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May 2006 issue 203
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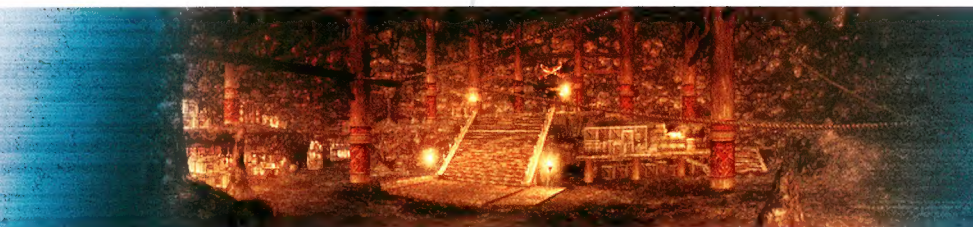
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- Why old problems are in our next-gen games
- Brain Age: the next big thing for DS
- Huxley: massively multiplayer shooting
- Next-gen Alone in the Dark...and tons more!

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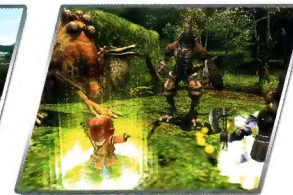


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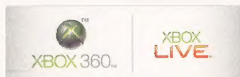


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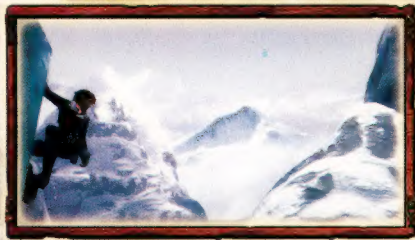
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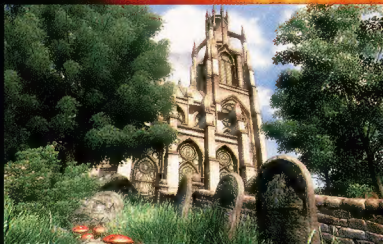


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—GameInformer

The RPG for the Next Generation





The Elder Scrolls IV
OBLIVION

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TOO HUMAN

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What's around the corner for the little fellas: the portable gaming machines.

■ **Monster Hunter Freedom**



■ **New Super Mario Bros.**



■ **Mortal Kombat: Unchained**



■ **LocoRoco**



EDITORIAL

I like the PSP. It's a well-designed machine. I don't like many of its games. They're not well designed for the machine. (I suppose that could mean the PSP isn't all that well designed after all.)

Metal Gear Acid, *Lumines*, *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories*... Many games work just fine on this platform. *Splinter Cell Essentials*, *Me & My Katamari*, and almost anything that involves the combination of "looking" and "shooting"? Forget about it. The control issues of not having a second "look-around" analog stick are just overwhelming. You can kind of blame Sony for not designing its portable system to be 3D-proof and for not accommodating the kind of games people are playing these days. But I more blame the publishers and developers who are trying to shoehorn their console-sized games into something that is, most certainly, not a console.

Gamemakers must embrace a platform and all of its strengths and weaknesses. The PSP isn't a first-person-shooter machine, so quit making first-person shooters for it (unless you find some ingenious control scheme that gamers can dig). It plays puzzle and strategy titles just fine, so how about some more of those? (OK, I know those aren't blockbuster genres, but still....)

Just look at the Nintendo DS. That system may not be as sexy, but, for the most part (not always), its games fit better. That's because developers are more inclined to take advantage of the touch screen, rather than forcing something onto the DS that it was never meant to play.

Whoever makes it, the next major portable system should have: a big screen like the PSP's, touch screen functionality like the DS, two analog sticks, two to four shoulder buttons, four face buttons (not counting Start or Select), a microphone, and wireless functionality. Yeah, this monstrosity might look a little bit like the gaming equivalent of The Homer, the everyman's car. But hey, at least it'll work for all the games I want to play.

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief

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Letters

prisoner advising, genre debating, cannibal satiating, and videogaming

Prisoner advice #1

Here's my situation: I am in prison in Maine, and I play a minimum of eight hours of games daily. Seven days a week, 365 days a year. The PS2 is simply my godsend here. It's the cheapest baby-sitter any Department of Corrections could ever allow inside its walls. Recently, though, I have noticed that my eyes start to tear up after about 10 minutes. The eye doctor here says my eyes are OK, that it's not them. This only happens when I am playing a game, any type of game. When I just watch TV, there's never a tear. What gives?

—Roger W. Smothers, Sr.

Have you tried blinking, or better yet, cutting your 57-hour-a-week habit down to a more manageable 20-30 hours? We get paid to play games, and we don't even put in those kinds of hours.

Prisoner advice #2

I am an inmate in an Ohio prison, which means I don't have access to a computer. I'm writing to find out if there are any good Adult Only (AO)-rated games out yet. Also, are there any gaming magazines that are not afraid to publish the titles of the AO-rated games?

—Michael L. Wimer

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Online racism

I've been hearing a lot of talk about how online play is the future of videogaming, but it's not a future I want to be a part of. Since I've been playing online, I've encountered some of the most ignorant people on earth. Most recently, I was playing *Dead or Alive 4* online, and I was kicking someone's butt. But after I beat him twice, he says that I'm a "cheap-ass n***er," and that "n***ers" like me are all the same. This is nothing new. I hear stuff like this online all the time. I filed a complaint, but let me ask the videogame industry: is there the new generation of gaming, do I or any ethnic people want to be a part of it? Experiencing things like this makes me want to give my 360 away. Online play can never be the next big revolution until this problem is fixed!

—Matthew Brown

Thanks for reporting back... from front lines of the idiocy wars (aka online gaming), Matthew. Look for a game from us in your mailbox.

We're not afraid of AO-rated games.

You're aware that *Katamari Damacy*, roughly translated from the Japanese, means "group sex in ball configuration," right? There's also *Beatmania* (self-explanatory), *Gun* (hot pistol action), *Rub Rabbis!* (perhaps the most perverted game ever made), and plenty of other sexy titles for an incarcerated young man such as yourself.

Prisoner advice #3

Hey guys, thought I'd type a few words down until the sheriff comes in. I'm a correctional officer here at a lovely jail, and I thought I would tell you about why my job's the coolest! Have you seen that TV commercial about people getting paid to play games? That's about how it is here. We play all sorts of games up in here, and I play two-player games with the inmates. As long as I get to come to work and play the latest games and get paid for it, it's the best job around.

—Jonathan Boudkin

Do people in jail do anything but play games these days? What happened to the riots, the makeshift knives, the synthetic drugs made from cleaning products, and the grain alcohol fermented in toilet bowls? Besides, aren't games supposed to make you act like a criminal? We're totally disenchanted.

Run-on rant-a-thon

I'm one of the many 11-year-old kids that plays Mature-rated games, and I read *EGM* every month, and you guys always make fun of us, and we don't appreciate it, and all the 30-something-year-olds write you about *Street Fighter* or some other game that took two seconds to make, and you compliment them all the time, and I've played those games, and they suck!

—Alex M.

Well, we think that kids who play M-rated games are making it harder for



It took two minutes to make and 10 years to get over.

their intended audience to play them, and we make fun of kids like you because you write such bad letters (presumably because you're playing *Grand Theft Auto* when you should be playing *Elmo's Letter Adventure*), and *Street Fighter* is a great game, and it took much longer than two seconds to make, and you suck!

(In)complete genre analysis

I was looking through some old issues of the magazine a little while ago, and I began to notice that sports games, as a whole, tended to score higher than all the other genres. Curious, I decided to do a little number crunching to see if my observation was true or not. I looked through a whole year of issues (June 2004 to June 2005)

and recorded all the scores given to games in the following genres: sports, role-playing games (RPGs), fighting, racing, shooters, strategy, puzzle, and survival-horror. After tallying up all the scores and determining an average score for each genre, here are the results I was left with:

Puzzle: 7.917
Sports: 7.880
RPGs: 7.429
Racing: 7.304
Shooters: 7.061
Strategy: 6.833
Fighting: 6.737
Survival-horror: 6.317

Sure enough, it looked as though sports games had a higher average score than almost all of the other genres, taking a backseat only to puzzle games. To be fair, though, I must point out that only five puzzle games were included in this average [versus] 32 sports games. —Brian Sheehar

Interesting analysis. You left out some key genres, though. We suck at math, so we just made these numbers up: >



Scary Resident Evil thingy says, "But survival-horror games are the bestests!!!"

POST OFFICE

Rambing and ranting from our message boards, boards.IUP.com (look for *Electronic Gaming Monthly's* forums)

"If life is really an elaborate videogame, what is your game called?"

Linkthelegend2: *People Crossing*, fewer animals but more idiots

Neato_Jinkins2: *Filiham H. Muffman's Splendiferous Zeppelin Adventure*

Icymatt: *The Game You Never Want to Play*

daniel564: *Welcome to My Life* (rated M for Mature)

IamEthos: *The Silent Adventures of That Really Quiet Kid*

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- Lawyer simulations: 7.639
- Dog-sitting: 6.481
- Games featuring some form of "baditude": 5.199
- Mario Kart knockoffs: 5.001
- Games that inspired Uwe Boll movies: 4.851
- Military propaganda and recruitment shooters: 4.521
- Crime-exploitation: 3.402

Playing pool

I thought I was a "hardcore gamer," but last week the torch was taken from me. I was in the recreation area playing pool when I saw a guy named Justin whip out his PSP. I watched him play *Tony Hawk* for about an hour and half, and as he played, he was rocking back and forth faster and faster. Soon, he ran up to me and thrust the PSP into my hands and just said, "HOLD!" I was busy with my game, so I went to put his PSP into its case, and that's when I noticed that there was a small wet spot on his chair. We

never asked, but we can only assume that he played until his bladder decided to teach him a lesson. I now bow to Justin's super-hardcoreness. —John Grimes

Actually, what you witnessed was a rare public viewing of the species *Hardcoreiois generosus* secreting a special reproductive fluid, which, via mitochondrial Wi-Fi, alerts other hardcores to his presence. He was probably running off to mate. And also: ewww.

Hungry for people-eating games

I NEED MORE GAMES ABOUT CANNIBALISM. NEXT TIME YOU GUYS TALK TO ANY GAME DEVELOPERS, TELL THEM. —Herman

Will do, for sure. By the way, in case you were wondering, everyone at EGM is supertrim and fit, not the kind of deliciously meaty, sedentary people-veal you might find at competing game mags and most gaming fansites. Anyway, we'll pass this along.



■ When Stephen Nobles was your age, he used to sit out in the snow, freezing to death, just to play online games, you whippersnapper.



■ iGame: Preorder yours today, jackasses.

Not fooled

It was way too obvious that the "iGame" [in EGM #202] was your April Fool's joke... that is, until I read that *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* received Game of the Month honors over *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter* and/or *Fight Night Round 3*. —Thomas Harrington

Fooled

In EGM #202, you forgot to mention iGame's biggest benefit: With all the games being scaled down to play on a D-pad for mainstream gamers, the iGame could bridge the gap between mainstream and hardcore. Games like *Call of Duty 3* [on the iGame] might persuade mainstream gamers to buy a next-gen console and get into real gaming. —Darryl Levy

Fool

I'm really excited for the iGame to come out, and I will not sleep until it does. I'd just like to tell you guys how loadably awesome you are for being the only source for this information. I say that you are "loadably" awesome because only it word used to emphasize the pure radicalness of *Battletoads* can describe how awesome you guys are for catching this scoop on April Fool's Day. If it were not for *Battletoads*, I would have to express my deep feelings for you through ritual sacrifice. —Dave Knapp

Life-threatening commitment to gaming

I don't have a router at my house, so I miss out on Xbox Live, DS Wi-Fi, etc. Fortunately, my pal hooked me up to his router, so I can play my DS online. Unfortunately, his parents

WIN THE GAME OF THE MONTH

We've hidden movie quotes in this issue—spoiler one and you can win our Game of the Month. Go to EGM-SOTM.YUP.com. There you'll find our message (subject head: **Movie Quote: EGM #203**) with the quote, the movie it's from, and the page number you found it on. Include your mailing address (no P.O. boxes) and your full name. Three randomly selected readers will win copies of this issue's Game of the Month.



are never home, so I can't go inside to play. Instead, I sit on a hill across from his house and play *Mario Kart DS* online. Where I live, it is very cold. I sit in the snow, freezing. My face stings. My fingers are numb, snow piling down hard each day. It's usually 30 degrees or less, and I can hardly see the screen through the snow, yet I'm having the time of my life! —Stephen Nobles

Complete sucker

In the letters section of EGM #200, you referenced Namco's *Space Shuttle Complete*, which shipped with a \$17,999 cockpit! Please, can you give me more info on this product? I have been looking everywhere on the Internet and can't find info or pictures of it. You also mentioned you were stuck on this game. —Lowride

What more can we say about a game that bankrupted families, destroyed friendships, and trained gamers to make precise mechanical repairs to the Hubble Space Telescope? The game's \$17,999 controller was built into the chassis of a Dodge Sportsman van. It ran on diesel fuel, had king-size cupholders, and smelled like a Jiffy Lube station. Hell yeah we were stuck...somewhere in the middle of our second semester of quantum physics. ☹

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



Bob Ross: The Game
Finally, the killer-app launch title for Nintendo's 3D-pointer-equipped console can be revealed. Realize your dream of becoming a mediocre landscape painter with the help of Afro-tastic PBS superstar Bob Ross. Learn to paint "happy little trees, happy little clouds, and pretty little mountains" all using Nintendo's fresh-hand-style controller and optional palette attachment. —Peter Kwarts & Bert Zuilhof

BONUS GALLERY

Going the extra mile for love of the game

Ms. Pod-Man

An enterprising geek built this supercute clash of old school and new school, a tiny *Ms. Pac-Man*-arcade cabinet that houses an arcade-emulating iPod Nano. "Yes, it works. This is the prototype version. It stands about 5 inches tall," says Scott Lawrence, the cabinet's creator. Check out his making-of photos at: www.umlaulama.com/gallery/tianomame



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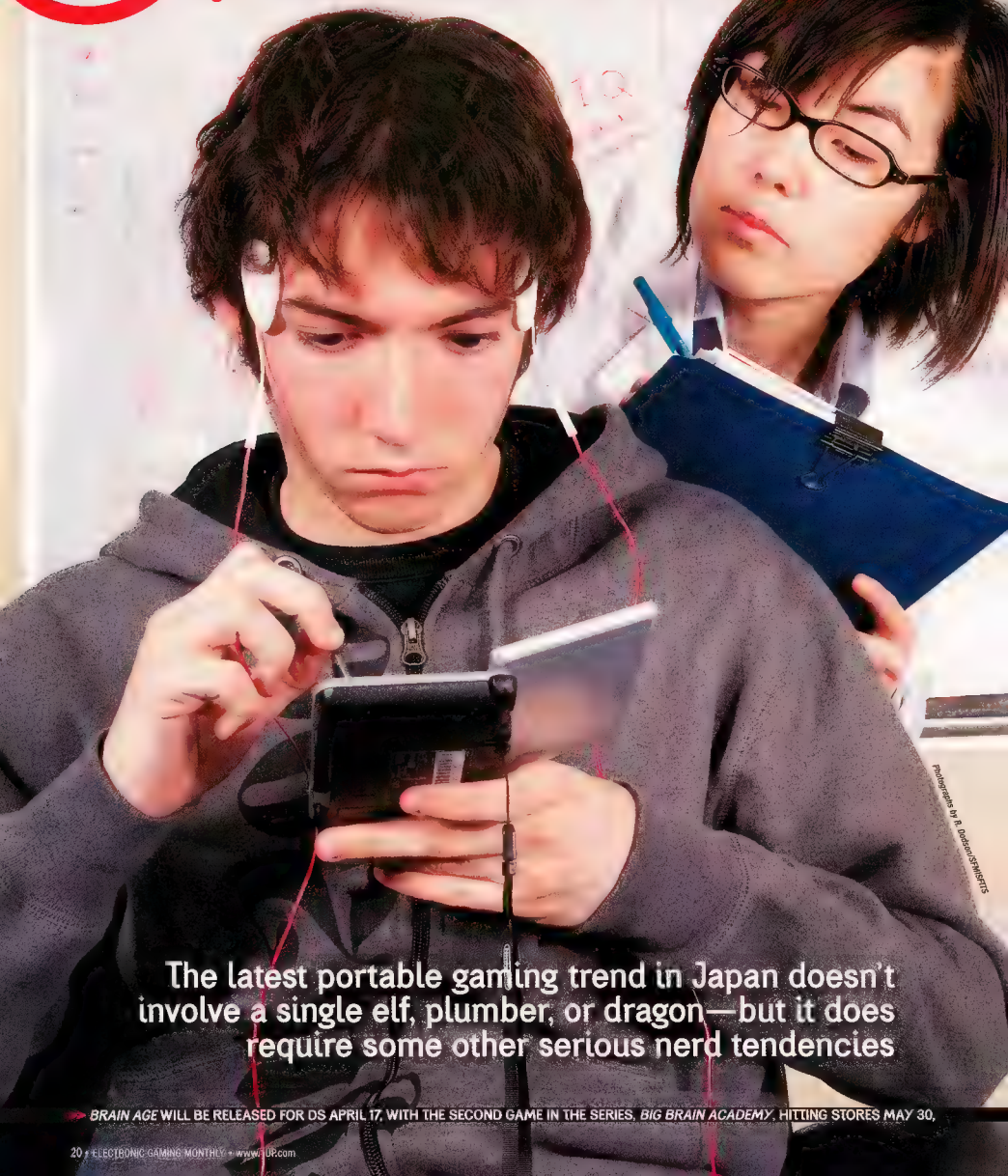
RISE OF LEGENDS





press start

gaming news, previews, new and not-so-improved consoles, and other stuff



The latest portable gaming trend in Japan doesn't involve a single elf, plumber, or dragon—but it does require some other serious nerd tendencies

BRAIN AGE WILL BE RELEASED FOR DS APRIL 17, WITH THE SECOND GAME IN THE SERIES, *BIG BRAIN ACADEMY*, HITTING STORES MAY 30.

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN

Crosswords, brainteasers, word jumbles, and IQ tests may be tried-and-true time-wasting phenomena, but they're not exactly what comes to mind when you think of upcoming hot trends in high-tech videogaming. Sure, you've got 83 million (or so) middle-aged women playing *Twist* online at this very instant, but when you think about the cutting edge of the medium, daily sudoku doesn't pop to the forefront. That all changes this spring, when Nintendo hits us with its new DS game, *Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day*.

Strain that brain

Brain Age takes the basic skills we all learned in grade school—reading, writing, and arithmetic—and turns them into addictive timed puzzles. It calculates

the speed and accuracy with which you solve the puzzles, then calculates your "brain age"—a number that determines whether you're a spry young whiz kid of 20 or positively geriatric in your 80-year-old dementia.

The puzzles involve everything from rapid-fire arithmetic and speed-reading classic literary passages from *Gulliver's Travels* to sketching out from memory the shape of the African continent. The minigames make extensive use of the DS technology—answers are written on the touch screen, and some puzzles have you speak the correct answer into the microphone. Some activities are easier than they sound, and some are harder—test your own gray cells in our quizzical sidebar (right)—but they all make you feel brainy. And that's never a bad thing, especially when it's based on actual science. ▶

Curious how well your brain is aging? Get cracking on the four puzzles below. Keep in mind, the real game bases your score on how fast you can solve the puzzles, so don't dillydally!

QUESTION 1: SUDOKU

7	5	3	8	2	
	2	8	1	4	
8	1				5 6
	3	1	8	2	
	1	7	9		
9	3	2	4		
9	8				3 7
	3	9	4	5	
2	6	8	1	4	

Complete the grid so every vertical line, horizontal line, and 3-by-3 grid contains the numbers 1 through 9 with no overlap.

QUESTION 2: SYLLABLE COUNT

Watching television rots your brain.	
No, really, it's been scientifically proven.	
Videogames, on the other hand, keep your prefrontal cortex active.	
And that's really good for society.	
By the way, have you been reading this aloud?	
If you have, that's good, because it's the best way to train your brain!	

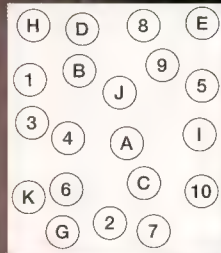
Determine the correct number of syllables in each phrase and fill in the blanks with your answers.

QUESTION 3: ARITHMETIC

11-8 =	4x1 =
9+2 =	1+7 =
1x7 =	4-0 =
2x0 =	10-8 =
2-2 =	4+9 =
3+3 =	6x9 =
9x4 =	9-1 =
4+5 =	8+1 =
1x9 =	0x1 =
15-9 =	12-8 =

This one's pretty straightforward—just do the math and write in the correct answers to each of the following equations.

QUESTION 4: CONNECT MAZE



Draw a line from A to 1, then to B, then to 2, and so on until complete. Don't touch any letters or numbers except the ones you're aiming for.

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN (CONT.)

► Weird science

Brain Age is the first in a series of three games for the DS that came out last year in Japan and have sold more than 2.5 million copies to date. Based on research by Dr. Ryuta Kawashima, a neuroscientist who has spent decades studying and writing about brain activity, the games are built on the premise that brain functions start to decrease after the age of 20—and that, just as with the rest of your body, exercising your brain keeps it strong. “Have you noticed yourself forgetting things lately? Do you have trouble articulating exactly what you want to say?” Kawashima asks in the game’s introductory manual. “These symptoms can be alleviated by training your brain.”

The games are supposed to stimulate activity in the prefrontal cortex—“the control tower of your brain,” according to Kawashima. All the activities in *Brain Age*, whether counting syllables in words or quickly memorizing a series of numbers on the screen, have been specially tested (using MRIs, even) and designed to train this center of your practical intelligence.

Real genius

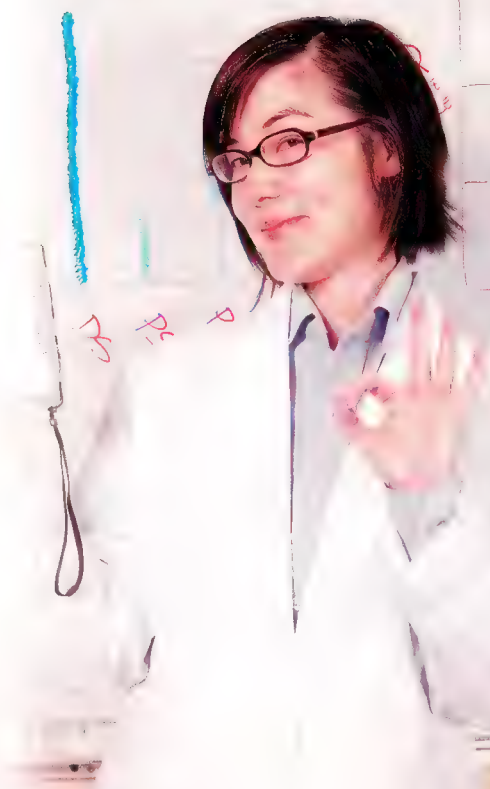
Math equations and MRI scans of brain activity might seem out of step with today’s popular games, but Nintendo isn’t doing Jedi mind tricks. From President Satoshi Iwata’s keynote address at last year’s Tokyo Game Show (“If we cannot

expand the market, all we can do is wait for the industry to slowly die”) to Executive Vice President Reggie Fils-Aime’s public promises to market to Oprah Winfrey’s audience, the company is clearly looking to bring new gamers into the fold.

If its unique sales pattern is any indication, *Brain Age* is a step in that direction. Unlike most games, which see the bulk of their sales in the first couple weeks after release, *Brain Age* wasn’t crazy out of the gate. “But then word of mouth built,” says Nintendo localization writer Alan Averill, who’s working on the series. “So five, six, seven months after release, it was selling way more than it was at the beginning—it never works like that.” Averill notes that sales increased particularly around Japanese holidays when people go home to visit family, suggesting that gamers were buying it for parents and other relatives who weren’t already playing the game.

And now, Nintendo looks to get Stateside smarties addicted—a sensible move, considering that the first baby boomers start turning 60 this year (and there are upwards of 75 million more out there, most of whom probably still view games as kid stuff). Nintendo’s not the only company doing this, either. Microsoft’s Xbox Live Arcade has definite potential to capture a similarly casual market. One way or another, with *Brain Age* hitting stores this spring, the mind games are about to begin.

—Jennifer Tsao



SOLUTIONS

SUDOKU

7	4	5	6	3	9	8	1	2
3	6	2	8	5	1	4	7	9
8	1	9	2	4	7	3	5	6
4	3	7	1	9	8	6	2	5
6	2	1	4	7	5	9	8	3
5	9	8	3	6	2	7	4	1
9	8	4	5	1	6	2	3	7
1	7	3	9	2	4	5	6	8
2	5	6	7	8	3	1	9	4

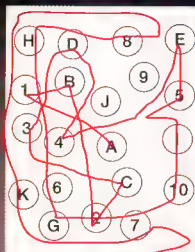
SYLLABLE COUNT

Watching television rots your brain.	9
No, really, it's been scientifically proven.	13
Videogames, on the other hand, keep your prefrontal cortex active.	18
And that's really good for society.	10
By the way, have you been reading this aloud?	11
If you have, that's good, because it's the best way to train your brain!	15

ARITHMETIC


11-8 = 3	4x1 = 4
9+2 = 11	1+7 = 8
1x7 = 7	4-0 = 4
2x0 = 0	10-8 = 2
2-2 = 0	4+9 = 13
3+3 = 6	6x9 = 54
9x4 = 36	9-1 = 8
4+5 = 9	8+1 = 9
1x9 = 9	0x1 = 0
15-9 = 6	12-8 = 4

CONNECT MAZE





Dr. Ryuta Kawashima, the neuroscientist whose research is the basis for the *Brain Age* games, is a well-known figure in Japan who has also written popular brain-training books.

"BETTER THAN DRUG ABUSE!"

We certainly *want* to believe that doing a few math problems can make our memories better and potentially stave off Alzheimer's, but when we saw Dr. Kawashima's floating head reminding us to eat a healthy breakfast before starting our daily brain training, we decided we wanted a second opinion.

Dr. J. Wesson Ashford, senior research scientist at the Stanford/VA Alzheimer's Center in Palo Alto, CA, acknowledged that several studies have found links between mental activities such as puzzles and a decreased likelihood of developing dementia. "The problem is that the people who tend to do the crossword puzzles in the first place may be those who have more education and are less likely to have early signs of Alzheimer's disease anyway," says Ashford.

But even without affirming the direct link between sudoku and superpowered brainage, Ashford did have some clear advice. "There's something to be said for playing these games rather than watching television, where everything's just floating in and you don't do anything with it," he says. "If you're coming home and doing a puzzle rather than drinking a pint of brandy, I would say that the puzzles are tremendously better—and it's a tremendous amount better than abusing drugs."

SCORING

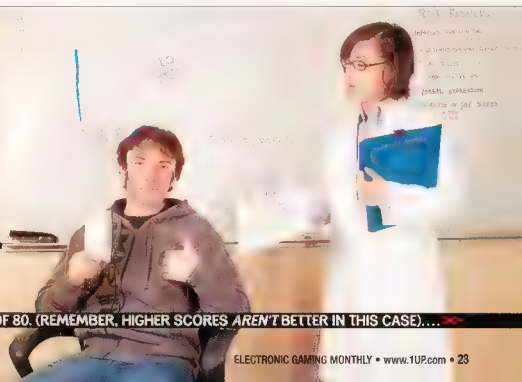
First, we're assuming this didn't take you forever to complete—slow brains are old brains, and time is of the essence!

Ten errors or more: Did you read what the good brain doctor said about abusing drugs? Clearly, you need to train your brain for more than a few minutes a day.

Four or ten errors: Congratulations! Your brain age is officially not embarrassing. But keep practicing. You have room for improvement.

Perfect score: We'd be impressed at your intense mental acuity, if you weren't such a cheater! See, we fudged No. 4 to make it physically unsolvable. Try again, smarty pants.

No gamers were harmed in the taking of these fake research photographs.



MAIN MEMBERS OF THE NINTENDO EXECUTIVE TEAM HAVE BRAIN AGES OF 80. (REMEMBER, HIGHER SCORES AREN'T BETTER IN THIS CASE).

EGM INTERNATIONAL

Motherly love

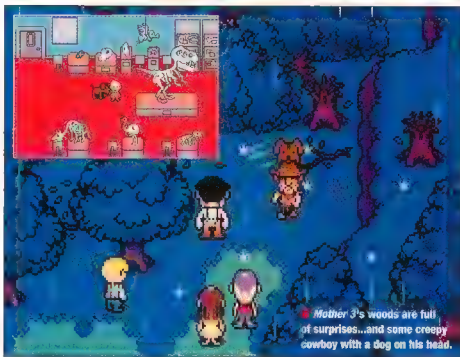
GBA

MOTHER 3

What the heck is this? A fan-made game? Nope, it's far better than that. In fact, despite the *Peanuts*-style graphics, *Mother 3* is one of the most exciting portable role-playing games of the year. But it's definitely been a bumpy development road: This series is the brainchild of Japanese writer Shigesato Itoi and has been haphazardly published by Nintendo (*Mother 2* hit the Super NES in 1995 under the name *EarthBound*). Itoi started work on the third game for the Nintendo 64, but it got canned in 2000 after multyear delays. Yet now, much to the delight of the *EarthBound* maniacs at fansite starmen.net and elsewhere, the project's been resurrected for the Game Boy Advance (Japanese gamers can pick it up in late April).

Why should I care? The *Mother* games are among the most offbeat and self-referential RPGs ever made. *EarthBound*, for example, stars a bunch of neighborhood kids that bash zombies with baseball bats and an alien race called "Mr. Saturn" that speaks in kindergarten scrawl, and it has you searching a monkey-infested cave for the "gourmet yogurt machine." It even features a truly spasmodic soundtrack that samples everything from the Beatles to *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

Itoi is currently teasing *Mother 3* on his Japanese site (1101.com), using a slow stream of screenshots and music samples. Is a U.S. release possible? It'd be a crime if it weren't.



BY THE NUMBERS

Oh, the profanity!

34 Number of hours freelance writer Josh Smith (injosh.com) monitored gamers' swearing habits while playing *Halo 2* (XB) online

8.11 Number of times per hour Smith heard someone drop the F-bomb (the most of any curse word)

7 Percentage of profanity that involved something sexual (usually directed toward someone's mother)

1.29 Price (in U.S. dollars) for a bar of Dove soap, which, after reading Smith's study, some parents should stick into their online gamers' mouths



THE HOT SEAT: CHOOSE OR LOSE



We'll let it slide that Executive Producer Kudo Tsunoda has a nasty smoking habit. At least this guy can make an Xbox 360 game—*Fight Night Round 3*—that actually deserves to be called "next gen." But can the brains behind Electronic Art's gorgeous-looking prizefighter go the distance in our Hot Seat?

