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- **Phantasy Star Universe:**
Online addiction hits Xbox 360 and PS2
- **Marvel: Ultimate Alliance vs. Justice League Heroes:**
Who's the comic-game champ?
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PSP THEA

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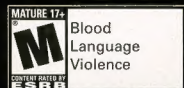
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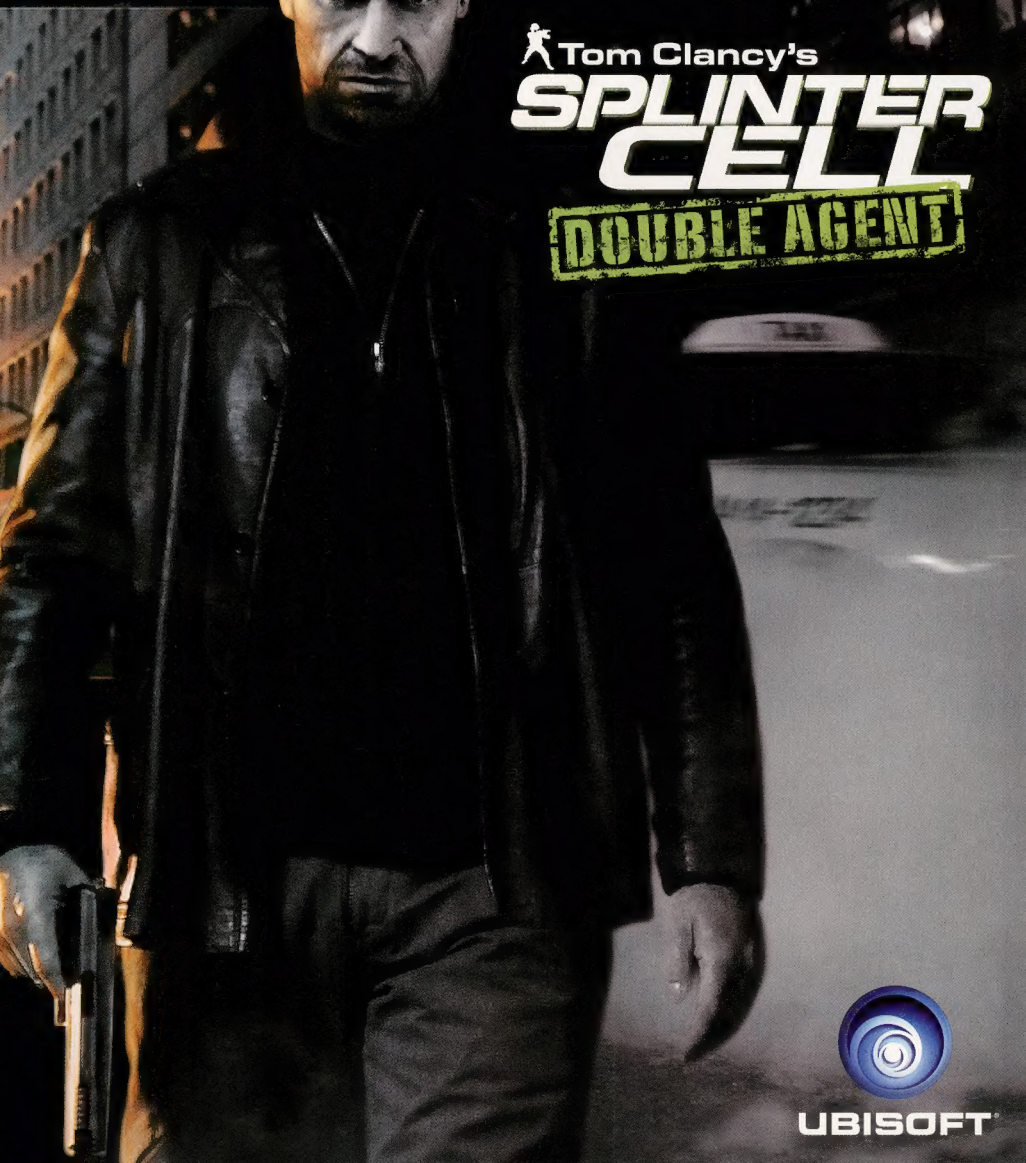
PlayStation 2

OWN IT OCTOBER 19TH

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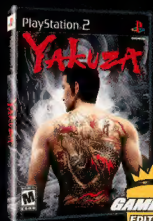


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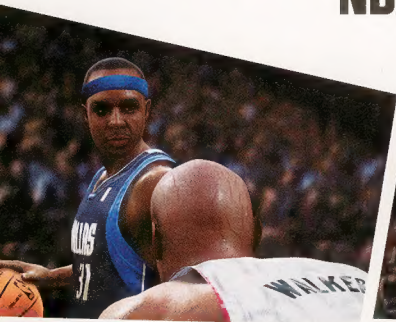
TITLE

NBA LIVE 07



FACTOID: lines of new AI code: 215,473

 INFORMATION
www.nbalive07.com

 DEVELOPMENT START | DATE OF RELEASE
 01 | 03 | 05 | 09 | 25 | 06


the real

Sometimes you have to tear an old house down to build a new one. For NBA LIVE 07, the development team rewrote the game's artificial intelligence from the ground up. Players react not just to teammates, opponents and coaches but to the ball as it moves through the air and around the court, tracking it with their eyes, heads and upper bodies. Player attitudes change depending on how much time is on the clock and how close the score is. "We spent the last year turning characters into athletes," says EA Canada gameplay producer Matt Lafraniere who squares off in daily hoops games against fellow NBA LIVE team members in the Burnaby campus gym. The difference is easy to see with new motion-capture video resulting in thousands of new moves and dozens of new dunk styles. Defenders now have to fight through screens. Guards plant hard when curling off picks and cutting. Big men pivot and square up to the basket before going up for a slam. Ouch.



our digits

- 17 number of basketball-related injuries sustained in Burnaby campus gym by NBA LIVE 07 developers
- 10 feet — height of soda can wall made from empties consumed by the Dynasty Mode team
- 1 number of table tennis-related injuries requiring hospitalization during the development of NBA LIVE 07
- 7,296 number of speech files by Greg Anthony and Ernie Johnson in All-Star Weekend mode
- 215,473 lines of new AI code in NBA LIVE 07
- 600 lines spoken by Steve Kerr per day during recording for NBA LIVE 07
- 0 number of scripted color comments from Steve Kerr in the game
- 5,000 number of player animations in-game
- 73 player ratings per player
- 150 real NBA plays



MATURE 17+

M

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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language



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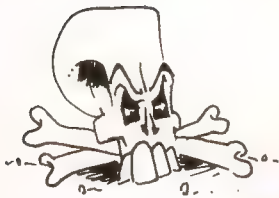
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Jump in.



GEARS OF WAR

EMERGENCE DAY 11.12.06



THANK MERRY FRANK!!

EDITORIAL



True story: Awhile back in downtown San Francisco, a group of punks jumped me outside a public-transit train station. My adrenaline was pumping, I was freaking out, and the first thought that ran through my head was: "Crap, my Xbox is in my backpack, and if they steal that, I'll lose all my game saves."

You ever try running for your life with a Titan-sized Xbox on your back? The thugs might as well have had a tractor beam. Luckily, they didn't give chase—either they were just messing with me, or that random passerby scared them off.

After I calmed down from the night's events, I came to a startling revelation: "Oh, my god—I care more about my saved games than I do my well-being." That's pretty sad, but when you're this passionate about a hobby, it's bound to come with some eccentricities.

I've since played out several scenarios in my head to see if I really value intangible electronic files that much: If someone were to rob my home, yes, I'd be fine losing the Xbox 360, if only the thieves would be kind enough to leave behind the hard drive. If someone rugged me on the train, I'd politely ask if I could at least keep my *Advance Wars: Dual Strike* cartridge before handing over my Nintendo DS. Hey, I can always buy a new DS, but I'd take forever to get all those *AW* medals back!

I realized all the time I've spent with videogames is invaluable (yeah, yeah, time spent with loved ones is great, too, but this isn't *Reader's Digest*). And judging from some of the letters we get retelling horror stories of lost game saves, a lot of you feel the same, too.

Got proof you're as pathetic as me... or more? Write to EGM@ziffdavis.com (subject: Save Me) and share. I'll get to your letters right after my judo class. Oh, in case you're wondering why *Spider-Man 3* isn't on our cover this month (as promised last issue), well, you'll have to ask movie director Sam Raimi why he's such a jerk and pulled our story at the last minute. Sorry for the late change in plans, and we hope you enjoy our in-depth look at *Guitar Hero II* instead!

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief



ROCK!!

80 CLASH OF THE COMICS

The eternal debate about whether Batman can kick Spidey's ass spills over into the gaming realm



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Letters

Leather daddies, cruelty, thompson-baiting, and videogaming

Real life like a fantasy world

I own a game store, and I put copies of *EGM* out for customers to see new games. It looks like that will now come to an end. Your comments [in *EGM* #206] on "wanking" (with perverted photo to boot) were uncalled for. Later in the issue, Seanbaby says that "Christian anything sucks." Sex is for marriage! What a great concept that God had! If we all followed that, the world would be a far better place: No rape, little to no STDs, divorce rates down, unwanted pregnancy down, no pedophiles, and probably no AIDS.

—*Gameworld1*

Some call our "wanking" pic perverted. We call it art. We spent many hours creating that photo. Was it wrong? Yeah. Was it fun? Ohhhhh yeah.

Fantasy world like real life

Wouldn't it be awesome if there was a huge Xbox Live game where you live in a



■ A typical night out in Oakland.

city and need to earn money? You could get a good job and a girlfriend, or you could get drunk and stab someone for money (but you go to jail). And you'd be playing with people over Xbox Live, so maybe you could be a millionaire hitman while another guy is a poor hob.

—*Sgt. Executioner*

We've played that game already. It's called Oakland, California. We gave it a 2/10, mostly because the police helicopters kept us up every night. And the voice acting sucked.

Stop and smell the flowers for Jack

I'm one of the two loonies who founded the "Flowers for Jack Thompson" project mentioned in [*EGM* #206] "America's Least Wanted." It was really great to see our endeavor recognized in print, even if it was just a passing mention. I must say, though, I was really let down by your view on it. It was referred to as "a bouquet" given in "mock condolence." You clearly didn't get the right picture.

Alyson [Burch] and I founded the project with the idea of approaching Jack Thompson with a respectful, lighthearted gesture. This was at the height of his personal culture war against gamers themselves, and he was receiving death threats and prank calls at his home and office. As much as we despised the man, we couldn't stand the actions of childish idiot gamers

that were fanning the flames of his senility.

We sent nine massive flow-er arrangements worth \$500 alongside a seven-page letter. We made a point of being straightforward and honest. We told him we didn't like him but said we'd approach it with dignity. In return he called us terrorists and said that we were employed by Take Two Interactive to harass him. He personally confirmed to me that he threw out our letter without a glance because we were teenagers who play videogames. Flowers for Jack was in no way "mock condolence." We wanted a human exchange with the man to break down the

stereotypes on both sides. He just happened to make an ass of himself.

—*George Ettinger*

Fat virgin strikes again

I was recently reading the letters section of your magazine when I came across something that I had written. At first I was thrilled that my letter had been selected for publication, but then I read your response and was a bit offended. I figured you referring to me as "thin-skinned," "honorless," and a "fat virgin" was simply a form of ironic humor, as was your exclamation that I should "eat it." That >



■ After months of playing *GTA* in search of boobies, Thompson turned a sickly shade of pasta.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Used not abused

I keep hearing about how the used game business is stealing money out of the hands of developers, but I just want to point out [something]: You can't count money you never made as money you've lost. When a used car gets sold, you don't see GM, Ford, or Chrysler throw their arms up in the air and scream, "There goes another new car we could have sold!"

There is a growing trend among the bean counters of America that just disturbs me. Too many of them sit around in their offices and ask themselves, "How can I make more money without actually having to roll my sleeves up and earn it?" Unfortunately, the answer all too often is to try to take or steal it from somewhere else.

A sale is not a sale until you've made it. There is no guarantee that the guy who bought that used game would have paid full price for it. The simple solution is this: Make a great game and sell it at a reasonable price. Then the profits will roll in.

—*Joseph Dennis*

Thanks for the well argued point, Joseph. Keep an eye out for a (sparkly new) game from us to you.

POST OFFICE

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

"I'll stop gaming when..."

Ragnarok 32: ...I beat just one more level. I swear this time I'll turn it off.

Vyse The Legend: ...when I can no longer walk on my own, and when I frequently make "fatalities" in my pants.

DaFro: ...the controllers become some kind of suppository.

DTJAAAAAAM: ...they pry the controller from my cold, dead hands.

Flangus: ...my Xbox Live chats are war-rantlessly wretapped.

Peacekeeper9: ...when I get to Step 5 of my Gamers Anonymous meetings.

Geminiomega: ...I'm done leveling up.

