EGM INTERNATIONAL

Nothing says Japan like...boxing?



■ PS2

HAJIME NO IPPO ALL-STARS

What's so "All-Stars" about this if I've never heard of it before? Believe us when we say that *Hajime no Ippo* (a comic and anime series about a Japanese boxer's struggle in the world featherweight rankings) is the bee's knees, a tour de force of action and blood sprays. This boxing sim, released to commemorate the saga's 15th birthday, takes the entire anime story and packages it into an arcade-style contest, complete with 70 characters and individual boxer customization.

So it's *Fight Night* minus the rapping announcer? Well, sort of. The first *Hajime no Ippo* game came here in '01 under the moniker *Victorious Boxers*, but the subject matter (do you know any real-life Japanese boxers?) will likely make *All-Stars* one for anime freaks only.



■ PS2

VM JAPAN

Where are all the PS2 strategy RPGs? What, three in the past year weren't enough for you? If that's the case, check out this flowery part of a PC title from '03 creator Falcom. Set in an alternate-reality Japan, *VM* puts you in control of a "Vantage Master" (a summoner of sorts) and asks you to defeat the other seven VMs trying to take over the country. The gameplay is a mix of *Disgaea* (PS2) and a traditional war game—there's a hexfield game map, but the graphics are high-res, anime-style, and very pretty.

So when's it coming here? No plans yet, although Konami is releasing Falcom's *Ys: The Ark of Napishtim* (PS2) early this year. Falcom also has one other PS2 game—a cutesy action-RPG called *Zwei!*—that's worth importing.

WHAT'S PLAYING IN THE

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

Who among you can truly pinpoint the joys of friendship? Really, who? I can't (that whole "social leper" thing gets in the way). But thanks to massively multiplayer online (MMO) games, I can have virtual friends.

World of Warcraft



This baby hit shelves right after the other MMO juggernaut *EverQuest II*, and it's the one that has won my heart. Taking place in the game world of developer Blizzard's three *WarCraft* real-time strategy games, *WoW* is an unmitigated triumph of art direction and lean, muscular game design. It looks like nothing else online, thanks to its rich, imaginatively cartoonish world that is bustling with life. Sure, *WoW* doesn't reinvent the MMO wheel, but it does what Blizzard does with everything they touch—it brilliantly refines and distills gameplay to its most essential and entertaining elements.

Guild Wars



NCSoft showed they had the right MMO stuff during 2004 with the awesome *City of Heroes*, and this game should further burnish their online reputation. *Guild Wars* (due out this spring) may look like a standard online role-playing game, but it's very different: Combat happens in real time and there's a heavy player-versus-player component. This one even has a weird collectible-card strategy element: You'll acquire skills as you level up throughout the game but you can only take eight of them into any given scenario, forcing you to plan and coordinate with teammates.

—Robert Coifey,
Computer Gaming World

UNDER THE RADAR

DRIVE TO SURVIVE

This budget-priced racer will undoubtedly slip into stores unnoticed, but you'll want to brave the bargain bins and check it out. *Survive* channels the long-running *Micro Machines* series with top-down visuals and simple controls, but fortifies the driving with a dose of *Twisted Metal*-inspired warfare and a hint of *Bombberman*-style multiplayer insanity. Recruit three friends, pick your vehicles, and race on any of over 30 different tracks. Passing the finish line isn't your goal, though—obliterating your opponents with missiles, machine guns, and mines is key to winning these last-man-standing contests. Even death doesn't put a damper on your fun, though: You're able to hurl bombs at the remaining racers from the afterlife....

Platforms: PS2/XB
Publisher: Enigma
Developer: Superonic
Release Date: March 2005



“Pray this one gets
brought stateside.”

—IGN

The
critically acclaimed,
action/strategy
online epic
has arrived!

More than 300 skills to collect

200 single player missions

Battle and trade skills on Xbox Live



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Alcohol Reference

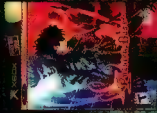
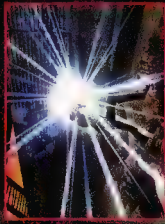
Blood
Mild Language
Violence

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Phantom Dust™

Get Back What's Yours.

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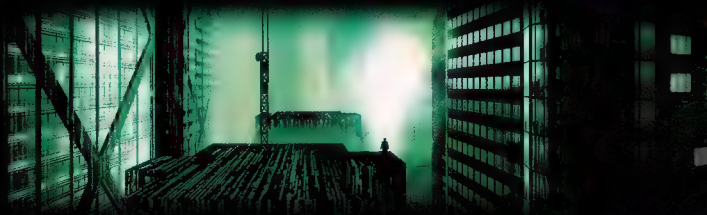
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THE MATRIX HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN TO GIVE UP ITS SECRETS.

The Matrix Online is the future of the Matrix, picking up right where the trilogy left off. The revolution is over, but within the Matrix a secret war still rages—a war of control between the Machines, the Exiles, and the people of Zion. Come join the continuing storyline of the Matrix where you decide who to oppose and what to believe. Only your courage and perseverance can protect the legacy of Neo's sacrifice. Jack In.

- ▶ Explore every inch of *The Matrix: Mega City*—the most realistic urban environment of any MMO. The entire city, including every room of every building, is in play.
- ▶ Defeat your enemies using devastating martial arts maneuvers and gunplay. Breakthrough MMO technology produces rich animations and hyper-kinetic battle sequences.
- ▶ Escape character regret. Reconfigure your character's abilities and performance on demand.
- ▶ Communicate with people in and out of the game in real-time using AOL® Instant Messenger™ technology.



LARGER THAN LIFE

When even big-screen TVs are too tiny, you need to supersize your games with a projector

Sure, your 20-inch Zenith has stuck with you since Mario dropped his first 'shroom, but you know deep down it's time to experience your games on a screen wider

than a yard stick. Before you hightail it to your local electronics store to drop serious cash on a massive high-definition boob tube, have you thought about a projector? They're cheaper,

easier to lug around, and will give you a screen, oh, about 6 feet across. We break down three popular models, coupled with games that demand to be played large. —Shawn Smith

Boxlight Raven

xbox.boxlight.com

Price: \$980

Ratio: 16:9 and 4:3

Perfect for: *Halo 2*

If you wanna play big on Xbox, might as well go with a projector created to match the system's look. And experiencing *Halo 2* 6 feet high on this sexy HDTV-ready projector is better than sex. If the single-player experience blown out in super-sharp progressive scan isn't enough to jump-start your heart, invite your chums over for splitscreen, where each of you will have the equivalent of a 32-inch TV for your quarter section of the screen. Quite literally: killer. Even better: the unit is selling for under a grand for a limited time.

Mitsubishi SE2U

www.mitsubishi-presentations.com

Price: \$995

Ratio: 16:9 and 4:3

Perfect for: *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*

Mitsubishi has won awards for its high-end business projectors, so we're jazzed to see its first consumer model come in at an entry-level price—and just in time for *Metroid Prime 2*. If the game is all about creating ambience by wrapping you in Samus' suit and dropping you on an alien world, then why not bring that be-there feeling right to your living room? The projector's robust package of features will have you selling your spacesuit when the action seems a bit too in your face.

InFocus ScreenPlay 4805

www.infocushome.com

Price: \$1,800

Ratio: 16:9 and 4:3

Perfect for: *GTA: San Andreas*

GTA's thug-life story and visuals deserve your living room wall. Rolling down the casino strip and gawking at the neon—or just cruising in your Jump Jet—will seem all too real when your pimped-out low-rider or plane is 5 feet across on this decked-out, first-class projector. The only drawback? You'll have to crank up the volume on your hi-fi to drown out the hum of this unit's somewhat noisy fan.

Nothing a little Cypress Hill and a shotgun can't fix (begging the lyric "how I could just kill a fan").



Screening Room

If you go the projector route, you better save some wall space. Like all projectors, a reflective surface will make your games and movies look *of* so nice. Those of you who own a home (or have a really nice landlord) should nab a jug of special paint called Screen Goo (\$50, goosystems.com) and paint the area of the wall that will act as your screen, being sure to mask it off for a clean rectangular edge. Or you can drop an extra \$250 for a screen from Da-Lite (da-litehometheater.com) or Draper (www.draperinc.com). They come in all varieties, but we figure an average user will want a high-contrast white screen at least 6 feet across with a theater-style 16:9 ratio, and that can be mounted to the wall or ceiling and tucked away as needed.



Projector 101

We wish owning a projector was as easy as owning a TV, but it ain't. So take a minute or two and read these helpful tips.

Is wider better?

Most TVs are nearly square in shape, or 4:3 ratio. Theaters are more rectangular, or 16:9 ratio. Projectors come in both sizes, so ask yourself, "How many widescreen games do you play? How many movies will you watch?" These days, 16:9-ratio projectors are a safe bet, since they can also handle 4:3.

Bulbous pricing

Before you go hog wild leaving your projector on all day and night, listen up: Projector bulbs cost about \$350 a pop. Thankfully, the average life for a bulb is around 4,000 hours. That means if you use your projector about 10 hours per week, you'll only need to buy a new bulb once every few years, or so.

You down with DLP?

Projectors have different technology inside to make them work, basically between LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) and DLP (Digital Light Projection). While each has its pros and cons, for average consumer use there aren't a ton of differences. Just keep in mind DLP projectors are usually cheaper, so if you're on a budget, it's the way to go.

Follow the lumens

Since brighter bulbs make for crisper imagery, you'll want to nab a projector with around 1,000 lumens.

Sound off

Although projectors come with audio inputs and built-in speakers, they often pump out tinny sound that in no way matches the grandiose visuals. You're best off hooking your consoles into a proper surround-sound system.

High def in da house

Most projectors above a grand are HDTV-compatible and support progressive scan, which makes for sharper visuals in XB games, most GC titles, and a few PS2 games. Just make sure you spring for component cables.



SHOW AND TELL: COLD FEAR

The Death Aquatic

If Steven Seagal's cinematic classic *Under Siege* is "Die Hard on a boat," then Ubisoft's upcoming survival-horror offering *Cold Fear* is undoubtedly "Resident Evil 4 on a boat." Think about it: You've got your stoic hero (Coast Guard soldier Tom Hansen) who's alone in a foreign land (well, a Russian whaling ship adrift in the Bering Sea) and legions of creepy natives hell-bent on rip-

ping you apart. Even the hyperdetailed graphics and unique camera angle mimic those of *RE4*. But hey, originality isn't everything—and PS2 and Xbox owners will be able to embark on this cruise while Capcom's heavy hitter makes its GameCube landfall. We've recruited *Cold Fear* Creative Director Gunther Galipo to explain what you'll be so afraid of...

Platforms: PS2/XB
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Darkworks
Release Date: March 2005



Rock the Boat

Gunther Galipo: *Cold Fear*'s foes are incredibly intelligent: To kill them, you'll need to use the environment to steady your body and aim correctly. The game takes place in the middle of a storm on the Bering Sea, so the moving environment can make aiming at enemies much more difficult.



Off With Their Heads

GG: You'll have to squash enemies' heads under your boot to keep them from coming back. This may sound a bit gory, but it's a viable solution for conserving ammo. And one more thing: Don't stand too close afterward, as we've seen some specimens survive decapitation and start chopping people!



Close-Quarters Splatter

GG: It's wiser to take out mutants from afar, but you're not necessarily doomed if these guys get close to you. They'll grab Tom and attempt to bite him, but if you are fast enough, you can get free from their grip by pressing the correct buttons, then quickly blow their heads off at close range.



Burnin' Clean

GG: You can easily wipe out mutants with a hearty dose of fire—either from a flamethrower or from explosive objects on the boat. Try shooting various barrels and machinery to produce bursts of flame. One warning, though: Enemies killed with fire won't drop any goodies, since the fire ruins their stash, too.



WHOSE GAME IS IT ANYWAY?

Match the title to its story line. It's simple, really.

P.M.03 (GC)	Space-age siren scans flora and fauna before shooting.
Cy Sirens (PS2)	Space-age siren fights to win her plastic boyfriend back.
Metroid Prime (GC)	Space-age siren dances robots to death.
Portal Runner (PS2)	Space-age sirens tackle cyber terrorism.

Illustration by Geoff Gustafson/EA GDD

Tekken's Nina Williams is even deadlier undercover.

As a covert operative of the CIA, Nina Williams enters an underground fighting tournament to track Kometa, a shadowy underworld organization. Functioning as the "sweeper" of her cell, Nina finds herself tracking a stolen high-tech weapon through a variety of locations to reveal a conspiracy on a global scale. Nina must now face a multitude of deadly enemies, as well as her own past, in order to save the world.

TEKKEN'S NINA WILLIAMS IN

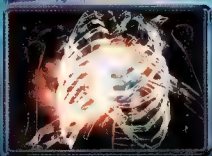
DEATH BY DEGREES



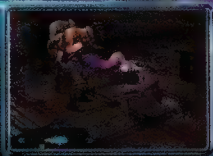
➤ Control Nina with an intuitive, 360-degree combat system



➤ Wield a variety of weapons



➤ Burst organs, shatter bones

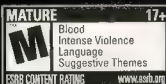


➤ Deliver Nina's signature moves outside the ring

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PlayStation 2

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Xbox

AFTERTHOUGHTS: STAR WARS KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II: THE SITH LORDS

Behind the scenes with the real Jedi masters

If 40 solid hours of gameplay didn't stoke your thirst for all things Star Wars, you're in luck.

Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords packs loads of replay potential. Whatever character you played the first time around—light or dark side, male or female—a completely different

can't be mean to people I've just met, and in role-playing games you tend to be meeting just about everybody for the first time. **Mike Gallo:** I also prefer the light side.

EGM: Do you think you can generalize about people's personalities based on how they like to play your game?

"If they pick dark side, maybe that means they like to kick puppies." —LucasArts Producer Mike Gallo

experience awaits the next time you play. We hit up Chris Avellone, lead designer with *KOTOR II* developer Obsidian, and Mike Gallo, producer at LucasArts, for some behind-the-scenes info and secrets about the game. (Just don't say we didn't warn you: spoilers!) —Jennifer Tsao

EGM: What's your favorite way to play the game, light or dark side?

Chris Avellone: I have to play light side. I

MG: Hmm...if they pick the dark-side choices, maybe that means they like to kick puppies?

CA: [Dark siders] want the most cash as possible, and they don't care who gets in their way.

EGM: All players gets one bounty hunter in their party: Light siders get Mira, while dark siders get the Wookiee, Hanharr. Is one of them better than the other?

The Droid You're Looking For

HK-47, the human-hatin' assassin droid (and fan favorite) from the first *KOTOR*, is back, and he's braver than ever. Designer Chris Avellone recommends trying to earn lots of influence points with him:

"HK-47 has a lot of interesting assassination insights on how to take down Jedi. In combat, reasons he was built during the Mandalorian Wars...how he felt about Malak, things he thought about Revan. At one point, he'll start

talking about the companions from the first game, and there's a whole list of funny lines where he talks about Carth and Bastila, and those can be worthwhile for a laugh. The delivery on those was excellent."



Statement: Oh, yes. My master had quite the collection of tortured individuals that seemed unable to confront their basic personality conflicts.



Let me cite some specific examples.



Mockery: "Oh, master, I love you but I hate all you stand for, but I think we should go praise our deity, muscle-covered lips together in the camp holder."



Go to egmextras.1UP.com for the story on how Bao-Dur (above) got his unusual voice.

Just Another Spooky Face?

Darth Nihilus was the poster boy for *The Sith Lords*, but he actually played a relatively small role in the game. We asked Lead Designer Chris Avellone why....

"He has a very mysterious past, to say the least. The decision behind that was that, to an extent, I thought that revealing too much about how he came to be would sort of lessen him as a character. We may [have] erred on the side of not providing enough information. If ever given the opportunity, we will attempt to rectify that. I think there might be more information...you know, I don't know if I can say any more...." [Pregnant pause]



CA: When you first get Hanharr, he's pretty much a combat monster. He's insane—really good in combat. Mira's not quite so good. But the whole light-side aspect of that is, if you really get into her character, if you get enough influence points with her, if you make an effort to try to understand what's going on with her, then you can turn her into a Jedi, which will over time make her better than Hanharr. It's the whole Yoda thing, where the dark side is quicker and more powerful, but in the long run, the light side will get you more rewards.

EGM: Meanwhile, male characters get Handmaiden, and female characters get Disciple. Any differences there?

CA: They're pretty similar; the Handmaiden has a little more combat focus, and the Disciple is more consular. There's not too much physical or statisti-

cal difference. Most of the differences come through in their personalities.

EGM: The player can choose what order to visit the planets in the game. What do you think is the ideal path?

CA: I would probably go Nar Shaddaa, then D'und and Onderon, then Dantooine...I'd probably leave Korriban for last because there are no party members there...then back to Onderon, then to the end....

EGM: The first game was so striking because of all the amazing worlds you visited. How come you decided to reuse two planets, Dantooine and Korriban, from the first game?

MC: Those two planets were really important to have back.

CA: We thought it would be kind of weird if you're searching for Jedi or Sith and you

don't go to Dantooine or Korriban. We also wanted to show the consequences of what happened to both of those locations since they were so pivotal in the first game. We thought the return of some old friends in terms of planets would help reinforce that you're still in the same universe, and here's the consequences of what your character did in the first game.

EGM: The game's huge, but we imagine some stuff must have gotten left on the cutting-room floor....

CA: HK-47 was able to track down the HK factory, where all the HK-50s were made. He finds out why they're being created and has a chance to shut them all down. The way it works in the game right now, all the HK-50s are employed by Goto. There was the potential to add another layer of complexity, but we just didn't have time. >



EGM: Did you play at all with *Mandalore*? He's actually Canderous from the first game.
CA: It's pretty evident from conversations with him. He keeps talking about Clan Ordo, and his voice is the same.
MC: But we don't mention it anywhere in the game at all.

EGM: We've heard complaints about the load times. How come they weren't improved from the first game?

MC: We've been able to do some different things technically, and some of those things may not show up to people just casually playing the games. We've been able to have more variety in character heads, the areas are bigger, we have more stuff going on. The trade-off there is that we're going to have load times that are the same, even though they've been improved. People don't remember how slow *KOTOR I*'s load times were.

EGM: Do you think you didn't give enough information about what happened to Revan, the main character from the first game?

CA: I think that makes things much more interesting for later on.

EGM: What was your inspiration for the story?

CA: I've always been a big fan of *The Empire Strikes Back*. The good guys didn't come out all rosy and happy at the end. It's just sort of building up to the final confrontation, which kind of appealed to me.

EGM: Final confrontation? Does that mean you're already planning another game in the *KOTOR* series?

MC: I'm sorry, what was that? Are you asking about a sequel? [Laughs] There's nothing to talk about at this point.

The Ultimate Saber

KOTOR II offers so many lightsaber upgrade options that we figured we'd go straight to the source to find out the very best ones in the game. Here's what the designers had to say about a Jedi's weapon of choice.

Best Energy Cell

Ultimate Diatium Damage +5 requires Computer Use level 29 to create

Best Emitters

Expert Fencing Emitter Damage +3, Defense +2 requires Repair level 27 to create

Refined Phobium Emitter 50 percent chance of Slow, DC18 for three rounds requires Repair level 29 to create

Best Lenses

Enhanced Byrothsis Lens Attack +3, Damage +4, BBD -4 requires Awareness level 29 to create

Pontite Lens Attack +1, Damage +2-12 requires Awareness level 27 to create

Best Crystals

Personal Crystal exact powers vary find in Dantoolne. Talk to Kreia as you gain levels or when your alignment changes to update/improve your crystal

Solari Crystal Attack +3, Damage +3, Damage vs. Dark Side +1-8, light side only

Qixoni Crystal Damage +5, Regenerate Force Points +1, dark side only

Lordlian Gemstone Defense +2, BBD +3

Barab Ore Ingot Damage +2-16

Ankarres Sapphire STR +2, DEX +1, Regeneration +2, Keen

Kaiburr Crystal CON +3, WIS +3, Regeneration +3

Hurrikaine Crystal Damage +1-8, Knockdown DC18

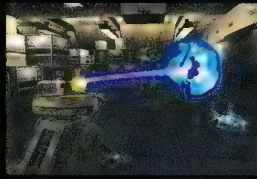
Best Colors

Color does not affect your lightsaber's performance

■ Lightsaber color is ultimately a fashion choice.



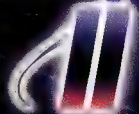
■ Apparently, *KOTOR II* only told half the story about Geth's droids.





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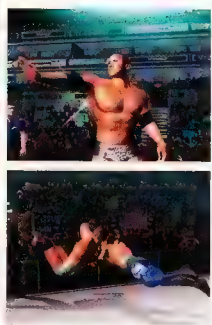
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■ The details are amazing. Check out the big vein on Triple H's inner thigh. Wait, that is a vein, isn't it?



WRESTLEMANIA 21

Ready for the main event?

Wrestlemania 21 for Xbox is a whole new beast," claims *Wrestlemania* Producer Matt Greig. We hope so, considering the *Raw* series was a hose beast we never wanted to see again. Apparently a lot of people agree, as THQ is taking a cue from Stunning Steve and totally reinventing its Xbox WWE franchise in an attempt to gain Stone Cold popularity. Borrowing from *SmackDown!*, *Wrestlemania* will feature

superstar voiceovers, WWE-style presentation, and the requisite gimmick bouts. The developers even tweaked some old modes. For example, the new bra and panties match requires you to humiliate your opponent before forcibly disrobing her, finally silencing the legions of fans clamoring for more sadomasochism in their sapphic confrontations. Unlike *SmackDown!*'s girly-man online mode, *Mania* will have every single-player

Platform: Xbox
 Publisher: THQ
 Developer: Studio Gigante
 Release Date: March 2005

match type available for Xbox Live. Plus, in the all-new title defense mode, if you want to be the man, you've got to beat the man, earning personal prestige by winning player-created belts (which also go up in prestige as they change hands). Despite being developed by Studio Gigante, creators of fighting flop *Tao Feng: Fist of the Lotus*, *Wrestlemania*'s looking like it may have what it takes to become king of the ring.

—Joshua Cain

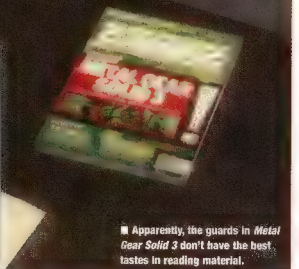


■ "Nosebleed—time out...time out!"

BY THE NUMBERS

Solid figures

- 1988** The year the original *Metal Gear* debuted in the U.S. for Nintendo's 8-bit NES
- 6** Units sold worldwide of *Metal Gear Solid* (PS1)—the best-selling game in the *Metal Gear* franchise
- 7** Number of actual Metal Gears (Rex, Ray, Shagohad, and four others simply dubbed "Metal Gear")
- 1** Number of those nuclear war machines that you've probably never faced (*Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* for the MSX console only came out in Japan)



■ Apparently, the guards in *Metal Gear Solid 3* don't have the best tastes in reading material.

DESERT ISLAND GAMES: MICHAEL MADSEN



Every now and then, we ship a celebrity or game designer off to a desert island and ask what three console games he'd want to last up on shore. This month's cast-away: *Free Willy* star Michael Madsen. Oh, he's also starred in *Reservoir Dogs* and the *Kill Bill* movies, and is the voice of officer Jack Forzanski in Midway's upcoming *MARC* (PS2/XB). Let's see what floats his boat.... —Marc Saltzman



Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (PS2/XB)
 "For the fantastic female companionship."



Driver (PS1)
 "Because I never had the chance to play it and always wanted to."



The Great Escape (PS2/XB)
 "Maybe Steve McQueen could give me some insight on escaping off the island."



**THE NEW LONGER LASTING
AXE EFFECT.**



CHEAT SHEET

Be a next-gen know-it-all with the help of our simple study guide

Becoming a *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* gang star, blasting away your Xbox Live buddies in *Halo 2*, beating down Samus Aran's darker half in *Metroid Prime 2*—that's so old-school. Or

rather, it will be soon, as over the next two years we'll witness the arrival of three new systems from the big three—current king Sony, steadily rising Microsoft, and the industry's old dog Nintendo.

Starting this issue, *EGM* will monitor the development of these machines, with a section dedicated solely to next-gen console news. We'll also talk to the peeps that make the games you play and ask them to explain all that

technical mumbo jumbo and how your favorite genres will improve thanks to the power of these new consoles.

To help you get up to speed, here's a quick rundown of what we know so far. —*Bryan Iltis*

SONY

CODE NAME(S)

Next-generation PlayStation, PlayStation 3

EXPECTED DEBUT

March 2005. Sony has stated that the company would unveil the system at a "premiere event" by the end of this March.

EXPECTED LAUNCH

Late 2005

TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIP(S)

IBM and Toshiba (computer processing unit), Nvidia (graphics processing unit)

ONLINE-READY?

Probably. "Online is going to be an integral part of any console going forward," says Sony Computer Entertainment America President Kaz Hirai.

BACKWARD COMPATIBLE?

Very likely. "I don't see any reason why we shouldn't or we wouldn't want to do that," professes Hirai.