Better for Fight Night (Pt. 1)



X Rocky III's Clubber Lang **Rocky IV's Ivan Drago**

KT: "Orn, orn, it's Mr. T. Not only did [Clubber] have devastating punching power, but the [had] the style and persona as well. A big trash talker."

Better for Fight Night (Pt. 2)



Punch-Out!!'s King Hippo **X Punch-Out!!'s Bald Bull**

KT: "One of the game's most memorable characters. He's the first guy you face that was so hard to beat, but so fun and addictive to play against."

Scariest



Mike Tyson's tattoo **X Don King's hair**

KT: "I've always wondered how much time it takes Don King to get his hair looking that good. So I guess I find his hair scarier because he must work hard on it every day."

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PlayStation 2



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An ornate, classical theater interior with a stage on the left, a balcony with intricate metalwork on the right, and a large, patterned floor. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting the architectural details.

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>> 2K GAMES ENTERS *THE DARKNESS*—THE PUBLISHER HAS PICKED UP PUBLISHING RIGHTS TO STARBREEZE STUDIOS' *CHRONICLES OF*

ALONE IN THE DARK (CONT.)

■ This gameplay perspective looks very *Resident Evil 4* (that's a good thing).

► "I can't say much," says David Nadal, director of the series' next-gen reinvention, currently confirmed for the Xbox 360 (and most likely headed to the PS3). "We've got [publisher] Atari on my back. We're still keeping mum on the story line, but players will be thrust into a modern-day setting and assuming the role of Edward Carnby." Carnby, of course, is the paranormal investigator who has been at the center of the *Alone in the Dark* series since its inception in 1992. The original game first made a name for itself with horror-seeking PC gamers, essentially inventing the atmospheric, puzzles-and-monsters formula that *Resident Evil* would later use to create a gaming empire. To this day, *Alone in the Dark* remains hidden in the shadows of its progeny, a fact that irks Nadal.

"When I played the first *Resident Evil*, I couldn't help but have the impression that I was playing a remake of *Alone*," he says. "But when the object of a game is to scare the living hell out of people, an immersive experience beats an original one. When *RE* first appeared, its only competition was a port of *Alone 2* on [the original PlayStation], which had graphics that paled in comparison to *RE*'s new generation of realistic

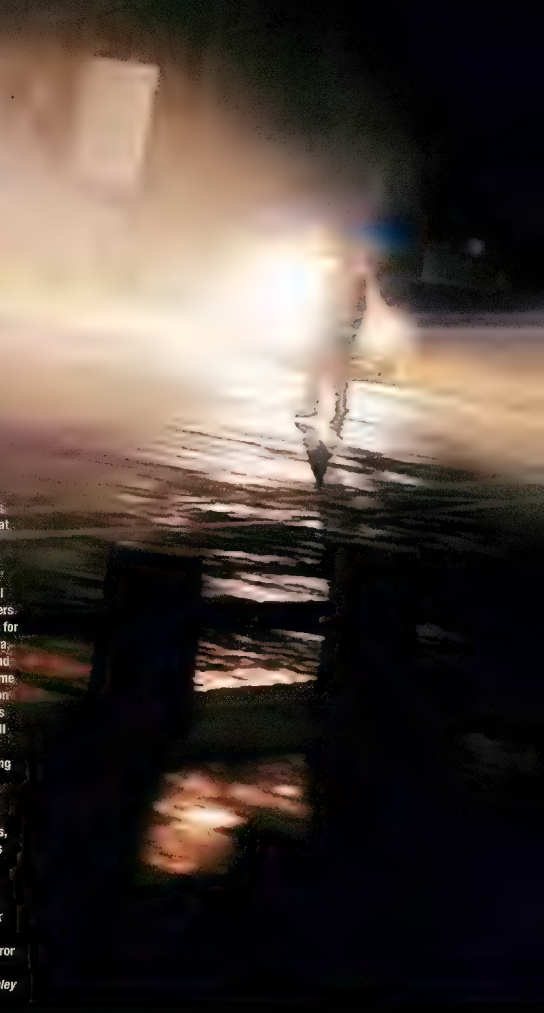
characters. It was at that moment that *Alone* lost its leadership." The series only slid further downhill from there, with sequels that, according to Nadal, "merely surfed on the wave of success from the first [game]." The *Behind the Music* rock-bottom moment came with 2006's embarrassing movie adaptation, courtesy of notorious film butcher Uwe Boll. How embarrassing? Colin Covert, film critic for the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, quipped, "If you took the 100 worst ideas ever conceived for a science-fiction film, and spilled them out onto the screen at random, you could not produce a more asinine hodgepodge than *Alone in the Dark*." Ouch.

But every great *Behind the Music* story has a post-rehab return to form, and this *Alone in the Dark* could be just that. Nadal and his crew at Eden Studios are going for a full-on makeover to "break from the established survival-horror genre and propose a new vision." Central to this new vision will be the game's location, New York City's famous oasis of green, Central Park. "The park is a place that one might think of as a quiet, peaceful environment where one would feel almost safe," says Nadal. ►



►► ACCORDING TO NINTENDO, MORE THAN ONE MILLION PEOPLE HAVE NOW GONE ONLINE WITH THEIR DS HANDHELDS... ►►

ALONE IN THE DARK



► To really capture that feeling, the team is re-creating the real thing. "We're building every single piece of it in an exact replica," he says. "From satellite photos and altitude data, we've been able to reproduce the park with a 50cm precision. From Central Park tree species to the well-known sites, the player will really feel as if he or she is in today's Central Park." Of course, the point of convincing you that you're experiencing something real is to subvert it with the unreal. "One overarching theme of this game is to challenge the feeling of security and make these elements horrific," says Nadal.

It will be interesting to see just how Eden pulls it off, given that players will be free to roam the park as they see fit. "The game's gonna be like the real world in a way that hasn't been seen, bringing a new sense of freedom of movement," Nadal says. "The player will be completely immersed in his surroundings and can use everything he has around him to survive." It's an interesting twist, but that freedom pretty much eliminates any use of the old spring-loaded haunted-house gags so prevalent in

the genre. Perhaps what we think of as "scary" in games isn't necessarily what this *Alone in the Dark* will be about.

"I think that true fear is suggested fear, the type that grows in our minds," says Nadal. "It's not based on classical surprise effects or gore. Real fear festers in our minds over time." This accounts for the game's hiring of Lorenzo Carcaterra, screenwriter for the movie *Sleepers* and the television series *Homicide*. The game will approximate the flow of a television drama, "festering" over episodic twists and turns, while Carcaterra's script will focus on the border between life and death, with Edward Carnby investigating "paranormal elements linked to the afterlife," Nadal says. "We're building the story from converging similarities between religions, cultures, and beliefs, as well as near-death-experience tales lived by those who have brushed against death." If anything, the series itself has brushed against death. We'll be watching to see if *Alone in the Dark* returns from the grave a zombieified shadow of its former greatness, or horror gaming reborn.

—Robert Ashley



Grand Theft Horror

The new *Alone in the Dark* takes place in a painstakingly re-created model of NYC's Central Park, in which you can move about at your whim. It sounds great and all, but does that mean you can bludgeon to death those annoying, spandex-wearing rollerblader dudes? "We wanted the player to feel part of the adventure but not forcefully be the center of it," says Director David Nadal. "There will be other people around living their lives. We'll have some of the 'typical' characters you'd find in Central Park, so yes, we'll have those rollerbladers, and yes, you'll be able to realize your fantasy." It's about time.

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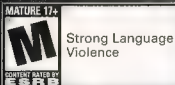
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UBISOFT



DISC JOCKEYING

Who will win the format battle between Blu-ray and HD-DVD? And why should gamers care? We pick a side

It's as if the consumer-electronics industry failed to learn from the great Betamax-versus-VHS wars of the late '70s. Once again, we're about to see a clash of media formats: HD-DVD vs. Blu-ray, two super-size disc types vying for the future of high-definition movie playback and data storage.

And you should give a crap because...? Well, for one thing, movie buffs who own HDTVs will find that flicks encoded on Blu-ray and HD-DVD—which will start shipping soon—look amazingly crisp on their fancy boob tubes (you need a high-def TV with HDMI inputs to take full advantage of either format). But the two are also not-so-secret weapons in the next-gen console wars.

It all begins with Sony, the primary owner and supporter of Blu-ray. The company plans on getting consumers to welcome its format by including Blu-ray sup-

port in its upcoming PlayStation 3 system. Microsoft has responded by announcing its support for rival HD-DVD, which is less expensive than Blu-ray technology and will be available sooner. Microsoft has promised an add-on HD-DVD drive for the Xbox 360—although it will be used for movies only and not as a games format (the system uses standard dual-layer DVDs for games).

Hollywood movie studios have taken sides, too. Only one major studio (Universal) has not yet announced its support of Blu-ray, while the HD-DVD camp is still missing support from Sony, home video juggernaut Disney, and others. Whichever side emerges victorious, consumers must take care as to which horse they back, at least early on. There is nothing quite so bad as being stuck with a closet full of eight-track tapes or Betamax movies once the war is over.

Blu-ray HD-DVD

PRICE	
\$1,000 and up for the first Blu-ray players (no price for the PS3 has been announced yet, but analysts expect it to be around \$500)	\$500 and up for HD-DVD players (no price for the Xbox 360 add-on has been announced)
STORAGE	
50GB (dual layer)	30GB (dual layer)
AVAILABILITY	
May 2006	March 28, 2006
FUNCTIONALITY	
Movie playback, recordable formats, data storage (PC and PS3)	Movie playback, recordable formats, data storage (PC only)
WILL ITS HARDWARE ALSO PLAY STANDARD DVDS?	
Yes	Yes
RESOLUTION	
Up to 1080p (full resolution promised for launch units and the PS3)	Up to 1080p (though initial units only support 720p and 1080i)
NECESSARY GEAR	
Blu-ray players will hook to any TV, but to take advantage of the ultra-crisp resolution, you'll need a 1080p-compatible HDTV with a digital input such as DVI or HDMI. "Old fashion" analog component inputs won't do the job.	Same story. That means the 360 add-on might need its own digital output, since Microsoft won't confirm if the 360's A/V port supports DVI or HDMI. We bet it doesn't, which essentially makes the add-on a standalone player.
HOLLYWOOD STUDIOS SUPPORT	
Sony (Columbia TriStar and MGM), 20th Century Fox, Disney, Paramount, Warner Bros.	Universal, Paramount, Warner Bros.
GAME SUPPORT	
An underdog called the PlayStation 3 and any software developer who wants to take advantage of the greater storage capacity Blu-ray offers.	A new promised add-on for the Xbox 360, but Microsoft says it will be for movie playback only.
WHY IS SONY BACKING BLU-RAY?	WHY IS MICROSOFT BACKING HD-DVD?
Simply put, Sony is counting on sales of its game system to get Blu-ray players in homes. Sony figures people will then buy Blu-ray movies, which will make the company a mint in licensing revenue (hence the reason Sony is willing to take a substantial loss on every PS3 sold).	The last thing Microsoft wants is Sony gaining power through Blu-ray. Yet Microsoft's initial HD-DVD support is weak; the company has stated that its add-on won't play games. We figure Microsoft is just stalling until widespread online distribution of games and movies makes disc size pointless.
WHICH DISC WILL REIGN?	
Blu-ray is faster and more durable (scrape the discs with steel wool and they still play). More importantly, it has better support, from games to movies to hardware, and the PlayStation 3 will serve as a Trojan horse for the format. "Based on the first two PlayStation systems, it's a pretty safe bet that Sony will sell 20 million PS3s [worldwide] in the first couple of years," says Michael Pachter, analyst for Wedbush Morgan Securities. With hardware numbers like that, the PS3 should be able to do for the Blu-ray format what the PS2 did for DVD and the PSP has done for UMD. A- — <i>Marc Camron</i>	



THE GAMEKILLERS

There are people out there whose sole mission in life is to cause you to blow your cool and lose the girl. They are, The Gamekillers.

THE BALLADEER

For an encore, he's going to do your girl.



It doesn't matter that he might sleep on a futon in the back of a van, chicks will always dig a guy who can sing. Whether he's the quintessential frontman for a college indie-alternative band or the scratchy-voiced crooner at the local pub, you've got to be wary of this pseudo rock star and his ripped-up jeans that he only takes off to have sex. Sure, his esoteric lyrics are irritating, but The Axe Dry wearer keeps his cool by letting the tune play out—after she sees he's a quasi-homeless has-been that never was, you'll be the one left singing her a sweet bedtime lullaby.

Don't



Do



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TAKE THIS JOB: COMMUNITY MANAGER

Our monthly look at the jobs you want—
with tips from the guys who have them

THIS MONTH:
AARON KAUFMAN
COMMUNITY MANAGER
FOR EA LOS ANGELES

TOOLS OF HIS TRADE

Namepeek 111

If you're gonna walk the walk, you'd better talk the talk. "Pwnd, flamed, noob, ROTFL," Kaufman rattles off. "My English teachers didn't teach me these words in school."

graf

Part of the job is having an eye for design. "Adobe Premiere, Photoshop, and Final Cut Pro are [the] primary tools for creating trailers and enhancing and updating our websites," he says. "I also create videos for the fans and take screenshots."

Pantacule

"I wouldn't be in this role without the many dedicated and passionate *Lord of the Rings* and *Command and Conquer* fansites," he says. "They [create] the community's vibe and can also make me jump out of my chair. It's a priority for me to know all fansites involved with my development studio's games inside and out."

Swag (aka Schwag)

Graphic cards, games, T-shirts, posters, mugs, autographed props—your name it, and Kaufman gives it away. ☺

KAUFMAN'S DETAILS

Experience: Six years in the industry. Notable games: *The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth I & II* (PC), *Command and Conquer* franchise, EA's first *LOTR* game for Xbox 360.

Community manager job data

Salary range: \$50,000 to \$70,000

Recommended education: A major in communications or marketing, as well as something of an art background and knowledge of multiple design and Web programs. **My alternative:** "Jump in and throw yourself to a pack of wolves, see if you can come out alive, and learn to have a thick skull!" Kaufman says. **Location of most jobs:** West Coast. **Current level of demand:** High.

What's a community manager?

This person acts as the voice of a development studio. He or she must understand the audience better than anyone

and offer support for fans. That includes talking daily on message boards, posting the latest news and updates, providing screenshots and videos, and orchestrating events. "It's all about creating and maintaining the connection between the fans and the developer," Kaufman says. He also organizes summits, inviting top community leaders from around the world to visit the studio for behind-the-scenes looks at current projects.

Kaufman's typical day

Team leaders stop by Kaufman's cube in the mornings for community updates, and he sits in with the development teams on several meetings every day. "Face-to-face interaction is key in my role," he says. He's constantly interacting with community message boards and fanites, assessing the vibe, maintaining the website, compiling feedback for development teams, and keeping the

community informed of his team's plan of action for the week. "I deliver reports assessing all the community feedback and the love—and the occasional brilliant ideas—from our avid fans," he says.

How'd he get the gig?

Kaufman worked as a game consultant for a market-research company for several years before arriving at EA Los Angeles. "I had a friend that worked at an EA studio," he says, "and I was referred for a position in the marketing department at the then-new EA LA studio." He joined on and was responsible for creating videos and screenshots, among other things. "But the most pivotal moment was when I organized a successful community summit at the studio, and the rest is history," he says. "The studio soon saw that there was a need for a full-time community manager. I jumped at the chance, and here I am." —Evan Shamoon

Illustration by John DeBenedetto



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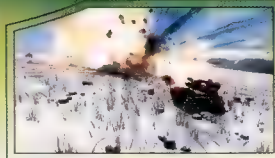
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PlayStation Portable



PS2/XB PREVIEW, SHOW & TELL

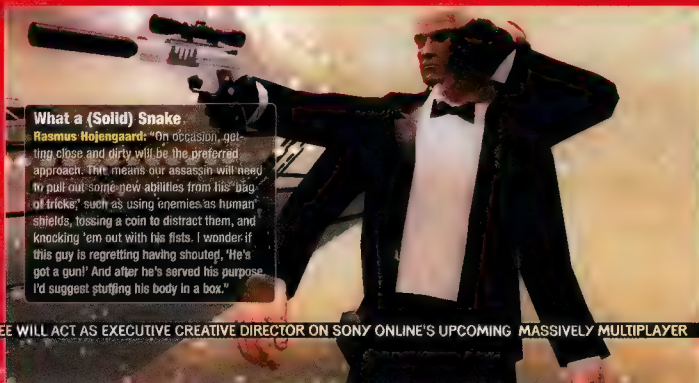
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

Publisher: Sony
Developer: IO Interactive
Release Date: May 2006

The hunter becomes the hunted

These days, *Hitman*'s killer-for-hire has more than just a bar code on the back of his aerodynamic head—he's also got a big ol' target. In *Blood Money*, the latest installment in Eidos' stealth-action series, Agent 47 must contend with a rival agency that hopes to acquire all of his contracts—and eliminate him in the process. Even though watching his own back will surely add a degree of difficulty to each mission, Mr. Clean seems quite ready for the competition. Director Rasmus Hojengaard of developer IO Interactive gives us a rundown on how the assassin will get the job done...and live to talk about it.

—Bryan Litzke



What a (Solid) Snake

Rasmus Hojengaard: "On occasion, getting close and dirty will be the preferred approach. This means our assassin will need to pull out some new abilities from his 'bag of tricks,' such as using enemies as human shields, tossing a coin to distract them, and knocking 'em out with his fists. I wonder if this guy is regretting having shouted, 'He's got a gun!' And after he's served his purpose I'd suggest stuffing his body in a box."

>> LEGENDARY COMIC ARTIST JIM LEE WILL ACT AS EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR ON SONY ONLINE'S UPCOMING MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER



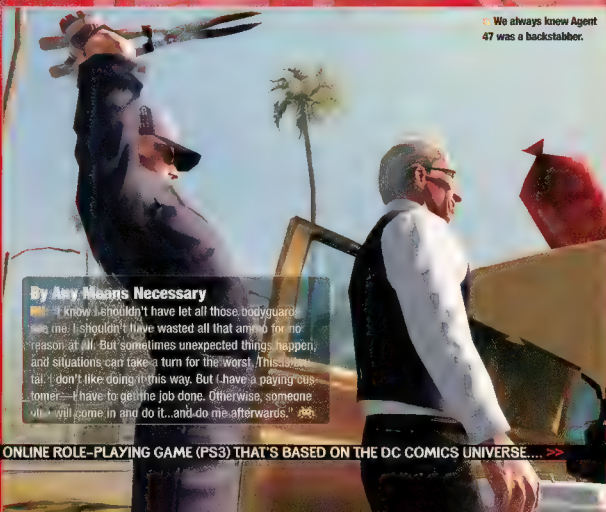
Follow the Boy Scout Motto

RM: "Being prepared in key here, so Agent 47's forever-expanding arsenal of ballistic gadgetry—including pistols, rifles, and submachine guns—will become increasingly handy as you progress through numerous missions. Each one of these weapons is now completely customizable, too. Here, he's found a spot to use his upgraded sniper rifle, but don't expect all of *Blood Money's* prime sniping locations to be this desolate."



Global Killer

RM: "Agent 47 will set up shop in several U.S. cities, including Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and New Orleans. But in this screenshot, he's made his way to a Parisian opera house, in which wearing the correct disguise has gotten him onstage and that much closer to his target. Damn, I didn't expect this much blood—I guess I shouldn't have used armor-piercing ammo for such a close kill. I wouldn't be surprised if the audience thinks twice about going to the opera when they figure out what happened."



Q We always knew Agent 47 was a backstabber.

By Any Means Necessary

RM: "I know I shouldn't have let all those bodyguards see me. I shouldn't have wasted all that ammo for no reason at all. But sometimes unexpected things happen, and situations can take a turn for the worst. This is what I don't like going in this way. But I have a paying customer—I have to get the job done. Otherwise, someone else will come in and do it...and do me afterwards." **RM**



Disney SQUARE ENIX

New allies

OVERHEARD

Did you catch that?

"It's like eating a **steak with a chocolate sundae piled on top of it.**"



—Silicon Knights (Sierra Darkness, Too Human) vs. Dante Dyack on his vitriol for how subsequent games in the Yoo Hwanan trilogy will complement one another

"Get behind the wheel of Desert Bus for a first-person, **hands-on view of the endless, interminable desert highway.**"

It's a bus. And it's an eight-hour drive. In real time."

—From the *Yoko* video release describing a level in Penn & Teller's *Smoke and Mirrors*, a never-released Sega CD game that recently resurfaced and is downloaded via *Yoko* CD emulators



"If you think that the fashion industry is filled with divas, no, the worst divas are the guys who got wedgies in high school. **Game divas are the worst divas** than a guy reviewer in a Helmut Lang suit standing in the second row of a show. Those guys are easy compared to the pissy gamers."

—Setting Up's Marc Ecko on gamers



"That'd be like getting a f***ing star in *Super Mario Bros.* and just walking at a regular pace instead of running around. When you get that star, **go and kill as many mushrooms as possible.**"

—Hip-hop star Kanye West on why he bragged about his numerous Grammy nominations

"I believe the nature of the [videogame] medium prevents it from moving beyond craftsmanship to the stature of art... **Videogames represent a loss** of those precious hours we have available to make ourselves more cultured, civilized, and empathetic."

—Movie critic Roger Ebert, responding to questions about his claims that videogames are inferior to film and literature

"**The scenes...were not accurate** representations of the graphics in the games themselves."

—A British advertising watchdog group demands that Activision take down its Call of Duty 2 television ads because of their superior—and fake—graphics

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>> THIS FALL, 2K GAMES WILL RELEASE AN ACTION-ADVENTURE TITLE (PS2/XB) BASED ON FOX'S ANIMATED SERIES *FAMILY GUY*... >>

DEAD RISING

Xbox 360 • Capcom • Summer 2006

Capcom's goofball zombie brawler has come a long way since its debut last summer—vastly improved visuals, multiple playable characters (that's Isabela rockin' the poofy shirt), and open-ended gameplay prove that it's more than just a silly *Resident Evil* knock-off. It's truly zany stuff—the game's *Dawn of the Dead*-inspired setup (you're trapped in a zombie-infested mall) has you attacking mobs of undead with anything at your disposal—guns, pipes, light sabers, groceries, and even dismembered body parts.



Chaos erupts at Chess King's spring clearance.

XBOX 360 PREVIEW

LOST PLANET & DEAD RISING

Capcom brings new blood to Xbox 360

A lthough you might associate Capcom with quality games (*Resident Evil 4* stands proudly as *EGM's* 2005 Game of the Year), you probably don't often utter "Capcom" and "innovative" in the same breath. After all,

this is the same publisher responsible for *Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha* and the 10 (or 12 derivative *Mega Man* games) released each year. That's why we're stunned by these two all-new, all-original titles headed to Xbox 360.



Think: Starship Troopers meets The Thing

LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

Xbox 360 • Capcom • Winter 2007

"We want people to understand that this is not just a mech game," pleads *Lost Planet* Producer Keiji Inafune. Yes, you do spend much of the game battling from within various giant robots, but you'll also waste no plenty of giant alien bugs on foot as well. In the update implies, the game's subzero climate plays a major role. "This wintry world makes a great setting because the 360 creates amazing snow effects and avalanches," Inafune adds. "Plus, it also creates an excellent atmosphere for survival."



New worlds

XBOX 360 PREVIEW: FIRST LOOK

HUXLEY

Publisher: Webzen
Developer: Webzen
Release: 2007

200-player firefights? PC and 360 gamers teaming up? Welcome to online role-playing shooter Huxley's bold new world of warcraft

That's a residential area; you'll find clubs and bars there. This central part over here is more like a town square where players will gather. And out here in the outskirts we have ruins—the bad part of town.” Producer Kijong Kang swoops the game camera for an aerial tour of the central city in *Huxley*, a first-of-its-kind mega-multiplayer first-person shooter due for the Xbox 360 in 2007. A lived-in-looking metropolis of danish apartment blocks, smog-belching industrial parks, and blazing neon signage, the city will hold thousands of players within its nearly one-square-mile area. “At first it was two-and-a-half square miles,” Kang says, “but we scaled it down because users couldn't find each other.”

Even shrunk down, *Huxley* is a lot to take in for console gamers, who are used to first-person-shooter multiplayer counts maxing out at 32 players and online worlds that typically don't require their own mass-transit system to get around. And even for computer gamers used to this sort of super-sized online gaming, *Huxley*—which hits the PC first at the end of this year—still comes as a system

shocker. It's part first-person shooter, part massively multiplayer online (MMO) role-playing game. It will have PC gamers helping out their console brethren. Even the developers at South Korean MMO specialist Webzen need a whiteboard to chart out the workings of the game's strange new world.

Kang draws two circles on our demo-room board and labels one as the city of the sapiens and the other as the home of alternatives, two of the three races in the game. The PC version packs both cities. He draws a third, separate circle and labels it the capital of the Hybrid Liberation Army. It's the one city in the Xbox 360 version, and it's home to the player's custom-made avatar, who fights for the freedom of the game's third race: the loping hybrid monsters. In the screen's lines connecting all the cities, showing how they'll sync up for PC and console cooperative and combat missions, before finally drawing separate squares that represent the battlefields outside the cities where all combat will actually take place.

The central city itself will hold 5,000 players. They'll mingle, form clans,

buy and tweak weapons and vehicles (for which they'll need special driver's licenses), and talk to nonplayer residents for stuff to do. “There are two types of quests in *Huxley*,” says Kang, “main story quests and side story quests, which link to the main story line. Players will get the quest by locating and speaking with NPCs. They'll also find them by using the in-game e-mail system or other forms of communication.”

Once players get a quest, they'll pose up with others who've accepted the same mission and then head to the quest area—always a location separate from the city. It could be in the wasteland of the outskirts, or maybe in the dungeon-like nether regions. Developer Webzen offers few specifics on mission types yet, but it's planning quests that support up to 200 participants for full-on 100-on-100 wars. Some missions will allow for fewer participants. One underground quest, for instance, limits participation to how many players can fit in the elevator to the combat area.

Unlike the PC game, the 360 version offers a solo campaign—but even that packs online elements (after all, this is

from a Korean developer that makes nothing but online games, in a country where people have actually died of exhaustion from not knowing when to log off). You'll play as a hero of the Hybrid Liberation Organization, and you'll go on missions that often require a trip to PC players' towns for items and info (see sidebar for a step-by-step guide). Again, Webzen offers few solid details on how the game will entice cooperation. In fact, with well over a year to go until the game's release, the developer is hazy with lots of details: Will Webzen charge a subscription fee? (Likely.) How will Xbox 360 players using joypads compete against PC users wielding the superior mouse-and-keyboard combo? (Webzen says it's working on leveling the playing field.) Will console players even embrace the massively multiplayer online shooter concept? (They will, also have Webzen's other 360 MMO—*All Points Bullfight*—as a car-bomb game from the creator of the original *Grand Theft Auto*—competing for their time.)

For now, we'll just have to settle for these first 360 screens and Kang's bird's-eye-view tour. **A**

—Crispin Boyer

DUTY CALLS: FINDING WORK IN HUXLEY'S MASSIVE WORLD

If you want to level up skills, build your bank account, or unravel the mysteries of the shadowy scientist the game's named after, you'll need to get a job in *Huxley*. Here are three steps to becoming a working stiff.

Step 1 Whether playing online in MMO mode or the solo campaign, players will get jobs by chatting with nonplayer characters or via the in-game e-mail system. Your inbox will fill up quickly, so you're never short on assignments.

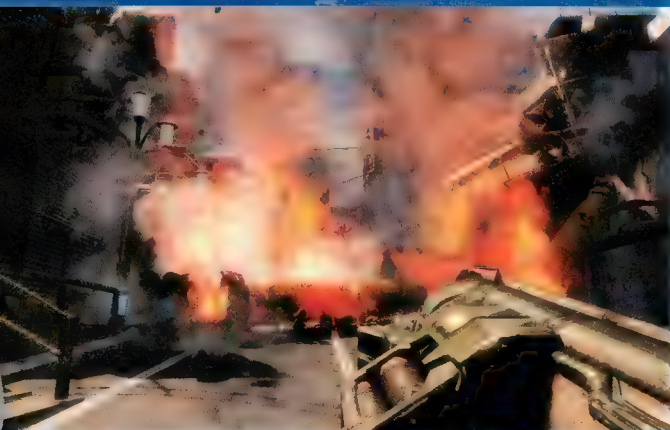


Step 2 You get a quest—now you just need to get to the mission area. It might be as simple as taking an elevator ride to the dungeons below town. Groups of players might share a transport to a battle zone. Last one in sits bitch.

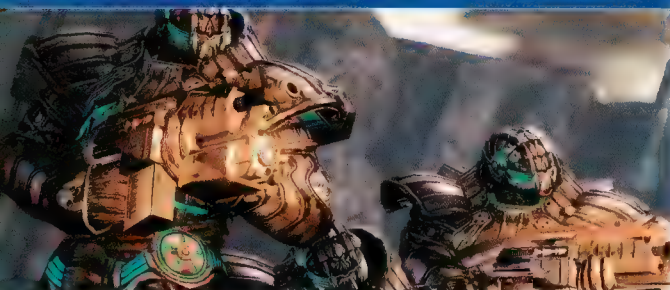
Step 3 Missions will vary from army-on-army battles to 4-on-4 frag-and-runs. In this solo-campaign quest, we rendezvous with a real-life PC player who gives us a special weapon. What's in it for him? Well, not something special for completing his mission, he says. Producer Kijong Kang.



■ The game uses the same graphics engine as Epic's mondo-anticipated *Gears of War*, so expect a similar level of dark-and-grimy beauty. "This allows us to focus our efforts more on making a great game," says Producer Kijong Kang.

