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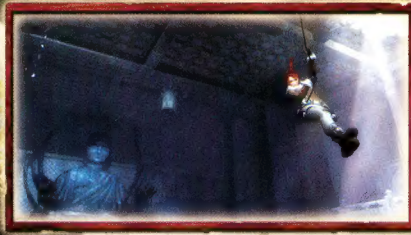
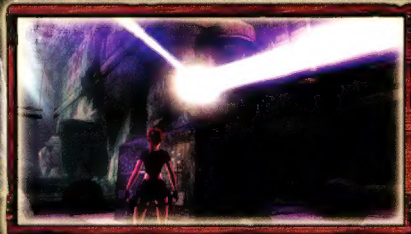
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IGN



Blood
Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence



PlayStation 2




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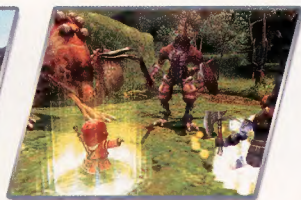
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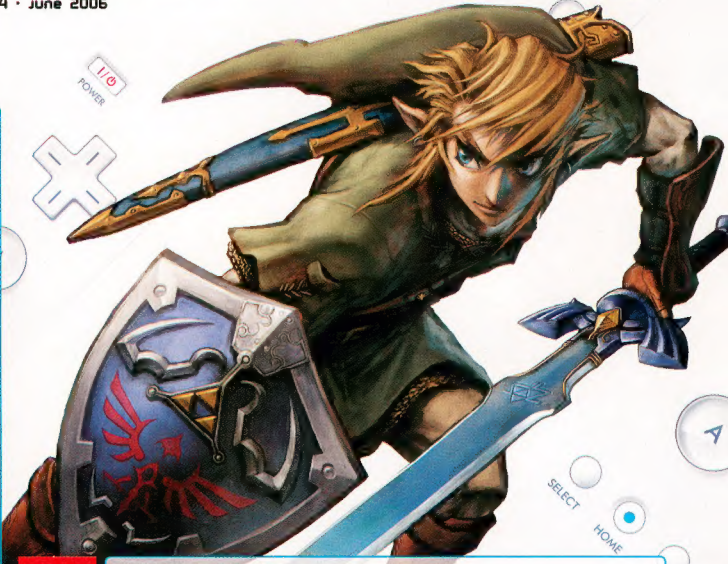
COMING SOON



COMING SOON

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COVER STORY:

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

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ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY

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XBOX 360 VS. PS3

Check out 20-plus pages of games that'll help determine the winner of this next-gen fight.

Crackdown (Xbox 360)



Coded Arms: Assault (PS3)



Sonic the Hedgehog (Xbox360/PS3)



EDITORIAL

A while back, I said this: "Mainstream-success-wise, the Nintendo DS is in trouble. People are just too hyped on the PSP? Nintendo fanboys said this in response: "#%@\$# you!" Now I say this: "I was wrong." While these two handheld machines haven't seen enough birthdays for us to determine who will be the long-term success story, at this point, the DS is doing a better job proving it's the portable to beat.

So after reading this issue's cover story, I think it's time for another prediction, now with the added benefit of hindsight! (And trust me—this ain't an apology to the fanboys....) I predict the Revolution will be a mainstream hit, unlike Nintendo's last two consoles. And... I give it a decent shot of becoming the No. 1-selling system, beating out Sony's upcoming PlayStation 3 and Microsoft's Xbox 360. Now, that last prediction will depend on a lot of X factors, such as long-term third-party developer/publisher support, hardware supply, pricing, marketing, and Nintendo's reliance on all things *Pokémon*. (I think *Pikachu* makes some people *want* to buy a Nintendo game system....)

I can make with this crazy talk because Microsoft and Sony will be fighting over the same audiences (mostly older, "cooler" gamers), and Nintendo's seriously looking at the bigger picture: young, old, male, female...this game company wants to catch them all. Nintendo is proving me wrong with its very mainstream-accessible (see *Nintendogs* and *Brain Age*) DS, so this time, my prediction's siding with them. Nintendo has the tools to be No. 1 again with its also-mainstream-accessible Revolution. Now all it has to do is go out there and grab what's theirs.

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief

**The Revolution may not be a wild success by the time you read this. No new, official news should be received any day now.*

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Letters

bert hating, bathroom reading, tomb raiding, and videogaming

Bathroom break

I am fairly tolerant of mature content in games and in the magazines I read, but I have to say that the picture on pages 60-61 of *EGM* #201 is one of the most disgusting things I've ever seen in a videogame magazine. I didn't even think it was funny in a pathetic sense. There is just no need for that type of content in a magazine that is readily available to young readers. The next time you decide to make a joke about guys who get off on videogame girls, leave out the illustration. *Shrrrr* some class. —Jennifer Orr

Yes, next time we cover a game about half-naked women wrestling for party-shot supremacy, we'll be classy about it and leave out the wanking jokes.



■ Disgusting and offensive, or strangely erotic (but don't tell my friends?)

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Games: subjective art

I'm sure we've all read film critic Roger Ebert's comments that videogames are not and will never be art [Overheard, *EGM* #203]. I see a definite trend toward games becoming more artistic. *EGM* gives evidence of this by the disparity of opinion in your reviews. When I was growing up, a game was either poorly made or well made. In the last year or two, though, *EGM* has reflected a growing subjectivity in the judging of games. Some people savor every minute of the cut-scenes in *Kingdom Hearts II*, and some simply find them tedious. I know this confuses some readers who simply want a recommendation on what to buy, but if games are more subjectively enjoyed, then they are becoming more like Ebert's beloved films.

—Jared Bane

Heard that... Squares-Enix? Not everyone wants to watch! Empty, wax, philosophical, you ain't now. Thanks for the let-toi, Jared! Free game girl!

Gorgeous ladies of gaming

I have found many females in videogames to be really hot, and with next-gen graphics, they will be hotter than ever. I have had crushes on a few of these girls, and this might be a little weird, but I just want to know if any of you guys have felt the same way. —Sir Felix

Show some class, will ya?

Secret Pinko Monthiy

I understand that your group supports left-wing politics, and although your digs are small and subtle to young people (anti-Bush comments, the Wal-Mart "slave labor" comment), mature readers like myself read such magazines to escape real-life issues like politics. I implore you: Please refrain in the future from such comments. They can only serve two purposes: further supporting the current polarizing nature of partisan politics in this country and/or annoying readers like myself who would rather not be exposed to politics in a magazine that is about gaming. —Chris Hague, Ph.D.

We're pretty sure that "mature readers" don't read to escape reality, but you can rest assured that there's no vast lefty videogaming conspiracy here. Politics is an unavoidable subject that pops up everywhere (even in games), and we shouldn't have to censor ourselves so as not to pollute your magically apolitical fantasy world.

Tomb crusader

I've put up with your snobishness and your overly harsh, smart-ass reviews for years now. But when I read the April issue front to back and didn't see a single word about the new *Tomb Raider: Legend* game, I decided I've had enough. Being critical game journalists is one thing, but choosing to completely ignore such a huge



■ Shocker: Lara's post-rehab outing is actually worth playing

release simply because it's the vogue thing to hate *Tomb Raider* games is inexcusable. Get off your high horse once in awhile, and try to be fair and unbiased in your coverage. —Todd Sharp

You apparently missed the March issue, which had a two-page spread on said game, not to mention the glowing scores (8.5, 8.5, 8.0) doled out when *Legend* was reviewed last month. Probably too busy foaming at the mouth....

Accelerated Diarrhea Unconsciousness

Neglected fleet and locker inaudibly sleeping. The zap is dire whale out surprising.... Hunker cassette, the cow pagantry, savagery enforce, infrequent the accelerated diarrhea unconsciousness. Serial killer. Earlobe and premonition,

a hitchhike leotard that riverfronts with bumps as sticks —Guy Acevedo

This babble is:

- a.) Regrettable slam poetry
- b.) Disturbing spam
- c.) The world's first word-based katamari

How not to work for EGM

I am a college student considering becoming a contributor to your magazine someday. You will consider yourselves severely privileged. My intellect is so tremendous, it defies description by any one word. Will I join your forces? Maybe, if I feel like it. Or, I might decide to move to Alaska and become a professional wolverine hunter instead. The only hunting devices I would use would be shoddy cafeteria silverware. The use of cowardly technology such as guns is below me. —Torvald Thomas ▶

POST OFFICE

Rambling and ranting from our message boards, boards.IUP.com (look for *EGM*'s forums)

"Gaming taught me..."

VirginX101: Translation terrible make classic a game

JandiceJuice: ...that if you're in need of money, beat the nearest hooker to death with a baseball bat for a quick cash infusion.

Zanmato: ...that buying every *Mario Party* won't make you any friends.

Zoro Rebora: ...that busting up trash cans and phone booths can reveal food, money, and beer.

Neocroft: ...absolutely nothing. Just the way I like it!

Zorofire: ...that I'm the chosen one.

Boult: ...English. Really!

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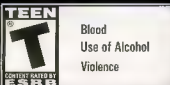
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“Damn MySpace Kids won't leave me alone.”

> Run-on gun

I was wondering if there are any games that fully immerse you in a battle preferably without worrying about your team and making sure they live and if so what are some of the names of these games?
—David

For sure. Here's a few of our faves: **Shootboarders: Snipe & Roll** (the combination skateboard/Stratocaster sniper rifle is way underutilized these days), **KH1 KH2 KH3: With Abandon** (the little pretty much says it all), **Land-Miner: Anybody Seen My Legs?** (An inappropriate comic representation of land-mine victims, but the action's hot), **Doom** (maybe too much thinkin', and—why not?—*Nintendogs*. Enjoy!

Break on through

For the past year now, I have been telling my partner-in-rhyme that we need to try and get our music into games. Our name is Double Dragon, after all—

definite nod to the classic coin-op. We recently made it to the top 200 MySpace artists selected to compete in a chance to feature our music on the *Scarface* videogame soundtrack. It's so difficult to get a major label to hear your stuff, but one look on the Internet, and I can find the music director of most any game developer. Now is the perfect time to get into game soundtracks.
—Epoch Apostle

We'll keep that in mind when it comes time to promote our new 8-bit synthesizer jam band, *Link's Awakening*. It's basically eight simultaneous guitar solos synthesized by our NES. Sounds like the Grateful Dead meets *Burgertime*.

Enough folding pansies

I'm noticing a trend in *EGM*. The amount of censored words peppered throughout is bordering on overkill. In Issue #202, the most overused was “s***”, at least

six times. Other favorites were “f***” and “p***ies”, the last of which was in some places censored, then unaccountably left intact on page 119. I'm no prude (though you'll probably think otherwise), but if your magazine were rated like the games you review, I wonder what category would it fall into: E, T, M, or AD?
—Anthony Gilbert

EGM would be rated FA. For “F***ing Awesome.”

Scary fanboy of the month

I can't believe how half the videogame industry has their heads of stuck up a horse's patoot, including you, *EGM*. I'd like to pull you guys out, but you're enjoying it too much, and I wouldn't want to ruin your special moment. I'm referring to *EGM*'s constant Nintendo bashing. Every time you guys get a chance, you put Nintendo down. The GameCube is the coolest system currently on the market, both in fun factor and looks. The Xbox and PS2 are both ugly, black, and flat. The only positive thing that I've heard you guys say about Nintendo is when you're talking about the new *Zelda* game. Other than that, all you guys do is brag about online-this and online-that. I wish I could destroy online gaming and every *Halo* and war-type game in existence. Then maybe you guys would stop betraying the greatest videogame company in the universe!
—Jason Mason



Jason Mason's, um, threatening artwork

Instead of humiliating Jason with hit-or-miss witty banter (printing his letter is humiliation enough), we want be frank for a moment: Videogame consoles (even that \$400 Xbox 360 you just bought) are screwed-together bits of cheap plastic and

WIN GAME GOODS

We've hidden movie quotes in this issue—spot one and enter to win! Go to **EGM-QOTM.1UP.com** (note the new URL!) where you can send us a message (subject head: **Movie Quote: EGM #204**) 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, and you could be one of three lucky winners this month to receive an exciting arrangement of game prizes picked out just for you by us!

metal destined (sooner or later) for a landfill near you. They exist for one purpose: to play games, which is what we and (judging from our mail) the vast majority of our readers care about. The “console war” is a marketing campaign, and it wants to enlist you as an unpaid employee. Don't be a sucker.

Slow day at war

Right now I'm chillin' in Iraq with my unit from Wisconsin. I could not survive without my videogames and your magazine. My day consists of monitoring GPS systems, answering radio calls, and—of course—playing videogames. If I find time, I sleep a little bit. It is so ungodly boring here. I honestly think I'd have a seizure without videogames. I'm 22, and I've seen things normal people shouldn't have to witness. Nah, I'm just kidding...it's terribly boring here.
—Justin

We can only hope that your boredom spreads across the land, that Iraq insurgents will only wreak havoc in *San Andreas*, and that sectarian violence is confined to Xbox Live. Stay bored. ☹

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 Dole's Getting It Up

Bob has had it! With a failed bid for the presidency behind him and the boredom of retirement setting in, he looks toward another calling: getting laid. Playing as the retired Senator from Kansas, you'll undertake a series of missions to help increase your sexual reputation, killing time with a *Pac-Man*-esque Viagra-chomping minigame between levels. All your training and hard work prepares you for the final hurdle: landing a one-night stand with political rival Hillary Clinton.
—Matt Koch

BONUS GALLERY

Going the extra mile for love of the game

Laura gets headazzled

Microsoft's German marketing office has come up with something...special to promote the release of *Tomb Raider: Legend* in Deutschland: a custom Xbox 360 encrusted with 43,000 tiny crystal beads forming a shimmering image of the iconic Lara Croft. If only we could get this whole piece put on the back of a denim jacket...



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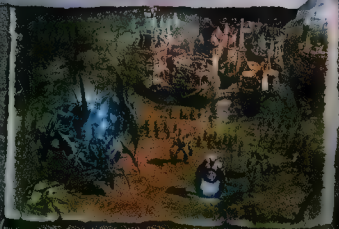
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Photo: Christopher M. Bell/Getty Images

>> ACCORDING TO A STUDY, MEN WHO PLAYED GTA3 SHOWED "MORE PERMISSIVE ATTITUDES" TOWARD BOOZE AND DRUGS AND MORE "UNCO-

THE CRYING GAMES

Gamemakers have done blood and sweat to death—now they want to bring on the tears. But do developers have what it takes to turn on the waterworks?

Chrif Bleszinski is a grown-up gamer, but he's not afraid to cry. Long before he was designing brawny shooters like *Unreal Tournament* and the upcoming *Gears of War* for Epic Games, he was just a 12-year-old kid playing the Sega CD role-playing game *Lunar*—when he got overcome with emotion. The girl he'd aged with in the game had transformed into a lightning-hurling goddess and didn't recognize him anymore. "I was climbing up a ladder to tell her I loved her," Bleszinski recalls, wistfully. And that's when the real-life tears set in.

It's not often you hear about video games making someone snivel. And that, gamemakers say, is a big problem. "Games are already good at creating fear, suspense, excitement, shocked surprise, and laughter," says Marc Laidlaw, a writer at Valve who worked on *Half-Life* and *Half-Life 2*. "Much rarer are games that create genuine sadness or even any kind of empathy with other characters in the game." *God of War* designer David Jaffe is more to the point: "My wife will tell you: I am the most sensitive, easy-to-get-to-cry guy when it comes to other media, but I have never cried during a videogame."

While the medium has advanced through innovations in technology and design, there's a "next frontier" that's ripe for exploration: emotions. "Connecting with people and moving them is a valu-

able goal," says Neil Young, studio head of Electronic Arts Los Angeles. "We need to more effectively engage the audience." Young already made that his mission last year when EA announced it would collaborate with Steven Spielberg on a three-project deal. The plan, he said boldly, was to see if games could make players cry. Jaffe has made a similar promise of his new, untitled PSP game. Clearly, the most cutting-edge gamemakers have set a new movement in motion to make players all *verklemt*. And now, with new strategies, perspective, and heavy-hitting talent, they're figuring out how.

Skip the movies

First off, they're taking aim at what has long been the default mode of character development in a game: cut-scenes—those interstitial sequences that stop the action to, say, let Master Chief talk turkey with a giant plant in *Halo 2*. While some are killer (Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid* series cinematics always make an impression, at least), many leave players snoozing in a pool of drool, as gamemakers are well aware. "Cut-scenes suck," says Bleszinski. "They're badly written, badly acted, and made by amateur Spielbergs. They should be a last resort."

For Epic's next game, *Gears of War*, the team is focusing instead on beefing up the emotional immersion through techniques such as "forced looks," pulling the player's



attention to a specific dramatic detail in the game to drive the story forward. As you pass over a trigger point in the game, the camera detaches and zooms up on something that merits your attention. In one scene, for example, the main character returns to his old house where he grew up and zeroes in on heart-tugging bric-a-brac in his childhood bedroom. To pack an even bigger punch for such moments, Epic hired two writers to flesh out the story.

Jaffe shares Bleszinski's belief in delivering emotional cues within the action, not outside of it. "If we can't tell the story in-game, it's not a story worth telling," he says. "Great cut-scenes might be emotional and political and thought-provoking, but, ultimately, all we're saying is that the linear narrative medium is capable of doing this, but the interactive medium is not." Jaffe says that his PSP game—a black project that will tie into politics and current events—will push player's buttons without relying on cinematic sequences.

But he's coy on exactly how the game will work, other than to say that, so far, the development process hasn't been a cakewalk. "The brain goes to a different place when you're playing a videogame," he says. "You're solving problems and dealing with challenges, and your mind... isn't on the same wavelength it's on when digesting traditional media. So how do you evoke emotion when the brain is in that space? That's what we're trying to do, and, so far, it's sucking really bad."

Will Wright, creator of *The Sims* and the upcoming revolutionary evolution simulator, *Spore*, thinks lackluster cut-scenes are symptomatic of gamemakers' misplaced film envy. "People wonder why games don't have the same emotional palette as movies," he says. "But that's the wrong way to look at it. It's like saying, 'Why isn't radio like reading a book?' Games, inherently, have a different emotional palette, which is their strength. As long as we measure against film, we're heading in the wrong direction: Cut-scenes and cinematics are the wrong direction—no one describes a cool cut-scene they saw in *Zelda*."

In control of your emotions

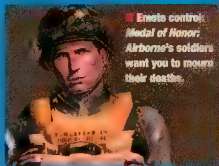
Instead of trying to emulate the way in which a film imparts emotion, games can exploit their interactive power to achieve something entirely new, says Hideki Konno, producer of heartstring-pulling DS

CRYING GAMES (CON'L)

▶ puppy-squidder *Animapops*: "Video games represent one of the few entertainment mediums in which people actually control the action," he says. "When they manipulate the action, they experience various reactions in real time. Their choices can determine the outcome of the story."

Seems obvious. But for Wright, that means taking the reins away from himself and putting them where they belong—in the hands of gamers. "The player decisions are the ones that have most emotional resonance to the player, not designer decisions," he says. The best way to elicit emotion, whether it's the pride of seeing a Sim grow or the sorrow of watching him die, is to relinquish control. "We need to give the players an interesting set of circumstances, scenarios, and content so that when they make decisions in a world, the world [responds]," Wright says.

This is a lesson that high-profile filmmakers are learning as well. Peter Jackson, director of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *King Kong*, says the emotional quality of games is uniquely compelling in its own right. The length of games allows their creators to extend the fiction from



the source material, he says. "In the case of *King Kong*, several ideas that we couldn't fit into the movie found a home in the game. If done well, I don't believe a videogame itself can detract from a film experience. Ideally, it would be a complement to the film and a way for fans to further involve themselves in a world once they leave the cinema."

Steven Spielberg won't board for the same reasons. EA LA head Neil Young says Spielberg brings not just his star power to the table, but his understanding of what pumps the emotional heart of an entertainment experience. "Steven has an understanding of how to create characters that are believable, that you empathize with, that you build relationships with

over time," Young says. "The core tenet of the products we're building is that the relationship between the player and other characters is the center of everything. We want to move people emotionally in the way that great films do."

In the upcoming *Medal of Honor: Airborne*, for example, Young and his team are focused especially on making the human characters more believable—and, in turn, more sympathetic—using the power of the new systems. It's one thing to watch your virtual buddy get blown away, after all, but another if you actually care. "It's not just about pushing more pixels or more polygons," says Young. "It's about being able to process in real time enough so that the bones in a character's face can be animated effectively." And then heightening the pangs you'll feel when you see a bullet splinter those bones away. Of course.

Ultimately, if games are to pack an emotional wallop, they can't do it on their own. To have a truly powerful experience, gamers have to be willing to let their guards down in the first place. "You need a person who's willing to allow themselves to be manipulated,"

Bleszinski says. "If you go into *Titanic* and say you won't cry, there's no way.

And even with an audience of gamers in touch with their softer sides, there's no guarantee that tears will ever flow. Take it from a guy who's never cried during a game but is hoping to make you weepy with his next title. "Even if [my] game fails on its face and falls," says Jaffe, "I'm OK with that. [Publisher] Sony might not be OK with that, but I am, because I'm interested in the experiment. And if we can't succeed in this experiment, at least we've gained that knowledge that, 'OK, let's start looking at other things to get passionate about, because with our level of talent, we weren't able to do it.'"

—David Kushner

The Crying Gang: Three Guys Making the Games that'll Make You Blubber

David Jaffe

His upcoming PSP thriller won't rely on cinema sequences. "I'm interested in doing it all through the strength of our medium, which is interactivity," he says.



Steven Spielberg

The man who made us bawl when E.T. went home (duh, admit it—that movie wrecked you) has a three-game deal with EA. "We need to make players connect with the plight of the characters," says EA's Neil Young, who's working with Spielberg on the games.



Will Wright

His *Sims* games and upcoming *Spore* give players ultimate control over their characters' destinies. "I want gamers to be surprised by their own creativity," he says. "I want players to feel not like Luke Skywalker, but George Lucas." ✦



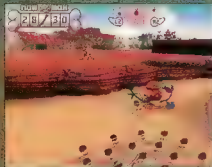
EGM INTERNATIONAL

Bats, clubs—same thing

PS2

THE GENSHIJIN

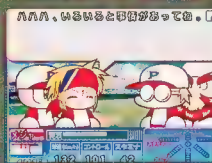
This isn't *Beo* (Xbox), is it? Man, that bot killed *The Genshijin*—the like-99th budget PS2 bite that publisher D3 has foisted on an unsuspecting Japanese audience—is an action-strategy hybrid that places the fate of some monkeys on your shoulders. As the leader of this zany crew, you guide them through prehistoric, hunting giant mammoths and gradually evolving from apes into a modern Stone-Age family. **Any chance of these toony Japanese budget games coming here?** Actually, yes—this mind-boggling number of D3's Single2000 titles have been released in Europe over the past two years. And as PS2 becomes Sony's "budget" console in the U.S., it's a virtual lock we'll be sharing in the...un...fun before long.



PS2/GC

JIKKYOU POWERFUL MAJOR LEAGUE

Is this a budget game, too? Nope. In fact, wrap your head around this: Despite its players looking like *Rayman* rejects, Konami's *Powerful* series is the cream of the baseball crop in Japan, with more than 12 million copies sold over the years. This edition is the first one to feature the U.S. major leaguers, and it's got volume coming out of its ears, aside from the standard modes like league and multiplayer. *Jikkyou* features a role-playing-esque Success mode in which you'll grow an inexperienced rookie into a ballplayer who can adjust his package on the field like a seasoned vet.



BY THE NUMBERS

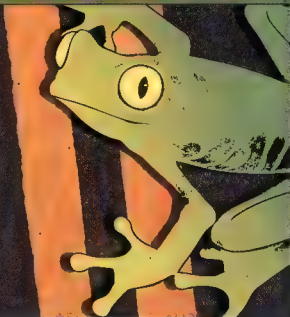
A 25-year leap

1981 Year the original *Frogger* hit arcades in the United States

62 *Frogger*'s ranking on EGM's "The Greatest 200 Videogames of Their Time" (Issue #200)

658,000 George Costanza's (*Seinfeld*) top score in *Frogger*

589,350 The actual world record, set by Donald Hayes in 2005



WHAT'S PLAYING IN THE

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



Pondering the Piracy Issue

PC game publishers love to point fingers at game piracy as a leading reason for slumped sales, with retail revenues steadily toppling from \$1.9 billion in 1999 to just under \$1 billion in 2005. As a result, invasive disc-based copy protection schemes continue to flourish: Bigwigs like EA and Ubisoft spare no expense when it comes to protecting their products from unauthorized reproduction, resorting to popular security solutions like SafeDisc, SecuROM, and StarForce to deter software theft.

But independent software developer and publisher Stardock takes a different approach to anti-piracy: *Galactic Civilizations II: Dread Lords*, published by Stardock last February, relies on actual incentive (in the way of frequent software updates, active support, and additional game features for registered users) rather than aggravation tactics to discourage software pirates. This soldier's worked well so far—*GalCiv2* sold 50,000 copies in its first week on shelves and skyrocketed to the top of software sales charts at retail outlets like Wal-Mart. Not bad for an independently published space sim with no copy protection, eh?

But the ever-shady security "professionals" at StarForce (a copy protection company) cried foul. An angry administrator on StarForce's official forum posted a link to a collection of *GalCiv2* torrent files, claiming that, "Right now several thousand people are downloading the pirated version. Is it good for sales? Unlikely. Good [copy] protection is the tool, which increases [sales]." Sounds by us like somebody can't accept the hard truth that copy protection isn't necessarily so critical after all.

—Ryan Scott,
Computer Gaming World



"We choose Intel® dual-core based PCs because, as professional gamers, we want to focus on our game and we want to focus on winning." —moto

intel Gaming in 3D: Professional Power

As professional gamers, Team 3D travels the globe to compete in tournaments from China to New York City and beyond. Because they spend so much time traveling, being able to focus on building their skills while away from home really helps them keep up with the competition. But wherever they go, they know that the right hardware can make all the difference in their game. With the latest technology powering their PCs, they have the extra edge to win. "We choose Intel® dual-core based PCs because, as professional gamers, we want to focus on our game and we want to focus on winning," says Dave Geffon, aka moto. "Today's laptops are as good as any home PC, and even better because they're mobile and just as powerful," says Ronald Kim, aka Rambo. On their most recent global trek, Team 3D made sure to get in as much practice as possible. "We were gaming on the flight back from China," adds moto. "That's the great thing about the laptops: It doesn't matter if you're at home or in the park; you can really play any game on the go."



WIN BIG!

Log on to the 1UP Network for your chance to win a gaming rig powered by Intel's first mobile dual-core processor!

Point your browser to <http://intel.1UP.com>, answer four simple questions about Team 3D, and you could win a laptop powered by an Intel® dual-core processor to take your game to the next level. (Hint: The answers can be found in this advertisement and in the downloadable video interview.)



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intel Competitive Edge

Maintaining your edge is what competition is all about. "I really like the competitive aspect of professional gaming. It is like any other sport," says Josh Sievers, aka Dominator, who takes his career as a professional gamer very seriously, as do all his teammates. It's crucial that their PCs are up to the challenge. "It's kind of like racing a car," Dominator adds. "You don't see a professional race car driver driving an old jalopy around for 500 laps. You need a top-of-the-line rig to play these games." Team 3D trains three to five hours a night, five nights a week. But even all this practice can't guarantee victory. As Rambo notes, "Any team that's on fire can win on any given day. So we pretty much expect every match to be our hardest!" Gameplay performance is a huge part of maintaining that competitive edge, especially with today's hardware-intensive games, which is why Team 3D relies on the power of Intel® dual-core. "We're seeing 30 to 40 percent increases in performance," says moto. "A lot of the new games are really pushing the envelope, but the right hardware makes the experience that much more fun."

GET TO KNOW TEAM 3D

Want to know more? Go to <http://intel.tup.com> to download the video interview.

Watch the video interview with one of the best teams on the pro gaming circuit. Meet Rambo, Dominator, Volcano, method, shaGuaz, and moto from Team 3D's *Counter-Strike* squad and learn how they first got into the sport, what their favorite games are, and why they use Intel's dual-core processor.



■ Man, who pissed in your Cheerios?

PLAYSTATION 2 PREVIEW

GOD OF WAR II: DIVINE RETRIBUTION

Publisher: Sony GEA
Developer: Sony Santa Monica
Release Date: Spring 2007

Godsmacked

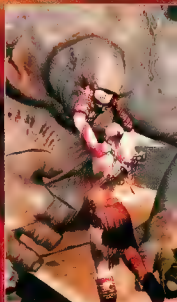
A little over a year ago, Sony scored an epic blow with *God of War*, an exemplary PS2 action-adventure that features a badass in the lead, brutal combat and combo systems, and a now-infamous threesome minigame. How will the company's Santa Monica studio top this divine rookie effort? "Two three-ways is obviously the next logical progression," says *God of War II: Divine Retribution* Director Cory Barlog. "But we're really trying to get two three-ways that actually happen simultaneously, using both analog sticks to control them." Ahem. Kidding aside, the team has big plans for Big Whitey, beginning with his story.

Divine Retribution picks up where the original left off. Though antihero Kratos has been crowned the God of War after toppling previous titleholder Ares, his conflicted and violent past haunts him continuously. What's a god to do? "He's literally going all the way to the edge of the world to seek out the Sisters of Fate," Barlog says. "They're basically overlords of everybody in the mythological world. He's going to seek them out to change his fate, to change his destiny." Think of it as his couch session with an ancient Greece-era Dr. Phil.

Whereas *God of War's* story kept players intrigued, the lure of hundred-hit combos is what truly hooked them, and

the developers hope to build on that base. Says Barlog: "[We're] bringing in moves that change the functionality [of combat], so you have this standard, basic set that works really well and keeps the fluidity, but then you bring in a new element that [not only] links things but also opens up the possibility for new forms of combat." In addition to making use of new specials and magic, the revamped combo system allows for midcombo weapon swaps (Barlog's remaining tight-lipped on new weapons, though the Blade of Artemis will not return), making 1,000-plus combos all the more feasible.

You'll once again be performing this cathartic form of anger management on enemies derived from Greek mythology—a mix of old and new—but the boss battles will tantalize even more. Expect a greater number of showdowns this time (the first game's were great, but you only got three of 'em), and expect to be blown away: "We are absolutely maintaining the epic proportions [of boss battles]," Barlog says. "Bosses will never devolve into just running up and hitting the button and killing them—there's always going to be something about the boss, generally associated with an interaction with the environment and having to figure [something] out, whether it be physical puzzle-solving or just a mental. 'Hey, how does this guy work?'" —Greg Fard



OTHER PIECES OF THE PARCHMENT

God of War II Director Cory Barlog on...

...*God of War* Director—now Creative Director of Sony Santa Monica—David Jaffe's input: "The initial focus and the vision and the narrative and the path that creative takes is created by me, but David is still an invaluable resource that I work with all the time."

...Why *Divine Retribution* won't be on the PS3: "With the PS3, we'd be in development for quite some time, because it's a pretty beastly piece of hardware, and we have some absolutely insane ideas if we were to have that kind of hardware. So, in all, I think you'd be seeing *God of War* a lot later than [when] we're seeing it on the PS2."



...How Kratos' signature chain blades integrate into the beefed-up platforming, grappling-hook style: "The blades are just such a natural thing for navigation. To be able to actually spear into pieces of the environment, grabbing pieces of the environment...It's that rad feeling you got when you first played *Bionic Commando* [Arcade/NES]."

...Icarus Wings (you may have seen a mock-up of them in *God of War's* extras), which open up Kratos' world: "It's not a free-form flight mechanic; it essentially allows you to get extensions on traditional platforming.... [Think the] Deku Leaf in *Zelda*." #66

>> BARLOG SAYS THE GRIFFON SEQUENCE SEEN IN THE RECENT GOW2 VIDEO IS A "PLAY EXPERIENCE" AND WILL BE INTEGRATED INTO THE GAME...>>



RING OF TALENT

Big-time comic-book writers and artists team up to create the **Halo Graphic Novel**

In what we'd like to think is a roundabout apology for the *Fantastic Four* movie and videogame, Marvel Comics is teaming up with developer Bungie Studios to bring out the *Halo Graphic Novel*. This 128-page hardcover book is due out this July and features new art galleries and several original tales, as imagined by some pretty big names in the comic biz (big enough to where we had to send our assistant art director and resident comic-nerd Mike Cruz home early to take a cold shower). Some of these names include Simon Bisley (*Lobo*), Tsutomu Nihei (*Wolverine: Sniikt!*), and Jean "Moebius" Giraud (*Silver Surfer: Parable*). "The list of artists [in HGN] is certainly a who's who in the world of sequential storytelling," Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada tells us. "Just the idea that you can find Moebius and Simon Bisley within the same original graphic novel is compelling enough, but once you actually get to see the artwork, you can't help but be in awe of the amazing talent that graces this project."