HARD DRIVE?

Doesn't sound like it. "We're looking to come out with other devices that you can store data from your downloads [on]..." says Hirai.

RUMORED GAMES

Gran Turismo 5, *Final Fantasy XII*

OTHER NEWS AND NOTES

The system will use Blu-ray discs, which can hold roughly six times the amount of data as PS2 DVDs.

MICROSOFT

Xenon, Xbox 2, Xbox Next

March–May 2005. Look for a debut at the Game Developers Conference (March) or the trade show dubbed the Electronic Entertainment Expo (May).

Late 2005

IBM (CPU), ATI (GPU)

Definitely. Expect several new features for Xbox Live, Microsoft's online gaming hub. "One thing we're pretty excited about is the idea of what's loosely called spectator mode," says Microsoft Game Studios General Manager Shane Kim.

Still up in the air. It may prove difficult since the console's underlying hardware will be different from Xbox (which uses an Nvidia-made GPU).

Yes and no (check out *Other News and Notes* below).

Halo 3, *Perfect Dark Zero*, *Kameo: Elements of Power*, *Dark Sector*, *The Elder Scrolls: Oblivion*

Reports abound that Microsoft will release multiple versions of its Xbox successor (hard drive/no hard drive, one with PC-related functions).

NINTENDO

Revolution

May 2005. Several Nintendo executives have said that Revolution will be shown in some form at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo.

Late 2005

IBM (CPU) and ATI (GPU) worked on GameCube, and it's expected both will contribute to Nintendo's next system.

Nintendo President Satoru Iwata has said that "customers do not want online games," but the company can't ignore this wanted genre forever.

Doubtful. No Nintendo console has ever included such a feature.

Again, doubtful. Nintendo likes to keep consoles at a consumer-friendly price, and including a hard drive would make that nearly impossible.

New installments of classic Nintendo franchises (*Mario*, *Zelda*, etc.)

A Japanese newspaper has reported that Revolution's controller might not sport a D-pad or the traditional A and B buttons. ❧

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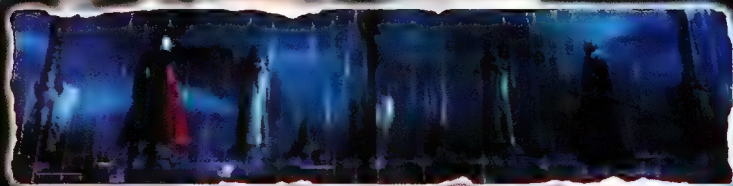
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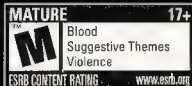


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DANTE'S AWAKENING

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the game begins,
the badass meter
is likely to
flat-out shatter”

— PSM

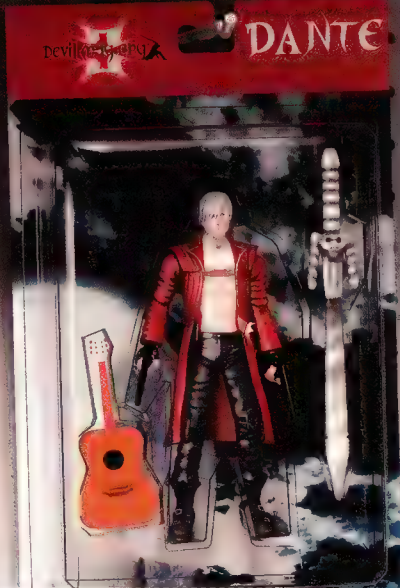
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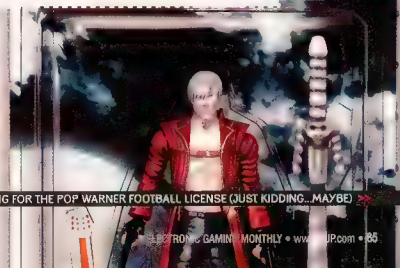
Dynamic heroes clog the PS2 shelves this March

With all the excitement around 2005's impending hardware announcements (PlayStation 3, Xbox 2, Nintendo's GameCUBE successor), it's easy to overlook the titles that will carry your current system into its well-deserved retirement. But realistically, are you ready to say good-bye already? Graphically, games like *Metal*

Gear Solid 3, *Killzone*, and *Gran Turismo 4* prove that even the elder-statesman PS2 isn't ready for the retirement home yet. So shake off your next-gen reveries and check out three promising heroes hitting the still-kicking PlayStation 2 this March. All three games feature kick-ass action stars who hack, slash, and leap their way

through detailed 3D worlds: *God of War's* surly Spartan Kratos slices his way through Greek Mythology, *Devil May Cry 3's* cocksure detective Dante mixes blades and bullets, and *Rise of the Kasai's* massive brawler Rau swings a mean axe.... >

—Shane Bettenhausen, Kevin Gifford, and Shawn Elliott





Everybody must get
stoned...by the Gorian
head on the wall.



Projectile
weapons are
for pansies.



■ **Bust out some elemental magic when foes crowd Kratos' personal space.**

Blogs of War

David Jaffe, the main man behind *God of War* and the *Twisted Metal* series, is one of a growing number of designers to keep a weblog—you can see his at davidjaffe.modblog.com—which he updates several times a week with his opinion on everything from Sony's PSP ("F***ing incredible!") to *Metal Gear Solid 3* ("I am so ready to love this game. But it is just so f***ing hard!!!").



GOD OF WAR

Platform: PlayStation 2
 Publisher: Sony CEA
 Developer: Sony Santa Monica
 Release: March 2005

It is not a particularly auspicious day for young Kratos when that enormous fang-ridden Hydra (look left) descends upon him. In fact, as his game enters the opening level, it's been an all-around poor evening for the pale warrior: Not only is he tasked with murdering the titular Greek god of war, Ares, but he's also being sought by every evil minion across the Aegean peninsula, mythical or not. It's hardly a wonder that *God of War*, the PlayStation 2 action title Kratos stars in this spring, begins with the muscular demigod flinging himself off a cliff. There's only so much abuse an antihero can take.

Of course, at this point, console owners themselves may be wondering how many more balls-out bash-em-up action games they can stand. With such expertly made

titles as *Ninja Gaiden*, *Viewtiful Joe 2*, and not one, but two *Prince of Persia*s hitting store shelves in a year's time, it's only understandable if consumers are getting a bit tired of the entire tap-Square-tilt-your-thumb-bleeds genre. It's a sentiment that director David Jaffe plans to tackle head-on: "If you expect *God of War* to be just another hack-n-slasher, you will be disappointed. If you are hoping to play a game where you get to actually live the adventure, this is the game for you."

If there's any innovation in *God of War*, this is it—a sense of pure energy that flows from every location and every battle, from the lowliest undead warrior to the smelliest of Minotaurs. Much of this energy stems from the battle system itself, which is closest to *Ninja Gaiden* in the variety it

offers. Kratos' move set includes a standard swipe from his two flail-like chain swords, a juggle move that tosses foes into the air, and a "grab" that instantly kills the lesser enemies in violent ways—ripping the wings off a hapless Harpy, for example.

Combine these basic attacks with three types of magic (all powered up by collecting the orbs dropped monsters drop), and you've got an offensive arsenal limited only by the sordidness of your imagination. Skeleton with a sword got you down? Fling him up, fire a Gorgon Flash bolt at him in mid-air, and watch as his now-styrofoam shatters into pieces all over the floor. If this isn't enough to satisfy your sadistic urges, then try out one of *God of War*'s sequential kills—If a PS2 controller button icon appears above a larger enemy, press it

and you'll set off a small button-matching mini-game as Kratos tussles with the monster, ultimately finishing him off with a gruesomely animated thrust if you succeed.

Director Jaffe's team has put painstaking levels of polish on nearly all of Kratos' exploits in *God of War*, whether he's kicking at archers while hanging from a rope or solving ancient puzzles Indiana Jones would be proud to get ensnared in. "Every decision made from a level and puzzle standpoint grew out of the story we were telling," says Jaffe. "There's a reason for almost everything in the game, and it helps make the experience feel more real." Judging by early impressions, this attention to detail will make *God of War* one of the most intense action games of 2005—even as it drives poor Kratos to suicide.



■ **God of War's dungeons offer Zelda-style complexity, but with 300% more gore.**

How Brutal Is God of War?

You can't kill a god without first spilling a little blood, so expect *God of War* to be a violent game. And we're not just talking about smiling hemoglobin-filled monsters here—in one section, Kratos must get past a door that can only be opened by human sacrifice. His answer? Run back to a nearby prisoner of war, drag his cage to the door, and watch as he's slowly killed by the mechanism's crushing walls. "I felt it was important to have puzzles that really allowed players to experience the morality void character that Kratos is," says Jaffe. He ain't kidding. >





Devil May Cry 3's Dante is a "body and mind" player with a hairy vengeance.

DEVIL MAY CRY 3: DANTE'S AWAKENING

Platform: PlayStation 2
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Release: March 2005

Dante smirks with big-man-on-campus bravado at whatever foe lies in his sights—be it a ghoulish demon, his unruly brother, or a three-headed devil dog about to bite him in half. “Dante knows he’s the man,” says Director Tsuyoshi Tanaka. “It’s evident when you see how little fear he shows when facing massive monsters.”

A prequel to the stab-and-shoot series, *Devil May Cry 3* focuses on the half-demon for hire’s dysfunctional family. “During the planning phase, we saw that the relationship between Dante and [his bad-seed brother] Virgil had potential,” Tanaka explains. “However, that sort of story could only occur pre-*DMC*.” The time-warp twist makes sense in one respect: *DMC3* shares more with the saga’s first installment than it does with the second. *DMC2*’s wide-open, dullsville areas are history, so fancy, up-close fighting is a must here.

As Tanaka says, “*DMC* is about its world as well as its characters,” and what a Transylvanian postcard of a place it is: Everything’s done up in cathedral-like concentrations of detail—candlelit gargoyles, wind-whipped curtains, eye-grabbing

stained glass. The game isn’t *Ninja Gaiden* gorgeous, but it does tap PS2’s processing vein, draining it nearly dry.

These lavish locales play host to countless monsters, and luckily, *DMC*’s antihero has never been deadlier. At 20-something, this Dante’s at the height of his demon-hunting game, “tougher, cooler, crazier,” as Tanaka says, than any of his incarnations to come. Here he can wield multiple weapons

“Stylish crazy action,” as Capcom calls its game, isn’t just a mishmash of adjectives. Six selectable fighting disciplines await your mastery. Swordmaster’s whirlwind of blade work and Gunslinger’s ballistic ballet are self-explanatory. Trickster, which emphasizes evasion and is “probably the easiest to master,” according to Tanaka, lets you twist and turn from harm’s way, walk on walls, and lunge from foe to foe

“Dante knows he’s the man.” —Director Tsuyoshi Tanaka

at once, shuffling between them with a button press. Plus, he packs all-new instruments of destruction including an axlike guitar and nunchakus that freeze foes solid. Wanna sweep ‘em off their feet with an electrifying solo, then cut to the chase with a pair of swords? Have it your way—*DMC3*’s artful combat always looks slick. Speed lines trace your sword’s trajectory; snazzy neon shadows appear in the wake of your acrobatics; and dying hellspawn crumble like shattered hourglasses.

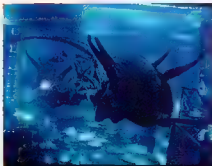
with lethal gusto, whereas Royal Guard, “a highly technical style that requires some serious reflexes,” focuses on defense. Not feeling the more followed routes? Try creating a doppelganger to do double damage, or tinkering with time, *Prince of Persia* style, in the other two areas of expertise. “We try to do something new every time—no one likes a plain old relash,” says Tanaka, doing his best to play devil’s advocate. “But you never know whether what you create will be welcomed or hated.”

Notable Half-breeds in Entertainment History



Blade

Hard-assed half-breed vampire cleans house with half-assed inbreeds in a trio of movies based on the Marvel comics character. Dante shares his love for trench coats.



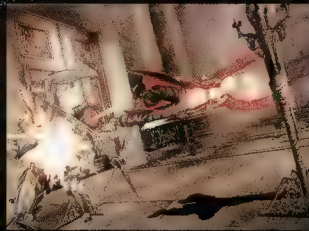
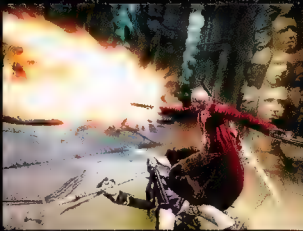
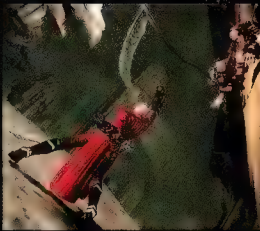
Alien Resurrection

Cloned from Ripley when she was "heavy" with an alien queen, these alien babies acquired physical and emotional traits from both species, killing the franchise in the process.



Out of this World

Late '80s sitcom mom shackles up with a deadbeat dad from beyond the stars, giving birth to a teleporting, time-stopping baby. Space poppa Troy gets visiting rights via a talking crystal cube.



Swordplay might represent the pinnacle of fighting style, but laser blasts are pretty damned effective.

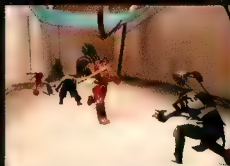


Devil Inside

When Dante gets good and pissed, his inner demons take over, turning the hero into a sinister (but still suave) devil. The selectable fighting style you pick—Gunslinger, Swordmaster, etc.—determines its powers, too. >>

TOPHEAVY STUDIOS (ALONG WITH SONY AND MICROSOFT) CLAIMING SHE WAS ONLY 17 YEARS OF AGE AT THE TIME OF FILMING. THE GAME HAS BEEN REMOVED FROM STORES. >>

Kasai's unique analog-stick combat system makes slaying a breeze. If only that were an Ewok...



RISE OF THE KASAI

Sony's 2000 brawler *The Mark of Kri* achieved cult status by getting three things right—an innovative analog-stick fighting system, a pack of intricate puzzles, and a wild visual style that blends Disney charm with copious gore. *Kri* fans can expect more of all three in *Kasai*, its sequel. "When we originally designed *The Mark of Kri*, we were excited by the [graphical] juxtaposition," explains Producer Jay Beard. "The reaction to this look was overwhelmingly positive, causing us to look at the sequel with a little more confidence in terms of what we could get away with."

As *Rise of the Kasai* proves, what Beard and his team at BottleRocket gets away with is another fine mix of action and stealth gameplay. Rau, the silent, lumbering

hero of the original, is back...well, sort of. Actually, just like *God of War's* Kratos, our hero meets his untimely end at the game's outset. You'll still play as Rau in flashback levels, but much of the game stars his friends and family (see sidebar). Each of the four playable characters has several melee weapons, as well as a special "remote view" ability—Rau can use his bird Kuzo to scout out ahead, while Tati has the rather unalluring ability to look through the eyes of corpses lying on the road.

With all these husky fighters at your disposal, *Kasai* rewards teamwork. Each stage is tackled with two characters; you control one directly while helping your computer-controlled partner take on enemies. (Sadly, Sony scrapped a planned online mode.)

Knowing your mate's personality will be just as important as knowing his abilities: "You could be attempting to sneak around," explains Beard, "when Tati comes charging in, ax drawn, blows the scenario, and gets you into a fight. So when playing as Rau, part of the gameplay is to anticipate Tati's poor judgment and play accordingly."

This cooperative aspect adds a new angle to a game already laden with originality. Like *Kri* before it, *Kasai* isn't just a bash-em-up or a Renaissance-fair version of *Splinter Cell*—it's a game that combines bits from all these genres to create something new. "Every level responds differently to how you want to play it," says Beard. "It isn't about a type of combat; it's about all aspects of combat."



Meet the Family

Rau's brought the family over for the sequel. Be nice.



Tati

Rau's little sister (still a child in the last game) is now a 20-year-old ball of pissed-off, knife-wielding girl power. Rack on.



Baumusu

Rau and Tati's adoptive father, Baumusu is among the last of the Rakus, an ancient order of gruff, smelly warriors.



Griz

This calm Zen-master type (the leader of the Rakus) is surprisingly sly for such a crabby old dude. Cialis, maybe? ☹



This is the Tip of America's Military Spear. You're on Point.



You are the First to Fight — a US Marine on the front lines of urban combat in Beirut. Lead a 4-man fire team that executes authentic Marine tactics. Move aggressively, knowing your team gives you 360-degree security, and devastate your enemies with precise air and mortar attacks. Experience a first-person shooter so realistic, the Marines use it as a training tool.



Play single-player, 4-man co-op, or go head-to-head in the Fire Team Arena.



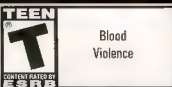
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**"MERCENARIES RANKS
AMONG THE BEST SEEN
ON THE PS2."**
-GAMESPOT

**"...ONE OF THE FIRST
TRULY SPECTACULAR
& EPIC GAMES OF 2005."**
-OPM



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PlayStation 2





CALL IN

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ANNIHILATE

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SABOTAGE

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MERCENARIES

PLAYGROUND OF DESTRUCTION™

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Illustration by Gern Glaser/AGE

ONLINE THIS MONTH

New to-dos in Halo 2

Twelve maps, seven modes, and dozens of submodes and options can keep a *Halo 2* fan multiplayin' for a very long time—we should know. But gamers aren't really the sit-still type, so the *Halo 2* community (including the developers at Bungie) has already pumped out several new custom game types. If *Ninjabaut's* getting old, give these a try.

Hoggin Boggin

Settings: slayer/team slayer; six minutes; three lives; all Warthogs; start with plasma pistol and grenades; no weapons, grenades, overshields, or active camo on map
The objective is to run down the other players. You can't shoot any guns (including turrets) unless you're the passenger in team games only. You can only throw grenades at Warthogs, never at any on-foot players. You can (and should) jack the

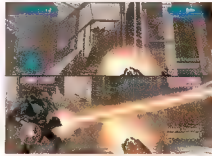
Warthog to take it for yourself. Last person standing with the most kills wins (so if you're eliminated, you're out, no matter what your score). Coagulation's the best map for this mode.

Golden Showers

Settings: slayer; no shields; sentinel beams only; no weapons on map
We don't name 'em, folks—we just tell you about 'em. Go fry up some Spartan meat!

Resident Evil/Dawn of the Dead

Settings: team slayer; 10 minutes; no shields or motion sensors; friendly fire off; no vehicles or turrets; shotgun and sword for primary/secondary weapon (no grenades); no weapons, grenades, overshields, or active camo on map
Live the freaked-out, panicked life of a human survivor surrounded by people falling victim to zombie-itus. Designate one person to be the zombie and color him brown. Everyone else is on the other



■ We'd make some lame joke about the golden showers mode here—like how it puts the P in "play"—but we won't.

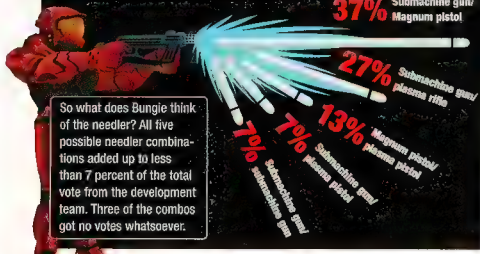
("human") team, colored something different (we suggest fleshy pink). Everyone must cooperate on these rules: Humans (pink) can only use shotguns. Zombies (brown) can only use swords. When a zombie kills a human, that human must switch sides to become a zombie (brown, with sword). Last human standing wins. This is an intense one, especially on the smaller maps like Foundation (where humans can barricade themselves in a room). It'll take a while, but eventually the first zombie will find himself a curious, stray human to "bite." Then slowly, they'll build up an army of walking dead to hunt down the remaining meathags. Play with at least 12 players.

GoldenEye

Settings: slayer/team slayer; no shields; extra damage on; no vehicles or turrets; start with Magnums only (no grenades); no weapons, grenades, overshields, or active camo on map
Remember *GoldenEye 007* for the Nintendo 64? It was the first-person shooter that crusty old gamers used to play before *Halo* came and rocked our faces. This mode tries to replicate the *GoldenEye* gun, where one bullet is all that's needed. Aim for the noggin for a one-hit kill.

It Takes Two to Tango

We asked the developers at Bungie Studios what their favorite dual-wielding combos are. Here are the top five results:



So what does Bungie think of the needler? All five possible needler combinations added up to less than 7 percent of the total vote from the development team. Three of the combos got no votes whatsoever.

WHAT'S UP AT



Read More, Meathag



When you're tired of searching for Internet porn, check out egmextras.1UP.com. Here you'll find the extended version of our *Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords* Afterthoughts piece, which includes developer tips on party formations. Plus, read our interview with the team behind the Xbox-exclusive grappler *WWE Wrestlemania 21*.

1UP.com Club in the Spotlight: Street Science Ministry



If EA's *NBA Street* series is your favorite pivotball, try meeting up with the devoted ballers at streetscience-club.1UP.com. Ryan Maynard, the club's floor general, says Ministry is "designed for serious Street-heads who throw their controller across the room when their Gamebreaker is blocked." To avoid bodily harm, we suggest sticking to online matchups.

Must-Hit Blog

Former *EGM*er Joe Fielder has traded the Bay Area for the sunny skies of SoCal and a career in game development (he's busy working on some *Honor-able* military first-person shooter), but that doesn't mean he's out of your life completely. Visit galking.1UP.com to see what Joe's playing when he's not making games.

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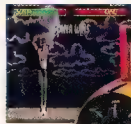
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THE
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BLOCKBUSTER

SAN ANDREAS SHAKES UP XBOX

And what we'd like to see come from the wreckage

That's right: The hyper-hyped *Grand Theft Auto* sequel is parking its hot (as in Jacked) wheels on Xbox this June. Rockstar refuses to give us the VIN number, let alone details on any additional, non-PS2 goodies the game might include, so we've come up with our own wish list.

Map quest

From the bewildering cloverleaf interchanges to the confusing back alleys, San Andreas is a regular Bermuda Triangle. Maybe we're supposed to feel like we're stopped at the corner of Skid Row and Mean Street, thumbing through a Thomas Bros. Guide for directions, but we'd prefer an easier-to-read map, or even better, a GPS system to stick in our ride. They had those in the '90s, right?

Bouncing back

You relieve a crackhead of his crack

money, erase your rivals' colors from the gangland rainbow, torch an herb farmer's ses crop, and before you can get into the Pay 'N' Spray and give the popos the slip—kabooie! You're dead and doing it all over again. When it comes to *San Andreas'* multipart missions, we want a save-anywhere feature, even if it means sacrificing half of our console's hard drive space.

Hood hounds

Main man Carl "CJ" Johnson may have helicopters, hooties, and hoochie mamas, but he hasn't got it all, at least not without hoochie's best friend. Yep—pit bull, Rottweiler, Doberman, whatever—our boy needs himself a hood hound.

Scarce hair

The world's a big place and science can't make sense of it all (fab-coat types are still trying to explain how a baldheaded CJ can

walk into a barbershop and come out with a Jackson Five-era afro), so why not let a Bigfoot stalk the state (the one that PS2 players only think they saw)? Eagle-eyed trackers could take pics, then swap shots of the elusive Sasquatch where all the good truth-is-out-there stuff goes down: the Internet.

Sanitizing switch

Ever try convincing your sweet ol' grandma that *Vice City* was getting a bad rap, only to have her walk in one hour later as you clubbed a geriatric for his social security/slot machine money? A no-swearing, no-killing-pedestrians-or-prostitutes game mode would've saved the day then, and it'll most certainly save the day now.

—Shawn Elliott



■ The biggest (and probably only) knock against *San Andreas* is its visuals. Expect the Xbox version to look prettier than these PS2 shots.

CHARTS

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES FOR NOVEMBER 2004

1	Halo 2 XB • Microsoft
2	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas PS2 • Rockstar
3	Halo 2 (Limited Edition) XB • Microsoft
4	Need for Speed Underground 2 PS2 • EA Games
5	WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw PS2 • THQ
6	Madden NFL 2005 PS2 • EA Sports
7	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater PS2 • Konami
8	The Incredibles GBA • THQ
9	Need for Speed Underground 2 XB • EA Games
10	Super Mario 64 DS GBA • Nintendo

TOP 10 GAME RENTALS FOR THE WEEK ENDING 12/05

1	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas PS2 • Rockstar
2	Halo 2 XB • Microsoft
3	Call of Duty: Finest Hour PS2 • Activision
4	Need for Speed Underground 2 PS2 • EA Games
5	Star Wars KOTOR II: The Sith Lords XB • LucasArts
6	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater PS2 • Konami
7	Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 3 PS2 • Atari
8	Klonoa PS2 • Sony CEA
9	Star Wars Battlefront PS2 • LucasArts
10	WWE SmackDown! vs. Raw PS2 • THQ

OVERHEARD

"We want to create some really controversial stuff. And that's not going to be because we're going to run down people in the street and pick up hookers or anything like that. It's going to be politically controversial."

—Oddworld Inhabitants President Lorne Lanning (Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath talks about his company's next game in an interview with computerandvideogames.com)

"PSP has been created with the assumption that the golden success formula is still working. We don't believe that."