RobomanReborn: I would say that I'll stop gaming when I die, but Jesus is a gamer. I totally just owned him in *Duke*.

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■ He ain't heavy, he's my lover.

> didn't really bother me. However, when you called my letter "stupid," it seemed awfully serious. I'd say my opinion was totally valid, and my letter was, in fact, well written and far from stupid.

—Ephraim Freed

You've got it totally backward. The comment about "stupid letters" was 100 percent humor, and it wasn't referring to you specifically. But when we called you a fat virgin we really meant it.

Don't try to reason with us

I'm all for sarcasm and the dishing out of ridicule to the deserving, but every reply save one in [EGM #206] letters section was negative. I think the letters editor needs some antidepressants, or maybe another outlet to vent his/her frustration in life. I get that they are attempts at humor, and maybe it just ain't my cup of tea, but a balance would be nice. It feels like letters are picked on the basis of, "Can I make

a smart-ass remark about this subject?" Maybe half of the replies could crush someone's spirit and the other half could try to answer a question or something?

—C. Norman

You try waking up from a three-day bender with your tongue covered in what appears to be cat litter and air-raid sirens sounding from the inside of your skull, then sit down to read a thousand variations on, "Your review of *Crusty Demons* was total bulls***!"

Pathefic

I'm tired of the people who complain about being insulted when writing to you. I for one am glad to be insulted. I don't care whether I deserve it or not. Please insult me! P.S. I would prefer your insult to me be about my sexual preferences.

—Grandmaster J.

Don't you have anything to bitch about, you sad little masochist? Grow a pair.

Army of leather daddies

Reid Schneider, senior producer for *Army of Two* [EGM #206], needs to grow up. He got awfully defensive when asked about the somewhat obvious homoerotic overtones in the game. "These are tough military guys," he said, as if a gay person could be neither. He then proceeded to further cement their straight manliness by saying they have "love interests" in the game. Duh, each other! Before you even asked the question, I thought to myself that the heroes of the game look like a couple of big, burly, BDSM leather daddies. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

—J.C. Foster

You think *Army of Two's* bad dudes are fruity? Check out page 64 for a cornucopia of questionable fellas.

Games should rot brains

I am concerned about these "brain games" for the Nintendo DS system. These games may seem harmless, but they are really bad for people. They sneak math problems and other mentally challenging stuff into games. You shouldn't challenge gamers. Challenge is bad. Have you ever read a challenging book? It sucked, didn't it? And what about the Space Shuttle Challenge? It exploded! Do you want to explode? I propose that developers make games that encourage people to not think—maybe a game where you get drunk and drive home. Then, when you get pulled over, you can assault the cops as they take you to jail. I'd play that game for sure.

—J.A.

Are you on Sony's PSP marketing team?

Missing link found

I'm 31 years old, a father of three, and I have been playing videogames since I was five. I let my daughters play games, though they may not play some of the ones I play. I have games for you to play as a family. According to Jack Thompson, people like me do not exist. I'm successful in my life. I've been married for 10 years and am very happy. What would he say to me? People like him only see what they want to see, and I am not mad at him. I truly pity him.

—Benjamin Brooks

WIN GAME GOODS

We've hidden movie quotes in this issue—spot one and enter to win! Go to EGM-007M.1UP.com (note the new URL, where you can send us a message [subject head: **Movie**]).

Quote: *EGM #206* 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!

Congrats for successfully existing, bro. And kudos for keeping your daughters away from GTA...but good luck keeping them from attending "rainbow parties."

Leave the boobs out of blood

Why does every new M-rated game have drugs and sex in it? What about the good old days when it was all about blood and gore, intense violence, and bad language? I'm only 12, and I can play M-rated games with blood and violence, but not with frickin' DRUGS and SEX! Just add blood and violence and you've got a good M-rated game. But they have to put in booze, sex, and nudity. What gives?

—Zulu

You and the guy who wrote our first letter should collaborate on a game about beating up chronic masturbators. The final boss: yourselves. ☹

OOPS!

From Jeremy Parish on his DS *Dark Labyrinth* review (which he gave a 7): "The intended score was 6.5. **Mea culpa.** Sorry about that."

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

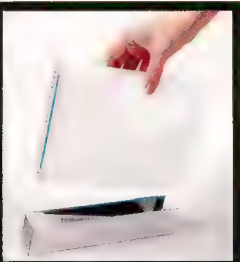
George Dubya's Action Grammar

After receiving a DS and a copy of *Brain Age* for his latest birthday, George W. Bush decided to make his own game—not about math or patterns like Nintendo's hit game, but about stuff that has, to quote him, "more importantness." In *George Dubya's Action Grammar*, you learn actual grammar and spelling from the president himself! Practice actual George Bush grammar such as: "Neither in French, nor English, nor Mexican." Become illiterate and gain unlimited power, just like Dubya, with *ACTION GRAMMAR*.

—Mike LeGera

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people
are
meant
for
something
more.

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press start

gaming news, previews, a bunch of fares, and other stuff

DOUBLE TROUBLE

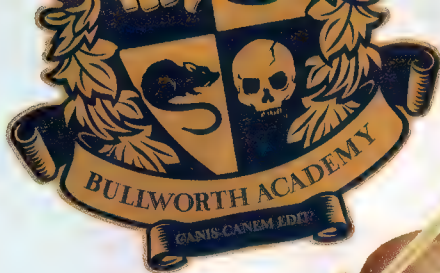
Enough recreation sports—Rockstar gets back to business with **Bully** and **GTA: Vice City Stories**

Well, look who's come crawling back.... You'd be crawling too if you had been hunched over a Ping-Pong table for the past five months. Rockstar's most recent release, the fun-on-a-lark *Rockstar Games Presents Table Tennis* (XB360), threw gamers used to mature content for a loop and into the world of recreation sports. Before that, the infamous Hot Coffee scandal—a big hubbub surrounding supposedly cut sex scenes appearing in hacked and modded versions of the PS2 and PC game *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*—ended with a neutered rerelease.

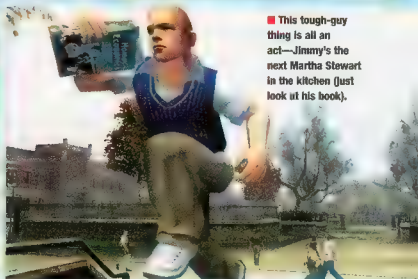
Amazingly, this chain of events has put Rockstar in a not-so-tough light, which is akin to sacrilege for the usually controversial company. But it looks to finally be getting back to what it does best this October: making games that push boundaries and piss off mainstream America. And if *Bully* and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories* prove successful, you can expect Rockstar to be standing ramrod straight as it pushes next year's lightning rod, *GTA4*.

—Greg Ford

>> STAYING IN THE DARK LONGER—DURING A FINANCIAL EARNINGS CALL, ATARI ANNOUNCED THAT IT HAS PUSHED BACK THE RELEASE OF ITS SUR-



■ This tough-guy thing is all an act—Jimmy's the next Martha Stewart in the kitchen (just look at his book).



■ Jimmy heads north for a better look into the girls' dorm room (we think).



BULLY

PS2 • October 2006

The dirt: *Bully* follows the exploits of stubble-headed Jimmy Hopkins, a 15-year-old malcontent who's been kicked out of preppy boarding schools across New England. His latest stop is Bullworth Academy—a full-fledged learning center complete with library, girls' and boys' dorms, ball-busting prefects, and creepy teachers. The missions in this story-based action-beat-em-up have Jimmy helping or hindering the five civics infesting the school—including nerds, jocks, and greasers.

Why *Bully* will piss off PTA members: The thrust of the game involves advancement through the use of bully-approved tactics and weapons such as slaps to the face, dead arms, Indian burns, slingshots, stink bombs, and plain old fistcuffs, which you execute with simple button presses and combos. Also, the mission subject matter ain't always mother approved: One mission finds Jimmy bumping into the embarrassed phys ed teacher exiting an adult book store, who then has the student go on a party raid in the girls' dorm. Not exactly after-school-special material.

Why it's not that bad: *Bully* not only takes place at a school, but part of the game requires you to go to class, where you'll complete rhythm-action games in chemistry and word jumbles in English. Also, bad behavior results in punishment, made possible through minigames—like mowing the lawn or shoveling snow—designed specifically to drag. So it's best not to think of the game as Hogwarts gone to hell, nor is it right to compare it to the *Grand Theft Auto* series, a regular misconception. For one, Rockstar is aiming for a Teen rating (not Mature, like most Rockstar titles). The game contains no blood, knives, or guns—think comic mischief!—and characters don't die. Also, though you'll be able to explore the Bullworth Academy campus and surrounding town, you're held in check by curfews each night and a more linear mission-based story, which takes place over five chapters. ➤

VIVAL-HORROR GAME *ALONE IN THE DARK* (PS3/XB360) UNTIL NEXT FISCAL YEAR, MEANING IT MAY MISS ITS PLANNED 2007 RELEASE....

DOUBLE TROUBLE (Cont.)



■ "So what makes you think it was me?"



■ Even if you fall off the new Jet Skis, at least you can now swim in VCS.



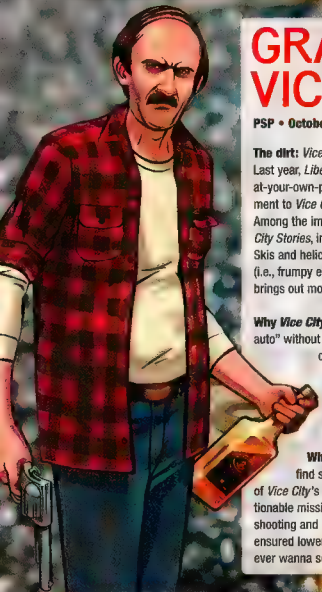
GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY STORIES

PSP • October 2006

The dirt: *Vice City Stories* is the second PSP go-round for a *Grand Theft Auto* retelling. Last year, *Liberty City Stories* took *GTA3*'s world and added a new story to the seminal go-at-your-own-pace driving/shooting action game. This year, Rockstar gives the same treatment to *Vice City*, which tackled decadent '80s-era Miami through its fictional titular city. Among the improvements, *Vice City Stories* features longer missions than those in *Liberty City Stories*, increased draw distances (resulting in less graphical pop-up), controllable Jet Skis and helicopters, new multiplayer modes, and a stricter adherence to common sense (i.e., frumpy elderly folks won't be stepping out of Bentleys in the ritzy part of town, dusk brings out more ladies of the night, and the like).

Why *Vice City Stories* will piss off politicians: It's hard to say the words "grand theft auto" without eager-to-please elected officials throwing their hands over the eyes and ears of children while filing antigaming legislation. And, as expected, it's more of the same here. The story again takes place in the drug-riddled, socioeconomically stratified *Vice City*, this time in 1984 (two years before *Vice City*'s happenings), and you can expect lots of shoot-outs, flattened pedestrians, and billboards boasting all sorts of double entendres.

Why it's not that bad: Let's see.... Maybe the lawsuit-happy hotheads can find solace in the fact that *Vice City Stories*' main character, Vic Vance—brother of *Vice City*'s Lance Vance, who is usually the impetus for the new game's morally questionable missions—is a Marine. That counts for something, right? What about the crappy shooting and lock-on system? Seeing as that will still be wonky, you're pretty much ensured lower kill counts than in, say, the 360's *Saints Row*. (Hey, work with us here if you ever wanna see *San Andreas Stories*.) ☛



▶▶ DON'T EXPECT NEW Q GADGETS ANY TIME SOON, AS ACTIVISION WON'T BRING OUT A *BOND* GAME (ITS FIRST) UNTIL SOMETIME IN 2008.....▶▶



LAP 3/3

GOBBLE. MUNCH. WAAAAH!

PAC-MAN WORLD RALLY

PAC-MAN AND AN AMAZING CAST OF NAMCO CHARACTERS ARE BACK IN THE BIGGEST, MOST EXCITING KART RACING GAME EVER! RACE ON WILD TRACKS OR FIGHT IT OUT IN BATTLE MODE WITH CRAZY PAC-POWERS AND EXCITING NEW WEAPONS!

EVERYONE
E
 MILD CARTOON VIOLENCE
 COUNTRY RATED BY
 ESRB



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egm international

Japanese games: now with 100 percent less underage sex

PS2

AMAGOUSHI NO YAKATA

Wow, an adventure game that doesn't involve dating girls? You got it—and it's from Nippon Ichi Software (*Disgaea*), so you know it has potential. *Yakata* isn't completely devoid of clichés, though—the game starts out with the typical spooky setup: Eight people are mysteriously invited to a musty old mansion, and—wouldn't you know it?—someone starts killing them. And as an unwitting “ninth actor,” it's your job to find the murderer.

Sounds kinda run-of-the-mill. You're in for a surprise, then—the adventure's completely non-linear, and you're free to solve the case any way you want to. Drag it out to keep everyone alive? Whatever, wimp! Snuff out the other guests to draw the killer out faster? Go for it!