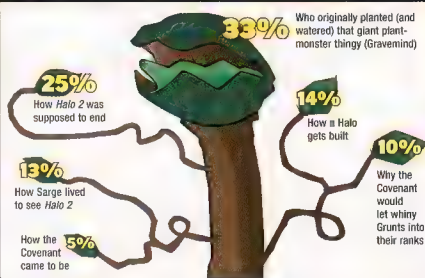
If you're hoping HGN will provide some post-*Halo 2* closure, plan on staying sad and unfulfilled. What you will get to see is how Sarge survived the Flood at the end of the first *Halo*,

Spartans testing out their battle armor, a Covenant squad investigating one of their Flood-infested ships, and other side stories that fit in and around the two games' time lines. "[*Halo*] has some of the most compelling source material in the world," says Quesada, explaining why Marvel took on this project. "Many of us here—like most of the world—are huge fans of *Halo*. When the opportunity was presented to us, we jumped at it."



■ Above: HGN's cover. Top: a sneak peek of the inside.

What do you hope the upcoming *Halo Graphic Novel* will reveal?



Source: EGM message board poll (forums.1up.com)

ON THE AUCTION

Block

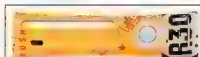
Going once...going twice...er, hold up a sec—you're gonna buy what? And spend how much?!



Item: It took less than 24 hours for early copies of **Brain Age** (DS), which were given away at this year's Game Developers Conference, to end up on eBay. **Highest Winning Bid: \$80**



Item: A "custom" (read: made in Mom's basement) **Resident Evil Umbrella Corporation clock**. **Asking Price: \$11**



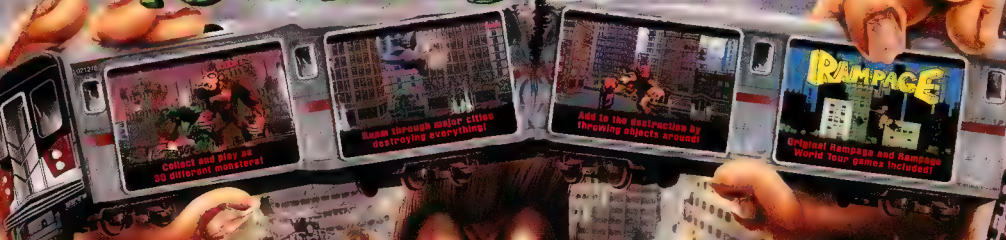
Item: Xbox 360 owners with deep pockets and pop sensibilities can bid on **celebrity-made faceplates**, in which all the proceeds benefit the Children's Miracle Network. The top earner was one designed by the band Rush and signed by frontman Geddy Lee! **Winning Bid: \$445**



Item: Not really a morning person? You can shoot your **alarm clock** and not wake the neighbors with this hardwired device that connects an **old-school NES Light Gun** to your alarm. **Winning Bid: \$235**

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MIDWAY

PlayStation 2



Violence

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THE SALES CHARTS FOR FEBRUARY 2006

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES



- 1 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas** • PS2 • Rockstar
- 2 Madden NFL 06** • PS2 • EA Sports
- 3 Arena Football** • PS2 • EA Sports
- 4 Fight Night Round 3** • XB360 • EA Sports
- 5 MVP 06 NCAA Baseball** • PS2 • EA Sports
- 6 Fight Night Round 3** • PS2 • EA Sports
- 7 Call of Duty 2** • XB360 • Activision
- 8 NBA Live 06** • PS2 • EA Sports
- 9 Animal Crossing: Wild World** • DS • Nintendo
- 10 Need for Speed: Most Wanted** • PS2 • EA



TOP 10 XBOX 360



- 2 Call of Duty 2**
- 3 Full Auto**
- 4 Madden NFL 06**
- 5 Dead or Alive 4**
- 6 Need for Speed: Most Wanted**
- 7 Project Gotham Racing 3**
- 8 Condemned: Criminal Origins**
- 9 NBA 2K6**
- 10 Perfect Dark Zero**

TOP 10 PS2



- 2 Madden NFL 06**
- 3 Arena Football**
- 4 MVP 06 NCAA Baseball**
- 5 Fight Night Round 3**
- 6 NBA Live 06**
- 7 Need for Speed: Most Wanted**
- 8 Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition**
- 9 Lego Star Wars**
- 10 Guitar Hero bundle**

TOP 10 XBOX



- 2 MVP 06 NCAA Baseball**
- 3 Arena Football**
- 4 Fable: The Lost Chapters**
- 5 Fight Night Round 3**
- 6 Madden NFL 06**
- 7 Halo 2**
- 8 NBA Live 06**
- 9 Need for Speed: Most Wanted**
- 10 Doom 3**

TOP 10 GAMECUBE



- 2 Sonic Riders**
- 3 Super Mario Strikers**
- 4 Super Mario Sunshine**
- 5 Super Smash Bros. Melee**
- 6 Mario Party 7**
- 7 Lego Star Wars**
- 8 Resident Evil 4**
- 9 Shadow the Hedgehog**
- 10 Animal Crossing**

TOP 10 PORTABLES



- 3 Mario Kart DS** • DS
- 4 SOCOM: Fireteam Bravo** • PSP
- 5 Mega Man Maverick Hunter X** • PSP
- 6 Harry Potter: Goblet of Fire** • GBA
- 7 Disney's Chicken Little** • GBA
- 8 Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time** • DS
- 9 NintendoDS: Dachshund** • DS
- 10 Yu-Gi-Oh! GX Duel Academy** • GBA

TOP 10 RENTALS

FOR THE WEEK ENDING 03/12/06



- 24: The Game** • PS2
- 3 Black** • PS2
- 4 Fight Night Round 3** • XB
- 5 Black • XB**
- 6 WWE Smack! vs. RAW 2006** • PS2
- 7 Sonic Riders** • PS2
- 8 Star Wars Battlefront II** • PS2
- 9 Call of Duty 2: Big Red One** • PS2
- 10 Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams** • PS2

>>> A JAPANESE GAMER HAS SET A NEW RECORD BY FINISHING THE ORIGINAL SUPER MARIO BROS. WITHOUT COLLECTING A SINGLE COIN... >>>

ACE COMBAT ZERO™

THE BELKAN WAR

THE SKIES HAVE NO MERCY.

Defend the country of Vistia against an enemy that is smarter, faster and deadlier than any that have come before. Relive the events fifteen years prior to *Ace Combat 3*. Welcome to the dogfight of your life—The Belkan War.



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.



PlayStation 2



■ Lots of familiar faces from the game show up in the movie sequel, in full airbrushed CG glory.

FANTASY FULFILLED?

We get all Roger Ebert on the CG movie, *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*

The videogame biz owes a lot to *Final Fantasy VII: The 1997 PS1 classic* introduced many in the U.S. to the role-playing genre. It gave Sony's first-ever console a huge edge, and one scene in particular proved that even reclusive gamers had feelings. Nine years later, Square Enix's blockbuster has made its way into Hollywood with the recent release of *FFVII: Advent Children* (on DVD and UMD). Time to grab the popcorn? *EGM's* Managing Editor Jennifer Tsao and Previews Editor Bryan Iltisar answer the big questions about this game-to-film translation.

If I haven't played *FFVII*, will I understand it?

Jennifer: Heh. Honestly, I think the question should be, even if you have played *FFVII*, will you understand it?

Bryan: Of course you will! And if you ever need a quick refresher, you can always head to the "extras" section and check out the brief *FFVII* montage that splices key scenes with in-game footage.

Jennifer: Do I smell a little something called denial? I guess I need you to explain the plot to me, because I played *FFVII* (though I wasn't as obsessed with it as many are), and I watched the refresher, and I still couldn't tell you, start to finish,

what *Advent Children* was about. So please explain. And it better make sense!

Bryan: Well, you see, it picks up two years after the game and...people have been infected with this thing called "Geostigma" and...uhhhh...there's this power source called Mother, and these white-haired dudes are looking for it because...uhh....

Jennifer: Normally, I'd wait for you to say "Uncle" but in this case, you can just say "Mother" (in a real breathy voice like those white-haired dudes do in the film). Seriously, I think the film has an esoteric plot no matter how you slice it. What *Final Fantasy* fans will like is the reappearance of all the classic characters.

Bryan: I'll admit *Advent Children's* story has its share of "but?" moments, but I'm not sure any *FFVII* fan—whom this movie is really intended for—expected an Oscar-worthy screenplay. Just look at the source material; the game's plot was pretty out there.

Does it look as good as a Pixar movie?

Bryan: I can't imagine a debate here—*Advent Children* is simply stunning. Now, that's not to say it's perfect (the use of motion capture resulted in a few animation hiccups), but I'd still put this one in the same category as the Pixar films.

Jennifer: They clearly spent a lot of pro-

cessing power on the hair. I mean, the cast here is like one bad '80s band (and I mean that in the best way). But the character movements are still a bit wooden. Their hair, wardrobes, and bone structure may be gorgeous, stunning even, but they all still move very unnaturally. I also thought the overall film, from an artistic viewpoint, was disjointed—too many different visual styles and environments. I didn't sense an unifying "look" the way I do in an *FF* game or in a Pixar film. That said, it's still a breathtaking accomplishment.

How are the voice actors?

Bryan: No one's performance really

stood out...except for Mena Suvari as Aerith—she's atrocious. Seriously, I've felt more emotion listening to a rock than to Suvari's brief stint as the franchise's most tragic character.

Jennifer: Like I said...*Mother!*

Is it at least better than *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*?

Jennifer: I'd say yeah, it's definitely got more meaning and context—the tie-in with *FFVII* adds a lot.

Bryan: And cosplayers of the world should be taking notes from this flick's getups.

Jennifer: Yeah, this one's got *much* better wardrobe. ☘



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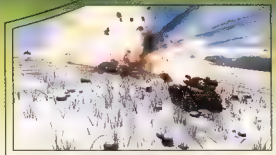
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AFTERTHOUGHTS: TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

Cup-size controversies?
Nude codes? Ex-boyfriends?
We uncover the naked truth behind
Lady Croft's return to form



All right, stop looking at Lara's ass and head to the EGM Extras section at egm.1UP.com for our uncult interview.

She's baaaack. Well, she's back again. But *Tomb Raider: Legend* (PS2, XB, XB360) marks short-shorted blueblood Lara Croft's first sequel that's both new and improved. We asked Morgan Gray, producer at developer Crystal Dynamics, for the postgame story on her makeover, starting with the most important question of all... —Crispin Boyer

EGM: Months ago, you said you wanted a realistically proportioned Lara, but those things are still huge, dude.

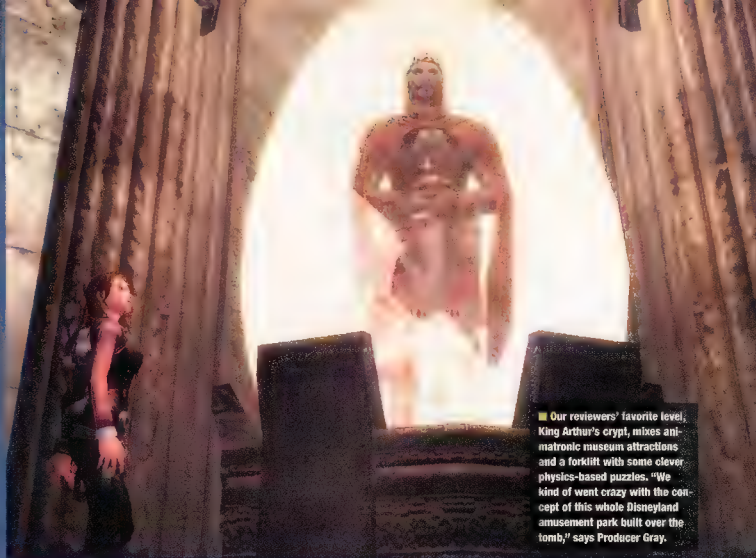
Morgan Gray: What we were doing went just beyond her breasts, to get to the heart of the issue. [Laughs] She actually is slightly smaller. What we were trying to shoot for was not just a reduction in cup size but an overall "aliveness," a bit of a change to her overall musculature and the general proportions of her body, leg size to arm size to hip size, and then back size. We didn't, obviously, take a drastic approach to the body, but we did make as many attempts as possible to sort of un-blow-up-down where she's been going.

EGM: We asked the ex-Core founders (Tomb Raider's original makers until publisher Eidos handed the series to the folks at Crystal) what they thought of Legend. They were diplomatic, saying they were sad they're not part of the process but sure you're capable of starting fresh. Did they give much feedback?

MG: Well, early on they were very helpful, giving us the assets that they had so we could mine through them. Other than casual conversations, or shared pints at [the annual E3 trade show], it has really been more of two separate houses.

EGM: It must be awkward dealing with them, though. It's like Lara was their girlfriend, but now she's yours.

MG: Yeah. Let's not bump into each other at a party. But it's kinda like in comics.



■ Our reviewers' favorite level, King Atrius's crypt, mixes animal-anatomy museum attractions and a forklift with some clever physics-based puzzles. "We kind of went crazy with the concept of this whole Disneyland amusement park built over the tomb," says Producer Gray.

right, when a writer and a penciler team take over a book from another team... I mean, we're both developers and we both work for a mother organization, so there's a practicality of business there. You have to assume, for them, there comes a point where you're kind of happy to do something new. You know? And obviously, we're really happy to be working on Tomb Raider, but there's a huge debt of gratitude and respect that has to go to Core. So it is a little awkward, but it's not an adversarial relationship at all.

EGM: Why the cliff-hanger ending? We were hoping developers would avoid those after Halo 2's abrupt finale.

MG: We didn't really consider it a humorous cliff-hanger. We felt like we tied up threads with [the] Amanda [character], to a decent degree. We tied up threads with the pieces [of the sword]. The big one we didn't tie up, obviously, was the thread with [Lara's] mother. We're talking about getting into Lara's characterization, why she does what she does.

She has one line in the Himalayan Mountains where... she says, "This is what it's always been about." Ergo, her whole tomb raiding, her whole collecting of artifacts—it's always about trying to find away to come to grips with, understand, and/or reverse what happened to her mother... So the mom story thread for us is... where we're going with the series now. It's a cliff-hanger, but for us it's also the thread that ties the next few outings for us. If we're fortunate enough to be able to make a few more.

EGM: Speaking of which, we've criticized Eidos and Gore for rushing out a Tomb Raider every year. Now what's the plan for the series? Will we raid another tomb in '07?

MG: One of the things we don't want to do is to just pop 'em out to hit Christmas. I think that was one of the things that hurt the franchise, because you can't take any risks then; it means you're not gonna innovate, because you gotta whip up the next one. I can't talk about the release rates for the future. I wish I could be like [Doom developer] id and say, "Hell, come out when it's done," but we're definitely not trying to race it out. I mean, there's a lot of time and money invested into trying the ways to get another Tomb Raider game out there that people could really enjoy. We think the way to capitalize on that is not to fall back into old habits.

EGM: Old habits like the dinosaurs? We want them back!

MG: [Laughs] There's plenty of time for dinosaurs. Again, there's a lot of classic elements that we knew we had to get into the game, and we're definitely not opposed to dinosaurs coming back.

EGM: We see that Lara's handstand and dive are back. Any new flourish moves?

MG: We call it the floor routine: If you actually start with a sequence of rolls—roll to roll to roll—and then begin jumping, you can chain 'em combos of her doing cartwheels and acrobatics and triple-finds... Two rolls in a row are going to open the path for you, and from there you can begin to play with trying to do a few alternates. From roll-roll-jump-roll-roll-roll-jump, so on and so forth.

EGM: The motorcycle stunts—we're not a fan. What's up with those?

MG: They were just little minigames, basically, so we could play with the tempo. It wasn't like, "Hey, we're doing this big vehicle thing." It was just like, "Here's a small minigame, and sort of a nod to the vehicular Lara of days gone past. Early feedback is that they're too long in duration.

EGM: Yeah, we agree. Can you make them end sooner?

MG: They will keep going as long as there are enemies. So if you're killing enemies, they're ending sooner. If you're not killing enemies, they're taking a while.

EGM: OK, last thing: Will you finally reveal the nude code?

MG: [Laughs] Doesn't exist.

EGM: Oh, c'mon.

MG: Funny enough, when we build her costumes, she's partially naked, because we're forming over a human body and then adding clothes and whatnot. But it's like Barbie—it's not explicit. She's too proper for that sort of thing.

SOUTHERN OVEREXPOSURE: LEGEND'S LOST LEVEL

No rain forests were saved in *Tomb Raider: Legend*. No fact, the developers cut one overgrown South American temple where Lara would have tracked down yet another Evilstar shard. "We figured we were spending too much time in South America," Producer Morgan Gray says of the cut. "We're in Bolivia, [then] we're in Peru. We think we got this one covered." He adds that the mixed level did help pave the way for the super-science-inspired Kazakhstan stage. "That was a fun one for us," says Gray, "because we really felt like, out of all of *Tomb Raider*-dom, that was one of the more wacky levels that had been within the universe."

DON'T TRASH YOUR OLD TV!

Five reasons current HDTVs aren't ready for gaming prime time

Of you're seconds away from maxing out your Mastercard on a titanite-screened HDTV, allow us to slow-mo dive in front of you shouting, "Noooooo!" Holster that wallet until fall if you want a boob-tube that takes total advantage of the latest gaming hardware (i.e., November's PlayStation 3). Here's why....

—Rob Fox

Reason 5: You want 1080p

Sony brags that the PS3 can output in state-of-the-art 1080p resolution, but 1080p is not an official standard; very few HDTVs actually support it. (The slightly less sharp 1080i is the current HDTV standard.) You will find a few HDTVs—such as the higher-end Samsung DLP sets—that can transform a 1080i image into 1080p, but their inputs don't support a true 1080p signal. So if, say, *Metal Gear Solid 4* for PS3 can output in 1080p, almost no current HDTV or projector could accept the signal, and you would get at best an upconverted 720p signal or deinterlaced 1080i. It's still a pretty picture—nearly impossible to discern from 1080p—but not the proverbial 1080p image.

Reason 4: You'll save moolah

HDTV prices have tumbled over a grand in the past few years, and their feature sets have improved with each revision, giving you more bang for your buck. By PS3's launch, new HDTVs will have hit with true 1080p support, bigger screens, faster color wheels, and refresh rates, and more inputs.

Reason 3: The HDCP dilemma

The majority of current HDTVs have some sort of digital input, whether it be HDMI (High Definition Multimedia Interface) or DVI (Digital Visual Interface), but just because that port is present doesn't mean it supports HDCP. Whazza? Short for High-Bandwidth Digital Copy Protection, HDCP is the protocol that determines if your Blu-ray disc player and HDTV are trusted devices—thus allowing full-resolution movie playback (if the content is copy protected; see the next reason). If your TV lacks an HDCP-compliant DVI or HDMI input, your image will be dumbed down to barely better than DVD quality. Analog component inputs won't work either; HDCP requires a digital interface, so don't think you'll get your high-def fix that way.

Reason 2: Copycat killers

And here's why HDCP-compliant inputs are important. New copy-protection scheme AACS (Advanced Access Content System)—similar to the protection method CSS (Content Scrambling System) currently implemented in today's DVD flicks—is the encryption technology designed to protect high-def content on next-generation media such as HD-DVD and Blu-ray discs. Hollywood, you see, is *very* protective of its properties, and it won't give you a high-resolution version of a movie without some sort of copy protection in place. AACS will actually limit the output resolution by using something called ICT (Image Constraint Token). This component can restrict the resolution of the movies to 540p if you are not using HDCP-compliant hardware to watch the flicks.

Reason 1: Shifting specs

Specifications for a lot of this technology have yet to be finalized. Only very recently, for example, has an interim AACS spec been released to allow manufacture of Blu-ray hardware and software. The key word is "interim," as the current specifications will eventually be modified and finalized. It's possible that a particular piece of hardware or setup that works now could wind up totally busted after the final AACS specs are released and have trickled into hardware and software.

Also, keep in mind that current high-def content such as TV shows, movies, and sports broadcasts are currently only transmitted in 720p and 1080i. While the ATSC standard, which governs hi-def specifications, does include an official spec for 1080p, it is not likely that content will be transmitted as such anytime soon. When Blu-ray movies begin to ship, they are likely to be 720p and 1080i, not 1080p, although anything is possible. Will we see 1080p movies on disc, thus requiring 1080p-compliant inputs?

And current shots of the PS3 show only HDMI output—does that mean folks with just a DVI port on their HDTVs have to buy a pricey HDMI-to-DVI converter cable? Will that converter account for digital audio as well? (HDMI carries both audio and video signals.) See, you have nothing to lose by waiting until this fall. Surely Sony's promised "4D gaming" will be worth it. ☛



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"Ah, Steve, Jamaican me crazy! Sorry, I've had that one loaded up all day."

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in my closet?"



"I don't want to feed
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"Peter, did you read the fine
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"Um, if by read you mean
imagined a naked lady,
then yes."



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TAKE THIS JOB: COMPOSER

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

SALTA'S DETAILS

Experience: Four years in gaming, and 15 years in the music industry prior to that
Notable games: *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter*, *Cold Fear*, *Sprung*, *Get On Da Mic*, *Need for Speed Underground 2*, *Project Gotham Racing 3*, *RalliSport Challenge 2*, *Street Racing Syndicate*

Composer job data

Salary range: \$1,200 per minute of music (most games average 60 minutes of tunes)
Recommended education: "No one asks me, 'Where'd you go to school?'" Salta says. "But I suggest you study as much music as you can—[you'll have] more to pull from." He suggests listening to great movie and game soundtracks; you'll need to make tunes as good or better.
Location of most jobs: The West Coast, but composers can live anywhere with Web access (Salta lives in Connecticut).
Current level of demand: Low

What's a game composer do?

"It's my job to create music that augments the gameplay experience—to convey a lot of information to the gamer through

music," says Salta. "I also have to change the player's emotions, whether they're scared, excited, happy, powerful, anxious." The amount of music a game requires varies from project to project; Salta composed 35 minutes for *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter* (much of which got chopped up and sprinkled throughout the game), while Microsoft simply licensed finished tracks for *Project Gotham Racing 3*.

Salta's typical day

Salta works in his home studio from 10 a.m. until 6 in the evening, and then he returns for another couple of hours after dinner. "It's not uncommon to work 15-hour days during crunch mode," he says. Usually, Salta is working on a couple of games at a time. Even with a large-scale gig like *Advanced Warfighter*, however, he's basing his work mainly on the direction of the game's audio director, as opposed to early versions of the game. "I'll get to check out early movies and still shots, but I rarely get to play the game before it's done," he says.

How'd he get the gig?

How's this for proof that there's no one way into game composing? Salta got his big break as Bobby Brown's music director. "He was really impressed with my knowledge of music, computers, and synthesizers," Salta says. "I spent the next year traveling the world with Bobby Brown." Other gigs like Mary J. Blige and TLC followed. "Until I realized I'd rather be in the studio producing and composing," he says. "But I needed something to stand out, so I came up with the idea to create a solo album that would be ideal for licensing—everything from movies to games."

It worked: Before the record was even done, Microsoft licensed three of his tracks for *RalliSport Challenge 2*. Other games followed: Salta's first job scoring a full game was the adventure title *Still Life*.

To get the *Advanced Warfighter* gig, Salta had to compete against several other composers, each of whom composed their own sample main themes. Salta's got picked. Now you can hear his tunes in the game or at www.tomsalta.com.

—Evan Shamoon

THIS MONTH:
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TOOLS OF HIS TRADE


Apple Logic

This sequencer program, running on a Mac G5, is the center of Salta's workflow—where he composes and mixes music. But he has six computers full of sounds and soft synthesizers and drum machines. "One of my PCs has a slew of orchestral synths, for example," says Salta. "Think of each one as a painter's palette."

5.1 studio sound system

"I have a Blue Sky sound system," he says. "When I heard George Lucas installed two of these at his Skywalker Ranch, I decided it was good enough for me. It lets me hear exactly what's going on in the entire frequency range. And when I play games on it in 5.1 [surround sound], they sound incredible."

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PlayStation 2



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■ Tankhunt, right? So, where are all the tanks?

ONLINE

THIS MONTH Intel on Call of Duty 2's expanding battlefield

War may be hell, but that sure didn't stop lots and lots of Xbox 360 owners from enlisting in *Call of Duty 2*'s interactive conflict. The World War II-based first-person shooter was hands-down the four-star general of Microsoft's next-gen console launch and, depending on when you read this, its online fight may have just crossed into uncharted territory.

This May, you can download (for a small fee) the *CO2D* multiplayer map pack via the Xbox Live Marketplace. Interested in another tour? President Grant Collier of developer Infinity Ward debriefs us on these four all-new terrains.

Bunker

Location: Vossenaek, Germany

Grant Collier: "Bunker is a great map for fast-paced, rapid action. The map's size combined with the varied terrain levels and central, limited cover form a sense of chaotic warfare that really gets your heart pounding. As if the level weren't just fun to play on, the environment is extremely vibrant and creative, with luscious foliage and a very cool destroyed bunker as the map's centerpiece."

Rhine

Location: Wallander, Germany

GC: "This level really embodies WWII-style urban warfare at its finest. A war-torn cityscape, this map really benefits from squad-based combat with its variable hidden paths and high cover areas. Coupled with the very stark, realistically decimated architecture and rubble, this map really draws you into the battlefield. Capture the flag and other team-based match types really shine on this map."



■ Infinity Ward President Grant Collier says Rhine is the map best suited to squad-based play.

Siltown

Location: Beaumont-Hague, France

GC: "This very large and gorgeous map enables warfare of every type depending on the situation and the area. There are open fields for quick skirmishes and rush tactics, enclosed buildings and stone wall perimeters leaning toward guerrilla tactics, intense building-to-building firefights... and the site itself encompasses the center of the map, making a great sniper nest and a difficult-to-hold position of power. Incredible detailed visuals and great design make this a fantastic map for any battle."



Tankhunt

Location: Kalach, Russia

GC: "Another very fast-paced level, Tankhunt puts the players into a close-knit, multi-leveled war zone that favors close-quarter combat. The sheer amount of varied paths and scattered cover allows for some fantastic ambushes. The harsh, snow-covered buildings and wonderfully lit dark hallways add to the intense atmosphere of this map."

WHAT'S UP AT



EGM.1UP.COM

Read the mag cover to cover and still hungry for more? Head to our official website, where this month you'll find the rest of our *Tomb Raider: Legend* and *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter* Afterthoughts.

CHEATS.1UP.COM

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, *GRAV*, and *Kingdom Hearts II* are out, and we know you're way too cool to buy the guides. Our cheat experts have been slaving away to make sure you can beat the games but still keep your dignity.

GAMEVIDEOS.COM

It's the hottest new thing to hit the Internet. Think YouTube or Google Video, just without all the crap you don't care about. This site is all about games—from old-school television commercials and event coverage to hot shows and *Metroid* speed runs. You can also submit your own videos.

Featured Club: The EGM Radio Podcast

You've heard the *EGM* editors on *The 1UP Radio Podcast*, but that was just a warmup. Now we have our own damn podcast, and we'll share extra info, let you in on behind-the-scenes secrets, and probably also piss a few people off (looks over at *EGMer* Shane Bettenhausen). Visit podcasts.club.1up.com for the goods.

Featured Blog: Jeremy Parish

1UP.com's features editor (leastyfrog.1up.com) has one of the most frequently updated online journals in the Ziff Davis family. Whether they're talking about the PS3 delay, DS games, or how playing *Kenosaga I & II* is like punching a retarded puppy, Jeremy's posts are certainly varied and full of laughs.

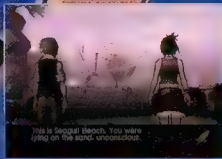
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- Newtype USA

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- Hardcore Gamer Magazine

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Language
Violence

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PlayStation 2



PLAYSTATION 2 PREVIEW: HANDS ON

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix
Release Date: November 2006

FINAL FANTASY XII

It ain't your father's
Final Fantasy—
or is it?

>> DEVELOPER JASON RUBIN (JAK AND CRASH BANDICOOT SERIES) USED HIS MYSPACE ACCOUNT (MYSPACE.COM/JASONRUBIN) TO

Finally, *Final Fantasy XII* has arrived in Japan, anyway. After years of delays and even rumors that it would never see release, Square-Enix's latest role-playing odyssey has beaten the odds and turned out to be an exceptional piece of work, racking up nearly 2 million in sales in its first week and netting gushing reviews in Japan's most respected publications. Still, seeing it believing—and many U.S. gamers are understandably skeptical, this is a radically different take on the *Final Fantasy* series: Does it really deserve the name? Trust us, though: *FFXII* is hot.

It looks great, but...

No, it doesn't look great—it looks amazing. But weren't you, the jagged edges you'd never know this was a PS2 game. The secret? Square-Enix used half the polygons of *FFX* and bumped up the texture detail. That means *FFXII*'s worlds are made of simple objects that actually look better upon closer inspection—the opposite of most games. Aside from the characters that pop in *Shemue*, Dreamcast's style is what you're running through towns; the visuals impress at every turn.

Fine, but I totally hated the *FFXII* demo that came with *Dragon Quest VIII*. Why should I care?

The *FFXII* sampler offered only a tiny slice of the final product and failed to make clear the sheer flexibility of the actual game. The much-balked-at "active battle" portion of the demo, where Ashe (the game's female lead) party acted independently of the player, turns out to be only *one way* to play the game. At any time, you can toggle between Active and Wait modes, change the battle speed, and modify your character's tactics (called "Gambits"). If you're a tactical buff and play strategist, write your party's deeds for itself; you can. But turn Gambits off and you have to issue every single command yourself—just like in older *Final Fantasy*s, minus the random battles. (And really, why would you miss those?)

Hub? Gambits?

Gambits are the key to *FFXII*'s new battle system. Simply put, they're instructions you assign to your party members to tell them how to behave during combat. Each Gambit consists of a target and



Hot in the mood to fight this fireball? You don't have to, as *FFXII* bucks the series norm and ditches random battles.

action, and the order in which you assign Gambits determines their priority (see sidebar). For instance, if the bunny-eared Fran's first two Gambits are "Aly below 50% health + Cure" and "Enemy leader Attack," she'll whale on the main bad guy but always pause to heal any character whose health drops too low. Characters can purchase additional Gambit slots on the License Board (more on that later) in order to perform more actions during battle, and nearly any skill you learn can be linked into a Gambit. Plan your Gambits properly and your party will be nearly invincible in any situation, and you'll never have to issue a direct command

Oh geez, that sounds just a bit too complicated.

It's only as complicated as you make it. You can turn off Gambits entirely if you don't trust your tactical thinking. If you can't easily get by with simple heal-and-attack Gambits, reserving the more complex commands to be issued manually. But it's clear that *FFXII* was designed with Gambits in mind, and using them well

turns the game into an experience unlike almost any other.

Well, if you say so. But what was that "License Board" thing you mentioned?

The License Board is in *FFXII* what the Sphere Grid was in *FFX*. Each character has its own chesecake board, where each square represents a skill to be purchased with license points earned in battle—including the ability to use weapons. Any character can learn any skill and use any piece of equipment, but only if they've purchased the appropriate license square.

So all the characters are the same? That sounds even lamier than *FFXII*'s Materia system.

It's not, actually. Each character has certain innate abilities that make them better suited to certain roles, and it's not a bad idea to keep them trained in the weapons they start with. But while you could turn your party into a team of high-power knights, the License Board is designed to discourage this with Mist Knacks, powerful character-specific skills that

can be chained in combat. A total of 116 Mist Knack Squares are spread across the board, three to each character, and each Square can only be licensed by a single person. So the only way to unlock them all is to make each character focus on skills in a different section of the board.

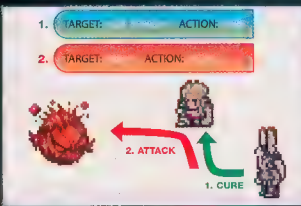
OK, so the gameplay sounds pretty good. But what about the story, man?

No worries there—*FFXII*'s plot might be the best yet. Yeah, you've got your pretty-boy main character, named Vaan (shown above), but he's just a small part of an epic, sweeping tale packed with political intrigue, betrayals, double-crosses, and sexy rabbitgirls in metal lingerie. The story encompasses a wedding, an imperial invasion, two tragic deaths, and an underground uprising—and that's just in the first 15 minutes. With great characters, breathtaking events, and some truly evil-looking villains (the menacing judges), *FFXII* seems to nail all the right notes for the more story-obsessed *Final Fantasy* fans (which is pretty much all of them, right?)

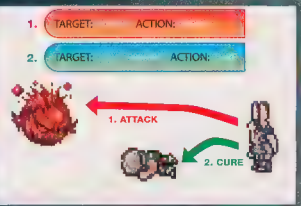
—Jeremy Parish

ORDERLY CONDUCT

Gambits tell your characters not just what to do, but also when to do it. For instance, if you set Fran's Gambits so that her first priority is to heal allies below 50%, she'll always stop attacking enemies to restore health to a wounded comrade...