—Nintendo President Satoru Iwata comments on Sony's upcoming handheld at a Foreign Correspondents Club meeting in Japan

"The winner is... Pontiac GTO!"

—Baxter Roy Jones Jr. mistakenly awards the title of Best Driving Game to an actual car at the lightweight 2004 Spike TV Video Game Awards; The award eventually went to Burnout 3.



■ We cannot wait for Pontiac GTO 2.

COUNTDOWN TO

200

THE 10 BEST MULTIPLAYER GAMES

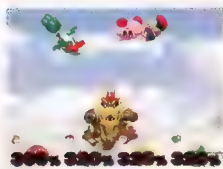
0 ur 200th issue is looming ahead like a greasy truck stop off I-94, and we're marking off the milestones with a new top 10 list every month. Here are the best multiplayer games ever made (based on when they came out)—visit our message boards at 1UP.com if you think we shortchanged *The Guy Game*.



10 Madden NFL series (1991-present)

This could be the No.1 pick for casual gamers—by our unofficial estimate, *Madden* accounts for at least 25 percent of the time wasted in college dorm rooms. It's easy to see why: Even though *Madden* gets closer to "real" football every year, it's still a piece of cake to pick up and play against your roommates.

Great moment: Scoring on a 44-yard run and dissing your opponent while John Madden explains why "you can't coach" the talent you have.



9 Super Smash Bros. series (1999-present)

There's a reason *Super Smash Bros.* *Melee* is still the top-selling GameCube title after all these years: It's quick, it's easy to learn, and the fighting action never gets boring. Get three of your friends around the television and the old ad cliché comes true—it really is four times the fun.

Great moment: Taking on three people at once after being pummeled and taking 300 percent damage. And winning. As Pikachu.

8 Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow (2004)

The world's first "multiplayer stealth game" sure sounded like a large undertaking, but it easily surpassed expectations. The cat-and-mouse game-play—pitting gun-happy mercenaries against stealth-at-all-costs spies—makes it one of the most teamwork-oriented games out there.

Great moment: Shooting a hapless merc with a spy bullet and listening in on his Xbox Live headset chatter. Then snapping his neck.



7 Mario Kart series (1992-present)

Racing games used to be all about speed—in *Mario Kart*, how fast you go is less important than which weapons you pick up and how well you use them. The result is a classic Nintendo experience: No matter how good you are, there's no such thing as a "gimme" race here.

Great moment: Creaming everyone else with a lightning bolt just before they reach the finish line. (Warning: May lead to sucker punches.)



6 Fantasy Star Online series (2001-present)

Console/dm's first online RPG (it debuted on Dreamcast) was more than just pioneering; it was (and still is) one of the most accessible multiplayer experiences, much more so than Square Enix's comparatively vast and foreboding *Final Fantasy XI* (PS2). Making a quick monster-bashing run is simple, quick fun, and 100 hours later, you're still doing it.

Great moment: Reaching level 199 alongside some guy playing a HUnevearl character...then attending his marriage ceremony back at the game's lobby.



5 GoldenEye 007 (1997)

While you'd admittedly be daft to pick this Nintendo 64 chestnut over *Halo* today, think back to its era: There were no four-player shooters—no first-person shooters to speak of besides *Doom*, really—and the idea of a multiplayer mode with tons of different play styles was basically unheard of. A true turning point for all console games.

Great moment: Running out of ammo and killing two or three people with your fists before getting gunned down.

4 Tetris Attack (1996)

Arrange colored blocks together to beat your opponent. That's all there is to this Super NES sleeper hit, but the deceptively simple design belies the trancelike experience you'll have when facing another human player. Master it and you'll start moving the controller faster than your brain can think.

Great moment: Building up such a massive chain of combos that the game crashes trying to keep up with everything.

3 Bomberman series (1985-present)

The ultimate time waster during the Genesis/Super NES era, this series was the reason many console owners bought multitap adapters (the Saturn version allowed a dizzying 10 people to play at once). Even now, its easy-to-learn gameplay is maddeningly addictive—it's all-out war once everyone has the most powerful bombs.

Great moment: Killing more than three people at once with a single well-timed bomb detonation. Including yourself.



2 Halo series (2001-present)

The first *Halo* is good in single player, yes, but it truly shines when you throw a bunch of televisions together and play 8-on-8 team deathmatches until four in the morning. Now that its sequel is on Xbox Live, joining the multiplayer shooting mayhem is a ton easier—there's always another clan out there ready to take you on.

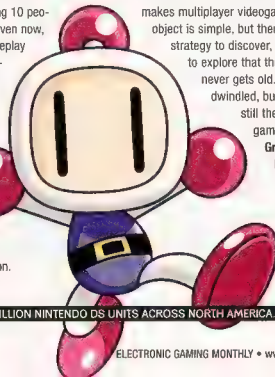
Great moment: Listening to an opposing team spout off about how awesome they are, then nothing but dead silence when your team pulls ahead.



1 Street Fighter II series (1991-present)

In many ways, *Street Fighter II* and all of its descendants define what makes multiplayer videogames fun—the object is simple, but there's so much strategy to discover, so much depth to explore that the competition never gets old. The scene's dwindled, but so what? It's still the pinnacle of games as sport.

Great moment: Playing as Chun Li just so you can get so load of her legs. C'mon, you know you do it.



IT APPEARS GAMERS ARE DIGGING THIS WHOLE DUAL-SCREEN THING, AS NINTENDO HAS SOLD MORE THAN 1 MILLION NINTENDO DS UNITS ACROSS NORTH AMERICA.

THE RUMOR MILL

You heart gaming gossip



■ The Q says *SOCOM* will infiltrate both PS2 and PSP this fall.

Yep, it's February (unless you picked up our issue really late, and if that's the case, shame on you), and you know what that means—Valentine's Day. And because I love all of my readers (well, some more than others), my gift to you is a larger rumor mill so you never leave here feeling like your significant other after you've blown him or her off yet again for *Halo 2*. If you've got any suggestions for this ever-evolving section, please drop me a line at quartermann@ziffdavis.com. And a tip for the fellas: When buying your main squeeze roses on the 14th, get the ones that require water. —The Q

Two-pronged SOCOM attack

Let's begin this round of rumors with a juicy one: Sony's U.S. Navy SEALs unit took some much-needed R&R in '04, but it looks like this plan is heading back to the virtual battlefield (and packing some extra firepower) this fall. A new *SOCOM* will arrive on

both PS2 and PlayStation Portable, and yes, the latest intel indicates that game saves will be compatible between the two versions of this tactical shooter.

Getting naughty with others

With the *Jak* trilogy finally complete (though I wouldn't be surprised if some day that action-platforming duo returns to the gaming scene), developer Naughty Dog is heading in a different direction with its next project. The studio is building some type of shooter (all signs point to the first-person kind) with a heavy-duty multiplayer component. Oh yeah, and the game is probably coming to PS3.



Be all you can be...again

Who would've thought that boot camp had become all fun and games? OK, I'm kidding, but *Full Spectrum Warrior*, a modified version of a U.S. Army training program, was indeed one of the surprise hits for Xbox last year. Now it appears that developer Pandemic is planning a follow-up that'll feature a much longer single-player campaign. Just don't expect it anytime soon (I'm hearing a mid-2006 release).

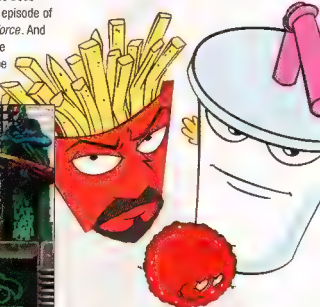
The next hot licenses

For ol' Q, no day is complete without flipping on the boob tube and catching an episode of *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*. And if my sources are correct, I'll be spending

even more time with the fast-food trio of Frylock, Meatwad, and Master Shake, as several game publishers are eyeing this and other Cartoon Network programs that currently make up its Adult Swim block. Yay for me!

These days, a soldier's duty is never over

After earning a silver award for *Call of Duty: Finest Hour*, Activision looks like it's hoping to garner yet another EGM medal of honor with its World War II-based first-person shooter franchise. My men on the front lines tell me that the publisher has ordered a new installment for all major consoles, but this one will come via a different development house (the name of the studio handling the project remains classified). ☘



■ Aqua Teens: Your arteries' worst nightmare.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

Q: Is Bungie Studios working on a remake of *Marathon*, a sci-fi first-person shooter that the developer released on Macs back in the early '90s?
A: Doubtful. First off, Bungie already has a sci-fi first-person shooter series that brings in the Benjamins—maybe you've heard of it—*Halo*. Second, Studio Manager Pete Parsons stated late last year that "after *Halo 2*, we are planning to do something different." And in our book, an update to a decade-old Mac game really doesn't fit that bill.





DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME.

To those parties attempting to recreate the stunts contained in the new MX vs. ATV Unleashed, we offer this message: DON'T. While that seems fairly obvious to most, you'd be surprised how many people will contemplate emulating its dangerous intensity, vis-à-vis the realistic head-to-head racing experience. Ergo, THQ and Rainbow Studios put forth the following caveats to all parties: Do not attempt to make a golf cart do 70 mph, nor launch a sand rail over a moving plane. Moreover, do not undertake the recreation of any and all stunts from MX vs. ATV Unleashed in order to replicate its realistic rag-doll physics. The insane stunts and fierce racing is intended for the sole intent and purpose of an intense gaming experience, not for the discovery of clever ways to inflict bodily harm. Case in point, THQ and Rainbow Studios offer this photo as reference of the projected outcome of ignoring this warning. Honestly, what was this guy thinking? Said driver wasn't anywhere close to successfully completing the jump, nor is the other side of the canyon he was attempting to reach even in the aforementioned photo. In summation, MX vs. ATV Unleashed is not real, don't attempt to make it real.



 rainbow
STUDIOS PRESENTS

MX vs. ATV UNLEASHED

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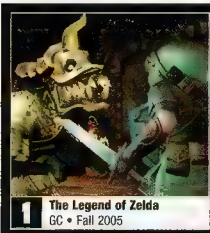
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THE HOT TEN

The waiting is the hardest part

Disagree with the list? You're the ones who created it. Choose and/or lose at egm.1UP.com.

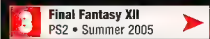
■ *FFXII*'s Barsh, desperately seeking a release date.



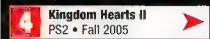
1 **The Legend of Zelda**
GC • Fall 2005



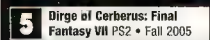
2 **Jade Empire**
XB • March 2005



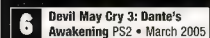
3 **Final Fantasy XII**
PS2 • Summer 2005



4 **Kingdom Hearts II**
PS2 • Fall 2005



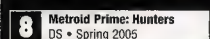
5 **Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII**
GC • Fall 2005



6 **Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening**
PS2 • March 2005



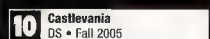
7 **Splinter Cell Chaos Theory**
PS2/XB/GC • March 2005



8 **Metroid Prime: Hunters**
DS • Spring 2005



9 **Star Fox: Assault**
GC • February 2005



10 **Castlevania**
DS • Fall 2005



JADE EMPIRE

XB • March 2005 — It's starting to feel like Chinese water torture. News on *Jade Empire* has slowed to a mere trickle, leaving us to daydream about this epic Oriental adventure's fully customizable characters, action-packed combat, and gorgeous environs. But keep hope within your heart, gentle reader. The next issue of *EGM* will crack open the proverbial *Jade Empire* fortune cookie, spilling its entrails in a tell-all cover story.



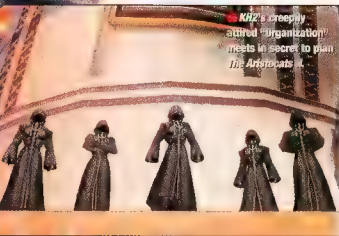
FINAL FANTASY XII

PS2 • Summer 2005 — Sure, the *FFXII* team can render facial hair like nobody's business, but when it comes to making deadlines, they're not so hot. With no firm release date in sight, the anticipation for this ambitious role-playing epic might reach dangerous levels by summer. In fact, don't be surprised if you're looking at screenshots of *Final Fantasy XII* before you get your hands on part XII....



KINGDOM HEARTS II

PS2 • Fall 2005 — For months we've been desperately seeking any new info on *Kingdom Hearts II*. We were hedging our bets that *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories* for GBA would reveal some hints of what's to come—it was billed as the link



between *KH1* and *KH2*, after all—but *Memories* actually poses more questions. Between the mysterious black-cloaked members of "The Organization," the memory-altering witch Namine, and the nebulous deity Diz, we're more lost than ever.



On these streets, Gamers rule.

Gran Turismo™ 4 is now available and ready to roll. Gas it on the right. Any questions? Didn't think so.



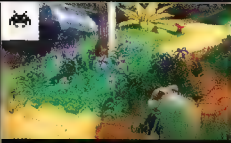
COMING SOON

March of games



■ For Conker, sometimes a cigar isn't just a cigar

MARCH 2005



Conker: Live & Reloaded
Microsoft • XB — Talking-turd humor is timeless, but this platformer's circa 1999 *Matrix* and *T2* parodies now seem stale.



Close Combat: First to Fight
Gathering • XB — A Middle Eastern tour of duty will hone your skills, test your courage, and, if you're unlucky, send you home in a body bag. Take the safer route—team up with three pals in this co-op third-person shooter designed by real Marines.



FIFA Street
EA Big • XB/PS2/GC — Don't know who Zidane and Totti are? You must be American. At least this is *street* soccer.



Pokémon Dash DS
Nintendo • DS — The stylus-controlled races afford all the joy of poking animals with sticks, without that ASPCA business.



Stolen
Hip Games • PS2/XB — Anya, a high-class, high-tech thief gives the stealth genre a shot of sexy.



Splinter Cell Chaos Theory
Ubisoft • PS2/XB/GC
Unlike series protagonist Sam Fisher, we can see this blockbuster coming.



Star Wars Republic Commando
LucasArts • XB — Finally, a game for all those who thought *Rainbow Six* needed more Wookiees (i.e., everyone).



Super Monkey Ball DX
Sega • PS2/XB — Now GameCube owners can no longer hoard all the monkeys-in-balls puzzle-game loving.



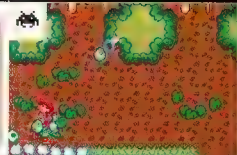
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect
EA Games • PS2/XB/GC — A twitchy shooter, now with more temporal paradoxes than you can shake a stick at.



Unreal Championship 2
Midway • XB — Shooting people is sooo played out. That's why *Unreal* has melee weapons and *Mortal Kombat* Raiden.



WarioWare Twisted!
Nintendo • GBA — If *WarioWare* wasn't insane enough, the new motion sensor now makes you look crazy while playing.



Yoshi's Touch & Go
Nintendo • DS — Man, Yoshi must be pretty damned old by now if he's been baby-sitting Mario since his diaper days.

Also in March

Atari Classics DS Atari • DS	ESPN MLB 2K5 Sega • PS2/XB	Kessen III Koel • PS2	MVP Baseball 2005 EA Sports • PS2/XB/GC	Red Ninja: End of Honor Midway • PS2/XB
Digimon World 4 Bandai • PS2/XB	Fight Night: Round 2 EA Sports • PS2/XB/GC	Mario Party Advance Nintendo • GBA	Pac-Pix DS Namco • DS	Rise of the Kasal Sony CEA • PS2
Dragon Ball Z: Sagas Atari • PS2/XB/GC	Fire Emblem 2 Nintendo • GBA	MLB 2006 Sony CEA • PS2	Pariah Groove Games • XB	Rugby 2005 EA Sports • PS2/XB
Enthusia Professional Racing Konami • PS2	God of War Sony CEA • PS2	Musashi Samurai Legend Square Enix • PS2	Rayman DS Ubisoft • DS	World Tour Soccer 2006 Sony CEA • PS2

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THE EGM 2004 YEAR OF



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Agree to Disagree

Hey, nobody said you had to like our picks. That's why you got to choose your own top 2004 games online. Head to bestof2004.1up.com to see which way your vote rocked.



THE GAME AWARDS

You read that right: 2004 was the biggest year for games ever. Now our highly combative recap picks the best (and worst). Warning: Fighting words ahead...

Twenty years from now, players will pop off their crystal Nintendo BoxStation helmets and reflect on 2004 as a year that wowed. Like a killer fireworks display, it started off big: *Ninja Gaiden*—kaboom! *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow*—crackow! *Chronicles of Riddick*—kebang! Then the whole year superheated into the most explosive

finale of megatitles ever, from *Halo 2* to *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* to *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*. Badoosh! The dust still hasn't settled, and we're certainly not going to wait 20 years to reflect. In fact, we're declaring 2004 the Year of the Game, and now we're settling down to debate its winners and losers, surprises and seen-'em-comings—and you're invited to

pull up a seat and watch the whole bitchfest.

Is it pretty? No. Is it dangerous? A little. But then, playing with fireworks always is (and these are the kind they sell only in Nevada). One final word before we start: We disqualify whatever wins overall Game of the Year from the other categories, just so it doesn't get too greedy. Now let's light the fuse... >

GAME OF THE YEAR

It's a deathmatch for Master Chief, Solid Snake, and GTA's CJ

Senior Editor Crispin Boyer: If the brilliantly bizarre rolling-crap-ball simulator *Katamari Damacy* for PS2 had more to it, I would so pick it for Game of the Year. But I can still indulge my root-for-the-underdog desires by going with *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, because I know all you knuckleheads are just going to say *Halo 2* and be done with it.

Executive Editor Mark MacDonald: You're right, that is a safe assumption, because *Halo 2* is obviously the best

game this year.

Crispin: Says you.

Mark: C'mon. It's got it all: excellent gameplay, superb A.I., amazing graphics, never-ending multiplayer fun—you name it. And say what you want about the ending, 'cause the game ain't over yet—everyone is still playing the unbelievably deep multiplayer modes online and will be for months. Apologies to *Paper Mario*, *Snake*, and Mr. Fisher, but it's no contest.

Previews Editor Shane Bettenhausen:

For me, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* goes straight to the top with a bullet—make that a small thermonuclear device. It has unbelievable visuals, perfect gameplay, and the best boss encounters in any game, ever. *Halo 2* is stellar, and *Katamari* is quirky fun, but neither approaches the epic, emotionally-charged thrill of *Snake's* latest adventure. Oh, and comparing *MGS3's* story to *GTA's*? Lowlife thugs running delivery missions isn't my idea of compelling narrative.

Crispin: OK, white-bread, we can disagree about the story, but that's only one gun in *San Andreas'* arsenal. More than ever, this new *GTA* is like 20 games in one. Gambling, racing, jetpacking, pool sharking—it's insanely ambitious. Can you valet park a freaking car in *Halo 2*?

Mark: No. You can't wash windows or do the laundry either. Boo-hoo. All respect to *GTA*, but however many games-in-one it might be, it's gathering dust now while we're all still playing *Halo 2*. Snuh!

AND THE WINNER IS...

HALO 2

System: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft
Runner-up: *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*

Talk about a close one. The mighty *Halo 2* defeated *San Andreas* by just one vote in our staffwide poll, with *MGS3* sneaking up from behind to take a close-third place. Just goes to show that a compelling story and killer gameplay aren't everything—*Halo 2's* crowd-pleasing online multiplayer modes are what put this supersequel on top.

■ Accepting for Master Chief: spent shell No. 49,302.



L.I.L. AWARDS...

Best Celib Performance:

Vin Diesel, *Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay* (XB • VU Games)



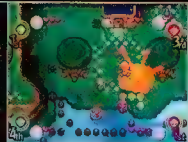
Best Online Multiplayer:

Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow (XB version only • Ubisoft)



Best Offline Multiplayer:

The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures (GC • Nintendo)





**"BEFORE NORMANDY
WE WERE JUST SOLDIERS."**

"BUT EIGHT DAYS IN HELL MADE US BROTHERS."

- SGT. MATT BAKER



Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language



PlayStation 2



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PLAYSTATION 2 GAME OF THE YEAR

Can a rolling ball of crap really crush GTA and MGS3?

News Editor Bryan Holtz: So it looks like the big three contenders among the staff are *GTA: San Andreas*, *Metal Gear Solid 3*, and *Katamari Damacy*. Well, that's two out of three right? You could probably play *GTA: San Andreas* till the next one arrives, and *MGS3* sets new standards for storytelling, but *Katamari*? Look, I appreciate its originality, but there are much better PS2 games to play (the new *Ratchet & Clank*, anyone?) than something that has you rolling around in crap for five hours.

Managing Editor Jennifer Teas: Obviously, Bryan, you don't appreciate *Katamari*'s originality. Any game that makes rolling around in crap fun and addictive is an award winner in my book. Plus, this ain't any old crap—this is neat Japanese crap!
Editor-in-Chief Dan "Shoo" Hsu: *Katamari*'s fun, but *Game of the Year* over *MGS3* or *San Andreas*? I give a big "LOL" to that. *GTA* wins, hands down. You might not think it does, because of its over-the-

hill graphics and very specific criminal-lifestyle theme, but this is as close to virtual reality as any console game cut there. Just go in the game and do what you want. I think *MGS3* and *Katamari* may be minigames within *San Andreas*.

Jennifer: I'm in a tough spot here. It's much easier to defend a masterpiece like *MGS3* or a megamonster like *GTA*—both those games get proper respect from me. But for all their innovation, they're still sequels that fit within existing parameters

of games as we know them. *Katamari* packs such a "wow!" punch. It makes me see all sorts of possibilities for fundamentally new gameplay mechanics. That's what I want to see more of in games. Plus, it rhymes with calamari. Doesn't that count for anything anymore?

Shoo: Well, now what am I supposed to say? Jen pretty much disarmed me with that "it's easy to defend *GTA*" comment. She's right: *San Andreas* is an easy, obvious pick. But I still pick it, so there.

AND THE WINNER IS... GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

Publisher: Rockstar
Runner-up: *Metal Gear Solid 3*, *Snake Eater*

Sure, we had a merry go-around with *Katamari*'s rolling-pin head, and *Snake Eater*, Snake's latest adventure nearly swept away the trophy, but in the end, enough editors stuck up for the new *GTA*. Not that *San Andreas* star CJ, a streetwise survivor whose only father figure was outlined in chalk, needs it. By the time he gets his hands on his own jumpjet, rakes in casino pots, and scarfs a billion burgers in this grandpappy of all have-it-your-way games, CJ's got all the respect he needs.



PS2 GAME OF THE YEAR
GTA: San Andreas

L'I'L AWARDS...

Best Game No One Played:
Ralliesport Challenge 2
(XB • Microsoft)

Most Devious Boss:
Metal Gear Solid 3's
The End
(PS2 • Konami)

Weapon of Choice:
Psi-Ops' Brain Powers
(PS2/XB • Midway)

XBOX GAME OF THE YEAR

A ninja, a spy, and a convict walk right into our debate

Crispin: This vote would be cinchy if *Halo 2* hadn't already won Game of the Year, but our rules forbid the overall winner from competing in the other categories. What does that leave for Xbox? *Blinx 2*?

Uh, no, I'm backing a dark horse: *Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay*. The movie sucked and tanked. The game is amazing. Crazy!

Shoe: *Riddick* is mind-blowing. The game-play's a bit simple, but the graphics and environments make for a sci-fi adventure

that's better than most of what Hollywood craps out. But I'm voting for *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow* on its multiplayer merits alone. Two spies, two mercenaries...it's a revolutionary game that hooked me for months. Only its cheaters and steep learning curve hold it from *Halo*-like stardom.

Reviews Editor Demian Linn: I'll tip my bowler hat to both *Riddick*—the best thing Vin Diesel's ever touched, or even stared blankly at—and *Pandora* (on Xbox Live only; I'd had enough sneaky by level two

of the game's single player), but *Ninja Gaiden*'s near-perfect take on ninja-related jumping and slashing may well be the best action game of aught-four. Sure, the camera occasionally sucks and the game's hard as hell, but the controls and sheer ninjatude will eviscerate you in the end. And I mean that in the best possible way.

Crispin: Yeah, but neither *Pandora* nor your ninja can top *Riddick* in terms of atmosphere. I've seen cheerier episodes of *Oz*, and we all know what happens on

that prison show. *Riddick* was so grimy, I felt like I needed a shower after playing it. And I mean that in the best way, too.

Shoe: And I mean this in the best possible way: *Pandora* is the Xbox Game of the Year, and you are both dumb and/or wrong if you think otherwise.

Demian: Sounds like what you're both saying is *Gaiden* was too tough for ya—and I mean that in the worst possible way. Let's see if the rest of the staff is hardcore. To the voting booths!



AND THE WINNER IS... NINJA GAIDEN

Publisher: Tecmo

Runner-up: *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow*

Snowiness counts for something, and *Gaiden*'s emerald-misted bamboo forests and mountaintop estates with gold foil screens and sliding doors are pure ninja magic. Gameplay means more, and this gem works like a full-faceted fighter—your kung fu is stronger than in any other beat-'em-up (before or after it), and survival requires unflickering focus and hair-trigger reflexes.