鈴奈

Arcade

LET'S GO JUNGLE!

I want to get away from it all! Then why not visit beautiful Southeast Asia? If Sega's latest arcade game is any indication, it's a relaxing place replete with lush scenery...and giant bugs. Yes, they raise 'em big down here, and if it weren't for your machine gun, you'd be dead the moment you left the plane.

What makes this gun game worth playing? A remarkable array of gimmicks—as if giant mantises weren't gimmicky enough. Made with two-player simultaneous play in mind, *Jungle* is set up like a cheesy action movie. And if you play with a friend, you'll get a “compatibility analysis” at the end that determines how hot a couple you are...assuming your genders are different, of course.



BY THE NUMBERS

Shredding the hero

30

times *Diablo III* has been delayed

701

times *Diablo III* has been delayed

1,321

times *Diablo III* has been delayed

459,576

times *Diablo III* has been delayed



>>> ROCK FANS WILL BE GETTING AN EARLY TASTE OF THE WII AT THIS FALL'S NINTENDO FUSION TOUR. THE TOUR KICKS OFF IN SEPTEMBER...>>>

WHAT'S PLAYING IN THE

In the News

AMD buys ATI for \$5.4 billion

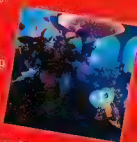
In July, PC processor manufacturer (and Intel competitor) AMD paid a cool \$5,400,000,000 for ATI, one of the world's leading graphics card producers. For budget-minded PC gamers, this hopefully translates to inexpensive quality graphics chips built right onto AMD-powered PC motherboards. As it stands now, onboard videocards flat out suck for gaming, and a decent card typically runs \$300 or more. If you ask us, the ATI-AMD merger can only mean good things for the frugal PC gamer.



Coming Up

World of Warcraft homogenizes

The biggest news for *World of Warcraft* players right now: Upcoming *WOW* expansion *The Burning Crusade* opens the Alliance side's Paladin class and the Horde side's Shaman class to everyone—meaning equal access to all the game's professions for players on both sides. This news sent the official *WOW* forums into an uproar, with some players celebrating the occasion and others crying foul at what they interpret as an affront to game balance. We say: Get over it!



Now Playing

Titan Quest

Developer Iron Lore Entertainment's *Titan Quest* provides ample satisfaction for action-RPG addicts still yearning for *Diablo III*. Yes, *Titan Quest*'s clearly a derivative game—and it doesn't pretend otherwise. Fortunately, a deep character-development system (you can progress in two of eight different and varied “skill trees” at once), excellent user-mod support, and an impressive world-editor place it well ahead of most *Diablo* clones...and the dazzling visual treatment and excellent lighting don't hurt either.



—Ryan Scott

Ryan Scott is the reviews editor at Computer Gaming World.



Grand Theft Auto

Vice City Stories

COMING OCTOBER 2006

TO THE PSP® (PLAYSTATION®PORTABLE) SYSTEM

WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/VICECITYSTORIES



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countdown to launch

T-MINUS TWO MONTHS

Your monthly prep for the PlayStation 3 and Wii liftoffs

Sony and Nintendo aren't the only ones scrambling to ship out the next-gen goods.

Right now, dozens of developers are currently hard at work trying to get their games ready for the impending launch and beyond. So we shot over a few questions to a man who knows both systems well—Randy Pitchford, President of Gearbox Software. Pitchford gives us intel on his first next-gen game, *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* for the PlayStation 3 (and though it's not confirmed, it's safe to say the Wii as well) and also dishes some details on what it's like working with two soon-to-be hot systems.

EGM: We know you're working on *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* for the PS3, so tell us: How much more powerful is the PS3 than the Wii?

Randy Pitchford: From a pure computational power point of view, it's really not fair to compare the PS3 to the Wii. The PS3 is built for speed. The Wii is built for its unique controller interface. You're going to be able to stretch the limits of next-generation rendering capability on the PS3 over its life cycle. From a graphics point of view, the Wii will just edge out the best of what was possible in the last generation. From a computing power point of view, the PS3 is a generational leap. The Wii is not.

EGM: Speaking of the PS3's power, can the games really look as good as the infamous *Killzone* target video that was shown at last year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3)?



Randy Pitchford, President of Gearbox Software

Or was that just a bunch of flashy fluff?

RP: It's widely understood that the *Killzone* target video was, as you say, "just flashy fluff." But there is a lot that was shown in that video from a graphics rendering point of view that is fully within the range of the PS3's potential. We are already doing stuff [in *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway*] that is real and is on par with the features that the *Killzone* video wanted to articulate.

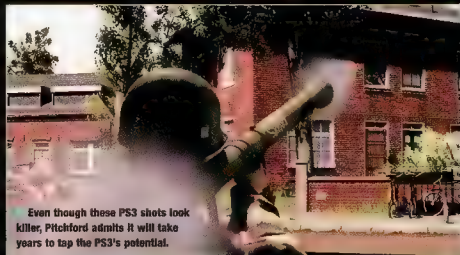
EGM: Let's be honest...is the Wii merely a souped-up GameCube, at least in terms of graphics?

RP: If we're being honest, then yes...I wouldn't use the word "merely," however. I think the Wii is awesome! It is just that what makes it awesome isn't about computing power—it's about interface, accessibility, usability, and how we think about playing games and interacting with them.

EGM: How is the Wii's new controller making you rethink first-person shooters? Now that you've worked with it, are you happy with all the things you can do?

RP: The Wii controller gives us some very, very exciting possibilities. We like aiming the thing directly at the screen and gesturing to reload, etc. We like using gestures like authentic hand signals to issue order to squad mates. We just won't need as many sticks and buttons to do things—you just do it. We've just begun to explore the possibilities.

EGM: Everyone seems to believe it is way harder to



Even though these PS3 shots look killer, Pitchford admits it will take years to tap the PS3's potential.

develop games on the PS3 than the Wii. Is this really true? If so, how come?

RP: It is a lot harder to develop for the PS3 than the Wii. The PS3 is a multicore cell processor that, to use most effectively, requires superspecialized and optimized, heavily threaded software. Meanwhile, the Wii is like a supercharged GameCube! We can do things exactly like we did them in the last generation, except we have faster processors and lots of extra RAM to use to make everything look better and run faster. So, we don't have to learn anything to be optimal on the Wii—we already start off as optimal. In fact, we can even be a bit wasteful on the Wii and be really competitive with other Wii titles. Meanwhile, to be competitive on the PS3 as we move through this next generation, we have to invest heavily in highly specialized code. It will be years before we are using the PS3 to the fullest.

EGM: Both Sony and Nintendo have had shoddy online systems in the past. Do you think either can compete with Microsoft's Xbox Live?

RP: Microsoft's core business is software. I think it's a little optimistic to imagine that Sony or Nintendo can beat what Microsoft has done with Xbox Live as they kick off. I imagine that, like Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo will want to focus on their service. They do have the advantage of looking at what Microsoft has done and being able to save some of the trouble of discovering how one could approach that problem. Because there is a baseline, it's easier to imagine improvements and variants. It will be really exciting to see where things land and what gamers think about the relative results.

EGM: Which system do you think has a better chance of



ME, I WANT WHAT'S COMING TO ME.



online this month

How to make—and sell—an Xbox Live Arcade game...

This month's online section is custom-made for anyone who's ever been told, "Don't quit your day job." That's just another way of telling you to give up on your dreams and keep flipping grease bombs at Burger King. Well flip that! Let's say you have this amazing idea for a casual game. You've planned out the gameplay, know what you want for the visuals, laid down some sweet tunes for a soundtrack, and even mapped controller buttons. Now what?

The best—and, let's be honest, most realistic—way to get it published is through Microsoft's Xbox Live Arcade, which is fast becoming the new frontier for DIY game development. And with Microsoft releasing XNA Game Studio Express—a free Xbox 360 game-making program that works on Windows XP-based PCs—this fall, getting into the videogame biz couldn't be cheaper or easier.

Here's how to make it happen in five simple steps, plus some expert advice from two indie developers whose day job really is making games.

—John Brandon

Step One: Submit your idea to arcade@microsoft.com

Short of showing your mock-ups into an exec's face at a trade show, you can get the attention of the folks at Microsoft with an amazing idea just by sending it to their inbox. They don't respond at all if they hate the idea, and, even if you do pique their interest, it could be months before they reply. "Microsoft will want to know what the game is, can they play a current version, what will make it absolutely fantastic on Live Arcade, and do you have the team to make it happen," says Steve Taylor, president of Wahoo Games, which made Xbox Live Arcade games *Outpost Kaloki X* and *Cloning Clyde*.

Step Two: Sign preliminary contracts and get a dev kit

If the Microsoft team likes the idea, they will set up a contract and loan you development hardware. (Or, more likely, they will send you to msdn.microsoft.com/xna to download XNA Game Studio Express.) It's not a guarantee that Microsoft will publish your game; it just means the hard work starts. "You'll need a team with the skills to manage every aspect of develop-

ment," says Reflexive Entertainment's Simon Hallam, the producer, designer, and programmer for Live Arcade action game *Wik & the Fable of Souls*. "[That] includes the programming, networking implementation, art, level design, user-interface design and implementation, music, sound effects, debugging, and performance and memory optimization." Sounds tough, but just one guy made Live Arcade hit *Geometry Wars*. Many Live Arcade games, in fact, were made by small indie teams of just one or two people.

Step Three: Get help from the Live Arcade team

Making a game means picking camera angles, deciding whether to include multiplayer, adding Live achievements and leaderboards, paying a programmer, and hiring an artist. It's time-consuming. Figure on three to four months of work and high credit card bills. But once you get all your stuff straight, it's time to get Microsoft involved. "There's always a review and discussion process with the Live Arcade team," says Taylor, "but they are passionate about helping the little guy with a great idea."

Step Four: Survive the certification process

Every Xbox 360 game has to meet Microsoft's rigid criteria. It's not like pulling teeth—more like having them get surgically removed. Both Taylor and Hallam say certification can be grueling. "It's the most difficult part, but the requirements are clearly specified," says Hallam. "It's stuff like using the correct terminology when referring to the Xbox 360 system, Xbox Live Arcade, controllers, peripherals, what actions the controller buttons perform, etc."

Step Five: Your game goes live and you get paid!

Once you pass certification, cry over your credit card bills, and bemoan giving up part of your life for this crazy dream, you finally see your baby released into the wild. It's exciting, says Taylor, because you never know if your casual game could be the next *Bewitched*. When someone downloads it from Marketplace, you get a percentage of the royalties along with the satisfaction of knowing you made a good game. And maybe, just maybe, you'll be able to quit the burger joint.

THIS MONTH:
DANIEL KIM
 QA LEAD AT
 CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

take this job

QUALITY-ASSURANCE LEAD

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

Kim's details

Experience: Five years with EA and Crystal Dynamics

Notable games: *Tomb Raider: Legend*, *25 to Life*, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour series*, *The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age*, *LOTR: The Battle for Middle-earth*, *Battlefield 2*

What's a QA lead?

This key person oversees the entire game-testing process, making sure his or her team of testers finds and reports every glitch, as well as updating the rest of the developers with the game's status. The job involves a lot of database work, assigning the right bugs to the right testers. "It's like air-traffic control," Kim says. "You're the middleman...between team members."

QA lead job data

Salary range: Hourly: \$10 to \$19/hour or \$28,000 to \$40,000/year. "If you're coming on as a temporary tester," says Kim, "they're hiring you during crunch time. Expect 60 to 90 hours of work a week. The overtime pay is nice."

Recommended education: Kim says that

in terms of formal education, you'll need a high-school diploma. "A college degree isn't necessary but definitely helps," he says. "English or communication degrees are particularly useful, as getting your voice heard by the rest of the team and being able to put your ideas on paper are both important parts of the job."

Location of most jobs: California

Current level of demand: High—and getting higher. "As next-gen games get more complex," says Kim, "they need more testers to make sure every nook and cranny is checked out thoroughly."

Kim's typical day

For a QA lead, organizing and prioritizing is the name of the game. "The first thing I do is look at any defects or bugs the QA team put in overnight," says Kim. "Then I go into the database to make sure all the bug write-ups are clear—this is key, so that the developers don't need to ask me or another tester what's happening with this or that bug, or what it is." When there's a new revision of the game, it's Kim's job to tell the producer whether it's

in good enough shape to go through the testing process. While he did quite a bit of playtesting before—it used to be at least 80 percent of his work—now all of Kim's actual playtime is voluntary. "I try to play as much as possible," he says. "I want to understand the bugs we're dealing with."

How'd he get the gig?

Kim originally applied for a QA position because he'd just moved near his company's HQ and was passionate about games. "At first, I didn't know what the job would demand," he says. "I had to go through a few tests to see if I noticed small details and how my writing was. They wanted to see that I had a good attitude, because I'd be spending so much time with the team."

Like many game-biz folks who got their start in QA, Kim sees the job as a springboard. "It's a great way to make good contacts and let people know what you're capable of," he says. "Knowing what defines a milestone, which discipline a certain bug falls into—you learn lots of crucial things from testing!"

