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MONTHLY

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- And more!





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PlayStation 2



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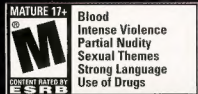
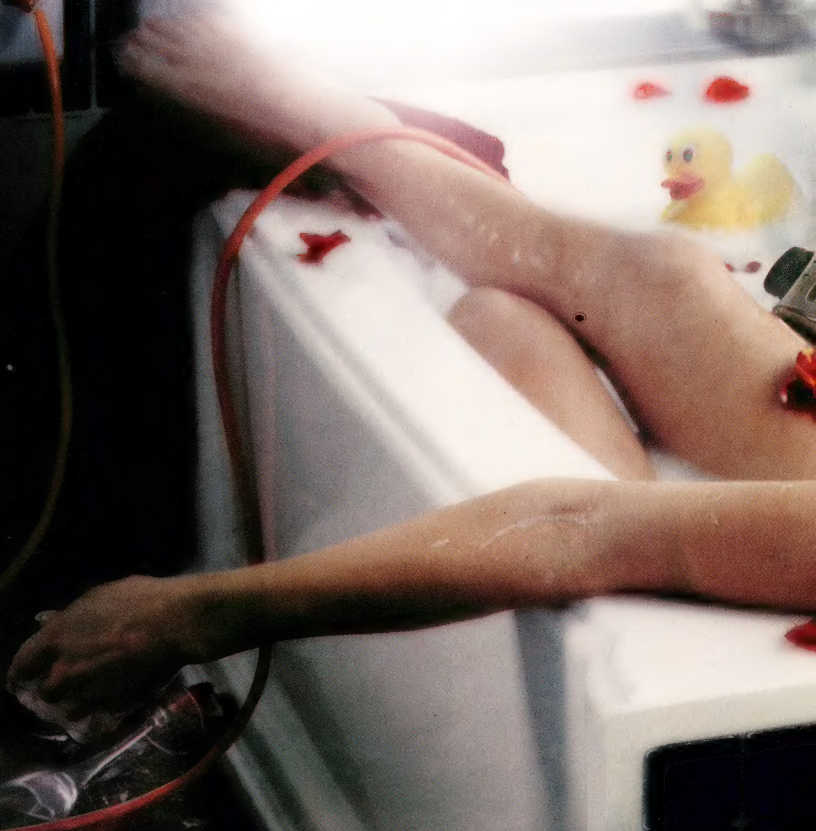
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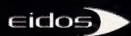
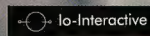


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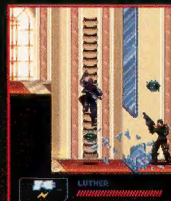
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PLATFORM SPECIFICATIONS



the pit and the pendulum

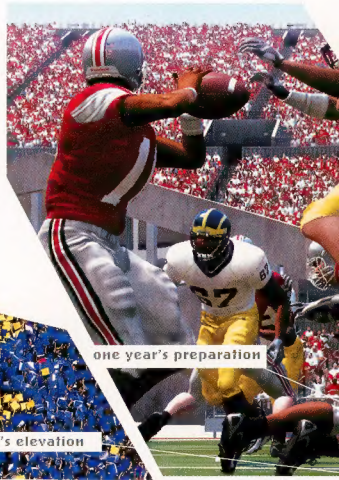
In the fourth quarter of the 2006 Rose Bowl, with a 5-point lead and 2:13 left in the game, USC coach Pete Carroll had momentum on his side. The Texas defense hadn't been able to stop the USC offensive machine all night. So USC went for a first down on fourth-and-two. Watching the game at home, EA producer Jeff Luhr knew that everything hinged on this play.

Sometimes the pendulum doesn't have to swing far to turn a game's momentum 180 degrees: Texas held the line, stopping USC's off-tackle run just two inches short of the first-down marker, and the Texas offense stormed down the field to score and win the national championship. Starting with Texas' stunning Rose Bowl turnaround, Luhr and the NCAA Football 07 team spent the next five months analyzing the history and science of momentum swings and writing them into the game, making sure that gamers will be able to pick up on mid-game momentum swings and use them to their team's advantage. "Emotion is a huge factor in college football," says Luhr. "When the momentum starts going your way in this year's game, you'll feel it – your crowd gets louder, your hits get harder, and your whole team plays better."



one year's preparation

one school's elevation



reverse engineers

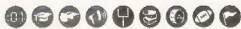
Getting the details right about big-time college football takes big-time homework. EA producer Anthony White and his team prepared for the season pretty much the same way a college coaching staff does – sitting in front of game films with pads of graph paper and reverse-engineering the playbooks of the teams they are studying.

The difference: Instead of 10 opponents, the NCAA Football 07 team put together the playbooks of each of the 119 teams in Division I-A. For this year's title, White's team watched more than 500 games, rewinding each new play, diagramming it, and coding it into the game. That includes some of college ball's trickiest formations and plays: the University of Nevada's hybrid "pistol" offense, the Oregon Ducks' triple option pass out of the shotgun formation, and New Mexico State's unforgettable double-cross handoff reverse on a kickoff return against Cal. "We're college football junkies," White says. "Even though it's research, it doesn't feel like work."



one week's concentration





TITLE

NCAA 07 FOOTBALL



FACTOID: Late-night pizzas eaten: 4,168

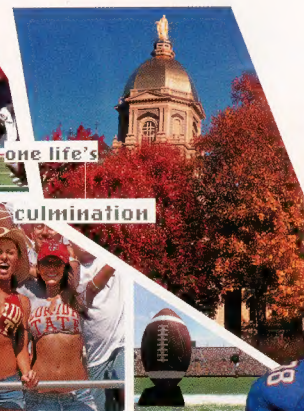
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www.ncaafootball07.com

DEVELOPMENT START 06 | 20 | 05 DATE OF RELEASE 07 | 18 | 06

the stadium that bites

Traditions run strong among rabid college football fans, and the members of the NCAA Football 07 development team at EA's Tiburon studio are no exception. During bowl week, associate producer Jeff Ecker, a Penn State grad, celebrated his resurgent alma mater's Orange Bowl victory over Florida State by running around the office, singing "Roar Lions Roar!" to every Seminole fan he could find. In fact, Ecker cherished his rollicking Saturdays at PSU's Beaver Stadium so much that he helped create the EA SPORTS Smart Fan technology that shows crazed college fans in the game's Living Stadium environment expressing their individual reactions to each play.

Meanwhile, Florida grad Tom Vuong, an assistant producer, was supporting his school by pushing hard to get an important new feature into the game: the Gator Chomp. During NCAA 07 games at "The Swamp," the Gators' home stadium, the student section will periodically erupt into a mass of arms snapping open and shut. Good luck concentrating on that corner blitz in the middle of that.



one life's

culmination



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COVER STORY: CALL OF DUTY 3

Think you don't want another WWII game? Think again. We're back from behind enemy lines with exclusive screens and classified information for the PS3, the Xbox 360—even the Wii

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ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY

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EDITORIAL

I just got back from the annual videogame trade show...the monstrous, life-draining Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3). I gotta make this quick, because I have about five minutes of energy left in me before I pass out. So let's talk about money! On Sony's surprise announcement that the PlayStation 3 will cost a hefty \$500 or \$600 (depending on which model you get)—I'm not going to jump on the bandwagon and declare the sky's falling on Sony's headquarters. Yes, it's expensive and not what Johnny Gamer is expecting to pay for a game machine when he walks into his local Best Buy, but I've never known so many Johnny Gamers in my life who are convinced they need a game system (PS3 in this case) without knowing a single thing about it. (A lot of people out there are somehow even convinced the PS3 is 20 times more powerful than the Xbox 360.) The PlayStation brand is just that strong. And, keep in mind, by this winter, people will be seeing Blu-ray DVD players in stores and Blu-ray movies on store shelves. Now, I have no idea if that will be everyone's preferred high-definition DVD format or not (over rival HD-DVD), but that awareness of Blu-ray out there, combined with high HDTV sales (the Consumer Electronics Association says high-def sets will outsell traditional TVs by 89 percent this year), means that all of a sudden, \$600 will not seem so bad to a lot of folks. Perhaps they were already looking to spend a few hundred on a next-generation DVD player for their new HDTV. Now they can get one and a PS3 in the same machine. Who doesn't love a two-for-one special?

I'm not kissing Sony's ass here or implying that it's going to win this next-gen console war. And I know that a lot of you are now buying a PS3 until it sees a price drop. But in the grander scheme of things, the \$600 price tag won't end up being as huge a deal as everyone's making it out to be right now.

And if you want to call me an idiot and are looking for more ammo, peep Space Ghost interviewing me on GameTap. Just go to www.gametap.com and sign up for the free trial. After logging on, click on "GameTap TV" and check out "GameTap E3 2006 Wrap-up."

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief



By the time you read this, the video of Space Ghost making a chump out of Shoe should be live on GameTap.

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Our brutally honest impressions of more than 80 hotly anticipated games

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> Epiphany: celebrities not real gamers
 In every television series or movie these days, there's usually an episode or a scene in which someone plays a videogame. Here's what I don't understand: An actor

will go through boot camp or go live in some third-world country for a year just to understand their character, but when it comes time to play a game on-screen, they get all wide-eyed and crazy, clicking buttons and gyrating joysticks in unnatural ways. Why can't they just play a game for a few minutes before the shoot?

—Chris Day

After a long, difficult day of fine dining, free luxury goods, and tantric sex with symmetrically perfect mates in top physical condition, it's very difficult to get in some game time. Trust us—we know.

Ebert lover sits on fence

Being both a gamer and a film critic, it's hard for me to see EGM suddenly bashing Roger Ebert because of his comments about videogames. I love videogames and have been playing them for as long as I can remember, but I also love films and have been watching and analyzing them for as long. What I'm about to say bothers me a lot: I've never been drawn into a videogame's story in the way I've been drawn into a movie's plot. Through the years, I've had fun watching movies and playing games. I've been anxious for game releases and movie premieres, but only once have I sat on my couch and stared at the screen for hours with my controller in hand: *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*. But I kind of categorize that as an interactive movie. Forgive me, for I have missed.

—Oscar Fuentes

Wow, *Sons of Liberty*, huh? We're afraid to hear your taste in movies... But here's the thing: While games don't yet tell stories as well as movies (see *Sons of Liberty*), art is not confined to storytelling. **Shadon of**



■ "I say, that Ebert fellow is a fat cow..."

the *Colossus*, current talking-point title for the games-as-art crowd, has a story you could tell in three minutes, but the experience is damn moving.

Blu-ray + UMD = Betamax?

I come from a family that has a history of getting burned in format wars. As a child, I watched movies on a Betamax machine or (laugh all you want) a CED video disc player. Growing up with scars like that makes one a little reluctant to hop on a new technology bandwagon. However, your article "Disc Jockeying," about the coming Blu-ray vs. HD-DVD war [EGM #203], has me ready to pip down my hard earned cash on a format right now. And it ain't the Blu-ray disc you picked as the early front runner.

I'm willing to put my money down on an HD-DVD player right now because of this line in the story: "With hardware numbers like that, the PS3 should be able to do for the Blu-ray format what the...PSF has done for UMD." With nearly every major movie studio (except for Columbia/Tri-Star, which is owned by Sony) cutting back on or eliminating Sony's UMD format, and with Wal-Mart phasing out sales of UMD movies, it seems that Sony has once again given us another Betamax. Given that they're 0-for-2 in showing video formats down our throats, I don't think I'll be wasting my family's money on this one.

—Sid McHenry

A controlling man

I have found the key to a great relationship. My wife and I have been married for three years, and we've been together for 10. The key to our happiness together is that, sure, we love each other, but more importantly, she loves to watch me play videogames. When I get home from work, she always asks me to turn on the TV and my Xbox, PS2, or GameCube (depending on the

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 #205**) 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!

current game I'm playing), and I enjoy a couple of hours together as I play my game while she snuggles beside me and watches. This is what a relationship is all about. Lately she's has been starting to play some games herself. But she doesn't play every day, which is great because she doesn't cut into my gaming time. So, I say don't go out looking for a fellow hardcore-gaming mate; instead, look for someone who plays games leisurely. More importantly, look for someone who will let you play [for] hours on end. That's what I call quality time!

—Brandon Boulet

Executive summary of this letter: Relationships are all about taking. Find someone who loves to give. (Oh, and the tantric-sex thing from our earlier response would be nice, too.) ☹

OOPSI!

In last issue's Wii cover story, we carelessly referred to the Xbox Live Arcade blockbuster *Geometry Wars* as *Gravity Wars*. We tossed the offending writer out our eighth-floor window so he could battle gravity—for real.



■ Typical cosplay fanatic makes her way to the Microsoft booth at this year's E3.

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



Ghenghis Khan Country

Insulted by the cute, lovable characters starring back at him from the TV screen, Ghenghis Khan invades Kong Country, laying waste to the happy-go-lucky, Caribbean-themed inhabitants. In *Ghenghis Khan Country*, you don't collect bananas—you collect heads on sticks, all while sowing apocalyptic destruction across the land. —Michael Iantorno

BONUS GALLERY

Games are culinary art

When creating his sugar sculpture for a class in the culinary school he attends in Orlando, Jesse Lardies decided to stick to what he knew: videogames. He forged this bit of *Zelda* fan art out of nothing, but sugar, water, and dyes. **EGM:** So, Jesse, did you flunk the class?

Lardies: I haven't checked my sculpture for a class in the class yet, but I usually do all right. **EGM:** What are you making next? **Lardies:** I'm going to try some 8-bit-inspired block sculpture, probably from *Super Mario Bros.* or something classic like that. **EGM:** Sweet...



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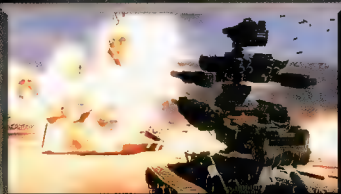
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press start

gaming news, previews, barrels of next-gen blabber, and other stuff

WAR OF THE W

>> HAVING TROUBLE WRAPPING YOUR HEAD AROUND THE TV SHOW *LOST*? WELL, WAIT UNTIL YOU PLAY THE GAME—UBISOFT ANNOUNCED THEY



WORDS!

We came, we saw, we listened—read what three of gaming's top executives had to say about the next generation and beyond

Late last year, Microsoft marched onto the battlefield, pumping its Xbox 360 in the air. Now it's time for Sony and Nintendo to rally their contingents for the upcoming war. But before the controllers clash, we sat down with the high rollers from each company at May's annual Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) to find out their personal strategies for victory.

Of course, no war is without propaganda—so we'll let you know who's fighting with fire and who's shouting blanks when we grade each system's showing at this year's E3. Who will be victorious once the words are spoken and the games are played? You, maggot! >

—Michael Donahoe & Shane Bettenhausen

PLAYING FOR KEEPS

Sony sure of more PlayStation domination

Kazuo Hirai, president and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment America, is all smiles about the November launch of the PlayStation 3. Why so happy? This guy firmly believes the PlayStation brand will dominate for another generation. Find out why Hirai thinks the PlayStation 3 is here to stay.

EQM: The PlayStation 3 is a powerful system, but graphics aren't everything. Are you worried Nintendo might be striking a chord with the casual gamers?

Kazuo Hirai: It seems to me they are going after a completely different demographic, perhaps a limited, younger demographic, which has kind of been their niche since the Wii—certainly with the GameCube. But the fact that they're not using technology...they seem to be going in a different direction, certainly, from where we're going and what we're trying to accomplish.

EQM: But they are actually going for a larger demographic with their simple-to-use controller.

KH: I think that it depends on what kind of software you have as well. What we've done over the past 12 years is pretty much just add two joysticks to the controller. And I think we can get into the history of the concept behind the motion-sensor controller as well, but that certainly adds another dimension of play for PlayStation 3 users. So the proof is in the pudding. Ultimately, I think that [Nintendo has] always wanted to break out of its niche market, and it's been trying to do that since the N64, so again, proof is in the pudding. Only time will tell, but it didn't seem to work with the GameCube.

EQM: Hardly any PS3 games use the motion sensor. Is this some tacked-on feature?

KH: Completely the other way around. We wanted to keep it under wraps as long as possible. We limited it to our internal studio, the guys over at developer IncoGNite, to incorporate into *Warhawk*.

I talked about the original PlayStation controller—that's where history began. We then added the two joysticks, then we added the vibration functionality. Then we launched the DualShock 2 with pressure-sensitive buttons, so everything we've done over the past few years was to make the controller more intuitive, make it more a part of your body, to move accurately

convey what you're doing in the game itself. And now it's the motion sensor. So if you look at how the controller's evolved for the PlayStation, this motion-sensing technology is really something that's a natural evolution in terms of the next steps for the user to be able to take his movements and have it accurately track and respond on the screen.

A lot of people have asked me, "Is this something that you guys thought of last week?" The answer is: absolutely not—it's been in [parent company Sony Computer Entertainment President Ken] Kutaragi's mind for the longest time, and it just follows a natural progression of what you can bring to controller technology.

EQM: Let's talk price. The PS3 may be pretty, but it's going to cost a whole lot of pennies. Is \$599 a viable price in the long run?

KH: If you look at what we've packed into the box, I think it actually is a good-value proposition. Now, in absolute dollar terms, it's higher than \$500? Yes, it is. But I also think that we have a history of making sure that our consoles have a 10-year life cycle. We've done it with PS1; you see how vibrant the PS2 displays are out there, both in terms of first- and third-party software support, so we're well on our way to making sure that the PS2 has a 10-year life cycle. So, in me, even if you buy it at the initial \$599-dollar price point, that's a viable console that you're going to keep for the next 10 years.

EQM: But can the PS3 reach the mass market at a \$599 price point? Especially looking at the competition's lower prices?

KH: I'm not saying that we're suddenly going to do a price change tomorrow, but if you look at the history of how we've priced our products—from 12 years ago, you'll see our trends. I got the same questions back in the day: PS2, \$299? That's not a mass-market product, because the PS1 at the time was at \$170, \$149 bucks, whatever it was. I mean, how are you going to break into the mass market? Well, the PS2 is \$129 now, and it's an absolute mass-market product. So I think you can look at the trending line, and two years out, three years out—I'm not going to even make a prediction—but there's no guarantee that it's still going to be at \$599 and \$499. We may have a more expensive version; we may have a less expensive configuration, but it doesn't stay the same forever.

EQM: What about the penny-pinchers who want a next-gen system now but don't want to fork out \$599, especially when they can get either a Nintendo Wii or Xbox 360 for cheaper?

KH: What kind of a consumer are we looking at here?

EQM: Your average gamer who might want a PlayStation 3 based on the brand but doesn't necessarily have the money to spend.

KH: But the average gamer who already has a current-generation console? Or, one who is getting into videogaming for the first time? If they're getting into videogaming for the first time, I would point to the PS2 and say it's \$129 bucks. And when you decide to upgrade to a PS3 at some point in time, the library is going to be backward compatible, so just get it that way. If you're talking about comparing feature for feature with an Xbox 360, for example, the PS3 has a wireless, motion-sensor controller, higher capacity with the 60-gig hard drive, and it can play Blu-ray movies right out of the box—and [for the Xbox 360] you can buy an HD-DVD adapter. If you do the math, I think at the end of the day, feature for feature, if you do an apples to apples, I don't know that there's such a price difference.

EQM: Microsoft caught a lot of flack for offering two different systems at retail—now you're doing the same thing. What gives?

KH: Our strategy basically is a strategy where the two have different configurations, but at the end of the day, for what the console is designed to do—play videogames, watch Blu-ray movies, and also download content from the Internet—it's the same. So it's not like one configuration doesn't even have a hard drive, for example. So I think the strategy is completely different there.

EQM: But don't you think the different models will confuse the consumers? One having HDMI [High Definition Multimedia Interface], use a high-quality digital signal output, one not, for example?

KH: I think it comes down to that the consumers can't be forced to purchase, whether the purchasing catalogs or whatever, and also working



MULTIPLAYER MAPS AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD ON XBOX LIVE. THE NEW PACK, "COLLATERAL DAMAGE," COSTS 500 MICROSOFT POINTS...>>

► To make sure that they can explain what the differences are.

You talk about HDMI, which is a very good point, but let's also be realistic: How many people who even have an HD monitor today have a TV with an HDMI input? We want to give the consumers the option to say, "This is what I want," or "[That] is what I want." As opposed to [us] saying, "We're only going to give you the \$599 60-gig option, take it or leave it—maybe the HD monitor you bought the other day doesn't even have [HDMI input], but we're going to give you [HDMI] anyway." So it's just a matter of how you configure your product differently.

Now, we didn't want to say, "Choose a Cell processor one, two, and three." We didn't want to get into that [situation], but I think the days of saying, "Here's one console; one size fits all," those days, unfortunately, I think are going to be past us. Some people want 60 gigs, because they want to store a lot of stuff; other people may not, because all they want to do is just cache stuff that they're downloading here and there. So that's an option that we want to give consumers.

EGM: Last year, you guys showed off a ton of pretty target videos for PS3 gameplay. Do you think you may have disappointed some people because the games here today don't look like those videos?

KM: I think you guys know better than any of the other mass-market publications about how you ramp up software development. We are about six months away from actual launch, and some of [these games that you see now] will be launch titles—others will not. We're not going to rush software that we don't think is up to snuff to market, just to have a launch lineup. I got the same question with the PS2.

"You guys aren't ready? There's no software. What we saw on the show floor is not looking good." But I think we delivered on what we said is the promise, and we don't think that we're going to deviate—from the promises that we've made. You take a look at something like *Gran Turismo HD*—I think a lot of people were blown away, despite the fact that that's more... I wouldn't call it a tech demo, but it's very far from being a complete product.

EGM: So what happens if HD-DVD wins the DVD format war? Does Blu-ray go bye-bye?

KM: Once we commit to a format, that is the format that we are going to go with. So we've chosen Blu-ray, and Blu-ray is the delivery medium for the PlayStation 3—and it's a story. I can't predict the future, but if I look at it with an objective eye, feature for feature or—more importantly—the capacity between the two, Blu-ray, given the fact that if you have two layers you can go with 50 gigabytes, is just leaps and bounds beyond what DVD or HD-DVD brings to the table. I think HD-DVD happens to be just a marginal improvement over conventional DVDs.

EGM: Are you worried about Microsoft's one-year head start with the 360?

KM: I have bigger fish to fry, so I'm not too worried about a head start. We've never [launched a system] first, and we've always managed to overtake those consoles. This is not just rhetoric; we've proven it with the PlayStation, and we're doing it with the PlayStation 3. So if they have an X million head start, that's all well and good for them. We're going to make sure that we overtake that very quickly and also make sure that we're in it for the long haul as well. So it is what it is. It's not too much of a concern for me.



PLAYSTATION 3 DEBRIEFING

Basic Intel:

The PlayStation 3 will be available in two different configurations when it launches on November 17, 2006:

	BASIC	DELUXE
Price	\$499	\$599
Hard Drive	20GB	60GB
Blu-ray Drive	Yes	Yes
HDMI Output	No	Yes
USB 2.0	Yes	Yes
Memory Stick/SD/CompactFlash	No	Yes
Wi-Fi	No	Yes

Notable Exclusives:

You'll have to pony up the cash for a PS3 if you want to play these upcoming titles....

- Devil May Cry 4
- Fatal Inertia
- Final Fantasy XIII
- Final Fantasy Versus XIII
- Heavenly Sword
- Lair
- Mercenaries 2: World in Flames
- Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
- Ratchet & Clank
- Resistance: Fall of Man
- Ridge Racer 7
- Tekken 6
- Warhawk
- Virtua Fighter 5

Report Card:

Strengths:

- + More raw power than competitors
- + Blu-ray playback out of the box
- + Free, full-featured online gameplay
- + Next-gen EyeToy camera
- + Motion-sensing controller

Weaknesses:

- High cost
- *Grand Theft Auto IV* not PS3 exclusive
- No rumble in controller
- Most triple-A titles coming in 2007

Overall: Sony's next-gen behemoth got off to a slightly rocky start at E3. A spotty press conference that mixed impressive fare (*Final Fantasy XIII*, *Metal Gear Solid 4*) with disappointing duds (*Genji 2*, *Gran Turismo HD*) and quirky oddballs (*Afrika*, *The Eye of Judgment*) made it clear that Sony will be in for a fight. The system's wallet-damaging price point (\$599 for the full-featured model) created instant backlash, but the feature-rich box justifies its price with technology—the inclusion of Blu-ray playback, a motion-sensing controller, and a hard drive in every box makes this the choice for deep-pocketed gamers wanting a cutting-edge console. Plus, most of the playable PS3 games felt solid—this lineup outshone the hands-on offerings for Xbox 360 at E3 2006.



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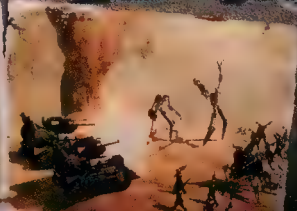
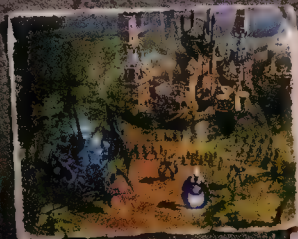
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RISE OF LEGENDS

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game studios



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HUGE
TEXT



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CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Blood and Gore
Violence



>> NINTENDO MAY NOT HAVE OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED THE PRICE FOR THE WII, BUT IT REPORTED THE SYSTEM WOULD RETAIL FOR LESS THAN \$250.

LIVE VIA WII-MOTE

Reggie believes we will love the Wii

Is Reggie Fils-Aimé, Nintendo's executive vice president of sales and marketing, worried about launching the Wii? He says no. Why? Because he believes in you—the gamers. Are you going to hit him down? Read what Reggie thinks...

EGM: We have to talk about the name: "Wii." Why the change? Was "Revolution" that bad?

Reggie Fils-Aimé: Nintendo knows our fans love the "Revolution" name. But the fact is "Revolution" as a name is not ideal. It's long, and in some cultures, it's hard to pronounce. So we wanted something that was short, to the point, easy to pronounce and distinctive. That's how "Wii" as a console name was created.

EGM: But couldn't you have chosen a name that still got your message across, only with fewer connotations to a certain bodily substance?

RF: We had a number of different names we were evaluating. But in the end, "Wii" as a console name was our best bet, the perfect choice. I do think the fans will accept it. And in terms of all the dirty jokes, frankly, we could have gone up with a range of other names where that type of stuff would have happened anyway.

EGM: Did you do any focus testing? Anyone hint "Wii" might not be such a good name for a console?

RF: There was no focus grouping, and quite frankly, focus groups are a little outmoded in terms of how to get good consumer feedback. But we did a range of things. In the end, I think that some members of the media are getting more hung up with the name than the consumers or the fans are. Believe me, I have walked the E3 show floor, and as I walk the floor, when someone's wearing a Sony PlayStation shirt, a Microsoft shirt, or Nintendo paraphernalia—I'm talking to a lot of fans and asking them the question: How do you feel about the name? And I'm hearing a hell of a lot of more positive than negative. I'm hearing a lot of positive about the name. The "Wii" name is a great name. It's a name that's easy to pronounce and easy to remember, and more succinct and easier to get used to than the others.

EGM: What could you have gotten the same support by choosing a more marketable name?

RF: I don't know. I do know that if someone says everything from the name is what would have done differently to launch the Nintendo DS. The fact is, we have made the decision. We're moving on, and we are seeing a lot of acceptance by the consumer. In the end, we feel that "Wii" as a console name is the right choice.

EGM: Did you give yourself a high five when Sony announced the price of the PlayStation 3?

RF: When I first heard their announcement, I was surprised. Arguably, you could say shocked. When I heard the announcement in their comments to support the price, I was even further shocked. They will do what they will do, and we will do what we will do. The fact is, the Wii console will be the most affordable system. [Nintendo President Satoru] Iwata has gone on record that Wii will be priced less than \$300, but certainly, I see a huge window of opportunity with our next home console. And we will take full advantage of that opportunity. [Shortly after this interview, Nintendo announced Wii will retail for less than \$250.—Ed.]

EGM: That's sure less than Sony's \$600 PS3. Do you think you may have missed an opportunity by not announcing your price after hearing what Sony is charging?

RF: In our minds, the first step is the consumer making the decision by asking, "Will this remote feel good in my hand?" What types of games can I play, and "What can television Nintendo do with this?" That's step one. And that's what we wanted to accomplish at this year's E3. Step two is beginning to appeal to more rational side interests, or what's the pricing and what's the launch date. Step three will be truly exciting the consumer by detailing the specific launch titles. We've announced *Zelda* as a launch title, and *Wii Sports* as a launch title, and *Wii Fit* as a launch title. And when the consumer sees all of that, I think we think that the ball is in a player's hands, and we will follow.