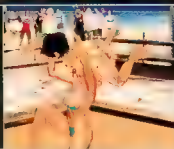
Best Music:

Kalamari Damacy
(PS2 • Namco)



Almost Better Than Porn:

Rumble Roses
(PS2 • Konami)



Mightiest Completion:

Street Fighter Anniversary Collection
(PS2 • Capcom)





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44 B.C. ROMAN EMPIRE

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GAMECUBE GAME OF THE YEAR

It all comes down to one killer final boss

Bryant: Wow...toughie. *Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door* proved that thin is in, but I pick *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*. The game's drop-dead gorgeous, the puzzles really test your noggin, and I'm still recovering from those nail-biting boss battles. Plus, any game that gets the schtickful Mr. MacDonald to stand an inch from the television so he can talk-trash to the final boss earns an award in my book.

Jennifer: Can't we just give the award to Nintendo and call it even?

Bryant: That's too easy.

Jennifer: But these games are all fantastic, and I suppose I'd just like to give some serious recognition to the underdog. A weed-n-garden sim like *Pikmin 2* isn't exactly sexy—you have to be special like me to appreciate it—but I love games that take you out of the box. Or, in this case, out of the house and into the yard.

Mark: I love all these games, but *Paper Mario* deserves the top spot. *Echoes* definitely got my adrenaline pumping, but it

didn't take too many chances with the *Prime* formula, while *Thousand-Year Door* took *Paper Mario* to a whole other level. A combat system so deep you never get tired of random battles and probably the best dialogue in any game, ever? That deserves recognition.

Jennifer: Lest we forget, *Pikmin 2* took the first game's novel gameplay, refined it, then gave it almost limitless playability with its multiplayer modes and random dungeons. So what if you never trash-

talked any bosses in the game? And nice work avoiding that subject, Mark. *Pikmin 2* just packs a low-key, quirky fun you can't find anywhere else.

Bryant: To go back to Mark's point, there's no need to take chances with the *Prime* formula; developer Retro had already concocted the magnificent blend of exploration and combat. And if I remember correctly, *Halo 2* really didn't mess with its game plan either, and we all know how much Mark loved that one.

AND THE WINNER IS...

METROID PRIME 2: ECHOES

Publisher: Nintendo

Runner-up: *Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door*

Lobster-armored sie-warrior Samus doesn't quite flatten the competition (namely, the origami-powered *Paper Mario* and the gardening astronauts of *Pikmin 2*), but the roll-about babe comes close. Hypnotic atmosphere, audio, and art direction put you in her space boots; crafty plane-hopping puzzles that demand the full use of your sneazy powers show you how delightful, fully tough those boots are to mill.



L'L AWARDS...

Best Looking:

Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay
(XB • VU Games)



Most Innovative:

Katamari Damacy
(PS2 • Namco)



Most Fun for \$20:

ESPN NFL 2K5
(PS2/XB/GC • ESPN Videogames)



HANDHELD GAME OF THE YEAR

Old school versus touchable technology

Crispin: Hmm...not much of a handheld scene last year, despite the launch of the Nintendo DS. I mean, launch game *Feel the Magic* was fun...for an hour or so. No way all that screen petting can top something like *Astro Boy: Omega Factor* or *Metroid: Zero Mission* for the GBA.

Shane: The man speaks truth—*Zero Mission* is stellar, especially for old-timers who played the NES original. This remake deviates playfully with your expectations, tossing in clever new bits to keep you on your toes. My close second place is *Boktai 2*, a great game that none of you

will ever play in a million years—it's freakin' *Metal Gear Solid* with vampires! **Crispin:** But at least *Feel the Magic* tries something new. It's the one DS game that shows off the system's potential. And *Astro Boy's* supercool...for a baby game. **Shane:** Hey, it's not for babies. It's like

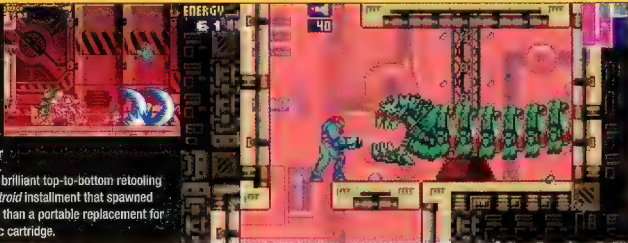
classic shooters *Gradus* and *Gunstar Heroes* mashed together, with a dash of Disney charm! It's a super-hardcore game that will leave babies crying, in fact. **Crispin:** Touched a nerve, eh? At least we agree *Metroid* is tops. Let's hit the staff vote and see if everyone else agrees.

AND THE WINNER IS... METROID: ZERO MISSION

GBA • Nintendo • Runner-up: *Astro Boy: Omega Factor*

It's really no contest. Not even *Feel the Magic's* newfangled touchy-feely technology or *Astro Boy's* hardcore (but don't say babyish!) charm could top *Zero Mission*,

more of a brilliant top-to-bottom retooling of the *Metroid* installment that spanned the series than a portable replacement for the classic cartridge.



MULTIPLATFORM GAME OF THE YEAR

Can brooding good looks win out over road rage?

Crispin: *Burnout 3: Takedown* or *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within*? *Burnout 3* or *Warrior Within*? *Burnout* or *Warrior Within*? *Burnout* or *Warrior Within*? I could really go either way on this puppy. **Bryan:** Or you could go *Madden*. It's crazy that after 15 years, Johnny Ballgame is

still the mayor of Footballtown, U.S.A. And unlike the coach-turned-broadcaster, this series is getting better with age. **Demian:** Hold everything. *Prince of Persia*, the nobody-understands-me-but-let's-rock-out-to-some nu-metal-tunes edition? *Madden*? I feel like Dennis

Hopper's character in *Blue Velvet*, and you guys just ordered Heinekens. F*** that s***—*Burnout 3!* **Crispin:** Ah, who am I kidding? *Burnout 3* was just too fun. Especially online. And I'm not just picking it because Demian seems to have flown into a rage.

Demian: *Burnout 3!* Burnout 3! Aiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii! **Crispin:** Ah, looks like it's time to get a new Demian.

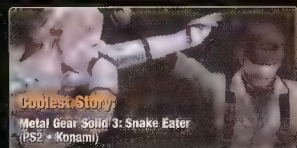


AND THE WINNER IS... BURNOUT 3

EA • Runner-up: *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within*

Burnout crosses the multi-console finish line uncontested with hyper-responsive handling, masterfully planned

courses, pile-ups worthy of the national news, and blink-and-you'll-brainfade-Winnebago speed.





▶ EGM'S THIRD ANNUAL TOBIAS BRUCKNER MEMORIAL AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE FIELD OF CRAPULENCE

Awful games need a mascot who can relate to them. So once again, we summon the dino-riding, half-cyborg spirit

of Tobias Bruckner—main villain of 2002's awful *Turok: Evolution*—to call 'em like we smell 'em. Poor Tobias per-

ished at the end of that terrible game, but in our hearts he'll always live on, in cahoots with crap. —Shawn Elliott

**MISSED THE POINT PRIZE:
FIGHT CLUB**

Someone ignored the "you do not make *Fight Club* merchandise" memo and green-lit this PS2 and XB game about a movie with an anti-consumerism message—Stank, Brad Pitt and Ed Norton balked at the chance to cash in, but not husky rocker Meatloaf. His man-mammaries are about the only recognizable likenesses on display.

WHY GET IT FREE WHEN YOU CAN BUY IT AWARD: THE GUY GAME

Nowadays, nobody needs to look hard for T and A; it finds us first. (Try Googling any word, including generally safe ones like "sweater" and "puppet," and see.) So what's with a bland PS2 and XB party game that makes you sit through hours of girls blathering before perking up? The college coeds in a certain direct-to-video series (it's wild) never had to name the current president before lifting their shirts and showing off their Dow-Corning labels. Now Google Dow-Corning to understand that joke.

REDNECK CULTURE AWARD: TEST DRIVE: EVE OF DESTRUCTION

A dead deer here, a mud bog there—while other games dabble in redneck doings, *Test Drive (PS2/XB)* deep-fries the whole damn turkey. You can not only crash the sorts of cars that guys with more kids than teeth find when they mow the lawn, but also unlock clips of real-life yokels driving school buses and boat trailers backwards around tracks. Can we get a gap-toothed whistle?

CLEARANCE AISLE SOUNDTRACK AWARD: DONKEY KONGA

We dig banging on GC rhythm game *Donkey Konga's* bongos as much as the next geek—although a strap-on-grilla chest would've been even cooler—but man, that music! Knowing the neighbors could hear us jamming to no-talent nobodies Jesus Jones and Chumbawamba was bad enough, but when our friends walked in as we rocked "DK Rap" and day-care sing-along "Bingo," we might as well have asked for a beating.

FAKEST REPRESENTATION OF A FAKE SPORT: SHOWDOWN: LEGENDS OF WRESTLING

We all know wrestling is, you know, "sports entertainment." But the guys in squared-circle glitchfest *Showdown (PS2/XB)* don't even try. They grapple 10 feet apart and pile drive without touching. Pretend harder!

JUST CASHING HIS CHECKS AWARD: TODD MCFARLANE

Spawn creator Todd McFarlane often seems more interested in creating yawns, and '04 was no exception for the comic-artist-turned-toy-mogul. Apocalyptic horsemen were too passé for *Spawn: Armageddon (PS2/XB)*, so the artist whipped up *Bullydozer*, a demented bulldozer (seriously) with a perverse compulsion to expose his one weak spot. Then his oh-so *Evil Prophecy (PS2)* brought us more skeletons, werewolves, peg-legged pirates, and bimbos with big guns than a drug store Halloween aisle.

BEATEN BY THEIR OWN GAME BOOBY PRIZE: CATWOMAN'S BADDIES

There's exactly one way to catch evildoers in *Catwoman*, the multiplatform counterpart to the glitzy flick that also failed to land on its feet: 'em into trash cans or other bins. But there's an easy way out: If you aren't quick enough, they'll climb in on their own accord. How'd that happen? This top-secret internal memo tells all:
Game designer 1: We gotta nix the dumpster diving, it's taking our testers too long to knock home the baddies.
Game designer 2: Hey, if the trashy gameplay goes, then so do I.
Game designer 3: OK, just make sure the goons jump in on their own.

JUST LIKE REAL LIFE: LIFELINE

When aliens assault an orbiting Hilton, you must help erstwhile waitress Rio thwart the attack...with nothing but a headset. Think it, *Lifeline's* talk-your-way-outta-this-one gameplay isn't worth shouting about because the lady just won't listen. It doesn't matter whether you shout or mumble like MC Chingy. Want to be ignored and misunderstood by a chick? Try a club; it's cheaper.

OVER-THE-TOOP OVEREXPOSURE AWARD: BLOODRAYNE 2'S RAYNE

Just because this goth-kid-killing, corset-filling vamp is queen of the damned doesn't make her queen of all media, too. From her silly song-and-dance routine on MTV to her topless pictorial in *Playboy*, this girl has been everywhere. Rayne, you're a beautiful girl. But if you keep showing your stuff like that, the boys will just think you're slutty. ☹

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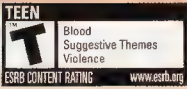
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WELCOME TO THE FAMILY



By Evan Shamoon

From Brando to the bloody horse head, the gang's all here in *The Godfather*, EA's lavish PlayStation 2, Xbox—and Xbox 2—take on the greatest Mafia movie of all time

"Goddamn FBI don't respect nothin'."

—Santino "Sonny" Corleone

Respect. It's been the mantra of many great minds and institutions throughout the years, ranging from the Pastafarians to the US Army to Ali G. Rodney Dangerfield never got enough of it, while Aretha Franklin took it upon herself to spell it out for us. Most recently, it became a critical component of your character's status in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. But nobody has embodied the notion of respect quite like the Mafia. You know...*respect*.

"It's really the core tenet of our game," says David DeMartini, executive producer

of Electronic Arts' forthcoming *Godfather* videogame. "So from a scoring standpoint, what you're attempting to build—in addition to a whole litany of things, including moving up in the organization and getting to different levels—is respect. It's kind of monetized in the game, and your standing is your respect level and character class relative to anybody else's respect level and character class. That drives a lot of the gameplay consequences and the way the game plays out."

But first, a bit of context: *The Godfather*

is a free-roaming, *Grand Theft Auto*-style romp through New York City, spanning the years 1945 to 1955. The game is based on Mario Puzo's original novel of the same name, which encompasses events of Francis Ford Coppola's Oscar-nabbing film, as well as a host of other incidents and details that never made their way to the big screen. The game will be coming out this Christmas for PlayStation 2, Xbox, and Xbox 2 (or "Xenon," if you dig code names). In fact, all the screens in this feature are from what's called a "gameplay target demo" of the Xbox 2 version—essentially a prerendered video of the game's interactive sequences created to meet the Xbox 2's technical specifications. Long story short: *The Godfather* should look like this on Xbox 2.

Suffice it to say, this is one of the most



...the first time you look at it? According to EA, all the scenes in the game are based on a series of interviews with the author of the book, Mario Puzo.

"We can disguise events. We can build up to them differently. We can spring them on the player."

—Creative Director Philip Campbell

noteworthy movie licenses in existence, and its close proximity to its many fans' hearts means that EA certainly has its work cut out for it. The game is still quite early in development; while all of the ideas and plans have essentially been finalized, much of the development and implementation of these ideas is still in its early stages. Our exclusive first look reveals a game that shows a great deal of potential; if EA is able to implement the concepts it has on paper, this could very well become the game that designer Peter Molyneux always promised with his hyper-hyped Xbox RPG *Fable* (albeit with the addition of a whole lot of spaghetti and a bloody horse head).

(God)father figure

DeMartini delivers the high-level picture: "So you've got this playground, or probably multiple playgrounds—five family territories—and then kind of an open playground in the middle. You can weave your way through 'open world' objectives—stuff that shows up on your task pad, opportunities that present themselves based on where you are in the world. There will also be mini-missions that you'll have the opportunity to undertake, then there will be main core objectives that we're going to route all the players through." (He refers to these objectives as the "primary touchstones" from the film.) The team expects 80 percent or so of the

MADE MEN



Don Vito Corleone

Don Vito Corleone is a man of his word. He has four natural children (Sonny, Fredo, Michael, and Connie) and an adopted child named Tom Hagen. Don Vito is the patriarch of the Corleone family, and you may refer to him as "Godfather."

Videogame-character equivalent:

The paddle from *Pong*



action to take place on foot, with the other 20 percent putting players behind the wheel of various old-timely automobiles.


Somewhat surprisingly, Michael Corleone is not the protagonist of the game; rather, a robust character-creation system allows players to generate and customize a mafioso of their own. EA

promises this feature will allow for the same level of depth and creative capability as the "GameFace" engine found in EA's own *Tiger Woods PGA Tour*. You'll be able to customize weapons, clothing, scars—all the way down to certain nicknames tied to particular characteristics.

And while it's plausible that this ▶



■ Can you spot the noninteractive cut-scene from the above screens? Surprise—It's the first shot. The far-right shot is gameplay, showing how the camera cuts in close when you confront people.

A man with dark hair, wearing a white shirt with black stripes on the sleeve, is shown in profile from the chest up. He is holding a clear glass with a lime wedge in it. The background is a plain, light blue color.

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purged the earth
of evil. I fear only
sunlight and girls.”

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■ Pants up to your navel: It was the style at the time.



■ Don't like the look of your thug's mug? The game lets you make your own man.

▶ character-maker feature may have something to do with Al Pacino's refusal to reprise his role as Michael Corleone. In the game, DeMartini insists that this was, in fact, the plan all along. (Interesting side note: Rival publisher VU Games is still trying to hire Pacino to voice Tony Montana in its upcoming *Scarface* game.) "The question is, do I want to play as Al Pacino, or do I want to experience the experiences that Al Pacino's character experiences in the world?" DeMartini asks. "Using my personality, what choices would I make given the different situations?"

Family reunion

Which is not to say *The Godfather* is short

on star power. Far from it: EA has secured the voices and likenesses of such mafioso icons as James Caan (Sonny Corleone) and Robert Duval (Tom Hagen), and other familiar faces are in the works as well. Most impressively, EA managed to get Marlon Brando on board, recording his voice session for the game just six months before the actor died of lung cancer. "We had an opportunity to discuss with Marlon some of the greatness that was *The Godfather* and some of his perspectives on the film," DeMartini says. "We've been working in very close collaboration with Paramount to obtain the original actors and recapture some of that authenticity of their performances."

MADE MEN



Michael Corleone

Don Vito Corleone's youngest son and a war hero, Michael has no interest in his father's business early on. But events make the choice for him and he soon becomes the *Godfather* trilogy's key figure, although you never play as him in the game.

Videogame-character equivalent: Solid Snake



While Coppola himself has refrained from any direct involvement in the game, EA says he has been supportive of the idea. "We did meet with him," DeMartini says, "and he embraced the project—not as something he wanted to work on, but he invited us up to his private library, where we spent many hours, and we have

access to all of his notes via this library. He was very gracious, but he's done three of these things and he's really not interested in doing any more *Godfather* stuff."

Structural integrity

To help the entire team better understand the underlying structure of *The Godfather*,

FAMILY HISTORY

Rule numero uno in the Mafia: Don't dis the don. So if you haven't seen *The Godfather* in a while (must not have TBS), you'd better bone up before you meet him in the game. Here's a refresher of major mafioso moments and their likely interactive translations...



Big-screen moment:

In the movie's opening scene, poor undertaker Bonasera comes to the Godfather begging for revenge for his recently raped daughter. When he whispers into the don's ear what he wants done to the offenders, even the Godfather looks taken aback.

Little-screen possibilities:

The Godfather finally agrees to help Bonasera out and assigns the job to New York mob captain Clemenza. Perhaps this will become hit No. 1 in the game?

Classic line:

"I can't remember the last time you invited me to your house for a cup of coffee, even though my wife was godmother to your only daughter. Let's be frank: You never wanted my friendship, and you were afraid to be in my debt."



Big-screen moment:

The wedding of Don Corleone's daughter, Connie, Singer/actor Johnny Fontane shows up unexpectedly and sings a song for the crowd.

Little-screen possibilities:

Grand Theft Auto meets *Karaoke Revolution*. You figure it out... 'cause we can't.

Classic line:

"No Sicilian can refuse any request on his daughter's wedding day."



Big-screen moment:

Hollywood director Jack Woltz makes the mistake of crossing the Corleone family and ends up sleeping with his beloved horse—minus everything below the neck.

Little-screen possibilities:

In the movie, there's a lot of time unaccounted for between Woltz cursing out Don Corleone and then winding up with a severed horse head in his bed. The first horse ever executed in a videogame? We're not ruling it out.

Classic line:

"You like horses? I like horses, I love 'em. Beautiful, expensive racehorses."



Big-screen moment:

In the first of many big-screen mob hits to take place in empty fields, double-crossing chauffeur Paulie is "taken out" amongst the stalks of wheat. How many times do we have to say it? You don't sell out the don, and expect to live.

Little-screen possibilities:

It sounds like you'll be going on quite a few missions with the likeable (if unreliable) Paulie. Perhaps you'll be tasked with offing the guy yourself, point blank? Sounds intriguing.

Classic line:

"Leave the gun. Take the cannolis."



MADE MEN



The eldest son of Don Vito Corleone, Sonny has a temper shorter than Paulie Shore's career. This makes him a faulty heir to his father's throne and ultimately leads to his premature death.

Video game-character equivalent: Bowser (Mario series)



"I imagine our living world of New York between 1945 and 1955 is like this table. And then *The Godfather* story—the movie itself, which is basically our starting off point—is a straight narrative shot through that [table]. It's very linear; it's got a destiny for its story line. The way I've always visualized our story [Campbell swerves his finger back and forth across the table] is that it kind of winds around through this line and intersects the *Godfather* story at key points. These are the moments we can exploit, where our player can be present [and] take part in them physically. Sometimes our player can replace the character that's in the movie; sometimes he's in the scene. My goal is always to

make the person playing the game feel like, 'S***, that guy was in the movie. I remember that bit!' I remember Tom Hagen at the window gawking like this for the horse's head! And the thing is, of course, he never did!"

Along with help from Mark Winegardner (the author selected by the Puzo family to write the series' most recent addition, *The Godfather Returns*), Campbell is the person given the hefty task of massaging Puzo's novel into interactive form. "Certain things we simply cannot change," he points out. "Sonny has to die—he dies in the movie, and he has to die in the game. We can't 'save' Sonny. But it's not going to be fun for the game designer—or the player

EA has set up an enormous "wall of game," on which it has essentially blue-printed the entire interactive narrative—from start to finish. It's an astonishingly comprehensive chart, one that gives a good idea of just how much preparation has gone into the game. (EA spent an entire year in reproduction before even

writing a line of programming code. "We really wanted to nail this one," DeMartini says with a smile.)

It's a subject that Creative Director Philip Campbell is keen to talk about as we sit at a coffee table digesting a hearty lunch (Italian food, naturally). "At the risk of sounding like a total wanker," he says



Big-screen moment:

Thanks to some shady connections with the fuzz, rival Mafia boss Sollozzo has all of Don Corleone's men removed from the don's hospital room. Michael arrives to find his father a sitting duck...and convinces the nurse to help move his father's hospital bed out of sight.

Little-screen possibilities:

We're thinking of a top-down, *Tetris*-style puzzle game. Gurney Shuffle, anyone?

Classic line:

"Do you know my father? Men are coming here to kill him. Do you understand? Now help me, please."



Big-screen moment:

The ultimate in revenge: Michael's classic killing of Sollozzo and the crooked chief of police McCluskey. Michael's walk back from the bathroom (where his gun is planted) to the diner table is one of the most gripping scenes in the history of cinema.

Little-screen possibilities:

Rife with dramatic tension, gameplay possibilities, and violence, you just know it's going to be in there. But if the player's not in control of Michael, how else is it gonna go down? We're interested to see how this one plays out.

Classic line:

"I have to go to the bathroom. Is that all right?"



Big-screen moment:

Michael goes to Italy to avoid unwanted attention after the murders of Sollozzo and McCluskey. He falls in love, gets married, milks a cow or two, and watches his wife blow up in a car bombing.

Little-screen possibilities:

Will EA build an interactive Sicily for what is an essentially actionless—but important—stretch of the story? Don't count on it.

Classic line:

"In any case, I want to meet your daughter. With your permission and under the supervision of your family. With all decorum. With all respect. I am an honorable man."



Big-screen moment:

Sonny, Michael's hotheaded brother, rushes to the defense of his younger sister and gets ambushed by Sollozzo's men at a toiletbooth. He takes roughly 300 bullets to the chest before taking his last breath.

Little-screen possibilities:

The game's creative director, Philip Campbell, points out that simply going along for the ride would be...predictable. We know we won't be able to prevent it, but maybe we'll get the chance to go after the perps?

Classic line:

"That son-of-a-bitch. That son-of-a-bitch...."



Big-screen moment:

The juxtaposition of life and death works amazingly well in a linear medium like film, but can such cinematic mastery be translated into something interactive?

Little-screen possibilities:

The juxtaposition of life and death works amazingly well in a linear medium like film, but can such cinematic mastery be translated into something interactive?

Classic line:

"Michael Rizzi, will you be baptized? I will!"



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DYNASTY WARRIORS

March 2005

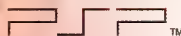
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"We had an opportunity to discuss with Marlon some of the greatness that was *The Godfather*."

—Executive Producer David DeMartino

game player, for that matter—if you just go along on the mission with Sonny as he's about to die. The real trick is to make people forget that it's about to happen... Because we're telling the story like this [swerves finger back and forth across the table again], intersecting at certain points, it's not phased like the movie. This means we can disguise events. We can build up to them differently. We can spring them on the player."

Sleeping with the fishes

More than anything, however, the developers' loftiest goal is to make a game that truly reacts to the player's actions. Repeated references are made to "a world with a memory"—one that tracks the player's every choice, every interaction,

every transgression. "When you look at *The Godfather* logo," explains Senior Producer Hunter Smith, "you see this puppeteer concept—this notion of pulling the strings. We're trying to give you the opportunity to pull the strings. You're living in this world, and you think about your interactions: How am I going to build more respect? How am I gonna make my way up in this world?"

DeMartino elaborates: "An example would come as you're at an entry level in the family organization. If you move into other family territory, you're not at a very high respect level—and you're gonna have a harder time doing things in those other territories. You might see those other families quickly kick your ass out of their territories, as you're not at a high enough

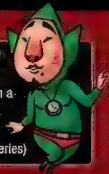
MADE MEN



Fredo Corleone

Fredo is the Godfather's second son. Something of a cross between a broken spoon and a doorknob, Fredo has a dim-witted disposition that makes him a constant liability in the ever-so-prickly world of organized crime.

Videogame-character equivalent: Tinkie (*Zelda* series)



rank or level to be in their space. So you're not going to see concrete barriers to keep you out of that space, but game systems will react against your respect level and your rank—and your relative geographical position within the game—and there could be consequences for you moving into certain spaces or not." Smith believes the game needs to distinguish itself from the kinds of narratives told in

other media. "A film or a novel is about your ability to empathize with that character," he says. "But we're about interactively, so you're actually guiding your character and dealing with the consequences. We're trying to leverage what our medium does versus what a linear medium does." Of course, nonlinear games are nothing new. Why, just a few pages ago, we described *The Godfather* as a *GTA*-style



Although EA won't confirm it, *The Godfather* is rumored to be the priciest game ever made.