—Evan Shamoon

TOOLS OF HIS TRADE

TestTrack Pro

"For the QA team, every bug you find in the game will be entered [into this database program]," says Kim. "Its status is always changing.... Some places use different programs, but knowing how these work is key."

Coffee, Red Bull

Forty-to-90-hour workweeks are no joke, and you need to stay really focused and on the ball. "You don't want to be falling asleep on the job," says Kim.

Certification documents

These are the documents provided by first parties (Microsoft, Sony, Nintendo) that detail the QA requirements to get your game published. If you're going to achieve your goal, you need to first know what your goal actually is.

A good personality

"You're gonna be with your team more than you're with your family," says Kim. "And honestly, if you can't get along with your coworkers...it's gonna suck." ☛

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Wii PREVIEW: SHOW & TELL

RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS

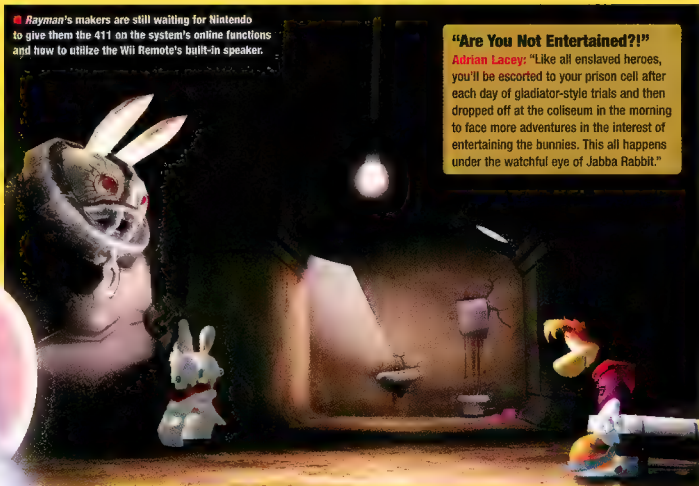
Publisher: Ubisoft
 Developer: Ubisoft Montpellier
 Release Date: November 2006

Wii's wascally wabbits

It's kinda ironic that in *Rayman Raving Rabbids*, you'll be assuming the role of a limb-challenged hero, as this Wii launch title—like so many games for Nintendo's upcoming console—is all about using your arms. Rayman must participate in 70-plus "trials" in order to free himself from a bunch of loony bunnies, and each task will require specific movements with the Wii Remote and/or Nunchuk attachment. So just how foolish will you look while playing this one? Ubisoft Game Manager Adrian Lacey offers us a glimpse....

—Bryan Intihar

Rayman's makers are still waiting for Nintendo to give them the 411 on the system's online functions and how to utilize the Wii Remote's built-in speaker.



"Are You Not Entertained?!"

Adrian Lacey: "Like all enslaved heroes, you'll be escorted to your prison cell after each day of gladiator-style trials and then dropped off at the coliseum in the morning to face more adventures in the interest of entertaining the bunnies. This all happens under the watchful eye of Jabba Rabbit."



FPB: First-Person Bartender

AL: "Now, here we go: sun, sand, and deranged bunnies that you'll plaster with your finest cocktail of carrot juice in a first-person-shooter-style trial game. You'll have to keep the juice flowing by pumping your Nunchuk and aiming the Wii Remote at their beady little eyes, which will fill up their masks as they try to take over your Beach Bar." >



GIANT ROBOTS ARE INVADING THE PS3—NAMCO BANDAI ANNOUNCED MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM IS STORMING STORES THIS WINTER....

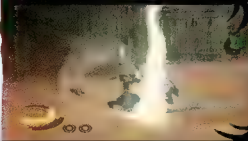
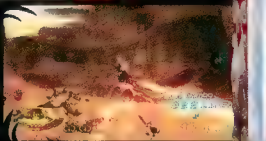
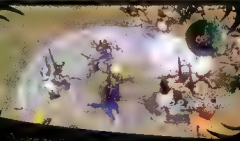
A SWEEPING SAGA
AN ANCIENT BETRAYAL
A BATTLE TO END ALL BATTLES



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NINETY-NINE NIGHTS

INTENSE ACTION

IMMERSIVE BATTLES



—PHANTAGRAM—





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afterthoughts

DEAD RISING

Picking the braain of Dead Rising's director

With gamers ransacking virtual malls all across America in Capcom's *Dead Rising*, we thought it would be best to buy some time with the game's director, Yoshinori Kawano, while the game is still alive at retail. Know what smoothies you should be drinking while busting open zombie heads? Kawano gives you the scoop. You might even be surprised to learn what happens when main character Frank West turns level 50, but then again, you may already know. You won't be sure, however, until you kill some time reading up.

—James "Milkman" Mielke

EGM: So just how much time did you spend in American shopping malls? And did you hang out in any one in particular for research?

Yoshinori Kawano: We visited quite a few in the California area, taking photographs and studying the layout, but the Willamette Parkview Mall isn't really based on any one mall. Most malls share similar dynamics, so we designed one that included all of the things we noticed.

EGM: Is it really possible to save everyone in one play-through? Or are players simply forced to restart and beef up Frank to a high level?

YK: It's actually possible to save everyone on a single run/through without leveling

up, but you really have to know where everything is and how to do it as efficiently as possible. [Programmer] Jiro Taoka can do it, but it's very difficult.

EGM: Damn, Taoka is hardcore! Now the save system can also be tricky, since it holds only one save. We actually screwed ourselves once because we saved too late to complete the main cases and we had to start over. Why not just allow multiple saves?

YK: We decided that, since the game takes place in a "real-time" style of environment, it would create a tension that you couldn't get simply from hitting restart and trying from your most recent save. We wanted there to be a penalty for your actions. It's something of a reprimand, actually, to be able to replay a chapter with the skills you've learned.

EGM: The game's story is hilarious—the whole zombies came from beef experiments, the gun-nut dad and his two sniper sons, and so on. Do you think all Americans are burger-bingeing gun crazies? Seriously, though, do you think any gamers in the States would take offense, or will they get it as a parody? And is the game a metaphor for mad cow disease?



Americans love burgers and guns—but mostly guns.

YK: [Laughs] Well, we hope people realize the whole game is tongue-in-cheek, but it is sort of a commentary on how the outside world views the United States. The mad cow disease thing is, how shall we say, this, not completely unintentional.

EGM: How many endings are there for the story mode and then the overtime mode? Ours ended with Frank screaming atop the tank. Is that the best ending?

YK: Yes, that is the best ending, actually, out of the seven total that you can unlock.

EGM: We figure this game has to be full of inside jokes and other little Easter eggs (well

besides all the Mega Man toy stuff), but it's hard to stop and look for them when you're surrounded by zombies. Can you point any out? Any posters or products we should examine for hidden messages? Any particular things we should photograph?

YK: There are 65 [pink] PP stickers in the game of the same type that you need to track down, and [photographing] them all will get you some pretty cool achievements and other bonuses that unlock. The problem will be finding them all. Some are hidden in plain sight, while others you won't be able to find unless you're looking at something at precisely the right angle. They're very small. ▶

▶▶ TO GET THE FULL MEGA MAN COSTUME, YOU MUST UNLOCK THE PUNISHER, UNBREAKABLE, AND ZOMBIE GENOCIDE ACHIEVEMENTS. ...▶▶



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DEAD RISING (CONT.)

EGM: Is photography the best way to level up?

YK: We definitely recommend going through the game two or three times because at level 50 you're superpowerful, and it almost becomes a different game. The CDs you pick up early in the game become lethal at higher levels. Taking all the right pictures, saving all the people, and finding all the different objects and books will give you experience as well.

EGM: Are there any other cool interactions gamers might miss the first couple times through?

YK: For example, there's a ride, which if you ride all the way around you get a lot of PPP points. There's a mountain bike, and you can do jumps with a skateboard. You'll need certain things in your inventory in order to pull off certain skills, things like that. Other things are like if you turn a Servotrace around until it's smiling, you'll unlock a certain achievement. There are 12 achievements that if you unlock them you'll get a special costume in the game.

EGM: What's up with the supersmall font? Why not include a font that's legible for non-HDTV owners?

YK: [Laughs] People should definitely have an HDTV before buying an Xbox 360.

EGM: What's Frank's most useful move, and what level does he get it at?

YK: It's close to around level 15 or so.

Once you learn the football skill, you can tackle. The cool thing about the tackle is, once you tackle an enemy, if you hit the attack button at just the right moment, you automatically jump off of them onto another, so you can chain them together like *Animasha's*issen attacks.

EGM: Is there any particular side mission players should see that they otherwise might have missed?

YK: There's one mission where you're taking pictures of all these sexy ladies. That's the one we would recommend it's the one we did first. [Laughs]

EGM: Are there any weapons players should try for pure comedy effect?

YK: There's a lot of good stuff in there. One thing you should try is the gumball machine, where, if you find a crowded room filled with zombies, you can throw the gumball machine, and it'll shatter, sending gumballs scattering everywhere, and the zombies will do this comedic shuffle before falling down.

EGM: The localization is really good in the game, which is ironic because it took a runny horror game to get it right when most of the serious survival-horror games sound silly due to subpar voice acting.

YK: A lot of it was thanks to [localization producer] David Crisp. We wanted to make sure we did it right, so we

called motion-capture actors from Los Angeles, rather than using Japanese people, so that the motions would "look" American. We used the same no-cap actors to do the voices as well to make sure that everything fit together.

EGM: Are the raincoat-wearing bad guys supposed to be the comedic equivalent of the robbed druids from *Resident Evil 4*?

YK: [Laughs] A little bit, yeah.

EGM: Are there any smoothie combinations we should know about?

YK: There's a blue juice, which gives you a spit the power of a bullet. It gives you "spitfire." I don't recall the specific ingredients, but it involves ice cream, something cold. There's also a black smoothie that gives you a random effect.

EGM: The game ends with a cliff-hanger. Do you have a plan for a sequel, and will the sequel take place somewhere like Disneyland or a NASCAR race?

YK: If everyone buys the game, there probably will be a sequel, but it depends on how well it sells. If there is a sequel, one place I'd personally want to set it in is a resort, so it could be fun and take pictures...

EGM: For research?

YK: [Laughs] Yes—Research and development. Bikini-wearing zombies, etc. *

NOW SHOWING @


GAME VIDEOS
 watch now, play later

A man and his homemade mech, what a next-gen *Star Wars* game might look like, the next game from the guys who made *Alien Hominid* in their garage... see all these and more at www.gamevideos.com/egm. —*Demian Linn*

WTF

GameCrazy retail training video

Check out this intentionally cheesy (we hope) training video for new GameCrazy employees. Next time they bug you to preorder, you shall know the depths of their personal pain...homey.

**OMG**

Next-gen *Star Wars* Jedi powers

LucasArts created this fancy target video to show off what a *Star Wars* game might look like powered on the next-gen behemoths. Absolutely wicked, as it turns out.

**LOL**

Land Walker: one man's giant mech

Some dude built this walking, Nerf-gun firing mech in his (cavernous) garage. Word to the wise: if you ever meet this guy, do *not* want him. Though, judging by its tipsy-turvy design, you could probably knock the tin can over with a push from your pinkie.

**1337**

Castle Crashers' Level 1' gameplay

See this upcoming Xbox Live Arcade new-school-meets-old-school beat-em-up in action. If it looks familiar, it should— indie developer Behemoth, the same people who brought you the controller-bustingly hard *Alien Hominid*, is making it.

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PlayStation 2



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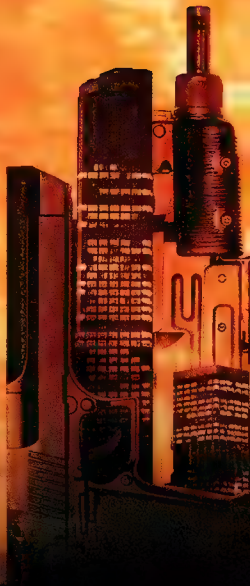


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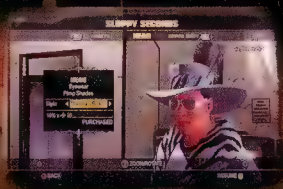
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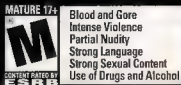
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PS3 PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON

RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

An in-depth look at the PS3's online capabilities, motion-sensitive controller, and more through the eyes of one launch game

Halo meets Medal of Honor, Half-Life 2 meets Call of Duty, this game meets that game—when it comes to this company's PlayStation 3 first-person shooter (FPS) *Resistance: Fall of Man*, Insomniac President Ted Price has heard all of the comparisons. And he didn't expect any differently. "Whenever a new franchise comes out, people automatically paint it with their impressions of previous games," says the studio head of hits such as *Spyro* and the *Ratchet & Clank* series.

"It's inevitable that you get compared to other games that you are familiar with. I think that when people play through *Resistance*, and when they experience the story, they'll discover that there are a lot of big differences between our game and the other first-person shooters."