EGM: Do you foresee the Wii being the next system this generation?

RF: I can certainly envision that. What gives me that confidence? A number of things. First, the Wii will most of the show lead except for our little corner of E3. And no disrespect to any publishers, no

disrespect to Sony or Microsoft, but the fact is, the world is watching what we're doing, and people are having great experiences. The second thing that gives me confidence is the building and burgeoning third-party support we're receiving. *Red Steel*, *Madden*, *Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam*, *Elebits*, *Sonic*—we didn't have that type of support when we launched the GameCube. The third piece is our own first-party library. We're showing a great *Mario* game; we're showing *Metroid*. We're confident that we are going to have a fantastic run.

EGM: Is it possible to compete with the mighty PlayStation brand name?

RF: In direct answer to your question, can we do it? Yes, we can. What gives me confidence? I've been receiving phone calls and e-mails from people I know personally who are saying, "Reggie, what's this Wii console all about?" These are people who are 35 to 45 years old; they're not core gamers, but they're hearing that Nintendo is doing something different, and they're hearing about what it is, and they're trying to do in the gaming market. So I think we're getting more and more buzz, we're getting more brand recognition, and I do think we are turning this industry upside down in a positive sense. So we certainly have every chance to come out of this generation with a significant increase in our market share.

EGM: How are you convincing third-party developers and publishers to come back to Nintendo after the GameCube's weak performance?

RF: It's three things. First, it's recognition of the innovation that we're bringing, and their understanding of how innovation can make their game better. The second is the financial understanding that it's just a hell of a lot more profitable to develop on this platform than it is to go to the PlayStation 3 and the Xbox 360. The third part is that our relationships are better; they've always been strong, but the publishers never believed they never believed that what we were trying to do with the GameCube would be successful. I think, at first, they didn't believe in the DS. But they believe now. If you go talk to them, they believe in the Wii now.

EGM: You have to admit, the Wii's graphics don't look as nice as the PS3's or the Xbox 360's.

RF: In terms of the Wii console and processing power, we believe that the smart decisions have been made. We're not a



...technology, whether or not video-linking capability should be something to look forward. By the time HD penetration is a substantial part, we'll be ready for the next generation.

EGM: But are you not going for the core gamers who expect HD-quality games from a next-generation system now?

MI: We will hope gamers are experienced for the party games like they've never seen. *Zelda*, *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Metroid Prime 3*, *Red Steel*—these are the better games that look great, play great, and have tremendous fun factor. And that might be the sweet spot of the current-gaming-consumer base. The Wii is a console that just brings the message that it's being made by a young and older audience. There are no settings for accessibility because it's essentially "look and play." But whatever can be done, we'll do it.

EGM: It's an innovative console, yes. But it's hard to look at these games and not wonder what they'd look like on a more powerful console.

Especially since gamers expect a significant hardware upgrade every five to six years.

MI: I think the core gamer, once they see the games, will understand exactly what we're doing. I haven't talked to one who's a jointed consumer who said, "Boy, it's not even about the graphics." Not one. The fact is, the next iteration of games will probably look much better than what we're showing today. Probably the third iteration, when they will look even better.

EGM: What are your thoughts on Sony unveiling a controller with motion sensitivity?

MI: What I know is, I've gone over there, put the controller in my hand, and it's nothing like what we're doing. Nothing like it. The things of functionality, the use of infrared for the gesture, the PS3's eye, the Move, they're all good, but I think the game is the key. What Sony will get is a lot of attention. Plus, we will have the marketplace to show our own. We have the speaker that gives us a different sense of gameplay. Sony will have a lot of attention, but we're not going to be the market leader.

Game creator Shigeru Miyamoto demonstrates *Wii Sports* at the Nintendo Press conference.



NINTENDO Wii DEBRIEFING



Basic Intel:
 Nintendo is mum on the launch details, but here's what we know:

1. It will launch this fall
2. It will retail for under \$250
3. The system offers free online gameplay via Wi-Fi

Additional Accessories:

1. Zapper
2. Virtual Console Controller

Notable Exclusives:
 The Wii provides the exclusive next-gen home to these games....

Dragon Quest Swords
 Eteibits
 Excite Truck
 Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles 2
 Fire Emblem
 The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess
 Metroid Prime 3: Corruption
 Red Steel
 Sonic Wild Fire
 Super Mario Galaxy
 Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz
 Super Smash Bros. Brawl
 Trauma Center: Second Opinion
 WarioWare: Smooth Moves
 Wii Sports

Report Card:

Strengths:

- + Innovative motion controller with built-in speaker
- + Virtual Console allows access to huge library of classics
- + Free "always online" gameplay service

Weaknesses:

- Graphics look mostly current-gen
- Few big-name third-party exclusives
- DVD playback costs extra

Overall: Nintendo's risky next-gen gamble paid off at E3. The bizarrely named Wii impressed attendees with its innovative controller and vast array of wild gameplay experiences. Few people, however, complimented the system's GameCube-quality visuals. Luckily, a huge number of playable games demonstrated Nintendo's commitment to the console, and gamers lined up for hours to get their hands on the machine. As it turns out, big-ticket titles like *Zelda*, *Mario*, and *Metroid* sported steep learning curves—it was tough to wrap your head around these unconventional control schemes in a hurried demo environment. Therefore, the less complex games (*Wii Sports*, *WarioWare*) fared the best with their pick-up-and-play simplicity.

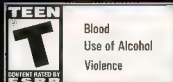


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...offering for customers. In terms of offering it as an accessory—if people want to use their Xbox 360 console for HD movie playback, they can go and get the accessory. The key thing is, we're not forcing customers to pay extra to buy, to get that capability in every single configuration of the platform.

EGM: Are you concerned about Sony snatching up the market with the Blu-ray?

Kim: I understand why Blu-ray is good for Sony. I'm not sure yet why Blu-ray is good for gamers and for customers. You look at the [two versions of the PS3] that they announced, right? The 20-gigabyte version doesn't have [HDMI High Definition Multimedia Interface]. So, without that, you can't output at 1080p. Well, I thought Sony was telling us that 1080p is the definition of high definition. So I don't understand how you marry the Blu-ray, high-def movie playback with the inability to render at 1080p. It's going to be a long time before anyone figures out which, if any, of those formats is going to win the de facto standard.

EGM: Well, what if Blu-ray actually does become the norm? Will Microsoft support the opposition's format?

Kim: We're completely behind HD-DVD. We're going to do everything we can as a company to establish HD-DVD as the standard. Because we believe it has far superior capabilities and features than Blu-ray.

EGM: How about this: HD-DVD becomes extinct. Would you switch sides then?

Kim: I guess if you ask Sony the same question, if HD-DVD becomes the de facto standard, what are they going to do? I mean, I guess you have to say, "Ok, we'll figure that out in the future." But we're not even contemplating that future.

EGM: How do you feel about Square Enix developing not one, but two, Final Fantasy games on the PlayStation 3? Are you worried the Japanese role-playing game market might be dead on the 360?

Kim: Well, I certainly don't think it means the genre is dead on the Xbox 360. At all.

EGM: But what about the Japanese audience?

Kim: *Final Fantasy* is great—it's a great franchise, right? That's why the investment that we have with *Final Fantasy* creator, Hiroshi Sakaguchi, is so important. We want to build Japanese RPGs that we can have as exclusives for Japanese customers. But I don't think that Square Enix said, "We're never going to build an RPG for Xbox 360 again." And I certainly don't think it means that the RPG genre, the Japanese RPG genre, is dead on the Xbox 360.

EGM: Since you were the first next-generation console out to the market, do you think your one-year head start was worth it?

Kim: Absolutely. Ten million customers before our competitors ship unit one—that's a huge advantage. Just look at our second-wave titles...and by the time they release, we're going to be in the third wave of titles.

XBOX 360 DEBRIEFING

Basic Intel:

The Xbox 360 is currently available at a retail establishment near you. No, really! But if you're late to the game, here are the facts:

	CORE	DELUXE
Price	\$299	\$399
Hard Drive	No	Yes
Wireless Controller	No	Yes
Component HD AV Cable	No	Yes
Xbox Live Headset	No	Yes

Notable Exclusives:

If you want to play any of these titles on a console, you'll have to do it on the Xbox 360.

- Alan Wake
- Blue Dragon
- Crackdown
- Dead or Alive Xtreme 2
- Dead Rising
- Fable 2
- Forza Motorsport 2
- Gears of War
- Halo 3
- Lost Planet
- Mass Effect
- Ninety-Nine Nights
- Saint's Row
- Too Human

Report Card:

Strengths:

- + Getting *Grand Theft Auto IV* in 2007
- + Cool accessories (wireless steering wheel, wireless headset, camera) on the way
- + Live Anywhere service links 360, PC, and cell-phone gaming

Weaknesses:

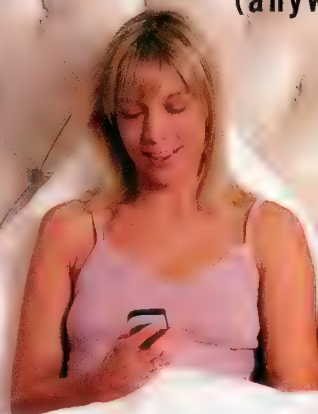
- HD-DVD drive costs extra
- Xbox Live still costs money (PS3 and Wii online to be free)
- Fewer big-name third-party exclusives than the PlayStation 3
- No motion-sensing controller

Overall: To defend the Xbox 360 against its rivals, Microsoft whipped out one of the biggest guns the next-gen war has seen—*Halo 3*. Sure, it was only a brief teaser trailer of a far-off title, but few games have this kind of impact. *Stick CG* trailers for *Forza 2* and *Fable 2* also created buzz, but actual gameplay demos of *Gears of War* and *Mass Effect* blew gamers away. The rest of Microsoft's lineup disappointed (*Too Human*, *Shadowrun*, *Crackdown*, and *Viva Pinata*), but an array of third-party fare made up for the slack. Microsoft appears to be staying the course with the 360, taking a wait-and-see approach on the subject of motion-based controllers and free online gameplay. Will their strategy change after the Wii and the PS3 hit the streets this fall?

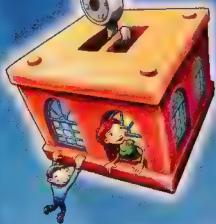


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NINTENDO DS



Notable Excludes:

Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin
Children of Mana
Death, Jr.: Science Fair of Doom
Diddy Kong Racing
Elite Beat Agents
Final Fantasy III
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles 2
Kirby DS
The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass
Lunar Knights
Mario Hoops 3-on-3
Mega Man ZX
Phoenix Wright: Justice for All
Star Fox DS
Yoshi's Island 2

Report Card:

Strengths:

- + Great mix of classic franchises and quirky new games
- + Everyone loves the sophisticated DS Lite redesign
- + Web browser coming this fall

Weaknesses:

- Wi-Fi online play still hampered by "friend codes"
- Most 3D games look pretty janky

Overall: Once again, Nintendo's unassuming portable topples its technologically superior rival by offering a mix of triple-A franchises and experimental software that utilizes the system's unique features.

A

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE



Notable Excludes:

50 Cent: Bulletproof G-Unit Edition
Coded Arms: Contagion
Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories
Hot PXL
Killzone: Liberation
LocoRoco
Lumines II
Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops
Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters
Silent Hill: Origins
SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals Fireteam Bravo 2
Sonic Rivals
Tekken: Dark Resurrection
Ultimate Ghosts 'n' Goblins
Work Time Fun (WTF)

Report Card:

Strengths:

- + Some games that aren't PS2 ports!
- + Downloadable PS1 games this fall
- + Cool accessories like EyeToy and GPS unit on the way

Weaknesses:

- Games still suffer from horrendous load times
- Publishers still squeezing ill-fitting PS2 control schemes onto PSP

Overall: Titles such as *LocoRoco*, *WTF*, and *Hot PXL* inject some much-needed pizzazz into an otherwise predictable lineup of ports and sequels. The 2007 lineup looks promising, at least.

C+

GAME BOY ADVANCE



Notable Excludes:

Final Fantasy V Advance
Final Fantasy VI Advance
Pokémon Dungeon: Red Rescue Team
Super Robot Wars OG

Report Card:

Strengths:

- + You probably already own one

Weaknesses:

- Very few games aimed at kids above age 12
- Severely outdated technology
- Nintendo's commitment to the platform diminishing

Overall: Wait, they're still making GBA games? You wouldn't necessarily know that, since Nintendo opted to not showcase the GBA at its E3 booth. Besides a duo of Super NES-era *Final Fantasy* ports, everything else on the console remains squarely for the pre-pubescent set.

SEE ME AFTER CLASS

PLAYSTATION 2



Notable Excludes:

.hack//GU Rebirth
ATV Offroad Fury 4
Dawn of Mana
Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII
Disgaea 2
God Hand
God of War II
Guitar Hero II
Final Fantasy XII
Lumines Plus
Okami
Persona 3
Rogue Galaxy
SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals Combined Assault
Tales of the Abyss
Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria
Xenosaga Episode III
Yakuza

Report Card:

Strengths:

- + Games are looking better than ever
- + Lots of killer exclusives
- + Tons of role-playing games

Weaknesses:

- Multiplatform stuff looks better elsewhere (XB, XBOX360)
- Online gameplay still clunky
- PSP-to-PS2 ports (*GTA: Liberty City Stories*, *Lumines Plus*) seem a little sketchy

Overall: Sony's current-gen powerhouse isn't about to bow out and let its successor hog the limelight. RPG fans get especially lucky this fall on PS2...

B+

XBOX



Notable Excludes:

DDR Ultramix 4

Coming to both Xbox and PS2:

Destroy All Humans! 2
FlatOut 2
Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance
Mortal Kombat: Armageddon
Scarface: The World is Yours
Spy Hunter: Nowhere to Run
Superman Returns
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Double Agent

Report Card:

Strengths:

- + Multiplatform games look better here than on PS2
- + Better online network than PS2

Weaknesses:

- Absolutely no first-party support
- No new exclusive titles to speak of

Overall: While the PS2 enjoys its golden years like a fun-loving grandpa hopped up on Cialis, the original Xbox lies forgotten, wasting away in some depressing assisted-living facility. Microsoft abandoned the console a full year ago, leaving third parties to pick up the slack with PS2 ports.

D

GAMECUBE



Notable Excludes:

Baten Kaitos Origins
DK Bongo Blast
The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess (also on the Wii)
Super Paper Mario

Report Card:

Strengths:

- + Cheap, available in purple
- + Nintendo still making games for it

Weaknesses:

- Absolutely no third-party support
- You can play the few remaining good games on the Wii

Overall: Like the GBA, the GameCube was mysteriously absent from the E3 show floor. We find Nintendo's lack of faith in its own console troubling, yet at least they still plan on releasing four more games for it this fall. Of these, *Zelda* and *Super Paper Mario* look like winners.

D-

Super:

That's how milk makes
you feel. The calcium helps
bones grow strong,
so even if you're not from
Krypton, you can have
bones of steel.

got milk?[®]



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SUPERMAN
RETURNS.
JUNE 30



This is end-of-the-world stuff right here.



XBOX 360 PREVIEW: SNEAK PEEK

HALO 3

Finishing the fight on the Xbox 360

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Bungie
Release Date: 2007

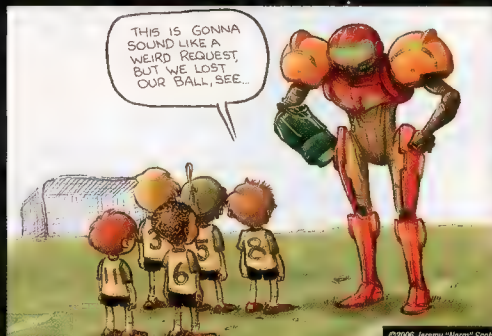
Microsoft surprised everyone and no one when it introduced a short teaser trailer for *Halo 3* at a conference briefing before this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo. It's clear the publisher doesn't want to steal any momentum away from *Gears of War* (that's the shooter it wants on your mind this year), but we all expected Microsoft to bring out Master Chief's big guns to combat Sony's debuting a playable PS3 and Nintendo's showing off its Wii. It's smart strategy....

We won't waste your time describing what was in the video; you can see it for yourself on IUPcom or GameVideos.com. You can also find some story hints (the Covenant has uncovered a massive, ancient artifact in the desert outside of New Mombasa) and technical details (the game will use all the high-def resolutions and Xbox Live features of the Xbox 360)

on Bungie.net. We can tell you that the trailer is representative of what *Halo 3* will look like in action. The developers showed us the same Master Chief and desert environment from the trailer and ran around, shot up some sand, and moved the camera out to prove the giant canyon is all real geometry, not a flat map painted in the background. We also saw some cool visual effects, like the way light reflects off of surfaces and how the atmosphere and clouds affect what you see in the distance. The graphics aren't in-your-face *Gears of War* "wow," but are subtly realistic...if that makes any sense. No? Well, don't worry about it. Your bigger concern should be that the series is near its end. "Ultimately, the end of *Halo 2* was to set up for the end of the *Halo* trilogy," says Bungie Cinematic Director CJ Cowan. ☛
—Dan "Shoe" Husu

overheard

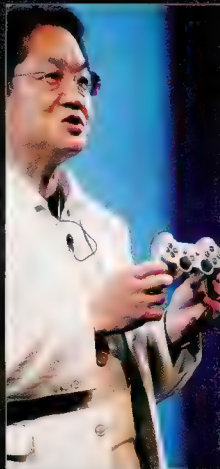
Yep, they really said that



©2006 Jeremy "Norm" Scott

“When are Nintendo gonna make a *Duck Hunt* movie? **Ya know, starring Dick Cheney?**”

—The Black Eyed Peas' Will.i.am, while performing at Nintendo's E3 party



“It's probably too **cheap**. For instance, is it not nonsense to compare the charge for dinner at the company cafeteria with dinner at a fine restaurant? With the PS3, you can have next-generation game experiences that could previously not be experienced—things like next-generation graphics and various services via the network. And, as with the PS1 and PS2, we believe people who like games will, without question, purchase it. **if you can have an amazing experience, we believe price is not a problem.**”

—Ken Kutaragi, President and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment, on the price of the \$600 PlayStation 3

“No, no, I'm just starting, a baby gamer—a **thumb-sucking baby gamer.**”

—Bane, when asked if he plays videogames



“We want to thank the people who wrote nice things about the name the day you heard it—**both of you.**”

—Nintendo Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing Hideo Kojima, when asked about the name “Wii” at the Nintendo E3 press conference

“The first 5 million [consumers] are going to buy [the PS3]...even if it didn't have games.”

—Sony Computer Entertainment Europe CEO David Reeves displays his blind faith in the PlayStation 3's potential

“Tell me **why you would buy a \$600 PS3?** People are going to buy two [machines]. They're going to buy an Xbox, and they're going to buy a Wii...for the price of one PS3.”

—Microsoft Corporate Vice President of Interactive Entertainment Peter Moore on his holiday-shopping recommendations

QUOTATION SOURCES (COUNTER-CLOCKWISE, STARTING WITH WILL.I.AM): ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY (EGM), IGN, REUTERS, CVM, EGM, EGM

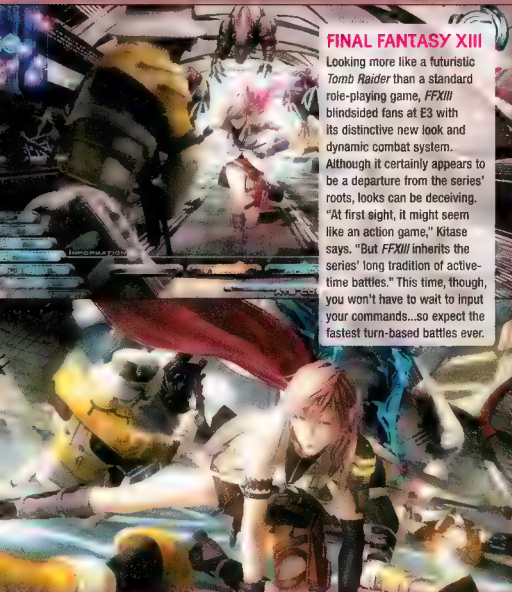
>>> THE NEW NOKIA N-GAGE IS NOT ACTUALLY A PHONE, BUT RATHER AN XBOX LIVE-LIKE SERVICE FOR NEW NOKIA HANDSETS...>>>

FINAL FANTASY XIII

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix
Release Dates: 2007, and beyond

Good things come in threes

Square Enix dropped a role-playing bombshell at E3—not only will *Final Fantasy XIII* be exclusive to the PlayStation 3, but two related titles, *Final Fantasy Agito XIII* (for mobile phones) and *Final Fantasy Versus XIII* (also for the PS3), will also join the overarching *FFXIII* saga, dubbed “Fabula Nova Crystallis.” This tongue-twisting Latin opus means “the new tale of the crystal,” a reference to the project’s central theme of fusing ancient magic and technology. And if you find three *FFXIII* games a tad overwhelming, brace yourself no more: “We may create more *FFXIII* projects down the line,” says Producer Yoshinori Kitase. —Shane Bettenhausen

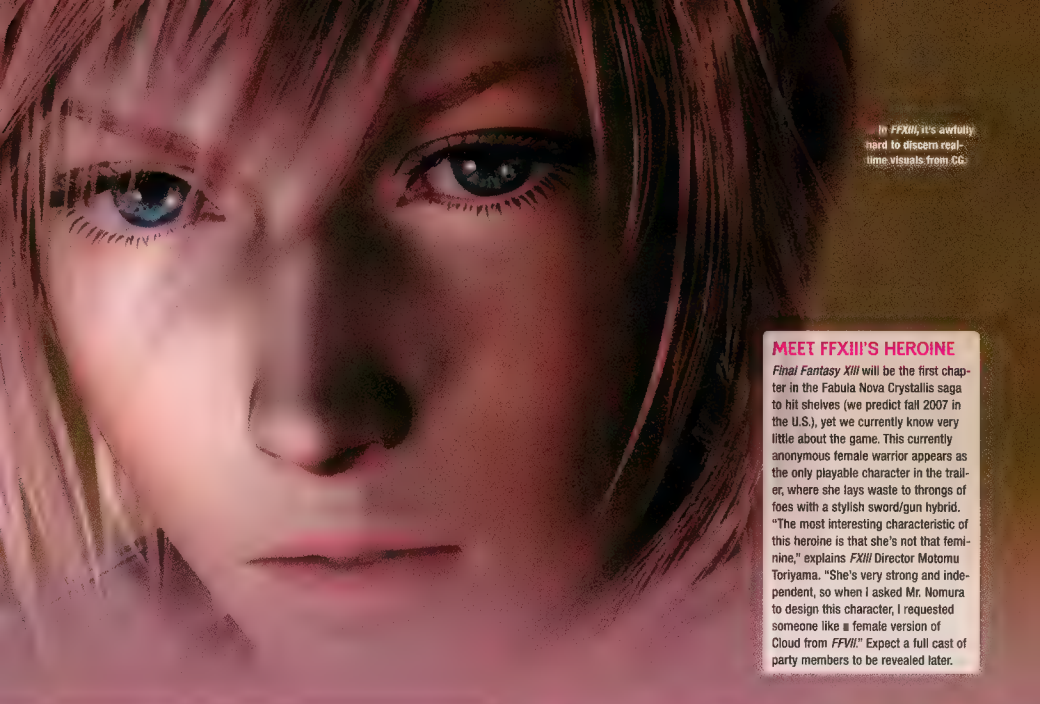


FINAL FANTASY XIII

Looking more like a futuristic *Tomb Raider* than a standard role-playing game, *FFXIII* blindsided fans at E3 with its distinctive new look and dynamic combat system. Although it certainly appears to be a departure from the series' roots, looks can be deceiving. “At first sight, it might seem like an action game,” Kitase says. “But *FFXIII* inherits the series' long tradition of active-time battles.” This time, though, you won't have to wait to input your commands...so expect the fastest turn-based battles ever.



>> WILL THESE TWO PLAYSTATION 3 FINAL FANTASY XIII TITLES MAKE USE OF SONY'S NEWFANGLED MOTION-SENSOR CONTROLLER? ODDS



In *FFXIII*, it's awfully hard to discern real-time visuals from CG.

MEET FFXIII'S HEROINE

Final Fantasy XIII will be the first chapter in the Fabula Nova Crystallis saga to hit shelves (we predict fall 2007 in the U.S.), yet we currently know very little about the game. This currently anonymous female warrior appears as the only playable character in the trailer, where she lays waste to throngs of foes with a stylish sword/gun hybrid. "The most interesting characteristic of this heroine is that she's not that feminine," explains *FFXIII* Director Motomu Toriyama. "She's very strong and independent, so when I asked Mr. Nomura to design this character, I requested someone like a female version of Cloud from *FFVII*." Expect a full cast of party members to be revealed later.



FINAL FANTASY AGITO XIII

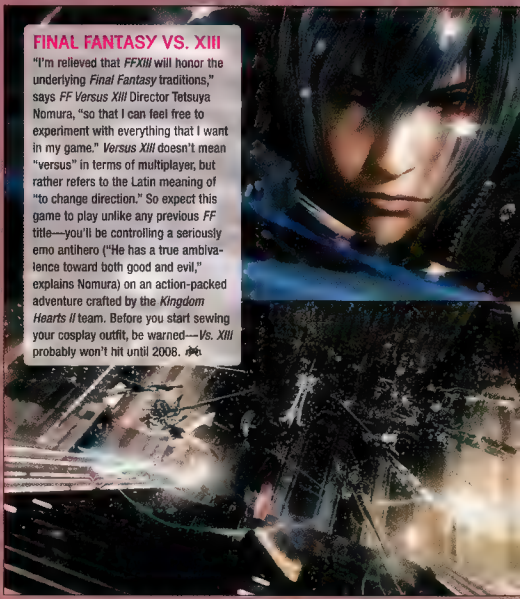
Seeing as how Square Enix's ambitious *Final Fantasy VII*-inspired mobile-phone little, *Before Crisis*, still hasn't hit U.S. handsets, chances don't look good for *Agito*, a multiplayer online game, to make it Stateside in a timely manner. When our phone technology catches up with Japan's, look forward to a cooperative online role-playing game that creates parties of adventurers based on physical proximity in the real world. For example, if you wanted to tackle a battle during your evening commute, the game would find other players on the same train.

■ *Agito* features a cadre of spiky-haired hipsters lookin' to fight.

LOOK GOOD. "I ALREADY HAVE SOME GOOD IDEAS OF HOW TO USE IT," SAYS FINAL FANTASY VERSUS XIII DIRECTOR TETSUYA NOMURA. ... >>>

FINAL FANTASY VS. XIII

"I'm relieved that *FFXIII* will honor the underlying *Final Fantasy* traditions," says *FF Versus XIII* Director Tetsuya Nomura, "so that I can feel free to experiment with everything that I want in my game." *Versus XIII* doesn't mean "versus" in terms of multiplayer, but rather refers to the Latin meaning of "to change direction." So expect this game to play unlike any previous *FF* title—you'll be controlling a seriously emo antihero ("He has a true ambivalence toward both good and evil," explains Nomura) on an action-packed adventure crafted by the *Kingdom Hearts II* team. Before you start sewing your cosplay outfit, be warned—*Vs. XIII* probably won't hit until 2008. ☹



PLAYSTATION 3 INTERVIEW

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Kojima Productions
Release Date: 2007

Straight talk with Metal Gear Solid 4's big boss

One year after announcing *MGS4* exclusively for the PS3, series creator Hideo Kojima arrived at E3 with a stunning 15-minute trailer (get it at www.metalgearsolid.com) showcasing several characters, deadly new enemies, and lush environments. What's most impressive, however, is how he does all that without revealing anything about how the game actually plays. Luckily, Mr. Kojima couldn't hide from our questions....
—Shane Bettenhausen

EGM: Will the gameplay look as good as the trailer? It's real-time, right?

Hideo Kojima: Yes, it is real-time, made with nearly final PS3 tools. My staff put a lot of time into it, but you still see a little glitching going on. Hopefully we should be able to fix all of that. We're only now learning how to best use the PS3, so we should be able to greatly enhance the visuals of the final product.

EGM: How is Sony's new motion-sensing controller affecting your plans?

HK: Well, we only very

recently found out about the new controller. So we were taken by surprise, and are now brainstorming ideas about how to utilize this brilliant mechanism.

EGM: Snake's not lookin' too good these days. Will his physical health deteriorate during the course of the game?

HK: Yes, Snake's health becomes a concern and, as he is injured on the battlefield, you'll see things like cuts and burns remaining on his skin. This game takes place in the heat of battle, so we want players to be constantly reminded of the danger of war.

EGM: Are the Gekko robots that Snake fights actually miniature Metal Gears?