OFFERS WE CAN REFUSE

Five movie moments we really hope don't make it into the game...



Rampant wife beating

Please, please don't make this a minigame.



Bloody horse beheading

As seen in our Family history sidebar, Don seemed to have thought we're not interested in equine decapitation.



Sofia Coppola's beheading

We know she was in *Godfather III* and not the only female film, but we just want to make sure she's



Morticianing

After Sonny gets pumped full of lead, his father asks Bonasara to make the horrific corpse look presentable. We want nothing to do with this scene.



Godfathering

Sitting behind a desk, speaking out of the side of our mouth, and occasionally scratching our chin doesn't sound like particularly good times. Nor does getting shot five times in the back and spending months in bed recuperating. Fortunately, EA assures us that this will not be a part of the experience.



■ Grand theft horseless carriage: The game will make up for the movie's lack of chase scenes.

"We're trying to give you the opportunity to pull the strings."

—Senior Producer Hunter Smith

game. "The big difference between us and some other competitors," Campbell says, "is that we have this very strong story that we have to work around. We want people to get through our game, we want people to get to the end, but we don't want them to lose the ability to stretch out into the living world and experience all that emergent gameplay. I mean, what's the point of having a good book or a good movie if you can't get to the end?"

Indeed, this is the central philosophy

behind *The Godfather*—and what its developers hope will set it apart from the ever-expanding crowd. "I'm most excited about the scale of what we're trying to do in creating the world and the depth of the experience we're trying to create," Smith says. "I think we're looking at these open-world games and saying, 'How do we make it have a rich fiction, as well as make you feel like you actually have consequences for your actions and that each moment builds upon your own expe-

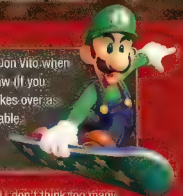
MADE MEN



Tom Hagen

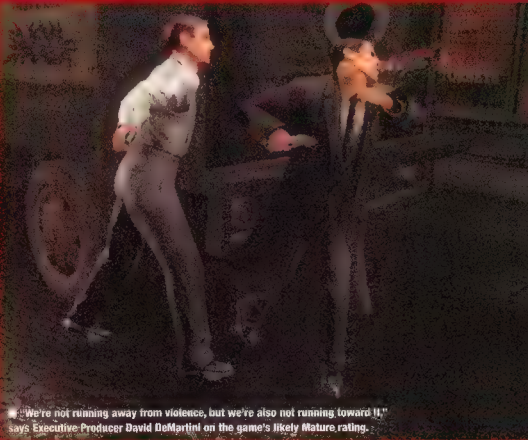
The German-Irish Hagen was adopted by Don Vito when he was just a boy. With a background in law (if you can't join 'em, beat 'em!), he eventually takes over as consigliere. Underrated and incredibly reliable.

Videogame-character equivalent: Luigi (*Mario* series)



rience of the game?" In our mind, next-generation means [that during] every moment you're investing deeper into your

experience...and I don't think too many games—especially in the action genre—have accomplished that." ❖



■ "We're not running away from violence, but we're also not running toward it," says Executive Producer David DeMartino on the game's likely Mature rating.



WIRELESS GUIDE

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A bonus supplement to
Electronic Gaming Monthly

AHEAD OF THE GAME

Nokia Finally N-Gaged

The N-Gage finally becomes a viable gaming platform with a string of hit games.



BALDUR'S GATE GOES MOBILE

>1UP rates the mobile adaptation of BioWare's D&D classic.

FIRST LOOK AT 2 FAST 2 FURIOUS

>The popular *The Fast and the Furious* mobile racer sees a sequel.

>POCKET
KINGDOM
Sega's massively
multiplayer
mobile online
RPG

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Combat Fighting

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XR-Jetski

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JOIN THE FAMILY



READY 2 RACE?

One of mobile gaming's most popular racers sees a sequel



One of the biggest racers in the mobile space is about to see a sequel. *2 Fast 2 Furious*, the action-packed sequel to the highly successful *The Fast and the Furious* film, makes its way onto mobile phones in a high-speed street-racing adventure. Developer Digital Bridges, must deal with the high expectations of fans eagerly awaiting this sequel—*The Fast and the Furious* Java game was downloaded over a half million times, and the sequel is projected to outsell it.

The sprite-based game takes a page from Sega's classic street racer *Outrun*. And though

it may not feature a hot blonde in a convertible Ferrari, the game does have 12 tracks with opponents who progressively increase in difficulty, cars from the film, and a new "connected" option that allows you to check scores and rankings. Players will also be able to upload best times on the global leaderboards, as well as download ghost opponents to race against.

By the time you read this, the *2 Fast 2 Furious* game should be available for download at www.thefastandthefurious.com.

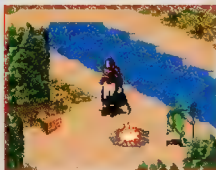


BALDUR'S GATE MOBILE REVIEWED



Baldur's Gate - 7.5

Baldur's Gate has long been an influence on the role-playing-game genre because of its *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*-based rule set for characters, its combat, and its dialogue and narrative style. Sorrent has now compacted the *Baldur's Gate* universe in an entirely new



adventure for mobile phones.

For those unfamiliar with *Baldur's Gate*, the story takes place in the Forgotten Realms, a land with a variety of terrains. You create your character by selecting from four races and five classes. Once chosen, you can distribute ability points among character attributes, including strength, dexterity, intelligence, wisdom, constitution, and charisma, but you must use your points wisely since they directly impact gameplay.

Using the mobile phone's control pad can be awkward when playing a game that relies on an isometric angle for gameplay. (I was longing for an analog stick the entire time.) Traversing dungeons and walking

down forest paths can be problematic because of the phone's directional pad, the strange collision detection of onscreen characters, and the "invisible walls" characters will walk into. Also, pressing "O" for object selection is tedious when you are engaged in combat with multiple enemies.

Still, Sorrent has taken BioWare's enormous role-playing game and successfully simplified it just enough for it to still be considered a large game by mobile-phone standards. Though the gameplay is quite linear and exploring maps can feel repetitious, *Baldur's Gate* is a great adventure for mobile-phone-owning RPG fans.

NOKIA FINALLY N-GAGED

Nokia's mobile gaming platform finally becomes viable with a string of hits

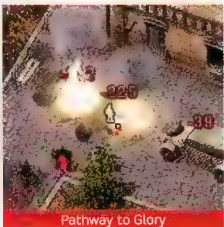
After a disastrous launch, Nokia has made great strides in improving its mobile platform. Not too long ago it introduced the QD model of its handset, which addressed many of the issues gamers had with the original design. And now, Nokia has demonstrated that the N-Gage is a platform that has some truly great games. Take a look at some of its recent highlights.



Pocket Kingdom



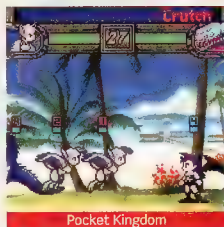
X-Men Legends



Pathway to Glory

Pocket Kingdom - 9.0

Developed by the talented folks at Sega, *Pocket Kingdom* is a massively multiplayer mobile RPG that allows players to build up kingdoms for use online in the N-Gage Arena. Players form parties for searching, scouting, and attacking rival kingdoms, with the ultimate goal of "owning the world." The twist is that the combat your soldiers partake in is entirely controlled by the computer A.I., leaving the player in the role of overseer and strategist; you build up the kingdom with troops, weapons, and armor and assign their combat duties.



Pocket Kingdom



X-Men Legends



Pathway to Glory

Online is where the action is in *Pocket Kingdom*, and Sega has made sure that in order to enjoy the online experience you must be a seasoned player before venturing into the N-Gage Arena. Players must find the Online Crest at some point offline for the option to become accessible on the Title screen menu. This ensures that players have enough victory points, items, units, and skill to compete. The N-Gage Arena features not only combat but also an auction system, instant messaging, and rankings.

Pocket Kingdom is a unique mobile RPG that is guaranteed to spark a community of gamers due to its innovative use of online gameplay. Some may be initially put off by the notion of computer-controlled combat, but once players discover the depth of gameplay, *Pocket Kingdom* quickly becomes a daily addiction.

X-Men Legends - 8.0

The console versions of *X-Men Legends* left me rather unimpressed. I felt the game could have done more with the mutant superpowers and the camera angles. With gameplay viewed only from an overhead point of view, *Legends* became somewhat boring by today's console game standards; the 3D models were begging to be viewed from dynamic angles. That's why when I got word of *X-Men Legends* heading to the N-Gage, it immediately made sense to me that this gameplay and design would work perfectly on the handheld system, as there was nothing overtly complex about the console versions that the N-Gage couldn't reproduce.

One of the biggest risks taken by the developers was to turn a 3D game into a completely sprite-based experience—a risk that proved successful, offering faster loading times and characters that aren't the typical low-resolution polygons found in other 3D titles. *X-Men Legends* looks fantastic in

2D, with large maps and interactive objects. And though the mutant superpowers aren't as spectacular as Capcom's fighting-game renditions, they look good considering they're on such a small screen.

Despite a few faults, such as the action getting chaotic with too many characters onscreen at once, the N-Gage has a finely tuned action-RPG experience starring the most popular superhero franchise in the history of comic books. *X-Men Legends* is an impressive handheld gaming experience that will keep you hooked for hours.

Pathway to Glory - 9.0

A WWII experience historically accurate in detail, Nokia's latest N-Gage title delivers an authentic combat gaming experience in the form of turn-based strategy. *Pathway to Glory* is one of those rare complete packages: a game that emits the artistic and technical aspects of its creation so nicely, players feel a genuine effort was put forth by its developers.

From its beautifully composed soundtrack, breathtaking artwork, and immersive missions to the calculated gameplay and detailed sprites, *Pathway to Glory* has indeed arrived at its destination as a glorious war game.

Pathway to Glory is played from an overhead view, as in a typical real-time strategy title. But unlike a traditional RTS, the game is turn-based, like *Worms World Party*, and it features combat elements reminiscent of Atari Jaguar's *Cannon Fodder*. If you've never played those games, don't worry—just think of it as a game of chess.

Everything looks great: The characters move swiftly, the animation is smooth, and there's very little varietal duplication. The color tones in the artwork are also utilized nicely in the overall design.

Developer Red Lynx has graced the N-Gage with a jewel of a game. It's a must-have, not to be missed title for fans of the action-strategy genre. Dare we call it the N-Gage's killer app?





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DIRECTORY

MULTIPLATFORM

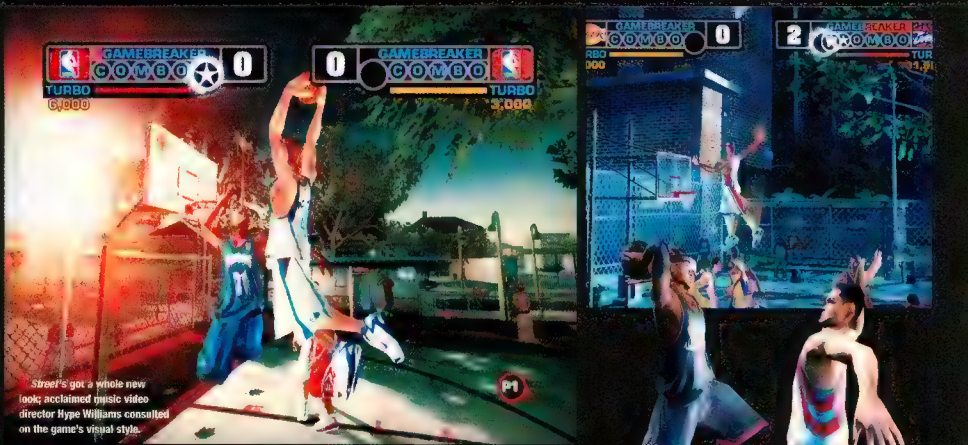
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- 129 Phantom Dust



Street's got a whole new look; acclaimed triple video director Hype Williams cancelled on the game's visual style.

What's the Diff: In *Streets* past, the PS2 version was always the way to go thanks to the DualShock's additional shoulder buttons. But with the new trick stick (which offers eight different moves right off the bat), the disparity isn't as big a deal. Our pick is the Xbox version, just because of the ease and convenience of Xbox Live.

PS2/XB/GC

NBA STREET V3

Start the block party

BUYER: Attention all sports developers: This is the kind of game you can make if you don't stick to the genre norm and crap out a sequel every year. The already blockbuster *NBA Street* series took a season off, and by doing so, had time to get the creative juices flowing and produce a third installment that reaffirms its position as king of the virtual court.

Street still features the same all-show, all-go gameplay you've always enjoyed, but now it's even more accessible. It doesn't matter if you're hip to the playground lingo or think those nut-hugging short shorts from the '50s are still fashionable—thanks to the all-new trick stick, any sports gamer can fake the opposition out of their Air Jordans. But the game isn't without

challenges. This time around, *Street* diehards will appreciate that executing multipoint gamebreakers requires a bit more skill, hops, and style. I only hope *V4* makes it harder to pick someone's pocket.

Yet it's playing solo that puts this one over the top. Creating a custom hoopster and earning respect never feels repetitive, as several events pop up on a daily basis. Do I take on T-Mac in a slam-dunk contest? Defend the honor of my custom court (see sidebar) against a rival? Or maybe take a trip to NYC's Rucker Park and battle the Beastie Boys (yes, those guys are in the game)? Point is, it's gonna be a while before you fully experience *Street*, but you might as well get started right...now.

DEMIAN: Before you do anything, turn off the announcer. This new guy must have studied Advanced Bugging the \$#!% Out of People from *Burnout 3*'s voiceover idiot, Stryker. With that done, you're looking at perhaps the best arcadey sports game since, well, the first *NBA Street*.

The single-player game takes forever to finish—honestly, I found it grueling and occasionally repetitive, but it's hard to argue that too much of a good thing is bad. The gamebreaker system has been tweaked to encourage dunking, but if you get too greedy you'll end up with no points—a nice little risk/reward dynamic. The last game's incessant goalkeeping has been toned down as well, putting more emphasis on stealing the rock. Player switching, however, still isn't perfect.



ONLINE
(PS2/XB only)



THE RATING SYSTEM

5.0-6.5
FAIR

7.0-10
GOOD

At EGM, we evaluate only games that have been deemed final and reviewable by their publishers. Three editors rate each game independently, and we use the whole scale. **5.0 IS AVERAGE.**

AWARDS



Platinum — for straight 10s. For games that are life-changing.



Gold — for games with an average score of 9.0 or higher.



Silver — for games with a mean score of 8.0 or higher.



GAME OF THE MONTH — The highest-rated game each month gets a star.



GAME OF THE YEAR — The lowest-rated game with unimpeachably bad scores.

■ Silent but deadly: Tonchu's Bin never met a back unfit for stabbin'.

GAMECUBE

130 Resident Evil 4
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DS

133 WarioWare: Touched!

ESRB KEY (Also check out www.esrb.com)

Everyone (E)

Thanks for moving the bar, Jimmo. Here are some games of innocent fun for your youngsters.

Teen (T)

Now that you're 13, your mom and I figure you can handle games with fluffcuts and language.

Mature (M)

You're a man now, son. Some those cuts with games of gore, violence, and hot pillaged sex.

Home Court Advantage

While *NBA Street V3* features famous playground courts like Rucker and Mosswood, you can also customize your very own roundball palace. Use points earned to purchase new surfaces, backboards, graffiti art, and even which companies advertise on your billboards. Too bad the *V3* online community can't play in the house you created via the single-player mode (everyone's gotta start from scratch when building a custom court for online play).



■ You'll earn up to four points for a gamebreaker, depending on how many moves you can pull off!

OFFICIAL PS MAG —GIANCARLO:

I can't get enough. From the second you start out with a created character in the street challenge, you feel compelled to keep playing game after game after game to get your

skills up to snuff with the competition and to build a custom court worthy of your baller. It's just so darn addictive, and the variety of games, including the NBA street ball league and the dunk contest, do an excellent job of keeping the on-court action interesting. As for online play, it's cool that you can bring a custom character and court to the online world, but why can't I just import my guy and court from the single-player street challenge game I spent half my life on? Gah! 🙄

White Men Can't Jump... Except For Plumbers

The Nintendo All-Stars squad—made up of Mario, his bro Luigi, and main squeeze Princess Peach—is exclusive to the GameCube version. Don't be afraid to pick this team; sure, they don't look the part, but these iconic videogame characters sport the same moves as the NBA's elite. That's even a Nintendo-themed court that features classic sound bites that'll be familiar to any fanboy. Very nice.



constantly alternating between two guys (but not the one you want to control) can be maddening.

It's the online play that really makes the clouds break and the heavenly light shine on down, though. Look for EGM Demian on XBL.

Good: Customizing your own court

Bad: Too easy to steal the ball

Shut Up, Already: The hip-hopping play-by-play announcer



THE VERDICTS
EGM.COM

9.0 8.5 9.0
BRYAN DEMIAN GIANCARLO

Publisher: EA Sports Big
Developer: EA Canada
Players: PS2 +2 (2-6 w/ Multiplay, 2 online), X3 +4 (2 online), GC +4
ESRB: Everyone.

www.nbastreetv3.com



PS2/XB

THE PUNISHER

Dysfunctional family man

Good: Seat-of-your-pants shoot-outs
Bad: Cornball dialogue, B-grade delivery
Slaughter Mode: Bullet time by another name

SHAWN: Big, bad (in a bad way), and likeable nonetheless, here's an ode to the hard-boiled matinee. A vigilante who takes bites out of crime by showing perks' heads into piranha pools (the game's grisliest scenes exist for the sake of groanworthy one-liners), the Punisher storms crack shacks and chop shops in his feud with the Guccis, a million-member family of identical Guidos who sprang from what must be the world's most fertile womb. Forget the pulpy and far-fetched plot; this one's all violence with a tongue-in-cheek cheesiness that makes virtues of its flaws.

Sure, it's an easy, everyman sort of game, a rental finishable in a few evenings, but your enemies are frosty (sometimes) and the firefights fun (usually). Antihero Frank Castle sharp-shoots weapons out of hands and takes and interrogates hostages for intel on arms caches (or just uses them as human-shields). He dives, bullets blazing, and leads goons to some of the most gruesome deaths you'll see in a game. Too bad so much of it is spoon-fed—you've got to stand on flashing floor tiles to pull off the more gratuitous moves.



JOSH: *The Punisher* is, without a doubt, the most brutally violent game I have ever played. It actually made me uncomfortable at points, which is saying something, considering that I enjoy barwire baseball bat wrestling matches. Needless to say, *Punisher* fans won't be disappointed. This game nails the cruelty and dark humor of the comic, featuring classic moments and familiar faces. The action is intense, while level variety and context-sensitive kills keep gameplay fresh. Nonfans (like Shawn and Jon D.) may want to pass, but comic aficionados should be punished (sorry) for not playing.

JON D.: So, do we rag on *Max Payne* for borrowing the Punisher's life and turning it into a game or knock *The Punisher* for aping *Payne*'s go-nuts-with-guns style? Derivative or not, *Punisher* suffers from the same crippling problem: The extreme gunplay gets old after you've capped your first 50 felons. Scripted spots set up colorful kills and brutal interrogation scenes, so games of age may appreciate the ultraviolence. But don't punish your pocket-book—this one's born to rent.



THE VERDICTS
OUT OF 100

6.5 8.0 6.0

SHAWN JOSH JON D.

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Volition
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.thq.com

PS2/XB

WINNING ELEVEN 8

A little something for the Euros in the house



Good: World's best soccer sim
Bad: Lack of league licenses
When: Will people actually start buying this great game?

PATRICK: *Winning Eleven 8* doesn't offer the flashy additions of other top sports titles. You won't find some funky skills competition or be able to tweak the price the nachos at Old Trafford. You won't even find Old Trafford (Manchester United's storied home pitch) for that matter, as the game is without most league/club and stadium licenses (though most of the real players are in the game, looking better than ever and playing nearly identically to their real-life counterparts).

The additions to *Winning Eleven* are subtle to say the least—your free Kick options have been expanded, for example, and you can now rush a kick before either team is fully in position—but then it's the tiny nuances that make this series one of the best in the sports genre. The gameplay remains dead on: Strikers kick the ball off opponents to force a corner, while the brilliant A.L. accurately adjusts depending on the score or situation. It even attempts to seem human; I brutally side tackled a streaking striker with no whistle but was called on the next play when there was virtually no foul—a total make-up call! It may not have all the bells and whistles of *Madden* or *Tiger*, but *Winning Eleven* may be the best pure sports sim you'll play.

BRYAN: Patrick's right—sorry, *Madden* fans, but your beloved franchise ain't the poster boy of sports-gaming realism. That honor goes to Konami's soccer series. And while *Winning Eleven* may be too much of the real thing for those who know David Beckham as "that stud married to Posh Spice," those who know

him for his bending skills on the pitch will surely dig this edition. The A.L. is even brainer than before (teams now put extra pressure on the goal when trailing and sit back with the ball when ahead), the shooting controls are less sensitive—a good thing—and the visuals are finally comparable to FIFA's. Now, if only the game were playable online...

DEMIAN: Don't even get me started, Bryan. Oh, too late—this game is great, but I'm pissed because in Europe's Xbox version *is* online. But not here, and that's a travesty, although you really need the DualShock's four shoulder buttons if you want the best control setup.

Winning Eleven's gameplay changes are minor, but then there wasn't a whole lot left to improve. There are even more dribble moves now, including a pretty handy sidesteal, and training drills help you learn the ropes (though not everything is covered—the game's incredible depth demands an even more comprehensive training mode). The best just got better; if only by a bit.



Through balls are less risky now, but these dang keepers are mere crafty.

THE VERDICTS
OUT OF 100

9.5 8.5 8.5

PATRICK BRYAN DEMIAN

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami Tokyo
Players: PS2 1-2 (3-8 w/ Multiplay), XB 1-4
ESRB: Everyone.

www.konami.com



PlayStation 2

SHADOW OF ROME

Will you not be entertained?

MARK: Readers, gamers, countrymen, lend me your eyes. I come to review *Shadow of Rome*, not to praise it. Well, not half of it anyway. For the noble Capcom hath told us it would blend stealth adventure and arena combat, and so it does, but with one of the two I find grievous faults.

The gladiator combat, for its part, does most certainly deliver. Against man, beast, or thrilling bosses, 'tis a joy to behold. The objectives doth vary (kill 'em all, chariot racing, co-op missions with the computer), controls doth suffice, and the limbs, oh how they doth fly. Does it not please you to chop both a man's arms off before tearing him asunder? Or dousing him in oils before lighting him aflame? All before a roaring crowd that reacts and rewards you accordingly—yea, it is good.

But O stealth sections! Were that you did not suck! Worthless villager conversations, puzzles with often only a single obvious solution, and guards too dense for words—by Zeus! 'treat the tedium astounds even I! And worthy though the larger plot may be, awkward dialogue hinders it to a degree whence it cannot redeem *Shadow's* faults. If only the stealth bits had themselves snuck away! It vexes me. I am terribly vexed.

CRISPIN: It's a cliché with a thousand lives in anything gladiator-related: the heart-of-gold warrior who refuses to finish off whopped foes to appease his audience's hunger for extra-red meat. But *Shadow of Rome*—an offbeat, rooted-in-real-history gladiatorial adventure from the guy behind *Mega Man*—beats that cliché to death with its own limbs. The slick combat system shows no mercy: Blood spits, skulls split, and meat falls right off the bone

sans any *Mortal Kombat* cheekiness. It's compelling enough to keep you retrying the more frustrating match types, plus put up with the stealth missions. Sure beats watching the History Channel.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—SCOOTER: I absolutely loved the action in *Shadow of Rome*. While the camera could use some work, the controls are good, whether you're performing decapitations, catapult sieges, or wanton animal abuse. Also, the boss battles are slick, ranging from a humongous and hairy German to a nimble assassin accompanied by vultures to a witch doctor riding a freakin' elephant. Despite the awesome blood-sport action, Mark and Crispin are right about the disappointing *Metal Gear* Toga bits. I'd rather play as someone who can slice off two arms and a cranium with one scimitar combo than a sissy who gets smacked in the head once and gets a "game over!" as a result. **A-**



E Modus Varietis

The gory fun of *Shadow's* arena-combat slays lively through sheer variety—you never set out with the same goal two times in row. Objectives vary: rescuing hostages and bringing them back to the starting point, fighting animals, besting a single rival in kills, earning a certain amount of praise from the audience, special chariot races you win by finishing first or killing all your opponents, etc. They're all handled well, but if any one doesn't suit your taste, you only have to wait till the next round. Plus you can replay any of them from the main menu and earn unlockables.