But quick-to-judge gamers are the least of Insomniac's worries. The developer is well aware that with *Resistance* being billed by many as the PS3's premier launch title, the pressure is on to deliver

one helluva shooter that shows what the console is capable of, and more important, convinces consumers to shell out some serious cash for this much-hyped machine. "We know all eyes are on us to demonstrate the power of the PlayStation 3," says Price. "But we feel very confident that we're going to do that at launch."

Can the game really be the Day 1 poster child for PS3 technology? We recently headed to Insomniac's headquarters, where we got the full lowdown on the

game's superhuge multiplayer mode, how it'll utilize that darn motion sensor in the PS3 controller, and, on the single-player side, just what makes *Resistance* "next gen." Oh, and expect some comparisons along the way (like Price says, they are inevitable).

The PS3 online trendsetter

As Sony drags its ass to reveal additional PS3 online details, we know that at least one game for the system will be bringing

■ Resistance's internet-based warfare supports up to 40 players. And during our fully populated playtest, the action ran without a hitch.

Resistance's war rages on—head to egm.1UP.com for all-new footage of this PS3 first-person shooter, plus a tour around developer Insomniac's home base.

>> SINCE RESISTANCE HAS SUCH A RICH FICTION, DEVELOPER INSOMNIAC WILL USE THE INTERNET AND OTHER RESOURCES OUTSIDE OF THE GAME



It—in terms of Internet play—at launch, like *Halo 2* (there goes comparison No. 1), the multiplayer here is as important as—it is not more than—the solo campaign. And it all starts with *Resistance*'s high body count. During our online session (playing a mode called Breach), literally 40 soldiers and aliens filled up a massive circular warzone where both sides tried to acquire nodes and blow the holy hell out of each other's reactor. But it ain't just the number of players that impressed us; even when

the firefight gravitated to one confined area, the action never chugged.

Technical feats aside, Insomniac really wants to make the online experience attractive to everyone. "We discovered that there are two multiplayer camps," says Multiplayer Lead Mike Stout. "First is the hardcore: the ones who go and play and compete and try to get better stats than everybody. And then, there's the casual: They like to tweak the game and make their own experience, play with

their friends, and have fun. They don't like stats getting in their way. Usually, a game will only appeal to one or the other. So what we tried to do is make it so there are two aspects of this game: unranked and ranked." Now, sure, other FPSes have used these classifications, but few have had such tough regulations for their ranked games. "It'll be the pure environment where no one can come up with a loophole, like, 'Oh, shotgun-only matches are the best way to boost

my kill stat,'" says Stout. "So in ranked matches, we're being very strict." That's good news, as leaderboards and rankings will certainly be a big deal in *Resistance*. While the former will be updated weekly (and have all kinds of stat subsections, such as total number of kills, who's taken the most nodes, base defense), the latter is based on military ranks. "The more you play and the more people you defeat and team victories you get, the higher your military ranking becomes," says Stout. And

■ While we miss the rumble feature in the PS3 controller, at least it's lighter and the shoulder buttons feel better for playing first-person shooters than using the PS2 JoyPad.

"We know all eyes are on us to demonstrate the power of the PlayStation 3."

—Insomniac President Ted Price



TO TELL WHAT HAPPENED TO ITS WORLD BEFORE 1951. "WE DIDN'T WANT TO GO OVERBOARD ON EXPOSITION," SAYS FREZ TED PRICE. >>>

RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN (CONT.)

► for those needing extra kudos, *Resistance* will also include a boatload of in-game achievements. "Ribbons are per-game rewards for doing something cool—like for a head shot, you'll get a head-shot ribbon," explains Stout. "On the other hand, Medals represent long-term accomplishments like accumulating 1,000 head shots or getting a kill with every weapon in the game." We're not sure if all PS3 games will offer similar achievements, but *Resistance*'s batch gives a good idea of what you can expect.

Maintaining control

Remember how this past spring, Sony unveiled the motion-sensing capabilities of the PS3 controller via dogfighter *Warhawk*? Remember how, at that time, so many developers were jazzed about putting such functionality into their PS3 games?

And remember how, with the PS3 launch now only two months away, we still haven't heard jack s*** about how other titles will take advantage of this feature? Well, Insomniac's finally ready to give us the goods.

And better yet, *Resistance* is using it in smart, practical ways. Can't recall the button for melee attacks? You don't need to—simply thrust the controller forward to perform this in-game action. Say you get "lagged" with the Bullseye weapon during multiplayer (which means your opponent can shoot in any direction and the bullets will still find you)—just shake the controller, and the tag goes bwh-byee (that same motion in single-player can free you from the clutches of an A.I. enemy). Also, while it's not set in stone yet, Insomniac's toying around with this idea: Moving the control-

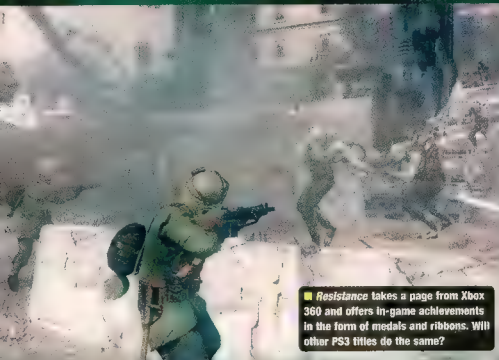
ler in some manner would offer a quick glimpse of the entire multiplayer map. (We say: Make it happen.)

The next-gen equation

Think *Resistance* is just another World War II game with a shot of alien culture? Well, Mr. Smarty-Pants, according to this game's history books, such a global fight never occurred. "Being set in 1951 with an alternate history, based on a really well thought-out time line, is something that we've been excited about from the very beginning," says Price. "It gives a lot of opportunities to do different things with the story, the characters, and what's going on worldwide. We believe it grounds the game a little bit better, perhaps, than some of the way 'out-there' science-fiction stories." The game tracks three days in

the life of U.S. Army Ranger Nathan Hale, who's sent to Great Britain to help the last-standing European country from the Chimera invasion. *Resistance*'s not-from-this-world creepy critters.

But we've seen plenty of FPSes (like *Half-Life 2*—oops, make that comparison No.2) with rich and powerful narratives. What's this one gonna do on a game-play perspective that's "next gen"? What makes *Resistance* a PS3-caliber game? A.I. is part of that answer. "There's a lot of things going on here [with the A.I.] that would have brought the PS2 to its knees," says Price. "In the *Ratchet* games, all of our characters were scripted—we were pretty much telling them exactly what they have to do at any time. With *Resistance*, we developed a lot more complex, innate behaviors for the A.I.—



■ *Resistance* takes a page from Xbox 360 and offers in-game achievements in the form of medals and ribbons. Will other PS3 titles do the same?



■ Sensitive play: Just move the PS3 controller forward to execute a melee attack.

MULTIPLAYER DEBRIEFING

A glimpse at PS3 online via *Resistance: Fall of Man*

The modes: So far, we know of four game types: deathmatch, team deathmatch, Breach (described in the main text), and Melt-down. "The objective in Melt-down is to destabilize your opponent's reactor by controlling more of the nodes on the map than your opponent," says Insomniac's Mike Stout. "The more nodes you've secured, the faster their reactor will drain of energy. Once the energy is completely gone, the reactor explodes, and you win." Stout assures that several other multiplayer modes will find their way into the final game (they better).

The maps: Trust us—there'll be enough of 'em. "We have a pretty large number of maps," says Stout. "There are four maps that work for 40 players, and then we can take those 40-player maps and shrink them down for 20 players, and 20 players, and so forth. Then there are other maps that are made specifically for smaller groups of people, and those don't ever change in size."

How the 40-player maps will stay populated: Matchmaking, that's how. "In the matchmaking we're doing for ranked games, we're trying to narrow the available pools of players so that we're more likely to pull out big player bases," explains Stout. "For example, if we let the players choose from three modes, rather than segmenting the players down into each of the various modes and sizes, we'll have bigger pools from which we can draw players to drop into bigger games."

Voice chat: Check.

Downloadable content: Check again. And Insomniac tells us that thanks to every PS3 having a hard drive, the dev team is much more likely to consistently offer additional content post-release. Still no word on the cost (if any) for extra goodies.

Clan support: Pretty basic stuff here: You create a clan, invite others in join, and you'll see a little tag next to your name that tells players which group you belong to. Also, being part of a clan "makes it a lot easier for others to add you to a party and matchmaking games," says Stout.

Vehicles: No dice. "After doing a lot of tests, we found that we enjoyed the more frantic, personal play style as opposed to a more open *Battlefield* style," says Stout. "So we decided against vehicles in multiplayer." You will get behind some wheels in the single-player game, though.

Advantages/disadvantages to playing as a human: Beginner players will want to use these guys, as their radar range is quite large and they can sprint forever. Humans are also less prone to head shots than the Chimera (whose heads are more in the center of their bodies). Still, humans aren't as inherently powerful as those unsightly fellas.

Advantages/disadvantages to playing as the Chimera: The key to their success—as well as their biggest weakness—lies within the Chimera's Rage mode. Enter this mode, and suddenly you can do more damage and run faster. But during this period, your body will also start heating up, making you more vulnerable.



GET TOGETHER. ROLL SOME DICE. HAVE FUN.

RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN (CONT.)

which takes a lot more processing power because they're doing constant checks to figure out who's around them, what's going on in the environment, who's shooting at them, where the projectiles are... what's about to fall on top of them. And they have to react appropriately, and this means they need to have a lot of different options." Lead Designer Colin Munson echoes Price's sentiments, adding that not only does the PS3 enable Insomniac

to create "brainer" A.I. enemies, but it also allows a lot more of them onscreen. "You'll find whole battlefields full of guys who are interacting intelligently together," he says. During our time with *Resistance*, we witnessed Chimeran troops wisely using cover to avoid our bullet sprays, others jumping outta the way after a grenade landed at their feet, and some even recognizing the gaps in our strategically placed (or, so we thought) proximity

mines. M, yeah, these ugly dudes definitely got something goin' on upstairs.

Big, bad weapons to the other half of *Resistance*'s next-gen equation. And just like with the A.I., what Insomniac's doing with the game's multifunctional firepower simply wouldn't be possible on the previous console. Take the Auger assault rifle: Firing through obstacles in such a ridiculously high rate just couldn't be done on PS2. Designer Nathan Fouts provides

further evidence: "In *Ratchet*, we could only get the lava gun to shoot out four or five big blobs at a time, and the enemies could pass through them. But because of the PS3, *Resistance*'s Zapper spits out 30 balls, and these chunks of explosive goop can even hang from the ceiling and then fall right on enemies." Look at that—even the developer is judging the game against its own creations. See, comparisons really are unavoidable. —*Bryan Lintner*



■ "Now get over here and give your Aunt Sally a kiss!"



■ Taking a joyride in *Resistance*'s jeeps feels very *Halo*-ish.



SOMEONE GOT MY BACK?

Resistance will also come with a co-op mode, but don't get too excited—it can only be played via split-screen (online co-op wasn't ever in the plans, says Insomniac). Still, if you decide to fight the good fight alongside a bud, you'll face some enemy types that don't appear while playing the campaign mode solo on the normal difficulty (they do pop up on the hardest setting, though). **A+**

MIDGAR DIED...





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PlayStation 2

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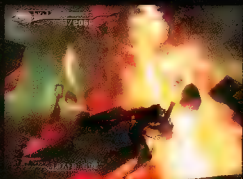
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THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS GAMERS

Meet five fearless, unstoppable pro gamers who show you the road to joining their ranks—so they can kick your ass!

With several leagues, dozens of national-level tournaments, hundreds of thousands of bucks in prize money, and multiple upcoming television deals, professional gaming is poised for the big time. Yet many gamers can name more pro bowlers than pro players. So we picked five fearsome console competitors whose skill and passion bring them *this* close to becoming household names. Study their collectible cards here and you just might figure out how to follow in their footsteps....

—Kyle Orland



Greatest achievement: Winning the MLG 2005 *Super Smash Bros. Melee* championship

Road to the pros: When Hoang was still unknown in the *Smash Bros.* community, he hustled some unsuspecting pros into losing hundreds of dollars to him in money matches. Emboldened, he surprised the 100-strong attendees at an underground tournament by placing first using Marth, an obscure *Fire Emblem* character no one was used to playing against at the time. In hundreds of tournaments since, Hoang has placed first in all but four, and he's never placed lower than ninth. Hoang admits that the travel and stress of being a pro can get hectic, but he says support from family and friends keeps him going. "Also, it's good to know that you are No. 1 at something," he says.

Luckiest tournament moment: At an MLG event in Anaheim, CA, Hoang was saved at the last second when a happy-face cloud appeared under him on the Yoshi's Story stage. To this day, some players still call it the "Ken Cloud."

Collector Card #2 of 5

Greatest achievement: Placing in the top eight of a CyberAthlete Professional League tournament in summer 2005. It was the first time an all-female team placed top eight in a large co-ed pro tourney.