HK: Hmm...the essence of a Metal Gear is different. The Gekko may use some of the same technology you've seen in past Metal Gears, like bipedal legs and weaponry, however it isn't a weapon with the lethality of a Metal Gear. It's more of a jeep or a tank.

EGM: The Gekko seem weirdly animalistic, with their graceful leaps and oily arterial sprays. What's going on?



■ The war-ravaged Middle East never looked so beautiful.

■ *MGS1* hottie Meryl returns in *MGS4*. Hope she's into old dudes.

>> METAL GEAR SOLID MASTERMIND HIDEO KOJIMA RECENTLY CONFIRMED THAT HE'S WORKING ON A BIG-BUDGET HOLLYWOOD MOTION PIC-

HK: Well, you might actually see those robots passing in another scene. [Laughs] We've tried to place a meaning behind the Gekko, much like we have with the Metal Gear. The head is for sensing, with a powerful eye and the central A.I., but the legs are animalistic, muscular. So it actually reveals what we're thinking behind this—it's machines controlling flesh, and symbolically, machines controlling man.

EGM: Then we also have soldiers armed with nanomachines, like Snake.

HK: Yes, and that all returns to the business of war. And it is a business-based war, where one day A and B will be fighting each other, but then the next day you'll have a new contract and you'll have to switch sides.

EGM: We see innocent people being killed in this trailer...will that be an aspect of the final gameplay?

HK: Yes, although we haven't quite decided the extent to which we'll involve civilians in the fighting. Some of them might join the fight in order to protect their families! In the past *Metal Gear* games you were viewing the battlefield from a slight distance, but now you're in it.

EGM: What's the story behind Snake's new Octo-Camouflage?

HK: When people think of an animal that camouflages itself, everyone thinks of chameleons, but there are many other species that are much better at it! And the octopus is one of them: When it's on top of a coral reef, it changes both its color and texture in order to blend in better. I had to show this to my staff to educate them about just how cool octopi really are.

EGM: Last year's slogan for MGS4 was "there's nowhere to hide," but now it seems Snake can blend in anywhere....

HK: Hmm, that's true...but it only works as long as you're not moving. In the past we had face paint and clothes changing, and we're going to leave that in the game as well. With that *slurp* though, you have to change as the mission progresses, but it isn't seamless. With this Octo-Camo switched on, you're constantly shifting to whatever you're up against! But you have to be careful, because if you have it on when you go to hide next to a toilet, you'll look like a toilet. It's really

uncool. Originally, we also had it so that Snake's face changed as well, but this looked so totally uncool that we had to leave it out.

EGM: In this trailer, reviled MGS2 star Raiden shows up and kicks serious ass. Did you want to shock all his detractors?

HK: Well yes, that was my plan all along. The main theme of *MGS4* is "Sense." What we've done to Raiden as a character, and how you react to him...that's all a part of it. We're going to experiment with many things, many viewpoints, and really try to challenge players' expectations and beliefs.

EGM: Will we be surprised by how other characters have changed?

HK: Yes, exactly. We're going to have a real all-star lineup of characters. I can't give you a full rundown yet, but there are characters from *MGS1*, *MGS2*, and *MGS3* here. I really want to get all the characters that everyone loved and hated into *MGS4*.

EGM: MGS4 seems like a bleak game—is this a reflection of current events?

HK: Yes, it does relate to all the strife across the globe. It's all over the game. Even the music—it won't be traditional *MGS* music. That haunting vocal in the trailer is the game's main theme. We're changing the graphical style, too. We wanted to make it clearer, more distinct, with a greater division between light and dark.

EGM: Can you bring your team from the upcoming Metal Gear Portable Ops (PSP) into the online mode for MGS4?

HK: We're thinking about that, definitely. But maybe *MPO* and *MGS4* won't quite match up in terms of timing. We'd like to include the ability to move your team between the two, though. It's funny, the *MGO* and *MPO* acronyms are kind of a joke; we take it from the term NPO, because Kojima Productions isn't really like a business pursuant entity—it's more like a non-profit organization. [Laughs]

EGM: What excited you the most at E3?

HK: Nintendo Wii. 🎮



■ In *MGS4*, Raiden has gone from pansy-ass to had-ass. Don't expect to play as him, though.

■ Raiden's gone all Ninja on us.

TURE BASED ON SOLID SNAKE'S STEALTH ADVENTURES. SO FAR, HE'S MUM ABOUT A RELEASE DATE, DIRECTOR, OR ATTACHED STARS...>>

egm international

When your PSP needs a vacation from itself

■ PSP

BOKU NO NATSUYASUMI PORTABLE

A recurring reality sure beats a final fantasy. *Boku no Natsuyasumi* (which means "my summer vacation" in English) may not sound like the quintessential American game, but in Japan, this simplistic time-waster hit it big on the PS1 and PS2 with pacifistic gamers yearning for a chill rather than a thrill. *Natsuyasumi*, which came out a year earlier than *Animal Crossing* in Japan, isn't quite as fanciful as Nintendo's game about nothing set in 1975 rural Japan, you control a precocious third-grader as he runs around the mountains, catches bugs, and gets into wholesome, character-building mischief. So, it's just *Animal Crossing* minus the animals? Essentially—but also with a wagonload of nostalgia value, making *Natsuyasumi*'s primary audience less for beaming children and more for forty-something middle-management types.



■ PSP

PORTABLE ISLAND

Wouldn't a portable island be a little unwieldy? Not when it's conveniently packed into an UMD. But whether you're in a fantasy island or not, what you do in the game isn't much different than the real deal—you'll find no discernible goal in this "relaxation tool" besides wandering around, fishing, making friends with the local animals, and generally wasting away the time.

So what's the point, then? To help you relax after a rough day, we'd suppose. Luckily, several differences keep *Portable Island* afloat amidst the sea of Japanese nongames out there: You can use it as an ambient-noise alarm clock, an MP3 player with a virtual DJ, and even a ukulele/steel-drum player (in case you're looking to embarrass yourself on the train).



BY THE NUMBERS

Foul play

- 12** Years that journalists, game developers, and sweaty fanboys have attended the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3)
- 3** New consoles unveiled at 2005's E3
- 1** New console you can actually buy today (if you're able to afford—or, more importantly, find—one)
- 537** Febreze bottles needed to remove the soiled stench left after each E3



>> HEY, PENNY-PINCHER, STILL DON'T HAVE A PS2? WELL, YOU HAVE NO EXCUSES NOW—SONY SLASHED THE PRICE DOWN TO \$129.99 A POP... >>

WHAT'S PLAYING IN THE



Spore

Even a year after its surprise announcement at the 2005 Game Developers Conference, Maxis Software's *Spore*—still a ways off from its 2007 launch—continues to grow on us. Given the game's brain trust (which includes Sims mastermind Maxis cofounder Will Wright) and original working title (*SinEverything*), that shouldn't come as much of a surprise.

For those who aren't up to speed, *Spore* simulates life on a scale ranging from micro to macro. What begins as an evolutionary exercise focusing on the life cycle of a single alien creature soon gives way to a full-blown civilization-management game. This complex ecosystem eventually balloons to cosmic proportions, presenting a galaxy full of developed planets to explore and expand. According to Wright, the galaxy in any given *Spore* game would take a dedicated player 67 years without sleep to explore.

In a game that combines the cerebral depth of *SimCity*, *SimEarth*, and *The Sims*—along with countless new tricks of its own—where does one begin? Answer: *Spore*'s handy creature editor. You can effectively create whatever hideous-yet-lovable monstrosity your heart desires (see the accompanying examples from our recent *Spore* hands-on time) thanks to the multitude of eyes, limbs, mouths, claws, and other body parts that you can graft onto it. Additional appendages unlock as your creature evolves, and you can even trade existing body parts in for more advanced ones. Different creature components impart various characteristics, such as better jaws to attack your prey with... or, for the digital bottom-feeders out there, faster legs to outrun predators. *Yikes!* —Ryan Scott

Ryan Scott is the reviews editor for our sister publication Computer Gaming World.



IF YOU'RE GOING TO SIT IN YOUR BASEMENT
PRETENDING TO BE AN ELF,

YOU SHOULD AT LEAST HAVE SOME FRIENDS OVER TO HELP.

GET TOGETHER. ROLL SOME DICE. HAVE FUN.



PLAYND.COM



sales charts

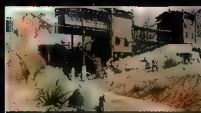


TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES



- 1 **Kingdom Hearts II** • PS2 • Square Enix
- 2 **Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter** • Xbox360 • Ubisoft
- 3 **The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion** • Xbox360 • Take 2
- 4 **Black** • PS2 • EA
- 5 **MLB '06: The Show** • PS2 • Sony CEA
- 6 **Fight Night Round 3** • PS2 • EA Sports
- 7 **Black** • Xbox • EA
- 8 **The Godfather** • PS2 • EA
- 9 **Fight Night Round 3** • Xbox360 • EA Sports
- 10 **God of War** • PS2 • Sony CEA

TOP 10 XBOX 360



- 1 **Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter**
- 2 **The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion**
- 3 **Fight Night Round 3**
- 4 **Burnout Revenge**
- 5 **The Outfit**
- 6 **Call of Duty 2**
- 7 **Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII**
- 8 **College Hoops 2K6**
- 9 **Far Cry: Instincts Predator**
- 10 **Project Gotham Racing 3**

TOP 10 PS2



- 1 **Kingdom Hearts II**
- 2 **Black**
- 3 **MLB '06: The Show**
- 4 **Fight Night Round 3**
- 5 **The Godfather**
- 6 **God of War**
- 7 **Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas**
- 8 **Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence**
- 9 **Gran Turismo 4**
- 10 **24: The Game**



The Godfather



God of War

TOP 10 XBOX



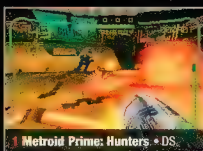
- 1 **Black**
- 2 **The Godfather**
- 3 **Fight Night Round 3**
- 4 **Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas**
- 5 **Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter**
- 6 **Fable**
- 7 **Nato 2**
- 8 **Lego Star Wars**
- 9 **MVP '06 NCAA Baseball**
- 10 **NBA Live 06**

TOP 10 GAMECUBE



- 1 **Sonic Riders**
- 2 **Naruto: Clash of Ninja**
- 3 **Mario Kart: Double Dash!!**
- 4 **Mario Super Strikers**
- 5 **Super Mario Sunshine**
- 6 **Super Smash Brothers Melee**
- 7 **Lego Star Wars**
- 8 **Mario Party 7**
- 9 **Resident Evil 4**
- 10 **Need For Speed: Underground 2**

TOP 10 PORTABLES



- 1 **Metroid Prime: Hunters** • DS
- 2 **Super Princess Peach** • DS
- 3 **MLB '06: The Show** • PSP
- 4 **Animal Crossing: Wild World** • DS
- 5 **Mario Kart DS** • DS
- 6 **Tetris** • DS
- 7 **Pokémon Trozei** • DS
- 8 **GTA: Liberty City Stories** • PSP
- 9 **Fight Night Round 3** • PSP
- 10 **Dora the Explorer: Super Spies** • GBA

TOP 10 RENTALS

FOR THE WEEK ENDING 04/30/06



- 1 **Kingdom Hearts II** • PS2
- 2 **MLB 2K6** • PS2
- 3 **The Godfather** • PS2
- 4 **Fight Night Round 3** • PS2
- 5 **MLB 2K6** • XB
- 6 **Tomb Raider: Legend** • PS2
- 7 **Black** • PS2
- 8 **NBA Ballers: Phenom** • PS2
- 9 **Ghost Recon: AW** • XB360
- 10 **The Godfather** • XB



RODRIGUEZ

WARNING

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



CONSIDER YOURSELF
WARNED.

CRASH COURSE

From the Gizmodo's launch to a literal crash, we swerve drunkenly down memory lane. Bet you can't look away...

In a theory, the Gizmodo was awesome: a handheld that would also play video and MP3s, have global-positioning capabilities, feature a digital camera, and offer text messaging. In reality it sucked. And with a history involving everything from the Swedish mob to phony Homeland Security credentials, the handheld saga quickly became gaming's biggest oddity. We follow the debris of the whole, twisted tale of the Gizmodo's rise and fall. Without the "rise" part.

—Erik Henningsen



**START
HERE**

February 2002

Floor Decor, a Florida flooring business, buys assets of a British wireless communications (or telematics) company. Soon afterward, the business is renamed Tiger Telematics.

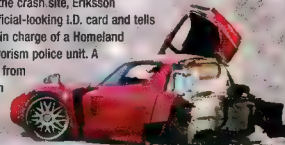


Mid 2002—early 2003 — Tiger Telematics abandons the exhilarating world of flooring to focus on electronics. As development of the taco-shaped Gizmodo begins, Tiger Telematics' European branch is renamed Gizmodo Europe. Early reactions are guarded—is the idea of a killer handheld from a flooring company too good to be true? (The answer, as we'll soon find out: Yes. It is.)



February 21, 2006 — Apparently not content with Gizmodo's crash and burn, Eriksson totals his Ferrari Enzo on California's Pacific Coast Highway. The car is one of only 399 ever made and worth a million dollars. Nearly tripling the speed limit at 162 miles per hour, the Ferrari spins out of control and is sheared in half by a pole. Eriksson, with a .09 percent blood alcohol level, is legally drunk but not seriously hurt, and insists he wasn't driving. He instead blames the crash on a mysterious German man named "Dietrich."

Despite a police search, Dietrich is never found. Amongst other weird occurrences at the crash site, Eriksson whips out an official-looking I.D. card and tells police that he's in charge of a Homeland Security antiterrorism police unit. A fully loaded clip from a Glock handgun is also found nearby. And it gets weirder.



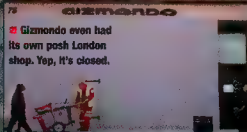
April 8, 2006 — Eriksson is arrested at his Bel Air home and nailed with embezzlement, drunk-driving, weapons, and—in what's sure to become a punch line—grand-theft-auto charges. (Surprisingly, the embezzlement charges come not from Gizmodo's tangled finances, but rather from Eriksson's auto collection—he has almost \$4 million worth of cars that were illegally brought to the U.S. despite the fact that he was only leasing them from British financial institutions. Oh, and he was late on the car payments to boot.) Los Angeles prosecutors also claim that the elusive "Dietrich" doesn't exist, and that a handgun found in Eriksson's home is illegal. Ball is set at \$5.5 million (prosecutors believe Eriksson to be a flight risk) as Eriksson pleads not guilty. If convicted, he could face a sentence of 14 years.

"It made me chuckle," Beaven says of the arrest. "Considering how much money they took out of Gizmodo, you wouldn't think stealing some of the most desirable cars in the world and moving to a place with the highest concentration of media reportage was such a great idea."



February 2, 2006 — After low sales and high operating costs wrap Gizmodo Europe in a knot of bankruptcy, the company finally takes a dirt nap. Accusations swirl that Gizmodo was merely a scam created to bilk investors. During the handheld's development, the executives' focus "wasn't on the product itself, but on other issues," Beaven remembers. "I can't speculate as to what those issues were, but they weren't focused on bringing out a console."

Looking back on his time with Gizmodo, Beaven says, "It was like 18 months of being on some sort of PR *Candida Camera*. You kept waiting for someone to jump out and say 'It's all a joke! We aren't really launching a console! We aren't really paying ourselves multimillion-dollar salaries!' But it wasn't. There was no camera."



April 26, 2006 — L.A. County deputies arrest Freer on charges of illegally buying firearms. They allege he used his credentials from Eriksson's antiterrorism unit to buy the guns. Turns out the unit is actually the security wing of a nearby transit authority that provides bus rides to the elderly. No word on whether these buses use the Gizmodo's GPS capabilities.

—Additional reporting by Darren Gladstone

September 2004–September 2005 — Gizmondo posts losses in excess of \$300 million. Where's all the money going? Game development, partially—Gizmondo claims everyone from EA to Microsoft is making games for the handheld. But the money's going elsewhere, too, like into \$1.5 million salaries for Gizmondo execs like Tiger Telematics Chairman Carl Freer and executive officer Bo Stefan Eriksson. (Oddly, Freer's wife is paid over \$150,000 for "public relations services," and money also goes to Northern Lights, an independent game studio owned by Freer and Eriksson.)



Freer

March 2005 — Tiger Telematics throws a star-studded party for the Gizmondo's European launch. (Well, it's "star-studded" if you consider Sting and Mini-Me from *Austin Powers* stars.) In the Gizmondo's first three months, less than 5,000 units are sold, due to their high cost, blurry video, low-res pictures, clunky design, and games that really only stand out for their spectacularly bizarre names. The Gizmondo "certainly would have benefited from more development time, and more, if any, consumer testing," says James Beaven, who worked as Gizmondo's head of corporate communications. "If you consider 'consumer testing' as passing it around to a few kids you know, then yeah, [the system had plenty.] If you consider rigorous testing as getting it out to different demographics and really looking at the device, then no."



■ Before he emceed Gizmondo's launch party, Tom Green once tumbled readKIL. How the mighty have fallen.

October 22, 2005 — The Gizmondo launches in the United States. The price: an astounding \$400. (Or gamers can opt for a \$230 model that forces them to watch downloaded commercials several times a day.) Gizmondos can only be purchased online or at special mall kiosks in 12 U.S. cities. Launch titles include the puzzle game *Sticky Balls*, with other games such as *Mama, Can I Mow the Lawn* and *It's Mr. Pants* on the way.



■ How could gamers resist a system that let them watch commercials three times a day? Pretty easily, actually.

Unfortunately, few outside the gaming press get to stare in open-mouthed wonder at this train wreck of a system and its library of ludicrously named games. "There was absolutely no marketing whatsoever," Beaven notes. "I was constantly reiterating the need for marketing to the consumers who would be buying it, and that never happened."

Shortly after the U.S. launch, Freer and Eriksson leave Gizmondo. Freer's departure coincides with suspicions that he may have been benefiting from improper financial deals, while Eriksson bails after news breaks that he and two other Gizmondo employees are allegedly in the "Uppsala Mafia," a Swedish counterfeiting ring. Wait—Sweden has a mafia? Seriously?

September 2005 — After several delays of the Gizmondo's U.S. release, word leaks that the company is developing a newer version of the device—one clearly based off of Sony's PSP—with a wider screen and streamlined features. Logic would dictate that this newer unit is the one that'll show up in the States. Logic loses again.



Photograph by © © GAMESMAGAZINE.COM

BASED SECRET LEVEL IS MAKING IT. NO WORD ON WHETHER THOSE GREEN FOOD-SWIPING ELF BASTARDS WILL BE ALONG FOR THE RIDE...>>>



GRAW may be old, but it's still loaded with plenty of live rounds.

online this month

Extend Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 tour of duty with these new modes

It's been 40 hours and you're finally ready to hang on your sword-and-shield-and-retro-fiddin' *Scratch-UV Division*. Now what? Well, that *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2* has still got plenty of fight left in it, and the Xbox 360's first shooter after all. Try these new custom multiplayer modes, as suggested by the game's developers at Red Storm.

Crazy Defend

Mode: 30x30 Territory
Settings: 1 Individual Respawns, 10 (Team Respawns), infinite Enemy Density, 3 Zones, Failure on 1 Zone Capture, 10 Minute Time Limit
Number of players: You really need at least nine players for this mode to have good chance of success, but it works up to nine.

Comments from the developers: "The great thing about this is that it's really frantic action in the zones. It's set up before the enemy gets there. Plus, you really have to coordinate your tasks. We will break into three squads: aggressive zone to defend and those defensive team that take over the others have to split up and provide coverage. A large limited number of respawns keeps people in the game and doesn't give you a feeling of invincibility."

Custer's Last Stand

Mode: 30x30 Territory
Settings: infinite respawns, infinite Enemy

Density, base Zone Failure on 1 Zone Capture, 10 Minute Time Limit
Number of players: Six or more is ideal
Comments: Best played on a fishing village or town area.

Hostage Control

Mode: Team Objective
Settings: infinite Respawns, Armed Officer, Mobile Random, no Zone Capture All, victory is set to time
Number of players: The more the merrier, but at least six

Comments: There is nothing better than watching a guy run off the other team try to sneak up and steal your officer until you have the officer open fire on him!

HIT and Run

Mode: 30x30 Territory (works for Team Territory as well, but not as much fun)
Settings: infinite Respawns, Mobile, Random for Zone Victory set to 10-50 depending on variable time
Number of players: As many as possible
Comments: "This game is best played on Dry Docks, as the sight is more very limited and it can be very frustrating/exciting to drop a guy as he is trying to enter the zone or get faster as you're almost in the zone."

Gangland

Mode: Solo/Team Territory
Settings: Set the kill restrictions to close to 1. This provides for some very up-close

and personal killing.
Number of players: Best suited for a large number of commands
Comments: "What you actually have to do is sneak up behind someone and shoot them in the back of the head while yelling 'Gangland!' into the headset. This is great on Hamburger Hill, as most players just go down when they capture the zone and it's easy to splatter their heads."

Kill Crazy

Mode: 30x30 Territory
Settings: 1 Base, infinite Respawns, infinite enemies, Failure on 1 Zone Capture, 5 Minute Time Limit
Number of players: Three to four
Comments: "This game type is so much fun because of the high numbers of enemies attacking your zone. While heavy accurate artillery is essential, other strategic elements heavily determine your success, such as ammunition conservation and the placement of support fire and machine guns."

Zone Domination

Mode: 30x30 Territory
Settings: Central Base, finite Occupation, infinite Respawns, 24 Minute Time Limit, 5000 Point Total Victory
Number of players: Good for four to five players
Comments: "This game is a blast. It's basically like Hamburger Hill. Smoke grenades really make the game interesting."

WHATS UP AT



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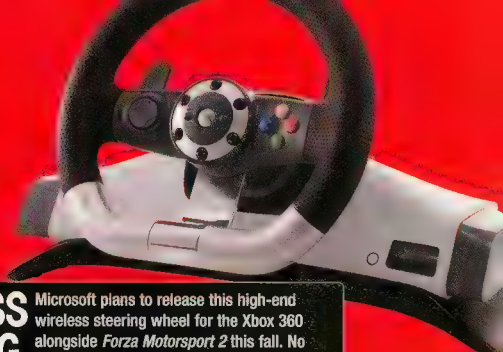
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Featured Blog: Stranglehold Team

In between eating pizza and marathon coding sessions, the developers of the game sequel to John Woo's *Hard Boiled* action flick also find the time to blog their experiences. Find out what it takes to make a big-budget next-gen action title at **stranglehold.1UP.com**.

the hot 10

Bored? Covet these objects!



1 E3 LOOT

Quality swag was scarce at this year's huge E3 gaming convention, but standout pieces included a *Gears of War* Xbox 360 t-shirt, a nifty DS Lite carrying case, and 30 different *Dragon Quest* slime keychains.

2 WIRELESS STEERING WHEEL

Microsoft plans to release this high-end wireless steering wheel for the Xbox 360 alongside *Forza Motorsport 2* this fall. No price has been revealed, but expect to drop some serious green, owing to the wheel's unique two-motor force-feedback system....

3 VIRTUAL CONSOLES

Microsoft's trickle of Xbox Live Arcade offerings has provided a modicum of old-school thrills on the 360, but the true retro renaissance should kick in later this year when arcade classics from Namco, Konami, Capcom, and Midway hit the network. Meanwhile, the Sony PlayStation 3 and the Nintendo Wii are expected to debut with large catalogs of downloadable games. Look for scads of PS1 and PS2 games on Sony's service, while Nintendo will offer NES, Super NES, N64, Sega Genesis, and even TurboGrafx-16 titles.



4 SUPER PAPER MARIO

Now *this* is meta. Nintendo's surprise GameCube title (due this fall) takes the paper-thin versions of Mario and company from the *Paper Mario* RPGs and puts them where they belong—in an old-school 2D platformer. It's positively sick. Go watch the trailer at www.GameVideos.com.

5 LUMINES LIVE

Tired of wasting your "Microsoft Points" on crappy Xbox Live Arcade games that you wouldn't even play on your cell phone? (Cue stern glance at *Feeding Frenzy*.) Good news—soon, you'll be able to snag *Lumines Live*, an updated version of last year's addictive PSP puzzler. Expect updated visuals, tweaked gameplay, and plenty of online action.

6 ONIMUSHA MOVIE

This spring's *Silent Hill* flick proved to be the most faithful game-to-movie translation yet—the game's spooky settings, grotesque monsters, and god-awful dialogue survived utterly unscathed. *Hill* Director Christophe Gans plans to tackle Capcom's *Onimusha* franchise next. No release date has been kicked around yet, but expect a \$50 million budget....



7 CRAFTY KIDS

Ever since some random chick eBayed her homemade *Katamaris Damacy* hat for mad bank, crafty entrepreneurs keep turning their love of gaming into cottage industries. Check out these recent eBay finds: a series of lovingly crocheted Mario characters and a set of high-class Game Boy cuff links (suitable for a very nerdy wedding ceremony).



8 TETRIS SHELVES



If you're a well-moneyed hipster looking to have the most stylish bachelor pad in town, head over to www.bravespacedesign.com and check out their awesome *Tetris Shelves*. These skillfully crafted blocks allow you to create modular designs, but they come at a hefty price—sets start at \$700. Budget-conscious gamers might attempt to trick a middle schooler with access to a wood shop into doing a similar project for \$20. Let us know how that works out.

9 CARD FIGHTERS CLASH DS

Several *EGM* veterans still talk shell-shocked war stories about the original *Card Fighters Clash* for the doomed NeoGeo Pocket Color. That stellar mash-up brought the coolest characters from Capcom's and SNK's fighting games together for the world's finest tactical card competition. After a lifetime of waiting, SNK has finally unveiled its upcoming DS update...and even if the graphics look a bit weak, we're still enthralled by the prospect....

10 KINGDOM HEARTS II TOYS

Seriously, how badass would that Cloud figure look on top of your monitor? Head to your local toy importer (or websites like www.play-asia.com and www.ncsx.com) and order these limited-edition collectible *Kingdom Hearts II* figures before they're gone. ☞

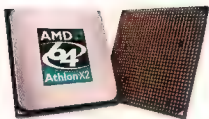


>> SUPERMAN RETURNS HAS BEEN DELAYED, MISSING THE MOVIE'S BIG-SCREEN DEBUT AND COINCIDING INSTEAD WITH THE DVD THIS FALL...>>



iBUYPOWER

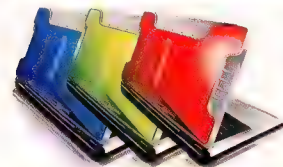
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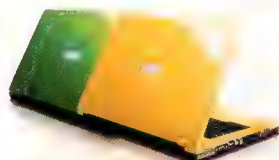
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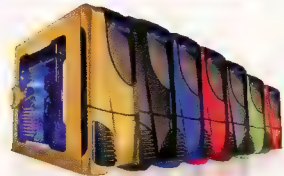
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PREVIEW: SNEAK PEEK

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

It's go time—Nintendo style

If you had to guess which franchise was the surest thing in Nintendo's arsenal, what would you say? *Mario*? Maybe *Zelda*? Nope—these days, the all-star beat-em-up *Super Smash Bros.* delivers the biggest punch (its GameCUBE entry, *Melee*, handily outdid everything else on the dying system). So when Nintendo unveiled a teaser trailer for *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* at this past Electronic Entertainment Expo, we were hardly surprised. But what did catch us off guard were some of new things going into this Wii fighter...and what's being left out.

—Jeremy Parish

RETURNING CHAMPIONS

Masahiro Sakurai
Sakurai, the mastermind behind the *Smash Bros.* franchise, left developer HAL a couple of years ago. His departure had fans wondering who would be heading up the series' next chapter—and the answer, it turns out, is Sakurai (along with a new dev team). This time, he hopes to realize his original vision for the series, incorporating a more robust single-player game. Oh, and he'd like to include online multiplayer, too. (But no promises.)

Mario, Link, Pikachu, Samus, and Kirby

Naturally, Nintendo's big four will return, and fans can rest assured that they can still humble their opponents by ingesting them with the big pink puffball. (Really, isn't that what friendship is all about?) One note on Samus: She initially appeared in the *Brawl* trailer in her standard armored form, then quickly shed her suit in favor of that slinkly bodysuit from the epilogue of *Metroid: Zero Mission* (GBA). Remember that part? Where she was pretty much helpless except for a puny stun gun? Cross your fingers that she has a few new tricks up her skintight sleeves, or Samus won't last long.

FRESH CONTENDERS

PH
The angelic hero of *Kid Icarus* made a cameo in *Melee* as a trophy, but his return here as a playable character (and his pretty-boy anime makeover) should be taken as a good sign by die-hard fans that Nintendo hasn't completely forgotten its beloved NES game.