Good: Action-packed gladiator warfare
Bad: Horrible stealth bits
Guard A.A.: Needs serious work



THE VERDICTS
GIVE IT AN

6.5 **7.0** **8.0**
MARK CRISPIN SCOOTER

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.capcom.com



PlayStation 2

SEGA CLASSICS COLLECTION

Nobody likes cover bands

Good: The hallucinogenic weirdness of *Fantasy Zone*.
Bad: Only two of the unadulterated originals included.
Embarrassing: Playing the remake *Golden Axe*, even by yourself



ROBERT: Apparently, old 2D games look so bad that even the people who grew up playing them can't stomach their eye-melting awfulness. Why else would Sega go to the trouble of remaking their oldies in half-assed 3D? Seriously, why?

Sega Classics Collection clearly targets people who played these "classics" the first time around (*Alien Syndrome*, *VR Flat Out*, *Columns*, *Space Harrier*, *Outrun*, *Golden Axe*, *Monaco GP*, *Bonanza Bros.*, and *Tan-Tan*). Besides the new coat of (mostly awful) 3D, the games stay fairly faithful to their namesakes.

Golden Axe, the worst of the bad stuff, falls on every level. A sloppy, amateur eye-seer, it won't please oldsters or visually savvy new players. The original, not a great game, is far better—but sorry, it's not included. *Fantasy Zone*, the best of the good stuff, looks nice in a coat of cartoony 3D and offers some fun shooter action, but everything else falls somewhere in between, mostly in the mediocre middle.

Sega should have included all of the originals. They might not have aged well, but you can't even feel nostalgic about these pointless remakes.



CRISPIN: I'll holler it for you. "Sacrilige!" Why Sega would take perfectly nifty hits from yonder arcade heydays and give them cheesy graphical facelifts is beyond me. After all, you'd think the target audience here is keen to wax nostalgic for the original product, not some badly tarled-up makoovers. At least one game here—*Golden Axe*—is ruined by the "upgrade." The rest are tolerable and still capable of generating fuzzy memories, even though games like *Bonanza Bros.* and the original *Monaco GP* stretch the definition of "classic."

DEMIAN: What...the...hell? I didn't think it was possible to really screw up a collection of old-time games, but turns out it is, if you try incredibly hard. The weirdest thing is that, even though the graphics of these borderline classics have been "reimagined" for whatever nonsensical reason, they still all look like they're at least 10 years old. And these other guys are right; the tweaked *Golden Axe* plays actively worse than the original. *VR Flat Out*, *Alien Syndrome*, and *Fantasy Zone* are fun, but still not \$20 fun.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

ROBERT	6.0	CRISPIN	6.0	DEMIAN	6.0
--------	-----	---------	-----	--------	-----

Publisher: Sega
 Developer: Sega/3D Ages
 Players: 1-2
 ESRB: Teen
www.sega.com

PlayStation 2

NANOBREAKER

Uh-oh, we've got a bleeder



Good: Supremely deep combo system
Bad: Dull story line, repeat bosses
Attempt at Dodging Controversy: Referring to the blood as "oil"

SHANE: With its interlocking levels, fancy subweapons, and combo-laden combat, *Nanobreaker* might as well be called *Castlevania 2099*. But that's not a bad thing—light control, stylish visuals, and eerie tunes make this a rewarding pick-up-and-play quest.

In several ways, *Nanobreaker* actually bests *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence*, the previous PS2 chapter of its vampiric cousin. While that game suffered from distressingly dull level designs, *Nanobreaker* peppers a goodly amount of puzzles and platforming into its hack'n' slashin'. Plus, a versatile combo-building system allows you to customize your attacks, and a neat "reel-'em-in-with-your-plasma-whip" move lets players with pinpoint timing get satisfying one-hit kills.

The predictable plot is a drag, but you probably shouldn't expect too much gratas with your 200,000 gallons of gore anyway. The game's length is mere of an issue—expect to beat it in about seven hard-fought hours—but at least you'll snag some nifty unlockables that will keep you playing....

BRYAN: Guess I'm the middleman on this one. *Nanobreaker's* strength lies in its combat, as the customizable whip-swinging combos add a nice personal touch, and unlike a lot of today's action games, boss battles require a few working brain cells. Oh, and it don't look too shabby, either. Still, *Nanobreaker* isn't a must-buy—the story spews more cheese than blood, the wonky camera hides foes, and the duo of poorly placed save points and

'lack of health pickups can turn *Nanobreaker* into a controller-smashing affair. Proceed with caution.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO: Shane's right that this is a stripped-down version of *Castlevania*, but wrong about everything else. *Castlevania's* cool gothic environments have been replaced with ridiculously boring, monochromatic industrial locales. The combat system is also pretty pointless; it requires you to upgrade different combinations as you progress even though the first few attacks are pretty much all you need throughout a big chunk of the game. On top of all that, the camera is a mess, making the platforming sections far more irritating than entertaining.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHANE	7.5	BRYAN	6.5	GIANCARLO	6.0
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Publisher: Konami
 Developer: Konami Tokyo
 Players: 1
 ESRB: Mature
www.konami.com



▲ **Alt.** Tekken fanatics: *Death by Degrees* comes with a playable demo of Tekken 5.

PlayStation 2

DEATH BY DEGREES

Dull on arrival

- Good:** Nina's tush
- Bad:** Screw-up-and-perish-instantly puzzles
- Since '79:** There have been 24 major cruise-ship accidents



SHAWN: Svelte secret agent woman and *Tekken* starlet Nina Williams gets about in swimwear and stockings (might as well be ogleworthy when we're staring at your assets for hours on end). Her impossible mission: Use janky judo, performed by tap-tap-tapping the analog sticks, to infiltrate a posh ocean liner (and later a penitentiary). The gimmick grows tiresome after a dozen tussles, even with the added glitz of X-ray clips that show cracked ribs and crushed hearts. Shooting, while easier on the thumb, isn't any livelier—foes don't bite bullets so much as fudge their cues as the blanks fire in an old-timey stage show.

Sound bad? Not next to *Death by Degrees'* too-tough confrontations with a cheap-cheaper-cheapest succession of boss types, in which you

peck away at your target's stamina between slow-loading stops at the pause screen and its buffet of life-saving snacks. Everything else—hunting for keys and passcodes, paging through memos and logs for puzzle hints, watching that load screen—is put together like a PS1 game. But, in, the boat looks lovely.

MARK: For a fighting game spin-off, *Death by Degrees'* combat can be surprisingly basic—just tap the analog stick in the direction you want to attack or dodge. You could delve deeper than this simplistic *Robotron*-style fun, buying new moves and learning complicated combos, but it's hardly worth the effort; save for a few interesting sections where you control a remote camera, the game progresses via lame, cliché puzzles,

crippled further by a terrible map, confusing level design, and obtrusive load times. Luckily, the silly plot will only disappoint those actually interested in the story behind the *Tekken* universe—in other words, nobody whatsoever.

G. FORD: Don't hate Nina because she's beautiful; hate her for taking part in an unpolished game. All of *Death by Degrees'* good points—impressive graphics, entertaining sniper scenes, solid upgrade and combo systems, unorthodox analog fighting that actually works well—are offset by poor enemy A.I. and one of the most user-unfriendly camera systems I've encountered in a long time. If only Namco had spent as much time perfecting the minutiae as it did perfecting Nina's body....



THE VERDICT: **5.0 5.0 6.0**

SHAWN MARK G. FORD

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Namco
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature
www.namco.com





PlayStation 2

XENOSAGA EPISODE II: JENSEITS VON GUT UND BÖSE

More brain-melting sci-fi

CHRISTIAN: *Episode II* starts slow, but once in gear, this sci-fi role-playing game's story is absolutely top tier. The newly redesigned (and cooler-looking) characters get into fascinatingly deep trouble. If anything's clear at this point in this multigame mega-epic, it's that the developers have more ideas than they can actually use—but they sure try.

But where the story is overstuffed, the gameplay is streamlined. The battles are better structured than those in the last game, giving you great feedback on how well attacks are working. There's also more strategy, as you'll have to jockey for turns and connect attacks to do decent damage. The feeling of trouncing a boss when everything aligns just right is a big reason I love RPGs so much.

I'm less keen on the fact that *Episode II's* character development, the backbone of any RPG, has been kneecapped. Each character has the same pool of skills. The skill trees in the last game were a bit scattershot but at least they were unique.

But most disappointing is that this game is but

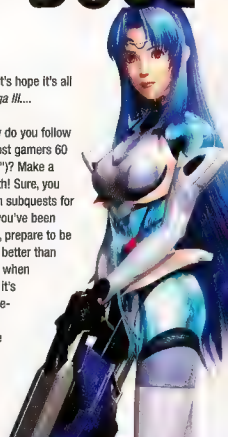
a *Xeno* snack, less than half as long as *Episode I*. Sadly, *Episode II* regresses as much as it impresses. I still love the story's Japanese existential bluster, and its characters are varied and intense. The slick sci-fi visuals are also second to none, but it's just a bit short on content to reach the sprawling heights of its predecessor.

SHANE: So much for sequels improving on their predecessors. *Episode II* ranks as a cosmic downgrade for the ambitious multipart space opera: It's substantially shorter (you can solve the game in 20 hours) and surprisingly simpler than the last game. Plus, the developers failed to fix *Episode I's* main problem—through the grand, sweeping narrative is actually quite engaging, too much of it unfolds through never-ending cut-scenes of people talking.

Nevertheless, intrepid players will probably want to stick with it for the strategic-yet-speedy battles, huge dungeons, and snazzy visuals. Plus, even by game's end, you'll feel like the meaty center of the

ongoing narrative still lies ahead. Let's hope it's all been rising action to set up *Xenosaga III*...

OFFICIAL PS MAG—SCOOTER: How do you follow a sprawling sci-fi epic that takes most gamers 60 hours to complete (40 if you're "fast")? Make a sequel that's less than half the length! Sure, you can do those goofy Global Samaritan subquests for cool loot and extra play time, but if you've been waiting for a heaping help of RPG, prepare to be bummed. While the battle system is better than the one in the first game, that's only when you're on foot; step into a robot and it's hold-down-Square-while-reading-the-Internet city. And the story, well, it's good—past hour 10. Yet, despite the game's pacing, the graphics, cut-scenes, and second half of the story end up making *Episode II* a solid RPG—just not the epic sequel that the previous game deserves. **A-**



Get Global

Brilliant scientist Shion Uzuki is not content with merely trying to save the universe from an insane terrorist organization, diving into her friend's psyche to save her from grave peril, and performing battle operations with the most advanced android ever created—she also helps people find misplaced items, fetches fertilizer, and even destroys broken machinery for sewer maintenance workers. That's all part of the Global Samaritan campaign, a minigame that has you fixing the lives of the game's hapless civilians. Anyone know where to deliver this love letter? What about how to help this struggling advertising agency? Samaritans have it rough....



Good: A fascinating, visually rich story punctuated by solid battles. **Bad:** The pacing is broken, and the game's too short to compensate. **Thank Namco For:** The redone character designs. **Slick**



THE VERDICT

7.5
CHRISTIAN

6.5
SHANE

7.0
SCOOTER

Publisher: Namco
Developer: Monolith Soft
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.xenosaga.com



Pick up Small Spear x 20



Forget the spears—characters can now summon ammo for ranged attacks.

PlayStation 2

CHAMPIONS: RETURN TO ARMS

ONLINE

Hack, slash, repeat

Good: Neat "good versus evil" branching story lines

Bad: Bang-your-head-against-a-wall boss battles

And Did They Really: Have to throw in that stealth mission?

JENNIFER: *Return to Arms* does a ton of stuff right—beautiful graphics, interesting environments, and satisfying, no-frills, action-RPG hacking and slashing, plus an online mode to keep you happy once you've beaten the offline game. I played for dozens of hours without tiring of the endless maps and mazes. It induces a sort of Zen-like state, that nice and easy middle ground somewhere between mind-blowing and mind-numbing.

Last year's game got repetitive at times, and that's fixed here with better pacing—some shorter maps, more diverse enemies, and just enough variety in the layout and puzzles. The role-playing aspects allow for specialization without being overly complicated, and I liked the branching story lines. Unlike, say, *Knights of the Old Republic*, here you actually visit different levels and fight

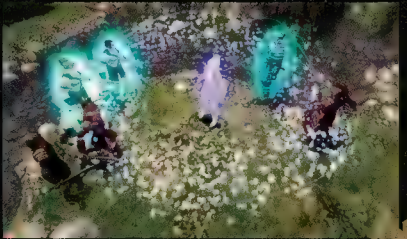
on opposite sides depending on whether you choose good or evil.

The game's downfall is its boss battles, though. Uneven difficulty makes them annoying—I hate killing one boss without a scratch, then dying repeatedly as the next one kills me in a single hit. It'll sure break you out of your Zen-like state, but not really in a good way.

SHOE: It's so 1990s to be playing the good guy, so for *Return*, I chose the path of evil to see different worlds from the do-gooders. I got a variety of objectives and several bonus stages (one in which I spent way too much time gambling my gold away), so I started enjoying this more than most other hack-n-slash-n-level-up adventures. This enthusiasm was short-lived, though. As I paraded through the areas killing similar tiny

enemies over and over (even the "big" monsters don't intimidate), it took forever to find any exciting, rare items to wield. Without those incentives, things got monotonous.

JON D: I've spent limited time with preludes like *Baldur's Gate* and the first *Champions*, so I don't have much of a buffer to muddy the game-play similarities between *Return* and the 8-years-old, nearly identical *Diablo* (PC, PS1). Despite its shameless lack of evolution, the formula is still marginally fun. Scouring dungeons for magic-imbued leggings and a slightly faster longbow actually took me away from *Halo 2* for a short while. I can't say I enjoyed the ambience—plot lines are forgettable and the characters painfully generic—but I think this one's worth a mindless-weekend rental. **A-**



Blue mist or no, we recognize that *EverQuest* still chick a mile away.

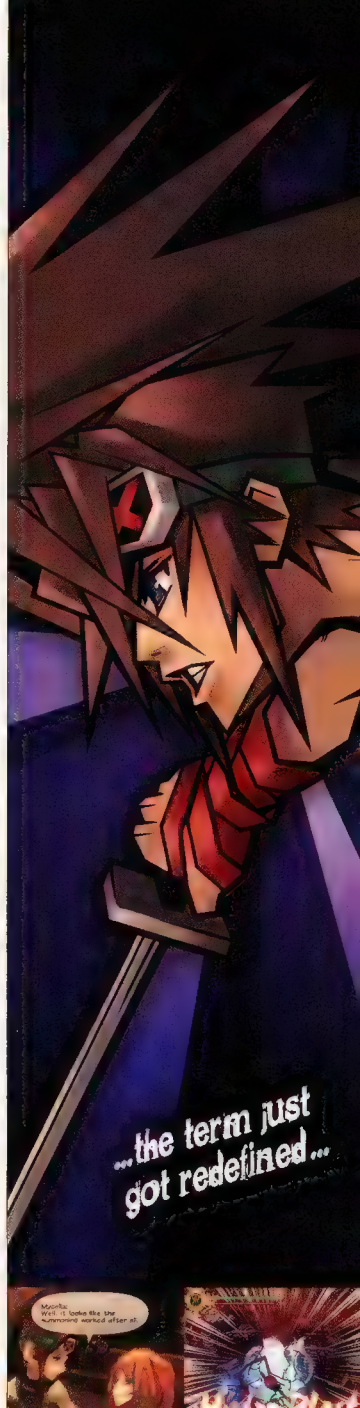
THE VERDICT'S OUT ON

7.5 **7.0** **6.0**

JENNIFER SHOE JON D.

Publisher: Sony Online
Developer: Snowblind
Players: 1-2 (3-4 w/Multiplay)
2-4 online
Rating: Teen

returntoarmsmission.sony.com



...the term just got redefined...





PlayStation 2

SHINING TEARS

A little bit dim

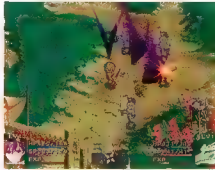
Good: Plenty of character customization and team attacks
Bad: Frustrating structure, super-derivative
What? How'd the dorky cousin of *Zelda's* Link get in here?

JUSTIN: Whether you're playing alone or with a friend, *Shining Tears* is a functional, cooperative action-roleplayer. With proper planning, partners can unleash team techniques like arrow spread-shots, magic circles of death, and vicious rebound attacks. So how do you go about cooperating with yourself? You use the right stick to position your partner while controlling the main character with the left.

The potential to mix and match eight different (though not terribly original) characters is promising, but *Shining Tears* quickly wets its own bed—and not with tears. Using the dull main character is almost always mandatory, inevitably creating an overpowered killing machine that turns slaying legions of dumbly apathetic baddies into a one-man show. Even if you make an extra effort to play well with others—and can stomach the adorably disproportionate battle-children and weird fantasy world where a cat-girl ninja fights centaurs outside a medieval castle—the trite story, laborious upgrade process, and tragically disjointed feel of the otherwise attractive, hand-drawn world cover up most of the glimmer.

JENNIFER: I was wary at first of this RPG's dialogue-bubble-heavy pseudo-cut-scenes and *Lord of the Rings*-lite story line of magical rings, an amnesiac ring-bearer, and the ring's dark, hidden powers. But an easy-to-learn combat and customization system helped me swallow that stuff and have a right good time. The cartoon graphics rank up there with the blabbiest of baby games, and it's all droopy eyes and anime clichés. But you can save anywhere or enter and exit battles as needed—nice touches that make this one user-friendly.

SHANE: Cripes, this and *Ys*, both in one issue...do we really need two old-school action-RPGs about heroes washed up on faraway beaches? *Tears* proves to be the weaker of these hack-n-slashers—its two-character concept seems innovative, but lackluster A.I. and poor pathfinding make single-player adventuring a pain. Also, shocking amounts of slowdown plague the simple 2D visuals and frequent loading times pepper your quest. The basic quests and combat still offer thrills, but you can certainly do better.



THE VERDICTS OUT OF 10	6.5	6.5	5.5
	JUSTIN	JENNIFER	SHANE

Publisher: Sega
 Developer: Amusement Vision
 Players: 1-2
 ESRB: Teen

www.sega.com

PlayStation 2

TENCHU: FATAL SHADOWS

Real mediocre power



Good: Ninjas
Bad: Stealth gameplay from the PS1 era
Not as Exciting as It Sounds: Fighting a bear mano a mano

FORD: On the scale of things players most want to do in their games, playing as a ninja ranks right up there with taking out boatloads of Nazis. Not even the presence of two playable ninjas can save this bland game, though, which brings nothing new to the stealth-action genre.

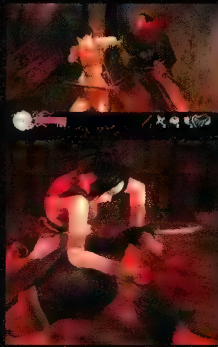
Usual *Tenchu* hero Rikimaru wisely takes a pass on *Fatal Shadows* as two female assassins tag-team their way through intertwining plotlines set in ancient Japan. But the story's not important; general sneaking and stealth kills are *Tenchu's* trademark, and those bits are still sickly satisfying.

Unfortunately, a number of flaws kill the game's flow, namely a particularly atrocious camera, a weak look-on system, a frustrating lack of checkpoints, and poor enemy A.I. Baddies will spot you and then forget about you, because hey, it's just a ninja—it's not like she'll sneak up from behind and slit your throat... Even when the whole ninja vibe works, the payoff just isn't enough to overcome the numerous frustrations. Slink on past this one.

SHAWN: Folded from the same steel as the last episodes, this *Tenchu's* honed parts include backstabbing, ball-busting heroines, sight-unseen kills that set off geysers of gore, and the ability to Ginsu your way back into hiding even after goofing up. It also shows the same nicks: slapdash cinematography, not-so-throat-grabbing graphics, and a few nitpicky missions where detection means doing it again, and again, and again, don't cut it. Propulsive '70s samurai-show presentation aside, the

series could use more sharpening between sequels.

BYAN: Five *Tenchu* games in almost seven years and the developers still can't fix the franchise's biggest flaw—the camera. And shockingly, it's even worse in *Fatal Shadows*. Sure, the stealth kills look sublime, but few will have the patience required to jockey the camera into position for executing these bloodstain finishers. The game also suffers from dumb-as-a-doorrail A.I.; duck around a corner or drop down a ledge only a few steps from an alerted foe and he'll suddenly forget about you. Another shoddy performance like this one and I may be calling for *Tenchu's* head.



THE VERDICTS OUT OF 10	5	6.0	5.5
	G. FORD	SHAWN	BYAN

Publisher: Sega
 Developer: K2
 Players: 1
 ESRB: Mature

www.sega.com

MUSASHI

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PlayStation 2

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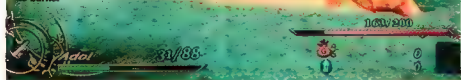
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SQUARE ENIX
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WWW.SQEM.COM



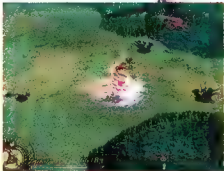
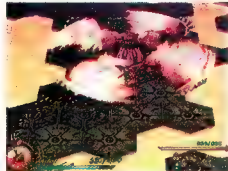
In classic old-school fashion, bosses are big as bars.



PlayStation 2

YS: THE ARK OF NAPISTIM

Easy does it



Good: Totally solid action-RPG.
Bad: The dub is a travesty, so bad it hurts.
Ark of what now? Doesn't matter, just move on.



JUSTIN: While *Ys* is supposed to be pronounced "ease," this action-RPG hails from the staunch old school, so don't expect the hand-holding and pages upon pages of help text you'd get from a recent *Zelda* title. What you should expect is a game that's solid, challenging, and fun.

You start off with most of the abilities you'll carry throughout the game, minus the power of three elemental swords. Whacking monsters puts equal emphasis on your character's stats and your skills; it's practically impossible to gain experience levels fighting enemies you've out-grown, which ensures that you'll continually run into enemies tough enough to give your reflexes a good workout. Of course, enemies that are out of your league will rip you a new one regardless of how skilled you are, but you'll be returning the favor just a few levels. It's not a bad balance. *Ys* noticeably lacks ambition, but it totally nails the classic feel it's going for.

SHANE: As an oldster who enjoyed *Ys Book I & II* (the first game to ever get a 10 in

EGM) for the prehistoric Turbo CD console, I approached this latest installment with morbid curiosity. Shockingly, *Ark* isn't totally a dated relic: Mildly impressive graphics, jammie tunes, oodles of spoken dialogue, and responsive, combo-based swordplay make *Ark* a pleasant little romp. A few bastions of old-school game design—occasional unclear objectives, requisite leveling up, and random areas packed with kill-you-in-one-hit enemies—keep it from feeling thoroughly modern.

CHRISTIAN: Despite the classic feel, *Ark's* gameplay isn't primordial—the action is enjoyably challenging throughout, with cool bosses to fight, big dungeons to explore, and suave weaponry. It's been a long time since this series last appeared, but the developers have been paying attention.

Whether you played the originals so long ago, or you just wish there were a pinch more old-school style in your *Baldur's Gate*, this game will satisfy. I've been waiting years for a new *Ys* game, but I think what pleases me most about *Ark* is that people who haven't been will enjoy it, too.

THE VERDICTS	7.5	6.5	8.0
	JUSTIN	SHANE	CHRISTIAN

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Falcom
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.konami.com



Xbox

ONLINE

STREET FIGHTER ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

The gang's all here



Good: *Street Fighter II* movie comes with Xbox controller sucks for 2D fighting.
Bad: *Street Scubby After All These Years: Gulle*



MILKMAN: If the army of neo-sequels to *Street Fighter II* that dominated every console known to man up until the modern era couldn't sate your hunger for Bison and Blanka, then *Anniversary Collection* should do the trick. A car crash of every iteration of *SFII*, from the arcades to 3D0 to Sega Saturn, *Anniversary Collection* lets you pit nearly any combination of players against each other. Always was better to see whether *Super Turbo Ken* was wanted than *Championship Edition Ryu?* Well, now you can. While this presents some balance issues and mismatches, it still makes for entertaining, old-school hoologianism.

The big draw here is that *Street Fighter III* is getting its spot in the limelight. The term "collection" should be taken with a grain of salt, though, since only *Third Strike* (not *Second Impact*, or the original *SFII*) makes an appearance. Still, it's the best of the series, and paired with the entire *Street Fighter II* animated movie, as well as smooth online play and trash-talking, *Anniversary Collection* is a much warmer object for your 2D dollars than Capcom's own *Fighting Evolution*.

SHOE: I'd sure like to Dragon Punch Capcom in the nuts for constantly releasing half-baked compilations. Why not just toss in the *Alpha* and *EX* series to make the ultimate *Street Fighter* collection? So they can milk gamers for more cash later, that's why. I still can't deny, however, that this is one kick-ass ass-kicking disc. No matter how old *Street Fighter II* and *III* get, they're still very playable today, with great controls and simple, straightforward fighting styles. The Xbox pad isn't the best for street fighting, but the online play was flawless during our testing.