Road to the pros: Dalton's first experience with *Halo* came when she walked in to find her sister destroying her brother-in-law in a 1-on-1 match. She was entranced by the social chemistry of networked matches and the game's "Zen-like" nature. Then Xbox Live came along, and Dalton met fellow female gamer Amy Brady, and the pair decided to form a clan "to provide a safe and competitive environment for female gamers," Dalton says. While the 500-plus members of the PMS clan often hold their own with the pros, domination isn't their goal. "We're not here to be the best, just the best we can be together," says Dalton. "Positive attitude is the No. 1 requirement we have."

Stereotypical practice space: "I play lying down on a couch using a 46-inch HDTV with surround sound," says Dalton. "Pink shag carpet, pink chandelier, and fluffy throw pillows complete the décor, thanks to my lovely PMS roomies, Celta PMS and Tart PMS."

Collector Card #1 of 5



>> CAPCOM HAS HIRED THE JAPANESE EQUIVALENT OF THE LATE JOHNNIE COCHRAN TO HAWK THE PHOENIX WRIGHT SERIES OF DS LEGAL-

★ THE DANGEROUS FIVE ★

#4 "THE POWER DUO"

Full Names: Dan and Tom Ryan.
Age: 20 (both—they're twins)
Handles: OGRE1 (Dan) and OGRE2 (Tom)
Game: Halo and Halo 2
Home town: Pickerington, OH
Play style: "Aggressive and flawless" (Dan) "Very well-rounded" (Tom)

Biggest Achievement: Being named the Halo 2 World Champions after winning World Cyber Games 2005 in Singapore.

Road to the Pros: After being introduced to Halo at a friend's house in 2002, Dan and Ryan burst on to the national Halo scene, winning the 2-on-2 portion of an Atlanta, GA, tournament in April 2003. From there, Dan says the biggest challenge moving up the ranks was finding teammates to complement their style for 4-on-4 matches. With fellow pros David "Walshy" Walsh and Ryan "Saiyan" Danford, Team Final Boss placed first in eight of nine 2005 MLG tournaments.

Want to win? Bring a twin: Dan says having a twin brother as a teammate means "always having a reliable teammate, always having someone of equal skill to practice with, and having someone to travel with to all of the tournaments and events."

Collector Card #4 of 5

★ THE DANGEROUS FIVE ★

#5 "THE KID"

Name: Victor de Leon III, aka "Lil' Poison"
Age: 8 (That's not a misprint!)
His game: Halo 2
Hometown: Long Island, NY
Play style: "Unpredictable!"

Greatest achievement: Getting second place out of a field of over 550 at the largest Halo 2 free-for-all tournament in the world last December. First place went to his uncle—who goes by the handle Poison—but we reckon de Leon is a little more notable because, you know, he's barely halfway to driving age.

Road to the pros: De Leon started playing Halo at the ripe old age of 4 and first competed in a local tournament at 5, earning fourth place as part of a team with his dad and two uncles. His second tournament was his first win, and he says he got used to "winning money so I can buy toys or other stuff." De Leon says he feels more pressure now that he's well known, but he doesn't let that stop him from embarrassing older opponents or offering coaching services over Xbox Live.

Reactions to age: "In the last event in Dallas, a guy triple my age quit during the competition," says de Leon. "I've also seen people cry because they lost to me." **aka**

Collector Card #5 of 5

★ THE DANGEROUS FIVE ★

#3 "THE DRAGON PUNCHER"

Name: Michael Brandt, aka "Jinmaster"
Age: 22
His games: Tekken 5, other fighting games
Hometown: Newport News, VA
Play style: "Mixture of turtle (defensive) and pit bull (offensive)"

Greatest achievement: Beating California's Bronson "Insanelee" Tran (the Tekken 5 national champion at the time) at the East Coast Championships in New Jersey back in May 2005.

Road to the pros: Brandt got into the Michigan Tekken Tag Tournament scene at 16, but his parents wouldn't drive him to any out-of-state tournaments. His cocky attitude didn't earn him any friendly rides from in-state players, either. His style and skills got him noticed, though, and when he moved to Virginia for a military job, he used his notoriety to attract people to his own tournaments. While he tries to make new players feel welcome, he's not afraid to draw the ire of more experienced players. After all, he says: "Millions of listeners hate Howard Stern but still tune in."

His four essentials for going pro: "Fire; the competitive drive to be No. 1; Money to practice and to travel; Time to practice and attend tournaments. And innovation to stay ahead of the competition."

Collector Card #3 of 5

■ All these screens showcase the Mugello track, which is located in Italy and owned by Ferrari.



XB360 **PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK**

FORZA MOTORSPORT 2

Hard drivin'

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Microsoft
Release Date: Winter 2006/early 2007

Check it out, the first real screenshots of *Forza 2*. Not too shabby. For a game that's coming out in just a few months, *Forza*-related info has been pretty hard to come by. But Dan Greenawalt, *Forza 2* director and full-time automotive evangelist—although that's not technically part of his job title—is finally ready to talk about what's going on with the sequel and how the game might not be just for hardcore racing sim fans anymore. You still have to be a hardcore car fan though—no getting around that.

—Demian Linn

EGM: You've announced a new photo mode that will allow players to upload their pics online. What else ya got?
Dan Greenawalt: Well, we've done a lot more in the online career space to give people the ability to really level up and win a lot more money. One thing we found is that we've got this really home-grown community of people that were creating their own seasons and tracking their car clubs with each other online, doing all this crazy stuff, and what they want to be able to do is make tournaments, and limitations, and create really competitive races. So we've given them those options, and it's still in the online career, so there can

kind of be a ringmaster that can set up races and set up leagues for people and actually earn a bunch of money.

EGM: Is it possible for someone who's really into the online mode to, basically, not play the single-player game, and just progress through the online stuff?

DG: Completely. The money is seamlessly integrated, and the only things that they wouldn't be able to do are some events that unlock one-off special cars. However, they could get the cars from other people online.

EGM: Do you anticipate that people who have Live access are going to be playing the game that way, as opposed to traditional single-player?

DG: We've got a really deep single-player, we're targeting 50 to 60 hours of single-player without repeating a race, and that's assuming you win all of them. A lot of players are really into that aspect, mastering the physics and just playing it more like a game, leveling up your character. But I think there's also a group that is very, very competitive. The nice thing is, we can match them with other people of the same skill level and they can race



>>> THE DEV TEAM IS CONSIDERING RELEASING A DRAG RACING MODE AS DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT SOMETIME AFTER FORZA 2 SHIPS... >>>



**ULTIMATE
AGILITY**

FORZA MOTORSPORT 2 (CONT.)



"We have captured that passion; it's pretty exciting to watch the game. I think people are going to go apes""

—Forza 2 Director Dan Greenawald

► online and do their career that way. And I think there's going to be people who are more about expression online—that's drifting, painting their cars, getting together and talking about cars. Our goal is to create more of a hub for those people too, so we can really be a bridge between gamers that like cars and car people that are getting into games.

EGM: How is the game going to feel different? Is it?

DG: I'd say that 95 percent of the players won't notice a big difference. But the people that do a ton of drifting, what they'll notice is when the car is at like 25 degrees of yaw, and you're using your accelerator to steer rather than the wheel, so you're not counter-steering but you're literally just changing the weight balance from front to back by using your accelerator, you'll notice you can get yourself in and out of trouble much quicker.

EGM: What's changed with the Drivatars? How has A.I. evolved in Forza 2?

DG: Our entire A.I. system is still built on Drivatar technology, but there has been some evolution on the back-end side, which is that they follow the line a lot better. And they've actually gotten really freaking fast.

EGM: Sometimes the A.I. cars would get really aggressive in Forza 1....

DG: Yeah, every once in a while the A.I. would just decide to hit you. But we got to the bottom of some of that. As far as the actual Drivatar training aspect of the game, we're taking on most of the training ourselves, and we're going to let people hire Drivatars just like last time, but how the training is going to be expressed... we're taking a lot of that offline and just doing it ourselves on this one.

EGM: So what's going on with the finally-force-feedback wheel you guys are coming out with?

DG: Being able to actually feel the forces through the wheel itself, it'll be exciting. Obviously, I play with force-feedback games all the time, so you can imagine that I've gotten pretty opinionated about force feedback!

EGM: Are you upset that it doesn't have a clutch pedal?

DG: Yeah, I'm torn. What I want is a wheel that has fantastic force feedback and lets you experience the game the way we intended, yet normal people can buy it and use it in their living room. But at the same time, I also want [one that has all of the bells and whistles of] a \$400-500 wheel.

EGM: So can you talk a little about where the series

headed—what are some of the dream features that you have in mind down the line?

DG: My ultimate goal in all of this is to get people that play games to get hooked on cars and get that car passion that I've got. Also, how can I get gamers who aren't the best racers, but maybe they know a lot about cars, to be part of the community and be really successful in the community and valued equally as much as these great drivers are?

EGM: Are you thinking, like, player-run tuning shops, paint jobs....

DG: Yeah, all sorts of things like that. I don't want this game to be just a driver's club and a tuner's club. What I want is one group made up of people where some are drivers, tuners, painters, organizers, and some guys who just like the shoot the **** a lot. **GG**



■ Price jump: Forza 2 will cost \$60, which is 10 bones more than most Microsoft-published Xbox 360 titles.

**ULTIMATE
STRENGTH**



afterthoughts

OKAMI

A brush with greatness

With its four-legged heroine and evocative watercolor visuals, *Okami* seems...a bit strange. But don't let it scare you off—this game offers a nearly perfect balance between offbeat artistry and stellar gameplay. We caught up with producer Atsushi Inaba in Japan to talk to him about *Okami*'s distinctive graphics engine, the game's tepid reception in Japan, and whether or not we'll be stroking it on the Wii.

—James Mielke

EGM: Those Celestial Brush techniques seem tailor-made for the Wii. Admit it—you're bringing *Okami* to Nintendo's new machine, right?

Atsushi Inaba: Before the Wii and the controller were announced, everyone was like, "Why not the DS?" because it had the touch pad; you see the stylus and assume that it could be a substitute for the brush. As soon as the Wii came out everyone started saying the same thing.

So at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, [designer Hideki] Kamiya and I went and tried it out. But it might not actually fit for *Okami* because it doesn't seem like the interface would be just right for brushes, but more specifically because the game doesn't just center around the brushstrokes. It's actually an action game, so having that controller response is more critical than the actual brush system. We specifically devised the brush system to work on the PS2's DualShock controller.

EGM: Early in development, *Okami* sported realistic graphics—what made you change its look?

Ai: We realized that the hardware limitations just didn't give us what we needed in order to do it in that style, so we started thinking about other ways that we could present *Okami*. The whole artistic aspect that you see now is just something someone came up with as a whim, and that's the one everyone liked, so we stuck with it all the way until the end.

EGM: Did that guy get a bonus?

Ai: [Laughs] A little bit.

EGM: Any extra bosses or secrets we may have missed in the game?

Ai: There are no secret bosses because the bosses are all part of the main scenario. But, in terms of areas, you'll find tons of secret areas and dungeons, side stories, things like that. So if you play the main quest, it's already a big game, but if you add in all that stuff it just becomes huge. There are some stronger enemies that kind of resemble bosses in a sense.

EGM: What's the payoff for beating those guys?

Ai: [Laughs] You can get something special for it.

EGM: The game is rich in Japanese mythology—are you surprised the game didn't sell so well in Japan? Were you worried that American gamers might not "get it"?

Ai: I was disappointed that the game didn't sell as well as I was hoping it would in Japan, but that may be partly a result of the market. I kind of expected that Japanese gamers might not be as open to the idea of games outside of defined genres, but I didn't expect it to be that extreme. Now I realize exactly what the market is like after releasing *Okami* in Japan.

But when it comes to America, a lot of the myths and stuff may be Japanese, but a lot of Japanese people don't even know the myths. So the game wasn't made with an expectation that our audience, whether it's Japanese or Western, understands or is familiar with the myths. It's more that the myths are used to create a unique fantasy world and environment to play in, so I feel that American gamers can look at it from a fantasy game approach and not think of it as "I don't understand Japanese myths so I can't enjoy this."

EGM: Right. Just like American gamers wouldn't necessarily be instantly familiar with, say, Greek mythology or Norse mythology.



■ *Okami*'s original, realistic look

It's just an exotic setting to them. Would you like to make a sequel or is *Okami* a one-game deal?

Ai: When we began making this game, we had no vision of a sequel. We wanted to make a game that stood on its own.

EGM: It's kind of surprising to hear that, since you seemed to put so much work into this. Does that mean there absolutely won't be a sequel or just that you didn't envision one initially?