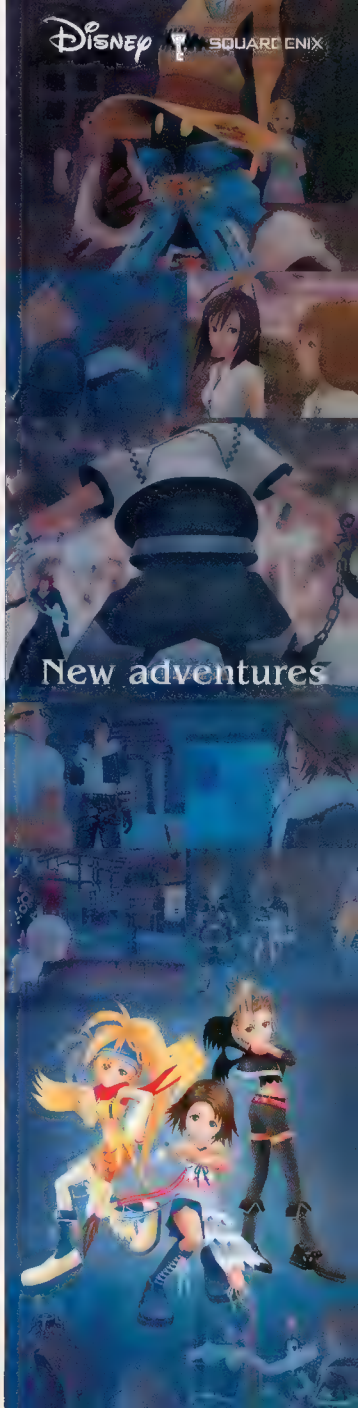


■ Collateral damage: You can blast apart massive sections of the environment, such as the steam pipe structure you just brought down on a squad of enemies. "We'll mark these destructible areas in a special way," says Kang.



WINTER, AFTER A 4KIDS CARTOON (WHICH WILL OFFER GAME HINTS) DEBUTS IN THE FALL... >>

Disney SQUARE ENIX



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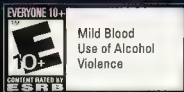
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PlayStation 2







ONLINE

THIS MONTH

Shocker—Geometry Wars king sucks at Robotron

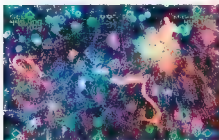
Met Scott Smith, 22: accounting student by day, *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved* villain genius the rest of the time, torozing the Xbox Live Arcade leaderboard from the No. 1 spot. Smith's record score (as of this writing) is 33 million—that's more than 10 times the high score of the guy who made the game.

EGM: So. Do you snort your cocaine or smoke it or what?

Scott Smith: Well...that's pretty funny, but um...I mean, it's just so addicting, the game is like crack, you know? I keep coming back to that game more than any other Xbox 360 game or Xbox Live Arcade game.

EGM: How much do you play per day?

SS: After I got the 22 million and first place, I decided to play different games and switch off. I only play maybe one game every two or three days. But then again, one game will take an hour and a half or more, because I could last until 10 or 15 million. I guess my average score is around 10 or 12 million a game.



Google "K4rn10k" (Smith's gamertag) to find videos of this *Geometry Wars* freak in action.

EGM: What do you do during the first few incredibly easy minutes of the game? Balance your checkbook?

SS: Yeah, that part's easy; it's just kind of boring after a while. Sometimes...you know the Pacifism achievement, right [don't shoot anything and don't die for one minute—Ed]? I would actually try doing that again, keep dodging. That's a good way to practice skills you'll need later. Also, for more than the first few minutes, I'll stand in the middle of the screen and just use one hand to try to kill them instead of moving. That's pretty fun, too.

EGM: So spill it: What are your hot tips? What's your stance on smart bombs?

SS: When I first played the game, my friend said, "Why don't you try playing without bombs?" And that was a great idea, because if you use a bomb, you never know what kind of situation you can escape from. So I started playing games trying not to use bombs, not necessarily to get high scores, but later on, I figured out in which situations I would need a bomb and in which situations I don't. [Now] usually what I do is try to get a high multiplier and keep playing, and use bombs sparingly if I need to. Sometimes, if I'm really high, if I have a 10X multiplier, I might afford to use a lot of my bombs, even if I have one or none left, as long as I keep my 10X multiplier, which will rack up points really fast.

Another thing I want to point out: I go in a counter-clockwise motion all the time, as much as I can. I just got used to one way

and I kept going that way. I always try to go in either a circle or a square, although sometimes if there's too many snakes on the sides, you'll see me cut up the middle, and then continue around the circle, like a semicircle. So yeah, that's something I always do.

EGM: What enemy do you fear the most?

SS: A combination of two, if that's possible. At the maximum difficulty, usually you get stuck with the jack spawns—those are the little tiny blue guys—and with a lot of the magnet guys, the red ships. They come together, and it's really hard to navigate through the jacks while magnets spawn in different areas.

EGM: What do you listen to while playing?

SS: I actually made a playlist called *Geometry Wars Fever [Laughs]*. Usually punk or techno, Pennywise, Avenged Sevenfold, Less Than Jake, the Offspring. I also have some random techno trance mixes, Oakenfold...fast-paced punk and techno music really get me going.

EGM: Are you any good at *Robotron*?

SS: No, definitely not. I didn't buy the full version. I guess I didn't give it much time, but I never really played it that much.

EGM: But you must be great at *geometry*.

SS: [Laughs] You mean like the subject? Yeah, *Geometry Wars* helps you do good on tests...maybe.

WHAT'S UP AT



EGM.1UP.COM

Our friends at 1UP.com are nice enough to give our content a home in cyberworld. Head online this month and you'll find video interviews with the *Too Human* (X360) developers, plus another big *Zelda* retrospective.

CHEATS.1UP.COM

We won't tell anyone you checked here for *Big Mutha Truckers* cheats. And we promise not to laugh (well, at least not to your face) after you look up those 25 1/2 Life hints.

PS3.1UP.COM

Head here for the full scoop on the PlayStation 3's November worldwide launch, including details on the console's hard drive and online network. And beginning May 10, visit E3.1UP.com for everything that comes outta the industry's big annual trade show, the Electronic Entertainment Expo.

Featured Club: The 1UP Show

The *EGM* editors make frequent appearances on *The 1UP Show*—a weekly behind-the-scenes look at the videogame biz. Visit The1UPShow-club.1UP.com to chat with others about past episodes and make suggestions.

Featured Blog: Mike Cruz

We've got fresh meat here at the mag—new Assistant Art Director Mike Cruz. Be sure to drop in and visit him, as he's going to be blogging all about what goes into bringing *EGM* to life each and every month. We make no guarantees that any images posted at EGMcruz.1UP.com will be safe for women who might be pregnant, people with heart conditions, or those with nervous bladders.

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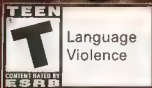
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NEW & NOT-QUITE-SO IMPROVED

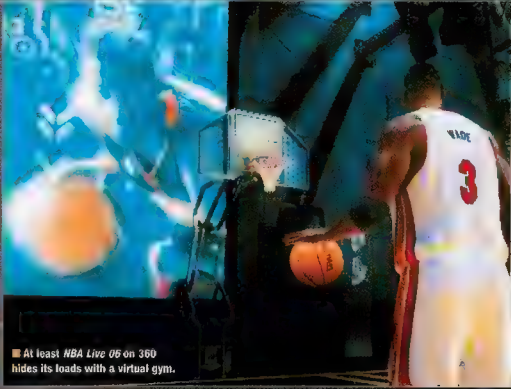
From choppy graphics to sticky glitches, the same old snafus seem here to stay on the newer systems. Will these problems ever go away?

NEW & NOT-QUITE-SO IMPROVED? (CONT.)

KING LOAD TIMES

A 360-launcher app for Xbox Live is a lot less fun than playing Halo 3. Here's why.

By now, you've probably noticed that the big advantage of Xbox Live is the speed of the service. For example, in Halo 3, you can start a match (memory) in a matter of minutes, and its DVD drive is only about three feet away. That means you don't have to wait for the game to load. But when it comes to load times, the 360 is still a long way from being a perfect machine. In fact, it's still a long way from being a perfect machine. In fact, it's still a long way from being a perfect machine. In fact, it's still a long way from being a perfect machine.



■ At least NBA Live 06 on 360 hides its loads with a virtual gym.



■ One Halo screen above is from Xbox 360, the other from the original Xbox. Which is which? Hell if we know.

SLOPPY PORTS

Bouncing a game to multiple consoles is an easy way for publishers to make extra dough on development work that's already been done. But across different generations of hardware? That just sounds like a way to make a quick buck (especially when third-party games on next-gen hardware typically cost \$10 more). Resident Evil 4 to the PS2 is a good port. Gun to the 360 is a we-can-get-away-with-it-'cause-it's-launch-day port.

Why it happens—Nathan Matz: "Many companies are still developing/releasing titles for the older systems but want to have a presence on the new systems, too. It's much cheaper to port an existing game than it is to make an entirely new one. So, not surprisingly, we're seeing a fair number of ports—most of which don't look as good as a title developed specifically for a next-gen system. Companies are already gearing up on the new platforms, so I expect that we'll see fewer and fewer last-gen ports as time goes on."
Chris Charla: "Bottom line, if the polygonal density or texture resolution is PS2-quality, that's what the game is going to look like! The 360 can maybe make edges smoother, but it can't add detail that isn't in the source art."

WINNINGS

Is gaming ever going to be a free world? Or will it always be a pay-to-play world?

By now, you've probably noticed that the big advantage of Xbox Live is the speed of the service. For example, in Halo 3, you can start a match (memory) in a matter of minutes, and its DVD drive is only about three feet away. That means you don't have to wait for the game to load. But when it comes to load times, the 360 is still a long way from being a perfect machine. In fact, it's still a long way from being a perfect machine. In fact, it's still a long way from being a perfect machine.

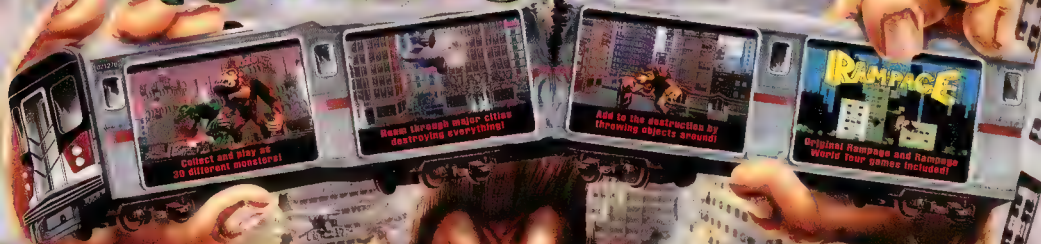
As time goes by, we'll be able to do much more computationally expensive collision detection that will minimize characters clipping through walls or getting stuck on small obstacles. Down really robust collision detection, like per-link or even per-polygon, isn't hard technically—it's just expensive. Hopefully on 360 and PS3, we can do way more here. On the other hand, we're also going to have way more detailed worlds, an outside world, so it could be a wash! ☺
 —Jon Dudlak



■ Perseus Lost's baddies bounce worse than they bite, thanks to a funky ragdoll-physics glitch.

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MIDWAY

PlayStation 2



Violence

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XBOX 360 PREVIEW

TABLE TENNIS

Publisher: Rockstar
Developer: Rockstar, San Diego
Release Date: May 2008

The house of Grand Theft Auto has gone soft

One little Hot Coffee scandal and...800Miles...you're left making a Ping-Pong game. For its first next-gen offering, highly controversial publisher Rockstar is temporarily trading prostitution and carjacking for paddles and whizzing shots in *Table Tennis* for the Xbox 360.

So why the unexpected change-up? Company reps tell us that rather than creating a complex open-world à la GTA's, the dev team (which is also

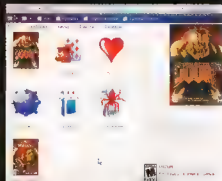
responsible for the *Midnight Club* series) wanted to focus and "get one thing perfect." A lofty goal, for sure, but *Table Tennis* does look solid: we found the controls accessible yet deceptively deep (you can cut all sorts of spin on the ball, for example). And in our good-casual sports life, the action is geared toward multiplayer—the game really shines when two highly skilled players get up and rock the ball back and forth during lengthy volleys.

This one will also bring a little bit of personality to the sport: each of the characters here has distinct behavior traits; you'll see the Egyptian "Somalian" perspire and (complete with next-gen back sweat) and the ponytailed "rechinman" loves to talk trash.

And...well, that's about it for *Table Tennis*. Much gets us thinking: The game seems fun and all, but are people really gonna dish out \$40 for freakin' Ping-Pong?



WHAT'S PLAYING IN THE COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



Windows Vista

To the 12 angry Internet nerds who continue to insist that PC gaming is dead: SFML Windows Vista, the next generation of Microsoft's Windows operating system, arrives in early October—here's everything you need to know about its gamer-friendly features.

Games Explorer

Whether you dig on *Half-Life 2* or *Minesweeper*, Vista's Games Explorer provides an all-inclusive gateway to everything PC gaming related. No more searching your desktop or Start menu for the right icon to start your favorite game—it's all right here. Each game's entry displays the box art, ESRB rating, publisher and developer information, and everything else you need to know at a glance.

Parental Controls

Videogame-hatin' Jack Thompson, be damned: Using Vista's parental controls, moms and dads can designate specific hours of playtime for their children, restrict access based on ESRB ratings, and even set up an activity logger to make sure those impressionable tykes aren't poking around in places they don't belong.

DirectX 10

Enjoy your PlayStation 3s and Xbox 360s while you can, because the DirectX 10 API should make them look like baby toys in comparison. Microsoft is cleaning up the messy code and stability problems present in previous DX incarnations, and adding support for new geometry shaders and other fancy graphical technology. Translation: incredibly awesome-looking PC games.

Halo 2

Yep, *Halo 2*'s coming to the PC—but only for Vista. Our only question: Is a PC port of a 2-year-old Xbox game the best showpiece Microsoft can come up with? Good thing we have plenty of other incentives.

—Ryan Scott,
Computer Gaming World

DEVELOPER BIOWARE (JADE EMPIRE) HAS OPENED A STUDIO IN TEXAS THAT WILL WORK ON A MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE RPG...

ACE COMBAT ZERO

THE BELKAN WAR

THE SKIES HAVE NO MERCY.

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Battle skilled rival aces with their own individual flying styles.



The Ace Style Gauge adjusts play to maximize the challenge.



Challenge your friends or enemies in two-player versus mode.

TEEN

T

Mild Language
Violence

ESRB CONTENT RATING

www.esrb.org



PlayStation 2

BANDAI
NAMCO
Games



XBOX 360 PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENSHOTS

BIOSHOCK

Heading 20,000 leagues under the sea

Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: Irrational Games
Release Date: 2007



If you think this dude seems sketchy...



...wait till you meet up with *Bioshock*'s tykes during chowtime. (Hint: That dead old fart looks awfully scrumptious.)

>> THE PASTY SPARTAN IS BACK—SONY CEA RECENTLY REVEALED *GOD OF WAR 2: DIVINE RETRIBUTION*, WHICH IS DUE EARLY NEXT YEAR.



Wo, it's not you, technically speaking, and thanks to the corporate miracle of "everything-everywhere-every time."

We inhabit an era so swollen with ricocheting motifs that even the most steroid-pumped movie-comic-game plots, monsters, and themes these days look like clip-art collectives, a museum to our American obsession with speed, guns, and girth. So what does an award-winning developer who's "been there, done that" do for an encore?

"For all its ups and downs as a movie, the most frightening part in *Titanic* is when the water takes over," muses Irrational Games founder and *Bioshock* Creative Director Ken Levine. He's talking about something Hitchcock, Lynch, Shyamalan—and you—understand instantly.

"In a game, I can throw all the rocket-launching demons at you in the world. So what?"

Not that Levine's known for cheap parlor tricks, but OK, we've heard that before, too. Hide, don't show. (Or show, don't roar.) But when was the last time a game made you care enough *not* to kill?

"In *Bioshock*, we're moving away from 'they look at the monsters in the zoo' to real people, just like you," Levine says. "People who've had to make tough choices and must now live with these horrible consequences, people that do more than charge you on sight. How you interact with them casts the entire dynamic of an encounter, and we want that to be vastly more complex than just 'you shoot, they shoot back.' I'm talking about emergent A.I."

Levine is, in fact, vamping on a wider-cast industry term: emergent gameplay, a "less pointy, still buzzy" phrase referring to unpredictable and proportionately memorable experiences brought about by player experimentation—in some cases bugs; in others, the sort of recombinative A.I. behavior that's at the core of Irrational's spiritual sequel to the much-venerated, if long-toothed, PC series *System Shock*.

But the immersive first-person bio-horror game *Bioshock* wants to be more. Firstly, it's not set in space, cyber or otherwise. Instead, think early 1960s, and imagine crashing in the middle of the ocean, surviving, and discovering a fight-house—no, not on land, just out in the middle of nowhere. You swim over, climb to the top, and

discover a deep-sea diving sphere. It's back to the rolling ocean or down (and curiosity only kills cats, right?) into the bathysphere and seaward you plummet. But near the bottom, you suddenly pass a spotlighted billboard advertising a genteel-looking brand of cigarettes. Huh? Moments later, you're bathed in the murky glow of a massive underwater city. Say hello to Rapture, in-the-deep-utopia extraordinaire.

Fall back half a century to post-WWII capitalist America, flush with ideologues like Ayn Rand, the concept of "man-worship," and the contrast of an almost apocalyptic Cold War arms race. Disenchanted with America's "society of looters," wealthy industrialist Andrew Ryan absconds with a few thousand of the world's "best and brightest." Safely tucked at ocean bottom, Ryan builds Rapture, a "pure capitalist" dream society full of intellectual and athletic titans...but you can't guess where this train's heading.

The catalyst to catastrophe in this case evolves from a stem-cell breakthrough that enables radical human genetic "modding" via a substance, dubbed "Adam"—initially for the better, but you've no doubt seen *The Fly* and know all about ways, lies, and madness. Arriving late to the party, you find the lights on (sort of) but no one apparently home (like that's going to last). Decaying bodies, snarl tunnels and clutter magnificent art deco vistas. Aping a tradition the original *System Shock* pioneered, the story's told in recordings and videos as you're quickly caught up in the consequences of this genetic war and struggling just to stay alive.

Along the way, you encounter a range of Adam-jacked characters, many wearing masks to hide their genetic disfigurements out of shame. And eventually, you'll be forced to make uncomfortable choices yourself: Will you use Adam to buff up? Compromise your humanity? Kill for it? The advanced A.I. ecology that spawns and sets creatures interacting independently promises wily psychological situations that should make series like *Grand Theft Auto* look one-dimensional. "I love to write game stories," Levine says, eyes alight.

"But, frankly, any game story I write won't be half as interesting as the emergent experience you create based on the variables we throw out and you set in motion."

—Matt Peckham

City of Lost Children

We can't say why, but something about featureless diving-suit monster scares the hell out of us in ways no horny demon from hell ever will. Dubbed "Protectors," these hulks of metal and gunnery shamble stoically around Rapture searching for "Gatherers"—young children who harvest Adam from dead bodies, ingesting and internally recycling it into a reusable genetic resource. The Gatherers scuttle out of ventilation ducts and hop rides on Protector backs to hold their hands on the way to the bodies. Why? Rapture's become one messed-up habitat, and a third group of meta-humans called "Aggressors" roam its ocean-infiltrated hallways, attacking other survivors relentlessly. Without the Protectors, it'd be open season on the Gatherers; though, where the Gatherers take the harvested Adam is one of the game's many mysteries. And there's one more thing the Protectors are guarding these frail, battered children from... you.

THE SALES CHARTS FOR JANUARY 2006

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES



1 Call of Duty 2 • Xbox360 • Activision

2 Madden NFL 06 • PS2 • EA Sports

3 MVP 06 NCAA Baseball • PS2 • EA Sports

4 Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories • PSP • Rockstar

5 Mario Kart DS • DS • Nintendo

6 Animal Crossing: Wild World • DS • Nintendo

7 Need for Speed: Most Wanted • PS2 • EA

8 Dead or Alive 4 • Xbox360 • Tecmo

9 Star Wars Battlefront II • PS2 • LucasArts

10 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas • PS2 • Rockstar



Mario Kart DS



Dead or Alive 4

TOP 10 XBOX 360



1 Call of Duty 2

2 Dead or Alive 4

3 Madden NFL 06

4 Perfect Dark Zero

5 Need for Speed: Most Wanted

6 Project Gotham Racing 3

7 Condemned: Criminal Origins

8 NBA 2K6

9 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06

10 Quake 4

TOP 10 PS2



Madden NFL 06

2 MVP 06 NCAA Baseball

3 Need for Speed: Most Wanted

4 Star Wars Battlefront II

5 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

6 WWE SmackDown! vs. RAW 2006

7 Gun

8 25 to Life

9 NBA Live 06

10 Call of Duty 2: Big Red One

TOP 10 XBOX



MVP 06 NCAA Baseball

2 Fable: The Lost Chapters

3 Madden NFL 06

4 Need for Speed: Most Wanted

5 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

6 Halo 2

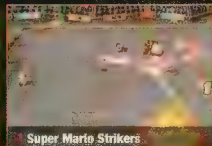
7 Star Wars Battlefront II

8 Call of Duty 2: Big Red One

9 Gun

10 25 to Life

TOP 10 GAMECUBE



Super Mario Strikers

2 Mario Kart: Double Dash!!

3 Mario Party 7

4 Super Smash Bros. Melee

5 Super Mario Sunshine

6 Lego Star Wars

7 Mega Man X Collection

8 Shadow the Hedgehog

9 Animal Crossing

10 Madden NFL 06

TOP 10 PORTABLES



Grand Theft Auto: LCS • PSP

2 Mario Kart DS • DS

3 Animal Crossing: Wild World • DS

4 SOCOM: Fireteam Bravo • PSP

5 Nintendogs: Dachshund • DS

6 Need for Speed: Most Wanted • PSP

7 Madden NFL 06 • PSP

8 Yu-Gi-Oh! GX Duel Academy • GBA

9 Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time • DS

10 Nintendogs: Chihuahua • DS

TOP 10 RENTALS

FOR THE WEEK ENDING 02/12/06



WWE SmackDown! vs. RAW 2006 • PS2

2 Arena Football • PS2

3 Call of Duty 2: Big Red One • PS2

4 Star Wars Battlefront II • PS2

5 Gun • PS2

6 Peter Jackson's King Kong • PS2

7 True Crime: New York City • PS2

8 Need for Speed: Most Wanted • PS2

9 Arena Football • XB

10 Madden NFL 06 • PS2

>> CAPCOM IS OPENING UP A NEW DEVELOPMENT STUDIO IN LOS ANGELES THAT WILL MAKE GAMES PRIMARILY FOR MOBILE PHONES.... >>>

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THE OFFICIAL GAME

IN STORES 5.16.06



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PlayStation 2

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THE RUMOR MILL

Where we talk the talk and walk the walk

A month doesn't go by without hearing the three following questions: 1) When's Nintendo gonna remake *Kid Icarus*? 2) Will *Shamus 3* ever see the light of day? and 3) How about a *Nights* sequel? Well, guess what—you won't find any of those answers here. Now, don't get all pissy; I've got plenty of scuttlebutt that'll surely turn that frown upside down. Check it.... —*The Q*

■ What the heck is a lombax, anyway?

Finally unlucky

By the time you read this Rumor Mill, Square Enix's hotly anticipated (yet ridiculously delayed) role-playing game *Final Fantasy XII* will be in the moogle-loving hands of Japanese gamers. But get this: We'll catch a glimpse of the series' next installment way before *FFXII* hits our shores. That's right; I hear Square will unveil *FFXIII* at this May's big industry trade show, the Electronic Entertainment Expo (known to most folks as simply E3). Expect a brief teaser video and confirmation from the publisher that the RPG will be a PS3 exclusive.

OK, smile

I don't know about you folks, but the Q can spend only so much cash on "new and improved" versions of his hand-helds. (But I'd still donate some pints of blood—or other bodily fluids—for that DS Lite. It looks H-O-T hot!) Anyway, more upgrades are on the way, as both the DS and the PSP will receive additional redesigns by the end of the year. So what's the latest and greatest feature? It seems Nintendo and Sony will add a camera to their respective portable systems...and more.

Paint us a picture

Tall, dark, and a rumormonger extraordinaire—I've definitely got a lot going for me. Sadly, that list doesn't include my art skills (I struggle drawing a darn stick figure). But that doesn't mean I'm not excited about new versions of *Mario Paint for the DS* and *Nintendo Revolution*. Details are pretty scarce right now, but word around the underground is that the next-gen console version will be quite robust, including the option to create 3D images. Nice, very nice indeed.

High flyer

And speaking of Nintendo's upcoming console, here's another scrumptious piece of gossip: It appears the flight simulator series *Pilotwings* is currently in development for the Revolution. Imagine holding the system's motion-sensitive, TV-remote-like controller in your hands just like a paper airplane and effortlessly guiding your craft through the friendly skies. If a game like *Pilotwings* can't get you jazzed about the Revolution...well, then you're dead to me.

Next-gen lombax

Talk about changing your stripes—Sony's *Ratchet* series went from a cute and cuddly platformer to a multiplayer-heavy shooter in just four short years. How will the furball and his metallic mate handle their next-gen debut? Honestly, I'm not entirely sure, but we'll all find out when *Ratchet lands on the PlayStation 3 sometime in 2007*. I just hope this franchise keeps up with the funny.

WHAT'S THE DEAL?

Q: Last year, you mentioned something about a *Shadowrun* game for the Xbox 360. Is that still happening?

A: Yep, and just as I mentioned in issue #195, this *Shadowrun* (due out later this year) will be quite different from the Super NES and Game Boy versions. Apparently, it's not meant to be a play-by-play approach, but rather a first-person shooter. The game's details remain hazy, but many sources are saying the Xbox 360 version will be the

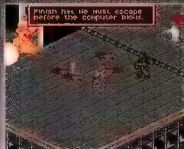


Photo courtesy of Electronic Arts

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JETER



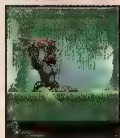
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THE HOT 10

Also known as The Hot Teen

1

PROJECT KATAMARI

Students in Yuri Giltman's "Making Toys" class at Parsons School of Design whipped up these remote-controlled *Katamari Damacy* characters, thanks in part to the magic of Velcro. See them in action at vg.typepad.com/makingtoys. One question: How much?



2

TAPE ON A QUARTER

Sure, you can order *Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max* through capcom.com and get that special D-pad that (permanently) grafts on to the PSP's semi-inadequate pad. Or you can stick some tape on a quarter. It works. Hot 10 courtesy of gamevideos.com's Ryan O'Donnell.



3

XBOX HITS GO DOUBLE ULTRA PLATINUM

Microsoft's offering a new "best of platinum hits" lineup—16 games at \$10 a pop. And they are:

- Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind
- Enter the Matrix
- Fuzion Frenzy
- Project Gotham Racing 3
- Shrek 2
- Soul Calibur II
- Ghost Recon
- Ghost Recon: Island Thunder
- Rainbow Six 3
- Splinter Cell
- Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow
- Tony Hawk's Underground
- Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4
- True Crime: Streets of L.A.
- MechAssault
- Counter-Strike

4

BULLS*** GAME ADS BANNED

Well, in Britain, at least. After three viewers complained that ads for *Call of Duty 2* showed graphics that looked nothing like the actual game, the U.K.'s Advertising Standards Authority banned the ads off TV. Too bad the U.S. doesn't have anything even remotely like an Advertising Standards Authority.

6

BRAIN AGE

Brain decay starts at 20. Find out how much damage has been done with Nintendo's latest—not-really-a-game.



5



7

MORE CLASSICS ON LIVE ARCADE

Midway's dusting off *Defender*, *Cyberball*, *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*, *Paperboy*, and *Root Beer Tapper* for Live Arcade. Be excited!

8

WARRIORS, COME OUT TO PAY

Rockstar has partnered with a collective of designers called the Retail Mafia to create limited-edition shirts and hoodies based on gangs from *The Warriors*. Check www.rockstargames.com or your local fancy-pants boutique. Tell them Françoise sent you.



9

XBOX 360 GAMES LOOKING NEXT-GEN

Ghost Recon: Advance Warfighter, *Too Human*, *Fight Night Round 3*, *Alone in the Dark*... this 360 thing is starting to turn out OK!



DEAD OR ALIVE MOVIE DOA

Stills from the upcoming *Dead or Alive* movie are online, and all we can say is: hahaha, hahahahahahahah <breath> aha.



10

"WAR IS HELL."

- GEN. WILLIAM T. SHERMAN

"YEAH, BUT DESTROYING STUFF IS DAMN FUN."

- THE OUTFIT



Experience the intensity of total destruction - where everything in your path can be destroyed. With Destruction on Demand™, strategic reinforcements and the battlefield to instantly increase your firepower. Four multiplayer Modes including Co-Op, Deathmatch, Strategy, Victory and Destruction vs. Now Live!

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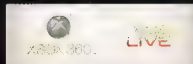
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MATURE 17+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

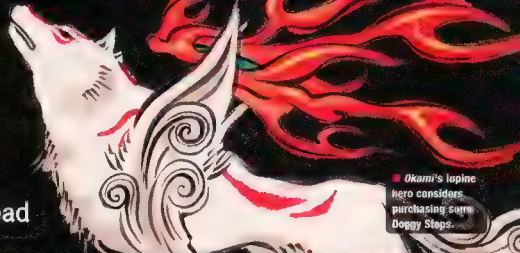
Violence
Blood and Gore
Language



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COMING SOON

Maybe you should just go outside instead



Okami's lupine hero considers purchasing some Doggy Stags.

MAY 2006



The Da Vinci Code
2K Games • PS2/XB/GC — This book-to-movie-to-game cash-in offers arty puzzles, mild action, and a badly coliced Tom Hanks.



Fuel
Dreamcatcher • XB — Feed your thirst for fossil fuels with this madcap racer, featuring more than 20 vehicle types.

Okami
Capcom • PS2 — Prepare to venture through mythical ancient Japan as a powerful wolf-god in this unique action-adventure. From its sophisticated ink-on-rice-paper visual style to its creative paintbrush-based magic system, *Okami* embraces innovation.



Guilty Gear Judgment
Majesco • PSP — Crams all the smoothly animated fighters and shreddin' butt rock of *Guilty Gear X2 #Reload* into your pocket.



Jaws Unleashed
Majesco • PS2 — Get all chummy with the locals as the titular great white himself. Unless the game gets delayed again.



MLB SlugFest 2006
Midway • PS2/XB — Zany, over-the-top, hardball returns with a new create-a-player mode, all for only 20 bones.



TimeShift
Atari • XB360 — Just as *Timecop* shattered your conceptions of the Jean-Claude Van Damme genre, *TimeShift* injects potent chronological trickery into the first-person shooting genre, allowing you to pause, rewind, and fast-forward time at will.



MotoGP '06
THQ • XB360 — Crotch-rockets go next-gen. Not to be confused with the other cycle series called *MotoGP* (by Namco).



Over G Fighters
Ubisoft • XB360 — Defend freedom and combat evildoers in this arcadey, *Ace Combat*-esque dogfighting sim.



Miss Spider infests your DS.

Also in May

Black and White Creatures
Majesco • PS2

Men at Work
VU Games • XB

Monster Hunter Freedom
Capcom • PSP

Gander Mountain's Trophy Hunter: 2006 Season
VU Games • PS2

Miss Spider: Harvest Time Hop and Fly
Game Factory • DS

X-Men 3
Activision • XB360/PS2/XB/GC/DS/GBA/TI-B5



X-Men 3's Wolverine loves to dance!