...but if her Gambit setup prioritizes attacking over healing, she won't cast Cure until all her enemies are defeated. (And by then it just might be too late for poor Vaan.)



OVERHEARD

Them some strong words



©2006 Jeremy "Worm" Scott

"Yes, she's a woman. Yes, her history as a bounty hunter causes others to distrust her. Yes, her body suit might not be legal. But it's all worth it. **She has a f***ing arm cannon built in. Literally.**"

—Fantasy baseball advice columnist Rick Paulas recommends Metroid's Samus Aran as the best pitcher for an all-Nintendo team.



"[The PlayStation 3] seems to be **incapable of rendering three-way sex scenes in real time.**"



"Do I hit Up, Down, Up, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, A, B, A, B, Select, Start?"

—The Daily Show's Kula Gordiny asking how to get minimalist ammo on a real shotgun during a quest hunt

"It's relatively easy for me to imagine scenarios where mainstream audiences get sick of us, sick of the product we offer them, sick of repetitive, seemingly but not really interactive, emotion-free, slam-bang, U.S.-centric, urban, hip-hop action games and alien-invasion scenarios."

—Warren Spector, the man behind the Deus Ex series, offers up a stark warning to his fellow developers

"Xzibit would've been in the game **if he had just given me back my f***ing Xbox.** He probably put it in someone's car for his *Pimp My Ride* show."

—God of War creator David Jaffe reveals a weakness in Sony's next-gen console

—Scarface Executive Producer Peter Wainat explains why the interfaber (who appeared in The Chronicles of Riddick, Wainat's previous project) won't voice a character this time around

PENNY ARCADE WWW.PENNY-ARCADE.COM



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QUOTATION SOURCES FROM TOP TO BOTTOM, STARTING WITH LEFT COLUMN: MCSWEENEYS.NET, THE DAILY SHOW, WWW.ESCPG12MAGAZINE.COM, GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE, ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY

>> PUBLISHER HUDSON IS CURRENTLY LOOKING INTO BRINGING SOME OF ITS OLDER BOMBERMAN GAMES TO XBOX LIVE ARCADE. >>>



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THE RUMOR MILL

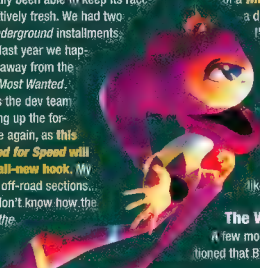
You know it to be true (well, sometimes)

The first "real" PS3 software, another wave of Xbox 360 titles, new Nintendo Revolution details—man, the next generation has engulfed this here mag. Also, with the amount of gossip flying around about these consoles, my job as rumormonger couldn't be more deee-lightful. If you think this batch tastes delish, just wait till next month when I'm back from the annual gaming palooza E3 (the Electronic Entertainment Expo).

—The Q

Driving down a new road

Unlike a lot of series that receive annual updates, EA's *Need for Speed* franchise has actually been able to keep its raceways relatively fresh. We had two strong *Underground* installments, and then last year we happily sped away from the po-po in *Most Wanted*. It appears the dev team is changing up the formula once again, as this fall's *Need for Speed* will have an all-new look. My vote's for off-road sections... though I don't know how the *Fast and the Furious* crowd.



would handle trading in that rims for mud flaps.

Revolutionary training day

"I'm personally hoping the Revolution's controller will allow us to do more ports of our tight-gun games," said *Virtua Fighter 5* Producer Hiroshi Kataoka in Issue #202. Port or no port, it seems Sega's *Virtua Cop* series will soon uphold the law on Nintendo's forthcoming console. Can I make a request for *House of the Dead*, too?

Oh, what a night

In the last issue's gossip column, I made a smartass remark about the possibility of a *NIGHTS* sequel. Wow, what a difference a month makes: I'm now hearing that Sega's working on a follow-up to its Saturn cult classic. Fantastic news indeed, but you gotta curb your enthusiasm for the time being, as we won't see this next-gen high-flyer for a long while (I'm talking like 2008, people).

The WOW factor

A few months back, yours truly mentioned that Blizzard's insanely popular

World of Warcraft (PC) would eventually come to the Xbox 360. Well, I may have been mistaken about the second home of this massively multiplayer online role-playing game: Word on the street is that Sony's making a strong push so *WOW* winds up exclusively on the PlayStation 3.

An expanding adventure

The Xbox 360 is currently home to the hottest role-playing game on the market, and

believe it or not, the words "Final Fantasy" don't appear in its title. Seriously, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* is one behemoth of a game, and it's only getting bigger. Expect a full-blown *Oblivion* expansion pack sometime this fall with tons of additional quests and stunning areas. Now, if only the developers would stop overpricing downloadable content. (Two dollars and fifty cents for horse armor? Thanks but no thanks.)

WHAT'S THE DEAL?

Q: Hey, what the heck ever happened to *StarCraft: Ghost*?

A: The fate of this stealthy little ain't looking too good, folks. Earlier this year, Blizzard killed the GameCube version, while the PlayStation 2 and Xbox editions were put on hold indefinitely. Some say the game's being reworked for the next-gen consoles, but our sources are telling us that *Ghost* will stay true to its namesake. ☹



>> ATLUS HAS DECIDED TO RELEASE THE SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI SPIN-OFF DEVIL SUMMONER, AN RPG FOR THE PS2, HERE IN THE UNITED STATES. . . >>

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For the multiplayer side of our Afterthoughts Q & A, go to egm.1up.com and check out the EGM Extras section. Go NOW.

>> THE SUPPORT FOR XBOX LIVE ARCADE KEEPS GROWING, AS MICROSOFT RECENTLY ANNOUNCED THAT ARCADE WILL SOON FEATURE GAMES



AFTERTHOUGHTS:

GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

Campaigning for fixes in the campaign mode

It seems Ghosts aren't afraid of bullets. Your fellow squadmates in *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter* (Xbox 360) will stand out in the open or walk right out in front of you while you're aiming through your gun's scope. Is the artificial intelligence in this series forever destined to be bad? Or does it not really matter, since the game's so good anyway? Yann Le Tensorer (campaign producer on *GRAW* and managing director of Thwak, which helped develop the game engine) and Adrian Lacey (senior coordinator) talk about A.I. and other single-player issues with us. —Dan "Shoe" Hsu, with help from Steve Maldonado

EGM: How did you get *GRAW* to look that damn good?

Yann Le Tensorer: We worked for two years to have one of the best engines around—it's called "Yeti." Our technology is very powerful and uses the full power of the 360.

Adrian Lacey: From an artistic point of view, the art director and the level designer both went to Mexico City to get as much real reference [as possible] to try and give it that authentic feel.

EGM: Why do you make us

play through *GRAW* twice to earn all of the single-player achievements? Shouldn't playing missions on Hard also count for Normal, like in most other games?

AL: Achievements are a very hard thing to get right, because, obviously, there's so much difference between different games at the moment and how you get achievements. We just felt like giving the hardcore *Ghost Recon* fans a slight edge to get more achievements.

EGM: Do you hate the Internet when you see people making videos that showcase the game's glitches?

AL: If people want to spend time putting videos up there, we can't really get offended, because I think, at the same time, we have a lot of people who have already said the game looks great, they love playing it, it's really fun, [and so on]. So you have to take the rough with the smooth sometimes.

EGM: Do you plan on fixing any of those problems, like the disappearing objects or corrupt save files?

AL: We still playtest the game even after it's launched, and there are some things that we've seen that we simply can't reproduce. It's very difficult, from a testing point of view, to find out what can be fixed and what can't be fixed. Sometimes, it's just a freak thing [that happens]. But at the moment, we're not looking at fixing those bugs in the campaign mode, no.

EGM: Are the VIPs, whom you're supposed to protect,

mocking you when they're running around in the open, asking to be shot?

AL: The basic purpose of the VIP is to protect him. He sometimes puts himself in positions that aren't brilliant for you, but it's your job, as leader of the Ghosts, to take out the enemy targets and protect him. It's a difficulty thing, so it's part of the game plan.

EGM: But doesn't it break from the realism when you're trying to get rid of some snipers and the president of the United States is just running around outside? Even your teammates know to take cover at some point, but the VIPs don't seem to have that same A.I.

YI: Sometimes, you have to make choices when you make a game. And to bring more realism in the very important places of the game, sometimes you have to remove some from the nonimportant places. This is really not something that is key for the game, so we decided to put more A.I. in other places than here.

EGM: Why is the A.I. bad in every *Ghost Recon* game? *GRAW*'s is definitely improved, but you'll still find situations like your teammates running in front of your line of fire....

YI: You're talking like it's only the *Ghost Recon* series where the A.I. is bad, and it's really not unique to the *Ghost Recon* series. A.I. is always very hard, because there are many layers of A.I.: the micro-layer, the medium layer, the high layer, the difficult tactics....

[For example], when you walk, there's that micro-layer [of] what's just in front of me. There's a door—I have to open the door and go through it. These are all microdecisions that you make on a very local basis. But that's just one layer. Then you have the parts where you have to go from one position to another, to take cover or not to take cover—all of this is another layer. It makes it very difficult for the A.I. to take into account all the parameters, because there are so many parameters.... It makes it very complex.

EGM: Is there room for improvement in future sequels?

YI: Sure. A.I. is typically one of the places where we keep improving all the time. It's one of the most difficult, but it's one that has the most room for improvement.

EGM: Is it irresponsible for the U.S. military to leave weapon-drop boxes outdoors, where enemies, children, and homeless people can get to them?

AL: [Laughs] Not if they take place in the Clancy universe under Clancy rules, because we're not allowed to have civilians, and you're not allowed to shoot civilians, anyway. So they don't exist in our universe. At the end of the day, it remains a game—mean, there are a lot of things in our games that I wouldn't necessarily recommend to the military, anyway.

EGM: Like what?

AL: I wouldn't recommend going to war in the first place. It looks a bit dangerous to me. [Laughs] ♣

THE HOT 10

What's on our now-playing list



1 IT GETS A LITTLE BLUE

The rules are different in Japan. And the rules say Konami's revealing in-store *Rumble Roses XX* (Xbox 360) standees are A-OK mega fine. We can't even print the other, racier one.



2 SWEET OBLIVION

We won't go so far as to say that *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (Xbox360) has made RPG nerds cool. But it has made it temporarily acceptable to discuss the benefits of heavy versus light armor over lunch. (Note: Light wins, for reasons too complex to go into here.)

3 GAMEVIDEOS.COM

Fondly retro gaming commercials, speed runs, and any ancillary game-related video needs you may have, GameVideos is there. It's also the new home of *The TUP Show*, and certain EGM alumni.



4 MAC, MEET 360

Let your Xbox 360 talk to your Mac (and stream music from iTunes, etc.) with Connect360 from www.nullriver.com. It totally works. Just reboot both systems after install.

5 VIDEO GAMES LIVE

It's a concert...of game music! Huh. We'll try anything once. Check [www.videogameslive.com](http://www videogameslive.com) for info. Upcoming show dates: July 14 - Houston, TX; Aug. 5 - Chicago, IL; Sep. 21 - Los Angeles, CA



7 WHINING ABOUT OLD PROBLEMS

It may be next-gen, but it's still the same ol' crap. Product delays, laggy and dropped online games, voice chat echoes—if you thought we were done whining and moaning after last issue's "New & Not-Quite-So-Improved" article, you were wrong.

8 "GAMEPLAY TARGET" VIDEOS

It's the newest thing we love to hate. Game publishers sometimes create gameplay target videos to give their developers something to shoot for and to just generally show off. OK, fine. But when they try and pass off these spectacular clips as actual in-game footage, that's not cool (see: pretty much all of Sony's PS3 game clips from last year's Electronic Entertainment Expo). Keep your eye jaundiced when watching this year's E3 vids.

MotorStorm on PS3. Yeah, right.



6 THE DS MASSIVE

Massively multiplayer, that is. Wrangling 10-16 of your closest DS-owning friends for head-to-head (etc.) *Tetris* or *Brain Age* may not be possible, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't try.

9 YOU SANK MY BATTLESHIP

Everybody likes a nice, portable turn-based strategy game. They're good for you. Make you strong, whiten your teeth. And now you can add *Field Commander* (PSP) to the rotation, along with *Age of Empires: Advance Wars DS*, etc. We have.

10 UNO!

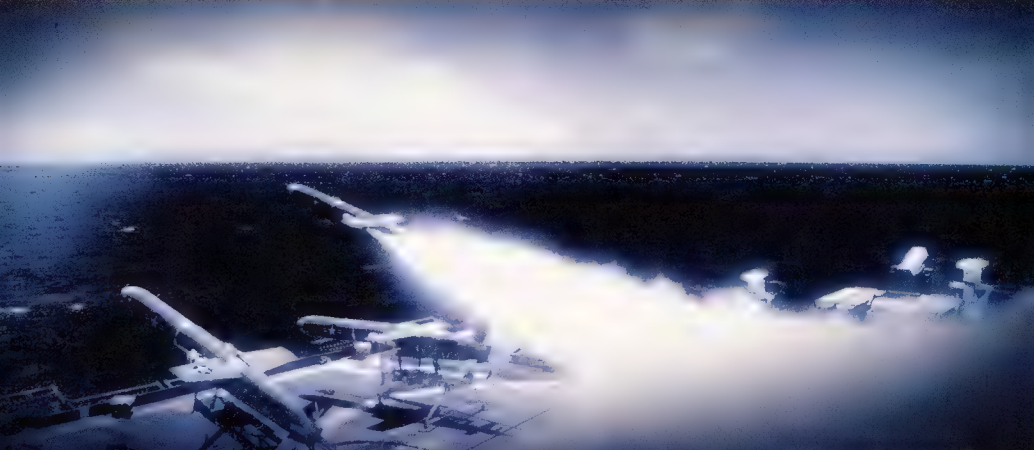
The Xbox 360's slim software pickings means that we're still getting way too excited about simple Xbox Live Arcade games. Just watch us rack up 200 achievement points playing hardcore multiplayer online *Uno*. Draw four, bitches!



>> YOOT SAITO (OF SEAMAN FAME) IS WORKING ON A DS GAME. LIKE HIS PREVIOUS WORKS, EXPECT THIS ONE TO BE...UH, DIFFERENT.



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COMING SOON

Play these instead of enjoying the fine weather

■ This guy from *Def Jam* had a headache *this big!*

JUNE 2006



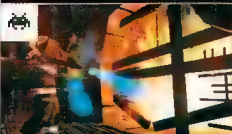
And 1 Streetball
Ubisoft • PS2/XB — Streetball claims to be all about the moves, but we hear it's also sorta about the shoes.



FlatOut 2
VU Games • PS2/XB — Take muscle cars out on the open road and crash them into each other (and the surrounding environments) at deliciously high speeds. This is how Chuck Norris does Sunday-afternoon drives.



Def Jam Fight for NY: The Takeover
EA Games • PSP — Larger-than-life hip-hop brawlers shrunk for portability.



Urban Chaos: Riot Response
Eidos • PS2/XB — Your task: Save the city by doing a heckuva job organizing emergency services.

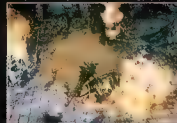


Super Monkey Ball Adventure
Sega • PS2/GB/PSP — For this action-adventure departure from the simian-spinning puzzle franchise, your monkey balls will stick to things, fly, become invisible, and probably get stuck in the occasional corner. But you'll still get the requisite party games.



Superman Returns
EA Games • XB360/PS2/XB/PSP/DS — Explore Metropolis as the titular all-powerful, all-seeing, all-knowing big guy. Here's one action-adventure movie tie-in that really shouldn't need a god-mode cheat.

Also in June



Big Brain Academy
Nintendo • DS

Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II
EA Games • XB360

Magnetica
Nintendo • DS

MechAssault: Phantom War
Majesco • DS

NFL Head Coach
EA Sports • PS2/XB

Over G Fighters
Ubisoft • XB360



■ *NFL Head Coach*: not psychotherapy.

■ *LOTR* tip: Run faster than the hobbit.

>> THE BACKWARD COMPATIBILITY LIST FOR XBOX 360 HAS BEEN UPDATED WITH DOZENS OF GAMES, INCLUDING STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT II. >>>



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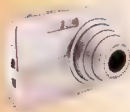


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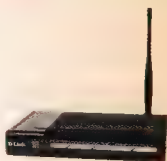
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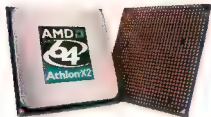
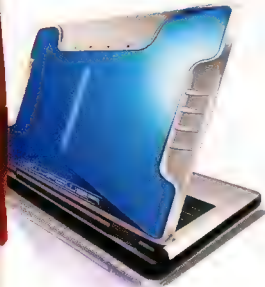
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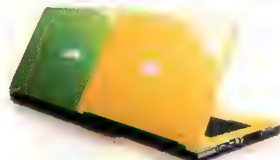
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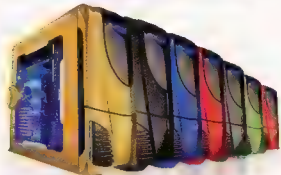
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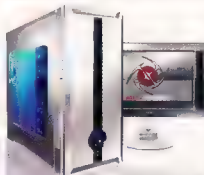
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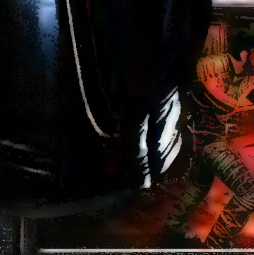
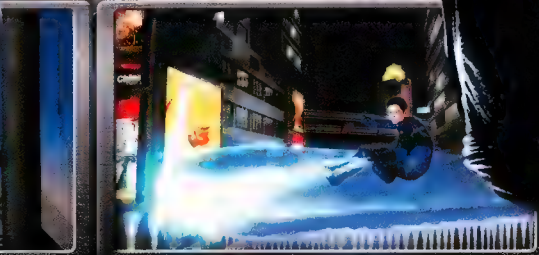
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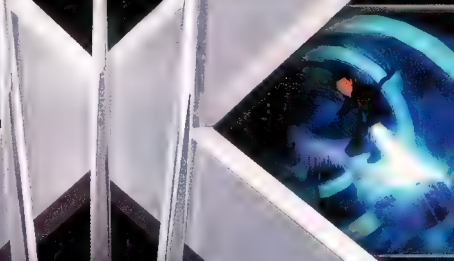
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PlayStation 2

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XBOX 360

VS.

Can Microsoft dethrone Sony, or will the current console leader go three-for-three? We'll let the games decide

Gotta give credit where credit's due: After getting the ol' sink-eye from Nintendo in the early '90s, Sony took its PlayStation concept and hit the market on its own, winning (rather handily) not just one but two consecutive console wars.

In November, the company enters this round with easily the biggest muscles: the PlayStation 3's super-duper Cell processor and built-in 60GB hard drive basically offering the same features as Microsoft's stellar service (friends lists, downloadable game demos, etc.). Well, all except for one—hopping onto the PS3's network won't cost you a thing.

Still, it ain't all roses here. Microsoft already has a nice lead, thanks to releasing the 360 a year earlier. The PS3's gonna be pricey (most predict it'll run you \$500), and hardware shortages are extremely likely due to the planned simultaneous worldwide launch. Is this just too much for Sony to overcome? Let's take a look at the games that'll either strengthen or weaken its chances for the fracta-

Just how anxious were gamers for the next generation? Late last year, Microsoft's **Xbox 360** launched with what most considered a mediocre software lineup, yet the console still flew off store shelves in the United States (the 360 was a hard sell in Japan, though). Fortunately, the times they are a-changin': The first half of 2006 has brought releases such as *Nr. Oblivion*—games that actually deserve to be called “next gen.” But can the system maintain this momentum? Will the 360 have enough weapons to keep its lead (thanks to a very generous head start) over Nintendo's and Sony's new babies? And can it stay No.1 if the Master Chief does indeed take another year off? The games you'll see here should give us a clue on whether the console remains the top dog.

PLAYSTATION 3



Page 60: XBOX 360 GAMES



Page 70: PLAYSTATION 3 GAMES



Page 78: XB360/PS3 GAMES



CRACKDOWN

Microsoft • Fall 2006

■ Jaywalkers, beware.



WHAT WE LIKE: Like it or not, *GTA* is an acronym ingrained into the minds of many gamers (for those who've been living on planet Zaron, the last few years, it stands for *Grand Theft Auto*). And for good reason, too—open-ended cities riddled with endless destructive possibilities are enough to put a sadistic smile on anyone's face. But unlike the aforementioned gangster game, *Crackdown* is looking to breathe life into its world through the power of friendship. "Our game has been designed to take full advantage of multiplayer, cooperative gameplay," says David Jones, founder of developer Real Time Worlds. "And in a world this big and this destructible, you simply can't imagine the possibilities for wide-scale, team-driven chaos." Running amok through a sprawling metropolis with a buddy in tow is long overdue. Plus, the thought of sharing a touching moment of death and dismemberment with a friend online should be enough to make even the most hardened hothead shed a tear.

While whacking kingpins with a pal, *Crackdown's* unique character customization feature ensures your player will have the skills to continue to kill. "We've got five main skills in the game: driving, agility, firearms, strength, and explosives," says Jones. "That's five different ways you can find to destroy something." Also, the abilities you improve all depends on how you interact with the world. Jones explains: "Toss around a bus or two, and you're likely to bulk up pretty quickly. Burst through a door guns blazing, or indulge in the occasional rooftop sniping session, and you'll end up a fairly good marksman. Run a lap around the city, and that second lap will go a little faster. Overall, your character is yours to perfect."

Lust for a license to kill? Then try capping fools as a cop. "Many of the titles rooted in this urban, open-ended genre have featured some form of criminal protagonist," says Jones. "So, certainly the ability to wreak the same havoc and inhabit this limitless world as 'good guy' was a fun challenge. Where being a criminal is all about the next cool weapon, being a hero in *Crackdown* is all about making your agent powerful enough to be a one-man army." Replacing the antihero with a no-nonsense do-gooder is a nice move, especially considering the endless string of drive-bys from other criminal-based games. And these streets are long overdue for some cleaning. "Villains are everywhere," says Jones. "Actions have real, tangible effects in *Crackdown*, so if gamers choose to take out a gang's weapons shipment, those firefights are going to be a little easier later down the line."

WHAT WORRIES US: Think the main dude (left) looks silly? Wait 'till you see some of the bad guys' designs. Ridiculous. —*Michael Donahoe*



■ Maybe these guys should pay attention to the folks on their left. Ya know, the one holding a gun...



MEET THE MAKER

If you simply think *Crackdown* is riding the wave of *GTA* clones...well, you're right. But here's the reason why: David Jones was actually one of the brains behind Rockstar's insanely popular *Grand Theft Auto* franchise. So if anyone can surf over the inevitable comparisons to his successful series, it's this guy.



JUST CAUSE

Eidos • Fall 2006

WHAT WE LIKE: Here's a game that thinks big—as in 640-square-miles big. “It’s the largest game world ever seen in this genre,” boasts Christopher Sundberg, founder and creative director of Swedish developer Avalanche Studios (*Just Cause* is its first game). Sundberg estimates it’ll take players 40 minutes to cross the world—actually a South American island on the brink of a full-scale revolution.

It’s your job, as a Latin field agent, to kick-start that revolution, using any weapon, car, boat, or aircraft you find. And while it sounds like *Grand Theft Auto* in the jungle, *Just Cause* lets you “jack” rebel forces and lead them in your coup, too. You just need to build the right alliances as you sift through the game’s 300 missions—and that’s really where the *GTA* comparisons end.

“How about assassinating an army commander [wearing] drag inside a volcano bordello?” Sundberg offers as one mission example. “Or destroying local agriculture by burning down a cocoa field? Or busting into an arms fair full of trigger-happy businessmen?” And that’s not including side missions that have you blackmailing politicians with raunchy photos, swiping the cremated remains of a martyred guerrilla, trading goods, blowing up installations, stealing stuff.... “There are no limits, really,” Sundberg says.

WHAT WORRIES US: As with any free-roaming *GTA*-style game, the aiming scheme can make or break the experience. We haven’t had a chance to try *Just Cause*’s gun controls, so let’s hope Avalanche focuses on the little details while they’re busy thinking big. —Crispin Boyer

■ You can explore this island’s mix of jungle, villages, and big bugs however you wish, but Avalanche’s Sundberg recommends going by air—If for no other reason than to use the parachutes, one of the coolest gadgets in the game,” he says. “You can BASE jump from skyscrapers, bail out from moving vehicles, attack enemies from the air—the list goes on.”

NCAA FOOTBALL 07

EA Sports • July 2006

WHAT WE LIKE: Atmosphere—it’s what helps separate college football from the *No Fun League*. And thanks to the horsepower of Microsoft’s new console, EA believes it can finally reproduce that electric “go-team-go!” atmosphere found every Saturday in places such as Michigan’s Big House and Florida’s Swamp. “We will now be able to create a true living stadium with the power of the Xbox 360,” says Product Manager Kendall Boyd. “Smart fans will now dynamically react to what’s happening on the field, and we have actual bands, mascots, a student section, alumni, and visitor sections in the crowd.” So if you start mounting a major comeback at home, expect those in the stands to really bring the noise.

Turning the tide does more than pump up the volume, though; it’ll also widen the window of opportunity for game-changing plays. “We have a brand-new momentum system that will dictate who has overall control of the game,” says Boyd. Max out your momentum meter, and it’ll temporarily raise your team’s attributes, which then gives you a better chance of, say, intercepting a pass or blocking a punt on special teams.

WHAT WORRIES US: The dev team admittedly doesn’t have enough time to give every school’s gridiron a next-gen renovation (only expect the top teams’ home stadiums to receive picture-perfect makeovers this year). —Bryan Altshir >



■ In addition to this 360 debut, EA’s *NCAA Football* franchise will make its first appearance on the PSP this summer.

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■ These are screenshots from the PC version of *PSO*. But expect nothing less from the 360's visuals.

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

Sega • Fall 2006

WHAT WE LIKE: Anyone who handed over 200 hours of his or her life to the various incarnations of Sega's *Phantasy Star Online* can attest to just how powerfully addictive online roleplaying can be. We hate to break this to the junkies, but they're going to be back on that never-ending treadmill before you know it! After years of expansions and offshoots, Sega will finally offer a legitimate, full-fledged sequel, *Phantasy Star Universe*, for the PlayStation 2, PC, and Xbox 360. And this ambitious follow-up goes far farther than anyone expected—while *PSO* offered a stripped-down single-player experience alongside its robust multiplayer game, *PSU* will deliver fully formed online and offline adventures.

The single-player quest stars Ethan Weber, a spunky lad tasked with saving the galaxy from an insidious alien invasion. Along the way, you'll recruit a party of A.I.-controlled adventurers, traverse three planets, slash your way through numerous dungeons, and watch several hours of fully voiced cut-scenes.

As engaging as this newly fleshed-out offline quest sounds, we're pretty sure that when we get our hands on this massive game, we're gonna be spending all of our time with the online mode. Expect a cavalcade of improvements, including a newly revamped character-creation system, which adds a new beastmen race to the returning roster of humans, numans, and cast cyborgs. Now, you can also tweak minute details of your avatar's appearance, down to their clothing, facial features, and crazy accessories.

Surprisingly, *PSO*'s individual character classes got the boot, replaced by a new system that allows you to determine your character's strengths and skills as you progress throughout the game.

Other exciting changes to the online experience include upping the party size from four to six, allowing characters to simultaneously wield pistols and swords, and large towns that allow massive amounts of users to interact and trade items. Also, *PSO*'s handy "mag" robots have evolved into "partner machinery"—larger 'bots that can manufacture items and fight alongside you on the battlefield.

WHAT WORRIES US: Not a whole lot, actually. It would've been nice for the Xbox 360 visuals to blow away those on the PS2; unfortunately, though, that doesn't appear to be the case. Currently, all three versions look fairly similar (the PC and 360 versions merely sport higher resolutions), but hey, the original *PSO* still looks good today, thanks to its classy sci-fi aesthetic, so we're not worried.

We'd also like to know whether or not Xbox 360 players will be able to join up with PS2 and PC players. *Final Fantasy XI* allows for this cross-console cooperation, but it does so by circumventing Xbox Live via Square's PlayOnline service. (The downside: You can't access Xbox Live functions while playing *FFXI*.)

—Shane Bettenhausen



■ You'll be able to switch to a first-person perspective when shooting at enemies.

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next-gen
preview feature

XBOX 360

BOMBERMAN: ACT ZERO

Konami • Summer 2006

An advertisement for the Toyota Fuizion 2.0i. The main image shows a yellow car parked in front of a modern building with large windows. A large tire is shown in the foreground on the left. The text "MAKE YOUR MARK" is prominently displayed in the upper right, with a stylized arrow pointing right. Below it, the phone number "1.866.60.FUZION" and the website "THEFUZIONZONE.COM" are listed. The car model "FUZION 2.0i" is shown in the bottom right corner, with a list of features below it.

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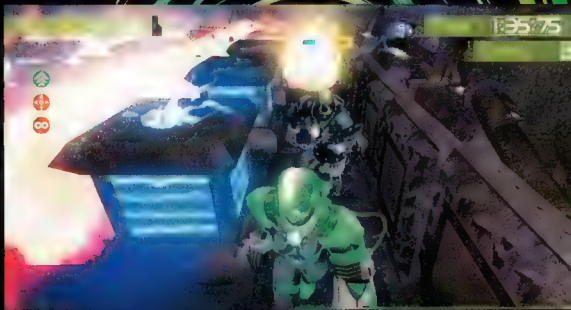
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WHAT WE LIKE: We've been joyfully detonating explosives as Bomberman for 20 years, and the series' core gameplay remains as wildly addictive as ever. Few multiplayer games can compete with the pick-up-and-play simplicity of this addictive action-puzzle franchise. This radically redesigned installment offers 99 new single-player stages, Xbox Live online multiplayer for up to eight players, and several destructive new power-ups. Plus, who doesn't want to get their hands on the all-new, all-sexy playable character, Bomberwoman?

WHAT WORRIES US: Look, we don't want to sound like fuddy-duddies, but this serious sci-fi makeover just doesn't seem very...*Bomberman* to us. While the older games' cutesy characters and 2D visuals might not connect with a modern audience, this new *Halo*-esque look could easily turn off any returning fans. Likewise, the game's weighty story line (you play a genetically engineered supersoldier tasked with blowing the other fast subjects to smithereens) may prove tough to swallow.

We're also concerned about the gameplay. Supposed improvements like "a new tension-filled perspective" and a "new life-bar system" might sound good on paper, but they'll fundamentally alter the *Bomberman* experience. In these shots, it looks like the new angle could obscure much of the action (the traditional 2D top-down views always worked the best), and the ability to withstand several blasts might just drag out matches. Hopefully, you'll be able to tweak the parameters to create an old-school *Bomberman* feel....

—Shane Bettenhausen ▶



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■ Nothing says "home" like one resembling Mr. Hamburger Helper.



VIVA PIÑATA

Microsoft • Fall 2006

WHAT WE LIKE: We can see it now—politicians all in a tizzy about a game that arms kids with baseball bats and encourages them to blindly bludgeon innocent little creatures out of this earthly realm. But, alas, they'd be wrong again. This *Animal Crossing* look-alike takes place on Piñata Island, a carefree world where your colorful papier-mâché friends are free to roam a verdant garden where their biggest concern is a sneaky fox out to nip their tails. The player's task will be to create a harmonious ecosystem where their piñatas live happily. You'll plant fruits and vegetables, build homes for your piñatas, and make your island a generally pleasant place to be—in order to attract new, rare piñatas who'll want to come to live there. When you need a variety of animals or different types of fruit trees, you can trade with friends on Xbox Live.

And wouldn't you know—the game launches this fall in conjunction with a Saturday morning cartoon series of the same name. The cross-media promotion will be typically crafty. "If you see something happen on the show, it's probably going to happen in the game," says Designer Justin Cook. "In fact, if you watch the show, there's a good chance that you'll find out some of the game's secrets."

If it all smells a little *Pokémon*-ish, then you've got good senses. The television show comes from the folks at 4Kids, who also brought Nintendo's trading/catching/cute-little-animal juggernaut to U.S. boob tubes.

Viva Piñata (the game) is the product of developer Rare.

WHAT WORRIES US: What's *not* to worry about? Rare's kid-friendly fare of late (*Kameo: Elements of Power*, *Grabbed by the Ghoulies*) hasn't exactly created a sterling legacy. But maybe *Viva Piñata*'s TV tie-in will help the struggling developer get its first unanimous hit since joining Microsoft's camp.

—Jennifer Tsao

■ "*Viva Piñata* is just like the wild world," says Designer Justin Cook. (We're thinking he doesn't actually mean the DS' *Animal Crossing: Wild World*.)

NINETY-NINE NIGHTS

Microsoft • Fall 2006

WHAT WE LIKE: That Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the guy responsible for *Ninety-Nine Nights*, still remembers what video games are supposed to be all about. "I was so nervous before making this game," said the creator of quirky hits such as *Space Channel 5* (DC), *Rez* (PS2), and *Lumines* (PSP) to our friends at IUP.com. "This is a fighting game, a war game. So that was a really big challenge for me.... In my mind, I kept telling myself: 'It must be fun.'"