SHANE: OK, I agree that bundling in the excellent *Street Fighter Alpha* titles would make this package even sweeter, but the *EX* games? Sho...you're officially kicked out of the cool kids club. But even as it stands, *Anniversary Collection* is the real deal—two of the best fighters ever made, faithfully re-created and (finally!) playable online. Consider these games a history lesson in fighting-game design: Other games aspire to *Street Fighter's* flawless control, infinite replayability, and boundless depth.

THE VERDICTS	8.0	8.5	9.0
	MILKMAN	SHOE	SHANE

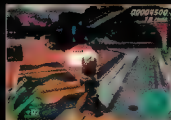
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Players: 1-2 (2 online)
ESRB: Teen

www.capcom.com



Start waking up the neighborhood.

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STARFOX
ASSAULT



Fantasy Violence

NINTENDO
GAMECUBE.

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Go on, a lava stage! That's how you know it's a platformer.

Xbox

TORK: PREHISTORIC PUNK

Stick a Tork in it, it's been done

Good: Solidly engaging hop-n-bop action...
Bad: ...but there are a pile of games just like it!
At Least: It's only \$20



KEVIN: For the die-hard Xbox maniac, it may be a tad depressing to see all these hyped-up platformers Microsoft announced years and years ago dribble out as budget releases from other publishers. Unlike the completely forgettable *Malice*, though, *Tork* is pretty decent—even with a hero that looks like a rejected mascot for the Minnesota Vikings.

Structurally, *Tork* is kissin' cousins with the PlayStation *Crash Bandicoot* games of old. Your spunky lil' caveguy jumps and slashes his way through a set of straightforwardly designed levels that cover all the classic themes—ice world, fire world, castle, you name it. There are some well-choreographed story scenes, and you can transform into assorted animals, but otherwise this is one of the most standard platformers in recent memory.

Still, there were just enough interesting bits (like when Tork takes on an enormous tanklike war machine with his bare hands) to keep me playing to the end. It's standard, true, but that doesn't mean I ain't worth playing through once. Never mind Josh and, to a lesser extent, G. Ford—they just hate fun.

G. FORD: Tork, much like fellow second-tier monosyllabic mascots Tak and Ty before him, falls a bit short in this mediocre hop-n-bopper. It's not that the punk's adventure isn't fun, because it does prove entertaining in multihour bursts, it's just that it feels unsubstantial compared to better titles, offering levels and tricks we've seen before. And while the game contains no fatal flaws, the camera could stand to be a little more lenient, and the whole animal-transformation gimmick is only effectively utilized during the final boss battle.

JOSH: If *Tork* had been released alongside *Crash Bandicoot* and *Mario 64*, people would've called it a rip-off, but they'd also have admitted it was still pretty good. After all, it has doodad collecting, a cute main character, not to mention an ice and a fire stage. Well, platformers have made a bit of progress since then, and *Tork*'s linear levels and simplistic combat (hint: Press the Attack button and walk forward) can't get it done in this age of *Jaks* and *Ratchets*. Only those too young to know better need apply...and Kevin!



THE VERDICTS
OUT OF 10

7.0	6.0	5.5
KEVIN	G. FORD	JOSH

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Twink
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone

www.ubisoft.com

Xbox

ONLINE

GUNGRIFFON: ALLIED STRIKE

Not even good for spare parts



Good: Healthy variety of walking tanks to choose from
Bad: With these graphics, it's 1998 all over again
Try Instead: *MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf*, *Steel Battalion*, *Yahtzee*



JON D: *Allied Strike* would be a mess even if the Xbox didn't already host a few very capable if not exemplary mech games for comparison. Choose a polygonal, drab walking tank from a lineup of increasingly more polygonal, drab tanks and outfit it with your pick from a small handful of stunningly similar guns. Then take it out for a spin in the field where the norm is a vast brown, tan, or green landscape dotted with vague elevation changes and 2D trees and fences you can walk right through (no, not over...through). Aargh.

The A.I., at least, makes for a worthy opponent on most levels and forces you to coordinate with your support units to put up a fight. But most tactical objectives can be destroyed without confronting their heavy-metal guards—I had to repeatedly skirt combat to save my limited ammo for blowing up inanimate silos and stationary guns. And while the simple human element of cooperative online or LAN play makes it marginally more fun than the single-player game, it's tough to get past the abhorrent production values throughout. Spend your purchase or rental money on *MechAssault 2* instead.

CRISPIN: My hearty congratulations and a crisp sawbuck tucked into a handsake to all you first-year game-design students who put together this robo-blasting technology demo. Sure, your visuals are crude and your missions are wildly frustrating, but you've built some interesting robot models and—wait...whazzat? *Allied*.

Strike isn't a school project? This is a full-priced, full-fledged game? Then why is it so hard to find other people to play with in the online multiplayer modes? Why are enemies so brain-dead? Why is the game so damn ugly? I rescind my congratulations—and gimme my sawbuck back!

KEVIN: *GunGriffon* seems like a killer idea on paper: Take the obsessively detailed robot-pilot combat of Capcom's *Steel Battalion* and shrink it down to a size accessible by people not into spending \$200 on a single game. The only problem: Without *Steel Battalion*'s huge plastic control-panel peripheral (not to mention the lush graphics and atmospheric sound effects), you've got just another slow, plodding giant-robot game that doesn't add a speck of novelty to the genre. What's the point, especially when your friends are tearing it up with *MechAssault 2* on Xbox Live?



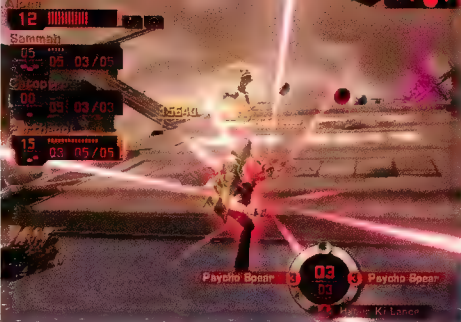
■ We fired up *GunGriffon*'s online mode and nobody was playing it on Live but us. Cuch.

THE VERDICTS
OUT OF 10

5.0	5.0	5.0
JON D.	CRISPIN	KEVIN

Publisher: Tecmo
Developer: Game Arts
Players: 1 (2-8 online or system link)
ESRB: Teen

www.tecmogames.com



Xbox

ONLINE

PHANTOM DUST

Card fighters clash

CHE: Toss those Yu-Gi-Oh! decks and grab a controller, because *Phantom Dust* is the only kind of card battle I'd want to play. By combining the tactical finesse of an action title with the random collect-a-thon addictiveness of a card-based affair, the game walks a fine, innovative line between preplanned strategy and improvised twitch-play.

Plumbing the depth of *Phantom Dust* requires you to understand the 300 or so available psychic powers, and then assemble arsenals (or decks of abilities) that strike a precarious balance between offense, defense, and the generic aura energy that allows you to dish out the pain. Finding that harmony is difficult but rewarding, requiring plenty of field testing against opponents in fully destructible playgrounds that crumple and bend to your whim.

Granted, *Dust* won't be everyone's brand of arena deathmatch. Since powers are dealt in random order from your arsenal, chance plays a fair-

ly big role in your success—the beauty of the game lies in your ability to strategize on the fly. With gorgeous visuals, a lush and sometimes haunting soundtrack, and the ability to download new powers, *Dust* is a brilliant counterpoint to the shooter-heavy Xbox Live lineup.

DEMIAN: Imagine a card combat game without the cards, and with an *Akira*-ish protagonist who looks like Ziggy Stardust-era David Bowie after a bar fight. This is definitely a strange one.

I love *Dust*'s inventive psi powers and eerie, destructible environments, but I hate that battles recycle the same few levels over and over, and all my little power-ups spawn in one spot, demanding I set up camp instead of charge into the fight. Chatting up every character in the hub world to find the one that can give you your next mission is a pain, but you'll forget that frustration seconds

after the battle starts. *Dust* is definitely flawed, but its distinctive atmosphere and gameplay (and online fights) make it well worth checking out.

SHOE: Once *Phantom Dust* is released, I'd expect its online arena to be a virtual ghost town, much like the postapocalyptic setting of the game itself. This one's simply too niched—just having to play through so many repetitive (but necessary and helpful) tutorial missions before you can get to the fun part (customizing arsenals) will discourage most. No doubt about it, *Dust* is a hardcore game with a hardcore learning curve. But hey, patience is a virtue, and the virtuous are rewarded with beautiful graphics, music, and set designs; and combat that looks simple but is intricately deep and satisfying. It took a couple of hours, but this one grew on me, big-time.

Good: Huge variety of powers to collect, unique art direction.
Bads: Limited stages, underwhelming single-player adventure.
Possibly: The only game soundtrack with composer Franz Liszt.



THE VERDICTS
OUT OF 10

8.5 CHE 7.5 DEMIAN 8.0 SHOE

Publisher: Majesco
 Developer: Microsoft Japan
 Players: 1 (2-4 online or system link)
 ESRB: Teen
www.majesco.com

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featured on the soundtrack for



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- REVOLVER

THE WAR WITHIN

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 SELECT STORES

AVAILABLE AT
 SELECT STORES



CENTURY
 MEDIA



✓ Gooey to see how things from TP's *Sanitarium* and *TP* still getting work.



GameCube

RESIDENT EVIL 4



Back from the dead



MARK: Forget what you know, or think you know, about *Resident Evil*. *RE4* not only brings the series out of its creative rut, it also packs the most refined graphics and gameplay in survival-horror since...well, ever.

Let's face it: The cumbersome controls and disconnected camera have always been a huge obstacle to fully enjoying the *RE* series. *RE4*'s over-the-shoulder view changes everything. You still push up to move forward and still sadly lack the ability to strafe, but combat is a snap—you can move and aim as easily as in a first-person shooter, with the added perspective helping you avoid obstacles. More important, a wide assortment of brilliantly designed enemies takes full advantage of this new viewpoint. A single well-aimed shot can disarm (literally or figuratively) knife- and ax-wielding foes or blow dynamite-tossing enemies to bits, along with

anyone unlucky enough to be near them. Aim for the head of walking suits of armor to remove the helmet and expose the flailing tentacles inside; blast a giant bat to distract the blind maniac; stalking you by sound; use a thermal scope to target the parasites keeping nasty experimental mutants alive. You never get bored of the gunplay.

The game also allows for terrific freedom in how you choose to attack (or should I say survive) the gigantic, wide-open environments it drops you into. Will you plow through run-and-gun style, stopping only to blast groups of enemies point blank? Or will you make your stand on the rooftops, tossing grenades and sniping long range? Whatever you choose, environments cleverly designed with plenty of ways in and out of any situation and tenacious enemy A.I. make for unbelievably intense gameplay. Enemies set up ladders, carry shields, brandish chain saws and axes, sprint, sidestep, block

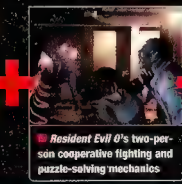
their heads, shout to each other—these aren't stupid, predictable zombies, there are tons of them (I once counted nine onscreen), and they are *hunting you*. Backed by amazingly realistic graphics and an outstanding soundtrack, it's one of the most frightening and exciting experiences you'll ever have.

I don't care how sky-high your expectations are, *RE4* will blow them away again and again. 2005's *Game of the Year* might have come out just 11 days into it.

SHANE: Sure, *RE4* looks phenomenal, but maybe you're still a tinge skeptical. What if, unlike Mark here, you didn't spend the last nine years gunning down zombies in previous *RE* titles? In fact, maybe you thought the majority of those games, with their steering-policemen-like-rusty-tanks gameplay and static prerendered backgrounds, kind of...sucked. Then listen up—buy *Resident Evil 4*. Now. If you're

Formula for Defying the Formula

Many of the new elements that blend together to make *RE4* so special were actually experimented with before in previous games:



Good: Incredible atmosphere, snappy graphics, great gameplay.
Bad: Some gooey dialogue, no strafe ability.
Do Not: Wait nine months for the PS2 version—play this one.



THE VERDICTS

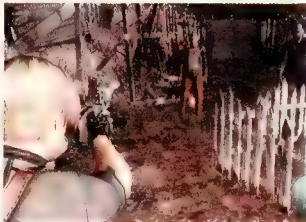
10	9.5	10
MARK	SHANE	MILKMAN

Publisher: Capcom
 Developer: Capcom
 Players: 1
 ESRB: Mature

www.residentevil.com



All of RE4's boss fights are unique and incredibly intense, save maybe the pushover final encounter.



the kind of guy (or gal) who buys *Zelda* games...buy this. You won't be disappointed.

RE4 doesn't merely improve upon the established *Resident Evil* concept, it fixes it: Everything from character control, camera angle, enemy A.I., inventory management, boss battles, exploration, and straight-up combat receives a desperately needed overhaul here. You'll experience the difference immediately upon starting the game: Moving Leon through the massive, well-designed environments feels right, and combat—which rewards pinpoint aiming accuracy—racks your nerves with blood-pumping tension. And just when you start to wrap your head around the game's mechanics, it cleverly changes them: Wild button-pressing minigames, breathtaking vehicle-based areas, and the burden of having to keep the president's daughter alive (!) continuously inject fresh gameplay concepts into the mix.

Overall, *RE4* delivers a gorgeous, lengthy, and rewarding adventure...it's a colossal leap forward for the franchise. But don't expect perfection. You will wish that Leon could strafe—turning is a laborious process that detracts from the feeling of realism. Also, the endgame feels rushed, with an absurdly wimpy final boss that ends the quest with a muffled snap instead of the boom it deserves.

MILKMAN: Abandoned, hopeless, miserable, afraid, outnumbered, underpowered, lost, and handsome as hell: These are the words to describe how I felt while playing *RE4*—and that's just in the first 15 minutes. It's not enough that every person you come across wants to put a pitchfork in you, but should you let Mr. Chain Saw get within striking distance, you'll find that this is not your daddy's *Resident Evil*.

An amazing example of a game making good on

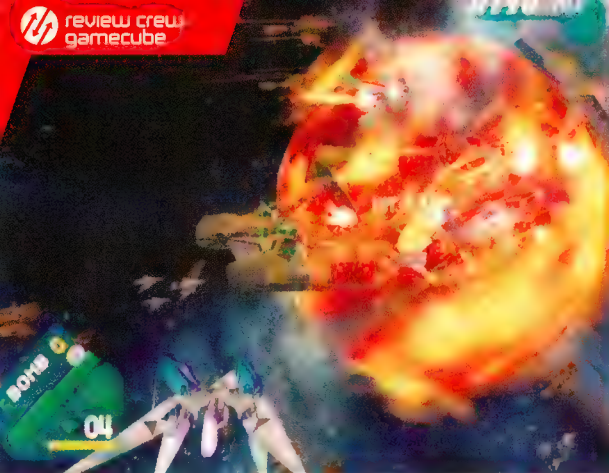
its potential, *Resident Evil 4* eradicates the problems that have pestered the series since day one. Gone are the crappy inventory system of old (no storage chests for you!), the stupid save ribbons, and the feeble-minded undead that have defined *Resident Evil*. I can't emphasize enough how this is a brand-new game. Controlling Leon is a delight (although Mark and Shane are right, a strafe would have been welcome), his A.I. "partner" Ashley isn't the burden you'd expect her to be, and the enemies are ominous and threatening. This game gave me the shivers from the first 15-minute prologue all the way to the final showstopping moments over 20 hours later. To say that *RE4* is gorgeous is an understatement. The characters, lighting, details, and environments are all top-notch, putting even games like *Ninja Gaiden* and *Metal Gear Solid 3* on their heels. While it may be a little too late to save the system, *RE4* shows that the Cube is indeed capable of sterner stuff. 🍌



Protecting Ashley adds an interesting new dynamic to RE's typical "kill everything" formula.



Never bring an ax to a gunfight.



■ In classic shooter style, every boss has a weak spot—like, um, the pink bit between this guy's legs. Just one more armored plate would save so much gr8.

GameCube

STAR FOX: ASSAULT

War of the fuzzies

KEVIN: After the beautiful-but-boring *Star Fox Adventures*' venture into furry platformer antics, *Assault* is a welcome return in style to *Star Fox*'s space-shooter roots—with short-lived but spectacular results. The 10 missions in single-player mode are divided between traditional forced-path shooting missions, free-form areas where you dogfight enemies, and on-foot bits where Fox McCloud and crew fight off dozens of aliens and war machines at once. The action never gets more complicated than “erase the red dots from the radar,” but it never lets up—you're under constant attack, swooping to avoid missiles and swapping vehicles on the fly. This isn't the first game to offer several types of shooting action at once, but I can't think of another that's this smooth and fast-paced. (The voices are great, too, making me wonder why Nintendo doesn't include real voice acting with all its other games.)

But like an arcade shooter, there isn't a great deal of depth—or length. Once you've reached

the end, all that's left is a whole lotta replaying to unlock random junk, including some old arcade games (see sidebar). But there's always multiplayer, which feels remarkably similar to *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal*'s online hijinks.

Being short isn't necessarily devastating, of course. It just means that *Assault* is aimed less at the *Mario* club and more toward the hardcore crowd—folks who enjoy chasing after high scores and going through the same trench run dozens of times in search of the perfect path. Who are you?

CHRISTIAN: *Assault* stays fresh—I never got tired of playing because it's constantly changing.

So it's a shame the game wraps up right as it's really building steam—it definitely left me wanting more. I found some solace replaying on higher difficulties, though, and the multiplayer is also worth a few spins. I could do without the cartoonish animal cast, but that's *Star Fox* for you.

What really pushes the game over the top for

me is the attention that was paid to every detail. It has a truly epic feel, buoyed by fantastic graphics and a rousing, orchestral soundtrack. *Star Fox Assault* succeeds where most games fail: It's simply exhilarating to play, despite its flaws.

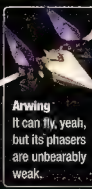
G. FORD: When the furry fox files, the classic spaceship-shooter action is appropriately stellar. But when Fox puts his paws firmly on the ground, things get dicey, and frankly, I'm surprised my fellow reviewers didn't find it as problematic as I did.

Assuming you're using the ideal control setting (more on that in a sec), the on-foot action is adequate but unwieldy, while the tank sections come nowhere near the *Halo*-style Warthog vibe they're obviously aiming for, no matter what controller layout you choose. Worse, the best on-foot and tank settings are in different groups—and you can't mix and match, or even switch mid-mission.

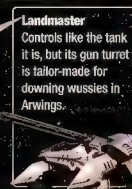
If only developer Namco had locked Fox in his Arwing and lost the key, we'd be lookin' good. 🐾

An Illustrated Field Guide to Star Fox Weaponry

Multiplayer combat in *Star Fox* tends to become a race for hardware, as it's all just too damn powerful compared to your standard-issue blaster.



Arwing
It can fly, yeah, but its phasers are unbearably weak.



Landmaster
Controls like the tank it is, but its gun turret is tailor-made for downing wussies in Arwings.



Missile Launcher
Anything less than this on foot is suicide. Pea-shooters be gone.

Sniper Rifle
Deceptively powerful—it can two-shot a Landmaster.



We Don't Need No Stinkin' Badges
Lack direction in your life? Then try unlocking all of *Star Fox*'s secret bonus areas—in classic Nintendo tradition, there are a bazillion, from new multiplayer maps and characters to emulations of *Xenosius* and other old Namco shooters. Earn high-score badges in each of the game's difficulty levels and find hidden “Special” flags dotted around the missions to dig up all the hidden stuff.

Good: Superb shooting sequences.
Bad: Over way too soon.
Oddly Alluring: Krystal. The key bit... wait, what are we saying?



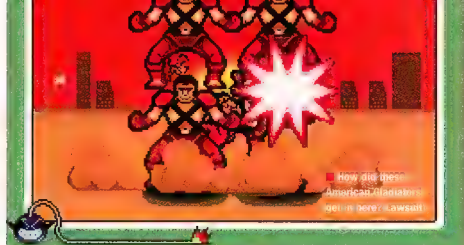
THE VERDICT
(OUT OF 10)

8.0 8.0 6.0

KEVIN CHRISTIAN G. FORD

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Namco
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Teen

www.nintendo.com

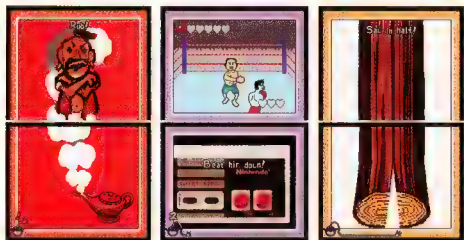


How did these American videogames survive the '90s? Shagott

DS

WARIOWARE: TOUCHED!

Sketch comedy



Good: Delightfully simple distractions.

Bad: Unskippable cut-scenes; no wireless/multiplayer

Play It in Public: Strangers might throw change at you



SHAWN: The pen is mightier than the sword. No, seriously: Stylus in hand, you'll fight off ninjas and hack through flying foodstuffs in *WarioWare's* latest menagerie of lickety-split microgames. At first, you'll wonder what happened and why, but figuring out how to play—frantically poking and prodding, huffing and puffing—is half the draw. Making full use of the DS' dual screens, microphone, and touchy-feely interface, one task has you literally blowing off babes who are angling for a beefcake's attention (wet-nap not included), while another flicks you into a nostril where you trim nose hair and break louder-like boogers in a quest for filthy riches.

While scratch-and-whiff wannabe *Foel the Magic* rubbed some the wrong way by providing only a dozen things to do, *Touched* offers over 100. Skilled scribblers can still speed through it all in a single longish car trip, but dry-erase patterns that shift as soon as you've got 'em pegged, unackable gee-gaws, including a working calculator, cooking timer, and metronome, and a pet parrot that picks up words (watch your mouth) keep you at the drawing board.

SHANE: Whether you're squeezing ketchup on hot dogs, leading Wario through a nasal passage, or blowing the smoke away from a house cat's mackerel cookout, you'll be amused by this new *WarioWare's* antics. And it forces you to use the stylus and microphone in wacky new ways, but these clever microgame designs tend to be a bit simplistic (especially ones involving blowing on the mic or just touching onscreen objects), so you'll be tempted to motor through it all in one marathon sitting.

JENNIFER: *WarioWare* on DS is totally addictive and innovative, and embarrassing to play in public, to boot! (Everything I like in a game.) It also has wacky, nonsense characters and a fun nonstony befitting a game where you erase chalkboards with pieces of *tamago nigiri*. I love the game's lighthearted fixation on bodily functions and its *Price Is Right* quality—you're never sure when your favorite minigames will pop up. The stylus makes things easier than a working arc on GBA, but the game's fast pace and boss stages keep the challenges...dare I say, healthy? In that ADD sort of way.

THE VERDICS ECC OF DS	9.0	8.5	9.0
	SHAWN	SHANE	JENNIFER

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Players: 1-2 (one DS)
ESRB: Everyone

www.nintendo.com

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Do you like the way I work it?

Workit Girl



ju R h4x0r?

Noodle

Kingdom's dialogue may well have been written by dozens of 1UP.com's message boards....

N-Gage

NINE

POCKET KINGDOM: OWN THE WORLD

Is that a kingdom in your pocket or...?



Elfaric
Cost: 220 loot



Shame on a griefer for trying to play game on a griefer!



Good: Simple massively multiplayer online warfare
Bad: Innumerable interface problems
The Only RPG: Where characters say "W00T"



KEVIN: It's impossible not to like the basic idea behind the first major N-Gage release since *Pathway to Glory*. Just like Nokia's previous great white hope, *Pocket Kingdom* is really meant to be played online: It's a sort of strategy role-playing game where you build up armies of wee fantasy stereotypes, send them off to conquer neighboring countries, and defend your own territory from your fellow players' invasions. It's like a giant, never-ending game of *Risk* you can play while at work or on the crapper.

It's a superb idea for a killer portable time-waster, and the dialogue (everyone talks in Internet-forum leet-speak) made me snort on multiple occasions, but the execution kills the experience. Doing anything in *Kingdom* requires you to go through layers upon layers of menus—you spend so much time wading through the bureaucracy, what should be a quick 'n' breezy experience seems like a trip to the DMV. At least it means lag is never a problem. Then again, for an online game, communication is so rare that *Pocket Kingdom* usually plays the same whether you're fighting against other humans or the CPU.

JENNIFER: *Pocket Kingdom* breaks a cardinal rule of role-playing games: Thou shalt not lose loot when pansy-ass characters die. Here, when a party member goes down, you lose it all. Stats? Gone. Loot? Obliterated. The close, personal bond you guys shared? Fuhgeddaboutit. I dreamed having to continually start over with new characters. Ostensibly, you earn cool stuff from defeated opponents, but that didn't motivate me. The game is also overly menu-driven, you don't control your characters in battle, and you can be ambushed online. I just didn't see the fun here.

ROBERT: *Pocket Kingdom* could be played on an ATM—you spend almost all of your time navigating menus. There's no "serious" strategy. And yet, I couldn't put it down, as if compelled by some primitive instinct to get stuff and crush my foes. *Kingdom* makes expert use of the classic Charles Atlas formula: You start out a 97-pound weakling, but slowly make your way to badassitude. The result is satisfying and addictive, even with the laggy menus and tedious item management.