>> NEXT YEAR, MIDWAY WILL BRING THE SWEATY, hardcore grapplers of TNA Wrestling to both PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. >>>

SOME PEOPLE WILL WANT A PIECE OF YOUR IDENTITY,
CHANGING IT TO FIT WHAT THEY THINK YOU SHOULD BE,
AND OTHERS WILL WANT A PIECE OF YOUR TIME, WASTING
IT WITH STUFF LIKE GETTING DRUNK AND GETTING HIGH
AND THEN ANOTHER PIECE AND ANOTHER PIECE AND...
IF EVERYONE TAKES A PIECE OF YOU, WHAT'S LEFT OF YOU?





■ No prerendered mock-ups here: Every shot in this story showcases legit *Too Human* graphics and gameplay.



For even deeper *Too Human* coverage, including video interviews and a guided tour of developer Silicon Knights' studio, head to the "EGM Extras" section of egm.1UP.com.

GOOD COMPLEX

Microsoft and developer Silicon Knights are forging an ambitious adventure trilogy—will **Too Human** change videogaming forever?

By Shane Bettenhausen

It's no secret that the Xbox 360 is going to need a lot more games if it's going to stand up against the looming competition of Sony's PlayStation 3 and Nintendo's Revolution. Multiplatform fare like *Madden* and *Splitter Cell* won't be enough—the console will assuredly need some killer exclusives. And that burden falls squarely upon the shoulders of Microsoft, a first-party publisher that, when compared to Sony CEA or Nintendo, hasn't really built a diverse stable of popular brands. Sure, *Halo* stands as an unstoppable juggernaut, and upstart series such as *Fable* and *Forza* will see anticipated sequels on the 360, but the majority of Microsoft's first-party Xbox offerings are best left dead and forgotten. (Masochists, feel free to conjure up memories of *Sneakers*, *Tao Feng*, *Rizton Frenzy*, *Whackoff*, *Azurik*, and—most distressingly—two *Blinx* games.)

Thankfully, the guys in charge now appear to have learned from past mistakes. This time around, rather than haphazardly dabbling in random genres, Microsoft has enlisted top-tier developers to create original, big-budget titles. *Too Human* is one of these dream projects, a ready-made blockbuster forged with carefully calculated mass appeal. Conceived as an epic from the ground up by maverick developer Silicon Knights, *Too Human*'s grandiosity can't be contained by a single game, as this fall's debut chapter is but the first in a

trilogy of planned releases. And there's more to this story than just a big-budget action game—*Too Human* has been in the works at Silicon Knights for over a decade, and if the words of its outspoken creator are to be believed...it just might change the world.

The history of humanity

Too Human hides a wealth of drama, intensity, and gravitas beneath its evocative, enigmatic title. We're not just talking about its complex mythology of gods, men, and monsters: While most new next-gen franchises start with a clean slate, this game arrives under a weighty burden of history. And although Silicon Knights President Denis Dyack seems reticent on the subject of *Too Human*'s abnormally long gestation, that decade of development may secretly give this game the edge it needs to succeed.

Too Human began its bizarre journey over 10 years ago, when Dyack and his crew at Silicon Knights were working on the cult classic *Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain* (PS1). While toiling away on that gothic action-RPG, Dyack was waxing philosophical on some heavy issues. "We wanted *Too Human* to be a really cool game that's fun to play, but at the same time, a game that makes some statements about technology, to help people to understand the effects of technology on society, what the differences are between man and machine, and what defines a human soul, beyond even what was done in *Blade Runner*,"

"We've created something that was utterly impossible before."

—*Too Human* Director Denis Dyack

says Dyack. "So we created the concept called *Too Human*, where you're playing this game and you're constantly being told that you're too human, that you need to cybernetically upgrade yourself in order to combat the growing machine forces." The team managed to get both PS1 and GameCube versions up and running (scope the sidebar on page 75 for details on these highly different takes on the concept), but a cavalcade of other projects continually relegated *Human* to the back burner for several years.

Fast-forward to 2004. After creating GameCube hits *Eternal Darkness* and *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes*, Silicon Knights amicably parted ways with Nintendo and dove headfirst into reimagining *Too Human* as a next-gen property. "Nintendo has publicly said that it wants to make smaller, simpler games," Dyack explains. "*Too Human* is not a smaller, simpler game—Microsoft better understands the kind of games that we want to make."

Returning to the project, Dyack and co. realized that their vision for the game had changed radically since they last tackled the material. "Since working with (*Mario* creator) Shigeru Miyamoto at Nintendo, our understanding of

gameplay evolved dramatically," Dyack says. "And when we worked with *Metal Gear* mastermind Hideo Kojima, our understanding of spectacle and drama really developed as well." The new *Too Human* would need instantly accessible gameplay, gripping cinemas, and stellar production values if it was going to be the triple-A hit Microsoft wanted. Most importantly, though, it would need more than one game to get its point across. "Back in the early days, we would have probably just gone and made one huge, gargantuan game," explains Dyack. "But looking at now, I personally think that 25 hours is pushing the limits of how long a game should be." Galvanized by the promise of new technology, *Too Human* became something far greater than its former iterations hinted at. "We're actually happy that we waited," Dyack adds. "The Xbox 360 is the perfect machine for the game, and we've created something that was utterly impossible before."

Too simple?

So now that the developer has had over a decade to carefully craft its dream project, what exactly is *Too Human*? Put simply, it's an action game. You control Baldur, a beefy, bald warrior who wields both a

GOD COMPLEX



▶ traditional weaponry and firearms against deadly mechanical foes. Combat provides the core of *Too Human's* gameplay. "Puzzles and platforming tend to be frustrating, so we didn't go in that direction," says Dyack. "What's crucial is that the one thing you do the most in the game—in our case, fighting—has to be fun."

The crew at Silicon Knights sought to make a revolutionary gameplay system that was both incredibly simple and surprisingly deep. "Just because people want instant engagement doesn't mean that they want something dumbed-down or stupid," explains *Too Human* Designer Henry Sterchi. So while the game seems initially simplistic (check the next page to get a grip on the unique controls), this pared-down setup masks startling depth.

"We were lucky enough to go through the Shigeru Miyamoto school of game design," says Dyack. "And if he were to pick up the controller with *Too Human*

today, I think he'd be really happy because he could play it so easily."

The button-free melee combat feels easy and instinctive, yet it's actually a tad disorienting at first. By simply tapping the stick in the direction of nearby enemies, you'll send Baldur rapidly careening around the screen dishing out devastating attacks and combos. When flicked in tandem with directions on the left stick, the right analog stick digs even deeper into Baldur's arsenal, filling the screen with effects-laden supermoves. Once you acclimate to the frenzied pace and fluid fighting, it's a highly rewarding, visceral combat experience more akin to a fighting game than a traditional adventure title. "The motion-capture guys we're working with have worked on films like *Hero* and *The Chronicles of Riddick*," explains Dyack. "We feel that some of the stuff they're doing surpasses even the fighting in *Soul Calibur*."

Plus, the interplay of firearms and traditional weapons-based fighting allows for over-the-top, knock-em-up-and-shoot-em-down maneuvers à la *Devil May Cry*. Boredom is the ultimate enemy in games like this, so customizable combos and a wide variety of weapon types (swords, hammers, polearms, pistols, rifles, lasers, and more) will hopefully ensure plenty of variety. "From my standpoint, the big failure with *God of War* was that I found the one combo that worked and just did it over and over," explains Sterchi. "In *Too Human*, you have to constantly be thinking about your enemies in order to succeed." Don't worry about *Human* mimicking *God of War's* too-few boss battles, either. "We have tons, and they're more *Metroid*- or *Zelda*-style bosses than in *God of War*," says Sterchi. "And don't worry about us doing one of those climbing-up-the-grinder levels, that's for sure." ▶

GOD COMPLEX (CONT.)



■ *Too Human's* lush environments skillfully merge futuristic architecture with design elements lifted from Norse mythology.



Of course, *Too Human's* innovative, stripped-down control system would be functionally impossible without its equally inventive camera system. Like Sony's breakthrough action hit *God of War*, *Too Human* purposefully takes all camera control away from the player. "I've never heard anyone say, 'Moving the camera was really fun,'" Sterchi muses. "So we've made it very dynamic: If you're using pistols, the camera automatically zooms out to give you a clear view of your targets, but if you use the sword, it zooms in to show off the action, more like a fighting game." The camera seems full of surprises—we witnessed some really clever zooms, pans, and cuts that gave the game a unique look.

"The camera is equivalent to what you see during the Super Bowl broadcast," Dyack explains. "You might have 50 cam-

eras around at all times, and you never know when that touchdown is going to occur, so you're constantly switching to the best camera to view the action."

Too deep?

Although *Too Human* aims to lure casual gamers in with its accessible combat, some surprisingly robust role-playing elements await those gamers looking for more than just a standard beat-em-up. "At first it's easy to play, but then they realize that there's a lot to dive into," says Dyack. "In my eyes, it's kind of like chess—you can learn the rules to chess in 10 minutes, but to become a master takes a lifetime." Silicon Knights wants to keep the game's role-playing elements largely under wraps, but expect deep character customization in the forms of cybernetic upgrades, weapon proficien-

cies, and oodles of unique equipment. "We really want to make sure that people don't think of it as a role-playing game, though," exclaims Dyack. "Because as soon as you say RPG, people think endless menus, boring combat, and dialogue trees—our game isn't about that."

Too hightrow?

The single most surprising aspect of *Too Human* isn't its creative combat, murky role-playing depths, or gorgeous visuals—it's the care Silicon Knights put into crafting its colossal story line. "There are a lot of really bad stories in video-games, and quite frankly, a lot of people don't really take it seriously," Dyack explains. "We approach game story from a Shakespearian model: He'd write cerebral metaphor for the people in the balconies while also including dirty jokes ▶

Too Human's combat aims to be so easy and fun that even your mom could play it. "If we only hit with a hardcore audience, then we've failed," says Director Denis Dyack.

HIS BAZOOKA IS WORSE THAN HIS BITE.

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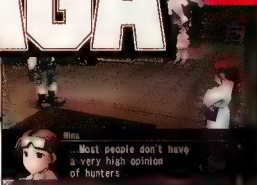
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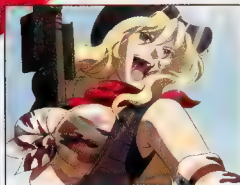
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GOD COMPLEX (CONT.)

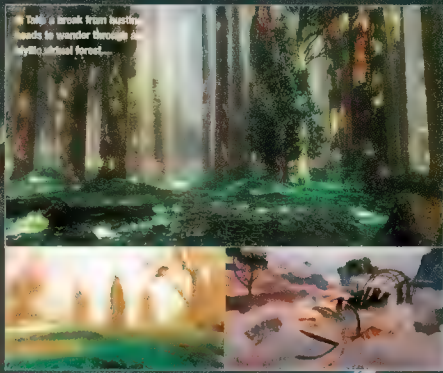
"The rabbit hole goes really, really deep."

Dennis Dyack on his game's complex narrative

Human Nature

As you guide Baldur through bleak terrain ravaged by millennia of warfare, you'll occasionally need a break from all that grisly combat. Good news: You can find temporary solace in a virtual-reality world dubbed Cyberspace. Don't expect an edgy realm of glowing green text like in *The Matrix*, though. "In Cyberspace we really wanted to juxtapose what people usually think of as cyberspace, which is technological, with something that looks as natural as possible," says Dyack. "In Cyberspace, you'll find a great repository of information, cybernetic upgrades, and plenty of secrets."

• This is a break from battling, and you can find temporary solace in a virtual-reality world dubbed Cyberspace.



• Baldur's armor and weapons are intricately detailed, and you can find plenty of secrets in the game.



► for the groundlings throwing beer on the actors from the front row." *Too Human's* sweeping plot works on three distinct levels: a top-line level chronicling the war between mankind and machines, a symbolic level referencing Norse mythology, and finally, a deep metaphorical level channeling Nietzsche's writings on relativism. "People who get into the mythology are going to get a ton out of this," says Dyack. "The rabbit hole goes really, really deep."

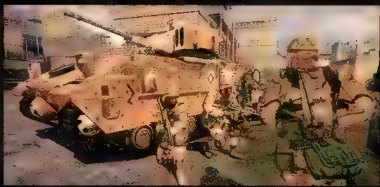
Norse mythology permeates every aspect of the game—each of the game's characters, monsters, and locations has a direct parallel

to the ancient legends. Be on the lookout for supremely subtle references—at one point during our demo, Dyack paused to point out that a doorway's shape was based on a particular ancient rune. But of course, this isn't a straight-up myth retreat in the vein of *God of War: Thor* and *Loki* weren't traditionally portrayed with laser rifles. When pushed on the subject of whether the Norse symbolism was meant solely as metaphor, Dyack lets it all hang out. "Imagine if the story we're telling in *Too Human* is really the source of Norse mythology," he explains. "Ten thousand years later

the true events are forgotten, so it becomes religion, and later a myth." So your Baldur, the brave warrior defending the humans against a mechanical onslaught in a long-forgotten futuristic past, is later canonized as Baldur, god of light in Norse mythology. It's clever stuff, and the brainchild of Dyack's personal interest in the subject matter. "Norse myths are my favorites because the gods are not immortal—they can die," adds Dyack. "In fact, they're fatalists—they all know that they are fated to die in Ragnarok, the apocalyptic war between the gods and giants."

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GOD COMPLEX (CONT.)



► Although the story centers squarely on Volkytes, Lord (left) and the Volkytes (right) play crucial roles.

The Tough Question

Although Silicon Knights remains adamant that the first chapter of *Too Human* will ship this November, the company faces the stigma of several delayed past releases.

That's a reputation that Denis Dyack would like to shake. "Can Silicon Knights ship a game on time?" he asks. "Well, *Eternal Darkness* actually would have made GC launch except for one thing that we couldn't



possibly anticipate—and that was 9/11." Dyack goes on to explain: "We actually had to redo 25 percent of the levels because we had some major setting set in the Arab world. It's not that we had some anything negative—at all—but the environment just wasn't ready for it. We were very disappointed about all of this, and we really got beaten by the press over that delay. But as Miyamoto says, 'People will forget that a great game was late, but they'll never forget that a game is bad.' At the end, I think no truer words have never been said."

► Bolivar can receive a massive quantity of loot, including optional Treasury Altars like this one.

► that ends the world." Truthfully, *Too Human's* deities aren't really gods at all. "The gods are humans who have been cybernetically enhanced to the point where they have seemingly superhuman powers," Dyack explains. "They're not magical in any way; they're just profoundly powerful."

Although his face lights up with glee when discussing his game's labyrinthine

narrative, Dyack still worries about giving too much away. If fans pore over ancient texts, they might just spoil the second and third game's climactic plots. Ultimately, though, he'd probably be proud of these impatient bookworms. "If you can get game players talking about mythology or Nietzsche then you've done something for the art form," Dyack offers. "Paying attention to the meaning ►

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GOD COMPLEX (CONT.)

Human Contact

Too Human will also allow players to venture onto Xbox Live and tackle the full single-player adventure with up to three other players. "A good analogy for this mode is *Phantasy Star Online*," explains *Too Human* Designer Henry Sterchi. "It was the first online RPG that had real combat, and you could actually chain the attacks together. We thought: What if every time you were attacking, you were busting out all these really cool moves?" Expect seriously ramped-up difficulty, some unique rare item drops, and ass-kicking team-up moves. "Imagine you launch an enemy up in the air, then your buddy jumps up and grabs him by the legs and piledives him into the ground," adds director Denis Dyack.

■ *Too Human's* online play hearkens back to Sega's *Phantasy Star Online*.



■ You'll want to bust out Balder's evasive maneuvers against larger enemies.

▶ behind the story is the future of gaming.

Too ambitious?

For something that's being billed as an instantly accessible action game, *Too Human* feels mysteriously like a Trojan horse—its user-friendly exterior masks untold depth, the promise of online addiction, and that seriously heavy story line. This balley bait-and-switch isn't accidental. "I think we'll hopefully take the gamer places that they've never been before," promises Dyack. "If we want to take entertainment to the next level, then we have to provide the perfect entertainment experience, and that's what defines *Too Human* above anything else." In order to achieve this lofty goal, Dyack will have to delicately balance the gameplay and story line of his epic creation. Hopefully, this time working alongside Hideo Kojima

taught him where to draw the line with his high-minded approach to game design...gamers don't want another head-scratching *Metal Gear Solid 2* situation.

Despite all the pressure, Dyack seems confident. "I think that *Too Human* will be the product that will define the company, for good or for ill...but we're thinking it will be for good," says Dyack. "In some sense it defines who we are and who we want to be." He has similarly high hopes for gamers in general. "In the future, instead of some negative story about how videogames turn people into killing machines, maybe we'll get a story about how games are getting people to talk about philosophy," muses Dyack. "I think a parent would be pretty happy if a kid was playing a game and starting talking about Nietzsche." Dream on, crazy dreamer.....



Too Ancient?

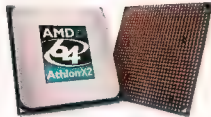
Looking back at the original PlayStation version of *Too Human* (above) reveals it to be a surprisingly different game. In this iteration, you controlled John Franks, a tough-as-nails detective going undercover to infiltrate a shady corporation in the year 2450. Comparisons to stealth blockbuster *Metal Gear Solid* were appropriate...Denis Dyack himself made the connection in an intriguing interview from 1999 that can be found on *Too Human* fan site www.toohuman.net. We know less about the later GameCube revision—unlike the PS1 game, it was never presented in playable form—but it appears to follow a similar hard-edge sci-fi aesthetic. The original concept for the game now seems rather simple compared to the nuanced, mythology-laden epic that it's evolved into. Hopefully, we'll get a deeper look into these abandoned versions in the inevitable behind-the-scenes DVD that will ship alongside a limited-edition release of the Xbox 360 game. **A+**





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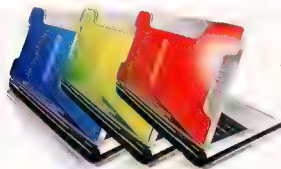
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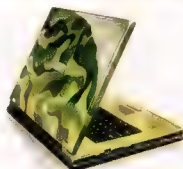
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ow this is what you call a fight. With year two of the portable war well underway, the Nintendo DS and Sony's PSP are still running neck and neck among U.S. gamers (over in Japan, Nintendo's machine currently has a slight lead). Sure, each handheld has had its share of ups (*Nintendogs*, *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories*) and downs (few non-Nintendo-made DS titles are worth picking up; the PSP is flooded with poor PS2 ports). But after looking at the upcoming software lineup for both systems, this battle's best days are ahead.

You'll find four different genres covered here: role-playing, action, fighting, and alternative. So pick your preferred path (no cosplay outfits, please) and catch a peek at the adventures you'll be having in the near future. >

—Bryan Intihar and Damian Linn

ACTION



ROLE-PLAYING

MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM

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The Answer Ahead: Believe it or not, monster hunting requires more than the ability to slay a few dragons. You gotta be domesticated, too, as the best of the best are pros at fishing, gardening, and cooking fine meats (can't go out hacking and slashing on an empty stomach, now can you?). Don't expect a break from your "chores" on the portable version of Capcom's action-RPG, because unlike most PS2-to-PSP ports, *Freedom* contains just as much content as its big brother does (and looks just as damn impressive visually).

But let's be honest: You really came here for the killings. And thankfully, the developers are making

the necessary changes to the home edition's grueling single-player campaign. "Basically, we 'adjusted' the [game's mission] structure, rather than 'corrected' it," says Producer Tsuyoshi Tanaka. "We didn't just shorten the time involved for each mission, but focused more on making the game easier and more enjoyable to play on this portable system." Still need a helping hand when tackling one of the game's Jurassic beasts? *Freedom* also supports local ad hoc play, where up to four players can venture out on quests together (sorry, no true online mode here).

Who knows, maybe you can get one of your friends to tend to your garden or cook up some grub (suckers).



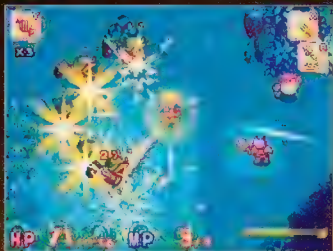


■ You can also head to the new Feyne Kitchen for some hearty meals (the food consumed here will temporarily improve your stats).



■ Freedom's less-demanding single-player game should mean you can take down Sean Connery's Dragonheart kin all on your own.

ALTERNATE ROUTES



Children of Mana • Nintendo • DS • Summer 2006

A four-player dungeon hack that's a lot like *Phantasy Star Online*...minus the online bit.

Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII • Square Enix • PSP • 2007

Cloud's best bud, Zack, takes center-stage in this long-awaited action-RPG. Want more info? Yeah, so do we.



Pokemon Ranger: The Bond of Bravery • Nintendo • DS • Fall 2006

Like anything we could say here will stop 5 million Pokemoniacs from buying this game.



Kingdom Hearts II • Square Enix • PSP • Fall 2006

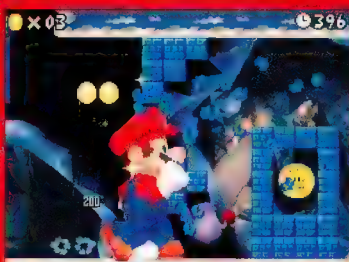
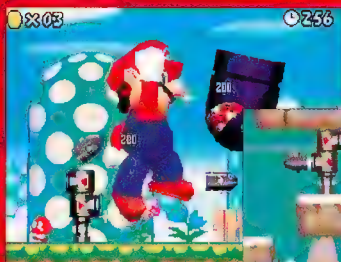
Basically the same package as the 2000 PS1 cult classic, but now in handheld form. Hey, at least it's a port of a good game...

Overclocked • 3 • Nintendo • DS • Fall 2006 — Expect 2D visuals as these two console RPGs go portable (musings for makerroom: for those 237 hours of cut-scenes) >

ACTION

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS.

NINTENDO • DS • MAY 2006



The Journey Ahead: It's a good thing we don't judge games based on the creativity of their names. Otherwise, we'd have to give this one a big fat donut. And don't let the "New" in this *Super Mario Bros.* fool you, either; even with its snazzy mix of 2D and 3D visuals, this platformer will resemble its older NES and Super NES cousins more than the last few console installments, so expect a very straightforward and accessible game (in the past, the developers mentioned that they felt the recent *Super Mario* titles had gotten a bit too hardcore).

While the series returns to its roots (at least for this go-around), the chubby plumber and his bro-ham-

my still sport some new tricks for reaching those flagpoles. Power-ups making their debut in this *Mushroom Kingdom* include "shrooms that'll shrink our two heroes, ones that'll really super-size them, plus a Koopa outfit—slip into this turtle shell and you can slide all around the level knocking out enemies. Just cross your fingers that you'll don this attire more often than *SMB3's* (NES), popular, yet underutilized, Hammer Bros. getup.

Aside from *New Super Mario Bros.*' butt-stomping, pipe-traveling solo venture, the game will also come packed with a two-player wireless co-op mode: Princess Peach—we're a-coming.

ALTERNATE ROUTES

Boktai DS • Konami • DS • Fall 2006 — Good news for all you albino gamers: This dual-screen *Boktai* ditches the GBA versions' light sensor, meaning you don't ever have to head outside while hunting these vampires.

Gangs of London • Sony CEA • PSP • Fall 2006 The makers of *The Getaway* franchise (PS2) want to show you that England's hoodlums spill blood over more than a Arsenal-Manchester United footy match.

Killzone: Liberation • Sony CEA • PSP • Fall 2006 The PS2 first-person shooter goes all *Metal Gear Solid* (as in, a top-down stealth-action game) on PSP.

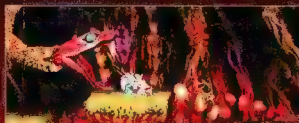
MechAssault: Phantom War • Majesco • DS • Fall 2006 — Apparently, Microsoft doesn't mind lending its Xbox BattleMechs to console competitor Nintendo for handheld purposes.

New Grand Theft Auto • Rockstar • PSP • Fall 2006 If we were a bettin' man (or woman), we'd put our money on Vice City as the backdrop for the next portable *GTA*.

Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins • Capcom • PSP • Fall 2006 — Expect to see Sir Arthur's dirty drawers a lot, as the developers swear this side-scroller will be just as challenging as the previous *GNG* titles.



Gangs of London



Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins

FIGHTING

MORTAL KOMBAT: UNCHAINED

MIDWAY • PSP • FALL 2006



The Journey Ahead: Pining for Jax? That shirtless special-forces operative with cyborg arms wasn't in the console version of *Mortal Kombat: Deception*, but he's en route to a pants pocket near you in *Mortal Kombat: Unchained*, along with new (well, new old) challengers Kitana, Frost, Blaze, Goro, and Shao Kahn. *Unchained* translates *Deception*'s smaller screen and features all of that game's many modes, including the third person-adventure Konquest. But the PSP version swaps online multiplayer for local ad hoc battles—from traditional head-to-head splatterfests to chess and *Tetris*...or... Puzzle Komat—and adds an all-new Endurance mode. "There are more enemies that come at you, and you've got to do different things to fight them off," says *Unchained* Producer John Podlasek about Endurance. "It's more of a minigame-type thing." Kind of sounds like the usual survival mode, but with double the severed heads and removed spinal cords....



ALTERNATE ROUTES

Tekken: Dark Resurrection • Namco • PSP •

Summer 2006 — This port of the latest arcade installment aims to improve the franchise's piss-poor handheld record (remember *Tekken Advance*?) with additional characters (including scary newcomer Dragunov and series vet Eddy Gordo) and stages. You'll find lots of new attire for decking out your pugilist, too.

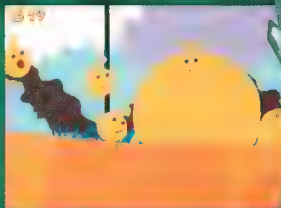


Power Stone Collection • Capcom • PSP • Fall 2006

Feel that? It's the spirit of Sega's ill-fated Dreamcast, as two of the console's brawlers—*Power Stone* (good) and the four-player *Power Stone 2* (not so good)—get revived for Sony's handheld. Aside from some routine upgrades (new quirky weapons, a training mode, etc.), this two-game collection makes the four new characters from *Power Stone 2* playable in the original game. And thanks to the game-sharing function, you only need one UMD for others to jump in with their PSPs and beat the crap out of you. ▶

ALTERNATIVE LOCOROCO

SONY (IN JAPAN) • PSP • LATE 2006

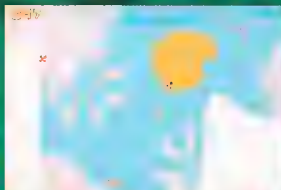


The Journey Ahead: Lead Programmer Greg Tavares knows his game—at least from the onset—isn't very manly. "Yeah, I guess a single LocoRoco is pretty wimpy," he says. "But a 20-weight LocoRoco is huge, and I certainly wouldn't want to get squashed by one."

So how does your jellylike creature go from chump to champ in this disgustingly happy-go-lucky side-scroller? Here's how it works: Rather than moving the LocoRoco from point A to point B with the PSP's analog stick or directional pad, you'll use the handheld's two shoulder buttons to actually tilt the game's environment up to 30 degrees, thus causing the LocoRoco to head in the desired direction. As you guide this orange goo through settings such as jungles and snow-covered mountains, you also must

avoid hazards like splinters and enemies, plus eat fruit so that your LocoRoco's size increases (the bigger the LocoRoco, the higher your score at the end of each level). But the game's not just about becoming a fatty; occasionally, you'll have to split your LocoRoco into several tinier ones so you can fit through really tight passageways or gain access to secret rooms.

Unfortunately, Sony hasn't announced a U.S. release for *LocoRoco* just yet, but don't worry—we've already heard of several other publishers that are extremely interested in bringing this wonderfully bizarre and intuitive handheld title Stateside. And remember, if a prince rolling a giant katamari ball around can make it here, so can one wimpy...er, we mean one tough blob of jelly.



Is LocoRoco the next Katamari? "The development team is very pleased when we hear [those comparisons]," says Lead Programmer Greg Tavares. "We are all fans of *Katamari* and are happy to be considered in such good company."



ALTERNATE ROUTES

Big Brain Academy • Nintendo • DS • May 2006

Mario's crew really wants to give your noggin one serious workout, as this sequel hits only a month after *Brain Age* (head to page 20 for more on that one). The big deal here: an eight-person multiplayer mode that only requires one game cartridge. Great, now all your friends will see that your brain cells really are fried.

Magnética • Nintendo • DS • June 2006

— This one's in the vein of the puzzler *Bust-A-Move*. You'll use the DS' stylus and touch screen to match similar-looking marbles and protect your base. You can hurl marbles of your own at the CPU, too.

Shoot 'A Least 20 Birds



Point Blank DS • Namco

• **DS • June 2006** — This portable shooting gallery includes 50 minigames from all three corny *Point Blank* games, complete with touch-screen functionality and a versus mode. Lightgun-shaped stylus not included.

MORE INFO FOR YOUR ADVENTURES



LITE IT UP

Nintendo's dual-screen handheld has gone and gotten itself a makeover. And it's lookin' good. In addition to being lighter and smaller (the screens stay the same size, though), the DS Lite features four brightness settings (the colors really pop on the highest one) and a larger stylus, and the microphone is now positioned in the middle of the unit. When we tried out the DS Lite, the D-pad just felt better, as well.

• The price is right: Expect the DS Lite (which is due out this May) to cost the same as the current model, roughly \$130.

JUST BROWSIN'

Now that you've got the DS hardware, it's time to use it for Web browsing (thanks to the touch screen and stylus), the cumbersome PSP or the handheld Wii allows you to check your e-mail and/or favorite online site. (We may change soon.) Nintendo recently announced Web browsing software for the Japanese market. A company rep hinted it

EVER WONDER...

...why so few third-party PSP games support online play (more confusingly referred to as "infrastructure mode")? While we've heard rumblings that Sony has purposefully kept this technology close to its chest (giving its own games an edge), the hardware maker insists that's not the case. "We've made it a focus for both first- and third-party titles to include infrastructure mode in future titles and are confident in the stellar content offerings that will become available this year," says a company spokesperson. OK, then, why haven't we heard of any new third-party titles that'll include this feature?