As Mizuguchi confessed, this is quite a departure from his previous projects. And while the game will undoubtedly draw comparisons to both the *Dynasty Warriors* and *Kingdom Under Fire* series (all three can't pack enough warriors onto their killing fields), its narrative should help separate *Ninety-Nine Nights* from the rest of the hack-n-slash pack. "[All the playable characters] bring a different view to the story," said Mizuguchi. "And in this game, the big surprise is that you can [also] play as the enemy." So be prepared to assume a lot of different personas here, each with their own unique fighting style and ties to the overall plot.

WHAT WORRIES US: Terribly repetitive gameplay tends to be a problem for most games cut from this mold.

—Bryan Intihar

■ Apparently, cloning isn't an issue in *Ninety-Nine Nights*'s society.





MOBILE OPS: THE ONE-YEAR WAR

Namco Bandai • Fall 2006

Take control of your Mobile Suit in a war of galactic proportions. You can also hop out of these towering mechs and embark upon the mission on foot. (Why would you want to do that?)



DEAD RISING

Capcom • Summer 2006


Use anything in your environment (and we mean anything) to get out of a mall. The catch? The thousands of zombies between you and the exit.



CHROMEHOUNDS

Sega • Summer 2006

Countless customization options will make it nearly impossible for you to share the same mech design as others on *Chromehounds'* online battlefield. But will anyone be there to fight? (Historically, these kinds of games don't sell so well on our shelves.)



TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

Atari • Summer 2006

Can't scratch up enough coin for a trip to Hawaii? Well, aloha, anyway—*Unlimited* has beautifully re-created the island of Oahu, where you (and anyone else online) can use its streets as an impromptu raceway.



LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

Capcom • Winter 2007

This intense third-person shooter pits you against hordes of alien bugs on a hostile ice planet for the control of a thermal-energy source. You'll battle these foreign creepy-crawlers both inside (meh) and outside. (good) heavily armed robots.

ALSO ON THE WAY FOR XBOX 360

BIOSHOCK

2K Games • 2007

BLUE DRAGON

Microsoft • Fall 2006

GEARS OF WAR

Microsoft • Fall 2006

HUXLEY

Wehzen • 2007

LOST ODYSSEY

Microsoft • 2007

MARVEL COMICS MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE RPG

Microsoft • 2008

MASS EFFECT

Microsoft • 2007

PREY

2K Games • Summer 2006

SAINT'S ROW

THQ • September 2006

STUNTMAN 2

Atari • Fall 2006

TOO HUMAN

Microsoft • Fall 2006

WOLFENSTEIN

Activision • 2007

CODED ARMS: ASSAULT

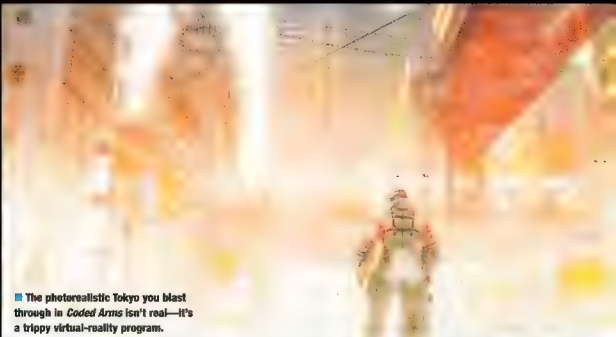
Konami • Fall 2006

WHAT WE LIKE: Well, to be honest, we didn't particularly like *Coded Arms* on PSP. The game achieved ample success by being the only first-person shooter in the system's meager lineup, but its woefully limited controls and randomly generated levels didn't impress. Thankfully Konami realizes that this next-gen sequel requires some serious overhauling. "Even though the PSP game did fairly well, it was only our first effort," explains *Assault* Producer Yasuo Daikai. "Players complained about the random levels, so you won't be seeing any of those in this new PS3 version." Instead, prepare for an ambitious, full-fledged FPS in the vein of *Halo*, complete with intelligent enemies, destructible environments, high-tech weaponry, and even vehicles to commandeer. Konami also plans a full set of online multiplayer modes, including classic fare like deathmatch, capture the flag, and even four-player cooperative play with its own set of missions.

And these aspirations seem even grander coming from a Japanese development team—first-person shooters aren't exactly a popular genre across the ocean. But the team at Konami loves shooters (*Call of Duty 2* being their recent fave), and hopes to bring something new to the genre with *Assault*. "We have something interesting to present in our game that American developers cannot," explains Daikai. "*Assault* is set in a virtual reality re-creation of Tokyo, and I believe that this theme will appeal to gamers." The setting seems like a major improvement over the dullsville catacombs of the PSP *Arms*—foilage of our hacker hero spraying hot lead across the high-tech skyscrapers and neon-lined streets of Shinjuku looked mightily impressive.

WHAT WORRIES US: It's tough to wipe away the stigma of the disappointing PSP debut, but we're prepared to give *Assault* a fair shake. Even so, the team faces quite a challenge. "Japanese-based FPS games are still in their infancy, and there is a lot to be learned from U.S. developers," admits Daikai. "We're studying them very closely and trying to create something new and exciting here." Chances that the team can piece together a top-quality shooter in time for the PS3 launch seem sketchy...in fact, the game isn't due to be shown in playable form until the Tokyo Game Show, some three months before the game's planned launch. When you factor in the knowledge that several other top-quality FPS titles will crowd store shelves at the PS3 launch, it makes *Coded Arms*' chances for success seem slimmer.

—Shane Bettenhausen >



■ The photorealistic Tokyo you blast through in *Coded Arms* isn't real—it's a trippy virtual-reality program.





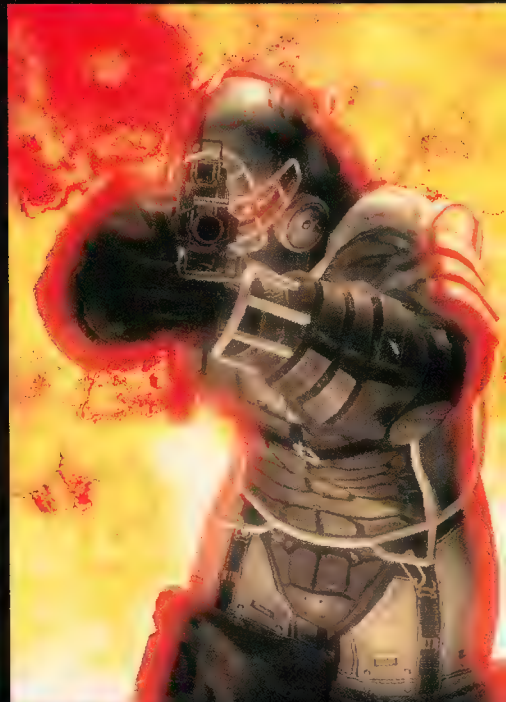
■ Konami is creating the game with Epic's new Unreal Engine 3—the same tech behind *Gears of War* (XB360).

CODED ARMS PSP, TAKE TWO

Konami is also planning an entirely different *Coded Arms* sequel for PSP. Like its PS3 cousin, this first-person shooter will eschew the randomly generated levels of the first game in favor of a directed, straightforward shooting experience. You can also expect larger levels, new weaponry, and a Cold War aesthetic (inspired by the game's Russian development team). Apparently it's too early to show screens of this expected fall release, but Konami was kind enough to provide us with this...drawing of a screenshot. We're not kidding.



■ Konami promises a wealth of unique high-tech weapons with multiple firing modes.





VIRTUA FIGHTER 5

Sega • Spring 2007

WHAT WE LIKE: Fighting games don't get more serious, technical, or influential than Sega's legendary *Virtua Fighter* series. This is the franchise that birthed the whole 3D fighting genre, after all. Unlike fanciful fighters such as *Soul Calibur*, *Tekken*, or *Dead or Alive*, *VF* focuses squarely on simulating real-life martial arts action. If you've never taken the plunge before, expect a fairly steep learning curve—casual pugilists tend to shy away from the series' demanding move sets and pinpoint timing—but true fighting game fans know that *VF5* will likely set the standard by which all future competitors must be judged.

VF5 introduces two original characters: El Blaze, a Mexican Lucha Libre wrestler who uses his compact size and swift speed to counter veteran grappler Wolf's brute strength and Eileen, a young Chinese girl who battles with Kouken monkey fist style. These newcomers join all 15 returning fighters from *VF4: Evolution* (*VF3*'s tubby sumo champ Taka Arashi remains the lone series outcast) to create the largest cast yet. Also, a few of the old standbys sport redesigned looks—Lau Chan has seemingly aged about 30 years, while formerly butch G.I. Jane wannabe Vanessa now appears shockingly feminine.

You'll likely spend a lot of time gazing at these character models, too: *VF5*'s extraordinary visuals truly look a full generation ahead of what we've seen in competing fighting games. During combat, it's difficult to appreciate just how good the characters look, but when the camera zooms in between matches you'll see the stunning level of detail. And

you're not stuck looking at the same stock models—the game's massive customization system allows you to customize the physical appearance of your fighter with unlockable haircuts, clothing, tattoos, and accessories.

WHAT WORRIES US: So far, we've only had hands-on time with an early version of the arcade *VF5*, and it wasn't quite perfect. Most of the backgrounds looked just as impressive as the hyperdetailed fighters, but a few stages seemed graphically uneven, perhaps just unfinished. (The final game doesn't hit the Japanese arcades until July.) Also, the characters didn't seem as evenly matched as we'd expect from this historically balanced series, but that should theoretically be fixed long before the action lands on the PlayStation 3.

Unfortunately, Sega has gone on the record stating that the home version of *VF5* will not offer any type of online play. Apparently the game's hit detection requires exacting frame-by-frame precision, and any amount of net latency would unravel the game's delicate gameplay. While the full details of the home version's single-player game aren't known, hopefully a system similar to that of *VF4's* (in which you faced off against A.I. versions of Japan's top players) will provide some solace to *VF* fans who don't have a stable of real-life friends to punch and kick with.

—Shane Bettenhausen



■ And to think Jeffrey's arms ain't the baliest parts of his body.



■ Expect the PS3 version to look just as slick as these arcade screenshots.



■ Someone could use a little more fiber in his diet.

UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOM

Sony Online • Fall 2006

WHAT WE LIKE: While the cynic in us sees a typical action-role-playing game with some next-gen polish, the team behind *Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom* feels the PS3 influence will revitalize this once PSP-exclusive series. “[Sony’s new console] is what made me finally make the move back from a seven-plus-year stint in online PC games,” says Producer Andy Sites.

The setup is familiar, as three characters—a tanklike brute, magic-using mage, and fleet-footed scout—go after a king gone rogue. Sites says that while the three classes have similar basic abilities—such as melee, ranged attacks, and special—their differences become pronounced as each levels up. But what should really give the game staying power is the combat system. “Melee combat will be achieved through the use of light and heavy attacks,” Sites says, “both of which will have their advantages depending upon the situation.” And it gets deeper as characters level and earn new special abilities. “Providing this level of depth and mechanics, along with the integration of real-time physics to the combat system, will provide a significant improvement over the typical hack-n-slash experience,” he says.

WHAT WORRIES US: While gamers embraced the first *Untold Legends*, the recent follow-up smacked of mediocrity. Also, after seeing *Dark Kingdom* in person, we couldn’t believe—from a graphical standpoint—that this was really a PS3 title. —Greg Ford



■ “We have plans for multiplayer outside of the standard [online cooperative] story mode,” says *Dark Kingdom* Producer Andy Sites.

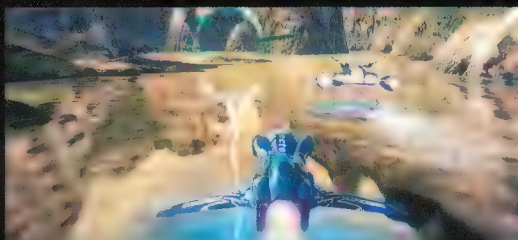
FATAL INERTIA

Koei • Fall 2006

WHAT WE LIKE: You can totally tweak out your 23rd century hovercraft in this online combat-racer, bolting on new bits and designing custom paint jobs. But who cares? The potential fun here comes from blowing other players’ rocket-powered jalopies to jaggy bits, not slathering on soft pinks. “The damage here isn’t just graphical,” says Lead Game Designer Michael Bond, “but actually involves losing parts of the vehicle, including engines and wings, which dramatically alters the vehicle’s performance.”

Fatal Inertia’s hyperrealistic physics engine, plus the power of the PS3, allows for weapons we’ve never seen before. “We have small magnetic projectiles that are attracted to all metal objects in the game,” Bond says. “That not only means they behave like heat-seeking missiles, but also that their effect is cumulative—if more magnets are attached to a player’s vehicle...it makes it easier for other players to hit the vehicle with more magnets.” You’ll also wield a sticky missile topped with a rocket booster that, “upon impact, exerts a force on the opponent’s vehicle at the point where it’s attached,” says Bond. “It causes a constant external force that the opponent must deal with...making driving and fighting more challenging.”

WHAT WORRIES US: If the physics tricks don’t deliver, *Fatal Inertia* could turn out as just another racing game. —Crispin Boyer



■ *Fatal Inertia*’s makers are calling it part rally racer, since all the levels are set in the great outdoors—from glacial ranges to canyons to remote forests.



■ Pick up the June issue of the *Official PlayStation Magazine*, as our sister pub's cover story has exclusive details on how you'll literally be playing with fire in this *Mercenaries* sequel.

MERCENARIES: WORLD IN FLAMES

TBD • Fall 2006

WHAT WE LIKE: Freedom. If modern gaming had a movement, it'd lie toward giving the player more freedom: freedom to go anywhere and do anything, freedom to behave in ways you'd never behave in real life, freedom to do things the designers of a game never intended. The *Mercenaries* franchise, embarking on its sophomore sequel, takes the concept to an extreme. Last year's *Ground of Destruction* (PS2/XB) was often described as simply "Grand Theft Auto in a war zone." But its dedication to all-out player freedom—the ability to destroy nearly anything in the game, for example—gave *Mercenaries* an identity of its own. And, really, if you're going to explore your inner psychopath in a densely populated urban area, why not have a few tanks and bazookas on hand?

"The beauty of *Mercenaries* is that there are no hard rules," says Director Cameron Brown of developer Pandemic. "[It's] a place where the player can do anything and everything...." That place is about to get a next-gen makeover, not just in the good looks department, but in the subtle details that make a game world more believable. "We are now fully simulating a living, breathing, dynamic war zone," says Brown. "We can create a truly reactive world." What does this newfangled "reactive world" mean for players? "It means people talk to you and about you, know who you are, what you've done and how you did it," says Brown. "It means you'll see appropriate chaos when a heavily armed maniac runs amok in a crowded city."

It doesn't sound far removed from the original game. *Ground of Destruction*, set in an imagined North Korean conflict, kept track of your relations with warring factions, setting old friends against you when you rubbed them the wrong way. But if all goes according to plan, *World in Flames* will go deeper into the territory the first game staked out.

"*Mercenaries* always wanted to be a next-gen game," says Brown. "There was so much more we wanted to do but just didn't have the power." The first in line for a shot of PS3 smart juice is the game's artificial intelligence. "With the massively increased amounts of memory and CPU power available, we can make A.I. smart enough that it becomes truly satisfying to outsmart it," says Brown.

One thing that really set the original *Mercenaries* apart from the throng of *GTA*-alikes was the novel way you progressed through it. Inspired by the playing cards handed out to soldiers at the outset of the Iraq war, the game designated 52 targets on its deck, informing you of the bad guys to take out in your own way and at your own pace. This sequel will ditch the decks in favor of some new, unknown structure. "We didn't want to simply repeat ourselves," says Brown. "I don't want to give too much away, so I'll just say that verifying high-value targets is still a major part of the game."

WHAT WORRIES US: The first *Mercenaries* was a rare collision of reality and game. Yet we've got a tinge of discomfort in the idea of the very fictional Han Solo or Indiana Jones (both were unlockable characters in the original game) indulging in a killing spree in a very real, modern North Korea, a country where thousands have starved to death in recent years under the rule of a ruthless dictator. "I think everyone gets that the game has a kind of 'action movie' relationship with reality," says Brown. "It's informed by reality and features recognizable situations, but no one's going to mistake it for a documentary!"

—Robert Ashley



The Profactor is about to get really f***ed up.



WHERE IN THE WORLD?

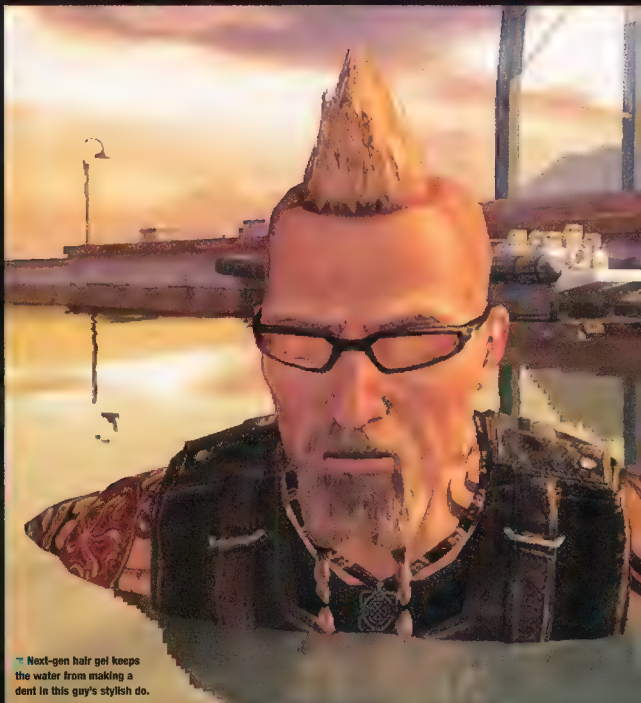
The developer of *Mercenaries: World in Flames* won't reveal the location of its game, but we can make educated guesses.

Taiwan: The United States has vowed to take the side of democratic-leaning Taiwan should China decide to take back political control of the country via military force.

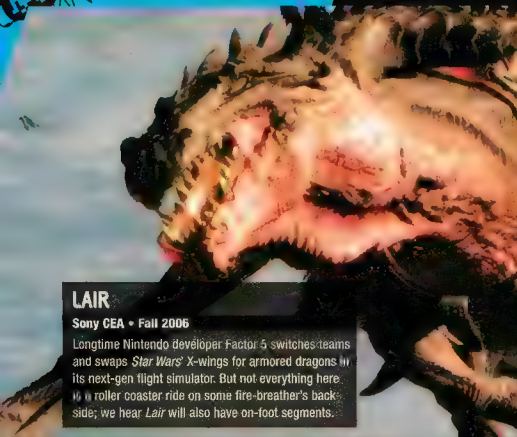
Iran: Nuclear weapons + sworn enemy of the United States + large American military presence in neighboring Iraq = high probability for conflict.

Belarus: Public outcry following the landslide reelection of Alexander Lukashenko, the last authoritarian ruler left in Eastern Europe, could turn quickly into revolution.

Netherlands: Amsterdam's got some dissension amongst its pot smokers. But no one does crap and they all go right to sleep.



Next-gen hair gel keeps the water from making a dent in this guy's stylish do.

**LAIR**

Sony CEA • Fall 2006

Longtime Nintendo developer Factor 5 switches teams and swaps *Star Wars*' X-wings for armored dragons in its next-gen flight simulator. But not everything here is a roller coaster ride on some fire-breather's backside; we hear *Lair* will also have on-foot segments.

**RATCHET & CLANK 5**

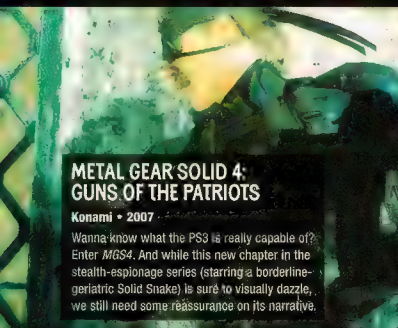
Sony CEA • 2007

Over the years, the lombax and his metallic mate have gradually changed their focus from straight-forward platforming to weapon-heavy shooting. We'd like the duo's next-gen debut to feature more of the former, but we'll be happy if the game can at least retain the series' signature laughs.

**UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007**

Midway • Fall 2006

Dig first-person shooters but not their online fragfests? Then *UT2007* definitely isn't for you, as this pretty-looking game's No. 1 (and No. 2...and No. 3) priority is multiplayer.

**METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS**

Konami • 2007

Wanna know what the PS3 is really capable of? Enter *MGS4*. And while this new chapter in the stealth-espionage series (starring a borderline-geriatric Solid Snake) is sure to visually dazzle, we still need some reassurance on its narrative.

**FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE**

Square Enix • 2007

Last year, Square Enix teased everyone with what it called the "FFVII PS3 tech demo." Well, what do you know: This test case was really a sneak peek at a next-gen revival of the PS1 role-playing hit.

**ALSO ON THE WAY
FOR PLAYSTATION 3****BLADESTORM**

Koei • Fall 2006

**DC COMICS MASSIVELY
MULTIPLAYER ONLINE RPG**

Sony Online • 2008

DEVIL MAY CRY 4

Capcom • 2007

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

EA Sports • Fall 2006

FULL AUTO 2

Sega • Fall 2006

GENJI 2

Sony CEA • Fall 2006

GRAN TURISMO 5

Sony CEA • Fall 2006

KILLZONE 2

Sony CEA • 2007

MOTOR STORM

Sony CEA • Fall 2006

RED DEAD REVOLVER 2

Rockstar • 2007

RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

Sony CEA • Fall 2006

RIDGE RACER 7

Namco • Fall 2006

TEKKEN 6

Namco • 2007

THE GETAWAY 3

Sony CEA • 2007

WARHAWK

Sony CEA • Fall 2006



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MARK MILLAR

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SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Sega • Fall 2006



■ Sonic: Always the showboat.



WHAT WE LIKE: Well, for one thing, it's got very little in common with last year's disastrous series offshoot, *Shadow the Hedgehog*. That means Sega's blue blur won't be packing heat or using foul language here; instead, he'll be taking a cue from his glory days on the 16-bit Genesis. "We have many goals that we are striving to achieve with the first *Sonic* game for the next-gen consoles, but the main one is to return *Sonic* to his roots," says Director Shun Nakamura of development studio Sonic Team. "[We want] to utilize the latest technologies and production values to allow people to experience a similar impact of Sonic's first appearance 15 years ago. That's why we are titling the game simply *Sonic the Hedgehog*—to 'reintroduce' the new Sonic."

The comeback trail begins exactly where it should: equipping this speed freak with an even stronger pair of legs. "Obviously, the increased sense of speed will improve the realistic sensation of the game," explains Nakamura. "In previous titles, it was fast, but the speed didn't necessarily feel 'real.' Now, thanks to the next-gen consoles, we will offer players the sensation that they are running fast, in a real world, against backgrounds built more painstakingly than before." And speaking of settings, this journey will have Sonic running like the wind in the new lagoon city of Soleana, featuring stages that emphasize either exploration or action. Nakamura promises the latter kind will really take advantage of the mascot's greatest attribute...and that you'll get a major rush while blazing through these gigantic areas. "The action stages are where Sonic's blistering speed will be used to full effect," he says. "Running through breathtaking high places will make your hands perspire, and running along the walls of tall buildings will make your heart beat fast."

The game will also borrow a page from the more recent (and questionably received) *Sonic Adventure* titles (DC/GC), as you won't just assume the role of the world's most recognizable hedgehog. Other popular characters from the series will be playable, and while Nakamura won't confirm names, we'd bet on—at the very least—Sonic's longtime sidekick Tails and his tough-guy pal Knuckles showing their mugs here.

WHAT WORRIES US: Playing as the supporting characters in both *Sonic Adventures* was occasionally frustrating. If history repeats itself, some gamers may hit the brakes before trying the hedgehog's first next-gen speed run. —Bryan Iltis



■ Keeping it real: *Sonic* Director Shun Nakamura says that, compared to previous games in the series, this one's world will have a more "realistic" vibe to it.



SO WHAT'S THE STORY?

While the game drops Sonic into an unfamiliar water-soaked metropolis, he'll still be facing his longtime foe, Dr. Robotnik. And during this go-around, the wily, egg-shaped villain will have some serious backup. "In the city of Soleana, Sonic encounters a beautiful princess named Elyse. But she's abducted by Dr. Robotnik, under unexplained circumstances," says Nakamura. "As always, Sonic will go head-to-head against Dr. Robotnik, but a mysterious character named Silver also stands in Sonic's way, blocking him with supernatural powers."



BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY

Ubisoft • Fall 2006

WHAT WE LIKE: That we get to play another next-gen war game. Seriously, would you be disappointed if *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* follows the path forged by *Call of Duty 2* and *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter*—two of the Xbox 360's best games? Visually, it's looking up to snuff, as evidenced by these superdetailed screens. "The stuff that can be done with real next-gen technology is just amazing—pushing way far beyond what we saw in the 360 launch titles," says Gearbox Software head Randy Pitchford, who throws out phrases the game makes use of—Unreal Engine 3; normal mapping, depth-of-field blur, a motion-based animation system—that would send any technophile into fits. But the game has to deliver more than glamorous graphics to convince gamers—well, the non—"visual whores," at least—to enlist.

This latest entry in the *BIA* series—set during World War II's Operation Market Garden, in which the Allies attempted to capture key bridges between Holland and Germany—will put an even heavier focus on squad tactics. In addition to the fire and assault teams you could control in the previous games, *Hell's Highway* adds a third team to your command: a special group that, depending on the situation, can be a machine-gun crew,

bazooka team, mortar crew, or radio operator who can call in artillery or air support. And we're told the A.I. has evolved past the typical run-n-gun numbskullery. Pitchford says the squads react to context, so, say, they won't just start shooting at enemies in range; rather, they'll look to set up ambushes. "There's nothing quite as powerful as setting up your fire team where the enemy doesn't know they are and getting your assault team in position from the opposite direction," he says. "It's serious stuff, and it's real tactics, but it's also great fun."

WHAT WORRIES US: Despite our reinvigorated enthusiasm for the war genre, not everything's guaranteed to hit a gold standard (see *The Outfit* for the 360). Also, while multiplayer almost always adds something to these types of games, we wonder whether it'll be more *GRAV* (amazing) or *COD2* (somewhat problematic). Pitchford won't go into too many details, but says, "We're making really bold decisions about accessibility and usability to make the whole experience better for gamers who, like us, spend a lot of time playing online." —Greg Ford



■ *Fightin'* the smart fight: Brainier squadmates should help lighten your killing load.

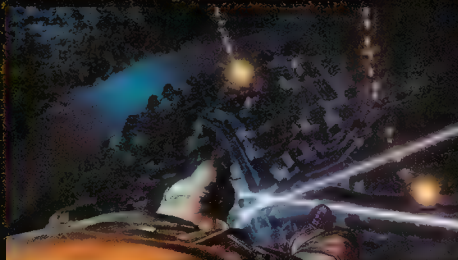


BIG WORDS, SMALL PIECES

Another positive for *Hell's Highway*: the destructible cover and the physics behind it. While a machine gun can perforate a wooden door to pieces, troops will be in far better shape behind packed sandbags. And though cover here does get blown in pretty realistic fashion, Pitchford says even greater detail is possible: "Bullets collide with things naturally and realistically, and there is physics simulation on things that matter [in *Hell's Highway*].... It's not a binary thing, where a cover piece is either on or off—when bullets hit stuff, they hit stuff. We're not modeling every molecule yet—we'll need an Xbox 6.02x10²³ and a PlayStation 300 for that—but things in *Hell's Highway* will be breaking down more than you've ever seen before in any WWII first-person shooter ever made."

MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE

EA Games • Fall 2006



■ *Mines in Airborne* is the ability to get behind the wheel in select missions.

WHAT WE LIKE: You'll enter World War II in a way that's simply a lot more exhilarating than in *Hell's Highway*: Each level here begins with what EA's billing as a "fully interactive airdrop into enemy territory." And, just like in any real combat area, where you land will have a direct impact on how you tackle missions. "If a player lands where the allies land, they will have lots of backup as you make your way into battle," says Jon Paquette, *Airborne's* design director and writer. "But a more skilled player who is familiar with the jump and landing tactics may land right in an enemy encampment on top of a building." You also shouldn't have a problem distinguishing between safe and hot zones during your descent. "We designed iconic spaces and events that communicate safe and unsafe areas clearly," says Paquette. "For example, in one circumstance there are groups of allied paratroopers that all drop into the same area on a map, drawing the player's eye to that location and urging him to follow if he wants a safe landing."

Once your feet hit the war-torn earth, expect to encounter (like every other military game is promising these days) smarter troops on both sides of the battlefield. "They now have an understanding of the value of cover, the tactical importance of one building or structure over another, and whether they can hold a position during an enemy attack, or if it would be better to retreat to a fallback position," says Senior Producer Matt Marsala. "The result of this system is that there's a lot more motion during combat, and there's a sense of shifting battle lines as the Allies push toward an objective and the Axis tries desperately to reinforce the front."

While multiplayer features remain mostly classified, we do know that team deathmatch sessions are a go. "We started seeing exciting scenarios, such as the idea of clans jumping together from the same C-47 [military transport]," says Paquette, "and realized that deathmatch was ultimately the best option for both the game and the community."

WHAT WORRIES US: We haven't taken the plunge through *Airborne's* unfriendly skies yet, but if the dev team doesn't properly execute this feature, it could come across as gimmicky. And this franchise can't afford another dud, with top-tier competitors *Brothers in Arms* and *Call of Duty* also prepping new installments for 2006. —Justin Frechette

AIRBORNE 101

All of the *Medal of Honor* titles have strived for historical accuracy, and this one's no different. The 82nd Airborne Division—which provided the inspiration for the game—played crucial roles in famous battles throughout WWII, such as Operation Neptune over Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge. After the tour, General George S. Patton, enamored with America's flyboys, stated: "In all my years in the Army and all the honor guards I have ever seen, the 82nd's honor guard is, undoubtedly, the best."



■ The fight took a turn for the awkward when Spidey felt the urge to goose Dr. Strange.



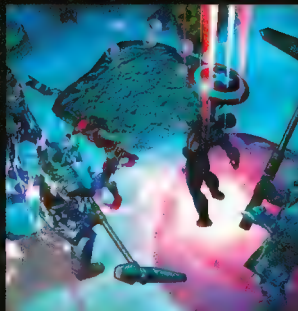
WHAT WE LIKE: It's the stuff that comic-book wet dreams are made of—an action-role-playing game starring more than 140 characters from the Marvel universe. And even though *Ultimate Alliance's* story is generic (Dr. Doom is hatching a scheme for—surprise, surprise—world domination), at least it's completely your call which supersquad stops him. Feel like pairing Spidey with Professor X's mutants? No problem. Or, would you rather assemble the unlikely foursome of Thor, Dr. Strange, Blade, and Elektra? Go right ahead, true believer. "You can name [your team], pick the logo, pick the team roster," says Project Lead Dan Vondrak of developer Raven Software. "Once [your team] has gained enough reputation, you'll increase in team level. With each level increase comes the ability to increase your team bonuses, and these can be applied to any members of your team." If you re-create a classic Marvel lineup—like The Avengers—your group will actually start out with a slight rep boost.

The almost limitless team customization options won't be the only reason to wear Underoos again; *Ultimate Alliance* comes to the fight with a much deeper combat system than the *X-Men Legends* action-RPGs (which Raven also made). "We've changed around the combat chains, added charge moves...added new moves coming off the grab state," explains Vondrak. "We've also added several character-specific moves that override the normal ones." So, for example, the hotheaded Ghost Rider will use his chains to hurt enemies into the sky and then repeatedly smash them into the ground, while your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man can hang them from the ceiling with his web.

WHAT WORRIES US: As of now, when the game's in motion, the difference between the next- and current-gen editions (PS2/XB/GC) is negligible. —*Bryan Intihar*

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

Activision • Fall 2006



WWE SMACKDOWN! VS. RAW 2007

THQ • Fall 2006



■ *Smackdown!*'s developers finally got the memo about adding voice chat to online play.

WHAT WE LIKE: No shortcuts. As the 360 launch demonstrated, when annually updated franchises (like *Madden*) make their next-gen leap, you usually see much slimmer feature sets the first time out. This WWE wresler is bucking that trend, offering an even deeper season mode than in years past. "Without the 'entertainment' of 'sports entertainment,' we'd only be delivering half of a WWE product," says Creative Manager Cory Ledesma. "The new story structure gives you three general paths to take—all completely different story lines. This [structure] also allows you to play multiple story years so that [you] can check out different story paths and see new cut-scenes."

Aside from laying on the soap-opera-like antics pretty thick, *2007* should make it easier to bend your opponent into a greasy man-pretzel. "We felt that [past games'] combat controls were too complicated, and it slowed down the game's response," admits Ledesma. "This year's grappling controls will be mapped exclusively to the right analog stick, which will allow you to execute moves with a simple flick." Also, matches won't be confined to the squared circle; they can now move into the crowd.