Meta Knight
Kirby's deadly but honorable foe joins the cast as a playable warrior, complete with batwings and deadly sword swipes. His menacing appearance is quite a contrast to the cheerful Nintendoog seen blocking the screen and complicating the action.

Wario
The only surprise about Wario's debut in *Brawl* is that he wasn't playable in previous *Smash Bros.* Then again, when you see his explosive flatulence in action, you may wish he were still MIA.

Solid Snake
Good: Looking his usual mullet-headed self, *Metal Gear Solid's* hero will be putting in an appearance at the behest of his creator, Hideo Kojima. Better: The door is open for other non-Nintendo characters to join the fun (can anybody say Sonic?). Best: Snake's dorky old-man mustache (MGS4) is nowhere to be seen.

MISSING IN ACTION

Wii controls
Sakurai feels that the Wii Remote is a little too fussy for *Smash Bros.*' fast-paced action and urges players to keep a GameCUBE controller handy for a traditional gameplay experience. This is actually good news, as it means that Nintendo isn't gonna force Wii Remote functionality on all of its next-gen titles.

A 2006 release
Remember those rumors last year that *Smash Bros.* would be a Wii launch title? Uh, yeah, well, forget that. 2007 is now the time frame for *Brawl*. That's great—now you've got plenty of time to get psyched and grow a Snake-style mullet. **3x3**

Developer: Nintendo
Publisher: Nintendo
Release Date: 2007

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Believe it (because you know you want to)

Hose me down, rumormongers, for I just trudged through a steaming pile of feasible facts coming off of the biggest videogame trade show of the year, the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3). My nose is still sore from sniffing out all the savory nuggets of knowledge I uncovered during that weeklong gaming blitz. Be sure to mark all these down now, because it won't be long before **The Q** sinks another round of rumors in the pocket. —*The Q*



Massively multiplayer mash-ups
Some things go good together: peanut butter and chocolate, Mario and mushrooms, *Burnout* and *World of Warcraft*—wait, what? Yep, you read that right—it appears as though the developers of the destructive driving series are working on a **massively multiplayer online *Burnout***. Details are sketchy, but I can tell you one thing: You crash cars—a lot.

PSWII
If you perused our pages detailing the PlayStation 3's launch, you maybe caught the part about its hefty price. To reiterate: It costs a lot of dough. But don't think

you're the only ones pissed about the price; I hear several publishers were more than irate after hearing the announcement from Sony. What does that mean? Well, do you like Nintendo? Publishers do—you may start getting a lot more games on the **Wii**, thanks to its cheap development costs.

Classic rock
Retro game music may not be blowing up on the Billboard charts, but that's not stopping *Guitar Hero's* creators from sprinkling some old-school ditties into the upcoming sequel. If my ear heard correctly, **the *Mega Man* theme music will appear in *Guitar Hero II* as an unlockable track**. The oldies don't end there, either—apparently, the devs are trying to scrounge

together other classic themes as well. And if that musical note didn't strike a chord with you, I also got this doozy: **Developer Harmonix is working on a new music game that'll make *Guitar Hero* look like a one-hit wonder**.

Tugging heartstrings
Sora and the Disney gang may have ended their console adventures, but don't think the magic is over just yet—I hear **Square Enix is working on a *Kingdom Hearts* game for the PlayStation Portable**. And I wouldn't be surprised if Disney's *incredible* pals at Pixar joined the party, too.

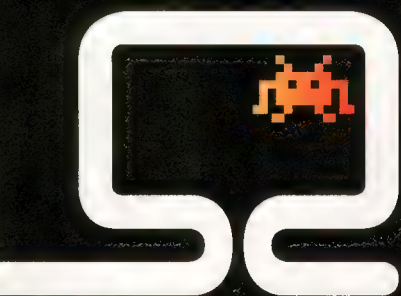
Use the Wii
Think the sword-fighting in *Red Steel* is cool? Well, imagine that but cosily cooler—like, say, a ***Star Wars* lightsaber game on the Wii**. Looks like you don't need to imagine that for too long, because if my sources are correct, **LucasArts is developing a *Star Wars* game specifically for the Wii**, with the main emphasis on lightsaber combat.

“LucasArts is developing a *Star Wars* game specifically for the Wii.”

Q-TIPS

- The most recent E3 rumor mill promise you got down on this list: **Shogun** looks to be working on a new PlayStation Portable.
- It appears as if **Klonoa** is developing a next-gen action title for the Wii, and with *Knights of the Outlaw* to boot.
- **Warner Bros.** says the *Legend of Zelda* franchise may return to the Wii, but the exact details are still being worked out.
- **IGN** Force reports that *Mass Effect* is a console title that's been canceled.
- **IGN** reports that *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* is a console title that's been canceled.
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EGM'S OPINIONATED PREVIEW GUIDE



We look into the future at more than 80 upcoming games. And it ain't bright for everyone...

A s the saying goes, "opinions are like a**holes—everyone's got one and they all stink." We disagree...about our opinions, that is. The recent Electronic Entertainment Expo—the industry's annual gamingpalooza—offered us not only a glimpse at several major titles headed our way this year and next, but also the opportunity to give you some honest impressions of these upcoming projects.

A few things to remember while reading this guide: First, we're only commenting here on games that were playable at the trade show. Second, if something is due out for both current-gen and next-gen systems (such as *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance* and *Phantasy Star Universe*), our opinion is only of the latter versions. And lastly, a lot can happen before these games land on store shelves, so some duds may actually turn out to be studs... and vice versa.

FOLLOW THE GUIDE: Can't be bothered with so much reading? Then just keep an eye out for these helpful icons.

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NEXT-GEN MULTIPLATFORM



■ Team Rainbow goes after the cast of *Cirque du Soleil*.



RAINBOW SIX VEGAS

PS3/XB360 • Ubisoft • September 2006



THE BASICS: "24 is a big inspiration for us," says Maxime Bédard, creative director on *Rainbow Six Vegas*, repeating the same line he delivered in our *Vegas* cover story just a few months ago. But now we can see what he's getting at, as a picture-in-picture news update breaks into gameplay mid hostage rescue in the early minutes of this game's 12-hour, sundown-to-sunup span. Exactly why terrorists are trying to blow up this city of sin is unclear, but most of Las Vegas' major landmarks will be safe—the big-name casinos (the Bellagio, the MGM Grand, and others) wouldn't let the developers explode any iconic buildings, or let players battle it out on their garish premises.

HOW WAS IT? Like a mostly indoor *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter*. The demo opened with a very *GRAW*-esque chopper ride, but once on the ground, the biggest tweak (other than rappelling down a building and busting through a window) was the revamped squad controls. *Vegas* borrows *Splinter Cell*'s under-the-door wire camera, and when scoping out a roomful of tangos you can assign targets to your squadmates before the breach and clear. Bédard wouldn't talk about the new, objective-based online mode except to say it'll be in there, along with the usual two- to four-player co-op and versus modes.

—Demian Linn



MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

PS3/Wii/XB360 • Activision • Fall 2006

Marvel maniacs will be wetting their spandex for this superheroic action-RPG, in which you beat up a bunch of enemies as your favorite heroes from this comic universe (the game's got over 140 of 'em). I'm also looking forward to creating my own tip-top team (including a name and logo) for four-player online co-op.

—Michael Donaghy



VIRTUA TENNIS 3

PS3/XB360 • Sega • Spring 2007

The addictive arcade port brings back more of the same strokes but now includes online matches (a series first), some new pros (including Taylor Dent and James Blake), and slightly slicker graphics. Still, it seemed to me as if *V3* is playing it safe and just going through the motions.

—James Lee



**NEXT-GEN
 MULTIPLATFORM**



■ The Darkness has no respect for the po-po.



THE DARKNESS

PS3/XB360 • 2K Games • Spring 2007

THE BASICS: From the makers of *The Chronicles of Riddick* (XB) comes a first-person action-adventure that's based on Top Cow's gritty comic. Aside from the routine assortment of firearms, you'll also have Darkness powers at your disposal, including giant demon arms and the ability to summon creepy creatures called darklings. "[The Darkness powers] will complement the gunplay," says Art Director Jens Matthies, "not compete with it."

HOW WAS IT? Totally intense. The demo only lasted 10 minutes, but it still had a

crapload of memorable moments: darklings gruesomely sawing off the heads of SWAT team members; shooting a guy's kneecap, and as he bends over in agony, putting a bullet in the back of his skull; guiding one of those demonic tentacles through a building's vent, which then eliminates—with unbelievable ease—the police threat outdoors. Too intense, you say? Then just sit back, relax, and watch full-length TV shows and movies on any of *The Darkness*' in-game boob tubes. I'm completely serious.

—Bryan Intihar



MADDEN NFL 07

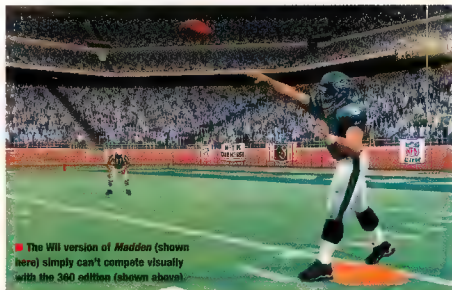
PS3/WII/XB360 • EA Sports • Fall 2006

THE BASICS: Loud (and somewhat loopy) announcer puts his name on the box. An NFL superstar puts his mug on the box, then falls victim to some curse. One so-called revolutionary feature (in *07* it happens in the running game) supposedly makes it an absolute necessity to buy the new edition. You get the drill.

HOW WAS IT? Now in its 17th year, Johnny Madden's storied franchise wasn't looking so hot. Compared to the current-gen

versions, both the PS3 and 360 *Maddens* were pathetically light in the features category (it's almost criminal that those next-gen versions won't include the robust Superstar mode). On the Nintendo front, while I enjoyed the new passing mechanics (you make a throwing motion with the Wii Remote to hit your receivers), the graphics were merely GameCube quality. Now, I wasn't expecting a major visual bump here, but c'mon—what you see below in this screenshot just doesn't cut it.

—B.J.



■ The Wii version of *Madden* (shown here) simply can't compete visually with the 360 edition (shown above).

FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR

PS3/XB360 • THQ • Fall 2007

Think *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter*'s supersoldiers thrown into the vehicle-happy mayhem of *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat*. And while this combo will appeal to the masses, *Frontlines* has some depth, too: upgradeable units that can earn added abilities, such as tactical nuclear strikes.

—Greg Ford



JOHN WOO PRESENTS STRANGLEHOLD

PS3/XB360 • Midway • Winter 2006

This shattering shooter hit all the right marks—good gunplay, intuitive controls, and enough breakable objects to fill a dozen dump trucks. Even though reducing thugs to humanized Swiss cheese may be nothing new, it was satisfying to run up banisters while double-fisting pistols Woo style.

—M.D.



John Cena and Rey Mysterio—training for a trip up to Brokeback Mountain.



WWE SMACKDOWN! VS. RAW 2007

PS3/XB360 • THQ • Fall 2006



THE BASICS: This annual grappler returns to the ring to declare its dominance in virtual man-on-man mayhem. Forget about bumping around with girls—*SmackDown!* is all about the meaty men who get your palms sweaty.

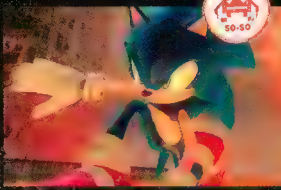
HOW WAS IT? Let's see: A revamped control system, beefed-up visuals, and interactive areas outside the squared-circle (like taking the fight into the crowd)—hell, all you need is a slick set of spandex and you'll truly feel like a WWE superstar.

Unlike most sports series that strip down their features for the next generation (cough, *Madden*, cough), this franchise was bursting at its stretchy seams with loads of new content. Besides the obvious changes (deeper story mode, more match types, etc.), *SmackDown!* has completely reworked its controls to help slow-learning wrasslers shoot through the ranks, as all the grapple moves are now performed using the right analog stick. No longer battling with buttons made the matchups feel fresh. Plus, the user-controlled moves let you decide where you want to dump your opponents when holding them up for a suplex—tilting the analog stick backward or forward determines which direction you drop 'em. These simple, yet intuitive, controls give this series some much-needed juice. —M.D.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

PS3/XB360 • Sega • Fall 2006

3D *Sonic* games have had a questionable track record, and things don't look to change here. Controlling fast-moving Sonic had me falling off ledges and losing track of the camera far too easily. Hope lies in new playable character Silver, who moves more methodically and uses psychokinetic powers to toss objects at enemies. —G.F.



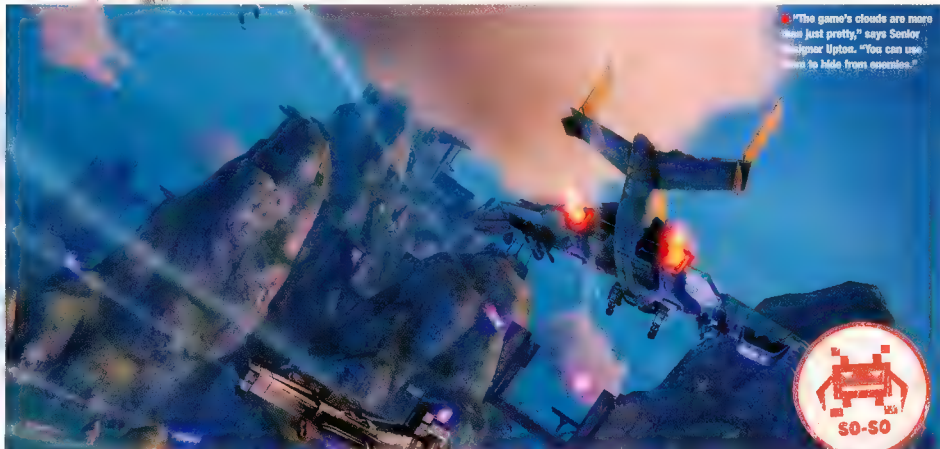
HAZE

PS3/XB360 • Ubisoft • March 2007

Futuristic first-person shooters set in jungles may sound like a fab idea, but it was hard to get wild for *Haze's* wilderness, mainly because of the game's mediocre squad-based play (your extra soldiers seemed more like extra baggage). The developers teased something supposedly cool called "combat stimulants," but they refused to show 'em. What a gyp! —M.D.



PLAYSTATION 3



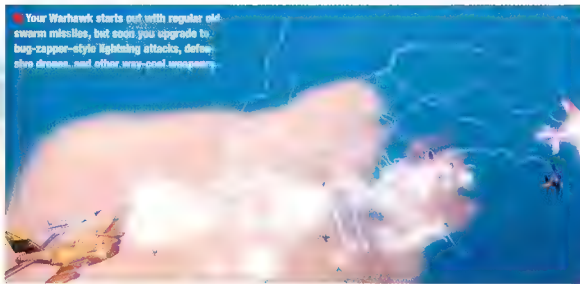
“The game’s clouds are more than just pretty,” says Senior Designer Upton. “You can use them to hide from enemies.”



WARHAWK

Sony CEA • Fall 2006

Your Warhawk starts out with regular old swarms missiles, but soon you upgrade to bug-zapper-style lightning attacks, defensive screens, and other waa-wooo weapons.



THE BASICS: The hammy full-motion-video actors of the original PlayStation shooter are out; mile-high mountains and ground-bound vehicle and infantry missions are in. This new *Warhawk*, cleared to land at or near the PS3's launch, is a "reimagining" of the original, complete with a massive world and missions that'll wait if you wander. "You can fly around in your Warhawk, see a battle on the ground, land [at predesignated pads], jump in a tank, drive to the battle, choose some stuff up, call the Warhawk down to where you are, hop in it again, and fly off," says Brian Upton, senior designer at developer IncoG. "It's a living world of war."

You'll spend about 60 percent of the game in the air and the other 40 percent on the ground in infantry or vehicle-driving roles. The 32-player online multiplayer games have the same variety of vehicles, too. "So you can have tank battles on the ground while people engage in dogfights overhead, switching back and forth," Upton says.

HOW WAS IT? *Warhawk* was the only PS3 game we played that used the controller's motion sensors (wagging the pad pitches and yaws your ship). But the controls felt overly sensitive; I kept wanting to switch to the analog stick, which you'll be able to do in the final game. The demo was also bland, with dull island terrain, swarms of the same enemy airplanes, and unimpressive carriers. We didn't get to drive any ground vehicles or even by actual missions, so I'm hoping those put some frills into this flight. —Crispin Boyer

FORMULA ONE 06

Sony CEA • TBD

Sony demoed *Formula One 06* working in tandem with the PSP (streaming the rear-view mirror cam to the portable screen), so start working on your homemade duct tape/helmet/PSP holder contraptions now. Or don't, since the game hasn't been confirmed for U.S. release, even though it's a launch title in Europe.



UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOM

Sony Online • November 2006

This action-RPG won't blow you away with its tremendous innovation, but it will, at the very least, look lovely. The gameplay is fairly derivative—hack-n-slash as one of three character classes with the usual combos, loot, and character upgrades, plus co-op and online multiplayer options. It works, but I wish I'd seen anything—anything at all—to set it apart from prior games in this and the *Champions of Norrath* series. —Jennifer Tsao





Aw, I'm fire-start, looks cool and...uh, how about this fire?



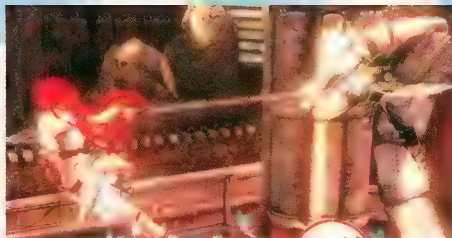
GENJI 2

Sony CEA • Fall 2006

THE BASICS: Fire rages across a feudal Japanese mansion as a tag team of warriors—one a lightning-quick samurai, the other a slow, pole-wielding strongman—take on pockets of armed resistance. What separates *Genji 2* from other combo-heavy action games is that you can switch between team members on the fly via the D-pad, even while in midcombo (the final game will feature four team members, one for each D-pad

direction). After bruising up a number of enemy warriors, you can enter a special attack mode, where carefully timed button presses cause big damage to everyone in the vicinity.

HOW WAS IT? *Genji 2* felt very familiar, never wandering far from established action conventions. It was also a little on the slow side, especially when controlling the big guy. —Robert Ashley



HEAVENLY SWORD

Sony CEA • Fall 2006

THE BASICS: It's a third-person button masher with the whole *Crouching Tiger* thing going on. Your hot, redheaded heroine kicks ass with her various weapons (such as knives on the end of chains for fast attacks, and a huge sword for more devastating blows) in an interactive environment, fighting through wave after wave of armies until you get to that big, bad boss. Repeat.

HOW WAS IT? This was Zhi Zhang in videogame form—beautiful and deadly. I couldn't keep my hands off of it. I'd throw

a fallen soldier's shield, and the camera would follow along as I guided it like a headturning flying saucer. And sometimes, just for giggles, I'd put an ax into a bad guy's crotch (one of many special moves). The countering system was intuitive: See sparks for a blocked attack? Press the button for a rad reversal. Even the *God of War*-style "finish him" minigames aren't played out quite yet. Now, can the whole game keep up the intensity? (The demo at E3 was shorter than most at the show.) —JL



■ Check out the stylized sun-blasted graphics. Also: panties.

GUNDAM

Namco Bandai • 2007

I'm not a violent man, but if I find the developer of this abominable anime garbage...I will punch—OK, breathe, one...two...three.... Anyway, everything from the cosmically clunky controls to the crawling speed (someone forgot to lube up these robots) made me question if this was actually a game or an inhumane torture device. —M.D.



MOTORSTORM

Sony CEA • Fall 2006

Seven vehicle types—including trucks, ATVs, rally cars, and buggies—highlight this off-road racer. But outside of the potential for amusing mis-matches and some online play, *MotorStorm* doesn't offer much to get excited about, regardless of how interesting watching next-gen mud accumulate on your ride can be. —G.F.





■ **Insomniac prez Ted Price** promises that *Resistance* will use the PS3 controller's motion sensor in some way.

RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

Sony CEA • Fall 2006



■ This monster squad kinda resembles *The Suffering's* creature collection. That's not a good thing.

THE BASICS: "[*Resistance*] is not a World War II first-person shooter," says Ted Price, president of developer Insomniac. "This is a very different world." And that's because, according to the game's history books, WWII never happened. As U.S. Army Ranger Nathan Hale (the main character is indeed a descendant of the Revolutionary War hero), you'll head overseas to Great Britain and fight the good fight against an alien species called the Chimera. While the *Ratchet & Clank* makers are certainly getting more mature with their first PS3 title, *Resistance* will still feature two of the developer's trademarks: large-and-in-charge weapons and a robust online mode (it currently supports 32 players, and Price hints that this number may grow).

HOW WAS IT? Remember how, like, everyone bought *Call of Duty 2* at the 360's launch? *Resistance* is well on its way to being that title for Sony's George Foreman Grill-looking console. And, just like with Insomniac's *Ratchet* games, it's the multifunctional firearms that stole the show here. One weapon, called the Auger, could shoot through cover, while the Bull's-Eye enabled me to "tag" an enemy with one pull of the trigger; any following shots would automatically travel to that spot whether or not I had the Chimera in my crosshairs—very nice. Also, even with roughly five more months left in development, *Resistance's* 32-player online death-matches were already running without a hitch.

—B.I.

SINGSTAR

Sony CEA • 2007

Karaoke Revolution is about to find store shelves a little cozier, as *SingStar* is set to hit North American shores. The European hit features original music videos that accompany each song, and players will be able to download new tracks and record videos of their performances for upload. The game comes with over 300 licensed songs, and you'll be able to buy new ones (3,000 are available already, with more being added). Cool.



Oh what'd I me... what'd you be... for?

FULL AUTO 2: BATTLELINES

Sega • November 2006

Only months after gorging on the original game's super value meal of exaggerated car crashes and hood-mounted missile launchers for the 360, this PS3 sequel plops unwanted seconds on my plate. Even with a new deathmatch mode—which played like a more realistic version of *Twisted Metal*—Full Auto 2 tasted too familiar.



—R.A.



ASSASSIN'S CREED

Ubisoft • Spring 2007

THE BASICS: During the Third Crusade, assassins lurked behind the scenes, quietly influencing events by, uh...murdering people. You play Altair, a silent killer who can scale walls or delicately bounce from beam to beam like an acrobat. He's deadly with a sword and full of tricks, like blending in with a group of monks to hide from the local authorities.

HOW WAS IT? I don't know what reality was like during 1191 AD, but this game sure seemed to do a good job of imitating

it. The locals reacted realistically to what you did. Shove them aside while running around, and they may shove you back; climb the side of a building, and they'll crowd around and watch (thus attracting the unwanted attention of the town guards). Even the levels are based on historically accurate architecture, so you won't find any videogame clichés like platforms sticking out of walls—you can only climb it if you could climb it in real life. It all comes together to feel like a true period piece. —Dan "Shoe" Hsu



■ *Assassin's Creed* comes from the same team that made *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (PS2/XB/GC).



MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES

TBD • Fall 2006

THE BASICS: Shoot and destroy with a motley crew of mercenaries—just like you did in the PS2/XB original.

HOW WAS IT? Although the graphics made the mindless mayhem look a bit nicer, it largely felt like I was playing a spruced up version of the first game. Only *Mercenaries 2* isn't set in North Korea, but instead, Venezuela. Not that it really matters what country you're in—

Kenya or Kentucky, you'll still blow crap up without a second thought to your surroundings. But at least this time you can enjoy the explosions with a friend (you can engage in the co-op mode anytime during the single-player game). Maybe taking down terrorists with a bud will help set this sequel apart from original. Because if that doesn't do it, I don't think a few new weapons and vehicles will make this worth the bounty. —M.D.



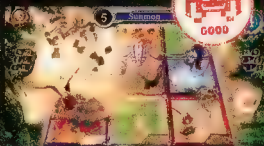
■ So this is what happened to Dog the Bounty Hunter's lost-est brother.



THE EYE OF JUDGEMENT

Sony CEA • 2007

Using an EyeToy-like camera as a card reader, *EOJ* is an interesting take on *Magic the Gathering*-style card battling. When you place an *EOJ* card in the view of the camera, the character pops up on your television, creating a visual accompaniment to the familiar statistics war. —L.A.



GRAN TURISMO HD

Sony CEA • TBD

This is not *Gran Turismo 5*—it's an upscaled version of *Gran Turismo 4* that Sony trotted out to show off the PS3's HD graphics. But even though it was running in 1920x1080 progressive scan (which very few current HDTVs can handle), it was missing some of *GTA*'s visual effects and conveyed very little sense of speed. Motorcycles have joined the roster, but we still left with a "been there, drove that" impression. —D.L.



NINTENDO WII

BEFORE YOU JUDGE: The Wii's graphics really aren't as ugly as some of these screens might indicate. Nintendo provided hardly any assets for its games, which forced us to snap some shots from videos.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

Nintendo • Fall 2006

THE BASICS: Link's long-awaited GameCube swan song (a back-to-basics quest featuring the return of a more realistic art style) will also be a launch title for Nintendo's innovative Wii. Surprisingly, *Princess* offers a lot of Wii Remote functionality—swordplay, archery, throwing boomerangs, heaving crates, and fishing all make use of motion control.

HOW WAS IT? That extra year of development time hasn't gone to waste—*Princess'* breathtaking visuals are easily the best we've seen on the Wii (despite being a GC port), and the game's designer promises more dungeons than even the gargantuan *Ocarina of Time* (N64). So really, I have no doubts that this game will deliver a monumental action-adventure experience.

Whether or not you'll want to tackle it with the Wii's wand remains up in the air, though—although movement and combat felt natural, the aiming required for stuff like shooting arrows or tossing your boomerang caused headaches. Perhaps it's the fault of a streamlined demo that tried to teach me too much too quickly, but the Wii controls simply seemed a bit too ambitious for this already complex title. As long as the final game introduces gameplay elements at a very gradual pace, this potential learning curve can be avoided.

—Shane Bettenhausen



■ In *Twilight Princess*, things get a little...er, make that a lot hairier when Link temporarily transforms into a wolf.

TONY HAWK'S DOWNHILL JAM

Activision • Fall 2006

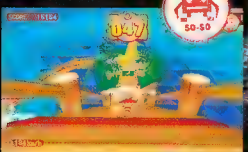
This *Hawk* didn't have the smoothest landing on Nintendo's new console. The first test races were very frustrating, as I kept sliding backward while climbing the game's steep learning curve. Seriously, tilting the sensitive controller to maneuvering my skater through every nook and cranny was like trying to learn some freak circus balancing act.



SUPER MONKEY BALL BANANA BLITZ

Sega • Fall 2006

Damn, these primates are a sensitive bunch: Even in the beginner-level mazes, I struggled to keep my monkey from going off the deep end. Luckily, though, the varying control styles for *Banana Blitz's* impressive collection of minigames (which includes the likes of Whack-A-Mole and Ring Toss) weren't so touchy.





SUPER MARIO GALAXY

Nintendo • Spring 2007

THE BASICS: To all those gamers who thought GameCube's *Super Mario Sunshine* was too much of the same old butt-stomping stuff, here's a world of gameplay that's unexplored. Actually, make that *worlds*. Each stage is comprised of planetoids populated with Koopas, Bullet Bills, and other archetypal enemies, and you hop from planet to planet by touching gold stars while wiggling the Wii Remote (or the Nunchuk analog-stick attachment, used to move Mario) or slingshotting off rubbery pillars. Pointing the Wii Remote guides an onscreen cursor that sucks up

collectibles or triggers special events. The E3 demo concluded with a battle against a titanic lava octopus that hurled mekons players volleyed by shaking the controller.

HOW WAS IT? One of the few Wii games that didn't make you convulse like the *Star Wars* kid bathed in Bengay, *Galaxy* used every function of the Wii Remote in ways that made sense within seconds of pressing Start. But this was a too-quick taste of the game that left me wanting more, while hoping the wee-world gameplay wouldn't get too gimmicky. —C.R.



■ No word on multiplayer support, but it better—*Smooth Moves* would make a perfect party game.



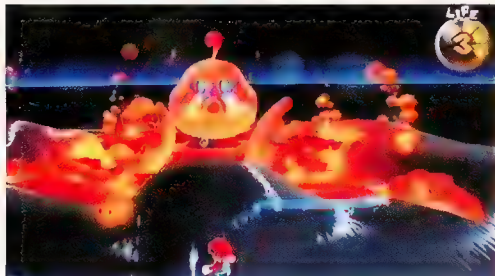
WARIOWARE: SMOOTH MOVES

Nintendo • TBD

THE BASICS: *WarioWare's* microgame insanity meets the Wii's motion-sensitive controller—someone at Nintendo deserves a raise. Before each event in *Smooth Moves*, you get a brief note about how to hold the remote (waiter style: like you're holding up a platter; Mohawk style: on top of your head, etc.), then you get about three seconds to figure out how the hell you're supposed to finish a completely mundane task, whether it's pumping an air pump, drawing a triangle, or swatting a fly. Like

we said: insanity...now with 700 percent more bodily movements.