FFVII: ADVENT CHILDREN GETS A DATE (NO, REALLY)

Something we didn't hold our breath for: the U.S. release of Square Enix's animated CG flick. It's only been what, like seven months since the Japanese debut of *FFVII: Advent Children*? Well, wait no more: This April 25, you can pick up the movie—which is set two years after the events of the (hugely successful PSP role-playing title—on both DVD and UMD (for \$27 and \$29, respectively). And we recommend buying the DVD edition. It'll include bonuses such as deleted scenes, a making-of documentary, and a glimpse at future *FFVII*-based titles. ✦



review crew

don't **** with mickey mouse or the square enix/disney messive

THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS...

Longtime *EGM* contributor Greg Ford's taking over the Reviews section, starting this issue. We've got some big plans in the works to keep our Review Crew relevant in the Interweb age, which we'll unveil in the coming months, but know one thing: *EGM*'s reviews are in safe hands. Safe, reassuringly calloused hands. I'll still hang around, but I'll be splitting my time between *EGM* and our new online project, *GameVideos.com*, which may actually be live by the time you read this....

—Domian Lim
(former) Reviews Editor

GAME DIRECTORY

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KINGDOM HEARTS II

GAME OF THE MONTH

THE RATING SYSTEM & AWARDS

10-7
GOOD



Platinum
Straight 10s. For games with an average score of 9.0 or higher.



Gold
For games with a mean score of 8.0 or higher.



Silver
For games with a mean score of 6.0 or higher.



The highest-scoring game each month gets a star.



The lowest-rated game with unimpossibly bad scores.

ESRB Ratings The ESRB's game ratings range from "Everyone" to "Adults Only." Visit www.esrb.org for the full lowdown.

THE REVIEW CREW

Lookin' good in their matching satin jackets

DAN "SHOE" NSU • Editor-in-Chief

Shoe's riding the Tom Clancy roller coaster: Hates *Ghost Recon 2*. Loves *Advanced Warfighter*. Loves *Splinter Cell*. Hates *Essentials*...
Now Playing: *Ghost Recon Adv. Warfighter*, *Godfather*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



MARK MACDONALD • Executive Editor

Now that Mark is away on vacation, people are no longer afraid to talk openly about enjoying *Metal Gear Solid 3*: *Substance*'s online game.
Now Playing: *Final Fantasy XII*
Blog: egmmark.1UP.com



JENNIFER TSAO • Managing Editor

Tetris DS made her feel old. *Top Spin 2* made her feel unathletic. *Katamari* made her feel uncoordinated. At least Jen had *Brain Age* this month so she could feel—aw, crap...
Now Playing: *Brain Age*
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



CRISPIN BOYER • Senior Editor

Crispin thinks *Godfather* is the best Marlon Brando game since the late, great actor played *Superman*'s man in the classic *Superman 64*.
Now Playing: *Tomb Raider: Legend*, *The Godfather*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



SHANE BETTENHAUSEN • Previews Editor

Although he's not about to write *Dooty/Dooty* fan fiction like Bryan, Shane had a magical time with *Kingdom Hearts II*.
Now Playing: *Soul Calibur III*, *Kingdom Hearts II*, *Too Human*, *Black Tiger*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



GREG FORD • Reviews Editor (Incoming)

The new reviews editor wanted to make a big splash for his first issue—he opted for the always-welcome 'fro wig/flowered shirt combo.
Now Playing: *Ghost Recon Adv. Warfighter*, *Full Auto*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



DEMIAN LINN • Reviews Editor (outgoing)

Please direct all your complaints re: *EGM* hates/loves Sony/Microsoft/Nintendo/whatever game to young Greg Ford. It's his fault now.
Now Playing: *CRAW*, *Soul Calibur III*, *Field Commander*
Blog: egmdemian.1UP.com



BRYAN HITHAR • News Editor

With G. Ford officially joining the squad, Bryan's no longer the youngest staffer. But he'll always be our best games editor.
Now Playing: *KH2*, *Mock Trial* With J. Reinhold
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com



ROBERT ASHLEY • Staff Reviewer

Robert has had already enough of the console war, and if you try to talk to him about your favorite system, he might bite your face off.
Now Playing: *The Godfather*
Blog: robertashley.1UP.com



ROBERT COFFEY • Staff Reviewer

For Robert, the great thing about sports games is that he can trick himself into thinking he's actually outside doing something.
Now Playing: *Fight Night Round 3*, *Top Spin 2*
Blog: ciltren_pain.1UP.com



JENN FRANK • Staff Reviewer

Everyone loves to see the wildly contorted, sneering "musician faces" Jenn makes when she's concentrating on rocking out in *Guitar Hero*.
Now Playing: *Guitar Hero*
Blog: superjenn.1UP.com



JAMES LEE • Staff Reviewer

After some time away, James came back to review, uh, one game. He's going to take a nap and do another one later.
Now Playing: *Fight Night Round 3*
Blog: egmwiley.1UP.com



NICH MARAGOS • Staff Reviewer

This month, Nich kept it nerdy but still explored new frontiers of penmanship freemanship by working on his own comic book.
Now Playing: *Steambot Chronicles*
Blog: debaser.1UP.com



PATRICK MAURO • Staff Reviewer

This syndicated radio guy reviews street hoops games while carrying his young on his back.
Now Playing: *Major League Baseball 2K6*
Blog: Patrick believes the future of blogs is radio



KATHLEEN SANDERS • Staff Reviewer

Kathleen decided that if her own sidekick, Minnie Chihuahua, should ever star in her own videogame adventure, it isn't going to be on PSP.
Now Playing: *CRAW*, *Age of Empires (OS)*
Blog: cookiecups.1UP.com



RYAN SCOTT • Staff Reviewer

Computer Gaming World's reviews editor plays plenty of console games, too—like geeky import rhythm games about male cheer squads.
Now Playing: *Exit, Deuce!*, *Tokyo Taxi*
Blog: cgw-ryan.1UP.com



GREG SEWART • Staff Reviewer

Thanks to *The Godfather and Driver: Parallel Lines*, this sweet-tempered Canuck has a New York-y attitude.
He's walkin', here! Fuggedaboutit!
Now Playing: *CRAW*, *Ico*
Blog: stewy.1UP.com



■ OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION

MAGAZINE and 1UP.com are there for us when we need someone clever to help us out with reviews, or just someone to give us a hug and tell us that everything is gonna be OK. Because, you know what? It is.

Xbox 360

ONLINE

THE OUTFIT

Dressed to kill...slowly



For an explosion-packed game, splash damage sure is useless in *The Outfit*.

THE VERDICTS OUT OF 10	7.0	6.0	7.0
	SHOE	MARK	ANDREW

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Relic
Players: 1-2 (2-8 online)
ESRB: Mature

www.theoutfitgame.com

Good: Action-packed multiplayer.
Bad: That "action" is slow, clunky.
Most Embarrassing Death: Crushed by an air-dropped tank



SHOE: Forget about "careful." This World War II shooter emphasizes carnage and raw firepower over tactics and planning. You and your A.I. squad must capture strategic bases (à la *Battlefield*) and explode Nazis with your guns, all while spending experience points (called FlUs) on firepower (vehicles, gun emplacements, soldiers, etc.) that's air-dropped down in real time. It's the opposite of realistic, but the potential for fun is still there.

I like this "Destruction on Demand" gameplay hook. It works especially well in the unpredictable world of multiplayer, where you have to make on-the-fly decisions about whether to save up for that super-duper tank, place machine-gun nests around a base, call in an artillery strike, or whatever. But in single player, this hook doesn't factor in as much since the missions are so linear. The game will tell you if you need to hunker down, and your armament choices are limited by which factories you've captured so far (and you'll be capturing them in the order the missions were designed for).

What ends up spoiling the experience for me, however, is the general slow and clunky feel of the game. If *Call of Duty 2* is a blitzkrieg of shooting action, *The Outfit* is a leisurely zeppelin ride...underwater. It's still exciting, just severely hampered.

MARK: Its World War II setting notwithstanding, *The Outfit* deserves props for trying something new. The game's mix of action (running and gunning, tossing grenades) and strategy (placing troops and weapons, taking and holding objectives) works great in multiplayer, where unpredictable opponents and some great modes make for intense battles. Slow everything down in single player, however, and *The Outfit*'s flaws catch up with it: mediocre graphics (which look much worse in the real-time cut-scenes), touchy vehicle controls, repetitive situations, and a story that never makes you give a damn.

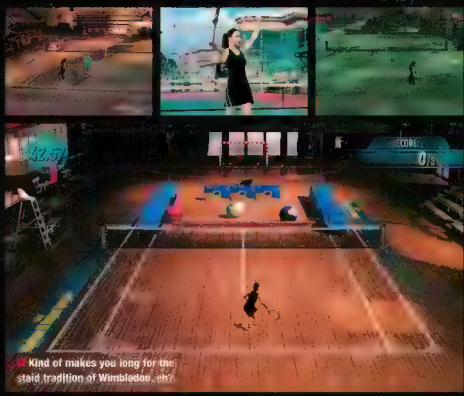
TUP.COM—ANDREW: *The Outfit* does a good job of mixing an open-map, control-point system with linear missions, and it makes you feel like you have more freedom than you really do. This is especially beneficial when you die—instantly starting the entire mission over, you just pick the closest spawn point and jump back in. But it's almost too easy: You aren't penalized for dying, and money's rarely a problem, since you "earn" it just by blowing crap up. In terms of fake-war fun, *The Outfit* is more G.I. Joe than *Army Men*, and the battle scenarios always keep your attention. But you don't need to be a four-star general to win this war.

Xbox 360

ONLINE

TOP SPIN 2

Bjorn (Borg) again



Kind of makes you long for the staid tradition of Wimbledon...sort.

THE VERDICTS OUT OF 10	8.0	7.5	8.5
	ROBERT C.	JENNIFER	ANDREW

Publisher: 2K Sports
Developer: 2K Sports
Players: 1-4 (2-4 online)
ESRB: Everyone

www.2ksports.com

Good: The great, strategically deep career mode
Bad: The browbeating, lopsidedly cruel career mode
The Party's Over: Once you fire up the lame "party" games



ROBERT C: I'll never forget the first time I played a *Top Spin* game. Of course, back then, we called it *Pong*, but still...it's a pretty irresistible formula. *Top Spin 2* does a fine job of delivering tense smack-the-ball-back-and-forth action.

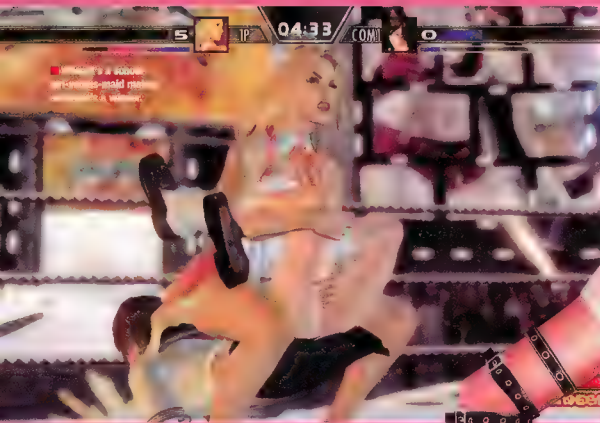
Aside from the obvious—and fairly nice—graphics upgrade, the big update comes in the form of two new shot types. The timing-reliant risk shots can be devastating...to *your* game, since timing them right in the heat of a match is crazy tough. The new advanced shots are more reliable, though you have to spend momentum (which you build up by winning points).

The game's heart, career mode, is generally strong but it skips a few beats. Custom-developing your player (by winning stars to assign to stats and then competing) is really satisfying...until you realize that though you're inexplicably ranked 14th in the world, you're constantly and depressingly trounced by lower-ranked opponents with better star ratings. Upgrading your initial bronze stars to gold is a long, hard slog. If only *Top Spin 2* had given you better options for improving your player after maxing out your 60-star allotment...It's still fun, just not great fun.

JENNIFER: It only took two seasons in career mode to demolish my grand-slam

dreams. Then I retired, out of money for training and sick of playing robotically good A.I. opponents who never miss. Guys, this is a video game—give beginners a fighting chance! The risk shots needed to win shouldn't require quite such precise timing, at least from a rookie. Also, let me train for free and travel through time to practice and compete when I'm good and ready. I enjoyed *Top Spin 2*'s solid tennis action much more when I was playing against human opponents, but I still want better party games.

TUP.COM—ANDREW: I've discovered the one major reason for tennis fans to pick up *Top Spin 2*, even if they already have the original. It's not because it looks like a next-gen visual stunner (it mostly doesn't) or because it's a fun and technically accurate representation of the sport (it is, but the first *Top Spin* already took care of that). It's that you can finally save your progress during the middle of a tournament. A majority of *Top Spin 2* feels very similar to the original, which is both good and bad: The various skill and power shots allow for different play styles, career mode is pretty deep, and the presentation is again top-notch, but the players still sometimes act the fool, turning some easy shots into embarrassing whiffs.



Xbox 360

ONLINE

RUMBLE ROSES XX

Don't forget the lube

BRYAN: Good thing I review games for a living. Otherwise, I don't think I could've explained to my girlfriend why I was playing this silicone-filled grappler. Really, how do you tell your significant other that snapping photos of these vixens...or kicking them with a giant stick...or adjusting the size of their machine-gun jubbles is all part of the game?

Yet once you get beyond the bouncin', you'll find one legit wrestling game here. Thanks to XX's oh-so-simple controls, any jobber can make these bombshells execute moves that would make the WWE's divas jealous. I just wish their repertoire sported a few more throws and body slams (all the girls rely too heavily on submission moves—which some perms may consider a positive once they see their opponent in such a compromising position). Moving on, this sexy sequel also comes to the squared circle with a much more robust feature set than the original had. You can now create your very own slut—I mean superstar, the new street fights are perfect for those looking for a speedier

bout, and no other wrestling game has a more finely tuned tag-team match (unlike in the WWE titles, XX's tag-team partners don't jump in every five freakin' seconds to break up a sure 1-2-3). And for all you graphic whores out there: Yes, the game looks "next-gen" good...even if the power of Microsoft's console can't remove the sticks from the wrestlers' asses (the girls still move like contipated Barbie dolls).

SHANE: I remain a firm supporter of the original PS2 *Roses*, but this flaccid follow-up fails to get me in the mood. Konami wisely adds several key features missing in the debut—character creation, tag-team matches, and online play—but foolishly nixes some of the best stuff about the last game. The gleefully gratuitous Mad Mud mode? Gone. The patently absurd story mode with its wicked lesbian doctor attempting to dismember the other ladies? Replaced by a simple series of meaningless bouts. Still, the strategic, grapple-heavy

gameplay suffices, and the character models look next-gen sexy. Here's hoping for a vastly improved *Rumble Roses XXX*...

THE GUY—JARED: I assume that the point of a sequel is to improve and build upon a previous effort. So why is *Rumble Roses XX* worse than its predecessor in every way imaginable? Here, Konami considerably tones down the pace, giving the game an extremely sluggish feel that almost makes the plodding *Legends of Wrestling* series seem good in comparison. The sexy creativity allowed by the lack of a license (crazy submissions and the like), which made the first title great, remains intact, but a severely downgraded gameplay experience overshadows the ingenuity. Another problem: Boring random matches replace the story-driven, albeit cheesy, single-player stuff from the first game. I expected great things of next-generation *Rumble Roses*, and all I got was hyperdetailed boob veins. **A**



A Disturbing Stipulation

So you think some wrestler shaving another's head after a loss is humiliating? Pfft, wait till you enter a Queen's match in *Rumble Roses XX*. Whoever suffers a defeat in these special bouts will then have to do one of myriad odd (and perverted) acts, which range from pretending to be a kitty cat, to rubbing lotion on the victor, to even hopping on a pogo stick. Oh, and most of the time these acts are performed while the character wears a skimpy bikini. Disturbing indeed.



Good: Much bigger feature set than the first *Rumble Roses*.
Bad: Too many submission moves.
We Miss: The original's mud-wrestling mode.



THE VERDICTS
 (OUT OF 10)

7.0

BRYAN

6.5

SHANE

9.5

JARED

Publisher: Konami
 Developer: Konami
 Players: 1-4 (2 online)
 ESRB: Mature

www.konami.com



Xbox 360 ONLINE

BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII

Five-by-five

Good: Easy to pick up and play, lots of planes to unlock
Bad: Mission objectives occasionally border on tedious
Feels Similar To: Ubisoft's recent *Heroes of the Pacific* (PS2/XB)

RYAN: Given the countless paper airplanes I manufactured during my school days, I'm something of an authority on archaic aerodynamics—and Ubisoft's *Blazing Angels* appeals to that inner flight jockey. Simple controls and 18 objective-oriented missions make this arcade-style flight-combat game accessible and easy to play in quick bursts.

A handy follow-cam helps you pinpoint targets in the war-torn WWII skies, unlimited ammo and a forgiving checkpoint system keep things simple, and CPU-controlled wingmen lend on-demand repairs and interference. Bombing runs, territory defense, and nerve-racking dogfights with squadrons of Luftwaffe aces make up most of the objectives; these tasks do get repetitive, but the action remains exciting enough (and brief enough) to keep boredom at bay for most of the single-player missions.

Once you earn your wings in the campaign (and three other lockable single-player modes), the real fun begins with *Blazing Angels'* 16-person multiplayer. Two teams square off in base capture, bombing, and kamikaze (suicide bombers versus defenders) modes, often making for intense and unpredictable battles. You can team up with a squad of buddies to tackle historical missions, too—and the single-player maps take on a significantly different feel when you bring three human pilots along to fly the not-so-friendly skies.

CRISPIN: So WWII dogfights consisted of Allied pilots soaring in lazy circles around bogies, downing them at their leisure

and occasionally dumping bombs on enemy tanks and boats. Oh, and they apparently suffered from glaucoma. At least, that's the impression I get from the first two-thirds of *Blazing Angels*, a slow-to-get-going flight shooter filled with too many boring dogfights and sporting its Vaseline-like filter around the edges of the screen to simulate superspeed.

Later levels—including a cool canyon run and an air blitz over Omaha Beach—ratchet things up. But it's the online stuff that soars to the rescue, with novel cooperative and kamikaze game modes. It's the most fun I've had flying online since *Crimson Skies* for the original Xbox. If only the single-player game flew as high.

G. FORD: Two things about *Blazing Angels* jump out at me: I dig the follow-cam, which makes focusing on a single target much easier—especially when he starts with the incessant looping. The other is the repair system. As unrealistic as it is, using a button combo to patch up your newly arrested airship sure beats nursing a life bar.

These additions aside, not to mention the sweetly simple controls, you can expect the same lock-on-em-them-rock-em gameplay of any arcade flyer. The clear levels—following a faint radio signal through a sandstorm, navigating through a fjord—are the exception. Ryan's right about the multiplayer, though. Kamikaze and co-op matches lift *Blazing Angels* into guilty pleasure territory, but don't expect many next-gen delights unless you're a high-del flyer.

THE VERDICT **7.0** **6.5** **6.5**

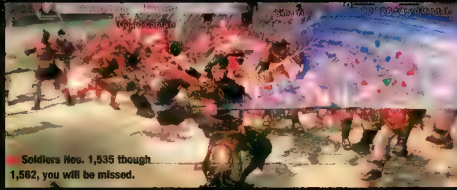
RYAN CRISPIN G. FORD

Publisher: Ubisoft
 Developer: Ubisoft Romania
 Players: 1-2 (2-16 online or system link)
 ESRB: Teen
www.blazing-angels.com

Xbox 360

DYNASTY WARRIORS 5: EMPIRES

Rerun of a rerun returns...again and again



Good: A comforting sense of familiarity, not unlike...
Bad: ...your daily rush-hour commute, but with more...
Bad 5: *Xtreme*: ...ancient Chinese history and less Howard Stern

ROBERT A: Welcome to the *Groundhog Day* of videogames. It seems that every morning, I wake up to find a new version of *Dynasty Warriors* in my bed, and—after a strong cup of Joe—I go through the familiar motions of playing it. This morning, though, I was semixelcited to see a shiny new Xbox 360 version seductively placed on my pillow...that is, until I discovered it was yet another rerun of the same game with an infinitesimally improved appearance. Here, I'll just fill in the *Dynasty Warriors* Review Form, 12EZ.

Big, generic landscapes packed with castles, tents, rivers, hills, fields of green, fields of dirt, fields of snow? Yes. Ten billion half-witted foot soldiers to plow through with spear/sword/axe/hammer combos? Uh-huh. A character roster that reads like a who's who of ancient Chinese history (I know all the names now)? Also yes. Shallow attempt at pushing the game in a strategy direction? Check. Design issues that, as part of the *Dynasty Warriors* tradition, remain untouched (crappy camera, nonexistent defense, worthless A.I., etc.)? Yep.

Better than the previous games in the series, though not nearly different enough to warrant giving a damn? Bingo.

RYAN: Everyone rags on Electronic Arts for releasing the same damn *Madden* game ad nauseum, but Koel's the real king of shameless reorganization: *Empires* marks the 15th *Dynasty Warriors* title (I'm counting the *Samurai Warriors* spin-offs, too) since the series' 1997 debut. For you nonmath wizards, that accounts

for 1.5 *Dynasty Warriors* per year. Hey, somebody out there must still love 'em—*Empires* certainly caters to its audience, with a campaign mode that tosses you into the fray without so much as a tutorial. And like *Dynasty Warriors 4: Empires*, it mistakes drastically over-complicated tactical menus for strategic depth...but underneath, it's just another tepid hack-n-slash tour of ancient China. Wise man say: Learn some new tricks.

LUP.COM—RICHARD: Question: Why should I pay for something that has been repackaged and remarketed over and over again? Perhaps for the new, improved graphics? Or the chance to play the game with a totally different controller? Well, sorry to bust your balls, *Dynasty Warriors* fans, but *Empires* is barely new; it still sticks to the same aging formula, with the same quasi-strategic battles and the same scenarios repackaged into different levels. I can find very little justification for buying a game that plays just a little better, with prettier character models and no apparent slowdown.



THE VERDICT **5.5** **5.0** **4.0**

ROBERT A. RYAN RICHARD

Publisher: Koel
 Developer: Koel
 Players: 1-2
 ESRB: Teen
www.koel.com



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Though the shooting in *The Godfather* is better than that in *GTA*, it's little consolation to peer Pat Rooney.



The Bizarre Finale of Marlon Brando

Once an icon of acting greatness, Marlon Brando spent the later part of his life making more...eccentric career moves, his role in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, for instance. So it came as somewhat less of a surprise that Brando had signed on to reprise his famous cotton-checked Don Corleone role in *The Godfather* game. Months before he died, recordings for the game were made at Brando's home, but due to poor audio quality (the sound of the man breathing through an oxygen mask), the performance was ultimately scrapped in favor of a soundalike.

PS2/XB

THE GODFATHER: THE GAME

Becoming Nobody Corleone

ROBERT A: There was a time when storytelling in videogames could be written off as window-dressing, something akin to the dialogue in a porn flick (back when they bothered with such things). But when a game tackles a classic drama like *The Godfather*, standards change. Sure, we're all used to game-marketing tie-ins with the latest Hollywood blunder, but *The Godfather* is different, a legitimate candidate for "Greatest Film Ever Made." It's one of those stories that plays your spine like a violin and beats your chest like a drum.

So it's strange that, with such great source material (including the faces and voices of most of the film's actors), *The Godfather: The Game*'s greatest failure is a lack of drama. Your user-created blank slate of a character weaves his way through every memorable scene in the movie. He's there, peering through a window when

"sleeps with the fishes," Luca Brasi gets strangled with piano wire, and he witnesses Sonny's toll-booth slaying firsthand. But he's always hovering around the edges of the story, an extra (if his own movie). In contrast to the full characters around him, his story consists of a thinly developed vendetta and a pocket full of canned phrases. Because of this, *The Godfather* feels less like a movie and more like a mobster theme park—a pretty awesome mobster theme park.

If it's a game, after all, and by all the usual weights and measures, it's a fine piece of work. The obvious comparison is to *Grand Theft Auto*, but where that series has expanded over the years to include workout routines and girlfriend upkeep, *The Godfather* stays focused on the relevant stuff: namely, offing your rivals, shaking down businesses, and running errands for the family. The city layout is perhaps the most

navigable of any game in the genre, a simplified version of greater New York City, circa 1944. I felt like a cab driver by the time it was over. The developer took a legitimate stab at improving the mechanics of *GTA*, with a more satisfying take on gunfights and a bunch of lapel-grabbing extortion moves. It never really achieves *GTA*'s exhilaration (or charisma), but *The Godfather* manages not to shame a good family name.

SHOE: It's impossible not to compare *The Godfather* to *Grand Theft Auto*, so I'm not even going to try.

Obviously, *The Godfather*'s got some great fiction to work with. You will weave in and out of the events of the movie like a key character who's always lurking in the background (you're the guy who helps deliver a certain equine package to a movie studio exec's bed, for example). And while



Good: Great atmosphere; easy-to-digest NYC; loyal to the movie **Bad:** No real drama; credits don't roll until *everything* is complete
People Skills: Police bribery, merchant intimidation, hit-and-run...



THE VARIANTS
ROBERT A.

8.0 8.5 7.5

ROBERT A.

SHOE

JAMES

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: EA Redwood
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature

www.ea.com

PS2/XB

DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES

DRIV4R: The Apology



Sure, things look smooth here, but wait! You fire a rocket launcher while an foot... slowdown city.

THE VERDICT (out of 10)

8.5 **7.5** **7.0**

GREG S. G. FORD DEMIAN

Publisher: Atari
Developer: Reflections
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature
www.atari.com

Good: Fantastic driving physics and atmosphere.
Bad: Story's still too linear, not enough extra-stuff to do.
Weirdest Feeling: Seeing the Twin Towers in the NYC skyline.



GREG S: What a difference a sequel makes. *Parallel Lines* is such an improvement over *DRIV4R* that it's hard to believe it's from the same developer. Roaming around a massive re-creation of New York City circa 1978 (for most of this third-person action/driving game, anyway) conjures up that same feeling a lot of us got while wandering around *GTA's* Vice City during the era of excess. Atmosphere is everything in *Parallel Lines*.

It's easy to see what developer Reflections did right this time around. The action is restricted to one big city, the story is a bit less linear (though you still don't have the freedom of a *GTA* title), and you almost never, ever need to leave your vehicle, unless it's to jack a replacement. So while the on-foot controls are still pretty clunky, it never becomes a real issue.

I dig this game. Reflections has done a great job of keeping the vehicle-based missions right this time around. Sometimes you're using a tow truck to steal rides for a fence, sometimes you're just the getaway driver for a petty robber, and sometimes you're racing. And thanks to strong driving physics, staying in the car has never been so much fun. This series has definitely turned a corner.

G. FORD: I'm with Sewart: *Parallel Lines* is a great return to form for the series and the most competent *GTA* clone I've played.

Unfortunately, it's also three years late. Had it come out within a year of *Vice City*, Rockstar would've had something to worry about. But it can't match *San Andreas'* scope, and as good as the game is, I found myself treading between boredom and frustration more than I'd like. Driving, though, couldn't be smoother, and props to *Parallel Lines'* take on the wanted meter, which puts different values on your car and your person. Perhaps if it brought something significant to the formula and the limited on-foot stuff weren't so weak, I'd be even more impressed.

DEMIAN: Still got room in your heart for the *Driver* series? After the buggy, sloppy, frustrating *DRIV4R*, I didn't. But I made some, because both Gregs—Sewart and Ford—are right: *Parallel Lines* is pretty decent. Not amazing, but decent.

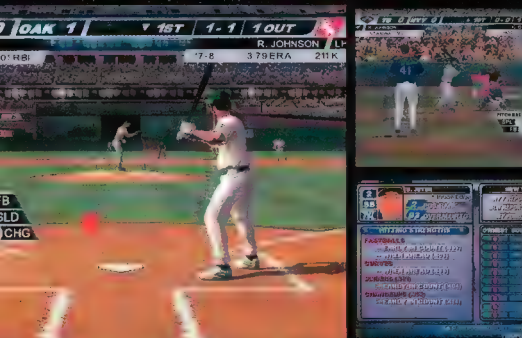
Parallel Lines fixes much of what made the last game such an acute pain in the ass. The chase missions are more forgiving, you can actually see traffic far in the distance rather than having it pop up 30 yards ahead, and the on-foot bits—well, though improved, they're still annoyingly clunky. But the game's style and story make up for its occasional deficiencies; NYC is a good place for a destructive romp, even if the missions and few side jobs eventually wear thin.

PS2/XB/GC

ONLINE
(PS2/XB)

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K6

Untapped potential



THE VERDICT (out of 10)

7.0 **6.5** **7.5**

G. FORD BRYAN ROBERT C.

Publisher: 2K Sports
Developer: 2K Sports
Players: PS2/XB 1-2 (2 online), GC 1-2
ESRB: Everyone
www.2ksports.com

Good: Revamped swinging and hitting systems hit the mark.
Bad: Fielding and baserunning controls, not so much.
Dangling Carrot: Earn points to spend on tons of unlockables.



G. FORD: Though it's not quite a 2004 Yankees-level choke job, the *Major League Baseball 2K* series missed a hanging curve of its own this year. With 2K Sports nabbing the exclusive third-party baseball-sim rights to the MLB license, it had a golden chance to nab the hardball crown from EA's NCAA-license-relegated *MVP* series. Instead, we got this scattershot effort.

Things start out strong: Pitching involves manipulating a pulsating ball's eye, which you stop once for the amount of juice on your pitch, then again for accuracy. Effective, but *MVP's* superb pitching meter still reigns. As for batting, you now pop back on the right analog stick to take a step, then release it to swing—definitely a welcome addition. Also, during the franchise and GM modes, you can buy scouting reports on players, which clue you in to a batter's weaknesses or a pitcher's tendencies—and good stuff.

But what's with the way-too-complex baserunning? Or the suspect A.I. fielding choices and the oh-so-weak pitchers? Sporting solid fundamentals but still in need of some seasoning, *MLB 2K6* misses its chance to dethrone *MVP 06*, MLB license or not.

BRYAN: First EA Sports bobbles the ball with *Madden NFL 06*, and now 2K Sports does the same with its latest baseball

installment—man, you just gotta love those exclusive sports licensing deals. Sarcasm aside, you'll find lots of holes in 2K6's lineup: overcomplicated baserunning controls, players who sprint around the diamond like Olympians (which translates into too many infield and extra-base hits), and hurlers—even when they don't encounter any tough innings—who lose stamina faster than some dude who's in the sack for the first time. What a disappointment, because I really enjoyed goin' yard using the right analog stick and the new pitching wrinkle that lets you adjust the catcher's position at home plate.