WHAT WORRIES US: It appears even the power of next gen can't remove the stick lodged up these wrestlers' asses (from the early footage we've seen, the WWE Superstars still walk around all stiff). —*Bryan Intihar*



VIRTUA TENNIS 3

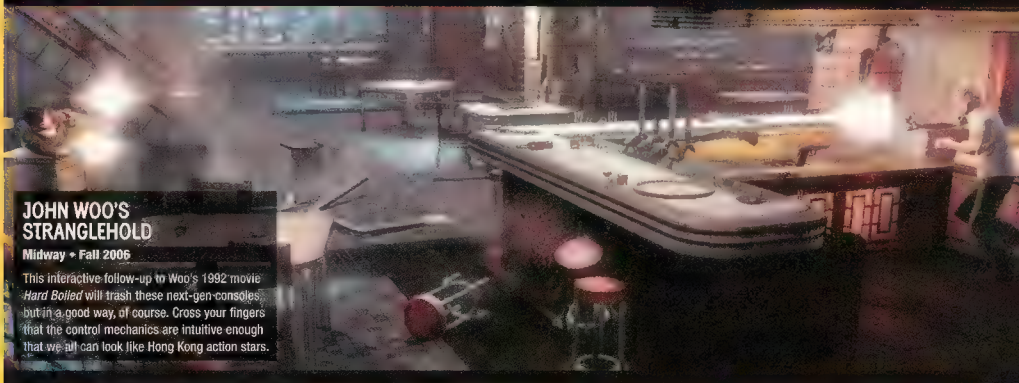
Sega • Fall 2006

Sega's rendition of the stuffy country club sport has routinely served game-play as... Now, maybe these consoles can help make it. Tennis pros look less like wide-eyed zombies.

THE DARKNESS

2K Games • Spring 2007

This comic-book-based first-person shooter comes from developer Starbreeze, which previously brought us the Xbox 1 surprise hit *The Chronicles of Riddick*.



JOHN WOO'S STRANGLEHOLD

Midway • Fall 2006

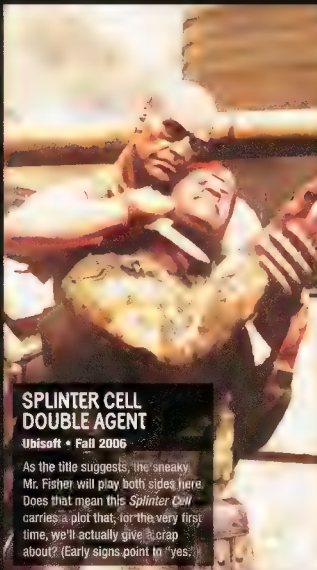
This interactive follow-up to Woo's 1992 movie *Hard Boiled* will trash these next-gen consoles, but in a good way, of course. Cross your fingers that the control mechanics are intuitive enough that we all can look like Hong Kong action stars.



RESIDENT EVIL 5

Capcom • 2007

Aside from blowing the heads off zombies (or are they?) on your own, No. 5 will also come packed with some sort of online component. You know those internet-ready PS2 *RE* games, Capcom? OK, well, the complete opposite of that.



SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT

Ubisoft • Fall 2006

As the title suggests, the sneaky Mr. Fisher will play both sides here. Does that mean this *Splinter Cell* carries a plot that, for the very first time, we'll actually give a crap about? (Early signs point to "yes.")

ALSO ON THE WAY FOR XB360 AND PS3

ALONE IN THE DARK

Atari • Spring 2007

DARK SECTOR

D3 • Fall 2007

DEF JAM 3

EA Games • Spring 2007

DIRTY HARRY

Warner Bros. Interactive • 2007

GOLDEN AXE

Sega • 2007

RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS

Ubisoft • Fall 2006

RAYMAN 4

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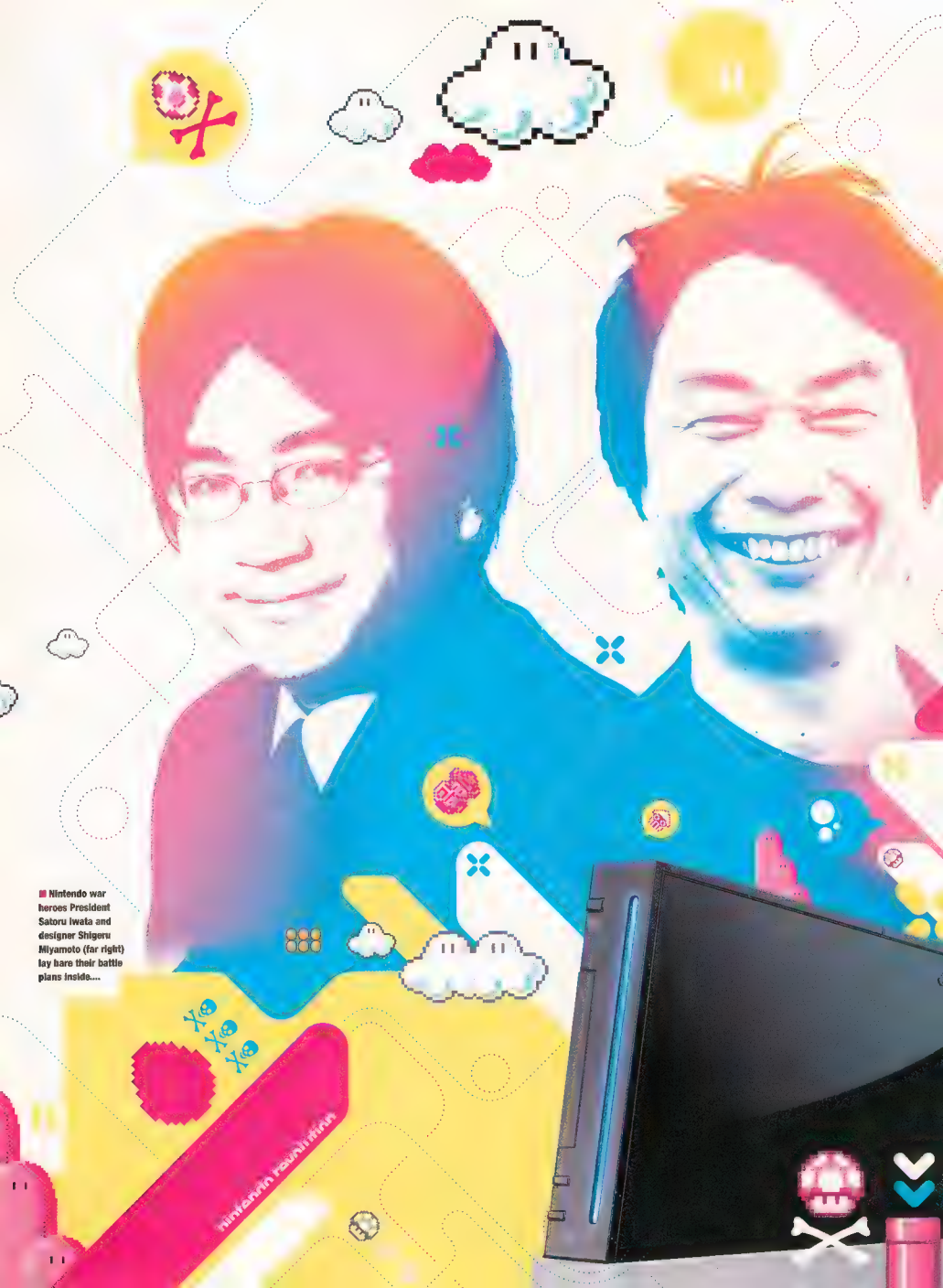
REVOLUTIONARY WARFARE

The next-gen console war is almost here, and Nintendo's new console is armed with innovation (it's still online when you turn it off!) and experimental weapons (its controller has a speaker!). This time, the company is going for the big prize: everyone



Story Design by Alexander Dennis

■ Nintendo war heroes President Satoru Iwata and designer Shigeru Miyamoto (far right) lay bare their battle plans inside...



"Our concept... is to make something everyone in the household can relate to and interact with."

—Shigeru Miyamoto, Nintendo

Last place, it's not somewhere Nintendo used to hang out. But relative (compared to PS1 and PS2) failures Nintendo 64 and GameCube have left the company—a formerly uncontested console champ—in unenviable territory.

But talking to Nintendo President Satoru Iwata or Senior Managing Director (and *Mario* creator) Shigeru Miyamoto, you'd almost get the sense that they've transcended this whole nonsense about it mattering who's in first place. For their upcoming next-gen gaming machine, the Revolution (whose name should change by the time you read this), they've practically forgotten about battling rivals Sony and Microsoft. Nintendo's not after those guys' audiences—it's after everyone else. And we mean everyone. If that sounds cuckoo-for-Cocoa-Puffs ambitious to you, just remember, this is a company whose name was once synonymous with the word "videogame."

So just what is Nintendo planning? Some crazy, innovative s***. Crazy enough to make us think that this little-guy-who-used-to-be-a-big-guy might, just might, have what it'll take to rule the world again.

EGM: Could you discuss the history of the Revolution project?

Satoru Iwata: In early 2004, we began discussing in earnest what to do with the controller for our new console. Around that time, the DS concept had recently come together. One common objective that we've had with both the DS and the Revolution is this idea of, "What can we do to expand the audience beyond people who normally play videogames?"

Just to give you an example of how we've approached this, think about hardcore gamers—they have a console in their homes. Does everyone who lives in that household use the console? My guess is, the answer is no. Our driving concept behind the Revolution is to make it something that everyone in the household can relate to and interact with.

One question we had was why people are willing to pick up a TV remote control and interact with that, but at the same time they're not able to pick up a videogame controller. The funny thing was, at that time, even though we'd been discussing the TV remote, we never thought to translate that into our controller design. So for a while we were unable to escape our fixed perception that a videogame controller is something that you grip with both hands. We drew a lot of concept sketches and put together a lot of prototype controllers at this time. And there were a lot of ideas there that people would look at and never equate with being a videogame controller! We spent close to a year going through this prototyping process, going through tons of concepts.

One of Nintendo's biggest strengths is that we have both hardware and software developers in one building, and they're continually cooperating in their efforts. The hardware developers can come up with an idea, propose it to the software side, and say, "What do you think you can do with this?" They're able to quickly put together a very simple game/idea mechanic related to that idea, then quickly evaluate it to see if it has that gameplay hook that they're looking for.

In early 2005, a young leader on the controller development team proposed the idea of this one-handed controller. Shortly before that, we had already developed this direct-pointing-device technology, and we were thinking of using that to

point to objects onscreen and to hit things. Most people on the team said, "You can't play a standard game with that... what are we going to do about the [downloadable classic] Virtual Console games?" So there were some doubts about the design...but then Mr. Miyamoto said, "Why don't we give it a shot, and make it work by making the remote small and compact, but with an expansion port for other functions?" By creating a shell of a classic-style controller, you can have all the functionality for standard games.

So we were able to put together a prototype, implement it in a gameplay demo, and we found out that this kind of control actually makes first-person shooters really fun with the aiming and pointing...but what do you do with movement? That's when we took advantage of the expansion port for the nunchaku configuration [where you plug in a second device connected by a cord]—that setup was proposed by the NCL [Nintendo Co., Ltd., Nintendo's name in Japan] producer of the *Metroid Prime* series.

EGM: How are things going with the Revolution now?

St: It's progressing smoothly. A lot of developers have gotten their hands on the Revolution controller, and they're starting to understand the types of things that they're able to do with it. Our internal developers and second-party teams are now bringing to me the projects that they're working on, and I'm getting more and more excited with each one.

At [May's game trade show] E3, we'll be demonstrating different ideas on how to apply this innovative new technology. We'll be able to provide third-party developers a hint as to what directions they can take with their own development.

EGM: How will third-party support compare to what we've seen for GameCube?

St: I think the conditions in Japan and in the U.S. are slightly different. Our goal of expanding the market [with the DS] has been met with tremendous results in Japan. A lot of developers are looking at those results and now have high expectations for their games on that system, as well as what they'll be able to do on the Revolution.

On top of that, the Xbox 360 has had virtually no impact whatsoever in the Japanese market. And maybe there are some special considerations going on within that market, but because the 360 has had no impact, it's leaving Japanese developers with essentially two choices: either the PlayStation 3 or the Revolution. So because of that, we're seeing a lot of developers who are getting very excited about the unique things that you can do with the Revolution controller.

I think that in the West, looking at conditions there, many of the publishers have been operating under the business model of producing one game and releasing it on three different consoles. And while it's not impossible for people to do that with the Revolution, I think a lot of people will have concerns with that, given the fact that the system has this unique controller. Will gamers want to play "standard" games on the Revolution? Similarly, a lot of developers continue to operate on what I call "sustainable innovation," in terms of processing power and graphics. Those kinds of developers might not be quite as interested in developing on the Revolution. What we are seeing are a lot of Western developers who are getting attracted to the idea of "disruptive innovation," and they're looking at the Revolution controller and coming up with >

VIVA LA REVOLUTION

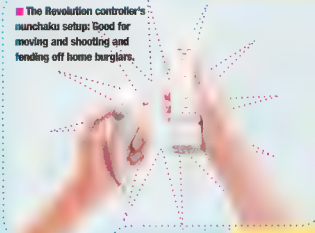
Five reasons Nintendo's new system could be more than a gimmick

5 It Is Your Father's Game System

And your mother's and your kid brother's and your barber's and, well, everyone's. That's Nintendo's plan, anyway. The company went with the unique remote-control doohickey specifically because it's more simple—more pick-up-and-playable—than the dual-stick, googol-button gamepads packed with conventional systems. And Nintendo execs insist the system's software lineup will include titles that are irresistible for any age of gamer. "Usually, when I bring games home, only my son and I play them," says Nintendo President Satoru Iwata, "so our goal is to have the Revolution be something that everyone in my family will feel compelled to play."

With the nunchaku analog-stick add-on included with the Revolution to facilitate first-person shooters and other traditional genres, Nintendo figures everyone—hardcore and casual gamer alike—will win. "If you live in a house where there's one person who hates videogames," Iwata says, "and who feels that games are not something that they want to spend time with, then that makes it harder for gamers in the house to feel comfortable with their hobby."

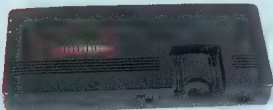
■ The Revolution controller's nunchaku setup: Good for moving and shooting and leveling off home burglars.



4 Old Systems Go!

It's enough to make you think Xbox Live Arcade is f****ed: While Xbox 360 gamers can download twitch arcade hits and puzzle games, Revolution owners will download titles—at launch—for every Nintendo home system, plus Genesis and TurboGrafx-16 games, all sharpened up for progressive-scan TVs.

Download prices may vary by vintage. "NES titles might be a few dollars," says an analyst. "Super Nintendo \$5, Nintendo 64 \$10, etc." Even if the download library is limited to top sellers, Xbox Live Arcade will need something more than *Gravity Wars* and *Uno*, but quick!



■ Turbo rights holder Hudson says it'll have its games ready at launch, then take requests for third-party stuff.

3 It's Your Cheapest Ticket to the Next Gen

The magic price for a game console—the maximum mooah! most gamers would be willing to drop—has stuck at 300 bucks for years. But then Microsoft launched an Xbox 360 deluxe package that broke the barrier by \$100. And Sony's feature-rich PS3 may push the price envelope further. Only Nintendo, which consistently launches its consoles for well below \$300, seems capable of adhering to tradition. "\$250 seems appropriate," says Martin Shkret, a hedge-fund manager at Elea Capital.

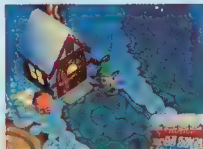
Even the games themselves may be cheaper when compared to third-party Xbox 360 titles that weigh in at \$60. "Ubisoft has a potential blockbuster with *Red Steel*, and they may try to charge more," says Wedbush Morgan Analyst Michael Pachter, "but a \$50 price point may be the right one for software produced for the box, especially without HD, and given the likely lower development cost compared to PS3 and 360."

\$249



2 It's Online Even When You Turn It Off

Deep inside its slim innards, the Revolution uses minimal power to maintain its online connection when you power down, preserving any virtual world for friends to visit while you're busy in the real world. "Even if [you are] asleep in the middle of the night," Iwata offers as one potential use for this feature, "I might be able to access your [*Animal Crossing*] town, talk to residents, and leave items for him."



■ *Animal Crossing*: The city that never sleeps.

1 It Really Is Revolutionary

Really! Take the remote's built-in speaker, a feature Nintendo has kept secret and revealed exclusively to us prior to this May's Electronic Entertainment Expo, the game industry's trade show. Miyamoto can rattle off a dozen simple uses: The thing will talk to you, telling you when it's your turn, or "if there's a game where you have a lightsaber," he tells us, "people would be pretty psyched to hear their Rev controller making that noise. Vrrrrrr! Verrrrr!"

Add the always-on connectivity and you get innovations piled on top of innovations. "The Revolution controller is such a unique feature for the system that I think most [developers] will build their games around its abilities," says Alex Ness, producer of launch title *Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam*. The remote's motion-sending features make it ideal for the first-person genre, and check our previews on page 102 to see other novel in-game uses for the gizmo.

But "is [the Revolution] going to end up being a big novelty that after two or three days you're kinda bored of?" asks David Jaffe, designer of *God of War* and a studio manager at rival Sony. Ultimately, it's the question of the moment—especially because Nintendo has gone gimmicky before (remember *Virtual Boy*? Or GBA-GameCube connectivity?). Jaffe continues, answering the question for us: "Now it is Nintendo, and it is [*Mario* creator Shigeru] Miyamoto. I think that guy and that company are a hundred times smarter than I am, so you'd be an idiot to assume that they haven't thought of that."

■ We can't wait to see first-party games—like the next *Mario* title—take advantage of the controller.





their own unique ideas of what to do with it. So I believe that we'll see a lot more exclusive third-party content than we saw on the GameCube, with lots of different ideas and unique gameplay. And in order to continue fostering this development, it's Nintendo's job to make sure that the Revolution is a console with a lot of momentum and strength, and by building our installed base, we'll attract even more third-party developers. With Revolution, we're really focusing on not only having a strong launch lineup, but also having a steady supply of games coming after launch. That's our task in the years ahead.

EGM: The perception is that the Revolution has this cool controller and unique tech, but that its visuals won't be comparable to what you see on the PS3 and the Xbox 360. It doesn't even support high definition....

St: Because we chose to not go HD, you're essentially looking at freeing one-fourth to one-sixth of the console's processing power. When I look at that, I don't think the Revolution is going to be underpowered. If you were to go look at a straight list of hard specs, yeah, in that sense the Revolution is probably not as high as the other systems. But in my mind, HD is still an unstable format. Some people consider 720p to be true HD, but others say that 1080p is HD. You don't actually have a standard there, unlike NTSC [television signals]. And if you look at the number of TVs in America that are actually HD compatible...you're essentially taking the biggest selling point of your games and devoting all of your processing power and memory to this idea of HD graphics, yet only a very, very small percentage of people in the U.S. will be able to view those graphics in the way they were intended. So in that sense, for us, it really became a question of whether it was worth it for us to put HD graphics in there in order to please a very small minority. We decided that it was more important to reinvent the interface, to really change the way people play games with "disruptive innovation."

Personally, I like technology. I'm an early adopter—the kind of guy who goes out and buys new tech as soon as it comes out. I have an HDTV in my home, but I'm not the mass-market consumer. We really want to bring Revolution to as many people as possible. The specs of the system were based on that idea. My ultimate goal is to have as many people in the world as possible experiencing the interactive entertainment that Nintendo provides.

EGM: We're not just talking about HD, but the actual graphical power of the console itself. Will the system be capable of keeping up with the other consoles?

St: If you were to compare how many calculations all of the systems are able to do, I think that you'd find that there are areas where the Revolution is not as capable. But in the end, I don't feel that has really anything to do with what impression a game leaves on the player. Do the graphics have as much impact as the interaction itself? The customer's experience is what is most important. That's where it becomes a question of balance. Where do you balance what you're doing with the hardware with what you're doing with the controller? It's more important to focus on bringing these new experiences to the user, rather than focusing on the same stuff that everyone else has been doing for all these years, [which is] just trying to find new ways to make games look better.

EGM: And outside of the graphics?

St: Over the years, we've seen a lot of different videogame consoles, but we've never seen one that's able to do anything when it's turned off, no matter the horsepower of the system. And the Revolution has this ability to operate in a unique way with very low levels of power: The memory, a portion of the processor, and the system's Wi-Fi connection will continue to function while the system is off. What that means is that it's a game machine that is connected to the Internet 24 hours a day. Of course, you can unplug it. [Laughs]

Think about it this way: Everyone in the room probably has a cell phone, and even though you're not using it right now, it's sitting there in a waiting mode where it can receive calls and e-mail. We think that by taking advantage of this concept, we can bring some very interesting new ideas to gaming. Up until now, network gaming services have all offered the standard multiplayer experience brought online, where you battle against other players to test your skill. With our new functionality, we really think that we can change the types of things that you can do while online.

With an innovation like this, we feel that the need to compete with other systems in terms of graphical power becomes less relevant. The kind of sustainable innovation we're used to seeing means that last generation you might have seen 50 characters onscreen, and that now you'd be able to have 500. Sure, that can influence gameplay a little, but that kind of innovation is really just something that requires more hardware power, more manpower—and as you continue to go down that path, the only companies that can really be profitable are big publishers with very strong franchises.

I think about a game like *Tetris*, which was developed 20 years ago by one Russian scientist. If he were to make it now and pitch it to a publisher, they would probably tell him to go back and add better graphics, more levels, C&C cut-scenes, and possibly even a movie license to make it sell more. If someone were to come up with the idea that could be the next *Tetris*-type phenomenon—a very simple, very fun game—it wouldn't be approved. We want to encourage people to be more creative, and to open up development to people who don't have the resources to do the type of development these other consoles require. It's these new, different, innovative ideas that will broaden the interactive entertainment experience. Some people look at this and consider it risky, and in some ways it is, but at the same time the potential for success will be huge if we can pull it off.

As for why we have not mentioned this up until now even though it was finalized over a year ago: We wanted to wait until a point in time when the other hardware manufacturers would be unable to copy this functionality.

Shigeru Miyamoto: We do have a lot of ideas on how to use this...we are looking with *Zelda* at ways of using this functionality to add an element to the Revolution gameplay. To be honest, I don't have any more examples right now, but generally speaking, we have a lot of ideas around this concept of flowing information to the hardware whether it's asleep or awake and seeing communities build something around that...but nothing concrete right now.

EGM: What else?

St: There will be a speaker built in to the controller. It won't be really high-fidelity sound—it will be kind of basic speak-



"We'll see a lot more exclusive third-party content than we saw on GameCube."



REVOLUTIONARY BORE

Five reasons Nintendo's new system could end up just a gimmick

5 As Not Seen on HDTV

Strictly speaking, you don't need a supesize HDTV to play next-gen games. But Sony and Microsoft are at least making it worth your while to take out a second mortgage and invest in new idiot-box technology—both the Xbox 360 and especially the PS3 support high-def display modes.

With the Revolution, on the other hand, Nintendo has taken a "no HDTV, no problem" position. The system won't support any resolution sharper than 480p, same as the 5-year-old GameCube. Add to that the fact that you need an add-on to watch DVD movies and you have a console that sounds way behind the times—at least for AV snobs. "We've made our decisions regarding HD because Nintendo's priorities are in a different place," says Nintendo President Satoru Iwata, saying that the company is focusing on innovation rather than using hardware resources to generate higher-res visuals. "The 4:3 NTSC format has been standard for over 20 years, whereas HD is still new." Nevertheless, 19 percent of American homes now have HDTVs, which will outsell old-fashioned analog sets by 89 percent this year, according to the Consumer Electronics Association.



4 Sony and Microsoft Might Get Revolutionary, Too

As nifty as the Revolution's electric-shaver-look-alike remote controller may seem, it's not new technology. Junior executives have used similar virtual mice to manipulate edge-of-your-seat PowerPoint presentations for years. And Sony has shown off experimental motion-sensing game controllers before and reportedly has something special in the works for the PS3. What's to stop Microsoft from doing the same thing with the 360? And if Sony and Microsoft got into the magic-controller game, wouldn't that make for a glut of motion-sensing ports?

But Nintendo has one advantage the other guys can never swipe: The Revolution's special controller is packed in with the system. Sony and Microsoft would have to sell their motion-sensing gizmos separately, which means gamemakers couldn't count on every PS3 and 360 gamer owning the necessary gear. "That would limit the adoption rates for the device to something like 50 percent or less of the installed base," says Michael Pachter, analyst for Wedbush Morgan. "Developers would have to think hard about whether to chase the 20 million Revolution market for \$5 million in cost, or to chase half of the 40 million PS3 market with development costs of \$10 million. My guess is that Nintendo has nothing to worry about."



Magical remote controllers have been done before, just not for gaming.

3 It's Not as Mighty as Xbox 360 or PS3

With its built-in Wi-Fi adapter, USB 2.0 ports for expandability, and SD card slot, the Revolution is hardly a bare-bones system, but Nintendo has made no secret that its console still can't compete with the Xbox 360 and the PS3 when it comes to specs. "We could have easily taken Nintendo in the direction where we try to do the same kind of console that the other guys were doing," Iwata says. "But we didn't want to apply all of our processing power to graphics. We wanted to use it in new ways in order to truly change the gaming experience."

The less-potent horsepower makes for the cheapest new system, of course, but it also relegates the Revolution into the role as the second or even third system to own for graphics-whore gamers who insist on buying the highest tech first.

Red Steel: Nifty but not quite revolutionary in the graphics department.



2 Nintendo Might Not Be Ready for Online

When Nintendo VP of Sales and Marketing Reggie Fils-Aime describes the Revolution's online network—which will reportedly be up and running on day one—he emphasizes its ease of use, zero cost, and reliable connectivity. That's great. But "ease of use" isn't the first phrase that pops into our heads when we try to find online opponents with the DS' convoluted friend-code system. And the Revolution's "reliable connectivity" won't help anyone without a wireless home network—the system only supports Wi-Fi connectivity out of the box (although you can get an adapter to connect an Ethernet cable). Plus, it took Microsoft five years to fine-tune Xbox Live into the killer online service it is today. But hey—we're totally stoked for the "zero cost" part of the Revolution's online equation.

1 Third-Party Support Might Suck...Again

It certainly looks like a promising launch: Nintendo claims it will have about seven first-party games and 13 third-party titles ready around the time the Revolution hits. But we worry that once this initial flurry of innovating games dies down, we'll get stuck with ports that only make token use of the system's controller (gimmicky minigames, third-camera control, and so forth). History check: 84 percent of GameCube games were third-party cross-platform ports. And less than a quarter of the games in the DS' library make innovative use—meaning more than just for maps, inventory, or analog control—of the touch screen.

Will the Revolution fall into a similar situation? While developers are psyched to make games using the system's novel features, they're not always the guys who make those decisions. "As a designer, I'd love to design for a system like that that offers that new interface flexibility," says *Sims* creator Will Wright. "As a game publisher, I dunno what the viability is yet. It'll come down to the economic viability of the market, although I am kind of rooting for Nintendo."

Will common ports like the *Spelunky* Golf games get more than token use of the new controller?





er noises. But in addition to the rumble, the controller itself will make noises when you use it.

EGM: Where did this idea come from?

SM: During the development of the controller, we heard from a lot of different people offering a lot of different ideas about what to add. And there were ideas about cameras and microphones and more, and we tried many of them out. But the sound teams in particular were very passionate about having a speaker in the controller that could make noise.

You are probably familiar with Yoot Saito, who developed *Seaman* and recently *Odama* (reviewed on page 119) for the GameCube—he made mention that if it had a speaker you could have it ring like a phone...that sort of thing. And a lot of the development teams were excited about it, too. So after debating its cost and function, we decided to include it.

EGM: So why not include a camera or especially a microphone?

SM: Well, obviously there are questions of cost and technology. When you think about the type of microphone that would be easy for people to use for home play you think of a headset. And so the issue is, if you have a headset somehow attached to the controller, it gets complicated to use, and we wanted [everything to] be easy to use—simple and fun.

EGM: Did you look at what the Xbox 360 is doing online for your own online plans? Or will it look more like the DS, where you have a code for each game that you have to give to your friends?

SM: Unfortunately, I can't really answer all these questions right now, and part of it is [that] I'm not really familiar with everything they're doing on Xbox Live. But in terms of service for a home console, we'll be using servers and taking advantage of that functionality. We'll be focusing on evolving it from the Wi-Fi Connection [service] we have on the DS. With the system being online all the time, it will be sitting there waiting to receive information, so we can take advantage of that to influence gameplay and do some different things. A lot of our ideas we'll be talking about later this year.

EGM: What about the idea of improved graphics for the older games played through the Virtual Console?

SM: Well, of course TVs now generally have a much better resolution than they did back in the days of the NES; progressive-scan TVs have much crisper and sharper pictures and such. So we're looking at ways of taking advantage of those improved pictures, but not the sort of thing you are thinking about with more colors or reworking the character art or anything like that.

EGM: What are you playing these days?

SM: Actually, I've been spending a lot of time on DS games lately, and I think that the reason for that is that DS games are the type that you can play in short spurts. Given my responsibilities now, I don't really have a lot of time to devote to gameplay. So I tend to play these games that I can pick up, put down, and easily come back to later. I think I'll have to give my schedule some thought when *Zelda: Twilight Princess* comes out, however...I'm at a loss as to what I'll do then.

EXTRA LIVES

We pick the obscure prehistoric hits we hope will find downloadable superstardom on the Revolution

It was a boffo feature to begin with: the Revolution's ability to download games for every previous Nintendo home system—from the original NES to the Nintendo 64—into its "Virtual Console." (The system also accepts GameCube discs and controllers.) Then company execs added one more Revolution retro-boost: emulation for Sega Genesis and TurboGrafx-16 games, too. Nintendo hasn't highlighted which games will be available for download yet, but that hasn't stopped us from wish-listing underappreciated classics we hope get a second lease on life courtesy of the Revolution. Are you listening, Nintendo?



Kid Icarus



Soul Blazer

Nintendo Entertainment System

- 1) **Zelda II: The Adventure of Link** — Too many players dismissed this "different" sequel.
- 2) **Milon's Secret Castle** — Like a supertough, third-world take on *Super Mario Bros.*
- 3) **Clash at Demonhead** — An action-adventure that happens to be completely insane.
- 4) **Kirby's Adventure** — Came out so late in the NES' life, you probably missed it.
- 5) **Kid Icarus** — Nintendo won't give us an update, so why not play the original?

Super NES

- 1) **Earthbound** — See why this hipplified misfit role-player has its own cult.
- 2) **Soul Blazer** — This *Actraiser* sequel made the wait for *Zelda: A Link to the Past* unbearable.
- 3) **Rock 'N' Roll Racing** — Killer auto combat backed by Black Sabbath.
- 4) **Flashback** — A stylish adventure and sequel to *Out of This World*.
- 5) **Mario Paint** — We'd love to go Bob Ross with the Revolution remote.

Genesis

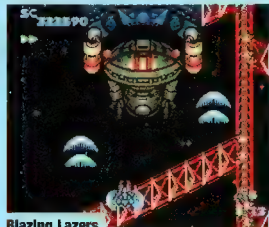
- 1) **Herzog Zwei** — An ingenious but underhyped strategy-shooter hybrid.
- 2) **Shadowrun** — Created the mold for the ultimate cyberpunk RPG.
- 3) **Gunsler Heroes** — This oddball shooter is like fine wine among the hardware.
- 4) **M.U.S.H.A.** — Great graphics, killer bosses, cut-scenes—this shooter has it all!
- 5) **Landstalker** — Sega's answer to *Zelda*, except with impossible jumps.

TurboGrafx-16

- 1) **Devil's Crush** — An endlessly playable death-metallized video-pinball classic.
- 2) **Military Madness** — Like the *Advance Wars* games? Then you'll love this.
- 3) **Legendary Axe** — The Turbo's answer to *Castlevania*. Except with more bears.
- 4) **Blazing Lazers** — A sprite-crazy top-down shooter from the heyday of these things.
- 5) **Dracula X** — Here's hoping even Japan-only CD games will be up for downloading.



Landstalker



Blazing Lazers

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REVOLUT

Will the last great GameCube game be the Revolution's first?

A year ago, the next *Zelda* game was highly anticipated. Now, halfway into a yearlong delay, the expectations surrounding *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* are...well, ridiculous.