HOW WAS IT? *Smooth Moves* is quick, clever, and makes you look and feel like an idiot, so yeah, it's pretty awesome. The microgames make clever use of the Wii Remote, like moving it to keep a broom balanced on your hand, holding it on your head while you do squats, or placing it by your hip for some virtual hula hooping. It reinvigorates an already always-fun series. —D.H.



ELEBITS

Konami • Fall 2006

The concept behind *Elebits* is simple—use the Wii Remote to interact with the environment and pick up little Pikmin-like creatures. Each captured elebit gives you more power, which opens up new parts of the world. The controller worked well for point-and-gather action like this, but it remains to be seen whether gameplay will evolve over the entire game to stay dynamic and interesting.



DRAGON BALL Z: BUDOKAI TENKAICHI 2

Atari • Fall 2006

The Wii's first fighting game wasn't as intuitive as I'd hoped. While swinging the controller had my character throwing punches, any advanced attack required trigger pulls and strange motions...and the response proved lfy in this cartoony-looking brawler. Not that anything I could say would serve to dissuade the series' legion of fans. —G.F.



NINTENDO WII



RED STEEL

Ubisoft • Fall 2006

THE BASICS: It looks like a Yakuza-themed first-person shooter, but it plays more like an old-school light-gun game. Stroll through the gritty streets of gangland, where supposedly badass gangsters act like automated shooting-range targets. You have the freedom to walk about as you please, using the Nunchuk's analog stick to move and the Wii Remote to aim. Cars blow up, cash registers smash open, and enemies die with a heavy sense of drama (like

Yosemite Sam). The demo also showed off a very rough sword-fighting bit, wherein slicing motions with the remote create a spazy version of swordplay.

HOW WAS IT? Setting aside the ridiculously sensitive aiming, the ugly characters, the broken sword-fighting, and the brain-dead A.I., this game is just a bad idea. Why set us free in an open world if everything in that world is spring-loaded and staged like a haunted house? —R.A.



Wii SPORTS

Nintendo • Fall 2006

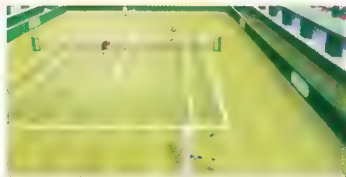
THE BASICS: It's a minigame collection—featuring baseball, tennis, and golf—for even the most casual sporto. Hold the Wii Remote like a bat and swing for the fences...or grab it like a racket and put topspin on the ball...or get all Tiger Woods and drive your way within inches of the tin cup. Simple, right?

HOW WAS IT? It's exactly the kind of change-up I've been waiting for from this genre. The controls were so

straightforward and accessible that even my mom—who still calls these things "gametapes"—could play *Wii Sports*...and enjoy it. As for me, I totally got into calling my shot—à la Babe Ruth—during Home Run Derby (check out the *Wii Sports* footage on GameVideos.com to see if I was successful). Now, if Nintendo can also challenge serious sports fans (for example, in baseball, I want to see hurlers mix up their pitches), then I'm game. —B.I.



■ Snazzy graphics, right? Too bad *Red Steel* doesn't come close to looking as good as these "visual target" shots.



■ Graphics: bad. Gameplay: fantastic.

Wii ORCHESTRA

Nintendo • TBD

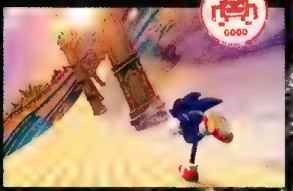
Yes, it's pretty damned fun to wave your Wii controller like a conductor's baton as you lead a curdly orchestra through songs—but truly, it ain't much of a game. Perhaps the final version can offer more gameplay beyond simply changing the speed of the musicians... —S.B.



SONIC WILD FIRE

Sega • Spring 2007

Sonic's Wii entry—completely different than the PS3/XB360 game—showed promise: *Wild Fire* has you tilting the controller left and right for movement and shaking it for attacks. It definitely had an on-tracks feel, but the fast action only left me to blame for deaths, not the camera...hallelujah. —G.F.





METROID PRIME 3: CORRUPTION

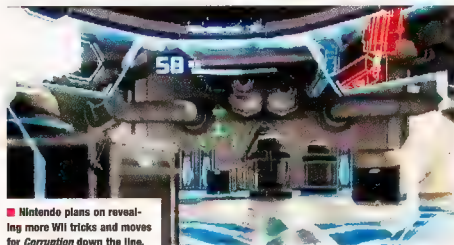
Nintendo • TBD

THE BASICS: Space bounty hunter Samus is on her third outing on the GameCube—oops, make that her first on the Wii (sorry, it's hard to tell with these graphics). The game's set up in a similar style to the last two first-person adventures, but with new moves that work with the Wii's funky controllers.

HOW WAS IT? I wish this next-gen *Metroid Prime* actually had next-gen graphics (imagine the collective drool from the fanboy nation if *Corruption*

looked as good as the Xbox 360's *Gears of War*), but I can't argue that the Wii control system suits this game perfectly. It plays like a first-person shooter, moving with the analog stick and pointing and aiming with the remote. Little Wii tricks, like thrusting the Nunchuk to launch a grapple beam to snatch a shield from an enemy, really got me involved in Samus' world in new and interesting ways. No way can I go back to playing *Prime* the old way now.

—D.H.



■ Nintendo plans on revealing more Wii tricks and moves for *Corruption* down the line.



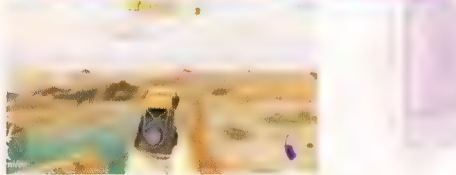
EXCITE TRUCK

Nintendo • TBD

THE BASICS: Imagine driving an off-road truck, only without an analog stick, steering wheel, or Calvin peeing on _____ sticker in the back window. Instead, you hold the Wii Remote horizontally (like an old NES controller) and tilt it left and right to steer and forward or backward to angle your truck up or down to land the jumps just right. It's the old *Excitebike* formula reimagined in 3D with a new-age controller.

HOW WAS IT? It looked awkward, but after trying it for myself, I got the hang of things within a half a lap. Holding the remote in the air as a steering wheel felt natural to me, though at times, I was oversteering all over the place. Good thing off-road racing equals forgiving gameplay by nature. Landing just right, well-timed boosts, and power-ups that deform the tracks in real time to create instant 60-foot jumps all add arcade-like strategy to the dirty fun.

—D.H.



PROJECT H.A.M.M.E.R.

Nintendo • TBD

This extremely straightforward brawler—you're a hulking dude thwacking robots with a hammer—became exponentially more fun thanks to some shockingly fluid Wii remote control. Spinning and swinging the hammer with the Wii Remote felt natural, visceral, and rewarding. You've got a solid gameplay base here. Nintendo—now build a great game around this.

—S.B.



BOMBERMANLAND

Hudson • Fall 2006

Don't expect traditional bomb-laying action here—instead, the Wii receives a collection of random minigames starring Hudson's lovable arsonist. And it seemed like a dud—the three little time-wasters we tried felt like *Mario Party* rejects and had little or nothing to do with *Bomberman*.

—S.B.





XBOX 360



GEARS OF WAR

Microsoft • September 2006

THE BASICS: *Gears of War* is only half the game that *Halo 2* is. That's not a bad thing, because the other half is *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter*. "There's no running and gunning in *Gears of War*," says Rod Fergusson, producer at developer Epic. "We call it stop and pop." So while this third-person shooter is heavy on the adrenaline and sci-fi action, you won't survive unless you learn to find some comfort and cover behind those concrete walls or stone pillars. After all, your enemies are brainy enough to do the same—the Locust Horde didn't get to where they're at (nearly wiping out all of humanity) without some smarts behind their ugly exteriors.

Multiplayer consists of two-player

co-op splitscreen or up to four-player co-op and eight-player (possibly more) versus over Live.

HOW WAS IT? Multiplayer session 1: I had trouble adjusting to this "stop and pop" style. *Halo 2* has trained me to run and gun, which led to messy and awkward firefights in *Gears*, and I was dying more than I was killing. Session 2: I started getting used to *Gears*' fightin' ways. I'd run for cover, blind fire over walls, revive almost-bled-to-death teammates... Now that I've adjusted, I'm beginning to appreciate the game's nuances. The battles are getting intense! Session 3: I like. I like a lot.

Aw, come on...just one more session? —D.H.



■ *Gears of War* features something called Active Reload: Hit the button at the right time to get a boost in reload speed or even a half-clip of double-damage slugs.

NINETY-NINE NIGHTS

Microsoft • Fall 2006

In the never-ending arms race to pack as many bad guys onto our TV screens as possible, *Ninety-Nine Nights* takes the lead. Moments into the battle, I sliced through a riot of goons so thick I couldn't even see my sword. The button-mashing combat was nothing new, but this one sure looked nice.



BOMBERMAN ACT ZERO

Konami • September 2006

Konami has scrapped the rainbows and cute s***, and replaced them with a life meter, a closer camera perspective, and a strange mode called First-Person Bomber. Now don't get me wrong; the gameplay's still grounded in *Bomberman*, but it seemed hollowed out. And visually, *Zero* was hardly next-gen.





SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT

Ubisoft • September 2006

THE BASICS: Sam Fisher is working for them damn terrorists! Or is he? In *Double Agent*, the sneaky spy has to make some tough decisions while infiltrating terrorist networks. Should he kill a hostage to "prove" he's one of the bad guys? Or does he risk blowing his cover by saving someone? After a while, Fisher's own agency may not even be sure which side he's on.

HOW WAS IT? Good...but I was expecting "great" (last two *SC* games = best multiplayer ever). In single-player, it was hard to tell if your moral choices had any effect on the game beyond the immediate cut-scene. The enemies looked as dumb and robotic as ever. Multiplayer (3-on-3 now) is more newbie friendly, with animated "helper ghosts" showing you how to navigate a level, for example. But the developers neutered the spies (no shock gun, elbow smash, etc.), so I'm not sure if that'll make the gameplay more intense or too dumbed down. —D.H.



■ You'll have a customizable all-terrain vehicle that you can use to drop down and explore new planets.



MASS EFFECT

Microsoft • 2007

THE BASICS: It's yet another action role-playing game from the folks who brought you *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* and *Jade Empire*, this time set in a futuristic sci-fi universe where enemy forces are out to destroy the human race.

HOW WAS IT? As clichéd as the setup sounds, this game really spoke to the sci-fi geek buried deep within me. The world looked amazing, with rich environments and loads of places (planets, asteroids, derelict spaceships, etc.) to explore. Dialogue—always important in BioWare games—hits a new level of interactivity now that you can dynamically select tactics and responses as conversations develop. The characters, too, have highly detailed facial expressions. "It's very subtle, but it's a huge thing, the movement in the eyes and the reflection and the detail on these characters," says Project Director Casey Hudson. "Usually in games you don't get this close." BioWare also promises that, unlike in its previous games, the galaxy will remain available for exploration after you've finished the main quest, and new locations are promised for download on Xbox Live. —J.T.



BIOSHOCK

2K Games • Spring 2007

THE BASICS: Since videogames have covered nearly every square foot of land (and, for that matter, the galaxy), it's now time to travel many leagues under the sea and explore *BioShock's* failed 1940s utopia called Rapture. As Ken Levine, president of developer Irrational Games, explains, this first-person adventure is "all about

being confronted with moral dilemmas and making choices."

HOW WAS IT? Freaky, head-scratching, disturbing...when it comes to *BioShock*, I use these adjectives in the best possible way. From the little girls who guzzled on the blood of the dead (and referred to their



pals in the old-time scuba gear as "Mc Bubbles") to the flooded bathrooms with cryptic messages scribbled on the walls, this game was 200 percent atmosphere. Throw in hundreds of ways to genetically alter your character (like speed boosts) and one crazily deep narrative, and *BioShock* is already looking really good. —B.I.

CHROMEHOUNDS

Sega • Summer 2006

I guess someone might enjoy piloting a giant robot across miles of sleepy countryside at golf cart speed just to have a slow-motion shootout with another crawling robot, but I'd rather sit through a load screen. *Chromehounds* looked decent, but it could use a fast-forward button. —R.A.



PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

Sega • Fall 2006

Phantasy Star Online (XB/GC/Dreamcast) fans won't be disappointed with *Universe*: huge monsters, multiple weapon setups (including dual-wielding), A.I. teammates, six-player support, and a full-length, story-driven, single-player role-playing game. Other RPG fans, however, will scoff at frequent load screens, so-so graphics, and repetitive gameplay. —D.H.





Chris Tucker and Jackie Chan got nottin' on these do-gooders.



CRACKDOWN

Microsoft • Fall 2006

THE BASICS: *Crackdown* puts you in charge of a genetically enhanced supersoldier to combat wrongdoings in futuristic metropolis Pacific City. You complete various missions, either solo or with a partner in jump-in-at-any-time co-op, and can increase your abilities—such as shooting, lifting, chucking objects, and driving (some rides will even morph based on your ability)—through repeated use.

HOW WAS IT? *Crackdown* controlled well enough, and the action moved at a

good clip, as superjumps had me crossing rooftops with ease and the targeting system let me focus on any body part. Also intriguing: the game's comic-book art style and over-the-top action: "It's a Hollywood spectacle," says David Jones, creative director at developer Real Time Worlds. But like so many me-too action flicks, *Crackdown's* gameplay felt similar to other open-ended shooters; though entertaining, nothing here convinced me this would raise the bar for the genre.

—G.F.



Developer Silicon Knights hopes to get as many as 100 enemies on the screen.



TOO HUMAN

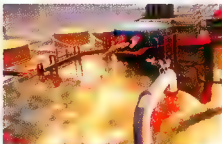
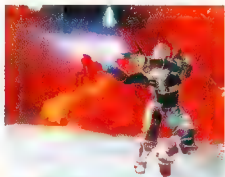
Microsoft • November 2006

THE BASICS: "We've been thinking about this game for over 12 years," Silicon Knights President Denis Dyack says of this high-concept brawler/shooter hybrid steeped in Norse mythology and packing wee role-playing elements (you can upgrade your brawny cybernetic hero with new limbs and weapons). You don't even have to worry about camera control as you wade through robo enemies and towering cyber gods. "We wanted to remove that layer of complexity," Dyack says of the autolcamera that at one point pulls out for a side-scrolling perspective reminiscent of the old-school *Contra* shooters.

state I wouldn't show *Too Human* at a high school science fair, much less the world's most important gaming trade show.

—Mark MacDonald

HOW WAS IT? In a word: disappointing. Solid, combo-friendly controls were lost in a storm of mediocre graphics, lame effects, technical issues (the game often froze for seconds at a time), and a woozy camera usually zoomed so far back it felt like I was playing *Robotron*. I know from our cover story a few months back that this game has great potential, but in its current



VIVA PIÑATA

Microsoft • Fall 2006

The designer of this garden sim claims to have never played *Animal Crossing*. Whether or not you believe him, *Viva Piñata* sure resembles the Nintendo classic, what with all the planting of fruit and darling little animal-like piñatas. It could be unbelievably boring or unbelievably addictive, but I was pleased to see new minigames you play as your piñatas mate—they're supposed to get more challenging for more complex piñatas.



SAINT'S ROW

THQ • Fall 2006

Sure, we've already seen gang wars and ho-recruiting missions in *San Andreas*, but I gotta say, *Saints Row's* graphics proved much easier on the eyes, and the on-foot shooting controls lacked the *GTA* series' spastic randomness. Also, the multiplayer—both co-op and 12-player versus—sounds compelling.





LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

Capcom • Spring 2007

THE BASICS: A cold wind blows through this futuristic third-person shooter from the makers of the *Onimusha* and *Devil May Cry* series. And this cold wind is as much an enemy as the swarming bug baddies or evil "snow pirate" army. The negative-digit temperatures that plague the game's Hoth-style planet suck your energy—or that of the scattered mechs you can hop aboard—forcing you to change up strategy. "Snowstorms make it harder to hit enemies," says Producer Keiji Inafune. "So do you wait

for a storm to subside before attacking an encampment, or do you plunge in despite the weather?" It's a question you'll have to ask your whole team in the promising multiplayer modes.

HOW WAS IT? This *Planet* had atmosphere. And it's not just the graphics that were polished—the control felt just right. With a few tweaks (such as the ability to launch your cool grappling hook while in midair), *Lost Planet* will be a real find. —C.B.



DEAD RISING

Capcom • August 2006

THE BASICS: It may be made in Japan, but *Dead Rising*—a zombie hack-em-up set in a mall, also from *Lost Planet* Producer Keiji Inafune—is formulated for We the People. Just impale any of the zombies with the construction drill, one of the game's many find-them-everywhere weapons, and you'll see. "If a Japanese person were to play this, they'd probably be like, 'Wow, that's too disturbing and gross,'" Inafune says of the drill weapon, which spins rotting victims into gooey shreds. "But when Americans see it, they'll be laughing their butts off."

Wait...laughter? That's hardly the right reaction to a game from the company that made zombieified "survival-horror" famous. But Inafune insists the experience is more *Shaun of the Dead* than *Dawn of the Dead*.

HOW WAS IT? Plowing through fields of zombies—up to 800 on a screen at once—with lawn mowers and bashing them with change-spewing cash registers was funny and fun for a while, but I'm afraid this game's long-term potential might be due for an early grave. —C.B.



TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

Atari • September 2006

Unlimited definitely had that new kind of racing game smell to it—explore and race others on the island of Oahu, Hawaii, via Xbox Live. And even though the controls were a tad too loose, I had a blast creating the race guidelines on this vacation paradise with my new friends. —R.A.



SHADOWRUN

Microsoft • January 2007

If you can't look past bland characters and *GoldenEye*-era environments, *Shadowrun* is a solid shooter with some cool new ideas. I dug swooping down on enemies with the glider, a set of wings that pops out at the press of a button. But please, hire new artists. —R.A.



CURRENT-GEN MULTIPLATFORM

■ If Kratos can't cut it as a god, he always has a future in rhythmic gymnastics.



GOD OF WAR II

PS2 • Sony CEA • February 2007

THE BASICS: You probably have a decent idea of what's going on here: Man kills a god and assumes his throne. Unfortunately, peace of mind still eludes him, so players once again take control of Kratos in this third-person action game that mixes hack-n-slaying with a sick combo system and Greek mythology. The first entry pulled off this combo so sweetly, in fact, that it nearly won our 2005 Game of the Year Award.

HOW WAS IT? *God of War II* featured plenty of additions—Kratos's chain blades could be used as grappling hooks to swing over chasms, and new magic moves and specials integrated into the combo system. "We're really taking [the first game's] combat and opening it up even further while still maintaining the accessibility of it," says Director Cory Barlog. After I easily knocked the eye of a cyclops and slugged over a giant stone pillar with my bare hands, I was inclined to agree. —G.F.



■ Sorry, still no "Stairway to Heaven" here.



GUITAR HERO II

PS2 • RedOctane • Fall 2006

THE BASICS: The reigning rocker returns for an encore, this time adding co-op play, 40 new guitar-lickin' hits, and, well...that's about it.

HOW WAS IT? If you jammed to the first game, you won't have a hard time picking up the notes here: Tame the six-stringed beast to a variety of rock tunes using the bitchin' life-sized guitar controller. Banging your head with a bud was the newest addition to the set list—player one tackles the lead guitar, while player two battles the bass. Not only will you perform in sync with your bandmate, but you'll also share both a combo and star meter, meaning you'll have to coordinate your rock-outs in order to keep the crowd clapping. But while the co-op mode struck a powerful chord, I still need to peck the final song list before I can give my full approval. Of course, I will likely be waiting in line regardless. —M.D.



DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2

PS2/XB • THQ • Fall 2006

THE BASICS: Humans return as the foolish fodder in this novel alien-action sequel. Along with the necessary new weapons and areas to annihilate, a co-op mode brings two players closer through the maiming of mankind.

HOW WAS IT? Like every sequel to a game that didn't blow balls, *Destroy All Humans! 2* played exactly like the original. That means those who enjoyed the first game will likely want to hop back

into the mother ship. But if you weren't cool with big-brained Crypto the first time, developer Pandemic has added a few (but not a whole lot of) new features to keep the invasion fresh. Most notably, a larger open-world ripe for rampage (the story takes place in '60s San Francisco and branches off to Japan, London, and Russia). Sure, it may be a speedy sequel, but at least some developers out there are still probing the current-gen consoles.

—M.D.



RESERVOIR DOGS

PS2/XB • Eidos • Fall 2006

Will premission rendered cut-scenes from this dialogue-heavy and cult-fave heist flick be enough to offset the game's generic driving and shooting levels, in which you control the five colorfully named characters? Not likely. Eidos will make use of the movie's excellent soundtrack and a Lion's Gate-approved backstory, so it's got that. —G.F.



XENOSAGA EPISODE III

PS2 • Namco Bandai • Fall 2006

Namco's space-opera RPG reaches its climax in this epic finale, which offers deeper gameplay and slicker visuals than its disappointing predecessor. But I have to wonder if the story line will suffer from an early curtain call (the series was originally planned as five games). —S.R.





■ Fantasy folks gather for another airdrop of hair products and impractical belly-baring armor.



FINAL FANTASY XII

PS2 • Square Enix • October 2006

■ The game's missions are the least linear yet so co-op players can go do their own thing.



SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS COMBINED ASSAULT

PS2 • Sony CEA • November 2006

THE BASICS: Sick of reviewers griping about bad guys that have been too brain-dead in past installments of its military-shooter series, *SOCOM* developer Zipper "has definitely taken the binders off them for this sequel," says Senior Designer CJ Heine. *Combined Assault*'s more gung-ho foes come in three styles, defined by their weapons: hidden snipers who nail you from afar, machine gunners

who pin you down, and shotgunners who flush you out. "You'll need to send in your dudes to draw fire and act more strategically," Heine says, adding that you'll have help from new ground vehicles (but still no aircraft), plus new weapons—such as a shotgun you can snap on to long-range rifles. Best of all: You can play cooperatively online (or via a LAN) through the campaign with three war buddies.

HOW WAS IT? With enhanced connectivity with the new PSP *SOCOM* game (*Fireteam Bravo 2*), backward compatibility with *SOCOM 3* online maps, and an open microphone for voice chat (no more jabbing a button to jabber), *Combined Assault* was state-of-the-art *SOCOM*. I didn't get to battle enough bad guys to tell if they were really much brainier, though.

SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS

PS2 • XB • VU Games • Fall 2006

Great source material, solid shooting mechanics, multiple playable characters who do all of Tony Montana's dirty work, a "f*** you" button—say hello to one of the most promising *Grand Theft Auto* clones in years. Just clean up those visuals and I'll be more than ready to rebuild this drug lord's criminal empire.



DIRGE OF CERBERUS FINAL FANTASY VII

PS2 • Square Enix • August 2006

And to think, the CG flick *Advent Children* was supposed to be the black sheep of Square's *Final Fantasy VII* Compilation. Nope, that dishonor belongs to *Dirge*, a shooter starring Vincent Valentine—who returns to Midgar with awful controls and a camera that's positioned so close that his "flowing locks can take up half the screen. Ugh.



■ Okami's lupine (and artistically inclined) hero has no trouble sticking it to his enemies.



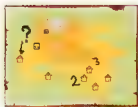
OKAMI

PS2 • Capcom • September 2006

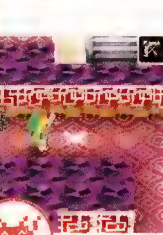
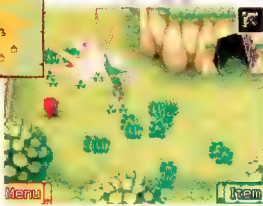
THE BASICS: A *Zelda*-style action-RPG where you play a wolf-god on a mission to restore beauty and life to a fairy-tale version of ancient Japan.

HOW WAS IT? "O god!" Isn't just a (very) rough translation of the game's title ("kami" being Japanese for "god")—it's what any *Zelda* fan will be thinking over and over as they play their way through this amazing adventure. Between *Okami*'s gorgeous, stylized graphics, its intriguing, puzzle-filled dungeons, and the truly innovative interface (players "draw" on the screen with a magic brush to affect the world, creating bombs, changing day to night, making the wind blow, etc.), this was one of the most polished, original, and thoroughly enjoyable adventures I'd played in years.

HANDHELDS



■ You can use the touch screen and stylus to make notes on Phantom Hourglass' maps.



■ Not shown: The new Madonna-themed skin. Not wanted: One starring Paris Hilton.



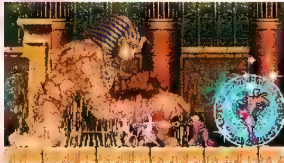
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

DS • Nintendo • Winter 2006

THE BASICS: Like every *Zelda* before it (well, excluding the crappy CD-i games), lovable Link gets on his knees for some deep-down dungeon-crawling. Only don't expect to fight off fiends by hammering away on buttons—the stylus controls all the action this go-around.

HOW WAS IT? At first, getting used to the dumbed-down interface was a chore, but after touring the land with Link, the difficulty drifted and the intuition sailed in; everything felt surprisingly natural, despite the fact that I never pushed a button. All the typical *Zelda* actions were performed

purely using the DS' touch screen: Stroking it made Link roll, tapping an enemy made him attack, drawing a path determined where he threw the boomerang, and so on. Simplistic? Sure, but you're likely to brush off the wacky controls once you paint the bigger adventure on the screen. —M.D.



■ *Portrait of Ruin* will even feature locales outside of Drac's castle, such as Egypt.

CASTLEVANIA: PORTRAIT OF RUIN

DS • Konami • October 2006

THE BASICS: Because we really can't get enough of Konami's brilliant *Metrodroid-vania* adventures, here comes yet another variation on the established *Symphony of the Night* (PS1) concept. This time, you play an American whip-slinger who must face a mysterious new vampire residing in Dracula's abode circa WWII.

HOW WAS IT? *Ruin* seemed to be every bit as amazing as last year's excellent *Dawn of Sorrow*, but with snazzy visuals (lots of nifty 3D elements in the backgrounds) and a wide variety of settings, both indoor and outdoor. Even better, an original gameplay system lets you to switch to a second character (a

female magic user named Charlotte) for a second set of attacks, or bring out both for explosive team attacks. A co-op wireless mode would push this *Castlevania* over the edge. Will it happen? Director Koji Igarashi hinted to us that he wants to include some multiplayer functionality. Fingers crossed.... —S.B.

SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS FIRETEAM BRAVO 2

PSP • Sony CEA • November 2006

The dead-on autoaim in the first PSP game practically had it playing itself, so I was happy to see things weren't quite so snappy in this sequel, which adds more weight to the heavier weapons and makes them slower to track targets. Oh, and calling in the new air strikes to take out anything—even one enemy—was pretty sweet.



STAR FOX DS

DS • Nintendo • Fall 2006

The brunt of the game lets you fly anywhere (no rails), as you target and destroy enemy ships and pillars, all from comfortably inside a stylus-controlled Arwing. A simple turn-based-strategy element allowed me to draw jerky flight paths, which broke up the potentially monotonous in-air portion. Local and online multiplayer modes should also help the overall experience. —Shawn Smith





KILLZONE: LIBERATION

PSP • Sony CEA • October 2006

THE BASICS: Things have changed in the *Killzone* universe in this sequel set just two months after the original PS2 shooter. Just look at the perspective, now set to a third-person, top-down view rather than tricky-to-control-on-PSP first-person. Developer Guerrilla Games says it made the change to foster more of a play-in-short-bursts portable experience. "It all depends on which weapon you use," says Test Lead Sebastian Downie. "Using a shotgun makes it more run-and-gun. Wielding machine guns takes more strategy."

You'll also find A.I. allies that watch your back or take out specific targets, or you can play cooperatively with a friend via ad hoc or infrastructure modes. "A buddy makes the game a lot more tactical," says Producer Steven Ter Heide. "You can use him to flank enemies."

HOW WAS IT? With objects you can duck behind, jackable turreted vehicles (drive 'em in one direction and fire in another), and A.I. buddies you can send out to draw enemy fire, *Liberation* seemed surprisingly deep. —C.B.



■ When you get sick of single-player stuff, multiplayer is there for you with deathmatch and capture the flag, plus remote-mine boobytraps.