ROBERT C: I don't like this game enough to play a full 162-game season. But an 81-game one is doable. *MLB 2K6* gets enough things right—solid pitching, games that don't devolve into home-run-hitting contests, a rich season mode—that most every game is a real pleasure to play, win or lose. But when those losses come at the expense of the less-than-crisp infield play or the truly awful baserunning controls, that pleasure is compromised. The animations and player models range from dull to horrific (Blue Jays' first baseman Lyle Overbay is a ringer for Billy Bob in *Sling Blade*). Still, visual flourishes, like the way a catcher leaps to snag a high chop off the plate, inject a little excitement into the realistic play.

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Hard to see, Lara is a model for the biggest ledge she can leap, keeping her feet from death to a minimum.

■ PS2/XB

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

Finally, a tomb worth raiding

Doing Lara Right
Congrats, Eidos: You saved your premiere series from extinction. Now here's how to keep it alive:

Do...
...keep it in the hands of Crystal Dynamics...
...get crackin' on that nude code. We're all adults.

Don't...
...crank out annual sequels...
...back more movies. Tia Carrere's *Relic Hunter* blew less.



IUP.COM — JEREMY: Lara Croft's been in exile for the past three years, driven into hiding by the shame of 2003's double-dut combo of *Cradle of Life*—that's the movie—and *Angel of Darkness*. Since then she's gotten herself a new wardrobe, some new moves, a little ah...reductive surgery... oh, and a new development team. Crystal Dynamics has applied its *Legacy of Kain* experience to the tombs and cenotaphs (and occasional Tokyo rooftops) of Lara's world and come up with the best *Tomb Raider* since the original.

LEGEND has the formula down to a science: Lara delves into ancient ruins, evades death-traps, repairs crumbling mechanisms, and loots corpses in true *Prince of Persia* style. But unlike the Prince's recent outings, *Legend* puts far more emphasis on exploration and puzzle solving than on combat. Gun battles are rare; most of the time you're looking for footholds in sheer cliff faces

and tripping switches. What makes *Legend* such a welcome change from *Raider* norm is that it's a complete reinvention of the aging franchise. The graphics are wonderful, and Lara moves fluidly yet still tactically, obstacles with precision. Even the narrative is engrossing thanks to running commentary by Lara's own Cortana-come-latelies. The loneliness that made the first game so haunting is absent, but the trade-off is a much greater sense of purpose to all the grave spelunking. Lara still has a few stumbling blocks to overcome, though. The overhauled combat engine makes gunplay fun, but targeting stinks, the bad guys' A.I. is spotty, and long-range skirmishes are like watching a stormtrooper battle: Everyone's shooting, but no one's getting hit. The "interactive cinema" sequences can be maddening exercises in trial and error, and the bike

chases are just agonizing. Snags aside, Crystal Dynamics has made *Tomb Raider* worth playing again. And thanks to the cliff-hanger finale, I'm actually looking forward to a *Tomb Raider* sequel for the first time in memory—which is no small feat.

CRISPIN: I dunno about the reductive surgery, relic-hunting hottie Lara Croft is still just a sports bra away from suffering severe head trauma every time she breaks into a jog. But Jeremy is otherwise dead right: *Legend* is that most mythical artifact of all—a good *Tomb Raider* sequel. This is how you reboot a short-circuiting series, with nonclunky controls, a realistic physics system that enhances the clever puzzles (expect lots of "hmmmm" and "aha!" moments), and a return of the sense of awe that filled the first two games, with their moly tombs and breathtaking vistas.

Equation for a Resurrection

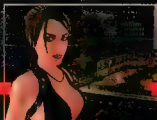
Lara couldn't make a comeback of *Legend's* magnitude all by her lonesome—her makers clearly cribbed ideas from these games...



The acrobatic moves of the *Prince of Persia* series, minus the time-rewind trick



The real-world physics of *Half-Life 2*, incorporated into the game's puzzles



Haute couture swapping à la *Final Fantasy X-2*



The heady puzzles of *Tomb Raider 1* and its first sequel



Shenmue's forklift

Good: Refined graphics and control help Lara's star shine again
Bad: Clumsy motorcycle chases, unsatisfying "ending"
What's the diff? The Xbox game has better textures, and that's it



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

8.5 8.5 8.0

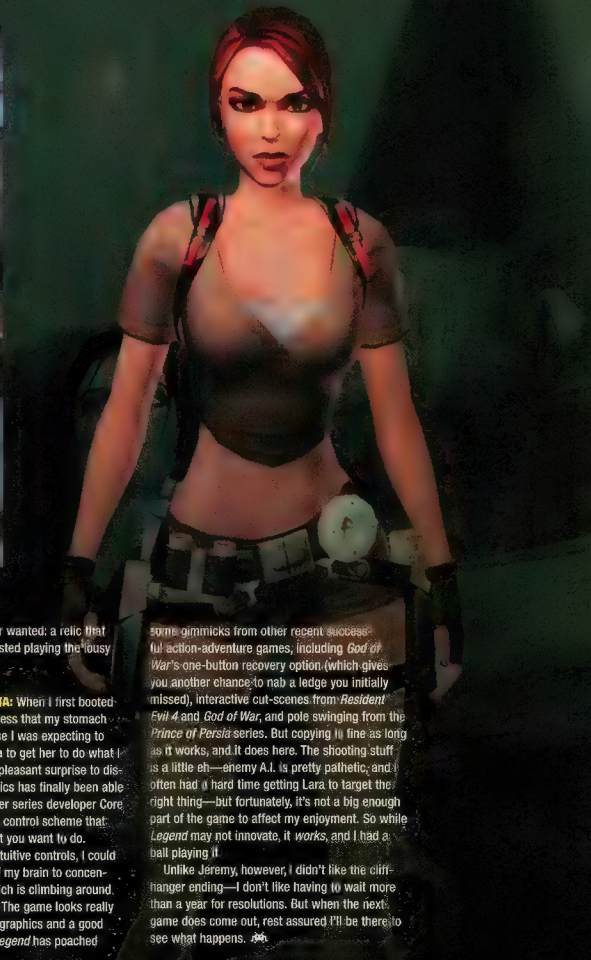
JEREMY

CRISPIN

DANA

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Crystal Dynamics
Players: 1
ESRB: TEm

www.tombraider.com



Legend isn't half as large as the earliest *Tomb Raider* games—you'll reach the disappointing, too-abrupt cliff-hanger finale in one weekend play session—but what's here is almost all outstanding. The so-so combat is kept to a minimum, leaving you mostly trying to figure out how to reach distant reaches through puzzle solving and *Prince of Persia*-style acrobatics. Lara's greatest-of-ease moves are so *Prince*-ly, in fact, that I found myself reaching for the time-rewind button after blunders.

Like Jeremy, I could have done without the motorbike levels, which drop the pacing into low gear. The story—a mash of new characters and flashback levels—threw me for a loop at times. It hits you over the head with cheesy magical effects that manifest themselves in the too-similar-to-each-other boss fights. More magical subtlety would have been nice—or at least give

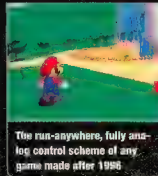
me the only artifact I ever wanted: a relic that restores all the time I wasted playing the fussy sequels before this one.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—DANA: When I first booted up *Legend*, I have to confess that my stomach tensed up, mostly because I was expecting to have a girl fight with Lara to get her to do what I wanted. So it came as a pleasant surprise to discover that Crystal Dynamics has finally been able to accomplish what former series developer Core never quite figured out: a control scheme that actually responds to what you want to do.

And thanks to these intuitive controls, I could use the conscious part of my brain to concentrate on the fun stuff, which is climbing around and exploring the tombs. The game looks really pretty, with crystal-clear graphics and a good variety between levels. *Legend* has poached

some gimmicks from other recent successful action-adventure games, including *God of War*'s one-button recovery option (which gives you another chance to nab a ledge you initially missed), interactive cut-scenes from *Resident Evil 4* and *God of War*, and pole swinging from the *Prince of Persia* series. But copying in line as long as it works, and it does here. The shooting stuff is a little off—enemy A.I. is pretty pathetic, and I often had a hard time getting Lara to target the right thing—but fortunately, it's not a big enough part of the game to affect my enjoyment. So while *Legend* may not innovate, it works, and I had a ball playing it.

Unlike Jeremy, however, I didn't like the cliff-hanger ending—I don't like having to wait more than a year for resolutions. But when the next game does come out, rest assured I'll be there to see what happens. **B+**



The run-anywhere, fully analog control scheme of any game made after 1995



The *Dragon's Lair*-style tap-the-button quick-time events from *Resident Evil 4*



Metroid Prime's scanning visor (Lara uses binoculars)



All the wonkiness of crap sequel *Angel of Darkness*



Tomb Raider: Legend

PS2/XB

COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE

Multiple-personality disorder



THE VERDICTS
OUT OF 10

5.5 **5.0** **5.0**

CRISPIN G. FORD KATHLEEN

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Pyro
Players: 1 (2-8 online)
ESRB: Teen

commandosstrikeforce.com

Good: Huge levels, cool character switching.
Bad: PlayStation 1-era graphics, confusing objectives.
Nothing Likes: The *Commandos* strategy games on PC



CRISPIN: Here's one way to make your dubya-dubya-two game stand out—if not exactly stand tall—on the crammed battlefield of military shooters: Load it with great ideas, then have each one misfire. At least you'll give us game reviewers lots to lament.

Why, for instance, do you get three unique combatants to switch between on the fly (gung-ho green beret, knife-chucking sniper, and quick-changing spy), but leaping from one trooper leaves him as vulnerable as a switched-off robot? And why turn players loose in such enormous levels when finding the objectives is so confusing? And why not include online co-op campaigns—which would suit the multicharacter gameplay so well—instead of tacking on lame deathmatch modes and one novel defuse-the-bomb game?

But despite these unfortunate mysteries—and blah graphics that look like they're out of a homebrew project—I really found it hard to hate *Commandos*. The later levels give you a lot to do with your guys. You'll sneak your sniper into position, then use your spy to take out Nazis of progressively higher rank, assuming their identities so you can march among enemy grunts with impunity. It's not conventional warfare—a good thing in this crowded genre—but it's far from ready for duty.

G. FORD: If anything, *Commandos* serves as a great propa-ganda piece. Nothing gets gamers enlisting in the next-gen war faster than mediocre games like this. *Commandos* does earn some stripes with its clever three-man hotswapping feature...it's just a shame about the weak teammate A.I. Then you've got the sometimes comatose, sometimes eagle-eye enemies, perplexing objectives, and the old saving/trial-and-error/reloading routine. Crispin's right, though: *Commandos* has a strange appeal when it hits its groove deeper into the game—just bear in mind it's a mediocre groove at best.

KATHLEEN: As a spy in disguise, I don't need to be too stealthy to garrote a fat, dirty Nazi. Unfortunately, another guard sounds the alarm. I take control of my sniper and shut up that tattletale soldier...but am dismayed to see that the spy character I switched from is being shot in the face. Stupid blunders like this usually sabotage *Commandos*' most interesting moments. Yeah, it does offer brief moments of fun further along in the game. Plus, some optional side missions do change up the outcome of other missions enough to make replaying some of them worthwhile. Problem is, getting to the good stuff requires battling through a blitzkrieg of banality.

PS2/XB

NBA BALLERS: PHENOM

Hip-hop basketball diaries



THE VERDICTS
OUT OF 10

6.0 **6.5** **7.5**

BRYAN DEMIAN PATRICK

Publisher: Midway
Developer: Midway
Players: PS2 1-2 (8-4 via MultiTap, 2 online), XB 1-4 (2 online)
ESRB: Everyone
www.midway.com

Good: Huge single-player game
Bad: You really can't control your teammate in 2-on-2 games
Long: The load times, which are slightly less aggravating on Xbox



BRYAN: I'm really torn here. On the one hand, this arcade hoopster shows the kind of ambition I've been begging more sports games to demonstrate. In a *Grand Theft Auto*-style fashion, *Phenom* makes the whole city of Los Angeles your playground. And just like in Rockstar's controversial series, you can do whatever the heck you want, whenever you want. Feel like entering that tourney in Hollywood against the NBA's best? Or would you rather head downtown and put up posters to help promote some concert? The choice is always yours.

On the other hand, *Phenom* tosses up way too many air balls. The awkward fixed camera makes walking the streets of this metropolis an absolute chore. And for all the things you can experience in this world (including a large assortment of laughable minigames, such as an *8 Mile*-esque rap-off and a charity car wash with the Laker Girls), it still feels pretty lifeless. Even the on-court action is messed up; the fact that you have such limited control over your teammate in the new 2-on-2 matchups (you can't switch to him on defense in story mode) is ridiculous. Well, maybe not as ridiculous as the game's insufferable load times on PS2.

DEMIAN: On the court, *Phenom* is still a couple steps behind the best arcade

basketballer, *NBA Street*. The gameplay just doesn't feel as refined, and *Phenom*'s tournament structure—most events run between eight and 15 games, and you can't save halfway through—gets really grueling. But I have to give *Phenom* some snaps for actually grafting a real story on to the basketballing. The cut-scenes may be ugly and the minigames pretty lame, but the game's ambition matches the main character's rise through the ranks. Too bad it doesn't quite execute in the clutch, though.

PATRICK: I like Midway's unique approach to this *Ballers* sequel: It lets you slide into the three-quarters-top of a baller/entertainer with aspirations of being and babes. You'll start as a nobody before getting noticed and drafted, and then choose whether to follow cover boy Chauncey Billups on a baller career path or Ludacris and become more of an entertainer. It's a cool twist, and the story is pretty interesting either way. Unfortunately, *Phenom* plays almost exactly like its predecessor except for some new shots—I'd like some more gameplay innovations. But I gotta admit, cruising around shrunk-down L.A. locales in search of stuff (such as diamonds to commission some custom bling) kept me playing, as did the Zydrunas Igauskas spelling bee.



L1+ More Heart

Want to know what's in store for *Kingdom Hearts III*? Well, you're gonna have to earn it. To unlock *KH2*'s secret ending, you must either complete all the worlds and Jiminy's Journal on the standard difficulty, or bump it up to proud (the hardest setting) and just do the first of the standard difficulty's requirements. Sorry, babies, but finishing *KH2* on beginner won't give you this fairly telling bonus clip.

■ PlayStation 2

KINGDOM HEARTS II



Oh Mickey, you're so fine

BRYAN: Mickey Mouse, Cloud, Simba, Sephiroth—sounds more like a terrifying cosplay session than a winning videogame combination. While the first *Kingdom Hearts* proved that pairing Disney with *Final Fantasy* wasn't completely crazy, this action-role-playing console sequel proves the duo has a lot of staying power.

It's been almost four years since Sora and his animated pals Donald and Goofy traversed various Disney-themed worlds on your PS2 (in 2004, the trio also had a quick GBA pit stop in the card-filled *Chain of Memories*), but this return trip to find pals Riku and Kairi—as clichéd as it may sound—was definitely worth the wait. And it starts with the Disney-based areas; simply put, this game's environments are way more appealing than the original installment's collection. It has worlds based on *Titanic*, *The Lion King*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean*, just to name a few—only the Pixar-

made Disney films are missing here (gotta leave something for *KH3*, right?). But more importantly, each world is impeccably designed. Take, for example, the *Steamboat Willie* level, where everything—from Sora's character design to the background noise of a running film projector—reflects the area's simplistic nature. Even the places you'll revisit from the first *KH*, such as those based on *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Hercules*, feel fresh thanks to some heavy-duty renovations. Also, the game's FF cast plays a much bigger role than in the previous go-around (some even fight alongside you during skirmishes—very nice).

But the biggest compliment I can give this action-RPG is that you don't have to be part of the Mickey Mouse Club or love chocobos to enjoy it. And that's due to the vastly enhanced combat system. It's no longer just a game of routine hacking and magic-casting; you can now transform

into a dual-keyblade-wielding wild man, execute crushing double-team attacks that can equate into 100-plus-hit combos, and add some flash to even everyday battles with the all-new reaction commands (think *Resident Evil 4*'s quick-time events).

Sorry to sound like a broken record, but I can't praise this game enough. It also delivers epic boss fights, a gripping narrative packed with twists, and turns (ignore what Shane has to say about the prologue), and some of the slickest visuals of this console generation. I've now invested over 80 hours in *KH2* (solved both the Japanese and U.S. versions), and I want to play it again. How that's for a ringing endorsement?

SHANE: Man, compared to Mouseketeer Bryan's love-in, my review is going to sound harsh. But trust me, I'm not hating—*Kingdom Hearts II* improves on the original in several key ways.



Good: Everything in sequel is supposed to be
Bad: The Little Mermaid stage
Hardcore: Optional Sephiroth boss battle. Can you say 15 life bars?!



THE VERDICT (out of 10)

10	9.0	9.5
BRYAN	SHANE	MILKMAN

Publisher: Square Enix
 Developer: Square Enix
 Players: 1
 ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.kingdomhearts.com



Now then, Monsieur, Mademoiselle.
Please, enjoy the evening.



Back in the day, I griped about *KH*'s spazzy, jarring camera; its dull, repetitive combat; and the mind-bogglingly bad Gummi Ship minigame. Incredibly, each of these missteps has been fully addressed in the sequel. Of these, the surprisingly deepened battle system makes the most profound difference. You're now able to better customize Sora's abilities, and a host of new, context-sensitive combos transform everyday combat into stunning acrobatic melees. The game's plentiful boss encounters fare even better: Unique "quick-time event" combos make these climactic face-offs feel appropriately special and dynamic.

Despite these welcomed fixes, *KH2* still feels rough around the edges. The mash-up of director Tetsuya Nomura's gravely serious narrative and the whimsical Disney worlds doesn't really gel. This unsettling disconnect begins with a woefully boring four-hour prologue that has you perform-

ing odd jobs and watching plenty of slow, talky cinematics. The clumsy juxtaposition of overwrought *Final Fantasy*-inspired psychobabble and giddy, kiddie high jinks might enrapture hardcore *FF* nuts and Disney freaks, but the rest of us will just want to tune out and fight...

TUPCOM—MILKMAN: *Kingdom Hearts II*, I am relieved to say, delivers on everything the series' potential hinted at. While it follows the first game's formula of leading Sora through a series of Disney-themed worlds and introducing him to a staggering roster of familiar characters, the overall level of polish is amazing. It's not enough that you get to meet high-quality renditions of characters like Iron or Capt. Jack Sparrow—when you see the immense detail of their respective worlds, it's jaw-dropping. Visually, this might be the PlayStation 2's best-looking game (these screens don't do it

justice). It's not just about the polygons, either; don't know what director Tetsuya Nomura's team did, but this finesse really shows in the animation, which is the 3D equivalent of Disney's finest 2D animated feature films. The fluid manner in which the Lion King preens his head or the Little Mermaid gestures with her wrist makes a big difference.

But the greatest difference is in the gameplay. Not only has the camera been tamed this go-around (though it still gets *iffy* in places), but the actual encounters are much more exciting, thanks to new combat mechanics and even more amazing summons. Combine all these vastly improved elements together and you have one amazing action-RPG. My biggest gripe is with the annoying load times, but besides that—and an occasional feeling that the developers stuffed in as many cameos as they could for cameos' sake—this might well become Square's No. 1 franchise. >



KINGDOM HEARTS II (CONT.)

WORLD TOUR

Need more info before purchasing Kingdom Hearts II's \$50 admission fee? We grade—on a scale from one to four mouse ears—the game's Disney-inspired locations (ya cheap bastard)

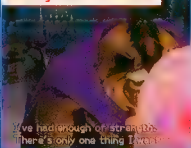
Aladdin



High: Catchin' a ride on the magic carpet.
Low: Genie's affection for Aladdin is bordering on scary.



Beauty and the Beast



High: The big fight in Beast's ballroom.
Low: The Organization XIII member you'll face here is cheap as hell!



Tron



High: When you first see Sora and co. in their neon-lit garb.
Low: The light-cycle minigame is kinda "meh".



Hercules



High: The Underworld tournaments.
Low: Is it just us, or did Hercules become a total p***y?



Mulan



High: Fighting literally hundreds of Heartless at once.
Low: Music just doesn't shut up.



The Nightmare Before Christmas



High: Taking a trip to Santa's digs.
Low: Another freakin' hassle with that worm-filled Oogie Boogie.



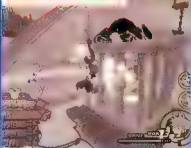
The Little Mermaid



High: This music-based world only lasts half an hour.
Low: That's 30 minutes of your life you'll wish you had back.



Steamboat Willie



High: Fantasyc old-yet-feels-new-school vibe.
Low: This world is over just way too fast.



The Lion King



High: The Shadow of the Colossus-esque boss battle.
Low: Simba's continuing daddy issues.



Disney Castle



High: Prototying Queen Minnie as she makes her way through the castle's hallowed halls.
Low: Discovering that Donald's lady friend wears the perfume that relations she's never met.



Pirates of the Caribbean



High: In the Black Pearl's dining area, you'll find a table with four bottles. One of them is for you.
Low: The game's "dash" mechanic for dodging enemies is a bit of a bore.



Winnie the Pooh



High: Fantasyc remembrance of the "elemental" first five Disney characters.
Low: When you're here, you're at your best getting Poop Boop.





■ Selectable battle formations inject strategy into random combat.

PlayStation 2

SUIKODEN V

A magically decent adventure

Good: Familiar-feeling but compelling story
Bad: Blah graphics, fighting system needs improvement
Dumbest Name: Georg

GREG S: *Suikoden V* is a hard game to judge. On the one hand, it's got the same ol' story. Everything's hunky-dory until one day a massive coup sends everything out of control, and one hero must gather together the 108 stars of destiny (he being one of them) in order to make things right again. Graphically, the game looks clean but completely lacks style, and while the random battle system is improved slightly over its predecessor's, it still feels archaic (probably because it's almost exactly the same as it was in the original *Suikoden*, which came out in 1995). The game also takes way too long to get going—we're talking several hours of setup before anything important really happens.

On the other hand, I can't be too harsh with the game. Underneath the musty exterior is a compelling RPG that will keep you playing despite its foibles. The fighting setup isn't too bad thanks to the inclusion of duels and army battles, and the whole thing has that *Pokémon* collection thing we all seem to love so much, with 107 characters to meet and recruit.

This series needs a major shot in the arm, as it's starting to show its age more than ever. Even so, *Suikoden V* is still entertaining, and that's what really counts.



THE VERDICTS Score (out of 10)	6.5	6.5	6.5
	GREG S.	SHANE	JENN F.
	www.konami.com		



SHANE: With *Suikoden V*, Konami attempts to get its fan-favorite RPG franchise back on track after part IV's misguided displeasure cruise into nautical nonsense. A back-to-basics approach means that this installment directly channels the series' finest effort—*Suikoden II* (PS1)—though it ends up feeling more like a bad cover version than an honest, modern improvement on the formula.

All the predictable ingredients are here: 108 charismatic characters to amass, climactic 1-on-1 duels, giant strategic battles, and a town to construct... Sure, it's deep and mildly engrossing, but we've seen it all before. Glacial pacing, lengthy load times, and an obnoxious, often infuriating new camera angle (good luck navigating the towns) keep *Suikoden V* from being the return to form it was intended to be.

JENN F: This latest *Suikoden*'s story is as good—and long-winded—as ever, narrated through tremendously well-acted, very pretty, and frequent cut-scenes. But while the cut-scenes impress (which helps move the story along), it strange murkiness totally undermines the in-game graphics' detail and artfulness, even when you zoom in on the action.

And the large-scale strategic battles—that's right! War!—move in disconcerting real time, resembling something like an upset anthill, with battle units all moving in a panic. Though these war screens feel woefully out of place, they at least make the game feel even more epic. Actually, my Russian lit professor back in college used to shout to us, "What is epic? It is long and boring!" Yeah, kind of like that.

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Warpath: *Warpath: Academy has your lagged, overkill*
Dwayne's pless for a shirt versus
skjins-GTP game went unheard.

Xbox

ONLINE

WARPATH

It's a mod world

Good: Smooth online play; weapon upgrade system
Bad: Limited options and modes; lame vehicles
At Least It's Only: \$29.99



G. FORD: If you've been holding on to your Xbox in the hopes that you'll be rewarded with a few more system-specific gems, the mod-feeling, multiplayer-tilted first-person shooter *Warpath*, made by the creators of the lukewarmly received *Pariah*, is gonna piss you off. Sure, the action is smooth, fast, and entertaining in that "hot damn, I'm playing against my friends in deathmatch" way. But, man, it feels archaic.

Warpath's hook is its upgradeable weapons. During matches, you get chips you can use to beef up your weapons (the standard shotgun/sniper-rifle/etc. assortment). Interesting, but I'd gladly trade that feature in for more diverse weapons... and more than four generic modes. Single player consists of a grid-based board-game setup—think a simplified, futuristic *Risk*—with each attempt at conquering a territory involving a deathmatch, capture-the-flag, or "fight for a point, move to the next" assault match (which isn't as great as Robert claims). Playing with bots gets old fast, though, and it's not playable online.

Warpath ain't so much a bad game—everything works as it should—but everything you'll find here has been perfected elsewhere for years. Generic name, tired weapons and modes, modlike feel—but get price or not, *Warpath* has no rightful claim to your time.



ROBERT A: Maybe some people out there have exhausted every online war-making game possibility and are jonesing for another fix. Me, I only get into an online game when it's something special, something that compels me to cancel important parts of my life (say, sleep), adopt questionable hygiene practices, and eat with a dietary abandon that knows no unfriendly delivery service. *Warpath* is not one of those games.

Bereft of a worthwhile solo experience and short on original ideas, *Warpath* is more like emergency relief rations for head-shot-oholics. It has some memorable maps, a couple of interesting twists on worn-out conventions (the tug-of-warlike assault mode is especially cool), and a bargain-bin price tag, but that's about it. Wake me up when the sci-fi shooter had passed.

1UP.COM—GARNETT: This Frankenstein seems to have been assembled from the *Pariah* spare-parts bin. As a PC game (which it also is), I'd swear it was a nicey done community mod. But on the Xbox, even at a discounted price, I expect a little bit more than some text and still artwork for the single-player game's story. It feels incomplete—whether or not it's just a tune-up for multiplayer. At that point part comes through with the same clever weapon upgrade system and lag-free performance *Pariah* had, though it also inherits that game's unsatisfying gunplay. And the skimpy four modes with just a handful of new maps only add to the "downloadable content" feel. If you want a quality online FPS, grab the criminally overlooked *Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict* off the bargain rack.

THE VERDICTS OUT OF 100	10	5.5	5.0
	G. FORD	ROBERT A.	GARNETT

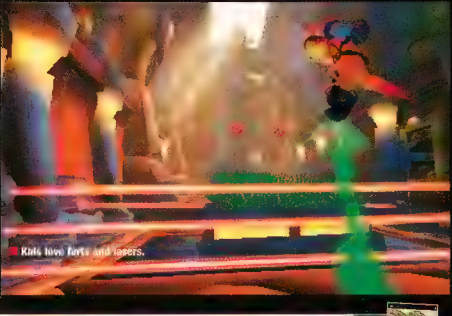
Publisher: Groove Games
Developer: Digital Extremes
Players: 1 (2-16 online and system link)
ESRB: Teen

www.groovegames.com

PSP

DAXTER

From under the shadow



Good: Bright, beautiful graphics, solid action
Bad: Repetitive, not as clever as it thinks it is
Now Required: A good *Clank* game



CREG S: I usually just assume that a 3D platformer on the PSP is going to be a mess. The system wasn't designed for easy manipulation of a camera in three dimensions. Surprisingly, though, *Daxter* manages to avoid any major problems of this sort and offers up some rather solid platforming action.

Daxter's not quite up to the standards of the PS2 games in the *Jak* series (of which this is a side story, taking place before *Jak II*), thanks to a fairly straightforward levels and very little exploration, but what's here is fun. *Daxter's* unique abilities—the hoverjump, using a makeshift flamethrower, and climbing certain surfaces—make for a few interesting gameplay twists, as well as some cool boss encounters.

I dig the dream minigames, too, even though it's so cliché to base anything on films like *The Matrix* or *Braveheart* nowadays. These sequences do a good job of breaking up the action just enough to keep the game from getting too monotonous.

Daxter isn't the best platformer you'll ever play, but in a system where the genre is so often done poorly, it manages to stand out. Definitely worth a play, whether you're a fan of the series or not.

KATHLEEN: I wasn't sure what to expect from career sidekick *Daxter's* first solo project. But I enjoyed using the ottsel's fwywater and pesticide sprayer to smash insects of unusual size and variety into splattery messes (the bright, beautiful graphics didn't hurt, either), even if the action does get a bit repetitive.

Some killer minigames and bonus levels help give this game some spice, though it could use more of em. Likewise, some clever boss battles illuminate the game's greater potential. Considering its PSP platformer peers (wanting in both quality and quantity), *Daxter's* a pretty fun platformer that could've been something really special with some more fine-tuning...something like its PS2 brethren.

1UP.COM—ANDREW: Visually appealing and rife with production value, *Daxter* is competent enough to be a PS2 platformer, which makes what developer Ready at Dawn did on the PSP all the more impressive. The game design itself is fairly basic platformer fare: collect these thingamabobs, double-jump onto the platform, swat enemies with a multitool combo, play timing-based minigames...and so on. What's cool about *Daxter* is that it's the first decent *Super Mario Sunshine* clone, in that *Daxter's* gas/fire gun does essentially the same thing as Mario's waterpack. Despite the game's been there, done that feeling, if all developers cared about their original PSP projects as much as Ready at Dawn obviously cared about *Daxter*, we'd be in good shape.



THE VERDICTS OUT OF 100	7.5	7.5	7.0
	CREG S.	KATHLEEN	ANDREW

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Ready at Dawn
Players: 1 (8 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.us.playstation.com



Good: We <3 everything *Katamari*.
Bad: Well, everything except the PSP control scheme.
If You've Never Played *Katamari*: Don't try this one first.



JENNIFER: This may be blasphemy, but I have a feeling *Me & My Katamari* would have been a really excellent game...on the Nintendo DS. The series' unique gameplay, where you roll a ball around wacky Japanese environments, picking up objects to increase your size, doesn't work well at all with the PSP's controls. Everyone knows that the DualShock controller's two analog sticks work elegantly on the PS2 versions. Until you play it without those sticks, you can't imagine how necessary they are. Using the directional pad (forget the analog nub—it's worthless, even here in the one game where it actually might work) and the face buttons to navigate your ball is painful, clunky, and ineffective. The normally cluttered environments become really tough to get around when you can't turn around easily or move deftly.

But you do get used to it, however hard the adjustment might be, and then it's possible to feel that old *Katamari* magic. Repetitive environments, however, mar the otherwise gorgeous presentation. I got bored playing in the same places over and over and over again, especially because levels are broken up into tedious "starter" stages (probably to accommodate the loading) that you'll play again and again and again. The unlockable stages are fun, and the ending credits minigame is classic. This just isn't a true stroke of brilliance for the series.