Ai: A lot of developers follow different patterns when it comes to making sequels. Some fall into the cycle of coming out with a new game every year, while others come out with one every four years. With *Okami*, it's more about us feeling what the users want. It's a timing issue. If the users want the game, the available platform supports the game that we want to make, and the designers are into it, then a sequel is not out of the realm of possibility. ☼





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Fall 2006

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XB360/PS2 PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sonic Team
Release Date: October 2006

Multiplayer: 3 steps to get in, 12 to get out

Up until now, Sega has done its damndest to push *Universe* as more than just a follow-up to the groundbreaking *Phantasy Star Online* games by focusing on this new *Phantasy's* epic single-player quest. And while we appreciate the effort to rise above the tacked-on offline content of *PSO*, we know where *PSU's* true strength lies—in its absurdly addictive multiplayer action. And whether you're a series noob or a 300-hour *PSO* vet, this rundown will prep you for the year's biggest online adventure....
—Shane Bettenhausen

STEP 1: GET CREATIVE

Designing your online avatar for *PSU* offers players far more freedom than they ever had in *PSO*. Now, you choose your character's race, gender, and appearance (including intricate new details like eyebrow shape, clothing patterns, and...er, breast size) before starting the game, yet you're no longer forced to choose a character class. "Each race has their advantages and disadvantages," explains *PSU* Creative Manager Takao Miyoshi. "For example, if you want a powerful Force [magic user], you'll likely want to pick a Newman...but, if anything, our experience with *PSO* has shown that people like to play in diverse ways and play with lots of different challenges." How you choose to develop your hero depends entirely upon your in-game actions, but if you want to make a morbidly obese robotic dwarf, unfurl that freak flag.



Space race riot

PSU offers four different playable races: humans, elf-like Newmen, robotic CASTs, and the all-new Beasts. Each one has merits and drawbacks, but we have a hunch that you'll be seeing an awful lot of Beasts and CASTs online. Why? Members of these races get access to killer special attacks: Beasts have Nanoblasts, absurdly powerful transformations that send them into a lycanthropic fury, while CASTs can summon SUV weapons, colossal guns that drop from the sky to obliterate enemies.



STEP 2: FIND SOME FRIENDS

Once your carefully designed hero beams onto Guardian Colony, the game's massive, five-story space station, you're inundated with possibilities—you can converse with other players (using preset phrases, a USB keyboard, or, if you're playing on the Xbox 360, voice chat), go shopping, shake your rump at a hoppin' discotheque, grab a cup of joe at the café, or chill out in your customizable personal quarters (see sidebar).

Of course, *PSU* isn't just about socializing in a snazzy space mall. Your real goal here should be to find some party members to go questing with. Up to six players can join forces to tackle missions across three vast planets, each with its own city full of shops, townsfolk, and goodies to discover. Mission types vary wildly, so you'll be delivering, escorting, exploring, and exterminating your way through a huge variety of locales. And this time around you don't have to worry about getting stuck with a pack of losers. The party leader can easily boot troublesome players from the group, or even ban them from any future collaboration. Plus, you can prevent looting by choosing to divide the spoils evenly among all players.



■ The leader chooses a level-appropriate mission for his party from *PSU's* new map screen (shown above).



■ **Note:** All of these screens in this preview hail from the PC version of *PSO*, which is a dead ringer for the XB360 game.

Home decor

"Another fun addition for returning *Phantasy Star Online* fans will be the customizable 'My Room' feature, which allows players to decorate their own personal space on Guardian Colony with various plants, objects, and furniture," explains Miyoshi. "Players can also decorate their walls and display their hard-earned weapons and trophies." Trust us, it's a lot easier to lure some random robotic hottie back to your bachelor pad if you have an impressive array of lava lamps and jellyfish-filled aquariums on display.



Partner Machinery

PSO players surely remember mags, the tiny stat-boosting robots that required demanding Tamagotchi-style upkeep. In *PSO*, a more advanced type of bot dubbed—Partner Machinery. These metallic buddies generally hang out in your room, storing your extraneous equipment, but they also have several other uses. "You can feed Machinery things that allow it to make items," explains Miyoshi. "For example, some PM can create powerful weapons and armor and, as your Machinery levels up, it will eventually be able to fight alongside you on missions." >



■ **Now,** that's our kind of robotic operating buddy.

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE (CONT.)

STEP 3: EMBARK ON A MISSION

The real fun begins when you and your crew pick a mission and travel to one of the three planets in the Guralh star system. Each world sports a distinct theme—Parum is an industrialized, Earth-like planet ruled by CASTs, Neudairz provides a lush, watery land of natural beauty populated by Newmen, and Beast homeland Moatob offers a bleak desert terrain.

No matter where you choose to land, you'll be doing a lot of hacking and slashing—beneath its slick veneer, *PSU* remains a *Diablo*-inspired action-RPG. And that core monster-slaying gameplay receives a sizable upgrade over what kept *PSO* players grinding. Hauling multiple weapons into battle now gives you a sizable strategic advantage: Customizing your equipment with special orbs called Photon Arts imbues them with magical techniques (your character doesn't actually learn magic in *PSU*—only your weapons do) and unlocks longer, more powerful combo strings. Plus, additional weapon types (a new type of twin daggers, longbows, and several more), a handy new strafe move (why didn't they add this earlier?), and the ability to wield a gun and sword simultaneously further deepen combat.

And although *PSU*'s online play, like *PSO*'s, will ultimately feel like an endless treadmill of new equipment and powers, you'll have more incentive to keep on truckin'. High-level characters will now gain access to specialized classes with new abilities and equipment...yep, kiss another 100 hours good-bye.

Who's the boss?

PSO vets still regale one another with tales of how they bested that game's monumental boss battles, so expectations run high for *PSU*'s biggest baddies. The one end-of-mission behemoth we faced, the flying monstrosity pictured here, didn't disappoint. The age-old strategy of blindly hacking away at him didn't work at all...the best tactic we devised involved switching into the new first-person view to snipe his wings, leaving him grounded until they regenerated.

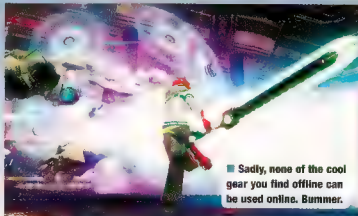


■ We spied some slowdown while playing online with six players on PS2, but the Xbox 360 version ran smoothly.



What about single-player?

We won't lie—we're far more psyched for *PSU*'s multiplayer action than its offline quest. But at least this time around, it's not a tossed-off rehash of the online game. With classy cut-scenes, tons of voiceovers, and A.I.-assisted combat, it's actually a fairly polished standalone adventure...that we'll play when our Net is down. ☹



■ Sadly, none of the cool gear you find offline can be used online. Bummer.



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Xenosaga EPISODE III

Also sprach Zarathustra



Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence



PlayStation®2



COME OUT AND PLAY

We tap our friend at gaygamer.net to bring us gaming's top 10 queerest characters

Since 10 percent of the population is gay, it's no surprise videogames have their fair share of hardcore homos. So we asked Fruit Brute, editor of the rainbow-powered gaygamer.net, to write up his list of the top 10 gayest characters in gaming.



10 RAPHAEL SOREL

Soul Calibur II & III

Talk about Gay Parade! Hell, this guy makes San Francisco look like a redneck metropolis. Just take a peek at his two costumes: 1) a "butch" blond bob with the goatee look and 2) an uber-gay French-pansy-who's-prettier-than-Marie-Antoinette look. But it's his long rapier, ruffy lacy collar, flamboyant thrust-thrust-jab-thrust moves, and mincing, hip-shaking walk that place him solidly at number 10. Sure he's a stereotype, but stereotypes are hilarious. Vive la gay France!



8 ZANGIEF

Street Fighter Series

Not all gay guys are femmy, limp-wristed dudes who dart about stroking their long, feathered hair. So, Capcom decided to represent the burly side of things with the Russian man-grappler Zangief. But what really gives away his gayness? The skintight Speedo? The thatch of groomed chest hair? Or maybe it's the fact he dislikes "beautiful young women." Yeah, that's pretty queer.



7 JUHANI

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic

Jedi babes are out and proud! When you first meet Juhani in *KOTOR*, you can either whack her or court her to be your bud. If you kill her, a jealous female Jedi will exact revenge out of her love for Juhani. Now if you save Juhani and follow the right conversations with her (you must be a female character), she will profess her love to you. Once the game is over, you are left to assume that you and Juhani fly off to some Jedi lesbian love nest for some Forceful lovin'.

5 KING OF ALL COSMOS

Katamar Damacy



More pompous, vain, and bitchy than a dressing room full of drag queens, and shall we say a, uh, theatrical fashion sense: purple formfitting catsuit, frilly collar, cape, rainbow headpiece, crown, six-pack, prominent package, and facial hair that would make the most seasoned biker bar patron seethe with jealousy.

Don't forget his "Royal Rainbow" powers, either—this guy is so gay that when he opens his mouth, a rainbow comes out...literally. If your gaydar doesn't go off into the red zone with this one, it's time to get new batteries. Yeah, I know he has a wife and kid, but so does Tom Cruise.

9 BIRDO

Super Mario Series

In "her" first appearance in *Super Mario Bros. 2*, Birdo was described in the manual as such: "He thinks he is a girl and he spits eggs from his mouth. He'd rather be called Birdetta." In subsequent printings, Nintendo corrected the "mistake" and Birdo became a full-fledged female. So, in reality, Birdo was the first male-to-female transsexual in the videogame universe. Just look at the size of that rock on her finger! Definitely a drag queen ring if I ever saw one and, believe me, after living in San Francisco for 11 years, I've seen plenty...



6 DON FLAMENCO

Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!

In my opinion, Don really treats that fine line between gay and metrosexual Eurotrash. But come on, this guy enters the ring with a rose in his mouth and proceeds to prance about while throwing out lines like, "Hey! Mr. Referee Mario. I like your hair!" and "Carmen my love...I dance so sweet for you!" He compliments the referee's hair but then professes his love to Carmen. Is Carmen a girlfriend or is he just expressing his big gay love for opera?





Pixel illustration by Sander Dennis

WHO AM I?

1



Even though I hate my job, I can't quit—I'm kinda chained to it.

2

Screw Gatorade; I'll take nectar, thank you.

3

A day doesn't go by when I don't think about my wife and kid.

4

Tanning is so overrated. Why look like a lurd when you be a nice, pretty pale?

5

Flowing hair is so girly—a real man lets his head shine.

Illustration: Rod of Mir's Korlos

4



MAJOR IVAN RAIDENOVITCH RAIKOV

Metal Gear Solid 3

This may be up for debate, but if you look closely, you can spy the flames. First, his relationship with Colonel Volgin—at one point, our hero Solid Snake is disguised as Raikov. Pretty straight, eh? Well, until Volgin grabs Snake's crotch twice and exclaims, "I know the Major better than anyone else." Gay. Oh, and his special move in *Substance* is a massive crotch grab that renders his opponent stunned. Really gay. Hell, even porn mags won't faze this flamer.

3



HANA TSU-VACHEL & RAIN QIN

Fear Effect 2: Retro Helix

Fear Effect 2: Retro Helix not only features two hot chicks, but two particular females who are also into hot chicks. Now that's hot! Hana Tsu-Vachel is "a beautiful assassin...desired by many yet belonging only to one." And yes, my gentle readers, the one she belongs to...is a woman! Rain, to be exact—Hana finds her pretty messed up in a cemetery and takes her in. The rest is history, folks.

2



PIERRE AND GERARD MAGIMEL

Shadow Hearts Covenant

The 2004 role-playing game *Shadow Hearts Covenant* features Pierre and Gerard Magimel—two wishy, unmistakably gay twin brothers. Gerard sells weapons while brother Pierre is a tailor who creates dresses. The dresses he designs have names like Sassy Sailor and Windy Pixie, but if you want 'em, you must trade Pierre a series of sexy muscleman trading cards. Yikes!

1

TINGLE

Zelda Series

You have to admit, Tingle made quite a questionable impression when he first floated into the *Zelda* franchise in 2000. Being a 34-year-old man-child who longs to be a fairy doesn't exactly help, either. And if that weren't fruity enough, Tingle is now set to star in his own RPG in Japan entitled *Tingle's Fresh-Picked Rose-Tinted Rupee Land*. Hell, it doesn't get much gayer than that. And while Tingle may not sew doll clothes or have a special crotch-grab move, I think we can all agree he is rightfully the gayest character in videogames. **AB**

—Fruit Brute, *gaygamer.net*



"Hey, don't yell at us—we didn't write this. So...uh...how 'bout them Bears?"



KILLING AN EXCLUSIVE

Assassin's Creed purrs a HR on the 360

Microsoft announced its formerly Xbox-exclusive *Assassin's Creed*, a stealthy adventure game from the peeps who brought us *Prince of Persia*, is also heading to the Xbox 360. OK, so most industry insiders already knew this, but it may signal a trend for Sony's console, considering it already lost the *Grand Theft Auto IV* exclusive. And now rumors, rumors are guessing Microsoft's *World of Warcraft* may slip to Microsoft's machine, too. Still, Sony can't really complain about the loss of a few games, especially when you factor in locked-up winners like *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*, *Final Fantasy XIII*, and *Devil May Cry 4*. Hell, if anyone should stop complaining, it's Microsoft.

the BIG ones

Heightening your anticipation for these heavy hitters

HALO 3

XB360 • Microsoft • Fall 2007

Someone get Bungie's Frank O'Connor a drink—he's the one guy we can always count on for something *Halo* 3-related. During a recent post on bungie.net (the developer's official website), he made a mention about being killed by a Banshee during a *Halo* 3 multiplayer session. Maybe this time round, Bungie will actually gameplay balance the Covenant craft.