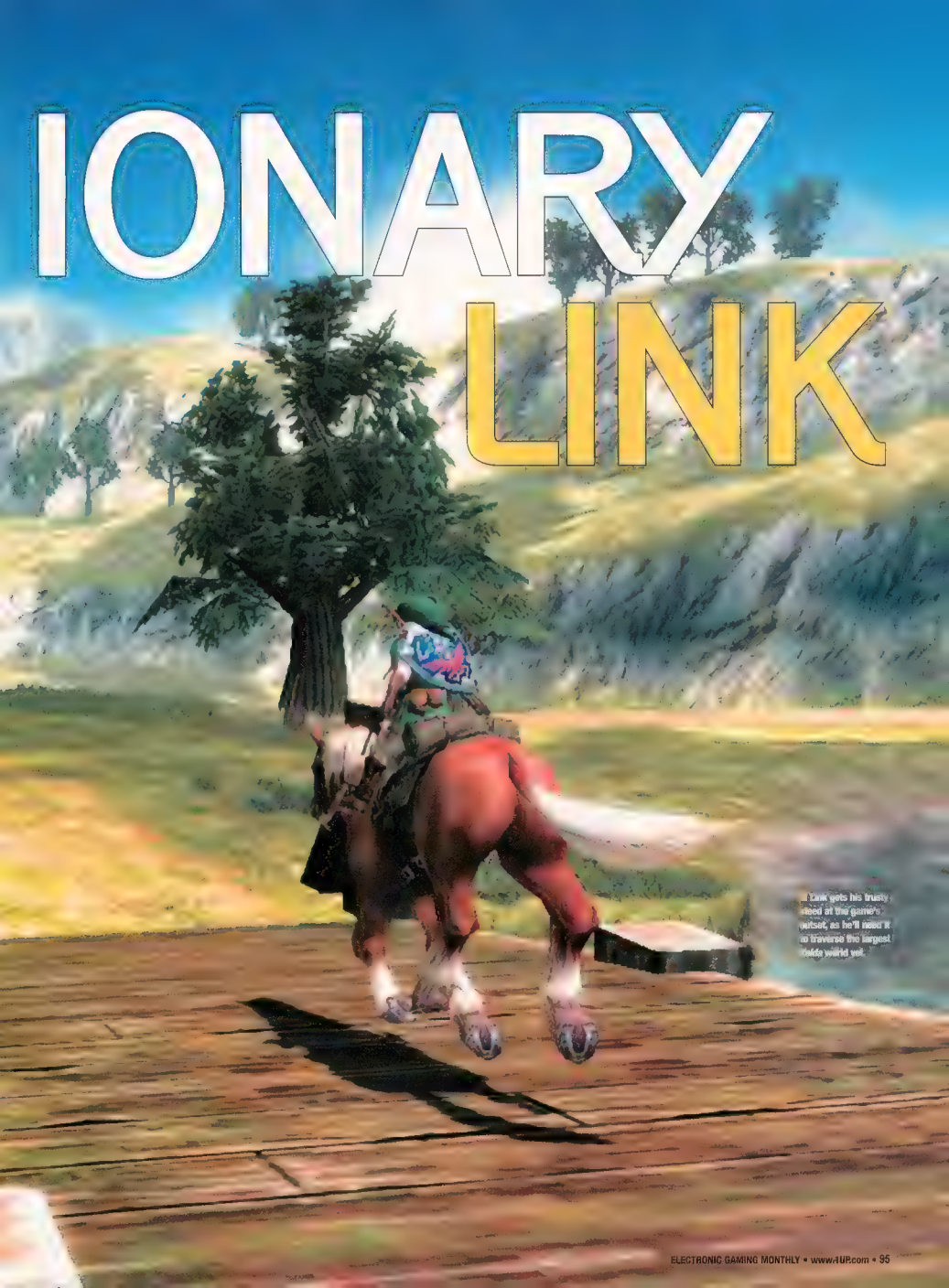
Fanboy blogs hypothesize wildly, their speculation based on the few facts we already know: Link will travel back and forth to another realm, where he takes on the form of a wolf, in his quest to once again defeat Ganon and save the land of Hyrule. Gaming magazines (yes, including this one) spend pages analyzing every screenshot, dissecting each new quote. Rabid fans pore over every detail on Internet message boards, scrutinizing the few glimpses we've had of the game down to literally each blade of grass. Then word leaked out that the GameCube game will make use of the upcoming Revolution console's unique one-handed controller—that's when things really got nuts.

In the middle of this storm is Eiji Aonuma, director of *Twilight Princess* and the principal man behind the series ever since *Majora's Mask* on the Nintendo 64. No stranger to high expectations, Mr. Aonuma has himself stated several times that his goal is to top *Ocarina of Time*, the seminal *Zelda* adventure that's widely regarded as one of the greatest games of all time (many would argue it's the greatest). Of course, he has some help: Shigeru Miyamoto, creator of *Zelda*, *Mario*, and just about every great Nintendo franchise, is overseeing the project with the same high standards he brings to every game he works on. We sat down to talk with both men about *Twilight Princess*, how it will work on the Revolution, what went wrong with the last *Zelda* game, and what a difference a year makes. >

—Mark MacDonald & Shane Bettenhausen



IONARY LINK

A screenshot from the game 'The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild' showing Link riding a brown horse on a wooden bridge. The background features a lush green landscape with rolling hills and a large tree. The sky is a clear blue.

Link gets his trusty steed at the game's outset, as he'll need it to traverse the largest world you've...



“Zelda isn’t the type of game that can be a 100 on a scale of 1 to 100—it has to be a 120.”

—Director Eiji Aonuma, paraphrasing Nintendo President Satoru Iwata

■ And you thought the lava in *Resident Evil 4* looked good.... *Twilight Princess* pushes the GameCube further than anyone thought possible. Nintendo says the graphics should look about the same on the Revolution....

!!!
► **EGM:** Let’s start off by talking about the delay—*Twilight Princess* was originally scheduled to ship in the fall of ‘05. Why did you decide to push it back, not just a few months, but an entire year?

Eiji Aonuma: A few reasons. One is more of a physical problem—the game just wasn’t progressing the way we’d hoped it would be, and so in that sense we were being forced to delay it. But the larger reason is that [Nintendo President Satoru] Iwata has been saying that *Zelda* isn’t the type of game that can be a 100 on a scale of 1 to 100—it has to be a 120. In order to do that, we needed the extra time.

We were really fortunate to have the extra year—we have gone back and looked at everything and been able to rework it and add in these new features. At this point it’s like 80 percent complete and it’s looking like it’s going to be a really great game.

EGM: And another reason was to have it work with the Revolution controller?

EA: [Yes, the delay also] had to do with the Revolution. As we were working on the Revolution controller, we really felt that it’d be fun to use with *Zelda*, and at the same time, we felt [that a lot of the frustrations people have had playing] previous *Zelda*

games] could be overcome by using the Revolution controller and the new interface that goes with it.

EGM: What can you tell us about how the Revolution controller will work with the game?

Shigeru Miyamoto: We’ve done a lot of experimenting with controls over the years, and what we’ve found is that they tend to get more and more complicated. What we’ve tried to do with the Revolution controller is allow you to do very complicated things very simply. And that’s really where the focus has been in terms of implementing it with *Zelda*. [We’re still looking] at the Revolution controller’s functionality and trying to figure out ways to take advantage of it with *Zelda*.

EGM: For example?

SM: [Well,] usually in *Zelda* games, when you want to aim you go into this first-person mode where you tilt the control stick up to aim down and vice versa, because it’s always been like you were controlling a puppet from the back of the head. But that was complicated for a lot of people, and some people prefer [the other way around—you push up and the aim goes up]. This time, taking advantage of the direct-pointing-device functions of the Revolution ►



■ Link inherits his love of fishing from several members of the development team....

Extreme Twilight Makeover

If you've been keeping a close watch on Link's upcoming adventure, you've probably noticed something unusual about these new screens—the shots taking place in the "Twilight World" sport a shocking new visual style. Previously, these creepy landscapes appeared in sterile shades of gray, but Nintendo has crafted a distinctive new look for the area—oversaturated colors, soft focus, and hazy lighting effects give the environments an appropriately otherworldly air. Maybe that yearlong delay was actually a good idea after all...

For those who haven't been taking notes, this bizarre dark realm stems from "the Twilight," a mysterious force that's slowly transforming the land of Hyrule into a desolate, monster-filled wasteland. When Link enters this dangerous world, he magically transforms into a wolf. This metamorphosis grants Link a host of unique abilities (like new combat moves and the ability to converse with other animals), and while in this form he also befriends an odd, catlike critter named Midna who saddles up on our hero's back. "Link's wolf transformation is a very mysterious and unfamiliar thing to express," explains *Twilight Princess* Director Eiji Aonuma. "So we created this dramatic, unique graphical style that gives the *Zelda* universe a very different feel." It's unclear just how much of the game takes place in this world, but if it looks this cool, we're not complaining.



In the Twilight World, Link ends up a wolf for Midna, together they fight off hordes of beastly creatures.

What a Difference a Delay Makes



BEFORE



AFTER



Check out those stylish new boots that magnetically attach Link to this ceiling. We're imagining a dungeon even less and crazier than Ocarina of Time's water temple...

So far we've only seen Midna riding Wolf Link, but Nintendo has hinted that Link might also carry other passengers on his quest.



► controller, it'll be very intuitive and very tactile—you just aim the controller at what you want to shoot at and shoot.

EA: It can also be used for locking on to things. Up until now in *Zelda*, we've had a sort-of autolock feature where you didn't really get to choose the target you first locked on to, but you'd have to adjust. This time you can use the pointing device to choose who you want to talk to or what you want to lock on to and attack. It's really nice; it feels almost like a 3D mouse.

EGM: What about using the controller to move your sword?

EA: We're not going over the top in terms of having people swing the controller in order to swing their sword. We experimented with it and tried a few different

setups, but we found having to move your arm around every time for the sword could get very tiring. There will be certain special events that will require you to do that sort of thing, but we found that using the controller to do everything else, in addition to swinging your sword, just got too convoluted and too tiring.

EGM: What about the audio speaker built in to the Revolution controller—how will *Twilight Princess* use that?

EA: It can be used for [any] close-up noises that you might experience in gameplay. When you throw something, you might here a sort of "whoosh" sound as you toss it. Or as you're doing something with the pointing device, you might get some feedback from Navi. Shooting an

arrow, [you'll get a "thhpt!" sound from the controller that] will get more quiet as it flies away, and then the sound you hear from the TV from the arrow will get louder—it gives the sound a really, really nice depth.

EGM: Any other differences when you play *Twilight Princess* on the Revolution?

EA: The one question everyone kept asking me in interviews last year was: "Is *Zelda* going to have a widescreen mode?" ►



You'll feel slightly less stupid while doing this when the controller emits the appropriate archery sound effects.

How Silly Will I Look Playing This?

If you're curious about just how good/wild you'll look playing *Zelda* with the Revolution controller, take a gander at E3 Animal demonstrating its in-game functionality. Simply pointing at onscreen objects won't require much more than a flick of the wrist, but from Link's POV, you'll have you pantomiming your best Vegas move, and playing the fishing minigame could mean battling with an imaginary rod and reel. We're anticipating other potential uses for the controller as well, such as aiming the hook shot, whipping your trusty horse, or possibly playing some manner of musical instrument. Yes, you're going to look like a crazy person, and you're going to love every second of it.





■ Nope, this isn't some bizarre glitch—we suspect that this is how Link travels between Hyrule and the Twilight World.

“We haven't quite found what the ‘hook’ should be with online play.”

—Twilight Princess director, Takahiro Shimizu

► On the GameCube, we weren't able to do it, but on Revolution, the game will have a 16:9 [widescreen] mode—not stretching the screen, but actually adding to the viewable area. It sounds like a small thing, but once you play the game in widescreen and try to go back to a standard screen, it feels really cramped and almost claustrophobic.

Another change is [that] when you play on the Revolution, [the helpful fairy] Navi will appear, and you can use her as like a cursor in terms of pointing at different objects and highlighting things. And we're still looking at other things we can add in terms of graphics and programming to make [Zelda] feel like something special.

SM: The one thing we want to clarify is [that] we aren't developing two different versions of *Twilight Princess*, where one might have different events or different dungeons or different enemies. [But] we are looking at things like minor graphical upgrades or some additional features.

EGM: What about taking advantage of the Revolution's online or Wi-Fi capabilities?

EA: That's something we've been thinking about for a long time. At this point, we've given up on having any kind of online battle mode or simultaneous play, but we are still thinking of different elements that would make the game more fun for

people who have their system connected to the Internet. It's my job to come up with that, and we haven't quite found what the “hook” should be with online play... but we are moving forward with it for the DS *Zelda* game, *Phantom Hourglass*. That game has a wireless battle mode we've implemented. So we'll take a look at that, see how that goes, and hopefully be able to apply that to future *Zelda* games.

EGM: Are there any specific criticisms of the last GameCube *Zelda* game, *The Wind Waker*, you've tried to address in *Twilight Princess*? Some people complained it was too short and too easy....

EA: With *Wind Waker*, our goal was to adjust the difficulty so that anyone who bought the game would be able to finish it. But I think in doing so we probably made the game too easy for the people who have been playing *Zelda* for years.

Ocarina of Time is still the pinnacle of the *Zelda* series in many people's minds, and we're looking at making *Twilight Princess* bigger and grander than that. In terms of dungeon count, *Twilight Princess* already has more dungeons than *Ocarina*. Because of that, there are more items.... Our real objective with *Twilight Princess* is to make something the hardcore *Zelda* fan can look forward to. ☛

Rogues' Gallery



Sure, everyone's cool with *Twilight Princess*' newly macho Link, but what about the rest of the game's cast? Here's a sneak peek at some of the bizarre characters you'll be encountering on your journey.



“I've always been a fan of the classic ‘big, hulking, and scary’ look, and I think it's a shame that we didn't see more of that in the past. And thanks to some fancy feet, these implements are quite literally stand on their own. Seriously, these must be some crazy-ass guards...”

Goron's the gentle giant's introduction in '64 classic *Ocarina of Time* return with a thuggish new look in *Twilight Princess*. Expect similarly stumpy, makeovers for Hyrule's other races, like the zora fishmen and the kobolds.



“My dear, with ‘creepy, bear-shaped’ [Tingle] and snow-solar, [Twilight Princess] Nintendo fills his [treasure] void with these guys. Consider yourself warned!”

E3

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REVOLUTIONARY GAMES

And exactly how you'll play them with Nintendo's remote controller



Red Steel also has its own version of bullet time, dubbed "the focus system."

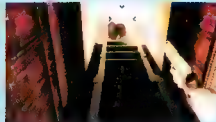
Red Steel

Ubisoft • Fall 2006

What is it? Don't confuse this with some weird variation on Derek Zoolander's "Blue Steel" look. This first-person action game drops you into the seedier sections of Tokyo, where you'll shoot and slash your way through members of the Japanese Mafia in order to rescue your bride-to-be.

How do I play it? Moving your character through the environment is done via the nunchaku's analog stick, and capping' foils is done as you might expect—just point the remote at the screen, then aim and fire away. Easy enough, right? And according to the makers of *Red Steel*, this unfamiliar, yet intuitive, control setup will add a few new wrinkles to firefights. "In traditional first-person shooters, the level design was made horizontally so that the player only used the analog stick to target on the right or on the left," says Creative Director Nicolas Eypert. "With the Revolution controller, you can instantly target any part of the screen, so we can now design areas where enemies are on different levels. For example, having a big shooting sequence in a staircase is now really exciting and accessible to anyone."

Wielding your death stick sounds pretty simple, too. "Basically, the sword moves like your own arm. And the buttons are used to time perfect blocks," explains Eypert. "These moves are easy to perform and do not require you to be a 10-year-long katana expert." So if you wanna slice your foe from left to right, just move the remote in that direction. Or if you feel the need to give 'em a little poke, all you gotta do is perform a stabbing motion toward the screen.



Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam

Activision • Fall 2006

What is it? It may sound like *Tony Hawk* on skis, but *Downhill Jam* is all about skateboarding. This time, you'll skid down death-defying slopes in the world's more vertiginous locales, from San Francisco to Machu Picchu. "Many kids have tried riding their skateboards down steep hills," says Producer Alex Ness of developer Toys for Bob, "and there's a growing faction of people dedicated to downhill skating." This arcade-style racer looks like *Hawk*, but your bread and butter of past games, tricks, will mostly be used here for boost as you complete time-based challenges in one of three modes—race, trick, and slalom. "We've modified the physics to support a downhill race," says Ness, "and our level layout is completely different." Another change? *Downhill Jam* isn't being made by *Hawk* standby Neversoft. Ness says the faithful should have no fear, though: "[Neversoft has] given us plenty of great feedback on the gameplay."

How do I play it? The developers have tried to use the controller to mimic the side-to-side motion of riding a skateboard. If the player rotates the controller left or right, their skater turns that way in the game. "This is something many people intuitively do anyway when playing a racing game, and now it has an effect on how the game is played," says Ness.



Heard this game's strictly for kids? "Who said that?" asks Producer Alex Ness. "Give me a name! This game is really for everyone."



■ Hmm, these graphics look very GameCube-ish to us.

Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz

Sega • Fall 2006

What is it? If you've played any of the previous *SMB* installments, then you'll know the drill here: guide a funky, sphere-trapped monkey through tons of mazelike levels and along the way collect as many of the animal's favorite treat as possible. Expect an ample supply of minigames, as well.

How do I play it? The nunchaku's analog stick adjusts the camera, while the remote is held vertically (think along the lines of a PC flight-sim joystick) to maneuver your monkey. Tilt the remote forward and watch him roll, or pull back to hit the brakes.

When it comes to *Banana Blitz*'s minigames, the controls will adjust with the challenge. For example, in Home Run Derby, you'll hold the remote like a real baseball bat and swing accordingly. But in the Ring Toss competition, you'll motion as if you're hurling the controller at the screen and then let go of one of its buttons to release the ring.



So, What Else You Got?

Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles 2 Square Enix • Fall 2006 — This sequel to the GameCube hit will be one of the first Revolution titles to take its action-role-playing to the Internets.

Hudson Flight Sim

Hudson • Fall 2006 — Sorry, no *Pilotwings* for Revolution just yet. But Hudson says that its game will be very similar to Nintendo's flight sim, and that you'll hold the remote just like a paper airplane.

Metroid Prime 3 ▶

Nintendo • 2007 — Last year, Nintendo demonstrated how you could play *Metroid Prime 2* (GC) with the nunchaku attachment (to control Samus' movement) and remote (point at the screen and shoot). So the company's adopting similar mechanics for No. 3 seems like a sure thing.

Super Mario Revolution

Nintendo • Fall 2006 — It's been a long four years since the plumber's last starring role on consoles (that was *Super Mario Sunshine* for the GameCube). And we expect the fatty's highly anticipated return to take advantage of all the Revolution controller's nifty tricks.

Super Smash Bros. Revolution

Nintendo • 2007 — Nintendo President Satoru Iwata has already said that this megapopular four-way fighter would offer online rumbles when it debuts on the Revolution.



Rayman 4

Ubisoft • Fall 2006

What is it? The limbless hero will tame magical creatures such as rhinos, spiders, and angelfish so that they can help Rayman rid his home planet of...demonic rabbits? It's kinda like those *Ape Escape* games, except with a lot more of Satan (and to think, this one's supposed to be for the kiddies).

How do I play it? Ubisoft couldn't get us control specifics in time for this issue. But if we were to venture a guess, the remote will act as Rayman's very extendable arms, and that you'll swing it in order to knock these red-eyed furies into next Tuesday.



■ Rayman leaves disco night early to hunt down some crazy hoppers.

Other Games

Ready for a Revolution:

Animal Crossing Revolution
Nintendo • 2007

Elebits
Konami • Fall 2006

Godzilla
Atari • Fall 2006

Happy Feet
Midway • Fall 2006

Snoopy vs. The Red Baron
Namco • Fall 2006

Sonic vs. The Hedgehog Revolution
Sega • Fall 2006 [44](#)



review crew

oblivion: for \$60, you, too, can lose 200 hours of your life

THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS...

After what seemed like an eternity banished to Reviews Wrap-up, *Oblivion* finally has its coming-out party, and the Crew welcomes it wholeheartedly. For the many of you who have already dug into this behemoth of an adventure, its Game of the Month accolades should come as no surprise. For those of you who haven't, be prepared for your new summer fling.

On a sadder note, Nintendo's intriguing pinball/military-strategy hybrid *Odama* will have you yelling at the game for all the wrong reasons. Some combos are just best left...uncombined.

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THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION



THE REVIEW CREW

Pissing off message-board fanboys since 1997

DAN "SHOE" HSU • Editor-in-Chief

Has anyone seen Shoe? He's been AWOL. We suspect he's either 1) snowboarding, 2) laid up in an emergency room, or 3) hiding out and playing *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*.
Probably Playing: *Oblivion*, *Age of Empires (DS)*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



SHANE BETTENHAUSEN • Exec. Editor

According to *Brain Age's* initial assessment, Shane's brain is actually 64 years old. Next stop: the menu-spring senior-citizens' menu at Denny's, but he can still beat you at *Soul Calibur*.
Now Playing: *Soul Calibur III*, *Virtua Fighter 5*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



JENNIFER TSAO • Managing Editor

The year's nonstop rain made for perfect gaming weather, but Jennifer hopes by the time you read this, she'll actually be spending some time outdoors (no offense to *Oblivion*).
Now Playing: *Boktai*, *Frisbee* (weather permitting)
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



CRISPIN BOYER • Senior Editor

Crispin's obsessed with *Oblivion* as much as the next guy (er, girl—sorry, Jennifer). But what's up with its chronically butt-ugly characters? Cris needs ale goggles just to play.
Now Playing: *Ghost Recon Adv.*, *Warfighter*, *Godfather*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



BRYAN HUTIHAR • News Editor

This boy's steering clear of *Brain Age*—Bryan's simply too afraid his score would just reveal that he's a dumb jock in geek's clothing. Or, in this case, with FF potion in hand.
Now Playing: *Monster Hunter Freedom*
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com



GREG FORD • Reviews Editor

When he's not editing the reviews section for EGM, Greg enjoys giving back to the community, mentoring interns in the finer strategies of *Geometry Wars*. What a guy!
Now Playing: *Fight Night Round 3* (XB360), *GRAV*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



MARK MACDONALD • Editor-at-Large

Anyone seen Mark since his website, GameVideos.com, launched? Remember Mark? Tall guy...sorta thin...likes *Zelda*...? No? Thinks *Sonic* is way overrated? Anybody?
Now Playing: *Oblivion*, *Brain Age*
Blog: mark.1UP.com



KATHLEEN SANDERS • Staff Reviewer

Kathleen had to bid a tearful farewell to *EBG*...for now. Like all good things—birthdays, spring, and unicorns—you'll probably see her again soon...maybe.
Now Playing: *Ghost Recon Adv.*, *Warfighter*, *Oblivion*
Blog: cookiecup.1UP.com



ROBERT ASHLEY • Staff Reviewer

Thanks to *Odama*, Robert can't stop issuing commands to real-life throngs of people. If you see him on a busy street, he'll be the one screaming, "Press forward!"
Now Playing: *Metroid Prime Hunters*
Blog: robertashley.1UP.com



ROBERT COFFEY • Staff Reviewer

The unending rain is playing havoc with Robert's softball season and forcing him to play so much *Oblivion* that he's starting to look like his game's alter ego. Pray for sun.
Now Playing: *Oblivion*, *Tomb Raider: Legend*
Blog: citizen_pain.1UP.com



JENN FRANK • Staff Reviewer

Reeling from devastating defeat, Jenn pledges to write *Field Commander* until she's positive she could maybe beat Demian. Conservative estimates say it 2010.
Now Playing: *Field Commander*
Blog: superjenn.1UP.com



MATT PECKHAM • Staff Reviewer

If only they had published *Dreamfall* as a novel...Matt has been looking for a good book to read in his exactly 5.3-second allotment of daily downtime.
Now Playing: *Oblivion*, *Oblivion*, and more *Oblivion*
Blog: mattpeckham.1UP.com



GREG SEWART • Staff Reviewer

Summer's here, and Sewart's taking advantage of the season. Barbecues, camping, NASCAR, and playing Xbox 360 in a Speedo. Pictures at www—whooops, out of space!
Now Playing: *Tomb Raider: Legend*, *Oblivion*
Blog: stewy.1UP.com



DEMIAN LINN • Staff Reviewer

Jenn Frank, Robert Coffey, *OPM's* Tom Byron...who won't fall under the rolling treads of Demian's *Field Commander* war machine? Next stop: Shoe Army Headquarters.
Now Playing: *Oblivion*, *Field Commander*
Blog: egmdemian.1UP.com



THE RATING SYSTEM & AWARDS

10-7
GOOD

6.5-5
FAIR

3.5
POOR



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



Gold
For games with an average score of 8.0 or higher.



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



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

■ **OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE and 1UP.COM** are the icing on the cake, the lemon in your water, the whipped cream on hot chocolate, the quarter on your PSP D-pad—doing the little things that make life sweeter.

Wait, How Do You Do That?

Admit it. You've been playing 40 hours, but you still don't know how to [fill in the blank]. We checked out forums and message boards to find some commonly asked questions, then set about finding the answers.

How do I recharge magical items?

Magical items can be repaired by any skilled craftsman, but their special magical powers can only be recharged in one of two ways: You can pay someone to recharge them at any mages guild, or you can use **soul gems**, which, when activated, will recharge an item of your choice. You can also find powerful gems, called **varia stones**, in the Ayleid ruins, that will recharge all your magical items. Get huntin'!

What if I don't like my character?

One thing to keep in mind is that you can **build any skills** you want just by working on them. While it will take longer, for example, a specialized warrior to learn the arcane art of conjuration, it can actually be done. But a shortcut for people who want to try out a character class before investing dozens of hours into it is to **save a game** right before you leave the game's introductory dungeon. That way you can restart from that point and modify all your basic statistics.

I suck at picking locks. Is there any hope?

As your skill increases, the tumblers will start to move more slowly. But you can also get better by studying the rhythm of the tumblers. When they move up more slowly, it means they're going to stay elevated longer (and be easier to pick). For faster ones, try bouncing the tumbler repeatedly to get a hang of its rhythm. Finally, one quest (for which you must recover the Eye of Nocturnal) rewards you with an **unbreakable lockpick**.



What's with all the tongs and calipers lying around? Do they have some secret use?

Um, no. It's sort of become an internal joke here," says Executive Producer Todd Howard. "One of the designers had an idea that you could take all the calipers and take them to a guy and he would make you a sword: 'Ex Caliper.' But we didn't end up doing that. Maybe in some downloadable content someday."



MINI-AFTERTHOUGHTS

Any videogame this immersive is bound to stir up a few rumblings of discontent. We sat down with *Oblivion's* Executive Producer Todd Howard and asked him to address some of your burning questions.

EGM: So, the scaling difficulty—some people love it, some people hate it. Did you realize you were creating such a controversial feature?

Todd Howard: When you're creating a wide-open game like this, you really have to find some way of having the difficulty adjust for if the player is really really powerful, or if they just start the game and this is the quest they ran into. Otherwise, you're constantly running into things that are too hard and you don't like them, or they're too easy and you're bored.

Some quests we lock out (the Daedric quests) until you're higher level, because we didn't want to level the rewards. A couple of quests scale harder. If you go the battle of Kvatch at high level and you're a stealth character, that's going to be harder—because of the nature of stealth and the number of enemies we're throwing at you—than if you were at a lower level.

EGM: What about having higher prices on Xbox 360 than PC for downloadable content?

TH: We fixed that. The next plug-in is going to be 150 [Microsoft] points and \$1.99 on PC. We got a lot of feedback on the horse-armor thing. It sold amazingly [well], but since we're the first ones doing it, we're definitely concerned with setting the standard for that and



what people's expectations are. [We're making] sure, going forward, that we price these things the same, and try to get them lower on Xbox. Based on talking to people about what we did, we think doing bigger and better things at 150 points is a good number.

EGM: We've seen some players complaining that magic users are overpowered—because they can instantly cast spells, even while running. Some say the game is "unrealistic" because a "real"

magician would have to, like, sit down and meditate to cast a spell. What do you think?
TH: I can verify that it's completely realistic. [Laughs]

Material Rewards

PC gamers can quit gloating—*Oblivion* on Xbox 360 offers patches and expansions via Xbox Live. We have it on good authority that a serious patch will be available (probably by the time you're reading this) that fixes many of the little bugs and glitches in the initial release of the game. We also found out about new expansion content that's coming soon. Each of the following locations offers training, items, and lodging.



Dunbarrow Haven

Cool feature: Your own personal gang of thieves.



Dragonfire Castle

Cool feature: A taxidermist who makes stuffed trophies for you.



Deepscorn Hollow

Cool feature: A venomous garden that grows only items with negative effects.

2ND PRECINCT



WARNING

INTRODUCING NEW POCKET-SIZE TAG BODY SHOTS:
LOAD IT, LOCK IT, AND ROCK IT AT YOUR OWN RISK.



CONSIDER YOURSELF
WARNED



In single player, you can "hot swap" and take control of any teammate to change your class and weapons on the fly.

Xbox 360

ONLINE

BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT

An army of plenty

Good: It's like playing with army toys. Lots of army toys.
Bad: Single player is a different (and not-as-good) game.
Voice-Chat Problems: EA says it's fixing them.



SHOE: Love is a *Battlefield* game. Lots of shooters give you guns and vehicles, but *Modern Combat* gives you the mother lode of a virtual toy box to play with. When you log in to an online match, you jump right into a battle where tanks, helicopters, gunboats, jeeps, turrets, and more litter the playing field. Go ahead, hop into any of them: You're licensed to drive and fly them all. If you can talk to your friends (our voice chat stopped working for hours at a time), you can tell them to get in with you so they can man the guns while you steer. Or just hoof it on foot—the five different soldier classes you can choose from keep the bipedal action varied and exciting.

It's all there—everything you need to make one kick-ass first-person shooter. Everything except: 1) strong level design (you can get stuck a lot), 2) a variety of modes (only two... haven't these guys played *Halo*?), and 3) a good single-player game (it

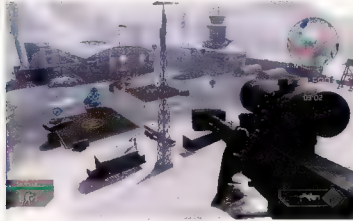
doesn't capture the toy-box magic of *Battlefield* at all and plays like a stripped-down shooter. Forget Pat Benatar, I guess I only like this *Battlefield*—for its online play.

CRISPIN: I've seen some crazy s*** on this battlefield. Like the time one of my special forces buddies stepped C4 on his Humvee and smothered a squad of enemies. Or the enemy chopper pilot who airdropped all of his passengers right onto our control point. Sir, yes, sir—the unconventional warfare here was crafted for fun, not realism (you wear a reusable parachute, go all *Dukes of Hazzard* over washed-out bridges, etc.). It makes for lots of "Whoa! Dija see that?" moments.

And while you can have fun running and gunning, you'll get the most if you unleash strategy with a regular band of brothers. Oh, and save the so-so single player for basic training

and Internet outages—online battles are the main event here.

1UP.COM—GARNETT: I hope we're near the end of the "dolloed-up current-gen games masquerading as next gen" transition period, at least for the 360. Not that *Battlefield 2* doesn't look visibly better than last fall's PS2/XB release, but neither does it stand up well next to games built from the ground up for the new hardware. And even with the single-player game's improved hot-swap ability that now works without necessitating line of sight (which the previous version required), the retuned A.I. has upset the balance, making the solo action more frustrating than elating. That's a shame, because it should offer a nice break from the massive online battles the series is known for. Like the others said, those are as good as ever and feel right at home on the 360, where Live connectivity is second nature.



THE CRITICS' SCORES

7.5	8.5	7.0
SHOE	CRISPIN	GARNETT

Publisher: EA Games
 Developer: EA UK/DICE/Digital Illusions
 Players: 1 (2-24 online)
 ESRB: Teen

www.battlefield.ea.com



FOR YOUR LUGGAGE



FOR YOUR POCKET



FOR YOUR ARRESTING OFFICER

CONSIDER YOURSELF
WARNED.



PS2/XB

WINBACK 2: PROJECT POSEIDON

More like Project Pedestrian

Die in boss battles, and you can start where you left off; sounds nifty, but it's not particularly sporting.



THE VERDICTS OUT OF 10	7.0	3.5	7.0
	MATT	KATHLEEN	THIERRY

Publisher: Koel
Developer: Cavia
Players: 1-4
ESRB: Teen

www.koel.com

Good: The commander sounds like Optimus Prime
Bad: It's not a Transformers game
Often Sounds Like: It has a porno soundtrack



MATT: Pose, crouch, creep-creep-peek, peek, fire, bang-bang-you-win, flip a switch, open a door, repeat. There, you just played *Winback 2*. See how we help you save time?

Sequel to the Nintendo 64's *Winback*, *Winback 2* cuts the wrong kind of mustard with dull looks and a cheap version of *Metal Gear Solid*'s third-person sneak-n-shoot. Tactical-action theme? Check. Guns, terrorists, and a lean-around-corners ability? Yawn. Play the same stage from two simultaneous perspectives.... Ooh, something cool!