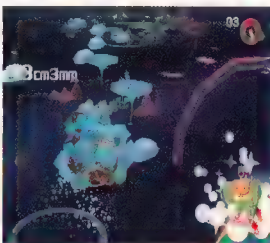
RYAN: I agree with Jen—*Katamari* wasn't quite meant for the PSP. The digital controls often turn gameplay into an awkward endeavor as you fumble around in a race against the clock. The stages themselves are unremarkable and few. Even the multiplayer map (a small island arena for up to four players) failed to hold my attention; with a "he who makes the largest katamari wins" rule in effect, it's next to impossible to dethrone any player who gains a substantial lead. I did enjoy the King of All Cosmos' expectedly oddball dialogue (perhaps the best reason to pick up the game), but that isn't enough to save a great PS2 franchise from handheld ho-hum.

1UP.COM—JEREMY: It hurts me deeply to give a *Katamari* game anything less than a glowing review, but alas, honesty *über alles*. I love being able to roll errands for the implacable King of All Cosmos any- and everywhere, but the joy of having a katamari in my pocket is diminished by some serious flaws. The awkward controls I can deal with—what I can't get past is the limited level design. The game's missions consist of six small segments strung together with no sense of connection, and you replay the same bits repeatedly. Which makes this game something I never thought I'd say about *Katamari*: predictable, and slightly unsatisfying. We are in very disappointed.

PSP

ME & MY KATAMARI

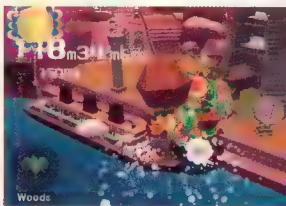
On a roll of complacency



THE VERDICTS
OUT OF 10
7.0 **5.5** **7.0**
 JENNIFER RYAN JEREMY

Publisher: Namco Bandai
 Developer: Namco Limited
 Players: 1 (2-4 via local Wi-Fi)
 ESRB: Everyone

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by Rick O'Connor

■ PSP

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION REMIXED

Take up a collection



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10):
8.5 8.5 9.0
KATHLEEN SHANE GIANCARLO

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom
Players: 1 (2-4 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Teen

www.capcom.com

Good: Bright graphics, classy games
Bad: Videogames have come a long way, baby
Approximate Price Per Game: \$1.36



KATHLEEN: Talk to any respectable child of the '80s, and it's likely you'll discover they cut their teeth on many of the games included in *Classics Collection Remixed*. Capcom has assembled a sweet retro treat here with 20 different games, from the heralded *Street Fighter* to the kitschy cult classic *Quiz & Dragons*. Each title also has the option to be viewed in an "enhanced" mode, an option that formats the image to fit the PSP's screen so it doesn't look too stretched or weird like some other PSP ports. You can even play some titles, such as the top-down shooter *1941*, vertically on the screen, which makes things much easier to see—though it's awkward to hold the PSP that way. Every game also has customizable controls, perfect for all us fussy old fogies who like our game tapes just so.

This collection truly hits its stride with wireless action for every game that offered multiplayer in the arcade. It doesn't get much more boss than hooking up with a friend for a co-op Wi-Fi brawl through *Final Fight*—even better—a four-player mash-through *Captain Commando*.

SHANE: Bow before Capcom, the king of quality shovelware. Rather than merely porting last year's excellent *Classics Collection* (PS2/XB) to PSP, Capcom

instead unearthed 15 entirely different nostalgic gems (alongside five returning favorites) here. OK, so not everything on the UMD qualifies as a classic... Outdated relics such as *Avengers* and *Section Z* won't hold your interest for 10 minutes. But you can't deny the appeal of fan-faves *Strider*, *Final Fight*, and *Magic Sword*, and many of the lesser-known B-tier titles qualify as buried treasures. *Black Tiger?* Totally awesome. *1941*, *Side Arms*, and *Varth?* Quality arcade shooters. *Mega Twins* (aka *Chiki Chiki Boys*) and *Three Wonders?* Fun, colorful platformers. Factor in a slick presentation, sweet unlockables, and Wi-Fi multiplayer for many games, and it's a must-have PSP release.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO: I've played most of these games well over 50 times, and I have to say that I can easily see myself playing through them another 50 times with this collection. Nearly every one is absolutely perfect for a handheld like the PSP—and the fact that they support the system's Wi-Fi multiplayer capabilities only makes them that much better. Add in a bunch of other cool little features like different aspect ratios for each game and vertical displays for the shooters—even if it's a little cumbersome, it's still incredibly cool—and you've got an instant classic.

■ PSP

SYPHON FILTER: DARK MIRROR

Who shot out the lights?

ONLINE



Good: Lots of guns, long campaign mode
Bad: Convoluted controls, samey enemies
Dark Is Right: Crank up the gamma, use the night vision



DEMIAN: The Red Section minion in my crosshairs is having a rough day. Those world-domination plans will have to go on hold; I've not only dispatched 30 of his best pals and comrades already, but I've also winged this one in the leg, so he's slowly limping back to cover.

It's hard to pull off a good shooter on the PSP, but little touches like that gimmick grunt help *Dark Mirror* compensate for a seriously complicated control scheme and the lack of two analog sticks. If you're expecting traditional *Siphon Filter* run-and-gun action, though, time to rethink. *Dark Mirror* slows the pace way down. In most battles, you'll have to peek around cover and pick your shots—rush the enemy, and you'll risk restarting from the last checkpoint in short order.

This measured, almost plodding game play ups the tension and works well in campaign mode, but the faster-paced chaos of multiplayer only heightens your awareness of the innately awkward controls. Multi's a bit short on maps and modes, too.

Still, it's fun to flip on the infrared vision (the better to part *Dark Mirror*'s oppressive gloom—forget trying to play outdoors) and take out a pair of enemies with an explosive dart, even though accessing and equipping the game's gadgets can be a royal pain.

KATHLEEN: *Siphon Filter*'s clever missions, sweet spy gizmos, and stirring music make for a really fun game—even if it is trapped on the tiny, portable hand-cramp maker called the PSP. Too bad controlling this third-person shooter can be a battle by itself, despite the alternate button layout options. I sometimes felt like I didn't have a real chance to react in time or maneuver properly.

Dark Mirror retains the series' signature autoaim target lock, but I'm just going to come out and say it—autoaim is cheap. And an ammo waster. Not that I was above using it, but when I did, I felt ashamed.

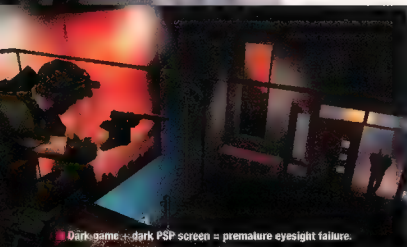
NICH: Gabe "Crazy Legs" Logan is back, not that his absence in the last *Siphon Filter* game was much remarked upon. *Dark Mirror*'s single-player game still relies less on manual accuracy than lock-on targeting, something the handheld can easily handle. Scripted waves of guys rush at you and you take them out, sometimes with teammates at your back. It's all right.

The online multiplayer is better, although it's tough to recommend this over the team action in *SDDCM: Fireteam Bravo*, and it could use some more maps. I definitely enjoyed the all-against-one Rogue Agent mode, though, despite being complete crap at it.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10):
7.0 7.0 6.0
DEMIAN KATHLEEN NICH

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Sony CEA
Players: 1 (2-8 via local or online Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Mature

www.playstation.com



Dark name: dark PSP screen = premature eyesight failure.

PSP

SPLINTER CELL ESSENTIALS

Rather unnecessary

Good: Story told via flashbacks.
Bad: Moving, looking, shooting.
Platform: Game, GBA, DS, handhelds and *Splinter Cell* (just don't mix).

SNOW: Sam Fisher, superagent extraordinaire, is accused of a few unpatriotic acts against his outfit. Is he working for the bad guy, or is he being set up in this Tom Clancy world of political intrigue? I would give a crap...if this game weren't so god-damn terrible.

Essentials is near impossible to control. The problem is, *Splinter Cell* is as 3D a game as they get—you have to be constantly looking up, down, and all around at your surroundings, searching for paths and avoiding enemy peepers. The PSP is 100 percent not the platform for this style of stealth-action. You get a couple of control and camera options, and you will eventually get better at moving and looking, but you will never feel comfortable doing anything in this game. Ever. I'll jump when I meant to look down. I'll crouch when I meant to look right. I'll cry when what I really want to do is snap my PSP in half. Oh, and the game has rough graphics, a few crashes,

hiccup pauses when something new is happening onscreen, long load times (load screens have load screens!), and an unfun, throwaway spy-versus-spy multiplayer mode (with only four maps)... Wait, all this just to play a *Splinter Cell* that offers no gameplay innovations whatsoever?

It's official. *Splinter Cell* is not meant to be a portable game. I think these other reviewers are too forgiving because *Splinter Cell*'s so great to begin with. But I'm a fan of the series, and I think this one stinks.

MARK: We shall agree to disagree. The great thing about *Essentials* is how faithfully it reproduces the full console experience. From gameplay to controls to graphics, everything works as good or better than any PSP owner has a right to expect (well, besides minor gripes like loading hiccups, the labor-intensive camera, and completely worthless multiplayer). But the problem with *Essentials* is how faithfully it reproduces the full

console experience. The excitement of playing *Splinter Cell* anywhere is held back a bit by the feeling that you've already played it all before, especially during the recycled missions you really *have* played before.

TOP-DON — GARNETT: Just because you can make a game on PSP doesn't mean you should. Sure, Sam Fisher has tres cool superspy mojo normally, but it gets snuffed away in handheld form, where panning restarts for every misstep come all too often. The analog nub doesn't offer the control subtlety needed for a game where the difference between walking and running can be life or death. And the onscreen action is so dark that portable play is out of the question. If I have to hunker down somewhere to control the light conditions just to play, I'd much rather be in front of a full-size television. Outside of a few graphical glitches, *Essentials* may impress, but this is best left to fans interested in the lore.



THE VERDICTS

7.0 6.0

SHOE MARK GARNETT

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Players: 1 (2 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Mature

www.splintercell.com

It's the first time in my life that I've felt like I actually fit in. Or at least in happy now that I don't. Truly **OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE** dedicated video **MANIAC**

who has some true fulfillment & that means a career in **GAME DEVELOPMENT** State of the art hardware and software **AT MY DISPOSAL**

Game Design & Programming Game Art Implementation & Animation programming **Writing** (what about you?)

The LAN tournament **ROCKED**

My demo reel turned them into web monkeys I want to learn how to create long hair paint effects with P



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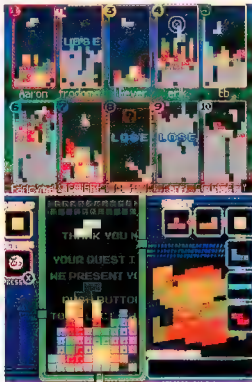
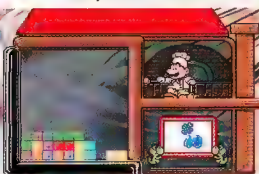
DS

TETRIS DS

A puzzle game for the post-Cold War era



■ We get the *Metroid* nostalgia, but nobody asked for a *Yoshi's Cookie* revival.



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

7.5 **7.0** **9.0**

JENNIFER CRISPIN JEREMY

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Players: 1 (2-10 via local Wi-Fi,
2-4 via online Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.nintendo.com

Good: Fun to relive the memories of classic puzzling.
Bad: Only one new mode really uses the touch screen.
Fandering: The fan service goes a bit overboard.

JENNIFER: If anyone out there can't conjure off the top of their head the six different shapes formed by four blocks that you fit together into lines that disappear, I want to meet you. You've managed to avoid one of the most pervasive gaming phenomena of the last 20 years. *Tetris DS* repackages this classic gameplay into six different modes, from the familiar and still appealing Standard to the new, strange, and at-times-unnecessary ones like Push (in which two players vie to edge the other off the screen). My favorite new mode is Touch: You have a grid of assorted pieces that you manipulate to form lines and clear the grid. It's perfect for the touch screen; too bad it's only five stages long. *Tetris DS* remixes itself further by layering classic Nintendo themes over each of the modes. So, for example, clearing lines helps Mario progress through a level of *Super Mario Bros. Cute*, but it adds almost nothing to the core gameplay.

If it weren't for the local multiplayer, this repackaging would seem almost pointless. But getting 10 people in a room all going crazy with items (*Mario Kart*-style zingers you throw at your opponents) is truly fun. It's a shame the regular online supports only up to four players.

CRISPIN: "In Soviet Russia, you play *Tetris* alone on monochrome Elektronika 60

computer. In America, you play with nine comrades over Wi-Fi on color handheld. What a country!" Oh, it's funny because it's true, Cold War-era comedian Yakov Smirnoff: *Tetris* has changed in the 20 years since both you and it left the motherland. But it hasn't evolved quite enough to be worth your rubles if you already own a portable incarnation.

The new stylish-powered Touch mode is more gimmicky than fun, and most of the new game modes add unnecessary complexity to the elegant formula. Still, playing it with friends is a Chernobyl-size blast, and the remixed tunes from your favorite made-in-Japan Nintendo franchises will have you pointing to that Far East island nation and hollering, "What a country!"

TUP.COM—JEREMY: Up till now, DS owners have been forced to slum it on GBA for a *Tetris* fix—shocking! After all, this is the game that made Nintendo a portable powerhouse to begin with. *Tetris DS* rights this wrong while practically reinventing the game. Don't worry, though; nerds can play straight-up *Tetris*. Those depending something more up to date have five other modes to choose from, all marinated in that tasty old-time nostalgia Nintendo does so well. These range from novel (Catch) to brilliant (Push), especially with 10-player online support.

DS

TAO'S ADVENTURE: CURSE OF THE DEMON SEAL

More like Curse of the Awful Interface



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

4.0 **5.0** **4.0**

GREG S. JENN F. JEREMY

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.konami.com

Good: Spell-drawing system is actually pretty cool
Bad: But it gets lost in the bad game surrounding it
Inspired By: *Azure Dreams* (PS1, 1997)

GREG S: When I first fired up *Tao* and started learning how to cast spells using the touch screen, it looked to me like we finally had a roleplayer that took advantage of the DS' hardware—you could say I was excited.

This excitement lasted right up until I reached the game's main town. It was there I started to realize the strange, arbitrary nature of the interface, like how some supposedly "open" doors were actually locked, how I couldn't interact with everything, and how the objects I could interact with weren't labeled as such.

And the battle system! "Awkward" isn't a strong enough word to describe it. The fantastic spell-drawing setup is lost in layers upon layers of touch-screen menus and frustrating physical combat. You have to dig through two menus to access your spell screen; then you must draw a spell, confirm it, and choose your target area before tapping another button to attack. Repeat.

It all could have been streamlined a lot. But even then, the slow pace and annoying guessing-games-style exploration in the main town make *Tao* yet another disappointing RPG endeavor on the DS. But it's still better than *Lunar Dragon Song*.

JENN F: Townfolk can be pretty cruel to kids with funny hair and facial tattoos. Luckily, *Tao*'s got a friend in *Petcho*, a

snarky tagalong who appears to be a cross between Pikachu and a moogles. *Petcho*'s good at making little suggestions ("Hey! I'm hungry! Let's go eat!") that really drive the plot forward—which I appreciate.

Actual gameplay in *Tao* is—oh, how do I say this? Basically, it's a *Rogue*-like dungeon crawl (Google it—*Rogue*'s an ancient RPG). It's simple, intuitive, and utterly tedious. The fun is in using a style—I mean, "wind rod"—in spellcasting, accomplished by doodling runic symbols inside some mystical circle. But when you call a game "*Tao's Adventure*," I want adventure-ousness, dammit, and this wasn't it.

TUP.COM—JEREMY: Unlike just about everyone I know, I actually enjoy these turn-based, dungeon-hack RPGs. Sure, they're repetitive, shallow, and usually more than a little unfair in places, but when done right, they can be ridiculously addictive. Unfortunately, *Tao* isn't done right. It's plodding and cumbersome, even for this style of game, with primitive 3D graphics and a slotlike pace. It also violates most of the rules of portable gaming, including the all-important "must be playable in short bursts" maxim. The touch-screen elements are pretty slipshod, too. Any joy you might glean from *Tao*'s progressive treasures collecting and monster slaying will be completely drowned by your tears of boredom.



DS

METROID PRIME HUNTERS

Pumped and nearly primed

SHANE: It's been well over a year since we all tried *Hunters*. DS pack-in demo *First Hunt*, and all that development time has paid off—the full game emerges as an impressive showpiece for the hardware. Developer NIS somehow overcame the seeming impossibility of squeezing the first-person adventure/shooter *Metroid Prime* onto the roughly Nintendo 64-esque DS. *Hunters* amazes with detailed alien landscapes and explosive special effects that wouldn't look out of place on the PSP.

It's a shame that the single-player adventure can't live up to the *Prime* heritage. Here, you guide Samus across multiple planets while amassing alien artifacts. And though the varied environments and open-ended progression represent innovations the franchise needs, the half-assed execution won't win any awards. Levels seem contrived and predictable—after a few worlds of hunting for keys, fighting repeat bosses, and escaping before the bombs blow, the design feels rote. Plus, placing the interface for switching visors and weapons on the touch

screen adds an unnecessary layer of complexity. But at least you'll never mistake the gameplay for warmed-over *Prime* outings. Whether you're controlling the camera with the stylus or the four face buttons, the necessity to aim transforms *Hunters* into an entirely new *Metroid* experience.

It's fast, visceral, and occasionally exhausting. You don't realize how much you're on locking onto enemies in the *Prime* games until you're forced to aim. Thankfully, the control works well and makes for adequately thrilling online multiplayer, as well as thrilling as a four-player king of the hill match can be.

TUP.COM—ANDREW: I agree with Shane about how good a job NIS did in getting *Hunters* to work on the DS; it managed to design the game around the system's awkward setup for first-person shooters. It also echoes that it never really felt like I was playing a true *Metroid* game, despite Samus Aran's presence. But once I passed that small mental

roadblock, everything was fine.

Because of the three-lookability granted by the DS, *Hunters* multiplayer isn't for better than *Prime 2's*, with enough modes and maps to keep a relatively small group of four entertained. Occasional slowdown can get in the way, and some of the maps and modes have certain quirks, but *Hunters* remains a very strong effort for the DS.

TUP.COM—JEREMY: I love *Metroid*, and I love portable games. So why am I not madly in love with *Hunters*? Maybe because it emphasizes its multiplayer aspect, which turns out to be little more than an expanded version of *Prime 2's* lackluster head-to-head gameplay. With support for only four players, *Hunters* doesn't even begin to compete with superior portable shooters like *SOCOM*. Meanwhile the single-player experience is disappointingly un-*Metroid*. Still, it's a good game, a huge leap for DS visuals, and perfectly fun in short bursts. Just don't expect much staying power. **B+**

Online Bounty Hunting

Hunters' wireless multiplayer action allows you to connect with other players through DS Download Play, local wireless, or Nintendo's online Wi-Fi connection service. It's worth the effort, though.

Pros:

Plenty of modes — *Hunters'* seven match types remain fairly

traditional, but they run the full gamut of what you'd expect in a first-person shooter.

Voice chat — Sure, it's limited to in-match chatter with your friends, but it's a step in the right direction.

Creative arenas — With plenty of environmental hazards, jump

peaks, and even zero-G sections, these stages feel vaguely *Quake*-ish.

Cons:

Four-player limit — Deathmatch can be fun for a while with four peeps, but many of these team-based modes feel weak given the low number of combatants.

Lame characters — After seeing how ugly the six new bounty hunters look, we think we'll stick with Samus.

Weak weapons — Apart from a nifty lock-on laser, most of the weapon pickups you'll find seem fairly useless.



Good: Best 3D visuals on the DS

Bad: Repetitive level design, reliance on touch screen

Promising innovation: Online voice chat between matches



THE VERDICTS
READ ON

7.5 8.0 7.5

SHANE ANDREW JEREMY

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: NIS
Players: 1-2/4 (local/online Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Teen

www.nintendo.com

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

The games that were too late...
or too little

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

XB360 • 2K Games • ESRB: T

We're more than a dozen hours into this mammoth roleplayer, and we haven't made a dent in it. Forget about dents—we haven't even scratched the surface. Or probably even seen the surface. This is a game, after all, with 50 achievements, most of which are going to require tens upon tens of hours to unlock.

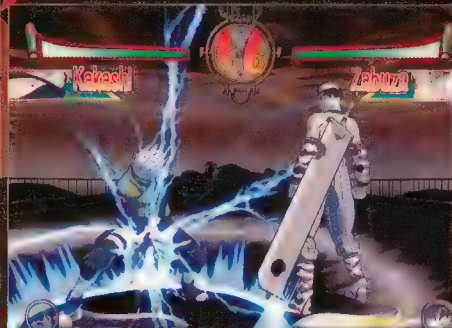
And that's OK, because the sprawling world and story of *Oblivion* is something that really pays off over time. No other RPG is as open-ended in letting you determine who you want to be and how you want to play. Feel like going the beloved hero route, with a small serial-killing issue on the side? With maybe some vampirism? *Oblivion* is happy to oblige, featuring a game world stuffed with physical and moral challenges just begging to be explored. One caveat: If you're looking for fast-paced RPG action, it ain't here. The deliberate, old-school PC roots of this series are front and center. Check back next issue for our full review.



Burnout Revenge
 XB360 • EA Games • ESRB: E10+ — Before you invest another \$60 into the *Burnout* franchise, ask yourself these questions: (1) How do I miss out on the current-gen versions? (2) Do I love online racing? (3) Do I own an HDTV set?
Bottom line: If you answer to at least two of these questions in "yes," then *Burnout Revenge* on the 360 wouldn't be a bad investment. If you agree to all three, then it's a no-brainer.



hey, I seen that on the TV!



Naruto: Clash of Ninja

GC • DS • ESRB: T — Given the middling quality of most anime-based fighters we encounter, this 3D brawler starring the abrasive orange phenom comes as an unexpected surprise: It's good. *Clash of Ninja* features beautiful graphics, a simple-yet-versatile fighting engine, great controls, and awesome over-the-top special Chakra attacks.

Bottom line: The character roster might be slim (10 fighters total), but this is still a well-rounded fighting game.



Samurai Champloo

PS2 • Namco Bandai • ESRB: T — Now, this is a recipe for weirdness. *Champloo* brings the badass Edo-era swordsmen, goofy situational comedy, and modern-day hip-hop trappings from the hit Adult Swim anime series into an unconventional brawler by the guys who made *Killer 7*.

Bottom line: When it's really weird (see: an entire level that plays like an acid-trip version of *Super Mario Bros.*), it's great. But endless hacking and slashing gets old.



Metal Saga

PS2 • Atlus • ESRB: T — This one might have been below the radar, but *Metal Saga*'s tank combat is pretty fresh for the role-playing genre. You can't always say the same thing about the story, but the side quests should keep you occupied for a long time.

Bottom line: Sharp humor and massive tanks give this overlooked RPG an edge. It sure ain't pretty, though...



Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter

XB • Ubisoft • ESRB: T — *Ghost Recon 2*'s ol' dumb/cheating A.I. returns, but it's more tolerable this time because we get to cheat as well (with cheap healing stations scattered throughout the levels). Mexico City looks amazing, if not nearly as good as in Xbox 360's *GRAV*.

Bottom line: All the "pretty" means the action chugs. And when the A.I. has near-perfect aim, that's a bummer.



Drakengard 2

PS2 • Ubisoft • ESRB: M — Nearly two years after the debut of the original, the song remains the same. *Panzer Dragoon* meets *Ace Combat* meets *Desert Strike* meets *Dynasty Warriors* meets mind-numbing boredom.

Bottom line: *Drakengard 2* is one of developer Cavia's most uninspired efforts to date.



Tourist Trophy

PS2 • Sony CEA • ESRB: E — From the makers of *Gran Turismo*, it's *Gran Turismo* for bikes. Straight up. This is one serious cycle sim: If you're a manual-gear type, you'll be hitting up to four buttons at a time, plus the left analog stick—which ain't easy. Look for a full review next issue.

Bottom line: How much do you like motorcycles?



Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Remix

PS2/XB • Rockstar • ESRB: E10+ — This rerelease adds a new city (well, new if you missed driving around Tokyo in *Midnight Club 2*), audio tracks, and 20 extra rides, all for just \$20.

Bottom line: If you love yourself some spinner rims and you don't own *MC3*, you're not going to get a better deal than this.



Rampage: Total Destruction

PS2/GC • Midway • ESRB: E10+ — Kudos to Midway for doing what it can to live up to the building-wrecking *Rampage* formula: Now you can attack buildings from the front, unlock tons of characters, and earn new moves by completing challenges on every level.

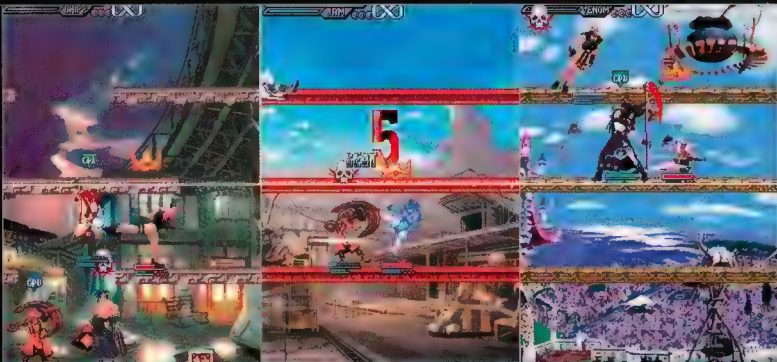
Bottom line: It's still the same ol' *Rampage* underneath: Fun in short doses. Which may be worth \$20 to you. ▶

REVIEWS WRAP-UP (CONT.)

Guilty Gear Dust Strikers

DS • Majesco • ESRB: T Take the heavy-metal, leather-clad *Guilty Gear* characters on the road (20 fighters in all) and add four-player Wi-Fi battles, multilevel stages, and a selection of touch-screen minigames (ranging from arm wrestling to billiards to playing with dolphins).

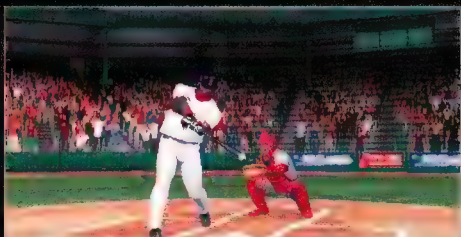
Bottom line: It's kind of like *Super Smash Bros.*, but with *Guilty Gear* combat. Too bad everyone needs a cart to play multi.



Worms: Open Warfare

PSP • THQ • ESRB: E10+ — *Worms: Open Warfare* returns the weapons-based insect-larvae team-combat series to its 2D roots after a mediocre flirtation with 3D. Once you acclimate yourself to its tactical gameplay and develop a good eye for weapon ranges, it's a fun—and funny—little strategy game (also coming to the DS, but we didn't get our hands on that one).

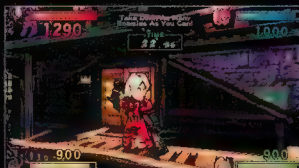
Bottom line: Should please old-school *Worms* fans.



MLB 06: The Show

PSP • Sony CEA • ESRB: E — Sony's handheld-baseballer is much improved and includes a surprisingly thorough GM feature in season mode. In fact, we'd rather play this version than the PS2 game. Still, the complicated baserunning controls could definitely use some work.

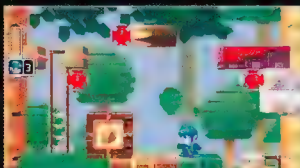
Bottom line: If you're dying to build a baseball dynasty during your morning commute, this is your game.



Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble

PSP • Capcom • ESRB: T — While the PSP version of *Rumble* adds a set of minigames and more characters (such as *Devil May Cry*'s Dante), the action is still way too crazy and chaotic to follow, even in widescreen.

Bottom line: A decent improvement on the GC version, but only for people who can legitimately get through a match without saying, "What the hell's going on?"



Mega Man Powered Up

PSP • Capcom • ESRB: E — Now *this* is a remake. *Powered Up* is addictive, fun, and—despite the baby-faced look—hard as hell. It's got the original game, a remixed mode with new bosses, a level editor, and tons of stuff to unlock. Awesome.

Bottom line: It arrived too late to review, but *MMPU*'s score would've been "frickin' sweet" (out of 10).



MX vs. ATV Unleashed: Over the Edge

PSP • THQ • ESRB: E — Leave it to developer Rainbow Studios to pull off a good, portable motocross/ATV title. *MX vs. ATV*'s racing is pretty much what you'd expect if you've played the console versions, complete with mix-n-match vehicles and four-player local Wi-Fi. And the physics feel spot-on.

Bottom line: A solid lap of on-the-go motocross.

REVIEWS ARCHIVE

A (re)view to remember...

BEST OF THE WORST
 Sometimes, being No. 1 isn't as impressive as it could be. It's always kick-ass to get Game of the Month, but there were a few months when the pickings were on the slim side. Here's a look at the lowest-scoring Games of the Month from *EGM*'s deepest game do drawers (all scores out of 10).