DONKEY KONG: KING OF SWING DS

DS • Nintendo • 2007

Similar in spirit to the simple, yet brilliant, *Jungle Beat* (GC) conga control scheme (except with more of a physics slant), you use only the L and R buttons to induce some serious swinging, jumping, and squashing. While the game has rich *DK Country*-styled scenery, *King of Swing DS* could use a little more variety in the objectives category.



S.S.



■ The more people that download your custom puzzles, the more tools you'll unlock for designing them.



MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG 2: MARCH OF THE MINIS

DS • Nintendo • Winter 2006

THE BASICS: The age-old rivalry between Mario and Donkey Kong—and DK's forbidden love of human females—has yet to go cold with this "find the exit" action-puzzler sequel. The stylus is your new best friend as you wind up legions of toy Marios to collect power-ups and utilize or avoid other *Super Mario Bros.* fare like Fire Flowers, floating platforms, and koopas, then carefully guide each and every Mario to the exit.

HOW WAS IT? I was quickly addicted to the early stages (essentially tutorials) and to the break-in-the-action boss battles. Unfortunately, the short E3 demo didn't feature the level editor promised in the final version. With this editor, you can share custom-made designs (you know, spell out "boobs" with bricks) with players all over the world via Wi-Fi—and download other people's levels to boot.

—S.S.



FINAL FANTASY III

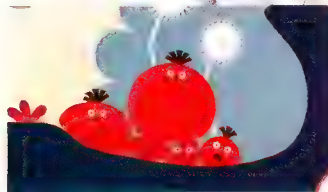
DS • Square Enix • September 2006

Japan's third *Fantasy* finally materializes on an American system. And this ain't just a sloppy port of a crusty role-playing game—the adventure features updated 3D graphics, complete stylus control, and new story twists. Need I remind you again that it's the first time it's been released in America? Well, I just did, kupo!



M.D.

HANDHELDS



■ An original game for the PSP? We're as shocked as these LocoRocos.



LOCOROCO

PSP • Sony CEA • September 2006

THE BASICS: Weird—It's a DS game on the PSP! *LocoRoco* is a platformer that you control using the L and R buttons to "tilt" the screen and cause your bubblicious little blobs to fall, bounce, or slide through the levels.

HOW WAS IT? The game was a little bit tough to control at first, and I hate to admit that I found myself wishing I had a touch screen and stylus, since the gameplay is very similar to the brilliantly

designed and executed *Kirby: Canvas Curse* (DS). But I did get used to it, and I eventually found myself enjoying the whimsical levels that required both imagination and technique to complete. With 40 stages in all and six different types of LocoRocos to play, the game should definitely offer variety. I just have to wonder if the limited and simplistic control scheme will be powerful enough to keep gamers going through genuinely complex platforming challenges. —J.T.



EVERY EXTEND EXTRA

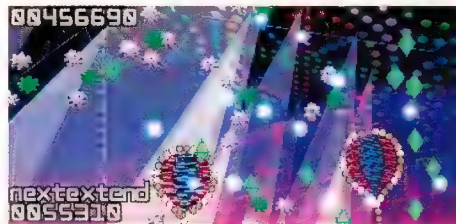
PSP • Buena Vista • Fall 2006



THE BASICS: It's obvious from the start that *Every Extend Extra* is the work of Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the guy behind music fusion favorites *Lumines* and *Rez* (PS2). Visually, *EEE* revisits the stark, wire-frame computerscapes of *Rez*: simple geometric shapes and bright colors floating in open space. As far as gameplay goes, you're in for something different. Dodging swarms of abstract enemy shapes, disco-ball bosses, and psychedelic blasts of gunfire, you must charge up and lay a bomb, blowing up as much stuff as possible without destroying yourself. In practice,

this amounts to keeping track of two different objects in an asteroid field of obstacles.

HOW WAS IT? The kiosk at E3 showing *EEE* sadly lacked headphones, so I couldn't quite tell what kind of role music plays in the game, though you can be sure—as in every Mizuguchi-made game—it'll be a big part of the experience. The underlying, simple arcade-style game was compelling enough on its own—fast, flashy, and addictive. —R.A.



ELITE BEAT AGENTS

DS • Nintendo • Fall 2006

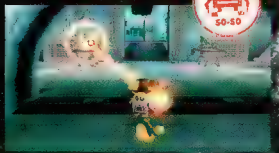
Get ready for a rhythm-action game that's quirkier than *PaRappa and Gitaroo Man* put together. On a basic level, *Elite Beat Agents* starts simple—you're touching the screen in time with the beat—but the hilarious comic-book-style story lines and rockin' tunes made it all worthwhile. —S.B.



RATCHET & CLANK: SIZE MATTERS

PSP • Sony CEA • Spring 2007

I suppose *Size Matters* refers to the fact that the only thing notable about this inevitable *Ratchet & Clank* PSP game is that you can play it on the go. The gadget-obsessed jump-n-shoot action felt just like those PS2 games, but with the expected control compromise. —R.A.





METAL GEAR SOLID: PORTABLE OPS

PSP • Konami • Winter 2006

THE BASICS: Sure, strategy card games and digital comics are all well and good, but this is the *Metal Gear* that PSP fans have been waiting for. Set in 1970, six years after the events of *MGS3*, *Portable Ops* is a full-fledged new addition to the stealth-action series; the game includes both a solo mission and an online deathmatch mode.

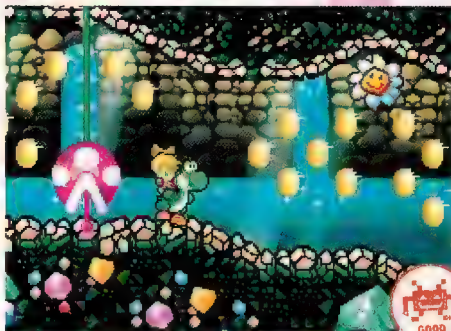
HOW WAS IT? Because the playable demo was multiplayer only, the answer to

that question depends a lot on your perspective. If, like me, you found the online play in *MGS3: Subsistence* conceptually interesting but clunky controlwise, *Portable Ops* won't change your mind. However, the sharp, smooth graphics are probably the best I've ever seen on the PSP, which bodes very well for the single-player game. And let's face it—that's the half most of us really care about, anyway.

—M.M.



■ Recruit soldiers in the single-player game, and they'll aid you online.



YOSHI'S ISLAND 2

DS • Nintendo • Fall 2006

THE BASICS: Nintendo finally answers fans' cries for a follow-up to the Super NES classic *Yoshi's Island*. It wasn't broken, so developer Artoon wisely opted not to fix it—expect the same mix of quirky graphics, egg-tossing action, and screen-filling enemies you loved in the original.

HOW WAS IT? This platformer rocked the DS with rewarding two-screen gameplay (you hop-n-bop seamlessly across both screens), a distinctive visual style, and some clever new twists (you can switch to

Baby Peach and Baby Donkey Kong, each with unique powers). Solid pick-up-and-play control made *Island 2* instantly likable, even if the level design didn't branch too far from the key-hunting mold established by the original game.

One thing to consider: In the wake of the excellent *New Super Mario Bros.*, this game will be up against some lofty expectations. Perhaps adding some multiplayer action or touch-panel minigames could push this one over the edge of awesomeness.

—S.B.



■ We're shocked that Y2Z hails from the team behind *Blinx* (XB). Way to not suck this time!

GANGS OF LONDON

PSP • Sony CEA • Fall 2006

Gangs of London—from the guys behind PS2's flawed *The Getaway*—and sporting a similar third-person action/driving feel—sure crams in a lot. It features graphic, novel-style cut-scenes, multiple story lines, characters that level up, squad tactics, and loads of minigames. But all this could be for naught if the devs don't give the gameplay a tune-up. —G.F.



BROOKTOWN: SENIOR YEAR

PSP • Konami • Spring 2007

Konami produces the most popular dating-simulation series of all time in Japan (*Tokimeki Memorial*), so if any company can bring the game Stateside, it's them. *Senior Year* succeeds by blending hilarious writing (packed with subtle double entendres) with addictive minigames. It's goofy, quirky, and fun...exactly the kind of game the PSP needs. —S.B.



All The Xbox 360 and PS3 versions of *Call of Duty 3* will look about the same, although the PS3 game will have more light sources and other touches. All screens are from the Xbox 360 unless otherwise noted.



THE BIG ONE



EGM EXTRAS

Listen up, grunt! March to cod3.1UP.com for more exclusive screens and video footage of *Call of Duty 3* in action—plus watch the developers putting real WWII weapons to the test. It all starts the week of July 4.

By Evan Slatmon

From rocking a Sherman to rowing a boat, *Call of Duty 3* brings the world of war to every system. But will battle-weary players reenlist?

Wow, Americans really like war," Atsushi Inaba, the Japanese president of Viewtiful Joe and *Okami* maker Clover Studios, says as he surveys all the virtual battlefields at this year's E3 game show. No kidding. Bombarding players with dozens of *DuBya DuBya Two* titles named every combo of "duty," "honor," "medal," and "brothers," the game biz has become a regular war factory in recent years.

But how many ways can you shoot a

virtual Nazi in his virtual face? That's a question for the guys at Treyarch making *Call of Duty 3*, the most intense chapter in the WWII shooter series, which Activision will publish for the Xbox 360 (plus the Xbox, PlayStation 2, and PSP) this fall and the PS3 and Nintendo Wii at launch.

"We get that [question] a lot," says Treyarch President Dave Stohl, seated at a conference table inside the company's Santa Monica, CA, HQ. "I think that people get the grand nature of [WWII], and when you deliver on that bigger and better, they

just keep buying into it. This franchise is so much about cinematic intensity—we're really excited about next gen because it's allowing us to deliver that in a much more 'immersive battlefield' kind of way."

Perhaps a more appropriate question, then: Why have WWII games remained so popular? Even as the rush seemed to be dying down, *Call of Duty 2* became the number-one-selling 360 title in 2005—75 percent of the people who bought the console bought the game. How do you explain gamers' love affair with a war that's more

than half a century old and didn't have a freaking laser beam to its name? "Listen," Stohl continues, "it's epic in scale, it's good vs. evil, the theater of war is huge, and the history is significant. But I think mostly it's the fact that the world thinks of it as a 'world war' with so many countries involved, and I don't think we see anything else like that, even to this day. I think the perception is that that's not going to happen again—hopefully." Because let's face it: Nothing puts a damper on your gaming experience like *World War III*. ▶

► **Make games, not war**

The first thing that strikes you about *CoD3*—as is often the case with next-gen titles—is how damn good the game looks. For those keeping score at home: No, it doesn't look OMG EXACTLY LIKE REAL LIFE!!!! just yet (games won't for at least another hardware generation), but the leap past *CoD2* is a considerable one. Most of the in-game systems have been rebuilt from scratch: Characters move more realistically; environments are laced with high-res textures and more shaders than you can shake a meaningless piece of tech jargon at (trust us, they're cool); and explosion, lighting, and gunfire effects are all well done. But it's the details that really matter. Foliage, for instance, flattens when someone walks over it (a fact that you're able to use to your strategic advantage, of course, if that someone happens to be an enemy). Grenades leave realistically scorched earth in their wake. Surfaces react to bullets the way they should: Grass is different from steel is different from

wood is different from human flesh. Put more simply: *CoD2* looked like a high-end PC game, while *CoD3* looks like a high-end next-gen Xbox 360 game.

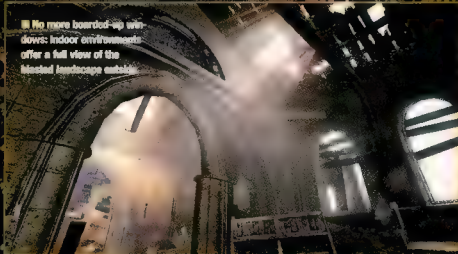
Perhaps the most impressive technological achievement we've seen from the game is simply how many human characters the team has been able to get onscreen at once. Ducking around the side of a barn to find an entire platoon of your men arriving for backup—or, worse, two dozen Nazis With Guns™ looking to turn you into human schnitzel—is something that simply has not been possible on more primitive hardware. Being surrounded by dozens and dozens of fully articulated soldiers getting their war on while you try to stay alive makes all the difference and moves things a significant step closer to the living, breathing battlefield experience that this sort of game aspires to.

At one point in our demo, we scan the horizon with our binoculars. It's dusk, but we can clearly make out a line of bomber planes lumbering across the sky.

Suddenly, one takes major damage and slowly begins to plummet, gaining speed until it becomes a fiery orb descending into the earth. We follow its journey through the double lens, only to bump heading into an approaching group of what looks like fifty grunts climbing over an embankment along the horizon line. Amidst the smoke-enveloped chaos we can't see their uniforms to make out whether they're friendlies. Several seconds later we get our answer in the form of shouts and bellows, all of which seem to rhyme with "farfengugen." We clutch our rifle, find cover behind a large rock, and wish to god we'd stayed with our battalion. It's moments like these that set the tone of the game, giving the impression that the battlefield is alive—that things are happening on their own timeline, seemingly independent of one another.

Seeing some action

The team at Treyarch doesn't want anything that'll pull you out of the heat of the ►



► No more boarded-up windows: indoor environments offer a full view of the needed landscape outside.





World War 2 Go

Developer Amaze is working on a PSP installment in the *CoD* series, set for simultaneous release with its console brethren. The game will focus on the Normandy Breakout as well, but will complement the story of the console versions rather than repeat it. Expect a 10-12 hour campaign seen through the eyes of several Allied soldiers, along with a host of four-player multiplayer modes. Let's just hope they can come up with a first-person control scheme that works on the PSP.

■ Missions are less linear, often hitting you with many pressing problems (charging tanks, tanking foes, enemy tanks) and letting you choose your battles.

► battle. Hence the new "Battle Actions." "These are things players have experienced in past *CoD* games, but that they're now having to actually do themselves," says Lead Designer Jeremy Luytjes.

Rather than simply pressing A to plant that explosive, for example, you'll actually have to go through the physical steps required to plant and detonate it. Instead of picking off enemies from the side of a boat while your squad mates row, you'll actually have to grab an oar and use the analog sticks to help get said boat not-so-gently down the stream. And hand-to-hand combat is now an occasional part of the game: At one point in our demo we entered a house we thought was abandoned only to find a German soldier lunging at us from the shadows. We're suddenly locked in a *Condemned*-style melee combat sequence, trying to wrestle a weapon from his hands and beat him into submission. While not all of these scenarios have actually been integrated into the game yet, the logic is sound; the more control you can give the player throughout the experience, after all, the better.

Viva la breakout

CoD3 takes place during the campaign known as the Normandy Breakout, following the D-Day invasion. Once the Allies took the beaches, the real battle began: the road to the liberation of Paris—an ordeal that cost hundreds of thousands of American lives. In the process of communicating the engagements, the team is trying to maximize its storytelling efficiency by

erasing loading times. In between levels, you'll watch the story unfold using the in-game engine rather than loading screens.

The theater of war has been expanded as well: In addition to American and British forces, the Polish resistance and the Canadian army are joining the story (you'll play as a soldier for each country). The team is fortifying the details to suit this complexity: When you're with the British army, for example, you'll fight alongside the French resistance.

It may seem like mere semantics, but it's just this sort of wide-angle vision that Treyarch is focusing much of its efforts on. "We had lots of conversations about movies like *The Longest Day*," says Stahl, "where you see a story being told from different perspectives—all connected. A lot of times this gets lost in the typical 'lone soldier' sort of game. We really wanted to bring that epic, coordinated battle idea to *CoD3*. Sure, it's interesting to play from different perspectives because you get to see different weapons, troop types, approaches to battle, that kind of stuff. But tying it together to make that make sense is what's really important. I think what we've done this time really makes you understand the connections between the different nations fighting in the coordinated battle."

Behind enemy lines (of code)

Of course, this sort of large-scale management means very little without equally compelling low-level coordination on the battlefield. Much effort is, unsurprisingly, ►





World War II

In addition to all the other versions of the game, Treyarch is working on a rendition of *CoD3* for Nintendo's next console. While the Wii game, seen in the screens above, won't look as snazzy graphically as it does on the more-powerful Xbox 360 and PS3, Treyarch is taking advantage of the Wii's special motion-sensing abilities: Aiming and shooting will be done with the Wii remote. "Typically the reticule in *CoD* games is centered on the screen," says Producer Sam Nourian. "With the [Wii] game, because of its accelerometers and a position-pointing device in the actual remote, we've freed the player up. We're going to be spending quite a bit of time in the coming months tweaking that until we get it just right."



Will the PS3 game use the controller's motion sensors? Treyarch says the Wii version has given them a head start in that department.

► being put into the game's A.I.: When you look around the battlefield you'll see the constantly shifting nature of war put into action. Allied and enemy commanders order directives to their troops, point them in necessary directions, and shout at them to fall back when needed.

Destructible cover is just waiting for your bullets. Approaching a group of Nazi soldiers stationed outside a farmhouse in the dead of night, we fire away. One of the troops is hiding behind a wooden fence; as our bullets pierce the stacked planks and turn them to splinters, the soldier panics and runs to find new cover. It's done with little fanfare, but that's the nature of good A.I.: You don't notice it because it's simply doing what it's supposed to. "When we got this up and running for the first time there were dozens of us crowded around a computer checking it out," says Luyties. "It's that kind of moment that makes working on next-gen hardware really fun."

Speaking of subtlety, a global wind system has been placed atop the environment as well, affecting the special effects and various other pieces of the game. Of course, you don't see wind on the surface;

rather, it makes its presence felt in more roundabout ways. Try chucking a smoke grenade, for example. In *CoD2*, when you would throw a smoke grenade and a tank drove through it, the cloud wasn't affected. This time around, it will react accordingly: when a tank drives through, the smoke it will crawl up the sides and creep outward. Shoot your machine gun into the cloud and you'll see little swirls come out the other end. Likewise, trees, grass, and other foliage will sway in accordance with the airstream, bending and shaking in harmony. Again, these are seemingly minor additions, which, when taken together, become infinitely more significant than their individual components.

To implement all these graphical and gameplay features, the team has nearly doubled in size since releasing the company's *CoD2* current-gen follow-up, *Big Red One*. "When you see the game," Stoltz says, "hopefully you'll understand why [we staffed up]." We just hope this small army finishes *CoD3* before American gamers get fed up with blasting virtual Nazis.

Who are we kidding? World War III will probably come first.





War Party: *CoD3* Multiplayer

No first-person shooter is complete without multiplayer modes—and both the Xbox 360 and PS3 versions will have the same or similar online features (multiplayer on the Wii has yet to be determined). You'll access the 24-player battles—up from eight players in *CoD2*—over either single- or splitscreen. Upon entering a multiplayer match, players will choose their class, ranging from medic to sniper, each with a special ability that improves as you earn points and go up in rank. The scout, for example, can initially call down only a couple of artillery shells, but after a few promotions he can order a megaton barrage with greater accuracy. Online leaderboards track your stats and even break down rankings by specialty (the top riflemen, for instance).

You also get a new multiplayer mode, called War, which has Axis and Allied teams battling for control of strategic locations that can only be taken in a certain order. But we can't forget about the vehicles: Jeeps, sidecar motorcycles, and Sherman tanks are all included for your driving pleasure. They're also multiple-occupancy, allowing one player to drive while the others take control of the turrets and mounted machine guns. It's not quite *Battlefield 2*, but it's not exactly a far cry either (game pun intended). Our demo of the multiplayer action proved once again that the immutable truth of videogames remains: *running over your friends with tanks is fun.* **A+**

■ *Plunging Henry's tank!*
Here's a shot from the PS3 game, which at this point looks the same as on Xbox 360.



review crew

we don't really know how to say this...but mario, well, he's kind of a big deal

THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS...

This is getting ridiculous. To put it bluntly: The length of the reviews list below is embarrassing. Fortunately, E3 coverage helps mask the problem, but why is it that summer months give us so little? Every year we hear publishers bitch that many well-received games get buried in the avalanche of fall titles (anyone remember the *Prince of Persia* sob story?). Well, guess what: We have three months wide open for them.

To see how to do it right, just check out the industry to which gaming is most often compared—movies. Hollywood breaks up the year into two seasons—summer blockbusters and the holiday awards period—and it does just fine. Editors, readers, kids—we all play games year-round. So release the next *Halo*, *Metal Gear Solid*, and *Zelda* in the fall. But give secondary franchises and standalone titles—the *Sly*, *Pikmin*, and *Psychonauts*—a chance to breathe. Hey, we're thrilled Mario made an appearance this month, winning GOTM in the process. And I have a feeling people will buy his game despite the season.

—Greg Ford, Reviews Editor



GAME OF THE MONTH

GAME DIRECTORY

- Xbox 360**
- 88 Final Fantasy XI Online
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- 97 Big Brain Academy
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- 99 Reviews Archive

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS.

THE REVIEW CREW

No refunds. All scores are final

DAN "SHOE" HSG • Editor-in-Chief

The Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) is now over, which means Shoe's left off dreaming about the games that he got to sample but now can't play anymore until they're finished...months from now. Betcha feel real sorry for him, don't you?

Favorite E3 games: *Gears of War, Mass Effect, Metroid Prime 3, Spore* (PC)
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



SHANE BETTENHAUSEN • Exec. Editor

Shane intends to make use of this summer's bleak gaming drought by going up on all the 2005 games he missed, beating interns at fighting games, and relaxing poolside.

Favorite E3 games: *Wii Sports, Yoshi's Island 2, Virtua Fighter 5, Metal Gear Solid 4, Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops, WarioWare: Smooth Moves*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



JENNIFER TSAO • Managing Editor

Jen broke with E3 tradition this year, skipping the hotchicks, party crashing, and photo ops with B-list celebs and/or hot booth babes. She did, however, start a rumble with the crazed Nintendo fanboys—"c'mon, some things are sacred."

Favorite E3 games: *Mass Effect, BioShock, SingStar, Wii Sports, Spore*
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



CRISPIN BOYER • Senior Editor

Crispin spent his ninth E3 (jeez, he's getting old) with the usual rituals: sweating, cursing at swabby fanboys, and challenging new coworkers to arm-wrestling matches when they show up at a party wearing stealthy metal-concert T-shirts.

That's Crispin's "look."
Favorite E3 games: *Gears of War, Super Mario Galaxy*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



BRYAN INTIHAR • Previews Editor

Bryan pretty much looked like this for the entire time at E3 after seeing that glorious *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* trailer. If you say any bad about the game, he'll punch you in the neck.

Favorite E3 games: *Gears of War, BioShock, The Darkness, Resistance: Fall of Man, Wii Sports*
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com



GREG FORD • Reviews Editor

What was new at this year's E3? Well, the Nintendo booth was still packed (and that weird smell still lingered). And despite rumors to the contrary, the booth babes were as bountiful as ever. The big diff:

Ford left L.A. with only two hotchicks—amazing!
Favorite E3 games: *Army of Two, God of War II, Spore*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



MICHAEL DONAHOE • News/Features Ed.

Since Michael's the noob on staff, here's some freaky facts about him: 1) He's a pro-wrestling nut, 2) he adores *American Idol*, 3) he prefers arm wrestling over handshakes, and 4) his favorite meal is emu.

Favorite E3 games: *Fatal Fantasy XIII, Army of Two, Spore, Heavenly Sword, Gears of War, SingStar*
Blog: egmiked.1UP.com



MARK MACDONALD • Editor-at-Large

When he wasn't busting his ass on E3 clips for GameVideos.com, Mark spent this month arguing with Shane and Shoe (correct grade for the PS3's E3 showing: C+), and watching the *Halo 2* and *MGS4* trailers over and over.

Favorite E3 games: *Mass Effect, MGS4, Halo 3, Army of Two, Wii Sports, Zelda: Twilight Princess*
Blog: egmmark.1UP.com



JAY FRECHETTE • Editorial Intern

Jay's pretty fired—he spent his first couple of months as a new intern for EGM writing reviews, getting beat in *Soul Calibur III*, surviving his first E3, and holding out to his job by keeping the editors supplied with plenty of baked goods (with some help from his mom).

Favorite E3 games: *Wii Sports, Halo 3, Spore*
Blog: egmjay.1UP.com



ROBERT ASHLEY • Staff Reviewer

From Shanghai to San Francisco to Los Angeles, Robert traversed the globe this month to play games and talk to the people who make them. Not bad for a redneck from the empty plains of Bush country.

Favorite E3 games: *WarioWare: Smooth Moves, Spore, Heavenly Sword, Super Mario Galaxy*
Blog: robertashley.1UP.com



PATRICK MAURO • Staff Reviewer

Devastated by the booth-babe crackdown, this syndicated radio guy boycotted E3 and spent his time in L.A. at Dodger Stadium and the beach burning his white body—he'll take a sunburn over swabby fanboys any day of the week.

Favorite E3 games: *Madden NFL/MCA4 Football 07*
Blog: Nope



GREG SEWART • Staff Reviewer

Sewart didn't hit E3 this year on account of his being so depressed about turning 30 that he refused to come out of his room. Good thing he could download all of those sweet vids on GameVideos.com. That way he got to get the E3 experience—without

the BO.
Favorite E3 games: *Guitar Hero II, Forza 2, Mass Effect*
Blog: stewy.1UP.com



■ We call on 1UP.COM when we are in dire need of help (or are just lazy). Quick as lightning, we come together like Voltron and form the most devastating, unstoppable review force in the universe.

THE RATING SYSTEM & AWARDS

 10-7 GOOD	 6.5-5 FAIR	 4.5-0 BAD
 Platinum For games with a Straight 10s. For games that are life-changing.	 Gold For games with an average score of 9.0 or higher.	 Silver For games with a mean score of 8.0 or higher.
 GAME OF THE MONTH The highest-scoring game each month gets a star.	 SHAME OF THE MONTH The lowest-rated game with unanimously bad scores.	

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

Want to skip some battles like this? It'll only take you 80 or so hours to hit the good stuff!

Gyogi

ONLINE

Xbox 360

FINAL FANTASY XI ONLINE

Like a shiny silver time capsule

GREG S: Outside of widescreen support and a slight resolution upgrade (you can play the game in 720p), *Final Fantasy XI Online* on 360 is the same game we've been playing on PS2 for years. (This makes some sense, since you share the game's servers with PC and PS2 gamers.) It's a relatively deep massively multiplayer online RPG in which combat requires more than just using the auto-attack command—it still feels shallow, though, compared to something like *Oblivion*.

And *FFXI* remains a hostile place for newcomers. If you can't find yourself a sugar daddy who'll power-level you through the early grind, prepare to spend countless hours working on your character before anything remotely cool happens. You'll eventually leave that dull existence as the difficulty ratchets up, but then you're pretty much required to join a group of players to make any further progress. With solo-friendly massively multiplayer games out

there—including *World of Warcraft*—*FFXI*'s system is downright annoying. Sure, those games reside on PC, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't hold *FFXI* to higher standards. Its rewards require more time, effort, and money than any but the most hardcore *Final Fantasy* fans will be willing to spend.

JENNIFER: Maybe you're one of those four-year-in-the-making *FFXI* experts itching to play your life's work on a next-gen console, with all its expansions wrapped in (that'd be *Chains of Promathia* and *Treasures of Aht Urhgan*) and better graphics—in which case you know *all* about the game's deep complexity and don't need to bother with the rest of us schmoes. Unfortunately, the rest of us schmoes are going to have real problems with this once-respectable MMORPG that just can't keep up with today's competition. Newbies will find themselves abandoned and bored on an ugly, lonely level tread-

mill that doesn't even introduce basic gameplay concepts. MMORPGs may be social experiences, but the early game needs to motivate you to get to higher levels where group gaming pays off. Here, I just didn't want to go on.

MARK: Jen and Greg are right: *FFXI* has dated graphics and is *unbelievably* unfriendly to new players. But ya know what? I got sucked in anyway, building my character and making friends online for 50-plus hours—and I barely scratched the surface. The massive size and scope are the draw here: *FFXI* is triggin' *ginormous* (even a single town can take hours to navigate), with enough skills, items, classes, and quests to keep you busy for years. Literally, for years. If you enjoy the social aspects of MMOs and have the time and patience to get over the steep learning curve, you'll find rewards in the deeper reaches of this sprawling *Fantasy*. **A-**

Hidden Fees?

While the *Final Fantasy XI Online* packaging does mention needing a credit card to play online, it's in rather fine print. Know that you'll have to pay a fee over and above the regular price of Xbox Live.

The good news? You don't need a Live Gold membership (and its \$50 annual fee) to play *FFXI* online. A free Silver membership, which requires a broadband connection, combined with a PlayOnline account (*FFXI*'s online shell) works just fine.