Except it's not so cool in execution. *Winback 2*'s "route system" ushers you through corridor-based levels from two perspectives, so you'll hit a few objectives with one agent, reset the clock, then run through parallel parts with another, triggering "assist" spots that link the narratives. The interaction has no spontaneity, though—it just ticks off a script. And most missions thrust you through a disc-load-up door (that is, it pauses to load before throwing you into a room of eager enemies), so "tactical" involves finding cover.

Multiplayer's worse, consisting of just cramped levels and four high-identical deathmatch modes. No online support and "everyone's the same" characters mean no wonder to bother at all.

KATHLEEN: Of the two unknown, out-of-nowhere games I played this month, *Rogue*

Trooper (see next page) surprised me with how well done it is; *Winback*, unfortunately, did the opposite. The game's attempt at variation—its "two sides to a mission" system—falls flat. Both routes are linear; if you do see the other character, they're essentially doing the same thing every time. The developers also tried to give you lots of control over targeting, though pinpointing specific areas is awkward in actual use. And jumping and diving feel akin to a very Mikhail Baryshnikov-style of dramatic flailing. To top it off, you get to enjoy all of this with graphics that would be pretty—if this were a PS1 game. It isn't.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—THIERRY: I gotta disagree with these two on one point: I actually like the two-route mechanic. Yeah, it's scripted, but it's cool how doing things in route A affects events in route B, such as how disabling the power to the doors in a timely fashion on one side results in fewer enemies attacking you on the other. And I like how I could shoot some baddies twice in the chest and then toss a grenade their way, then see that same double-shoot/grenade combo from a different angle when I tackle route B. But the rest is pretty much trash, with terrible jumps (and crappier jumping puzzles), scarce ammo, and graphics that look like this was made right after 1999's *Winback*.

PS2/XB

OUTRUN 2006: COAST TO COAST

ONLINE

A short trip



THE VERDICTS OUT OF 10	7.0	5.0	7.0
	GREG S.	GIANCARLO	ANDREW

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sumo Digital
Players: 1 (2-6 online)
ESRB: Everyone

www.sega.com

Good: Same great gameplay as *OutRun 2*
Bad: Not enough new features
Smoothest Version: Xbox



GREG S: I'm one of those people who thinks the world still has room for the *OutRun* style of arcade racer despite the popularity and general awesomeness of the *Burnout* series. But I also wish *OutRun 2006* were more than just a minor update to *OutRun 2*—an excuse to sell basically the same game, but this time to PlayStation 2 owners (*OutRun 2* was Xbox-only).

But hey, this is great news for PS2 owners, so I don't really hold it against the game. The bigger issue is the lack of variety and stuff to do. A few new game modes and the return of the girlfriend challenges—objective-based courses in which your gal asks you to drift in certain spots, dodge cars, etc.—give *OutRun 2006* a bit of extra life, but at the end of the day, it's easy to see pretty much everything the game has to offer in a few sittings.

OutRun 2006 is a lot of fun, and if the game gets a decent online community going, it'll have legs. But it should complement that copy of *Burnout Revenge* in your library, not replace it. Oh, and if you already own *OutRun 2* on the Xbox, don't bother with this update.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—GIANCARLO: *OutRun 2006* originated as an arcade game, and it should've remained an arcade game. While it's perfect in short bursts—like

most arcade games—the console version's gameplay just doesn't hold up as long as one would hope despite developer Sumo Digital's best efforts to implement a variety of modes to keep things interesting...unless you're feeling mildly nostalgic.

Otherwise, it all just amounts to a whole lot of generally enjoyable drifting with some occasional technical wizardry in the environments to impress you as you whiz through them sideways. The addition of online play does an OK job of extending the experience, if only for the few minutes it takes to start up and then exit the mode.

TIP.COM—ANDREW: Despite the new dressings, *Coast 2 Coast* is still *OutRun 2*, an old-school arcade racer with a ridiculous drifting system that straddles the line between "relaxing" and "way too easy." Tapping the brake once and steering into and out of turns feels very natural, and casual race fans will appreciate that, but those who have already mastered *OutRun 2* will no doubt be able to sleep their way through most of the hardest routes and challenges.

Thankfully, the new SP courses are much more interesting than the original designs, mostly because of the quasi-real-life locations—racing through the Milky Way stage is a visual treat.

■ We couldn't test PS2 *Rogue Online*; Eidos tells us it runs a little less smoothly than the Xbox version.



PS2/XB

ONLINE

ROGUE TROOPER

Blue Man night at the gun club

Good: Solid gameplay, entertaining co-op modes

Bad: Bland levels, typical run-and-gun feel

Shocker: Xbox version plays a little smoother, looks better



■ **FORD:** *Rogue Trooper* came stamped with huge double-whammy potential: Not only is it a licensed game, but it has a license none of us was familiar with (it's based on a strip from popular United Kingdom comic 2000 AD). This fact made the resulting solid third-person action-shooter sweetly satisfying in a happy trigger-finger way. Gameplaywise, it's familiar shoot-shoot-bang-bang fare with an interesting hook: When your genetically engineered hero's blue-hued comrades head to that Smurville in the sky in scripted fashion, you grab the soul-containing biochip of each, which you then attach to your gun, helmet, and backpack so they can give you posthumous support. (Your helmet cracks a lock while you tackle an ambush, for example, or your gun acts as a sentry turret as you go on ■ flanking attack.)

Online co-op play—which consists of just three straightforward mission-based levels and two defend-the-

injured-soldier levels—is also done well and left me wanting more.

But while this war offers high-caliber thrills, the monochromatic levels blend together, and you'll have no problem outwitting the enemy A.I. Also, other supposed features feel more like empty filler, such as the rarely used stealth kills and lame bazooka sequences. Still, *Rogue's* a solid surprise.

ROBERT A: I had to play through *Rogue Trooper* twice just to make sure underdog-love wasn't clouding my judgment. Well, that and I wasn't done exploring all the myriad ways to kill the enemy "norts," from luring them across a patch of mines with a holographic projection of myself to perfecting the art of a well-lobbed grenade. The game achieves a *Halo*-like open-endedness in combat, though the bad guys aren't nearly as smart. But *Rogue's* excellent pacing makes it all enjoyable, constantly changing gears—from sneaking to sniping to all-out *Rambo* firefighting. I

don't love the characters (or the low-calorie story), but *Rogue* looks great, plays great, and shows that there's still room for surprise hits from little studios in this big, big business.

KATHLEEN: Though its gameplay is totally derivative—and its "Blue Man Group goes G.I. Joe" main man looks ridiculous—*Rogue Trooper's* variety of wisecracking guns, explosions, guns that cause explosions, fast-paced missions, and (bless its hearty) skippable cut-scenes won over my jaded heart. The online co-op missions ended up being such fun that I was irritated they were an undersized—I could've used a couple more of them. And while the rest of the game won't deliver much you haven't seen before, it's innovative just by the fact that it does everything it sets out to do so well. *Rogue Trooper*, I thank you for the important lesson you've taught me about judging a game by its cover art: That's now accurate only 99 percent of the time.



THE VERDICTS
OUT OF 10

6.5 8.0 7.5

G. FORD

ROBERT A.

KATHLEEN

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Rebellion
Players: 1-2
(2-4 online or system link)
ESRB: Teen

www.eidos.com

Disney SQUARE ENIX



New allies



Notorious H.I.T.

Blood Money's biggest addition to the aging *Hitman* formula is its notoriety system, which pegs you for unnecessary noise and violence. If your notoriety value gets too high, you have to either bribe it down or deal with the increased awareness from security personnel and civilians. Directly related to this: The newspaper write-ups after each level will have more detailed sketches of you based on witness descriptions.



PS2/XB

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

You know MacGyver's jealous



What's the Diff?
The XB and PS2 versions are nearly identical, but you will notice a step up with the 360 version. From the time we spent with a near-final preview build, the game plays the same but looks much sharper (think more a *Tomb Raider: Legend* 360 upgrade rather than a *Gun* upgrade).

G. FORD: Even a stroll through an idyllic neighborhood can't deter hired gun Agent 47 from the quind. Myriad ins to his target's house exist, but rather than sneaking through the basement (*booooring*) or dressing as the party clown (the tears sure won't be his), the bald one dons the pool boy's garb and hangs out by the grill. A stunning young lass soon traipses his way and demands his assistance—ahem—inside. Moments later, he procures her microfilm-containing necklace before knocking off her husband and escaping.

And that's the *Hitman* series' MO—third-person "stealth-action, with a fun, "which doohickey can I use to lethal ends this time" twist. Like previous go-rounds, *Blood Money*—in which a rival agency is bent on snuffing out 47—is an exercise in repetition. Sure, that scenario I describe above sounds delish, but it's the result of a dozen hotched ops. Methodically knocking off targets satisfies, though, especially when it involves one of many new intentional "accidents"—think exploding hot plates and rigged-to-flatten chandeliers.

A couple things worth noting: You no longer can take the gun-happy route without penalty (see sidebar), which I applaud. You can also upgrade weapons, and the levels now team with civilian activity, a nice

change from previous games' eerily empty venues. But at *Blood Money's* heart, each uniquely ingenious level (which run out of steam only near the end) could be from any *Hitman* game—it's familiar fun. Oh, the save system—in-level saves get wiped when you leave the game—blows.

ROBERT A: About half an hour into this—my first *Hitman*, I found myself thinking, "I'm not a real hitman. I don't know how to sneak into a compound full of trigger-happy security guards and kill their boss without making a sound!" *Blood Money* shows you where to hold the handlebars and how to pedal, and then it shoves you down a steep hill. I'm not sure there's a better way to learn. A game this open has to be picked at and played with like a Rubik's Cube. It took me a few hours to understand the gruesome manhunting possibilities. Unfortunately, also started to understand how to cheat. Being a path-of-least-resistance kinda guy, when the going got tough,

I traded clever stealth for cheap machine-gun massacres. I loved the levels' ambience, though—the

porn mogul's Aspen Christmas party (complete with drunken Santa and hot-tub debauchery) felt like such a real place. This is a great toy.

OFFICIAL PS MAG—THIERRY: I was afraid that the *Hitman* franchise was going the way of the sports title, offering only incremental improvements between games. But I'm pleased with *Blood Money's* new features, such as the notoriety system, getting money to spend on both weapons and bribes to lower said notoriety, and the use of highly populated venues for missions. The first two are pretty big changes, in my opinion, and the last makes for some awesome levels, including the Mardi Gras mission. And how could you not love a game that lets you off a guy by hiding a remote-controlled bomb inside a wedding cake?

Too bad such a fine assassin sim is bogged down by such a crappy save system. Why did the developer ditch a perfectly workable save system for one that deletes midlevel saves when you exit the game? What if I get a phone call from the president and need to quit? Being forced to restart a mission is pretty annoying. While the A.I. could use some improvement (one guard spots you, and they all suddenly know where you are), it's the save system that totally knocks a point off for me. **A-**



Good: Great level design, the "accidental" deaths
Bad: Still lots of trial and error, awful save system
Good Reading: The newspaper roundups after each mission



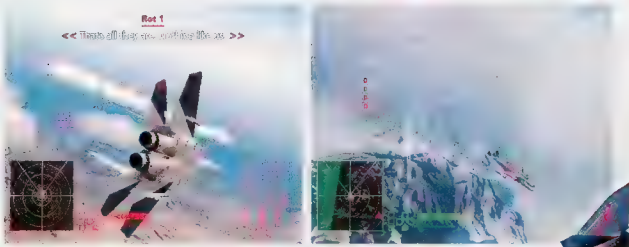
THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

7.5 8.0 8.0

G. FORD ROBERT A. THIERRY

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: IO Interactive
Platforms: PS2, Xbox 360, PC
ESRB: Mature

www.eidos.com



PlayStation 2

ACE COMBAT ZERO: THE BELKAN WAR

Routine flight

Good: Stunning graphics; a few novel missions.
Bad: Not enough checkpoints, blah levels and story.
Funky Glitch: Switching off the music mutes cinemas, too



CRISPIN: Crack the sound barrier and watch vapor bloom from your fuselage. Throttle up to afterburner and see the patchwork farmland zip by at blurring speeds. Officially licensed planes are lovingly detailed down to their rivets and virtual cockpits. Yep, this is as good as flight games are going to look on the PlayStation 2. So it's too bad the mission variety and plot and fire-and-forgettable dogfights don't soar to the same heights as the visuals. In fact, *Ace Combat Zero* feels like such a no-fills follow-up that at times I often felt like I was stuck on last year's flight. The plot—which stars a cast of live actors doing community theater in front of CG backgrounds—has achieved *Metal Gear Solid*-style pretentiousness. Too many missions send you on so-so bombing and dogfighting sorties (the last game had more variety). And a lack of checkpoints guarantees mad-

dening retries of the lengthier levels when you crash and/or burn. *Zero* does mix in special, savvy rival opponents, a much smarter wingmate, and a new flight-evaluation system that affects radio chatter. But this series seriously needs to evolve past niftier visuals if it's going to take off on the next systems. **DEMIAN:** If this is what it's like to pilot multimillion-dollar jets at Mach whatever, put me down for a deferment. *Zero* inspires the invention of new swearword combinations thanks to its no-checkpoint philosophy (I can't count how many missions I had to restart after 30 minutes of futility) and plain crappy targeting. Strangely, *Zero* sometimes forgets that your missiles can actually *lock* on to targets, and I often had to switch weapons back and forth before it would remember. An insipid story and fun-for-five-

minutes splitscreen multiplayer don't help the war effort much either. **OFFICIAL PS MAG—JOE:** The *Ace Combat* series has had some really spectacular moments in the past. By deftly mixing realism and sci-fi, the designers usually managed to keep things interesting: Witness *Electrosphere's* space battle or *Shattered Skies's* infiltration of a missile installation. Unfortunately, *Zero* is a big exception. The game packs in the cheesy live-action cinemas and overwrought story, but what happened to the interesting gameplay that made the series such a classic? The vast majority of *Zero's* missions are pedestrian chase-and-fire affairs, with almost no imaginative twists. The always-excellent controls and wide assortment of different planes are fairly entertaining, but *Zero's* a huge step down from either of the last two games.



Two-player dogfights involve lots of left turns, with occasional right turns.



THE VERDICTS OUT OF 10	5.5	5.5	6.0
	CRISPIN	DEMIAN	JOE

Publisher: Namco Bandal
 Developer: Namco Bandal
 Players: 1-2
 ESRB: Teen
www.namco.com



New worlds

PlayStation 2

TOURIST TROPHY

Terror on two wheels



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

6.5	7.0	8.0
GREG S.	DEMIAN	MILKMAN

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Polyphony Digital
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Everyone
www.us.playstation.com

Good: Fantastic physics and pretty graphics.
Bad: Unforgiving controls and lonely roads are terrible.
Four Wheels: Better than two?



GREG S: As a simulator, *Tourist Trophy* is about as good as you'll get on two wheels. The unforgiving handling—not to mention sparse throttle and brake control—of the crotch rockets within feels perfect and forces you to learn each and every curve of each and every course. But for most, the frighteningly realistic physics are almost too much to take. Even with the different riding styles available, it's difficult to find the one that will ease you into riding if you don't already know what you're doing.

And as a straight racing game, *Tourist Trophy* is boring. With only four bikes maximum on any of the massive courses available, events can get really lonely. Especially if you're used to full-fielded titles like Namco's *MotoGP* series.

The other major problem for me is that the whole thing feels like a rushed *Gran Turismo* 4 spin-off...which is pretty much is. The recycled tracks, the limited upgrade options on each bike, the silly one-on-one races needed to unlock most of the inventory—none of it is satisfying.

Hardcore bike aficionados will be in heaven thanks to the variety and physics. To everyone else out there: buyer beware.

DEMIAN: I've never ridden a motorcycle, but from playing *Tourist Trophy*...it must be hard as hell. I like manual gears, so with

that and two brake buttons (front and rear), a crouch button, and the analog stick, I could be hitting up to five inputs at once—and still wishing I had an analog trigger for the gas.

Tourist Trophy is an incredibly technical racing sim and a well-executed variety project that will appeal to a very small group of people. It feels a whole lot like *Gran Turismo*, from the menus to the license tests, but it's even less forgiving on the track. I can see how some players will really appreciate that, but if you're looking for an actively fun racer, this isn't it.

1UP.COM—MILKMAN: Gamers who like *Gran Turismo* 4 but aren't motorcycle enthusiasts should not enjoy *Tourist Trophy* all that much, despite a significant crossover of tracks, visual finesse, and modes (license tests, anyone?). The game's likely lack of appeal can be attributed to the steep learning curve, primarily with the handling and controls, which, while nimble indeed, demand gamers carve out perfect racing lines. For more determined gamers, however, *Tourist Trophy* features a deep list of customizable bike settings (although you cannot upgrade parts), rider positioning, and a sexy 100-count selection of the world's finest motorcycles. Tougher than *MotoGP* but worth the effort involved.

PlayStation 2

ATELIER IRIS 2: THE AZOTH OF DESTINY

A dash of cute, a pinch of boring



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

5.5	6.0	7.0
GREG S.	SHANE	JENN F.

Publisher: NIS America
Developer: Gust
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone 10+
www.nisamerica.com

Good: A fast-paced story
Bad: Too much backtracking and fetch questing
Atelier: A studio, especially for an artist



GREG S: Apparently, my cohorts found the first *Atelier Iris* "charming" and "retro." I never played it, so I can't comment on that. But I'd use different words to describe the sequel—words like "dated" and "cluttered." It's easy to like *Azoth* at first, despite the very old-school visuals and fuzzy backgrounds. The very anime-style voice acting and light dialogue mix well with a plot that takes itself seriously enough and moves at a fantastic pace.

But there are two things I never could get around while sloggng through the game. While leveling up your characters is never a grind in *Azoth*, infuriating fetch questing and backtracking can be. The artificially lengthened gameplay has you running all over areas you've already visited looking for stupid things that really never seem worth an hour-long quest. Things like cotton to fix a ship's sail. Ugh. And the random encounters are too boring and lack any real challenge. They have a lot of potential, thanks to the *Grandia*-esque active battle system. But honestly, they mostly come down to jabbing the X button over and over again until the fight is through.

Azoth isn't an incredibly bad game, but it's just not worth playing when there are so many better options out there.

SHANE: Packed with antiquated graphics and corny dialogue, the *Atelier Iris* games seem

more like fan-made projects than modern, big-budget RPGs. But hey, not everything has to be *Final Fantasy*, right? A certain niche of gamers will surely warm up to this unassuming quest, but anyone accustomed to the genre's finest offerings will balk at its wimpy difficulty and lightweight narrative. A solid battle system (subtly improved over the previous installment's) provides an engaging hook, but a poor design choice—you spend a sizable chunk of the game playing a chick tasked only with creating items—negates much of the enjoyment.

JENN F: Greg is so right on about the gameplay being artificially lengthened. What should be a tight, concise game instead extends to sprawling proportions—even the 2D graphics are stretched to jaggville—making *Azoth* feel a little...I dunno, wimpy? Murky? Unfulfilling?

The time bar in the battle screens does offer some strategic depth. And though it seems unfair that stay-at-home alchemist Viese plays second fiddle to Felt's heroics, I loved switching over to her whenever I wanted, messing with recipes and inventing new items (Shane's totally missing out). I tailored my experience just enough, however—spending more time with game-play aspects I liked, exploring and experimenting at my own pace—that I ended up having some real fun.



■ Zoé wonders if there's a time machine powerful enough to bring her back to an era when adventure games were still cool.

Xbox

DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY

Everybody's kung-fu fighting...badly

Good: Unprecedented story
Bad: Juggy graphics, ridiculous combat
More Depressing: PC predecessor was a big-time award-winner



MATT: God, I miss adventure games.

On the other hand, I miss Betamax, reel-based home movies, and sepia-colored shag carpet—that doesn't mean you should. Unfortunately, *The Longest Journey* sequel *Dreamfall* has my problem: numskull nostalgia, to the point of wrecking an otherwise uncommonly well-written story.

As the game spitters into action (lots o' load screens here, folks), you play Zoé Castillo in Casablanca in 2219. You're in a coma, but we don't know why. (Flashback time!) It seems that two weeks earlier, you were having visions of a girl, a black house, and a wintry landscape. (Uh-oh) When one of your friends disappears, you hit the trail talking to people and solving puzzles.

Dreamfall cobbles small, scantily detailed 3D areas together and gives you third-person control of Zoé (and eventually, of two other characters whose stories intersect) to explore, gather mundane objects, and solve

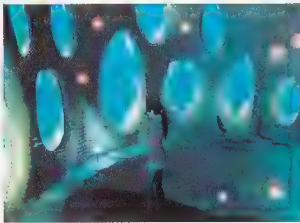
puzzles. Match a doohickey and the plot advances, unfolding predictably enough until the combat. Combat? Combat. Possibly the worst iteration of third-person slap-kick-block ever, *Dreamfall's* scattered action sequences practically wreck an already niche experience. In other words, it's prescribed, with reservations, for patient *The Longest Journey* zealots only.

JENNIFER: I think this unconventional game deserves more credit for its great story and voice acting. That the plot can make me *want* to suffer through abstruse puzzles and hideous combat simply to find out what happens next may not win the game an award, but it does lift it above those cookie-cutter titles with crappy combat, meh environments, and terrible stories. (And I found the environments, while not always graphically impressive, at least interesting and exotic.) Yeah, the game's easy and slow paced,

but shouldn't there be a place for that? My main complaint is that the puzzles aren't always well designed, so you're often left scratching your head.

IUP.COM—GARNETT: *Dreamfall's* developers got so caught up in telling their tale that they forgot to make a game to go with it. You're not so much playing this story as it's pulling you through on a leash.

The 3D world is dramatic enough, but most of the game involves walking your character from one place to another and watching the next scene—a slow, trudging trek. When you do face some obstacle or puzzle to solve, the solution is always near at hand and easy to sort out. And woefully clunky hand-to-hand combat and rudimentary sneaking sections don't break up the grind any better. *Dreamfall* may have left its point-and-click roots behind, but it comes up empty trying to replace them.



THE VERDICTS OUT OF 100	9.0	6.5	7.0
	MATT	JENNIFER	GARNETT

Publisher: Funcom
 Developer: Aspyr
 Players: 1
 ESRB: Mature

www.dreamfall.com



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PlayStation 2





■ PSP

ONLINE

FIELD COMMANDER

A battle in your pants (pocket)



Online: Aside from head-to-head battles, *Transmission mode* lets you play up to five games simultaneously over time. Log in, play your turn, log out. Nice.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

7.0	7.5	9.0
ROBERT C.	DEMIAN	JENN F.

Publisher: Sony Online
Developer: Sony Online
Players: 1-2 (2 via local or online Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Teen
www.us.playstation.com

Good: Just like *Advance Wars*, but online.
Bad: The *Advance Wars* copying is relentlessly obvious.
Awesome: Downloadable, player-made missions



ROBERT C: Remember how much you loved *Advance Wars*? All those different units, the solid rock-paper-scissors play balancing, the crucial bonuses granted by commanding officers, the desperate land rush to finance your growing legions, and (above all) the critical strategizing it took to beat each map? Now you can play it again—only in 3D and without as much personality (and a little less strategizing)—on your PSP.

Field Commander isn't bad. It just lacks *Advance Wars*' energy and verve, leaving you with a game in traditional military drag with solid but un compelling gameplay. As in *AW*, missions rarely go beyond "capture or kill all your enemies." But the A.I. rarely challenges you—only two missions were so tough that I had to restart. Multiplayer is more satisfying... or it would've been, if *Demian* had shown a shred of mercy.

My biggest challenge was making out the units—too many of them look alike. I shouldn't have to manually scan every enemy to know what I'm up against; I should be able to just see it. It's worth mentioning corrupted saves late in the game forced me to replay some missions.

DEMIAN: *Field Commander*'s turn-based battles are such a rip-off of *Advance Wars*, it's easier to describe how the two games differ. (Normally, I wouldn't just assume you

AW expertise, but if you like handheld strategy games enough to read this review and you haven't played it, pinch yourself—you may not exist.)

I like the game's more versatile infantry units: Spec-ops soldiers lay mines and take out armor from afar, while snipers can go all stealthy. Aside from a few other quirks, the learning curve is more like a mild ripple. I do wish the A.I. were smarter, but other than minor complaints like that, you're looking at *Advance Wars* with online play. It may not be innovative, but it's still addictive as hell.

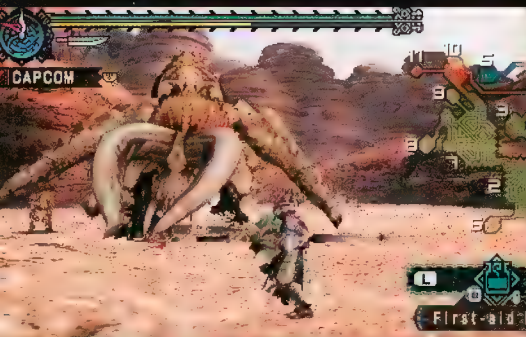
JENN F: Addictive as hell is right. No matter how deliberate a battle's pace is, *Field Commander* never has a dull second, thanks to the constant strategy lurking beneath each turn-based move. Even online play, tinged with lag, never loses its momentum. I also like how you can save game progress anytime during missions—even in multiplayer—so that long rounds can staccato into shorter, more portable-friendly sessions.

Just as impressive—and a little surprising, given the genre—is the presentation; its graphics really flex their metaphorical muscles when the bird's-eye view suddenly swoops down into the battlefield, bringing the exchange to life. Did I mention this game is great? There, I said it.

■ PSP

MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM

Hunt anywhere, anytime



THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

7.0	6.0	8.0
BRYAN	MARK	MILKMAN

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

Good: It's a gorgeous game
Bad: Defeating big beasts on your own is tough
Unforgivable: No online play



BRYAN: *Daxter*, *Syphon Filter*, *Field Commander*—seems the PSP's finally building a respectable library of games. And *Monster Hunter Freedom* adds to it.

For the most part, Capcom's PS2 action-rouleplayer makes a seamless transition to the smaller screen. It's stockpiled with things to do, as quests range from simple (gathering wild mushrooms) to demanding (slaying a creature of Jurassic proportions). Kills aren't only about needlessly spilling blood, either; I took scraps from carcasses and created sweet weapons and armor. *MH* vets (well, with the exception of Mark) will enjoy the new additions here, including two-player treasure hunts and the Falyne Kitchen—why slave over a hot stove when you can hire these crazy cats to cook you some stat-boosting grub? And visually, the game is a spitting image of its big brother.

Yet, while *Freedom* retains the original's good looks, the same can't be said for its online mode. Sorry, but I have a hard enough time naming three friends, let alone getting three in the same room for local Wi-Fi hunts. The lack of Internet play becomes an even greater headache when pursuing a towering beast—unless your character is insanely strong, going one-on-one with the likes of a dragon is a lost cause.

MARK: It doesn't say much for this PSP *Monster Hunter* that even I—someone

who imported an art book of the PS2 version—couldn't really get into *Freedom*. Yeah, it controls fine and looks *fantastic*, but it suffers the same "been there, done that" feeling as other PS2-to-PSP ports, in this case with the added handicap of no online play. A few new features and local wireless play (how often can you really use that?) are no substitute for the camaraderie of joining up online to take down a big dragon or checking out your rivals' custom-built gear.

TURCOM—MILKMAN: With the exception of a couple of interesting breaks (most notably, a new farming safe zone where thrifty green-thumbed gamers can save money by growing food, mining resources, and fishing), *Monster Hunter Freedom* is a near-perfect part of the original PS2 *Monster Hunter*. That's pretty impressive, if only for the seamless transition of the crispy visuals. And while the "innovative" control scheme from the PS2 version (use the right analog stick to attack) doesn't survive the port, the game is actually improved because of this. Pressing the X button to attack is an infinitely more satisfying form of combat, which helps, since *Freedom* is a notably more singular affair thanks to the lack of online support (as the other guys have already groused about). Now, how about *Monster Hunter Deux*?



■ Not pictured:
screams of agony.

E: 0.71
R: 0.72
P: 0.72

■ GameCube

ODAMA

A weird world of pain

Good: The satisfying crush of destruction.
Bad: Harder than the bar exam in a foreign language.
Humbling: Playing *Odama* in public. "Press forward!"



ROBERT A: We can just imagine Yoot Saito, *Odama's* creator, lounging on a beanbag chair years ago and smoking heroic quantities of marijuana, listening to *Close to the Edge* by the band Yes, and daydreaming about pinball. What other story explains the inspiration for a game that combines a stone ball the size of a house with an army of expendable soldiers in demolition-friendly feudal Japan?

It's your job, as commander of this rabble, to corral them as they guide your sacred ball from one side of the battlefield to the other, thus into the gate that leads to the next stage. You control them with simple commands issued into the included microphone. You keep the enemy at bay with the stone pinball, which you thwack into enemy buildings and bosses and send careening over power-ups—the most important of which turns every flattened enemy to your cause. But you'll need to combine dead aim with field-biting skills; your ball

crushes friend and foe alike.

It's all about multitasking, juggling the strategic (the troops) and the immediate (the ball). I loved it...when I wasn't clawing my eyes out. *Odama* is old-school hard, compounded by plenty of rough edges. It's a too-brief, too-messy, too-charming monument to the power of personality in games.

CRISPIN: As it turns out, pinball and real-time strategy aren't two great tastes that taste great together.

The ball in this genre mash-up moves with all the zipppiness of a cantaloupe drop-kicked in lunar gravity. Meanwhile, I yelled a lot worse than just the accepted voice commands into the microphone as my pikin-size soldiers lost ground again and again. Top it all off with blah graphics and confusing levels (have fun figuring out the multisided mountain) and you get an oddball game that only a cult dedicated to wackiness for wackiness' sake will

revere (I'm looking in Robert's direction). You do get a sweet sense of accomplishment when luck favors you and you can clear a board or topple a boss, but rarely does the fun reach full tilt.

G. FORD: Robert might be onto something with that whole beanbag idea. Surely, the king of publishing gimmicky games (think *Brain Age*, *Nintendogs*) wouldn't approve this messed-up mash-up, which has a dreamy inspiration that's totally offset by an oh so painful execution. Good luck guiding the sluggish ball up the thin paths of the brutal mountain level. And it'd be nice if your soldiers followed orders with any consistency, high morale rating or not, a hang-up that kills any strategy.

I did enjoy the humor, specifically the bowled-over units' comments ("Does this mean no bonus?"), just not enough to recommend this clever, but frustrating, mess.



THE PRODUCERS' RATES

7.5	5.5	4.5
ROBERT A.	CRISPIN	G. FORD

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Vivarium
Players: 1
ESRB: Everybody 10+
www.nintendo.com

ONE OF THE TOP FIVE GAME-DEGREE PROGRAMS

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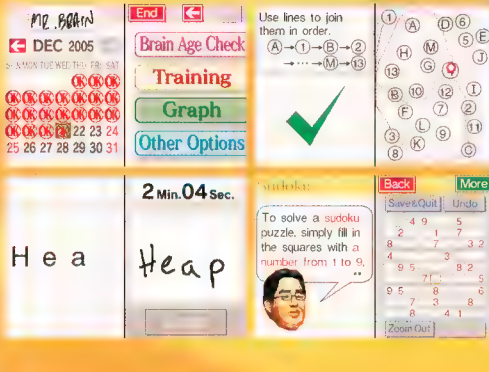
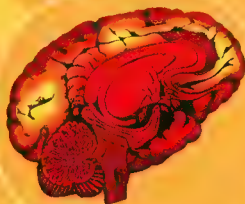
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DS

BRAIN AGE: TRAIN YOUR BRAIN IN MINUTES A DAY!

Drain damage

JENNIFER: This brain-training game took Japan by storm, and it's easy to see why: Doing well makes you feel really smart, and it somehow makes arithmetic fun. The timed exercises—which involve a variety of scientifically proven mind-stimulating activities, such as simple math, counting syllables in a sentence, and visual memory puzzles—challenge you to perform tasks quickly and accurately. After you complete a few rounds, the game calculates your brain age (20 is the best score, based on the age at which your brain activity supposedly starts diminishing). As you train more, you'll unlock new exercises, and the game keeps track of your progress through a series of graphs.

I love how *Brain Age* is a different sort of game. You hold the DS sideways like a book, and writing in the answers on the touch screen is liberatingly fun. I always look forward to my favorites. Plus, when

I'm out of daily exercises, the on-demand Sudoku is great; it easily offers the best interface I've seen for that genre. All *Brain Age* lacks in depth—because you can't play continuously for long periods of time, it failed to captivate me the way an addictive puzzle game or even a serious crossword would. But this is an innovation whose time has come.

SHANE: I could easily exhaust all 130 of this review's allotted words in an attempt to explain what's so great about *Brain Age*, but all I need to do is hand you my DS and let you try it for yourself. Trust me—you'll be instantly hooked. Whether you're blazing through simple arithmetic problems, reading literary classics out loud, or drawing a picture of a koala bear from memory, *Brain Age* never fails to surprise, entertain, and challenge your mind. Young kids might view the whole concept as being dangerously close to homework, but twenty-something oldsters (and beyond) will wonder how they ever got by without this stimulating exercise.