Batman: Return of the Joker (GB) **7.25**



Nintendogs (DS), Rumble Racing (PS2), Max Payne 2 (PS2/XB) **8.17 (TIE)**



Mario Paint (SNES) **8.25**



Age of Empires: The Age of Kings (DS), Drill Dozer (GBA) **8.33 (TIE)**



Ace Combat 2 (PS1), Circuit Breakers (PS1) **8.38 (TIE)**

GAME	SYSTEM	VERDICT	SCORE
24: The Game	PS2	■ Faithful to the hit show but lacking the same freshness and wicked gunplay	7.5 5.5 7.0
30 Cent: Bloodproof	PS2/XB	■ Awful third-person shooter looks like a million bucks but plays like, well, 50 cents	3.5 3.0 3.5
Age of Empires: The Age of Kings	DS	■ This deep, historically savvy turn-based strategy game is fun—and good for your brain	9.0 7.5 8.5 Silver
America's Army: Rise all a Soldier	PS2/XB	■ A decent, realistic, Army-themed first-person shooter with less flavor than an MRE	6.0 6.5 5.0
Animal Crossing: Wild World	DS	■ The same insane fair-ly late fishing/talking/walking game is now portable and online	7.5 7.0 9.0
Ape Escape 3	PS2	■ A frustrating camera thumps much of the monkey-snatching fun in this platformer	8.0 5.0 5.5
Ape Escape Academy	PSP	■ Seeking a good <i>WaroWare</i> -inspired minigame title for the PSP? Keep looking	4.5 5.5 4.5
Arena Football	PS2/XB	■ Ridiculous defensive rules make <i>Arena</i> more forgettable than the actual league	6.0 5.5 5.5
Beatmania	PS2	■ Carpal Tunnel! causing rhythm game requires as much practice as being a real DJ	7.5 4.5 5.5
Black	PS2/XB	■ Ka-BOOM! A first-person shooter full of sound and fury, signifying nothing	6.5 6.0 8.0
Chibi Robo	GC	■ Bunky camera and slow text screens keep this adorable house robot from being great	6.5 7.5 6.0
CMT Presents Karaoke Rev. Country	PS2	■ The best (and only) all-country-music karaoke game we've ever seen!	7.5 6.5 7.0
Condemned: Criminal Origins	XB360	■ Clunky controls hobble this macabre survival-horror title's deeply eerie gameplay	7.0 6.0 8.5
Crime Life: Gang Wars	XB	■ This brawler is a butt-ugly, fundamentally terrible, mindless embarrassment	2.5 2.0 1.5
Dead or Alive 4	XB360	■ Boots and button-mashing are the core components of this pretty fighter	7.0 6.5 6.5
Drill Dozer	GBA	■ Sweet, classic 2D platforming returns in a great little portable form	8.5 8.0 8.5 Silver
Electroplankton	DS	■ This visually trippy, unsaveable-music-making game is all novelty, but no gameplay	5.0 7.0 5.0
Exit	PSP	■ Long-form puzzles and lovely, arty graphics accent this pokey-paced, but fun, game	8.5 7.0 7.0
Fight Night Round 3	XB360	■ Perfectly pretty pugilists pummel and punch with precision and parascare	9.0 8.0 8.0 Silver
Final Fantasy IV Advance	GBA	■ A revered role-playing game made even better with new dungeons and portability	9.0 9.0 8.5
Final Fight: Streetwise	PS2/XB	■ Decent brawler with nice minigames stumbles on repetition and bad save system	6.5 7.0 7.0
Full Auto	XB360	■ Like <i>Burnout</i> with guns and a do-over button—so nice, we woulda liked more of it	8.0 8.5 8.0 Silver
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	PS2/XB	■ A squad-based shooter with broken rules of engagement	5.0 5.0 5.0
Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	PS2/XB	■ Another solid, but short and snail-paced, round of old clear-cutting 'n fun with friends	6.5 6.5 6.0
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	XB360	■ Amazing war-is-hells-fun shooter with great multiplayer. Next-gen is finally here!	8.0 8.5 8.0
Grandia III	PS2	■ This racing game offers a ton of cool cars that crash in random, frustrating ways	6.5 6.5 5.5
L.A. Rush	PS2/XB	■ "Old school" doesn't always mean "all good," but this RPG is classically sound	6.5 8.5 7.0
Legend of Heroes: A Tear of Vermillion	DS	■ This RPG, dungeon-filled RPG with action-packed combat featuring your favorite bros.	8.5 8.0 9.0
Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time	DS	■ Retains Mario's status as champ of kart games, now portable and online	9.0 8.5 8.5 Silver
Mario Kart DS	DS	■ Mario's party, RPG-ish tennis game benefits from simple controls and fun multiplayer	8.0 8.0 4.0
Mario Tennis: Power Tour	GBA	■ This chatty, grilly, graf-art action game isn't half as cool as it thinks it is	4.5 4.0 6.5
Mark Eckro's Getting Up	PS2/XB	■ A treat for <i>Mega Man</i> fans but will seem outdated and difficult to anyone else	7.0 7.5 7.0
Mega Man Maverick Hunter X	PSP	■ Short, but streamlined, card-based tactical roleplayer that stars Mr. Snake	8.0 9.0 8.5 Silver
Metal Gear Acid 2	PS2	■ A great story and worthwhile additional content raise the bar for re-releases	10.0 9.5 10.0 Silver
Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	PS2	■ Innovation isn't defined as finally adding a decade-old feature to your base-as-a-game	6.5 6.0 4.0
MLB 06: The Show	PS2	■ Gundam RPG with superbosses and lots of customization but lots of techy quests	6.0 8.0 5.0
MS Saga: A New Dawn	PS2	■ Poor feeling is just one of many errors found on this collegiate diamond	5.5 8.0 8.5
MVP 06 NCAA Baseball	PS2/XB	■ We agreed this samurai game was beautiful but weren't sure of all RPG aspects	4.5 7.5 8.5
Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams	PS2	■ This shooter's multiplayer goes the distance to offset the imperfect single-player	6.5 8.0 9.0 Silver
Perfect Dark Zero	XB360	■ A Poké-themed puzzle that inflicts equal parts dull and puzzable	6.5 7.0 6.5
Pokemon Trozei	DS	■ The series makes some strides on the Cube with this possible RPG for Pokémaniacs	7.0 6.0 7.0
Pokémon XD: Gale of Darkness	GC	■ A rather ho-hum puzzler that does manage to score a few "AHM!" moments	5.5 6.5 7.5
PD: Practical Intelligence	PSP	■ The heaping, well-zimmering, puzzle-solving Prince returns to fighting form	9.5 7.0 9.0 Silver
Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones	PS2/XB/GC	■ Tally, visually stunning, senseless racing thrills. The best of the 360 touch titles	8.0 8.5 9.5 Gold
Project Gotham Racing 3	XB360	■ A crappy vehicular assault game with a dumb premise and broken control	3.5 4.0 6.5
Pursuit Force	PSP	■ Visually choppy, generic first-person shooter with decent multiplayer	5.5 5.0 8.0
Quake 4	XB360	■ Outdated graphics and gameplay stall this portable, multiplayer <i>Resident Evil</i>	6.5 7.0 7.5
Resident Evil: Deadly Silence	DS	■ A touchable minigame game that doesn't provide enough fun to be lovable	6.0 5.0 6.0
The Rub Rabbitt!	DS	■ Sadly, the worst of the beloved classic arcade-fighter series in the one that's online	5.5 5.5 6.5
Samurai Showdown V	XB	■ A little-toe-short-but-quippy RPG with an excellent fighting-based battle system	8.0 7.5 7.0
Shadow Hearts: From the New World	PS2	■ Sonic's hovercraft racer isn't fun or fast enough to catch up to Mario's standard	8.0 5.0 5.0
Sonic Riders	PS2/XB/GC	■ A step back to the nothing, roller-coaster, side-scrolling <i>Sonic</i> done properly for DS	8.0 8.0 8.0 Silver
Sonic Rush	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
Spider-Man 2	DS	■ The same <i>Spider</i> fighter you loved—without enough new features to make it shine	8.0 8.5 7.5
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max	PSP	■ Third-person action sequel no one asked for delivers new ways of being average	6.0 5.0 6.0
State of Emergency 2	PS2	■ A maze game that blends infuriating ball-rolling and adorable aim themes	6.5 5.5 6.5
Super Monkey Ball: Touch & Roll	DS	■ A shiny new <i>Mario</i> -style adventure that needs to take the difficulty up a notch	7.5 7.0 8.0
Super Princess Peach	DS	■ An RPG that's too ugly and unbalanced to make the action battles worthwhile	5.5 5.0 7.5
Tales of Legendia	GBA	■ This dusty, classic RPG ported from the Super NES hasn't aged very gracefully	6.0 7.5 7.5
Tales Ill Phantasia	PS2/XB	■ This flawed and unbalanced racer is partially redeemed by its amazing variety	6.5 6.0 7.0
ToCA Race Driver 3	PS2	■ A lenient camera and wonky controls short-circuit this puzzle-solving robot game	5.5 4.0 6.0
Tokobot	DS	■ A pick-up-and-play golf game that makes excellent use of the DS' touch screen	8.0 7.0 7.0
True Swing Golf	PSP	■ A hackneyed, hack-n-slash dungeon crawl with a semiautomatic multiplayer mode	6.5 5.0 5.0
Unfold Legends: The Warrior's Code	PSP	■ Fantasy sci-fi/West RPG with a solid battle system but surprisingly vanilla plot	8.0 7.0 6.0
Wild Arms 4	PS2	■ <i>WE</i> series finally catches up with the rest of the gaming world and goes online	7.5 6.0 8.5 Silver
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 9	PS2/XB		

*Games in red are previous Game of the Month winners.

game over

with the best games, toys and anime around.



SEANBABY'S

SALUTE TO GIRL GAMING

Get out of my games and into my car

In the last few years, the biggest riddle of the videogame industry has been: Why don't girls play games? Every magazine and website has done a feature on it. It's the first interview question with any girl gamer, and it's the main topic of discussion at the gals-in-gaming conferences. After, of course, mud wrestling and team slow-motion bra-removing. And after all the hard thinking, here are what the experts say are the top reasons that games aren't appealing to women:

- 1) It's men's fault.
- 2) Some kind of basic behavior pattern, like how girls enjoy shoes or crying or whatever.
- 3) Ovaries, like those found in women, cause electronic devices to malfunction.
- 4) Things with buttons are stupid.
- 5) Mmm...this Yoplait yogurt is new-fireman-calendar good!

Most of these arguments about why girls don't play games are pointless. Any idiot can take a stereotype and smash it into a discussion about gaming. I even manage to do it at the end of this sentence; women love shopping and fruitball crap, so they like *Kingdom Hearts*. But that's the kind of intellectualism that can be annihilated by two things: reality and the word "duh." And if there's one thing I've learned from the lifetime I've devoted to getting ruined by women, it's that no one understands them. Especially them.

The fundamental problem with women playing games is that it's harder for a girl to become a nerd. Women have an air of social confidence that comes from knowing they control the sex life of every man they ever come into contact with. And they've seen enough men who care more about their *EverQuest* paladin than their abs to know that videogames weaken the existing social framework. And when that's gone, your gender is moot—your lap becomes just another thing on which to rest your bean dip.

LADY GAMES FOR LADIES

I guarantee you we'll all be killing each other in the desert with bladed boomerangs over a tank of gas before we figure out how to get girls to like games. The more important issue is: How long before the industry's blatant pandering backfires completely? The following are my picks for the industry's five worst insults to womankind. Go ahead and get excited because no one has tackled gender issues this hard since the guy who wrote *He's Just Not That Into You* jumped on his boyfriend and giggled with him on into the night until the sun rose on their love. I don't want to get off the subject, but that guy knows less about women than I do, and I once gave a girlfriend a gift certificate for Christmas.



Final Fantasy X-2 (PS2)

In this game, you get different powers by changing your outfit. This was so indulgent to some dude's idea of what girls want, they might as well have released a game called *Emotional, Shirtless UPS Man It: He Remembered Your Birthday*.



Barbie Horse Adventures: Wild Horse Rescue (XB)

You get to dress up your pony! Choose the perfect ribbons and saddle blankets while Barbie shouts words of encouragement like, "What a cool-looking horse!" As if I need some plastic slut to tell me how cool my horse looks.



Mary-Kate and Ashley Sweet 16: License to Drive (GC)

One question in this game asks the player to identify which color is not one of the four colors shown. If this game were called *Alcohol and Pregnancy: Remedial Kindergarten*, that question would still be disrespectful to its audience.

Barbie: The Princess and the Pauper (GBA)

In this game you use the power of song and pretty gowns to fight through treacherous woods. And while it may be a realistic representation of a princess' outdoor-survival skills, it's not fun. Barbie might as well fill her pockets with bacon and scream like a horny bear. Her Attack button makes her sing, for God's sake! She's going to die!



To make Erika sing, press the B button.



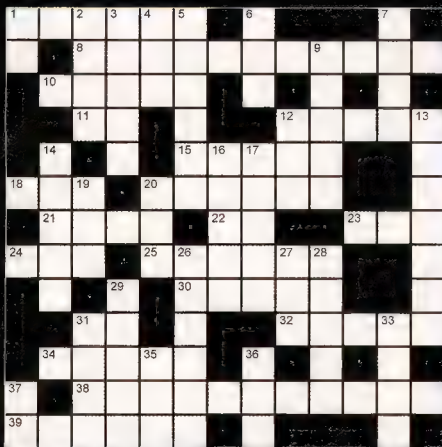
Trollz Hair Affair (GBA)

When they were children, Mary-Kate and Ashley sort of looked like troll dolls. Please note the scientific photo pictured here. And now that Mary-Kate and Ashley have grown up all hot and dress like they want someone to buy them a drink, troll dolls did the same thing. Which might be even creepier. ☹



MORE HUMAN THAN TOO HUMAN

(Solution on page 119)



ACROSS

1. Resident Evil 4's Ashley
8. Too Human subject matter
10. Metal Gear's Kojima
11. Robotnik, for one
12. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Shredder's boss
15. Gun scenery sight
18. Like MLB's Derek Lee
20. Mega Man V train Man
21. Illusion of... (Super NES)
22. Karate Champ outfit
23. Xbox 360 fighter, for one
24. Successor to MSR
25. Main man of Too Human
30. Like Madden linemen?
31. Like Metal Gear Solid 2 Vamp's sexual orientation
32. Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic's synthesized scents
34. MLB SlugFest unlockable cheat team
36. ET's last name?
39. NES flop Chubby

DOWN

1. Competition for 24 ACROSS?
2. PSP Metal Gear
3. Nine-headed Battle of Olympus foe
4. Munch's Oddworld partner
5. Bad-guy Pokémon
6. Mario Sunshine Bloopers' ammo
7. Console DVD feature Progressive
9. Latest Fight Night round
12. Powder-filled explosive barrel
13. Enemies of 1 ACROSS
14. Glitchy
16. Hot Shots! Golf hole-in-one
17. PS2 UFC-inspired fighting championship
19. Where Square's Bouncers worked?
20. Grand Theft Auto commercial vehicle
26. What a shield does to damage
27. Silly, secret Silent Hill endings
28. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas homie
29. Member of Red Faction?
31. Super Mario Chomp's forte?
33. Disc drive function
35. Commodore 64 Star Trek subtitle, for short
36. Street Fighter Ken's home nation
37. Sega's final hardware, for short

GRUDGE MATCH

Which Night falls?

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3 **FRIGHT NIGHT**

With Mike Tyson out of the picture, the chances of getting your neck bitten in the boxing ring aren't nearly as bad as if you were cast in the '80s vampire flick *Fright Night*. But you can get yer ass whooped in either. Which would you prefer?

FIGHTS

<p>Hard-hitting slugfests Advantage: Fight Night</p>	<p>One-sided child beatings</p>
--	---------------------------------

OPPONENTS

<p>Other crew-cut guys in high pants</p>	<p>Gnarly vampires Advantage: Fright Night</p>
--	--

TOKEN GIRL REPRESENTATION

<p>Ring babes Advantage: Fight Night</p>	<p>Married...With Children's Amanda Beare</p>
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SOUNDTRACK

<p>A surround-sound system lets you hear that right hook on your left ear Advantage: Fight Night</p>	<p>Frightening theme song by the J. Geils Band</p>
--	--

SPECTATORS

<p>Just a half tick above wrestling fans</p>	<p>Dracula's feathered-hair manslave Advantage: Fright Night</p>
--	--

STAKES

<p>Championship title Advantage: Fight Night</p>	<p>Mostly wooden</p>
--	----------------------

WINNER: FIGHT NIGHT

Our *Fight* or *Fright* response: The only thing that sucks more than *Fright Night* vampires is *Fright Night* itself! Take that Chris Sarandon, wherever you are.



EGM RETRO:

TWENTY (REALLY RAD) YEARS OF ZELDA

Take a historic stroll with Nintendo's happy little elf

Can you believe that Nintendo's *The Legend of Zelda* series turns the big two-oh this year? Not only does that put Link and crew in a select group (after 20 years, the series is still considered cool), but it also divides gamers along a sharp line of mortality. You little squirts who weren't even born when the original game came out ain't got nothing on us old-timers who swapped Triforce tips between classes in high school. Still, we can all join together and agree on one important issue: *Twilight Princess* won't be in our GameCubes soon enough.

—Jeremy Parish



NOW IT IS THE BEGINNING OF A FANTASTIC STORY!

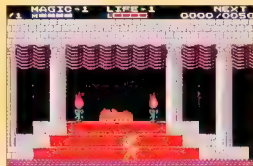
The original *Legend of Zelda* first appeared Feb. 21, 1986 on the Famicom Disk System (the floppy-drive add-on for the Japanese version of the NES). The U.S. version appeared a few months later and innovated straight out of the gate, by necessity: It was the first game to feature a built-in lithium battery to save game progress, since American cartridges couldn't be rewritten like Japan's FDS diskettes. Incredibly enough, many copies of *Zelda* still have functional batteries, outlasting Nintendo's estimated life span by a good 15 years. (If only Dreamcast VMU batteries had been so resilient.)



PLAY THAT FUNKY MUSIC, WHITE BOYS

Nintendo certainly had some...uh, interesting ideas about how to sell the original *Zelda* to American kids who had never seen anything like it. We can get behind the "Never-ending adventure" tagline; back in 1986, *Zelda* really *did* seem impossibly huge. But the pencil-necked doofus wandering through shadowy corridors calling out for *Zelda*? Sorry, dude, if it were that easy to find the princess, the quest would hardly be "never-ending," ya know?

Still, that's nothing compared to the other *Zelda* commercial, featuring two completely unflinching white guys rapping about how the game was, yes, "really rad." Shockingly, the ad campaign was a complete failure, and the game sold quite well despite Nintendo's best efforts to make it look utterly uncool. Don't take our word for it, though—check out the commercials for yourself at our new sister website, gamevideos.com. Word...to your mother.



PUTTING THE ACTION IN ADVENTURE

Zelda II: The Adventure of Link was released in Japan less than a year later, in January of 1987. However, mysterious "chip shortages" prevented the game from reaching the U.S. until late 1988. While many people feel the second game was too dramatic a deviation from the original's RPG-like feel (it emphasized side-scrolling combat and brisk action), many of the game's concepts influenced the later 3D sequels like *Ocarina of Time* (N64).

EXTRACURRICULAR EXPERIENCES

Zelda has put in an impressive showing on portable systems, with no fewer than four top-notch handheld adventures to date (plus the original *Four Swords*, which debuted as a bonus feature in the GBA remake of *A Link to the Past*). But not many people realize that Nintendo was responsible for only one of these games, 1994's *Link's Awakening* on the old green-screened Game Boy. The rest have been the handiwork of external developers such as Capcom and Flagship, which did a bang-up job of keeping the games lively without straying too far from *Zelda*'s basics.

Their work has certainly been a vast improvement over the first set of *Zeldas* to come from the outside: the infamously horrible CD-i trilogy of *Faces of Evil*, *Wand of Gamelon*, and *Zelda's Adventure*. A frightful example of contractual obligation in action, the CD-i games were the fallout of Nintendo's decision to bail on its Play Station deal with Sony and support the CD-i platform instead.

It's difficult to truly understand how terrible these games really are without seeing the clunky gameplay and spastic cinematic animations. Try to imagine that Link had a face-first run-in with a bag of ugly before being tasered into an epileptic state. Then visualize how his twitching would look when drawn in crayon by a hyperactive 3-year-old. Holding the crayon in his mouth. Got it? OK, now, the CD-i games look kind of like that, except much worse.





LINK TO THE SOMETHING SOMETHING

Does the *Legend of Zelda* tell one big story, or are there just a bunch of Links running around who happen to make a hobby out of rescuing princesses named Zelda from pigmen named Ganon? Unfortunately, Nintendo's stance on the issue could best be described as "ambivalent." Yet whether or not you want to connect the dots across every single game, we're positive that certain titles are related.

Zelda II (NES) starred the same Link who appeared in the original, except all grown up; likewise, *Link's Awakening* (GB) depicted the further adventures of the star of *A Link to the Past* (SNES). And while *Wind Waker's* (GC) Link was an untested child, he followed in the footsteps of "the Hero of Time"—that is, the Link from *Ocarina of Time* and *Majora's Mask* (N64). Oh, and the remaining games (*Oracle's*, *Four Swords*, and *Minish Cap*) seem to be interconnected as well due to the presence of the evil sorcerer Vaati and the priestesses Farore, Din, and Naryu.



Need an even bigger fix of *Zelda* nostalgia? Check out zelda20th.1UP.com for all the reminiscing you can handle on an empty stomach.

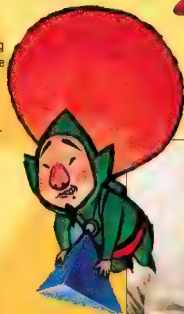
CREDIT WHERE CREDIT'S DUE

Psst! Hey, Nintendo fanboy! Yeah, you over there in the 1-Up mushroom T-shirt. You've gotta stop telling your friends how legendary designer Shigeru Miyamoto (top right) is the sole guiding vision for the *Zelda* games, because he really isn't. Not these days, at least. The franchise's future is in the hands of a guy named Eiji Aonuma (bottom right), who is currently working on *Twilight Princess* and has directed every console *Zelda* since *Majora's Mask*. Miyamoto serves as producer, which is a lot less hands-on.

Still, Mario's maker is the man behind the original *Zelda*. We're told that Miyamoto's inspiration for the game's vast overworld and labyrinthine dungeons was a real-life experience: As a child, he stumbled across a series of caves in the Japanese countryside and spent a summer slowly exploring them.

Zelda's gameplay, though totally unique for its time, was in some ways like a more sophisticated version of Atari's *Adventure*. And *Adventure* was, in turn, a visual remake of Will Crowther's *Colossal Cave*...which, by chance, was a text-based computer game inspired by Crowther's love of exploring caves. We're pretty sure the giant one-eyed crabs and the deranged old men handing out swords to passersby were entirely Miyamoto's invention, though.

Anyway, what this ultimately means is that you should probably blame Aonuma for creepy, middle-aged, fairy-wannabe Tingle, who made his debut in *Majora's Mask*. ☘



OLD SCHOOL

10 years ago in EGM

On the Cover: Virtua Fighter 3

During our interview with VF3 (Arcade) headman Yu Suzuki, we asked hard-hitting questions such as, "The graphics are approaching movie quality, aren't they?" and the favorite, "Will there be a change in the operating system, like, more buttons?"



Game of the Month: Resident Evil (PS1)

The first game in this celebrated franchise went home with a Gold Award that month. One of our reviewers called *RE* "an interesting graphic adventure loaded with puzzles." Thank goodness someone came up with calling the genre "survival-horror," because "graphic adventure" just sounds stupid.

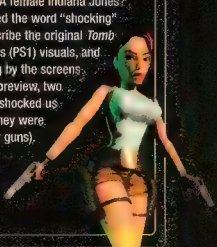
Happy 8th Birthday to Us!

As the staff reflected on 82 issues, they couldn't give a reason for why the folks before them put Fabio on *EGM's* third-ever cover. And time hasn't helped solve the mystery, either—as issue #203 goes to bed, we're still scratching our heads about this utterly disturbing cover choice.



Hey, It's a Lady!

What? A female Indiana Jones? We used the word "shocking" to describe the original *Tomb Raider's* (PS1) visuals, and judging by the screens in our preview, two things shocked us (hint: they were not her guns).



FINAL WORD

Metal Gear Solid 3: Controversy Never Dies

Here at *EGM*, we don't fight over girls or sports teams or cars. We fight over videogames.

With our recent reviews of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* (last issue's Game of the Month), the fierce inbraffics arguing flared up again. In one corner, you have insane *MGS3* fans Shane Bettenhausen (previews editor) and Bryan Intihar (news editor). In the other corner, you have a more reasonable and levelheaded crew (guess which side wrote this intro?) in Dan "Shoe" Hsu (editor-in-chief) and Mark MacDonald (executive editor), who appreciate *Subsistence* but don't think it's all that, much less Game of the Month material. Here are excerpts from a recent lunchtime conversation, which you can catch on an upcoming episode of *The 1UP Show* (the1UPshow.1UP.com).

Control issues

Mario: All right, so nobody is disputing that *Subsistence* overall is a really awesome package—a better version of the original. But online...here's my biggest problem: Why is shooting not on a trigger or shoulder button like in every single other game? You have to take your thumb off of aiming to shoot.

Shane: It shoots like the single-player game.

Mario: You think the control is better with the shooting on the Square button instead of a shoulder button? And shooting seems to be either a no-skill automatic thing, or you have to aim every single shot.

Bryan: I'm not saying it's better, but I'm saying it works. And I'm so used to playing *Metal Gear*, it wasn't confusing to me at all.

Shane: Is the online perfect? No. Would I give the online game itself a 10? No. But it's fun, we had a good time, and I would play it again...

Mario: This reminds me of when *MGS3* first came out. All three of us were on the review, and I was the sole guy who said the camera was screwed up—that the camera would be better being this other way. And your answer to that: "Oh, it wouldn't be *Metal Gear* then."

Shane: I don't remember that.

Deathmatch for babies

Mario: How many times did you come in first in deathmatch?

Shane: A lot. I routinely came in first.

Mario: So did Bryan and here's how: by running around, using the autoaim with the little submachine gun. He never stopped moving; he just ran around using the autoaim, like "buddabuddabudda!" He never aimed a single shot...

Bryan: Yeah, I did! Head shots!

Shoe: By accident.

Mario: You're OK with just running around and holding down the Square button and shooting somebody?

Bryan: No, I would go to first-person mode—I did it up from the rooftops, sniping people in first-person mode and getting head shots. And I also spent five times as many hours practicing, getting used to that. Of course you guys aren't going to be as good as I!

Mario: It's not that. Once I'd figured out the little autoaim thing, I was right neck and neck with you. So, however many hours or whatever that you played, I was neck and neck with you just running around holding down the Square button...

Shoe: I played that same way....

Mario: When I finally figured out, "Oh, so that's how this works: You just autoaim." F** going into first-person and actually trying to use skill; I'll just f**in' sit here and shoot s**.

Shoe: I tried playing it all different ways. I used the claymore mines; I was sniper at one point. But after awhile, I was getting first place just running around shooting....

Shane: You guys make it sound like it's this dumb game. It's not. Once, we were playing a sneaking mission, and I set up this huge trap for Bryan. I set up all these mines; I was waiting there in first-person

mode to shoot him, and it completely worked. That's the "awesome moment" you guys talk about in *Splinter Cell*. That same thing happens here. There's strategy.

OK, you brought up Splinter Cell

Shoe: How could you possibly like *MGS* online so much but not want to touch *Splinter Cell*

Pandora Tomorrow or *Chaos Theory* or *Halo 2*? All of those other games are better in all respects than multiplayer *Metal Gear*.

Bryan: My problem is that I'm not really good at *Halo 2*. I also prefer the *Metal Gear* universe. I'm not saying I don't like [the other games]. I'm saying that I like what *Metal Gear* offers as well. Honestly, it's more accessible—

Shoe: Oh, no.

Bryan:—I think it's more accessible.

Shoe: Oh, no as much as, like, *Halo*.

Bryan: Oh, no, no, no, definitely not. First-person shooters are more pick-up-and-play.

Shane: I had less trouble playing *Splinter Cell* [online than *Subsistence*].

Bryan: No, not me.

Shoe: It's easier to control than *Metal Gear*. In *MGS3* you have to hold down three buttons to get precise first-person, down-the-barrel shooting. Or you can run around in third person and aim toward another character's general direction. When you hit someone, they can't react after I run around fast enough.

Mario: That's another thing. When you're running and you start getting shot in the back, you don't have time to turn around or dive away—you're going to get killed.

Bryan: It's the same in a first-person shooter! If you're

shot from behind, you're screwed.

Shane: You need to dive.

Mario: In *Halo* you could throw a grenade, or in *Splinter Cell* you have a good chance of getting away. In *Metal Gear*, it wasn't worth it to turn and fight or do anything; you just kept running and tried to get around the corner.

Inanity defense

Shane: You know, I think we don't love *Metal Gear* online as much as you think we do. And you guys don't really hate it as much as you're acting like you do. You're acting like it's s** and it's not.

Shoe: I don't like it.

Mario: I think you guys don't play these kinds of games so much, so you get something and you're like, "Oh, this something is really cool." I see it more like, "Cool, this game looks this good, and it has potential."

Shane: I had less trouble playing *Splinter Cell* [online than *Subsistence*].

Bryan: Shoe, you just played a day. That would be like me playing *Pandora Tomorrow* for two hours and saying it was crap....

Shoe: I could tell *Pandora Tomorrow* was awesome within the first hour.

Shane: It's not like Bryan and I are trumpeting this as the best online game of the year....

Bryan: And we're not saying this is more revolutionary than *Splinter Cell*'s multiplayer, but it is more accessible.

Shoe: Didn't you think it was clunky, though? **Shane:** The controls are very precise. It's very complex; there are a lot of buttons....

Shoe: It's not complex; it's just unnecessarily clunky. I'll play *Halo 2* or *Splinter Cell*....

Shane: It's comparable. It's more complex and not as fast, but you're in complete control. You guys make it sound like the gameplay is just shooting.... *Metal Gear* online is by far the greatest PS2 game of all time.

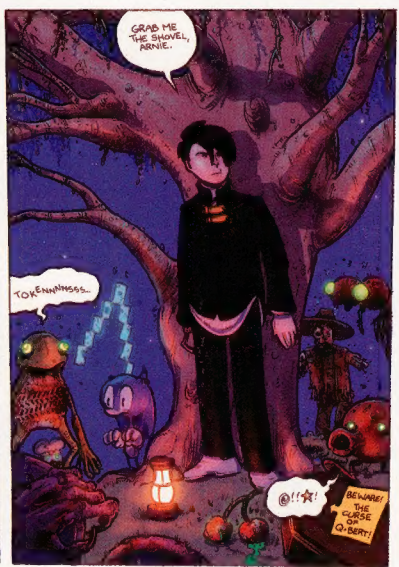
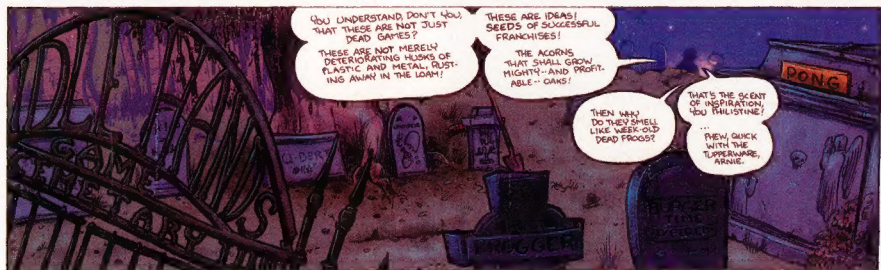
Mario: So if you had mediocre gravy put on a delicious steak, would you be happy?

Shoe: We can get into an entirely different discussion about the offline core game....

Shane: I don't really wanna talk about *Metal Gear* with you anymore. I don't wanna talk about *Metal Gear* ever again. You people....

Mario: [Laughs] ♫

"If you had mediocre gravy put on a delicious steak, would you be happy?"



THE 1UP SHOW

★★★★★

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Nothing comes close. I can't get enough. I wish it was released daily.

★★★★★

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