Good: An already established online community
Bad: Looks and feels like a 4-year-old game
Price of Freedom? \$12.95/month



THE VERDICT
8.0 (out of 10)

6.0 6.5 7.0

GREG S. JENNIFER MARK

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix
Players: 1 (1-10,000-plus online, according to the box)
ESRB: Teen

www.playonline.com

Video Games



Juiced

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MotoGP URT 3

The MotoGP series is the definitive motorcycle racing game for the Xbox and PC. The game accurately captures the excitement of Grand Prix motorcycle racing. This time, MotoGP 3 is taking the franchise to the extreme, expanding beyond the realms of Grand Prix racing to the high adrenaline Street Racing. Players hone their skills on the track through the Grand Prix series.



Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War

Ten thousand years have passed since the treasonous acts of Chaos toppled the Golden Age of mankind. Fires burn brightly throughout the galaxies, illuminating carnage and slaughter as mankind defends itself from ancient enemies. Control one of four unique races in head-to-head or cooperative multiplayer action, where faith, skill, and strategy are key to ruling the galaxy.



Full Spectrum Warrior

For the last 15 years the corrupt dictator, Sopot, has oppressed the people of the Commonwealth. His relentless pursuit of unification with the neighboring United Republic has left the country soaked in unnecessary bloodshed and poverty. Propaganda is plastered through communities and a Public Information Building, built as a tribute to the self-centered chancellor spews news broadcasts with claims of victory as more and more soldiers fall victim.



Big Mutha Truckers 2

Big Mutha Truckers 2 begins with Ma Jackson being taken into police custody for tax evasion. The only way she can win her case is by hiring Cousin Jacob, the most "fancy-talkin' legal fella" this side of Boogey's Canyon. Players will be challenged to locate six jurors and raise the cash needed to bribe them to let Ma off by trucking, trading, wheeling and dealing.



MX vs. ATV Unleashed

Based on a Training Aid developed for the U.S. Army®, Full Spectrum Warrior is a squad-based, real-time combat game that allows players to experience the intensity and gritty realism of urban warfare. Featuring advanced AI, your squad will act like a highly trained infantry unit – with team members reactively responding to situations based on combat training and taking the appropriate formations based on combat situations.



Evergirl

Hit the town with your friends as you plan the hottest events and prepare for summer camp. Be an actress, train with the soccer team or throw an end of the year party! At everView, it's up to you!



MX vs. ATV Unleashed

Rainbow Studios has mastered ATV's, conquered motocross, and now redefines the genre they built on the PC. Rainbow Studios isn't the only one building anymore, as the MX vs ATV Unleashed franchise introduces a track editor for the first time, allowing players to create the ultimate off-road environments



One down, 357
more to go.



XB360/PS2/XB/GC

X-MEN: THE OFFICIAL GAME

Officially underwhelming

Good: Playing as Nightcrawler
Bad: Cut-scenes, controls, camera...
Practically Useless: The block button



G. FORD: Though *X-Men: The Official Game* features a decent enough concept—you take control of Wolverine, Nightcrawler, and Iceman in events leading up to the *X-Men: The Last Stand* movie—the subpar execution sucks away any fun. The laughable, mostly static cut-scenes (which shoot for a comic-strip effect but end up looking unfinished) hint at the mediocrity to come in this third-person beat-em-up. Each of the mutants you control has levels themed to his abilities. Wolverine feels like a whipping boy for waves of grunts, Nightcrawler makes use of his warping ability to zip through more platform-based stages (easily the best of the bunch), and Iceman glides through the air to take out Sentinels and put out fires. (Notably absent: co-op play. These guys are still a team, right?)

The play-style variety may be decent—and you get to upgrade abilities—but each character's level sets

grow horribly repetitive and pointless, with stingy checkpoint placement compounding the frustration. Factor in a lousy health-recharge setup and only basic combos, and you've got a mess. Also worth noting: The PS2 version looks the worst, and while the 360 version fares the best (though not by much), it sure ain't worth the extra \$20.

MICHAEL: In case you thought movie-licensed games were getting better, Activision has dropped its drawers to remind us that game companies can still produce these turds. *X-Men* is a vile pile of sloppy game design—crappy cameras, monotonous missions, and clunky controls riddle this experience. It's not particularly fun to play as any of the mutants, especially since the mission variety for each one caps off at zero—every Wolverine level goes like this: Slash a slow of soldiers until you either 1) get bored

and turn off the game, 2) get bored and return the game, or 3) get bored and eventually earn the "Mission Complete" screen. If you actually get to the third option, you're truly a hero.

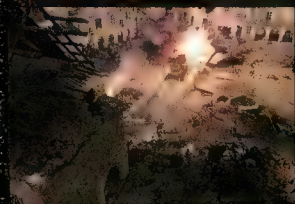
JAY: I can only imagine the thought process that resulted in this mess: of a tie-in (a shame, since the *X-Men Legends* games are downright decent). "Wolverine is good at beating people up, right? Let's have him kill, like, a hundred of the same enemies for every one of his levels—that'll be fun. Oh, and Iceman? He shoots ice, so let's have him put out fires for three levels straight... the kids will love that. And for Nightcrawler, since he can teleport, let's have him flip switches and disarm bombs, then backtrack through the level and Oh it again. Awesome." Add in some of the worst cut-scenes ever, and you have yet another casualty at the movie-licensed-videogame genre.



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THE VERDICTS
(out of 10)

3.5 **4.0** **4.0**

G. FORD MICHAEL JAY

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Z-Axis/Hypnos
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen

www.activision.com

PS2/XB

ONLINE

URBAN CHAOS: RIOT RESPONSE

Rescue us



THE VERDICTS
OUT OF 10

3.5	5.0	5.5
JON	SHANE	JAY

Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Rocksteady
Players: 1 (2-8 online)
ESRB: Mature

www.eidos.com

Good: Unlockable weapons are worth the extra work.
Bad: As bland online as it is off.
Note to the Developers: "Head snotted" isn't a viable phrase



JON: I had to double-check to make sure the same guys you did PS2's execrable *Fugitive Hunter: War on Terror* (Black Ops, who also did *AND 1 Streetball*, below) didn't make *Urban Chaos*. (But now developer Rocksteady's on my list.) It's not as bad as that game, but it's got the same heavy-handed "American heroes kicking ass" theme that overshadows an already unremarkable first-person shooter. As the star of an antigang police unit, it's your job to "work with" (though they basically just shadow you through levels) firefighters, cops, and paramedics to exterminate a gang of thugs that has taken over the city.

Almost every stage plays out the same—rescuing the civilians and hostages populating the city. It could be a better game, but the priorities here are so out of whack: If the developers have the disc space and resources to create a live-action fake-news video to follow every single stage, they have no excuse for all the gameplay and production shortcuts. Character models get recycled like mad against bland, graphically poor settings, and the small set of online game options (just objective-based defend missions and a king of the hill variant) feels like an afterthought.

SHANE: As current-gen consoles enter their twilight years, we're seeing a lot of games

like this—no-hum shooters that inspire you to dust off that well-worn copy of *Halo* or *SOCOM* on your shelf. *Urban Chaos* desperately tries to make its mark with live-action cinematics, unique mission objectives, and a few meager gameplay innovations (a riot shield, the ability to capture foes alive). But none of it works particularly well—the overbearing patriotic plot feels cheesy (especially coming from a British developer), and the repetitive, unremarkable level design flatlines early. If you need a simple gunplay fix, though, this could maybe see you through a weekend...

JAY: Though the game may be utterly average, I gotta say that *Urban Chaos'* cover, clichéd story and enemies give it a certain charm in that generic-action-flick kind of way. You'll be dispatching hordes of mindless gang members while rescuing civilians—and that's it. Jon said it: Most of the time you feel like you're playing the same recycled level over and over again. That, along with the cheesy cut-scenes and ancient graphics, makes *Urban Chaos* play more like a solid student project than a finished game. Online multiplayer is fun for 20 minutes, but crippled levels make the objectives, such as defending police trucks, completely unbalanced. Also, where's the straight-up deathmatch? I kinda miss it.

PS2/XB

ONLINE

AND 1 STREETBALL

Not ready for prime time



THE VERDICTS
OUT OF 10

5.0	5.5	5.0
BRYAN	PATRICK	JAY

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Black Ops
Players: PS2 1-2 (3-8 w/ MultiTap), 2-10 online, XB 1-4 (2-8 online)
ESRB: Everyone 10+
www.ubisoft.com

Good: Sweet dribbling mechanics
Bad: Story mode is weak
Strangest Nickname: The Pharmacist...whe—?



BRYAN: Tune in to ESPN late one night and you'll surely catch a game of *AND 1 Streetball*. You know, these are the guys who shake-n-bake in front of their opposition for what seems like an eternity before taking it to the hole. Ubisoft's inaugural baller wonderfully captures this brand's style of play thanks to some fairly innovative dribbling controls that use a combination of both analog sticks and the shoulder buttons (don't mind *EGM* nab Jay—the mechanics here are ridiculously tight).

But here's the rub: Accurately reflecting one's sport doesn't necessarily translate into a strong videogame. And that's the case for *AND 1*—the game's so offense-focused that it severely handicaps those on D. Seriously, stopping anyone in the middle of some fancy dribble moves is complete luck.

Besides the inherent problems on the court, the *AND 1* Tour (the game's story mode) is a joke, with objectives such as blocking X number of shots in one game, stealing the ball X many times...note to developer Black Ops: I learned how to do this stuff at the beginning of the game, remember? In the freakin' tutorial! Elementary in-game requirements such as these had me more than ready to leave this tour.

PATRICK: Guys on the *AND 1* tour can flat-out ball, no question, but what Bryan watches in the middle of the night doesn't

always a good game make.

The dual-analog-stick dribble controls and ability to create combos affix a solid foundation. But they don't offset the frustrating reality that all the action not related to building up your combo meter—especially playing defense—feels unresponsive and pointless. Like Bryan said, *AND 1* accurately re-creates street basketball, and I got a kick out of controlling these local legends...but for about only one session. It's fun once, maybe twice, but you won't want to do it for a prolonged period of time—kinda like watching real late-night *AND 1* sessions.

JAY: Create a baller and go from a nobody to a street legend while earning new outfits, tattoos, and more. This dose of b-ball déjà vu (*NBA Ballers: Phenom*, anyone?) has all the sick moves you'd expect from an arcade-style jamfest but without the satisfaction. Convoluted controls make performing tricks frustrating, but it doesn't matter because accomplishing them gets you nowhere. Pull off a Cross Shuffle to a Slip 'N' Slide and your defender doesn't budge, making faking out your opponent—the purpose of the game—pointless. I did enjoy playing as *AND 1* pros such as Hot Sauce and The Professor, and the story and quick play modes do a good job of capturing the atmosphere of the *AND 1* culture. Too bad the actual balling action has been done before and better.



Well, at least Redman ain't wiping his own a** with this guy's tongue.

■ PSP

DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY: THE TAKEOVER

A whole lot of hip-hop hijinks

Good: Pretty port of the console version
Bad: Hardly anything new, cheap enemies
Too Legit for This: MC Hammer

MICHAEL: At this point in the PSP's life, I was hoping we'd finally start seeing some original titles—you know, like we did with the DS. Instead, we're still getting ports. Here, EA sends us back to 2004 to essentially replay the decent *Def Jam Fight for NY*, adding a new subtitle, a few new moves, and...well, come on—it's a port.

The main problem with *Takeover*—a gangsta grappler featuring hip-hop stars—is that it can't decide whether it wants to be bare-fisted fighter or a wild wrassler. It ends up as some messed-up hybrid, so gameplay ends up skipping a beat, with unbalanced matches, a dumb refilling life meter, and the notorious cheapo-comeback AI. Still, the action is acceptable, especially the use of interactive environments—chucking chumps against SUVs is particularly brutal.

But *Takeover's* main track, the story mode, is a repetitive mess. And

since all the characters are recycled from the console version (providing new ones would obviously go against the PSP's porting rules), you end up roughing up the same rappers over and over and over... Rather than bothering with this half-assed remix, wait for a new release.

BRYAN: It's been almost two years since *Fight for NY* bloodied up consoles, but apparently, that wasn't enough time for the developers to fix the franchise's notorious cheap-as-hell AI. Maybe it's that these hip-hoppers are eating their spinach like Popeye, but almost anytime you bring computer-controlled opponents within an inch of their life, they suddenly start reversing attacks and proceed to lay the smack down on you. Not fun.

Like so many PS2-to-PSP ports, you won't find much compelling new content here, either. The story mode—

albeit featuring a slightly tweaked narrative—has you facing the same guys in the same venues. And the all-new ground attacks and grapples feel unbalanced; they take way too much energy off, especially when the AI's dishing out the damage.

PATRICK: Games that work well on a console don't necessarily give you the same sense of control on the PSP. This isn't the case for *Takeover*, though. The fighting here is fluid, with varied moves and slick animations, and creating your combatant—complete with ink and bling—is fun. My only real complaint: The camera didn't always let me know where I was. In the midst of a combo, I'd get turned around, lose my place, and then get pummeled. Despite this flaw—and the fact that not-so-muscular Snoop Dogg wouldn't last a minute in these fights—*Takeover* delivers a solid PSP fighter.



THE VERDICTS
5.0 5.0 7.0

MICHAEL BRYAN PATRICK

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: EA Canada
Players: 1 (2 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Mature

www.ea.com

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■ PSP

THE LEGEND OF HEROES II: PROPHECY OF THE MOONLIGHT WITCH

Leaving the bar securely in place



THE VERDICTS
OUT OF 100

6.0 5.5 6.0

GREG S. JON JEREMY

Publisher: Namco Bandal
Developer: Falcom
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.namcobandalgames.com

Good: Old-school RPG flavor
Bad: Nothing about it is exceptional
Battles Similar To: Those in the *Lunar* games

GRAB \$: The RPG landscape right now on the PSP is similar to that of the original PlayStation, pre-*Final Fantasy VII*. Games like *Legend of Heroes*—which really isn't exceptional in any way—stand out more than they should simply because the benchmark on the system is currently so low.

Heroes II, like its predecessor, is a strictly by-the-numbers RPG. The clichéd coming-of-age story featuring youngsters saving the world against all odds is something we've all seen a million times before, and the turn-based battle system is just interesting enough to make you think—and also so mundane that you'll tire of it quickly.

Still, you'll find worse role-playing games on the system. At least with *Heroes II*, you know what you're getting into. The game holds your hand at every corner and does whatever it can to keep you from getting lost or frustrated. And the graphics, while not mind blowing or particularly pretty, are solid and colorful.

Is it sad to settle for average simply because of the dearth of RPGs on the current handheld consoles? Yeah. But *Heroes II* doesn't really offend on any level. It just doesn't excel.

JON: I love the name "*Legend of Heroes*" because it's the perfectly generic

moniker for a perfectly generic game. A battle system that factors in your party's battlefield location adds more strategy than your standard turn-based games, and classic-RPG serfilities are sweet relief for those of us who have no idea how you cast a bloody ice spell in *Final Fantasy* anymore.

But the ratio of quality games to time spent dicking around in towns on forced minimeissions or sitting through story BS is way low. Being the only fish in the sea doesn't make it a keeper; it was a big ol' average for me.

1UP.COM—JEREMY: I don't think we're allowed to say, "If you liked such-and-such a game, you'll enjoy this one!" in *EGM* reviews, because, well, it's lame. Unfortunately, I can't think of much else to say about *Heroes II*. It's not just similar to last year's *Heroes*, it's almost completely identical.

The two games share the same graphics, battle system, skills, and pet-raising elements, which means all that's new are the characters and story. Fortunately, they're pretty decent, though *Heroes II* does suffer from the same abominable translation flaws as its predecessor. Still, it's charming enough, and if you liked the first *Heroes*...well, you know the rest.

■ PSP

LEMMINGS

March of the ports



THE VERDICTS
OUT OF 100

6.0 5.5 8.0

ROBERT CRISPIN SHOE

Publisher: Sony CEA
Developer: Team17
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone

www.us.playstation.com

Good: Tastes just like the *Lemmings* your mom used to make
Bad: As stale as the *Lemmings* your mom used 10 years ago
Overkill: Editor lets you make new levels, as if you needed more

ROBERT: You've got to hand it to the mind behind *Lemmings*. After all these years (more than a decade now), it's still a crazy idea for a game. Allow me explain the concept as if I were David Jones, the guy who thought of it:

"OK, so armies of lemmings—you know, those furry things that are so damned dumb that they just walk off cliffs into the ocean? Well, these little guys pour out of the sky down into a deadly obstacle course. You follow me? Only, they just walk into any old lava pit or booby trap lying around, so you gotta protect them. How? You give them jobs—make this little guy a traffic cop, that little guy a ditch digger, this guy a climber, and so on. It's like a puzzle. How can you get your pack of doofus lemmings to the exit without too many of them dying grisly deaths? Plus, if they do get killed, it's funny!"

Maybe it's the level of ultraviolence I've grown accustomed to, but the cute-meets-gore charm of *Lemmings* has evaporated from this all-too-familiar setup. It's still a clever little distraction, lovingly packaged with plenty of options here, but I had my fill long ago.

CRISPIN: It's been a while since we watched these bad-hooded rodents march brainlessly to their demise. And that's for the best! The critters' extended hiatus

might help *Lemmings* vets forget everything they've seen before in this grabbed-from-the-past PSP version. The formula, which works fine on the go, is still as addicting as you remember. *Lemmings* come-lately players will certainly get hooked.

But \$40 is a lot to ask for yet another PSP port with tacked-on content—especially when you can find free versions of the game online. Sure, the new levels are tricky fun, and you get the option to create and share your own custom stages, but I'm getting tired of paying for déjà vu on my PSP.

SHOE: Sure you can follow Crispin and Robert's logic—if you want to go down that path of jaded-gamer-ness. I've played plenty of *Lemmings* in the past, and I found this update to be just as appealing as ever (who can remember the puzzles from ages ago?). The graphics are vivid and colorful on the PSP, thanks to the developers who brought us that other awesome awesome strategy series, *Worms*.

Also, this disc is loaded with over 150 stages—some pretty easy, some for which I swear a solution doesn't exist (but I'm determined to figure them out eventually). *Lemmings* gives you enough fun and clever real-time puzzles to keep you scratching your head until you're a bald old man.



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DS

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS.

Old and loving it

SHANE: Weird...it's as if some unreleased sequel to *Super Mario Bros. 3* (NES) has traveled to the future to remind us all that it's perfectly OK to run from left to right. Oldsters weaned on classic NES *Mario* fare will instantly dig this retro-chic romp, while younger players (most of whom weren't born when the last straight-up 2D *Mario* installment, 1991's *Super Mario World*, came out) will get a crash course in the classics.

The gameplay nobly adheres to the *SMB3* tradition, but with a few additional moves (triple jump, butt stomp, wall jump) and some gimmicky new power-ups ('shrooms that make you tiny or huge, plus a koopa suit). The absence of a decent flight power-up (controlling Lakitu's cloud isn't exactly fun) stings, but at least the game's cavalcade of brilliant stages to bop through never disappoints. Expect a serious, old-school challenge with plenty of one-hit kills and desperately hard jumps along the way. It's straight-up, unadorned *Mario* with two-dimensional game-play...and frankly, I wouldn't want it any other way.

Finally, you've gotta give it up to Nintendo for bundling a phenomenal suite of over 25 Wi-Fi multiplayer

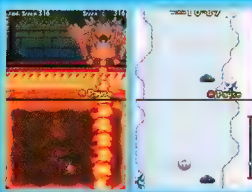
minigames (see sidebar below) with the single-player game. Nintendo could have easily ripped out this collection and sold it as *Mario Party DS*....

SHOE: I'm a reasonable man. I acknowledge that the 3D *Marios* (*Sunshine* and *64*) are fantastic games. But they get butt-stomped under the might of the old 2D wonders (*SMB3* being my all-time personal fave). *New* is the ultimate in fan service to us junkies of the originals. It feels like a "best of" remix of several *SMBs*, yet provides enough new content to make it the true dream sequel we've been waiting over a decade for. And if you're that newly arrived extraterrestrial who's never played *Mario* before, you'll instantly fall in love when running your perfect-controls character through the perfect-design levels, looking for all the clever secrets hidden throughout. It didn't take me long before I knew this was going to be one of the easiest 10s I ever gave out for a review.

And like Shane says, even the minigames impress—while superlame on their own, they practically make for an entire *Mario Party* when you go wireless with some

friends. How can you go wrong when you're practically getting two fantastic games in one?

1UP.COM—JEREMY: *New Super Mario Bros.* is a pure test of skill—fine-tuned classic gameplay that can kick your ass sideways and leave you begging for more abuse. You get no hand-holding, tutorials, or forgiveness here, making it a welcome change of pace from modern games. But you'll find some disappointment, too. In going old school, Nintendo has played it a little too safe; *New* gets the details right but forgets the most important factor of all: creativity. The worlds and challenges feel much too familiar, and the power-ups are simply uninspiring. *SMB3's* gameplay coupled with *Super Mario World's* depth is nothing to sneeze at, but without a spark of creativity, it falls short. Nintendo got the "*Super Mario Bros.*" part right...just not the "*New*." ★★



But Wait, There's More!

New SMB packs a serious arsenal of multiplayer Wi-Fi options. You and a friend can engage in some entertaining sibling rivalry with a frantic Mario-versus-Luigi race, but the real fun lurks in 26 wild minigames. Some of these contests hail from *Super Mario 64 DS*, but many are new. With one copy of the game, you and up

to three buddies can play various action, puzzle, and parlor contests. And these games aren't merely kiddie fare—poker and blackjack bring the seedy taste of Vegas to the Mushroom Kingdom. One complaint, though: Would it be so hard to make these work with the Nintendo Wi-Fi network? *New SMB2*, perhaps....



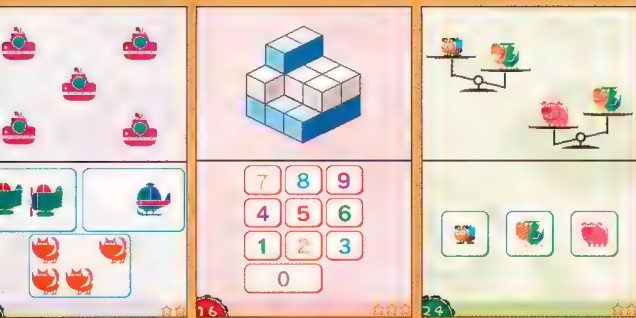
Good: Classic gameplay, fantastic minigames.
Bads: Doesn't venture far from tradition.
Tricky: Opening up worlds 4 and 7 (see cheats: 1UP.com)



THE VERDICTS
 SHANE 9.5 SHOE 10 JEREMY 8.0

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

www.nintendo.com



DS

BIG BRAIN ACADEMY

Where weight gain is good

Good: Minigames are fun, visual, and challenging.

Bad: Still a bit on the short side.

Practice: Before entering multiplayer sessions.



JENNIFER: By now, you've probably aced *Brain Age*, the first game in Nintendo's brain training series, and are feeling rather...cooky. That means you're ready for *Big Brain Academy*, sucker. The difficulty on this one is ratcheted way up from the last game; *Academy* uses a much more visual approach to challenge your mind and determine its weight (heavier brains win).

The concepts are the same—timed puzzles test your math, memory, and cognitive abilities—but the implementation is much more creative and engaging. Each of the 15 minigames feels distinctive; sometimes you're punching memorized numbers into a calculator, other times you're repeating the patterns of barking dogs and chirping birds.

Even though the overall game has a much simpler structure than *Brain Age*—here you merely practice any of the minigames you choose, or

you take a test that combines five of them—I found it much more fun to play for longer periods of time. Plus, better multiplayer offers a truly satisfying challenge that lasts as long as you want it to. Heck, even if you're not burned out on your *Brain Age*, you should definitely pick this one up for simple, brainy fun.

SHANE: Nintendo has kicked my brain's ass. First, *Brain Age* beat my mind back into fighting shape, and now *Academy* pumps it up in a slightly different way. The gameplay here isn't quite as compelling as *Brain Age*'s—you don't turn your DS sideways to write in it like a book, and the weirdly Mr. Peanut-esque Dr. Lobe can't compete with the hosting skills of the irrepressible Dr. Kawashima. But the tricky puzzles and problems here offer more complexity and variety than *Brain Age* does, making this a must-buy for the

phenomenally addictive multiplayer action alone.

MICHAEL: Unlike *Brain Age*, *Academy*'s minigames will give your lobes a licking. Sure, the various activities may feign childlike simplicity, but behind the façade you'll find tough challenges that'll make you question your intelligence—my first score slaughtered my self-esteem in ways I haven't experienced since elementary school.

Sure, *Academy* is packed with plenty of challenges for your cranium, but fans of *Brain Age* will likely miss the user-friendly puzzles and lack of bonus brainy-app sudoku. But if you're looking to expand your noggin with others, *Academy*'s multiplayer mode trumps *Brain Age*'s—matching minds with eight players is not only intense, but a smart way to brag about both your brain and your mad gaming skills.



THE VERDICT
Great fun

9.0 **8.5** **7.5**

JENNIFER SHANE MICHAEL

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
Players: 1 (2-8 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Everyone

www.nintendo.com



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REVIEWS WRAP-UP

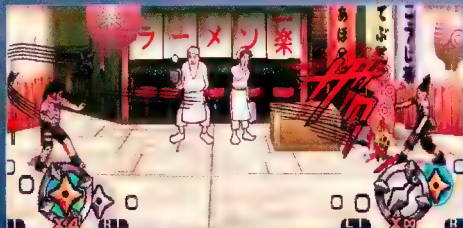
The games that were
too late...or too little



TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

PSP • Eidos • ESRB: T — Picking the right port of Lady Lara's return to greatness is a cinch if you own every system: The Xbox 360 game shines the most. But if you must take her with you, the PSP game crams in her entire adventure, which deftly mixes *Prince of Persia* acrobatics with slick puzzles.

Bottom line: The system's lack of a second analog stick strikes again, making it downright disorienting to pan around Lara's environments (you must hold a second button to do it). And you absolutely have no reason to buy this if you already played it on the bigger consoles.



Naruto: Ultimate Ninja

PS2 • Namco Bandai • ESRB: T — This simple fighter puts you in the shoes of the ninja wannabes from the hit show. Play through the scenario mode to relive big moments from the series, or the ninja training school to unlock items and characters. With multileveled stages, simple controls, and an emphasis on grabbing items and power-ups, *Naruto* copies the *Powerstone* and *Super Smash Bros.* formulas well while making good use of the license.

Bottom line: Certainly not deep but still fun, much like the show.



Gallop Racer 2006

PS2 • Tecmo • ESRB: E — Finally, another edition of the game for compulsive gamblers and equestrian club preppies. Somewhere beneath an enormous stack of utterly incomprehensible management menus (covering everything from stud breeding to the color of the rings around your jockey's socks), you'll find a horse racing game.

Bottom line: Unfortunately, racing your horses isn't much more exciting than managing your stable. *Gallop Racer 2006* is for statistics freaks and Catherine the Great-level horse lovers only.



Armored Core: Last Raven

PS2 • Arctec • ESRB: T — Soon mech heads countrywide will be able to play what seems like the millionth version of *Armored Core* on the PS2. Despite some interesting features—such as the appearance of humans and the ability to keep fighting after a limb (or two) of your mech has been destroyed—*Last Raven* looks and plays like every other *AC* game out there.

Bottom line: Regardless of the minor tweaks to the giant mech series formula, nothing here will change your opinion of the series, love it or hate it.



MLB 2K6

PS2 • 2K Sports • ESRB: E — Even though this marks *MLB 2K's* rookie year on the portable diamond, this game actually performs better than its seasoned console big brother. Pitchers no longer lose gas after just two or three innings on the mound, and players aren't too speedy along the base paths (which translates into a more realistic number of infield hits). Also, like so few third-party PSP titles, this one's got online play.

Bottom line: Already an All-Star during its first season in "The Show."

reviews archive

Just in case you forgot...

DON'T SAY WE DIDN'T WARN YOU

No sugar-coated previews here. If we think a game is gonna suck, we let you know—that's our job. Let's look back at some past previews of games we predicted were going to be stinkers, and what our reviewers ended up giving them (all scores out of 10).

"Critical strikes would have been more satisfying if the enemies actually reacted."



Death by Degrees (PS2)

5.3

"Meh. It's a Goosebumps story that plays like *Hunter: The Reckoning*—unfortunately, that's it."



Grabbed by the Ghoulies (XB)

4.6

"...this one could end up as a ho-hum virtual dollhouse struggling in the shadow of *The Sims*."