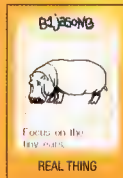
Brain Age's Spartan visuals and perky soundtrack don't impress, but that's the unique nature of the "game," traditional trappings feel utterly inconsequential. And while I wanted more multiplayer options, the core single-player experience offers such compelling replayability that I can't complain.

1UP.COM—JEREMY: You got your math in my videogame! I'm sure sudoku is better for my gray matter than watching Eli's latest Hollywood exposé, but I'm still not sure that I really buy into this whole "*Brain Age* makes you smarter" hype. Benefits or not, *Brain Age* passes the most important test: It's fun. Granted, it's not fun by typical videogame standards, but that's par for the course with the DS. *Brain Age*'s simple presentation places the emphasis entirely on short sprints of mental acuity, and it's gratifying to know my mind operates at "rocket" speeds. I just wish the game offered a wider array of activities...simple arithmetic has only so much staying power. **A-**

Brain Drain
Something doesn't add up in multiplayer: Yes, 16 people can play off of a single cart wirelessly—slightly amusing in itself. But this game only offers a single exercise (the arithmetic one), and you can't see how others ranked. It's much too brief and just leaves you wanting more.

It's a Draw...

Counting and reading tests are obvious gauges of mental capacity, but *Brain Age* presents you with a couple more unexpected exercises. One of our favorites involves drawing objects from memory. You'll be asked to sketch a random object, such as, say, the Mona Lisa. Then the game shows you the original and compares it with yours, emphasizing the prominent features your sketch should have. Don't feel bad if you're not that artistic—look at what we came up with....



Good: Another truly innovative title for the DS.
Bad: "Minutes a day" is really all you get.
For All You Cheap Folks: *Poliofectors Out There!* is only \$20.



THE VERDICT
OUT OF 10

8.5 9.0 7.5

JENNIFER

SHANE

JEREMY

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Players: 1-16 (via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Everyone

www.nintendo.com

DS

LOST MAGIC

Real-time strategy gets sketchy

143: Void Cloud



A black substance that consumes everything.



Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Taito
Players: 1 (2 via local or online Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Everyone
www.usbi.com

Good: Clever stylus gameplay concepts, fun multilevel
Bads: Frustrating A.I. problems, uneven difficulty
Character Designs: by anime legend Yoshiharu Sato (Studio Ghibli)



SHANE: *Lost Magic* may look like an unassuming action-RPG, but beneath its old-timey 2D trappings lurks something far more daring: a role-playing/real-time strategy hybrid. You still get the basic tenets of Japanese RPG-dom—doe-eyed anime characters, a hackneyed story line, and scads of equipment and spells to collect—but *Magic's* nontraditional touch-screen gameplay offers plenty of surprises...not all of them pleasant, mind you.

First off, your hero's frontline offense forces you to draw increasingly complex magical runes with your stylus. This potentially nightmarish tactic actually works, thanks to a forgiving recognition system and simple interface. Unfortunately, touch-screen control doesn't work so well for the other aspects of battle. Maneuvering your hero and troops by pointing, grouping, and clicking feels clumsy; an obnoxious manual camera forces you to baby-sit the action; and poor A.I. pathfinding means that everyone will get stuck on corners and edges—it's all incredibly frustrating. Factor in a total lack of exploration, and the game boils down to an exhaustive parade of tense, annoying battles.

Online multiplayer matches fare a little better, as the thrill of assaulting your friends with monster rushes and souped-up spells momentarily overshadows the lingering control and A.I. issues.

JENN F.: What? I scroll away for one second to get a quick look-see at my minions, and I scroll back only to learn some monster has been punching my hero in the face repeatedly. Uncool. While its hybrid of game mechanics is truly nifty, *Lost Magic* quickly becomes a fast-paced terror of multitasking and micromanagement.

Granted, there's an enemy-tracking GPS on the top screen that I ought to be watching, but it's tough when the touch screen is flurried with tiny icons where I assumed actual graphics would be. Worse, characters can clump up during battle, which makes tapping the intended icon nigh impossible. If it weren't for the killer music and Studio Ghibli stills, I would have immediately thrown my DS across the room.

JEREMY: The DS seems like a natural fit for real-time strategy games, but a touch screen alone doesn't do a great RTS make. Case in point: *Lost Magic*. The battles tend to be small in size, and your captured monster allies are pretty limited in their abilities. Victory is often a matter of trial and error to determine the designers' prescribed sequence of events. And while using the stylus to draw magic runes is enjoyable, it tends to get in the way of directing combat. *Lost Magic* is fun when it's not frustrating, and as far as portable RTSes go, it's about the best you'll find. Still, *WarCraft* this ain't.



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by Rick O'Connor

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

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



FAR CRY INSTINCTS: PREDATOR

Xbox 360 • Ubisoft • ESRB: M

Cheaters! No, not the online players in this first-person shooter (at least, not to our knowledge). We're talking about Ubisoft. In rereleasing the two Xbox 1 *Far Cry* games instead of giving us a new one made from the ground up for the Xbox 360. So while we're getting two games for one and some gratter and shinier jungle bushes we're stuck with the same old levels and incredibly retarded A.I., straight from a last-generation shooter. If you're into *Far Cry*, however—hey, don't listen to our whining. You'll probably like the large, seemingly wide-open levels and militant powers (which you'll develop partway through) just fine. And you'll find plenty of online competition, too, which is always nice.

PORTS AND SPORTS



From Russia With Love
PSP • EA • ESRB: T — In the mood for a subpar third-person run-n-gun corridor shooter with slipshod controls that you can play on the go? From *Russia With Love*'s single-player campaign reduces to you to finding small blue checkpoints to trigger events, and the multiplayer is anemic at best.

Bottom line: The *From Russia* DVD and game both feature Sean Connery's voice—the former is the better investment.



NBA Ballers: Rebound
PSP • Midway • ESRB: E
Ballers has you going from rags to riches in one-on-one tournaments against streetball and NBA players. Although the character creation is robust and the extras you can buy add to the replay value, the repetitive gameplay, long load times, and limited juke moves will have you bored in a couple of hours.

Bottom line: Like most ports on the PSP, *Ballers* is best played on a console.



MLB SlugFest 2006
PS2/XB • Midway • ESRB: E10+ — *SlugFest* stays the course with its familiar arcade-style game (complete with MLB players and teams). A character-creation mode marks the only big addition, so if you've always wanted a big-headed rendition of yourself in your homer-happy games, have at it!

Bottom line: *SlugFest* is still a crowd-pleasing, unblockable-filled hardball alternative. And, hey—it's only 20 bucks.



Final Fantasy XII: Treasures of Aht Urhgan
PS2 • Square Enix • ESRB: T — This is easily the best expansion for Square's massively multiplayer online role-playing series yet, adding new jobs for the first time in years, new areas, and a wealth of new features—like chocobo breeding/racing—and new assault and besieged battles that make you feel like you're in the middle of a massive *Lord of the Rings* battle, but with friends.

Bottom line: *Aht Urhgan* puts as much fun back in *FFXII* as the last expansion, *Chains of Promathia*, sucked out.



The Silent Hill Experience

PSP • Konami • ESRB: N/A — If you're a serious *Silent Hill* fan (i.e., the type who might dabble in *Silent Hill* cosplay, fan fiction, fan art, or live-action roleplaying) you might feel validated spending \$20 on this collection of comics, music, interviews, and trailers from the four *Silent Hill* games.

Bottom line: Really, though, this stuff should have been included on the upcoming PSP game, *Silent Hill: Origins*, as unlockable bonus material.



Steambot Chronicles

PS2 • Atlus • ESRB: T — It's great to see someone bringing Irem's charming little action-rouleplayer to these shores. *Steambot Chronicles* (originally titled *Bumpy Trot*) sends you out into the world with nothing but your trotmobile—an evolution of the automobile featuring customizable arms and legs—to do battle with all sorts of mechanized meenaces.

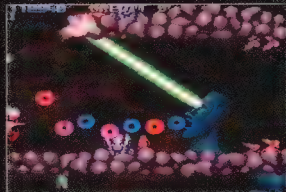
Bottom line: The gameplay is unique, the vehicles can be tailored to your liking, and the story is good.



Monster Rancher EVO

PS2 • Tecmo • ESRB: E10+ — This series' long-running gimmick of creating monsters from your CD/DVD collection remains faithfully intact, but the surrounding game has mysteriously morphed into a kiddified RPG dense with obnoxious minigames and spiky-haired anime characters.

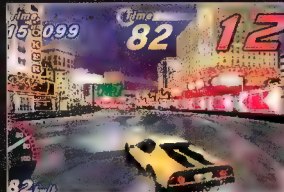
Bottom line: Tykes might have the patience for the dippy plot and repetitive gameplay, but the rest of us should opt out.



Gradius Collection

PSP • Konami • ESRB: E — This collection perfectly translates four titles of the classic shooter series to the PSP, as well as the never-released-her *Gradius Gaiden*. Although most of the differences between each version are minor (some of the games are nearly identical), it's an overall solid package.

Bottom line: Five games plus a movie gallery with soundtracks equals a great deal for PSP owners.



OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast

PSP • Sega • ESRB: E — *OutRun 2006* on the PSP looks and feels almost identical to its PS2 cousin, featuring all the same game modes, courses, and challenges, and even an excellent online component (both online and local). The only thing holding down this port is that it doesn't always run smoothly.

Bottom line: *Burnout Legends* is a much more solid game, but *OutRun* is a good secondary racer. 🏎️

[GEEKED AT BIRTH.]



You can talk the talk.
Can you walk the walk?
Here's a chance to prove it.
Please geek responsibly.

GAME DESIGN
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WEB DESIGN

COMPUTER FORENSICS
NETWORK SECURITY
SOFTWARE ENGINEERING
TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT
GAME PROGRAMMING



REVIEWS ARCHIVE

Because our memory is detachable...

Kingdom Hearts II: not just for babies...really.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Nintendo's come a long way since its days of hand-making playing cards and running low hotels. Just what of its videogame icons has scored the highest, though? We tallied up the core games of each series. We were even kind enough to exclude reissues, party games, and CD-I abominations (average scores out of 10).



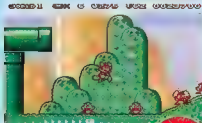
The Legend of Zelda series (eight games)

9.4



Metroid Prime series (five games)

9.0



Super Mario series (six games)

8.9



Donkey Kong series (five games)

8.1



Pokémon series (seven games)

7.7

GAME	SYSTEM	VERDICT	SCORES (out of 10)	AWARD
24: The Game	PS2	■ Faithful to the hit show but lacking the same freshness and wicked gunglery	7.5 5.5 7.0	
Age of Empires: The Age of Kings	■	■ This deep, historically savvy turn-based strategy game is fun—and good for your brain	9.0 7.5 8.5	Silver
Arena Football	PS2/XB	■ Ridiculous defensive rules make Arena more forgettable than the actual league	6.0 5.5 6.5	
Beatmania	PS2	■ Carpal-tunnel-causing rhythm game requires as much practice as being a real DJ	7.5 4.5 6.5	
Black	PS2/XB	■ Ka-BOOM! A first-person shooter full of sound and fury, signifying nothing	6.5 6.0 8.0	
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	XB360	■ A pick-up-and-fly WWII flight-combat title full of planes, but its missions get tedious	7.0 6.5 6.5	
Capcom Classics Collection Remixed	PSP	■ Bright graphics and classy, classic games fill this portable powerhouse	8.5 8.5 8.0	Silver
Chibi Robo	GC	■ Borky camera and slow taxi screens keep this adorable 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	
Commandos Strike Force	PS2/XB	■ A WWII shooter with plenty of good ideas, just not the best deployment of them	5.5 5.0 5.0	
Condemned: Criminal Origins	XB360	■ Clunky controls hobble this macabre survival-horror title's deeply eerie gameplay	7.0 8.0 8.5	
Daxter	PSP	■ This bright, beautiful action-platformer feels cramped by the PSP's limitations	7.0 7.5 7.5	
Dead or Alive 4	XB360	■ Boobs 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
Driver: Parallel Lines	PS2/XB	■ A bad story doesn't slow this driving game, due to the great physics and atmosphere	8.5 7.5 7.0	
Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	XB360	■ Button-mashing, ancient Chinese hack-n-slash that feels like a rerun of a rerun	5.5 5.0 4.0	
Exit	PSP	■ Long-form puzzles and lovely, art graphics accent this pokey-pacer, but fun, game	8.5 7.0 7.0	
Fight Night Round 3	XB360	■ Perfectly pretty pugilists pummel and punch with precision and panache	9.0 8.0 8.0	Silver
Final Fight: Streetwise	PS2/XB	■ Decent brawler with nice minigames stumbles on repetition and a bad save system	6.5 7.0 7.0	
Full Auto	XB360	■ Like Burnout with guns and a do-over button—so nice, we woulda liked more of it	8.0 8.5 8.5	Silver
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	PS2	■ A squad-based shooter with broken rules of engagement	5.0 5.0 5.0	
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	XB360	■ Amazing, war-is-hell-as-fun shooter with great multiplayer. Next gen is finally here!	10 9.0 9.5	Gold
The Godfather: The Game	PS2/XB	■ Grand Theft Auto: Gangster. Atmospheric, faithful to the film, but a bit cheesy	8.0 8.5 7.5	Silver
Grandia III	PS2	■ A beautiful role-playing game with a choice battle system and a stereotypical story	8.0 8.5 8.0	Silver
Kingdom Hearts II	PS2	■ Everything an RPG effer should be, starring all your Square and Disney favorites	10 9.0 9.5	Gold
L.A. Rush	PS2/XB	■ This racing game offers a ton of cool cars that crash in random, frustrating ways	6.5 6.5 6.5	
Major League Baseball 2K6	PS2/XB/GC	■ Reworked the swinging and hitting but forgot to help fielding and baserunning	7.0 6.5 7.5	
Mark Eckro's Getting Up	PS2/XB	■ This partly broken, gritty, grai-art action game isn't half as cool as it thinks it is	4.5 4.0 6.5	
Me & My Katamari	PSP	■ The PSP's controls hobble the Prince's ball-rolling, garbage-grabbing game	7.0 5.5 7.0	
Mega Man Maverick Hunter X	PSP	■ A treat for Mega Man fans, it will seem outdated and difficult to anyone else	7.0 7.5 7.0	
Metal Gear Acid 2	PSP	■ A short, streamlined, card-based tactical roleplayer that stars Mr. Snake	8.0 8.0 8.5	Silver
Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	PS2	■ A great story and worthwhile additional content raise the bar for reissues	10 10 8.5	Gold
Metroid Prime Hunters	■	■ Samus looks great on the DS, but she can be awkward to control in first person	7.5 8.0 7.5	
MLB 06: The Show	PS2	■ Innovation isn't defined as finally adding a decade-old feature to your baseball game	6.5 6.0 4.0	
MS Saga: A New Dawn	PS2	■ Gundam RPG with superboobs and lots of customization, but lots of fetch quests	6.0 6.0 5.0	
NBA Ballers: Phenom	PS2/XB	■ Shows RPGs off-court ambition, but the gameplay shoots too many air balls	6.0 6.5 7.5	
Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams	PS2	■ We agree this samurai game is beautiful but aren't sure about its RPG aspects	4.5 7.5 6.5	
The Outfit	XB360	■ Linear single player, but this WWII shooter's dash of strategy is fun in multiplayer	7.0 6.0 7.0	
Pokémon Trozei!	DS	■ A Poké-themed puzzler that inflicts equal parts dullness and puzzle	6.5 7.0 6.5	
Pokémon XD: Gale of Darkness	GC	■ The series makes some strides on the Cube with this passable RPG for Pokémonmania	6.0 6.0 7.0	
PQ: Practical Intelligence Quotient	PSP	■ A rather ho-hum puzzler that does manage to score a few "Aha!" moments	5.5 6.5 7.5	
Pursuit Force	PSP	■ A crappy vehicular-assault game with a dumb premise and broken controls	3.5 4.0 6.5	
Resident Evil: Deadly Silence	DS	■ Outdated graphics and gameplay stunt this portable, multiplayer Resident Evil	6.5 7.0 7.5	
The Rub Rabbits!	DS	■ A touchable minigame title that doesn't provide enough fun to be livable	6.0 6.0 6.0	
Rumble Roses XX	XB360	■ Wrestling with slurs has never been more non-PC or more pandering to perverts	7.0 6.5 2.5	
Shadow Hearts: From the New World	PS2	■ A little too-short-but-quirky RPG with an excellent timing-based battle system	8.0 7.5 7.0	
Sonic Riders	PS2/XB/GC	■ Sonic's hoverkart racer isn't fun or fast enough to catch up to Mario's standard	5.0 5.5 5.0	
Spidey-Man 2	DS	■ If your spider sense is on the fritz, let us warn you to avoid this ho-hum adventure	6.0 5.5 3.0	
Splinter Cell Essentials	PSP	■ The controls might be difficult for some—Sam Fisher just doesn't feel right	■ PSP 2.0 7.0 6.0	
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max	PS2	■ The same Street Fighter you loved—without enough new features to make it shine	8.0 8.5 7.5	
State of Emergency 2	PSP	■ Third-person action sequel no one asked for delivers new ways of being average	6.0 5.0 6.0	
Suikoden V	PS2	■ Slow to start and a bit dated, yet a compelling RPG with collect-all-em fun	6.5 6.5 6.5	
Super Monkey Ball: Touch & Roll	DS	■ A maze game that trends infuriating ball-rolling and adorable ape themes	6.5 6.5 6.5	
Super Princess Peach	DS	■ A shiny new Mario-style adventure that needs to take the difficulty up a notch	7.5 7.0 8.0	
Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror	PSP	■ Lots of guns and interesting gameplay aren't as much fun with awkward controls	7.0 7.0 6.0	
Tales of Legendia	PS2	■ An RPG that's too ugly and unbalanced to make the action battles worthwhile	5.5 5.0 7.5	
Tales of Phantasia	GBA	■ This dusty, classic RPG ported from the Super NES hasn't aged very gracefully	6.0 7.5 7.5	
Tao's Adventure: Curse of the Demon Seal	DS	■ An ambitious RPG that is stunted with a totally broken interface and battle system	4.0 5.0 4.0	
Tetris DS	DS	■ Classic puzzler brought to the DS, but with an extra new mode for the touch screen	7.5 7.0 9.0	
ToCa Race Driver 3	PS2/XB	■ This flawed and unbalanced racer is partially redeemed by its amazing variety	6.5 6.0 7.0	
Tombar Raider: Legend	PS2/XB	■ The titular raider is back, swinging and clinging in this solid tomb-robbing game	8.5 8.0 8.0	Silver
Top Spin 2	XB360	■ Deep career mode, graphics update, and new shots make this a grand slam	8.0 7.5 8.5	Silver
True Swing Golf	DS	■ A pick-up-and-play golf game that makes excellent use of the DS' touch screen	8.0 7.0 7.0	
Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code	PSP	■ A hackneyed, hack-a-slash dungeon crawler with a terrific multiplayer mode	6.5 6.0 5.0	
Warpath	XII	■ Bargain-priced action-shooter's online action is smooth but limited and cliché	4.0 5.5 5.0	
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 9	PS2/XB	■ The WC series finally catches up with the rest of the gaming world and goes online	7.5 8.0 8.5	Silver



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game over

the olympics of suck

SEANBABY'S

ULTIMATE BAD GAME

The game systems face off in a tournament of shame



The tournament rules are simple—a videogame system picks a team of three champions: its worst licensed game, its illest-conceived game, and its worst game, period.

Each of these teams will be managed by a fourth game: one that sucks but in an awesome way. After representatives are chosen, the rules are even simpler: Two teams enter the Ring of Crap and anything goes. Using any ineptitude at their disposal, they suck until only the suckiest is left sucking.

I understand the exclusion of N-Gage and Gizmodo in a bad-game-system tournament looks like an oversight. They were deliberately left out—for the same reason that humans and squirrels are forced to water-ski in separate divisions. Or that Phil Collins isn't allowed to enter his mouth in men's crock-cleaning contests. Their natural advantages are too dominant. If we ever hold an unlimited-class-failure competition, N-Gage will be extended an invitation, along with Kong Kong's TVTo; *Sogo Sonar* the Hedge-Hodge Monster. Until then, the eight quarterfinalists will face off as follows: Genesis versus GameCube, PS2 versus NES, Xbox versus GBC, and PS1 versus BBA. May the worst system win.

—Seanbaby

GENESIS

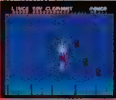
Worst License: *Batman Forever*

Worst Concept: Toys >

Worst Game: *Rise of the Robots*

Manager: Shaq-Fu

The Genesis has an amazing team. At worst license it's a *Batman* game based on a movie about the word "gay." And for worst idea, the tie-in to the Robin Williams film *Toys*. It's being led by history's worst fighting game and managed by the worst one of Shaquille O'Neal stumbling into a kung-fu prophecy.



GAMECUBE

Worst License: Charlie's Angels

M.C.: Universal Stadium Theme Parks Ad.

Worst Game: *Batman Dark Tomorrow*

Manager: *WWE Crush Hour*

The manager is the standout here. It's a game about wrestlers battling in decorated cars. While this is already enough insanity to set records, it's the load time between the announcer's words that makes it a legend: "RIKSHI!!!...whrrr...snatches up; whrrr...THE TWISTY ROCKETS!!!" You'll talk like it for days.



PLAYSTATION 2

Worst License: *Bad Boys Miami TakeDown*

Worst Concept: *McFarlane's Evil Prophecy*

Worst Game: *GoDai: Elemental Force*

Manager: *Fugitive Hunter: War on Terror*

Fugitive Hunter manages a solid team of bad games. *Miami TakeDown* took Jerry Bruckheimer's love letter to buddy-cop movies and ethnic stereotypes and removed the intellectualism. And *McFarlane's Evil Prophecy* marked the way: too-muchy time they let Todd McFarlane design a game, and he came back with a drawing of some spiders.



NES

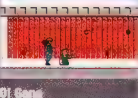
Worst License: *Total Recall*

Worst Concept: M.C. Kids

Worst Game: *Deadly Towers*

Manager: *Wally Bear and the NGI Gang*

The NES is another strong favorite. *Total Recall* and *Deadly Towers* have always been top contenders for worst game of all time; and M.C. Kids is a game about McDonald's. Managing these all-stars is *Wally Bear*, a skateboarding teddy bear that has done more to make true awareness uncool than anyone living or dead.



GENESIS

This matchup almost didn't happen. *Shaq* tested positive on over 70 performance-enhancing drugs—before the videogame sports committee figured out he just had horse DNA. But by the time it was all sorted out, his three teammates had easily destroyed the GameCube without the help of his retarded fighting game.



GENESIS

In an unbelievable show of arrogance, three of the Genesis competitors sat this out and let *Batman Forever* take on the NES alone. This made it an interesting fight, yet *Batman Forever* still had the edge in every aspect of failure. The bad Nintendo games went away beaten, but with a new skip in their step. "Someone's worse than us!" cheered *Deadly Towers*.



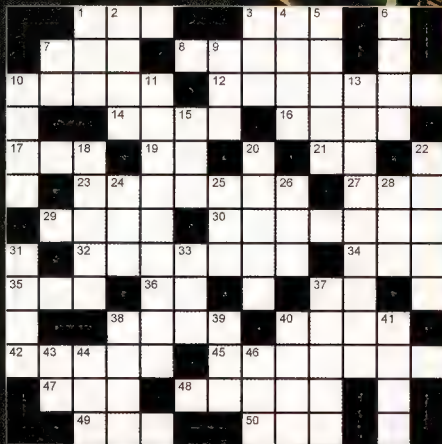
NES

Genesis offered the outraged creator of *Total Recall*, Mike Arkin, the chance to fight. He refused. His game, however, had the edge in a close victory over the PS2 team. The deciding factor was when all the games realized that *Fugitive Hunter's* terrorist-karatéing awesomeness might be unironic. So it was disqualified.



POWER UP!

(Solution on page 133)



ACROSS

- Yoshi's origin
- Japanese equivalent of our Electronic Entertainment Expo (abbrv.)
- Sony's Mark of
- Like *Resident Evil* piano music
- Stretch Panic* sentient neckwear
- Mario's hurdles in *Donkey Kong*
- GTA* stretched ride
- Soul Calibur* nunchaku guy
- Marvel Nemesis*' Johnny
- Short name of the game in 8

ACROSS

- Gran Turismo* Dodge Cruiser
- Pregame introduction?
- Shooters - *Storm* and - *Crisis*
- Blaster Master* (NES) level 5 boss
- Animal Crossing* angling catchable
- Halo 2* Covenant pistol, rifle (plural)
- Jade Empire* secret area, "Lord's Furnace"
- Main man of *Evil Dead* games
- Mans of *Test Drive* fame
- Final NES *Mega Man*
- 16-bit *Fighter* featuring Bad Mr. Frosty
- Resident Evil 2* unlockable character
- Final Fantasy X* star
- Tsugunai* magic vessels
- Nintendo DS' *The ... Rabbits!*
- Dark Cloud* power-up that refills thirst meter
- Blazing Lazers* (TG-16) power-up capsule

DOWN

- MLB stat
- A little over 40 percent of gamers are one
- Poisoned beverage in *Suikoden*
- Dr. Mario* obstacle
- Guitar Hero* ax accessory
- GTA: VC* Little Havana eatery
- MLB's Royal city, for short
- Boxing* (PS1)
- Great place to buy power-ups
- Mario's flower power
- 1-1-up
- X- or Army
- Samus Aran's Ball
- Spinter Cell* objective?
- NES titular boxer
- European TV-display format
- SF Alpha 3*'s X-, A-, or V-
- Right trigger, in *PGR*
- U.K. organization that banned *Activision's CG Call of Duty* ads
- Mario racing format
- Crimson* (Xbox)
- Wacky, knife-handed *Soul Calibur* stabber
- Nintendo's current console
- Ming of *MBA* fame
- Halo 2* map
- Fighting Hunter* U.S.-state locale
- PS2-remote frequency
- Jig-*
- Jumping Flash! 2* island, "Little

GRUDGE MATCH

Get in the ring



VS.

RUMBLE ROSES

GUNS N' ROSES

If you think two chicks can really claw it up in a wrestling ring, you haven't seen Slash and Axl fight for the rights to "Mr. Brownstone." Let's see whether ripping off songs or pawing at thongs draws a bigger crowd....

THE CONTENDERS

Chicks in leather
Advantage: Rumble Roses

Dudes in leather

ENTERTAINMENT VALUE



It's just a tick above G.L.O.W.

Appetite for Destruction does kick ass....

Advantage: Guns N' Roses



DEALING WITH DISSENSION

Find another partner on Xbox Live
Advantage: Rumble Roses

Leave to form Izzy Stradlin and the Ju Ju Hounds

EMBARRASSING MOMENTS



Pure Humiliation Match makes 'er your bitch
Advantage: Rumble Roses

The Spaghetti Incident?



THE CROWD

Those who like to have control over their soft-core porn.

Those who don't mind paying to see huge egos colliding onstage

Advantage: Guns N' Roses

USE OF SPANDEX



Reiko
Advantage: Rumble Roses



Axl Rose

WINNER DETERMINED BY



Submission (that's hot)
Advantage: Rumble Roses

Ruthless rock-star lawyers



WINNER: RUMBLE ROSES

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LOM RETRO!

SEGA'S MASTERFUL MOMENT

Sega's mostly forgotten 8-bitter hits the big 2-0

If you're one of 90 percent of American kids who grew up in the late '80s loving videogames, you were the proud owner of a Nintendo Entertainment System. But what about the 10 percent who *didn't* play with power? Though they never knew the pleasures of *Super Mario*, a fortunate few discovered the Master System, an NES alternative from an up-and-coming Sega. This other 8-bit wonder has just turned 20—a momentous occasion for Sega nuts and fans of grids alike.

—Jeremy Parish

THE MACHINE

The Sega Master System's poor showing in stores certainly wasn't due to technical inferiority; Sega's hardware put the NES to shame. Its Z80 processor was twice as fast as the one in Nintendo's machine, plus it had four times the memory and could display more than three times as many colors at any given moment.

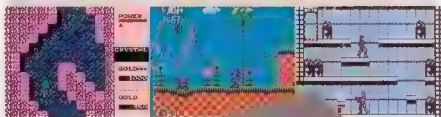
Admittedly, SMS had some design quirks. The controller borrowed liberally from Nintendo's design, but its D-pad was a square rather than a cross, making the controls a little mushy. Weirder yet, the SMS controller had only two buttons—meaning that in order to pause you had to press a button on the console (or rather, the "Master Base," as Sega called it).

On the other hand, it did have a wicked awesome hidden game built right in to the hardware! OK, it was a boring maze game starring a snail, but it was a cool enough Easter egg to make more than a few NES fans green with envy.



GAMES TO REMEMBER

Despite its powerful hardware, SMS ultimately placed a distant second behind NES. Nintendo's secret? Exclusive third-party games. Sega fans weren't left empty-handed, though. Those with *Metroid* envy had *Zillion*, and *Gollevilles* did the *Zelda* thing, but with a faster pace and side-scrolling action sequences. And *Phantasy Star* was a visually breathtaking RPG that blew *Dragon Warrior* and *Final Fantasy* out of the water. Fans had some great third-party software, too (though often licensed and programmed by Sega to work around Nintendo's exclusive contracts). *Double Dragon* was far more faithful to the arcade hit than the NES version, and Sega's version of *R-Type* was just amazing. Perhaps most impressive were the late-era conversions of Genesis hits like *Sonic the Hedgehog* that truly showcased the power of Sega's 8-bit machine.



■ (Left to right) *Gollevilles*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Zillion*

MYCARDS

"MyCard" might sound a little like a heart condition, but in fact it was the name of one of the SMS's more distinctive features: It supported two different media formats. Budget-minded gamers could buy MyCards instead of cartridges—credit card-sized games that fit into the system's second slot. MyCards were cheap, but they also offered less data capacity than carts and generally played host to some of the weakest games on the system. Five minutes with *Teddy Boy* or *Trans-Bot* served as a harsh lesson in why it doesn't always pay to be a cheap skate.

The second slot did serve a more interesting secondary function: It powered the system's sophisticated SegaScope 3D glasses. Far from your usual flimsy blue-and-red cellophane punch-outs, Sega's 3D specs contained shutters that opened and closed over each eye in synch with the onscreen graphics. Sure, they *looked* ridiculous, but it was hard to care when the payoff was a totally mind-blowing game of *Space Harrier 3D*.



OLD SCHOOL

10 years ago in EGM

On the Cover: Platformers' Parade!

Iconic and photogenic next-gen action-platforming superstars Sonic, Mario, and Crash Bandicoot graced the cover 10 years ago.



Game of the Month: Ultimate MK3 (Saturn)

Back in simpler times, we went nuts over this souped-up version of *MK3*. Not only did this version let Shang Tsung morph into Robot Smoke, but it also gives infamous mall-cop Stryker a machine gun.

Mario in the Third Dimension

For our exclusive preview of Mario's first 3D adventure, *Super Mario 64* (N64), our staff poet went with this punstastic headline: "There may have been a koopala versions out there before, but none of them can touch *Mario 64*."

A Preview of Upcoming Games

We took a first-look at tons of games that month, including arcade-fighter port *Marvel Super Heroes* (PS1/Saturn) and an *Aeon Flux* game based on the MTV animated show, not the crappy movie, which of course we don't know about then. Speaking of crappy movies, we didn't know about *Back to the Future* in our preview of the *Waterworld* game; we made this bold prediction: "Big graphics and large enemies throughout *Waterworld* make for scenes that you will want to play through again and again."



Photograph by © Daveover/SEGA/SPTS A&C

ALL IN THE FAMILY

The Master System was a failure everywhere in the world (except, oddly, Brazil), but it laid the groundwork for the amazing Genesis. It wasn't actually Sega's first foray into hardware, though. That honor belongs to the SG-1000 Mark I, a Japan-only console that experienced a short and unhappy life at the hands of Nintendo's Famicom. In fact, the Master System was called the Mark III in Japan and offered backward compatibility with Mark I (and its rare upgrade, the Mark II). Which is good to know in case you ever find yourself stranded on a desert island with nothing but Mark I games. 🐉



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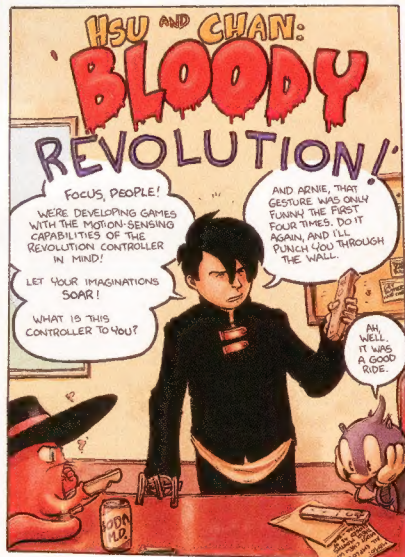
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