THE VERDICTS OUT OF 10	5.0	7.5
	KEVIN	ROBERT

Publisher: Nokia
Developer: Sega
Players: 1 (2- vs online)
ESRB: Teen

www.n-gage.com

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

The post-coital cigarette of the Reviews section

We couldn't cram every last game in this issue, but only a few escaped the scrutiny of a

three-person review. Hurry up and solve that *Resident Evil*, though—we should be smack in the post-holiday

doldrums, but a small pile of late, big-name titles are coming your way, like *Gran Turismo 4*, *Doom 3*, *Splinter Cell*

Chaos Theory, and *Devil May Cry 3*. Gird your loins, or whatever else needs girding.



Metal Slug Advance • GBA • SNK • ESRB: T
Bobblehead warriors do hyperdetailed, hand-doodled battle on foot with itty-bitty weapons of moderate destruction...again. But this chapter in the side-scrolling saga might be the greatest (we'll leave the hair splitting to the curmudgeons). Midmission continuums minimize frustration, and collectible trinkets make you want to rereinstate even after the smoke settles.



King of Fighters 2002/2003 • PS2 • SNK • ESRB: T
If the addition of purple horseshoes couldn't convince you to put Lucky Charms back in your breakfast, *King of Fighters*' regular rereashes won't make you a convert, either. '02, the lesser of this two-disc, budget-priced pair, rounds up retirees. '03 features fresh faces and three-way tag-team tussles that let you swap brawlers midmatch. Next year: green clovers.



MC Groove Dance Craze • GC • Mad Catz • ESRB: E
Bust out the included (and curiously foul-smelling) Beat Pad and move to the groove of...Jewel. Or don the spandex and switch to dance workout mode—which only counts the calories you burn for correct footwork, no matter what your pit stains and B.O. tell you. The song list may suck, but it's the only dance game in town for Cubers.

If you smoke, you may ALREADY BE DEAD. So don't smoke.

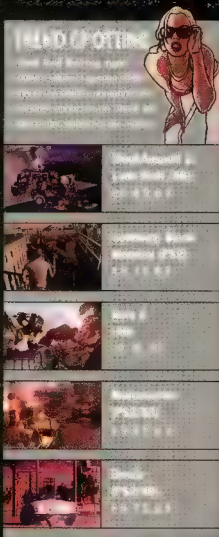


REVIEWS ARCHIVE

Slaved over by interns since mid-2004



Link's new cap not only shrinks him to miniature size, but also plucks off pesky lice.



what's the deal?



PURE EVIL TWO-PACK

- GameCube
- Original Scores for Resident Evil (GC): 9.0, 9.0, 9.5
- Original Scores for Resident Evil 0 (GC): 8.0, 9.0, 8.0

Capcom has re-released its gruesomely gorgeous GameCube games in a single package priced at \$29.99. Both feature beautiful visuals, undead assailants, and the usual girth-shriek-inducing scares. If you games' worth of pants-crumplation isn't enough, the pack also comes with a *Resident Evil 4* demo. It's tough to find, though, so check Amazon.com if you're hard up.

GAME	SYSTEM	VERDICT	SCORES (out of 10)	AWARD
Alan Hemild	PS2/GC	■ The FF side-scrolling cartoon action thrills; the cheap one-hit kills... don't	8.0 8.5 7.0	
Age Escape: Pumped & Primed	PS2	■ This party game is only slightly less fun than hurling feces at friends	5.5 6.5 6.5	
Asphalt Urban GT	DS	■ If you're looking for a great racing game for DS... keep lookin'	6.5 6.5 6.0	
ATV Offroad Fury 3	PS2	■ Enhanced online options and deeper customization flesh out the four-wheeler's thrills	6.5 7.5 6.5	
Backyard Wrestling 2	PS2/XB	■ Everything wrong with professional wrestling tied up in a mediocre package	6.5 6.0 6.5	
The Bard's Tale	PS2/XB	■ This action-RPG's satirical humor and repetitive gameplay'll make you laugh and cry	6.5 6.0 9.0	
Baten Kaitos	GC	■ An RPG with totally innovative card-based fighting and a totally creepy story	8.0 7.5 6.5	
Blinx 2: Masters of Time & Space	XB	■ Jazzy cats and fabulous leather-clad jigs! What doesn't sound fun about that?	7.5 6.0 6.5	
Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django	GBA	■ Stuck up on SPF 45 before going outside with this solar-sensor-equipped action-RPG	8.0 7.0 7.5	
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	PS2/XB/GC	■ Engage in the time-honored tradition of Nazi shooting as an American, Russian, or Brit	8.5 7.5 8.0	Silver
Dead or Alive Ultimate	XB	■ The bouncing boobs of DOAs 1 and 2 look way nicer revamped for Xbox	7.0 7.5 7.5	
Donkey Konga	GC	■ (Mostly) great songs and a quality bong controller make for a lively party game	8.0 7.0 7.5	
EyeToy: AntiGrav	PS2	■ Wave your hands like you care in this body-controlled hovering-party game	8.5 6.0 7.0	
Feel the Magic: XYXX	DS	■ A stylish mix of romance and minigames that takes advantage of the DS' abilities	8.0 9.0 7.0	Silver
Fight Club	PS2/XB	■ Browning the IKEA catalog is more fun than playing this crappy cash-in fighter	2.5 3.0 2.0	
Final Fantasy I & II Dawn II Souls	GBA	■ Spectacular remakes of the first two <i>Final Fantasy</i> showed into one tiny cartridge	9.0 8.5 8.0	Silver
Fullmetal Alchemist	PS2	■ Rabid fans of the <i>Alchemist</i> anime show will lap it up, everyone else... not so much	6.0 6.0 6.0	
The Getaway: Black Monday	PS2	■ Potty-mouthed gangsters can learn some new words from this so-so cinematic caper	4.5 7.0 6.5	
Ghost Recon 2	PS2	■ This team shooter wouldn't pass Game Programming 101	2.5 3.0 5.5	
Ghost Recon 2	XB	■ Nothing remarkable about this military squad shooter, save its solid online play	6.0 6.0 7.0	
GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	PS2/XB/GC	■ Not quite the killer app GoldenEye 007 (N64) was, but single player is still fun	7.5 7.5 7.5	
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	PS2	■ Three massive cities and hundreds of diversions make this sequel larger than life	10 10 10	Platinum
Growlanser: Generations	PS2	■ Sure, the visuals are cutsey, but this RPG will test the hardest of the hardcore	7.0 8.0 7.0	
Halo II	XB	■ The second coming of the Xbox'savior lives up to the hype, both online and off	10 10 10	Platinum
The Incredibles	PS2/XB/GC	■ A superhero game for the little 'uns, but with a sociocopy adult difficulty	5.5 6.5 7.5	
Jack 3	PS2	■ The jack-of-all-trades gamekeeper keeps this duo among the performing elite	8.0 8.0 8.5	Silver
Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories	GBA	■ The cards say you'll be experiencing a bit of action-RPG déjà vu... which isn't so bad	7.0 7.0 7.5	
The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap	GBA	■ Shrinky Link reinvents himself in this surprisingly deep pocket-sized adventure	9.0 8.5 8.5	Gold
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	PS2/XB	■ You won't find penis jokes like this unflinching outside of Spencer Gifts' naughty aisle	3.5 2.5 1.5	
The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age	PS2/XB/GC	■ High production values don't make this RPG the greatest show on Middle-earth	7.0 7.0 5.0	
Mario Party 6	GC	■ Still fun, but the reshaped board game antics are lingering like an uninvited guest	6.0 6.5 8.0	
Mario Power Tennis	GC	■ Mario packs so much fun service, you won't want to return this as a game of mine	10 7.5 8.0	Silver
MachAssault 2: Lone Wolf	XB	■ Online robot battles crush Lone Wolf's single-player game under 40x tons of steel	8.0 8.0 8.0	Silver
Mega Man X8	PS2	■ Mega Man takes another shot at the third dimension and gets it right this time	6.5 6.5 7.0	
Men of Valor	XB	■ Decent multiplayer saves the day in this otherwise blah Vietnam-era shooter	6.0 7.5 6.0	
Mercenaries	PS2/XB	■ Go anywhere, steal any vehicle, blow up any building in this awesome action epic	8.5 8.0 9.0	Silver
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	PS2	■ Venture back to the idealistic '60s for Snake's most ambitious stealth action journey	9.0 9.5 10	Gold
Matrimond Prime 2: Echoes	GC	■ Saturn looks smokin' hot even in the dark... world, that is	9.0 10 10	Gold
Mr. Driller: Drill Spirits	DS	■ Simple, addictive puzzle action that truly shines in its wireless multiplayer mode	7.5 7.5 7.0	
Need for Speed Underground 2	PS2/XB/GC	■ Brookie Burke is a street-smartin' race queen? Eh, the game's good, so whatever	8.0 8.0 8.0	Silver
Neo Contra	PS2	■ Konami has another decent Contra sequel in this short, but sweet, blast-em-up	6.0 7.0 7.0	
NFL Street 2	PS2/XB/GC	■ Backyard football for the big boys...and it's good	6.0 8.0 9.5	Silver
Odyssey: Stranger's Wrath	XB	■ Action, platforming, and first-person shooting meld in this refreshing, bizarre game	8.5 8.5 8.5	Silver
OutRun 2	XB	■ The graphics say 2004, but the arcade handling still says 1989	6.5 6.0 8.0	
Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door	GC	■ Nintendo's much-needed GC role-playing game is flat-out fantastic	9.0 7.0 7.0	Gold
Pathway In Glory	NG	■ While calling it the best game on N-Gage isn't saying much, it's still pretty good	7.5 7.5 7.0	
Pink Pals	DS	■ I'm a pal and tell others not to waste an Andrew Jackson on this poor text messenger	1.5 0.0 0.0	
Princes of Persia: Warrior Within	PS2/XB/GC	■ Boy, is this price in a bad mood. Maybe it's because adventure 'N0, 2 isn't as fun	8.5 8.5 8.5	Silver
Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal	PS2	■ PS2's best mascot platforming game...with guns. Lots of guns	9.0 9.0 10	Gold
Ridge Racer DS	DS	■ Six-player wireless LAN races (on one cart); good, but graphics and bad control...bad	6.5 6.5 8.25	
Rumble Roses	PS2	■ Luscious ladies lock limbs in this wonderfully smutty (yet bare-bones) brawler	7.5 6.5 6.5	
Sega SuperStars	PS2	■ This EyeToy game collection is moderately entertaining for the hour it takes to play	6.0 7.5 7.5	
ShutShook: Nam '67	PS2/XB	■ Boom-boom with the ladies after boom-booming the enemy in this grim shooter	7.0 6.0 4.0	
Spider-Man 2	DS	■ If your spider sense is on the fritz, let us warn you to avoid this ho-hum adventure	6.0 5.5 3.0	
Sprung	DS	■ Hook up with young hotties at a ski resort. Slightly more fun than champaign	4.0 5.0 1.0	
Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic II	XB	■ Not as good as the first game, but still, a <i>Star Wars</i> game that doesn't suck!	8.5 7.0 9.0	Silver
Sulkoeden IV	PS2	■ Uneventful yet functional RPG set adrift on the choppy seas	6.5 6.5 6.5	
Super Mario 64 DS	DS	■ It's a remake of one of the best platformers ever! Only it's a-much harder to control	8.0 8.0 9.0	
SV Chaos: SNK vs. Capcom	XB	■ SNK and Capcom go on it again, this time with spotty online and mediocre game	6.0 6.0 3.0	
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2	PS2/XB/GC	■ With four-player brawl'n, the half-shell heroes are half-baked, and...cashed	3.0 4.0 2.0	
Troa 2.0: Killer App	XB	■ The more apt name, <i>Troa 2.0: Better Than Average</i> , probably wouldn't have sold	7.0 6.0 7.5	
The Urbz: Sims in the City	PS2/XB/GC	■ The Urbz' suburban theme gets kicked down upstairs and outside but loses something	7.0 5.5 7.0	
The Urbz: Sims in the City	DS	■ Now with fewer bodily functions and more button-mashing minigames	8.5 7.5 9.5	Silver
Viewtiful Joe 2	PS2	■ More of what you (hopefully) know and (should) love from Joe's first starring	8.0 8.0 8.5	Silver
Virtua Quest	PS2/GC	■ A trouble-torn has less of an identity crisis than this fighter/RPG platformer	5.5 5.0 4.0	
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw	PS2	■ SmackDown goes online and adds voice acting. The rest is basically the same	7.5 8.5 7.0	

SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP



Don't try these at home

A lot of people talk about what they'd do if they ran the world. Then they usually go on and on about how they'd bring about a utopia by making trees free and liquefying fat people for industrial lubricant. Well, if I ran the world, the first thing I'd do is declare it illegal to bring bad games within 200 yards of me. Actually, that's not true. The first thing I'd do is meet Jean-Claude Van Damme. Next, I'd declare, like, 20 days out of the year National Jean-Claude Van Damme Doing the Splits Day and throw a sweet parade celebrating my decision. Then, and only then, I'd command me to

play something with Barbie in it to remind myself why I took over the world in the first place—to not play Barbie games. It would work, and I'd use a special phone that automatically dials Jean-Claude Van Damme when I pick it up so he could hear my good news. Oh my god, I just now realized how awesome I am!

—Seanbaby

■ Catherine Bach, always a vision in denim hot pants.



Dora the Explorer: Super Star Adventures • GBA

I am not a complicated man. I don't require multiple allegorical layers for me to declare a work as genius. In fact, my favorite movies are *Dumbass Falls Off Ladder* and *Cat Totally Runs Into Wall*. That said, this game is for idiots. I don't care if they're four, if they play this, they're idiots. The game knows this so too and assumes the player can't read. Here's an example of a conversation between Dora and her monkey: "Picture of a star! Picture of a magical flying prince!" Someone once said a picture is worth a thousand words, but that guy hasn't seen a moron cartoon girl spit out a drawing of a castle. That's worth exactly 10 words: "Next level has something to do with a castle, maybe."

My favorite part comes at the end of a stage—Dora's purse smiles and shouts, "WE DID IT!" What a victory for us, bag! Let me tell you what we did: Fruity things flew by and we smiled and laughed together. Parents, if you have a child capable of enjoying this game, here's how to make it even more fun: cover it with peanut butter and say it's candy. Then give them a handful of bugs and tell them that it's also candy.

Top tip: Making your way through the danger-free maze can be hard, idiots! For extra help, look at the little arrow that points in the direction to go at each intersection. Note: I'm serious.



The Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee • PS2/XB

This is a sloppy racing game with boring objectives and a banjo soundtrack. I love it. If you were wondering what it takes for a bad game to be kick-ass on a technicality, it's horn bonus. Every time you hit a big jump, the game cuts to the Duke boys' slow-motion view, and if you hit the horn button you receive the horn bonus. It makes every single jump into a compelling honk or no-honk situation. "Can I get the horn bonus this time? Only seconds to...hit...horn button...YES! GOT IT!" This idea is so genius, the horn button might as well be an in-your-face button at every game that came before.

The horn-honking bar has been set, and from this game forward, industry titles will have to adapt. Will *Burnout 4* give bonus points for honking the horn during a stunt? If it doesn't, it'll seem hopelessly behind the times, and yet if it does, wouldn't that simply make it another *Dukes of Hazzard* clone? I'd go so far as to say that all games that don't include a horn bonus are splitting on progress. For example, *Metal Gear Solid* should feature a hat with a built-in horn so you can honk for extra points during a stealth assassination.

More horn bonus: Honking during normal driving conditions gives you no bonus points but should be done anyway to prepare yourself for how rad it will be when you hit a jump doing it.



That's So Raven! • GBA

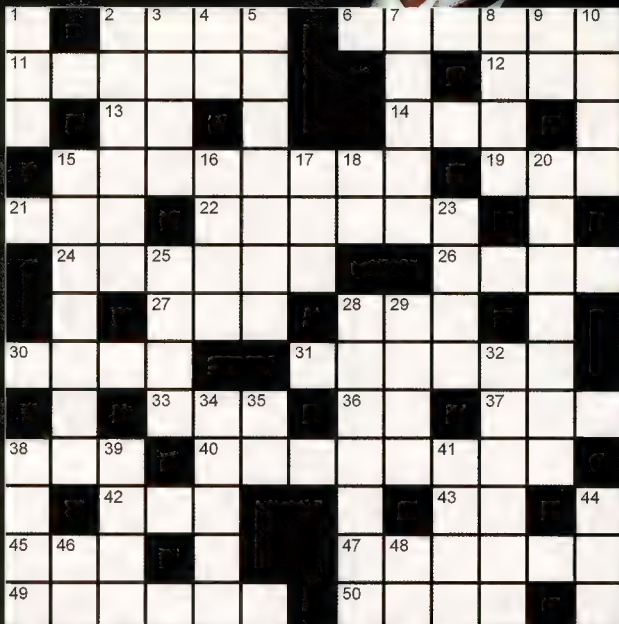
There are many things that go into making a good game. I don't know all of them, but the people who made this don't know any of them. Making a fun game while being true to the established *That's So Raven!* continuity must have been a challenge. A challenge the developers excitedly failed. You navigate Raven through her school, using water bottles and perfume to fight off deadly enemies—janitors and nerds pushing AV carts. To call them enemies is a little dramatic, though. As long as you don't walk in front of them, you'll be OK. This should be easy if you were born with human hands instead of flippers.

I want to know who gremlit "avoiding bored janitors" as a videogame plot. Could they not get the game rights to episode 46 of *Saved by the Bell*? I can see trying to trick fans of *That's So Raven!* into buying garbage that says *That's So Raven!* on it, but why not at least try to make it fun? Your fans aren't going to turn on you if you give Raven a rocket pack so she can fight off the rival school's lava monsters. Other licensed properties do this. Hell, the *Taenaga Mutant Ninja Turtles* traveled through time in one of their games, and they were already ninjas and turtles to start with.

Didja know: "That's so Raven!" is one of the most underused catchphrases in the English language, said by fewer than zero people in a single day! 🐼

A CROSSWORD YOU CAN'T REFUSE

(Solution on page 138)



ACROSS

2. *Street Fighter II* Spaniard
6. Like Hawk or Margera
11. Online *Final Fantasy*
12. Metal Gear designation
13. Leon stars in No. 4 (abbrv.)
14. Another name for AV cables
15. Godfather surname
19. *AMF Bowling* objective
21. Title for 15 ACROSS
22. PS2/XB first-person shooter
24. Played Brando's son in *Godfather* series
26. Like *Prince of Persia* prince
27. *Solid Snake's* country of allegiance
28. Written under your "hover" meter in *Blaster Master* (NES)
30. Lara Croft raider
31. Super Nintendo *Yoshi* expedition
33. Part of *Um Jammer Lammy's* gear
36. PS2 *Mobile Suit Gundam* epithet, for short
37. Right, right, left in *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*
38. Like 8-bit *Racer*
40. Snake's *MGS3* job description?
42. Like PS2's star-studded *Jam*
43. Hit the drugs too hard in upcoming *Narc* remake?
45. *Leisure Suit Larry* souvenir
47. You do this more in fighting games than in RPGs
48. *Splitter Cell* snooping tool?
50. Makes Mario invincible

DOWN

1. Wireframe PS2 shooter
2. *San Andreas* beach
3. Square's black sheep *Secret of...*
4. Short for N64 *Bond* classic?
5. Nintendo DS uses an internal one for wireless connections
7. *Ghost Recon 2* locale
8. Sega CD thriller *Night*...
9. *Godfather* publisher
10. *RBI Baseball* pitcher Nolan
11. *Godfather* director
16. 13 ACROSS' Spanish sidekick
17. *Street Fighter III* fighter
18. Up and right on a *Zelda* compass (abbrv.)
20. Principal *Godfather* nationality
23. Surrounds World 8 in *Super Mario Bros. 3*
25. Home to some *Vice City* immigrants
28. Like bodies of water in *Mario Golf*
29. Rubs out Mafia style?
32. *Madden* Oaklandite
34. Corleone's crime syndicates
35. Sony console, for short
38. Steals cash from, in *San Andreas*
39. *Medal of Honor* key event
41. Easy place to lose your PS2 DVD remote?
44. _ Wong, from *Resident Evil 2* and *Resident Evil 4*

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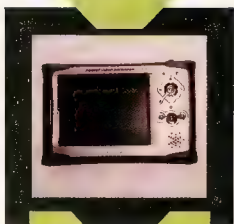
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HSU AND CHAN
 THE
Godfodder

OH HELLO, VIDEO GAMERS-- I'M HSU TANAKA, THAT'S MY BROTHER CHAN, AND IT SEEMS THAT LIFE HAS ONCE AGAIN GIVEN US LEMONS-- BIG, BLACK-SUITED LEMONS WITH CONNECTIONS TO THE GEMENT INDUSTRY! WE ARE IN THE HOUSE OF DON NITO BALONEVY THE SECOND, THE MAN AN ENTIRE CITY CALLS... "GODFATHER!"

RE-REPORTEDLY, SOME PEOPLE ALSO CALL HIM "SPANKY," BUT WE'VE BEEN ADVISED THAT IT'S BEST NOT TO EMPLOY THAT PARTICULAR TITLE ON THE FIRST MEETING.

WHO YOU TALKING 'TOD? KEEP MOUTH!!

THE DON WILL SEE YOU NOW. WIFE YOUR FEET, DID YOU WASH YOUR HANDS? LET'S SEE 'EM!

DOES YOUR HAIR EVER LAY DOWN IN BACK? PICKY!

HELLO, GENTLEMEN, ARE YOU WELLET ARE YOUR FAMILIES WELLET?

OUR SISTER CARRIED A DOORFUS, AND ONE OF YOUR GOODIES JUST TOTTALY SEIT IN MY HAIR.

WITH THE RECENT PASSING OF MY FATHER, I AM NOW IN CHARGE OF THE BALONEVY FAMILY OPERATIONS, INCLUDING THE REPAIRMENT OF FAVORS, AND THE COLLECTION OF OLD DEBTS. YOU FOLLOW ME, MR. TANAKA? WE DO NOT FORGET THOSE WHOH WEEVE HELPED IN THE PAST.

HEH!

EXCELLENT, COME THIS WAY.

WHAT'S HE TALKING ABOUT, HSU?

UPL... IT'S POSSIBLE THAT MY SPRING BREAK OF THIS WAS A BIT MORE FANBUCTIONARY THAN I'D INITIALLY REPORTED.

AHEM.

IN RETURN FOR OUR SERVICES, I'M ASKING A PERSONAL FAVOR OF YOU -- YOU MAKE VIDEO GAMES, SO I HEAR. I WANT YOU TO MAKE A VIDEO GAME CHRONICLING THE GLORY OF THE BALONEVY FAMILY THROUGH THE AGES! MAKE IT REALISTIC AND DRAMATIC! YOU KNOW, CRYING WOMEN AND ALL.

YOU MEAN-- YOU WANT US TO MAKE A REAL-LIFE CRIME SIMULATOR?

THAT'LL BE ME! EXCUSE!

WEEE A FAMILY RUNNING A BUSINESS, MR. TANAKA, AND YOU'D DO WELL TO REMEMBER THAT, IF YOU VALUE YOUR KNEECAPS. AS AN ASIDE, IF EITHER OF YOU FIND YOURSELF WETTING YOUR PANTS IN TERROR, OR SPINNING THE PLASTIC SHEET PLACED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM FOR... UM... PUTTING UP DRYWALL...

SO-- WAIT-- YOU WANT US TO MAKE A VIDEO GAME ABOUT THE BALONEVY MAFIA, BUT WE CAN'T INCLUDE ANY PREFERENCES TO CRIME?

CORRECT, OR WE FINE OUT YOUR EYE-BALLS WITH A KNITTING NEEDLE.

I HAVE TO GO STAND ON THE PLASTIC.

Kneek Kneek! SHE GET!

FLOWERS FOR DON NITO BALONEVY! ISSTAT SO? WHO SENT 'EM?

I DID.

WHAT?

BOOM!

GET 'EM, BOB!

THE MANNKXNIS SEND THEIR REGARDS, BALONEVY!

WITH SARCASM!

BAM BAM BAM

>COUGH< W-- WITH MY LAST BREATH... I CURSE ALL VIDEO GAME DESIGNERS... I CURSE YOUUUUU...

G A A A A

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL, SO THEY SAY! SEE YOU IN THIRTO DAYS, VIDEO GAMERS!

YOU MAKE VIDEO GAMES, HUH? YOU EVER TAPPED FOR IDEAS?

THIS WAS MORE FUN THAN SPRING BREAK '97!

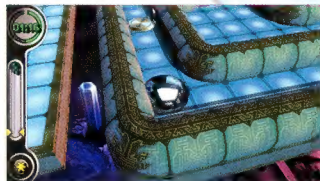
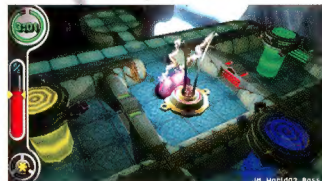
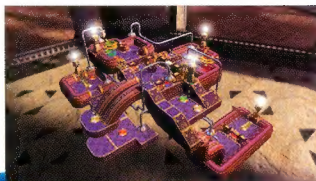
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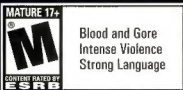
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