PlayBoy: The Mansion (PS2/XB)

4.6

GAME

24: The Game	PS2
Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War	PS2
Age of Empires: The Age of Kings	PC
Atelier Iris 2: The Azoth of Destiny	PS2
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	XB360
Beatmania	PS2
Black	PS2/XB
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	XB360
Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!	DS
Capcom Classics Collection Remixed	PSP
CMT Presents Karaoke Rev. Country	PS2
Comanche Strike Force	PS2/XB
Daxter	PSP
Dead or Alive 4	XB360
Dreamfall: The Longest Journey	XB
Drill Dozer	GBA
Driver: Parallel Lines	PS2/XB
Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	XB360
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	XB360
Field Commander	PSP
Fight Night Rounder	XB360
Final Fight: Streetwise	PS2/XB
Final Auto	XB360
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers	PS2/XB
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	XB360
The Godfather: The Game	PS2/XB
Hitman: Blood Money	PS2/XB
Kingdom Hearts II	PS2
Lost Magic	DS
Major League Baseball 2K6	PS2/XB/GC
Marc Eckst's Getting Up	PS2/XB
Me & My Katanami	PSP
Metal Gear Acid 2	PSP
Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	PS2
Metrod Prime Hunters	DS
MLB 06: The Game	PS2
Monster Hunter Freedom	PSP
NBA Ballers: Phenom	PS2/XB
Odama	GC
Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams	PS2
The Outfit	XB360
OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	PS2/XB
Pokémon Trozei!	DS
Pursuit Force	PSP
Resident Evil: Deadly Silence	DS
Rogue Trooper	XB
The Rub Rabbits!	DS
Rumble Roses XX	XB360
Shadow Riders: From the New World	PS2
Sonic Riders	PS2/XB/GC
Splitter Cell Essentials	PSP
State of Emergency 2	PS2
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max	PS2
Sukikoden V	PSP
Super Monkey Ball: Touch & Roll	DS
Super Princess Peach	DS
Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror	PSP
Tales of Phantasia	GBA
Tao's Adventure: Curse of the Demon Seal DS	DS
Tetris DS	DS
Tomb Raider: Legend	PS2/XB
Top Spin 2	XB360
Tourist Trophy	PS2
Untold Legend: The Warrior's Code	PSP
Warpath	XB
Winback 2: Project Poseidon	PS2

SYSTEM

VERDICT

■ Faithful to the hit show but lacking the same freshness and wicked gunplay	7.5	5.5	7.0
■ Great graphics can't make up for boring missions and a forgettable story	6.5	4.5	6.0
■ This deep, historically savvy turn-based strategy game is fun—and good for your brain	9.0	7.5	8.5
■ A niche RPG that, despite new features, still ends up feeling dated	5.5	6.0	7.0
■ Over-the-top snooter with lots to do—and lots to ride—that's best played online	7.5	8.0	7.0
■ Carpal-tunnel-causing rhythm game requires as much practice as being a real DJ	7.5	4.5	5.5
■ Ka-BOOM! A first-person shooter full of sound and fury, signifying nothing	6.5	6.0	8.0
■ A pick-up-and-fly WWII flight-combat title full of planes, but its missions get tedious	7.0	6.5	6.5
■ A smart "game" filled with tons of brainasers that graphs how smart you are (or aren't)	8.5	7.5	9.0
■ Bright graphics and classy, classic games fill this portable powerhouse	8.5	8.5	9.0
■ The best (and only) all-country-music karaoke game we've ever seen!	7.5	6.5	7.0
■ A WWII shooter with plenty of good ideas, just not the best deployment of them	5.5	5.0	5.0
■ This bright, beautiful action-platformer feels cramped by the PSP's limitations	7.0	7.5	7.5
■ Boobs and button mashing are the core components of this pretty fighter	7.0	6.5	6.0
■ This adventure title offers an immersive narrative but no game to go with it	4.0	6.5	4.0
■ Sweet, classic 2D platforming returns in a great little portable form	8.5	8.0	8.5
■ A bad story doesn't slow this driving game, due to the great physics and atmosphere	8.5	7.5	7.0
■ Button-mashing, ancient Chinese hack-'n-slash that feels like a rerun of a game you won't care	5.5	5.0	4.0
■ Flawed, but ultimately a fun RPG with a great story and a huge world to explore	6.8	9.0	6.8
■ Sure, it's a rip-off of <i>Advance Wars</i> , but it's as good that you won't care	7.0	7.5	9.0
■ Perfectly pretty pugilists pummel and punch with precision and panache	9.0	8.0	8.0
■ Decent brawler with nice minigames stumbles on repetition and a bad save system	6.5	7.0	7.0
■ Like <i>Burnout</i> with guns and a do-over button—nice, we would like more of it	8.0	8.5	8.0
■ A squad-based shooter with broken rules of engagement	5.0	5.0	5.0
■ Amazing, war-is-hell-a-lin shooter with great multiplayer; next gen is finally here!	10.0	9.5	9.0
■ Grand Theft Auto: Gangster, Atmospheric, faithful to the film, but a bit cheesy	8.0	8.5	7.5
■ The bad badass returns with some great level design but a hurlin' save system	8.0	8.0	7.5
■ Everything on an RPG sequel should be, starting all your <i>Squid and Diner</i> favorites	10.0	9.5	9.5
■ This innovative strategy-RPG unfortunately lacks the magic touch	5.0	4.0	6.0
■ Rewarded the swinging and hitting but forgot to help leading and baserunning	7.0	6.5	7.5
■ This partly boring, gritty, grif-'n'-action game isn't half as cool as it thinks it is	4.5	4.0	6.5
■ The PSP's controls hobble the Prince's ball-rolling, garbage-grabbing magic	7.0	5.5	7.0
■ A short, streamlined, card-based tactical roleplayer that stars Mr. Snake	8.0	8.0	8.5
■ A great story and worthwhile additional content raise the bar for roleless	10	9.9	9.5
■ Samus looks great on the DS, but she can be awkward to control in first person	7.5	8.0	7.5
■ Innovation isn't defined as finally adding a decade-old feature to your baseball game	8.5	6.0	8.0
■ A beautiful action title that is best played with friends...too bad it ain't online	7.0	6.0	8.0
■ Shows good off-court ambition, but the gameplay shoos too many air balls	6.0	6.5	7.5
■ This mash-up of pinball and strategy (with voice commands) is more strange than fun	5.5	6.5	6.5
■ We agree this samurai game is beautiful but aren't sure about its RPG aspects	7.5	7.5	8.5
■ Linear single player, but this WWII shooter's dash of strategy is fun in multiplayer	7.0	6.0	7.0
■ A solid arcade racer that is easy to pick up but lacks the variety of a <i>Burnout</i>	7.0	5.0	7.0
■ A Poké-themed puzzle that inflicts equal parts dullness and puzzle	6.5	7.0	6.5
■ A crappy vehicular-assault game with a dumb premise and broken controls	3.5	4.0	6.5
■ Outdated graphics and gameplay stunt this portable, multiplayer <i>Resident Evil</i>	6.5	7.0	7.5
■ This action-shooter shows it's easy being blue thanks to engaging combat and co-op	6.5	7.5	8.0
■ A touchable minigame title that doesn't provide enough fun till be lovable	6.0	5.0	6.0
■ Wrestling with sluts has never been more need gen or more pandering to perverts	7.0	6.5	3.5
■ A little too short-but-quirky RPG with an excellent timing-based battle system	8.0	7.5	7.0
■ Sonic's hoverkart racer isn't fun or fast enough to catch up to Mario's standard	5.0	5.5	5.0
■ The controls might be difficult for some—Sam Fisher just doesn't feel right on PSP	2.0	7.0	6.0
■ Third-person action sequel no one asked for delivers new ways of being average	6.0	5.0	6.0
■ The same <i>Street Fighter</i> you loved—without enough new features to make it shine	6.0	8.5	7.5
■ Slow it went and a bit dated, yet a compelling RPG with collect-ent-all fun	6.5	6.5	6.5
■ A maze game that blends infuriating ball-rolling and adorable ace themes	6.5	5.5	6.5
■ A shiny new <i>Mario</i> -style adventure that needs to take the difficulty up a notch	7.5	7.0	8.0
■ Lots of guns and interesting gameplay aren't as much fun with awkward controls	7.0	7.0	6.0
■ This dusty, classic RPG ported from the Super NES hasn't aged very gracefully	6.0	7.5	7.5
■ An ambitious RPG that is stunted with a totally broken interface and battle system	4.0	5.0	4.0
■ Classic puzzle brought to the DS, but with only one new mode for the touch screen	7.5	7.0	9.0
■ The titular rider is back, swinging and clinging in this solid tomb-robbing game	8.5	8.5	8.0
■ Deep career mode, graphics update, and new shots make this a grand slam	8.0	7.5	8.0
■ <i>Gan Turismo</i> on two wheels, this racer offers realism with a steep learning curve	6.5	7.0	8.0
■ A hackneyed, hack-'n'-gish dungeon crawler with a semitun multiplayer mode	6.5	6.0	5.0
■ Bargain-priced action-shooter's online action is smooth but limited and clichéd	4.0	6.5	5.0
■ A boring, low-budget, deathly-action title that's more frustrating than fun	4.0	3.5	4.0

SCORES

WARD

■ Agent 47: an army of one.

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



game over

more hot flesh than that van damme flick with the two van dammes



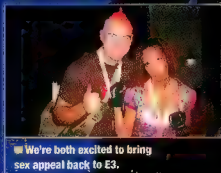
SEANBABY'S

BATTLE AGAINST E3 BABE OPPRESSION

Can one man's courage save the cleavage of a nation?

For many attendees, this year's E3 game show was a chance to wave around the Wii for the first time and wonder what happened in their life that made them into an 11-month-old baby. But for dozens of hot, hot girls, E3 was anything but Wii. In an effort to kill as much joy as possible, the convention initiated a new dress-code policy for booth babes (see below for the official rules). This year, bikini bottoms and midrifts were made illegal, and gestapo monitors were hired to patrol the show floor to make sure that no one's music was too loud and that no one's models were too arousing, I say: To hell with that.

—Seanbaby



■ We're both excited to bring sex appeal back to E3.

When faced with crushing oppression—like a rule forcing women to wear pants—we all have a duty to fight back. I decided I could do my part by sneaking in my own booth babe. Since modeling agencies no longer return my calls

and I make a terrible Bloodrayne, I could only do this by convincing my girlfriend, Natalie, to dress up in a tiny Christie Monteiro (from *Takken*) outfit. And despite what you've heard about women loving to be sexually objectified by their own boyfriends, this was harder than you might think.

There are three types of people who criminalize sexiness: parents, Quakers, and ugly people. But E3 is an 18-and-over event, Quakers were poached to extinction by oatmeal hunters, and ugly people are too busy letting insects crawl in and out of their mouths to lobby against anything. So who knows how this new policy came about? Luckily, a handful of game companies like Sony Online decided to ignore the rules and just pay fines. And at \$5,000 per violation, the least Natalie and I could do was take a picture with some naked wizard Sony spent so much money to show us. I took this moment to reflect on the bravery of my and Sony's struggle to promote the going-wildness of girlkind.

My friend Kasey contributed by showing up in her Wonder Woman costume,



■ This is at least \$10 million in naked violations.

E3 security, however, wouldn't even let her of her film crew in. When she tried to convince them that her ass meant the showgoers no harm, E3 called the cops on her. What kind of backward ray did the Legion of Doom hit us with when the LAPD is called in to arrest Wonder Woman because she looks good? Luckily, the actual law is unaffected by E3's prudeness, and the cops let us go free. I'd like to think that one of them also said, "I want to take a bite out of THAT crime!" and high-

lived an orangutan.

From her disinterested karate poses, it seemed the crushing stress of lifting so many spirits with only her own tiny pants was wearing on Natalie. She and the isolated pockets of nudity weren't enough for me to drive them crazy. One kid was so desperate that he got caught taking upskirt shots of a spokesmodel in her sensible pink minidress. And the photographer from IGN Babes, a website built on celebrating women in the sweatiest, loneliest way possible, devoted several minutes to panting and taking pictures of Natalie.

It got so creepy I thought he might be a human-shaped bag of snakes. My theory was supported when he laid a hissing egg.

Natalie and I learned two things from this year's E3: One, never let me be in charge of picking out her clothes again; and two, never let people with chemically removed genitals plan your convention. Beautiful women have it hard enough already with every man trying to sleep with them, every woman calling them names, and every book not making any sense to them. Don't oppress them further by taking away job opportunities. The *Dead or Alive* girls didn't put their lives on the line in lingerie so some communist could make their real-life counterparts put on a turtle-neck. Please follow my example and support your local bikini girls. ☹



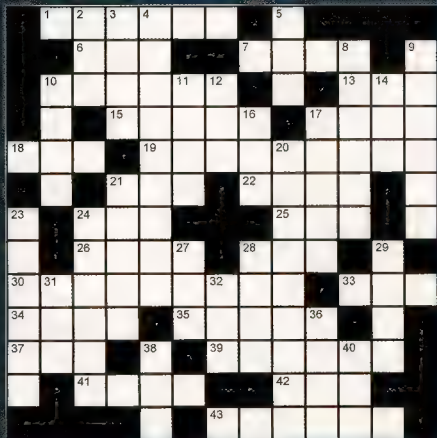
■ The LAPD refused to arrest Kasey, E3's most-wanted criminal.

Official E3 Dress-Code Rules: "Material, including live models, conduct that is sexually explicit and/or sexually provocative, including, but not limited to nudity, partial nudity, and bathing-suit bottoms, are prohibited on the Show floor, all common areas, and at any access points to the Show." —2006 E3 Exhibitor's Handbook



DUTY CALLS & THE IMPORT SCENE

(Solution on page 105)



ACROSS

1. *Call of Duty's* M1 rifle
6. "Pocket" in *Pocket Fighter* to import gamers
7. Castlevania: *Aria of Sorrow* sword
10. Steals your weapons in *Symphony of the Night*
13. Org. that would be proud of Capcom's *Eco Fighters?*
15. Like Candy Cane's *Rumble Roses* skirt
17. Defeat a dragon
18. *Call of Duty 2* firearm Bren
19. NES game whose box art features a half-naked Fabio
21. PS2 is compatible with this digital sound encoding
22. PSP *Metal Gear*
24. Import PS2 fighter *Gar - Den Break Blow*
25. Characters that can use magic in *Gauntlet*
26. Little old Jedi
28. *Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones* accessory Thor's
30. PS2/XB *COD2*
33. Sequel epithet
34. *Rumble Roses XX* chest wear?
35. *SOTM* quote: "You have been doomed... you lost the ability to love!"
37. Xbox Live headset attaching point
39. Dahlia Tal's birthplace in *Pandora Tomorrow*
41. *Call of Duty* submachine gun
42. Raw titanium in *Everblue 2*
43. Expressed boredom with a game?

DOWN

2. It's *Dark* in N64's *Major*
3. 10 ACROSS' job?
4. Frequency follow-up
5. *Futurama* playable
8. Concern of 4 DOWN?
9. 2007 *NightFire* BADGIRL unlockable
10. Gothic *Street Fighter III* character
11. Klonea's are big 'n' floppy
12. FIFA player Ferdinand
14. *Golden Tee* standard
16. Extracted from brains in *Destroy All Humans!*
17. Tomba subject matter
20. *Batman Begins* villain
21. Usually need to find keys to open them.
23. Threw punches in *Fight Night Round 3*
24. Wielders of Diskarmor on NES and Xbox?
27. Unnumbered pages in your *EGM*
28. Places to rest
29. Quit a *Call of Duty* game early?
31. Irritating *Stick (PS1)* in Japan: *Dengeki Ira Bou*
32. Binary possibility
36. Unlock achievements on Xbox 360
38. Latest *Matrix* game traces his *Path*
40. Longer abbreviation for videogame trade show E3?

GRUDGE MATCH

Slipping you a Mickey



KINGDOM HEARTS II

WALT DISNEY WORLD

Before Sora met his mouse on the PlayStation 2, central Florida's geriatric-filled wasteland was one of the only places to see all your favorite Disney characters together. But with all the cameos in *Kingdom Hearts II*, is Walt's world still worth it?

CAST



Only the A-list of Disney names.
Advantage: *Kingdom Hearts II*

Getting to Mickey might mean tending off that damn teapot from *Beauty and the Beast*!



FINANCIAL DRAIN



\$40-\$50 tops while it's still fresh.
Advantage: *Kingdom Hearts II*

That \$5 popsicle is the least of your worries, sucker.



AUTHENTICITY

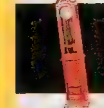


Mulan looks and sounds like the real thing.
Advantage: *Kingdom Hearts II*

Mulan looks like your friend's mom in a kimono.



TESTING YOUR PATIENCE



Loading is frequent but brief.
Advantage: *Kingdom Hearts II*

Friggin' Space Mountain can be a three-hour wait.



DIFFICULTY



A two-fingered infant would have it easy.

Try finding your Ford Focus in a sea of rented Ford Focus.
Advantage: *Disney World*

INTERACTIVITY



Work on your rhythm with the Little Mermaid.
Advantage: *Kingdom Hearts II*

Look like a douchebag on a Segway tour of Epcot.



WINNER: KINGDOM HEARTS II

It's a small world after all, kiddos. But not small enough for you to fly to Florida just to squeeze sweaty costumed men in order to satisfy your inner childhood fantasies.

FINAL WORD

E3: All over but the bitching

The first thing *EGM's* editors do when they fly home—beaten and blitzed—from the annual E3 game-biz show is take showers. In rubbing alcohol. But as soon as decontamination is done, they're ready to reminisce (read: argue) about the show that was. Considering that this year's E3 hosted just-debuted Wii games, shocking price announcements, and a seething sea of Nintendo fanboys, we're ready for serious "ramblin'." Just check our staff page on page 67 to see who's chimed in for this magazine-wide hoggie....

Who was deadlier? Fanboys stampeding to Nintendo's booth, or fanboys spazzing with the Wii remote?

Michael: Can I say both? Honestly, this system is a killer—in more ways than one. I never thought I'd fear death by a console. Thanks a lot, Nintendo!

Crispin: I actually wondered why each Wii demo was preceded by a warning to slip on the remote's wrist strap—until I heard about one psycho player who actually launched the controller across the room. This thing's gonna chip some teeth.

Jennifer: I still haven't determined whether I've developed a rash from the sweaty fanboy who bumped into me in the Nintendo booth. Anyone else notice that Nintendo's demo people wiped off the controller with a washcloth before passing it to the next person? Get me my Purell!

Speaking of the Wii, what'd you think of its graphics?

Shane: Man, Nintendo wasn't lying when they told us that they were focusing on gameplay over graphics. Most of the games looked kind of last-gen. At least the best-looking titles (*Zelda*, *Mario*) looked as good as low-end 360 and PS3 stuff....

Bryan: What graphics?! Everything looked very GameCube-ish to me.

Jay: To be honest, the graphics didn't bother me. I care more about them degrading on the promises of the Wii-note than graphical prowess. Most of the games were fun to play, so I'm sold. I can get my normal-mapped, HDR-lit, high-poly character fix on the 360 or the PS3.

Greg: Jay's right. I think most of us plan on buying a Wii in addition to another graphically next-gen console. And it doesn't get better than the Big N's big three franchises.

Michael: I counted the polygons—*Metroid* only had 30,000. Lame!

Which games had the best graphics?

Greg: EA's new PS3/XB360 game *Army of Two*, due next year. Holy crap! I thought *Ghost Recon Advanced Warlighter* looked good on 360, but this game totally one-ups it. Incredibly detailed character models, a stunning sinking aircraft carrier—more than once, I had to make sure it was a 360 running this thing. And you have no idea how beautiful next-gen water can be....

Crispin: What about next-gen velociraptors? The new *Turok* game looks—



■ The new *Turok* (above): Now with 100 percent less Tobias Bruckner (right).

asp!—pretty good. I mean, I saw a fairly canned demo for PS3/XB360, so I don't know about the gameplay, but it was running in real time, and its T-Rex doo-dooed all over the one in the *King Kong* game. Doesn't come out until fall 2007, but I'm already jazzed. About *Turok*. Am I crazy?

Bryan: Only because *Turok's* new developers have never heard of our adopted worst-games-of-the-year mascot, racist cyborg *Turok: Evolution* boss Tobias Bruckner. But in terms of visuals, *Metal Gear Solid 4* stole the show for me. And just as I expected, this is the game that demonstrated what the PS3 is really capable of.

Shoe: *Assassin's Creed* looked sharp. The civilian crowds move and react realistically, and the architecture is all real. It made you feel like you were there...not playing through some videogame levels. They better not put in any swinging blades or flamethrower traps, or I'm asking for my money back.

Michael: *Heavily Sword* was a looker, but it was the animation that amazed me the most. Any game that makes me cringe from successive shots to the balls is doing something good. Or wrong. Depends on how you view shots to the crotch.

Any PC games you wish would come to consoles?

Jay: *Crysis*, for sure. This sorta sequel in *Far Cry* looked so good! I wanted to cuddle after playing it.

Greg: Along those lines, I know all of us who saw *Spore*—a "from goo to space age" universe sim—were E3-drunk green, just like we were with *The Sims* so many,

years ago. Will Wright, the genius behind both and probably the smartest guy I've ever met, continually amazes me.

Jay: Would a game like *Spore* translate well to a console? I can't imagine playing that game with a controller.

Shane: *Spore* on the Wii would work perfectly. You know it's going to happen!

Crispin: I'm probably the only guy here who cares, but I thought *Flight Simulator X* looked sweet—and very *Pilotwings*-ish. I'd totally play it on consoles. Speaking of which, where was *Pilotwings* for the Wii? I was also happy to see that shooter *F.E.A.R.* is coming to home systems—to the 360.



■ Gimme, gimme: Luscious shooter *Crysis* (above) and Will Wright's *Spore* (below).



"Finally, I can kill zombies the way they were meant to be killed—with a plastic remote."



The \$600 PS3—worth it, or a rip-off?

Crispin: This might be the first console in years I don't buy on launch day. It's just too pricey—especially when the games don't look better than Xbox 360 stuff. And I don't want to get the \$500 model because of its missing features—like an HDMI port, Wi-Fi, and so on.

Greg: Considering I'm not yet convinced Blu-ray DVDs will take off, I don't see it worth the extra \$200 over a premium 360. Will I want one? Sure. Will I actually buy it at launch? Not until I see a game I can't live without, which, with *Grand Theft Auto 4* no longer exclusive, may be awhile.

Shane: Well, I'll be standing in line for one. I'm excited about the games, but also for Blu-ray movies (I saw some running when I was in Japan, and they look phenomenal), downloadable media content (like movies and TV programming), and even the 5.1 Super Audio CD playback. And no, Sony didn't pay me to say that.

Jennifer: I can't buy into the Blu-ray hype yet—especially at that price tag. For me, it all depends on the online capabilities. I don't think the Xbox 360 would have been worth it for me if not for the great community on Xbox Live, and Sony hasn't proven that they can do online right. I'll wait and see.

Crispin: I mean, it's a fair price for all the crap you're getting—especially a Blu-ray player. But this isn't like back when the PS2 launched and everyone was jazzed about its built-in DVD player. I don't think the casual consumer is demanding high-definition DVD movies yet. And what's left is a super-expensive game system with graphics that certainly don't look like they're worth an extra \$200. I'll buy three WIs instead.

What new trends did you see this year?

Bryan: *Gears of War*, *Too Human*, *Turok*—apparently the "dark, metallic look" is so hot right now.

Jay: Three words: Unreal Engine 3.

Michael: Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft shilling promotional photos of people who obviously don't play games. Well, unless they're paid a fancy sum for marketing photos.

Crispin: You'll never guess what I saw—*a Tony Hawk skateboarding game!* Bet you never saw that coming. Siffi, it sounds pretty cool—it has this massive skate-

anywhere, Middle America world going for it. I'm sure I'll get it when it hits next-gen this fall.

Besides the big stuff (*Mario*, *MGS4*, *Halo 3*, etc.), what did you find most intriguing?

Crispin: LucasArts showed us a next-gen Indiana Jones game for 2007 that really piqued my interest. It was a brawler, but it was really physics based—you could use all kinds of stuff in the environment. Fights got all crazy.

Shane: The *Geometry Wars* guys aren't showing us *GW2* yet, unfortunately. But they might have something going on with *The Club*. It's a full-blown third-person shooter for the 360 and the PS3, but you're shooting people for sport, not for survival, which is the way it should be in real life. Also, you have to keep the action up and quickly combo your kills together for high scores, so it's faster paced and more arcadey than other shooters.

Michael: I like killing zombies, but it just doesn't feel real on the current consoles. That's why I'm happy to hear Capcom is making a *Resident Evil* game on the Wii. Finally, I can kill zombies the way they were meant to be killed—with a plastic remote. ☹

Oh, this fight just got started. To hear all the EGMers debate gaming's hot-button issues, check our Podcast at egmlive.1UP.com.



Don't even think about cutting us in the Wii's launch-day line, beautiful people!



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■ Thought we'd throw in a cheap joke involving Phoenix Wright? Wrong!

egm retro

WHO SNUBBED MARIO?

Mario reclaims his star in *New Super Mario Bros.*...no thanks to his "friends"

Your Honor, Nintendo's multimillion-dollar fortune was built on Mario's hard work in games like *Super Mario Bros.* The fact that *New Super Mario Bros.* is the portly plumber's first side-scrolling platform game since 1992's *Super Mario Land 2* reeks of foul play. It seems that, for the past 14 years, his so-called "friends" have been stealing his spotlight. If it pleases the court, the prosecution would like to call the following witnesses.



YOSHI

Now, Mr. Wario: Is it not true that Mario gave you your first big break in 1991's *Super Mario World*? Back then, you were



content to be a mere sidekick—you knew your place! Giving Mario rides, gupping enemies, sometimes belching fire or tak-

ing flight as the occasion warranted.

But there was a dark side to fame, wasn't there? Do you not deny, sir, that for *Super Mario World 2*—Mario's fifth adventure—you insisted on equal billing? Oh, you pitched *Yoshi's Island* as a vehicle for Mario, but in truth, it was your bid for superstardom.

And Mario trusted you! Yet while he went on to explore 3D worlds in *Super Mario 64*, you stomped his original 2D legacy into the ground with lackluster sequels like *Yoshi's Story* and *Yoshi Topsy-Turvy*. Have you no shame, sir?

WARIO

Mr. Wario, do you swear to tell the truth—sir! Please do not steal the court's Bible. Thank you.

Your reputation is hardly unimpeachable, Mr. Wario, so it should be little surprise that you parlayed your role as the villain in *Super Mario Land 2* into the top billing for the sequel. My client is a trusting man, sir, and when you presented the idea for *Super Mario Land 3: Wario Land*, he truly believed you were after the best interests of the franchise. Imagine his surprise when he attended the premiere and discovered his best scenes had been left on the cutting room floor, reducing his role to a mere cameo!



Worst of all, you weren't content with transforming the *Mario Land* series into *Wario Land*. You weren't even content to star on the only decent Virtual Boy game ever made! No, your greed knows no bounds, as your despicable corporate antics in your *WarioWare* titles have proven. And now—is...is that my wallet? How did you get that? No further questions, Your Honor.

PRINCESS "PEACH" TOADSTOOL

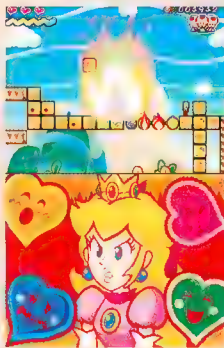
Your Highness, your betrayal is perhaps cruelest of all. For years, Mario has been rescuing you from a dire fate at the hands of Bowser, gamely risking his life without a thought of reward! And yet rather than spend money on a decent security system for your castle, you squander it on go-kart tracks and tennis courts.

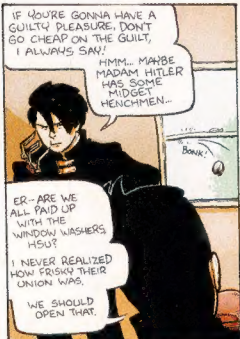
Mario longs to be your equal. *Super Mario Bros. 2* was a look into his dreams—dreams in which the two of you

adventure side-by-side! Yet when *Super Princess Peach* came along and you could at last play the role of heroine rather than victim, you refused to share the spotlight. This is how you thank your tireless champion—by snubbing him?

Now, now, crying won't help. Neither will getting angry. Er, the prosecution requests a short recess while we put out the fire in the witness stand...
sobs

—Jeremy Parish







STERE

ITY

THAT WHOLE "EVERYONE'S DOING IT" THING
WHEN IT COMES TO BEING A TEENAGER
AND GETTING HIGH?

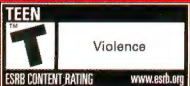
JUST ANOTHER STUPID STEREOTYPE.

Ready... Set...
Fight Alpha Style!

Five Smashing Prized Fighters
United for the First Time.

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ALPHA
ANTHOLOGY

BONUS
SUPER BURN FIGHTER MIXTURE
(released on console as Street Fighter EX)



PlayStation 2

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