Also, during the *Halo Graphic Novel* panel at Comic-Con, he said that Spartans (like Master Chief) were never listed as killed, only missing. Could this be a clue about *Halo* 3, or just more warble from the Bungie camp? We guess the latter.

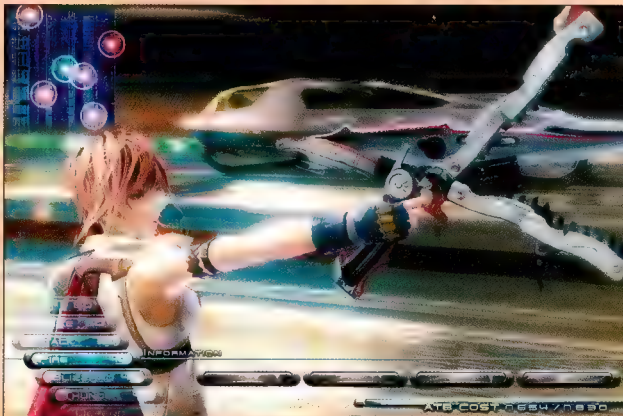
■ N.R. Giger called. He wants his phallic symbols back.



METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

PS3 • Konami • Fall 2007

Rather than gawk like an immature fanboy, one *MGS* diehard took a chance run-in with series creator Hideo Kojima at this summer's Comic-Con to ask him some choice questions about No. 4. And better yet, Kojima answered them. He confirmed that the stealth-espionage game wouldn't be shown in playable form until next year, the final version should run in 1080p (the PS3's highest resolution setting), and his team is still conducting tests on how to take advantage of the motion-sensor controller. When the fan brought up the possibility of tilting the controller to crack enemies' necks, Kojima simply laughed and said another member of the *MGS4* team had the same exact idea. Sounds like a good one to us.



FINAL FANTASY XIII

PS3 • Square Enix • 2007

Expect a flood of new info on Square Enix's absurdly ambitious (and goofily named) multigame *Final Fantasy XIII* project, Fabula Nova Crystallis, in the wake of September's Tokyo Game Show. Until then, though...this lovely new screenshot from *Final Fantasy XIII* will have to satiate your hunger for next-gen FF.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

WII/GC • Nintendo • Fall 2006

They say that no news is better than bad news, and here's *Zelda* to prove it. Last month we had a big fat nothin' to report, which left us talking about the *Tingle* RPG (DS) in the *EGM* International section. But that sure beats this month's news, which is that Link's own DS outing appears to have been delayed until next year. Nintendo hasn't confirmed anything, but *Phantom Hourglass* was a no-show on the company's recently released 2006 schedule. ☹



X Kevin Robinson

WOODWARD

WOODWARD

get Xtreme get



sales charts



TOP 10 BEST-SELLING GAMES



Another month, another butt-stampin' victory.

- 1 **New Super Mario Bros.** • DS • Nintendo
- 2 **Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories** • PS2 • Rockstar
- 3 **Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!** • DS • Nintendo
- 4 **Cars** • PS2 • THQ
- 5 **Hitman: Blood Money** • XB360 • Eidos
- 6 **Cars** • GBA • THQ
- 7 **2006 FIFA World Cup** • PS2 • EA Sports
- 8 **Big Brain Academy** • DS • Nintendo
- 9 **Hitman: Blood Money** • PS2 • Eidos
- 10 **Cars** • GC • THQ

TOP 10 XBOX 360



- 1 **Hitman: Blood Money**
- 2 **The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion**
- 3 **Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter**
- 4 **2006 FIFA World Cup**
- 5 **Fight Night Round 3**
- 6 **Table Tennis**
- 7 **MotoGP '06**
- 8 **Call of Duty 2**
- 9 **Battlefield 2: Modern Combat**
- 10 **Burnout Revenge**

TOP 10 PS2



- 1 **Grand Theft Auto: LCS**
- 2 **Cars**
- 3 **2006 FIFA World Cup**
- 4 **Hitman: Blood Money**
- 5 **God of War**
- 6 **Guitar Hero Bundle**
- 7 **Kingdom Hearts II**
- 8 **NFL Head Coach**
- 9 **Over the Hedge**
- 10 **MLB 06: The Show**

TOP 10 XBOX



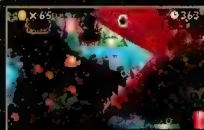
- 1 **Cars**
- 2 **2006 FIFA World Cup**
- 3 **Hitman: Blood Money**
- 4 **Halo 2**
- 5 **Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas**
- 6 **Fable**
- 7 **NFL Head Coach**
- 8 **Jaws Unleashed**
- 9 **X-Men: The Official Game**
- 10 **Major League Baseball 2K6**

TOP 10 GAMECUBE



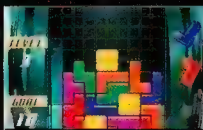
- 1 **Cars**
- 2 **Over the Hedge**
- 3 **Naruto: Clash of the Ninja**
- 4 **Paper Mario: TTYD**
- 5 **Dance Dance Revolution: Mario**
- 6 **Super Smash Bros. Melee**
- 7 **Mario Kart: Double Dash!!**
- 8 **Teen Titans**
- 9 **Super Mario Sunshine**
- 10 **Lego Star Wars**

TOP 10 PORTABLES



- 1 **New Super Mario Bros.** • DS
- 2 **Brain Age** • DS
- 3 **Cars** • GBA
- 4 **Big Brain Academy** • DS
- 5 **Cars** • DS
- 6 **Super Mario Advance** • GBA
- 7 **Over the Hedge** • GBA
- 8 **Mario Kart DS** • DS
- 9 **Animal Crossing: Wild World** • DS
- 10 **Metroid Prime Hunters** • DS

TOP 10 MOBILE

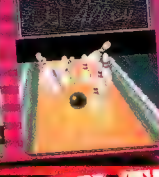


- 1 **Tetris**
- 2 **Pac-Man**
- 3 **World Poker Tour**
- 4 **Bejeweled**
- 5 **JAMDAT Mahjong**
- 6 **Platinum Solitaire**
- 7 **Diner Dash**
- 8 **Ms. Pac-Man**
- 9 **Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005**
- 10 **Sonic the Hedgehog**

>> THOSE ITCHING TO FRAG A BUNCH OF NOOBS IN *UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007* ARE GOING TO HAVE TO WAIT—EPIC DELAYED IT UNTIL 2007... >>

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ASPHALT 2



Keyword: ASPHALT

MONKEY POOL



Keyword: POOL

PLATINUM SOLITAIRE



Keyword: CARD

AND1



Keyword: AND1

PRINCE OF PERSIA THE TWO THRONES



Keyword: PRINCE

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the hot 10

Consume till you drop

1 NEXT-GEN CONSOLE PREORDERS

If you're hoping to score a PlayStation 3 or Wii this fall, we sincerely suggest that you preorder one immediately. Seriously, like right now. Otherwise, prepare to receive a royal rapping from eBay scalpers (aka those of us who did preorder).

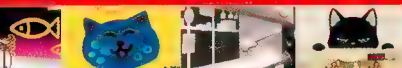


3 HALO FACEPLATE

Good news—Master Chief will grace the Xbox 360 this October...well, physically, at least. *Halo 3* is at least a year away, but we're pretty sure that plenty of loyal fans will plunk down \$19.99 for this stylish faceplate.

2 DS LITE GETS FASHIONABLE

White DS Lites are so last season. On September 13th, Nintendo unleashed new DS Lite units in this fall's hottest hues—onyx (for gamers looking to exude a touch of class) and coral (for those preferring a touch of sass).



4 RHYTHM HEAVEN

Take one look at this wildly creative music game and you can tell that it hails from the makers of the brilliant *WarioWare* series. Sadly, Nintendo has no plans to bring this quirky game stateside. Import away, kids!

5 A TRIBE CALLED QUEST REUNITES...FOR A BASKETBALL GAME?

Eight years after calling it quits, pioneering rap group A Tribe Called Quest is currently headlining the 2K Sports Bounce Tour, a cross-country jaunt in support of 2K Games' upcoming NBA 2K7. Check www.2ksports.com/go/bounce for the full schedule, but make haste—the tour wraps up this October in New Jersey. How did this unlikely reunion occur? Turns out Tribe member Phife Dawg is a huge fan of the b-ball franchise (look left—that's him in the hat).



6 SPYRO REBORN

Forget everything you know about *Spyro the Dragon*. Not terribly hard, eh? Now, open your heart to VU Games' upcoming *The Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning* (arriving in October for current-gen consoles).

It's still a cuddly platformer, but tight control, creative levels, and classy production values (Frodo himself! Elijah Wood, voices the titular dragon) place it above the baby-game pack.



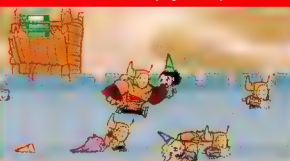
7 TUP YOURS PODCAST

While it won't replace the EGM Live! podcast (EGMLive.1UP.com) in your heart, the weekly 1UP discussion offers plenty of news, analysis, and party game-calling. Hear it at 1UPYour.1UP.com.



9 CASTLE CRASHERS

OK, this wacky four-player brawler won't hit Xbox Live Arcade until early 2007, but we're boarding the hype train a few months early. The same guys who brought us cult classic *Allen Hominid* (PS2/GC) work their magic here, crafting a pick-up-and-play romp in the spirit of cult-classic *Guardian Heroes* (Sega Saturn).



10 XBOX 360 LIVE VISION CAMERA

Xbox Live just got a whole lot kinkier—this camera expands the horizons of Microsoft's online service to include photo chat and streaming video feeds to the multiplayer arena. Can you say full frontal *DMO7*? Plus, expect motion-sensing gameplay, à la Eye Toy (PS2), in future 360 offerings.



8 FOR YOUR STATUARY

If last month's *Shadow of the Colossus* action figure broke your bank...these statues will obliterate it. Scoop these absolutely sick renditions of Cloud and Sephiroth from *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*—each one will set you back roughly \$200. RPG fans with deep pockets can order these directly from www.square-enix-shop.com in October.



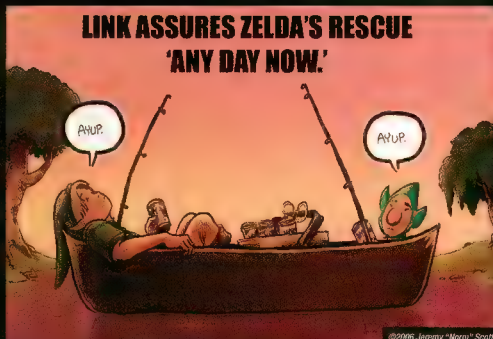
WANT TO GET GUN-HAPPY WITH JOHN WOO'S STRANGLEHOLD (PS3/X360)? LOOKS LIKE YOU'LL HAVE TO WAIT—IT GOT DELAYED UNTIL 2007...

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



overheard

Sure, they talk a big game...



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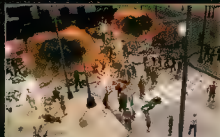
"What other entertainment medium that's mass-market is at \$60 a pop? I would kill to have a game that's jam-packed with an amazing story and amazing moments and four hours long and costs 20 bucks. **I think videogame prices need to go down.** \$50 is far too much for an impulse buy. \$60 is completely out of the question."

—Epic Games Designer Cliff Bleszinski in February 2006, six months before Microsoft announced a \$49.99 price point for its Xbox 360 game, *Gear of War*



"[Digital distribution] will be the business model for the future of games. **I'd be amazed if the PlayStation 4 had a physical disc drive.**"

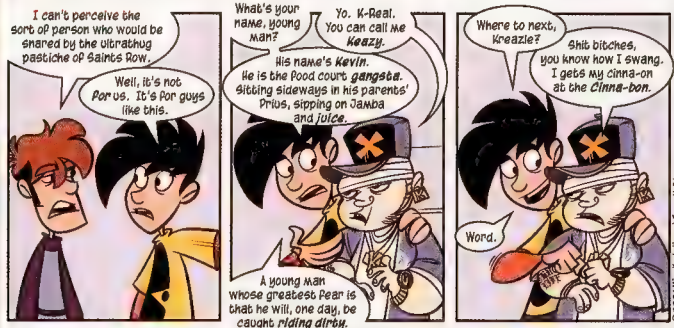
—Phil Harrison, president of Sony Computer Entertainment Worldwide Studios, speculates that Sony's future systems won't use disc-based media at all. Does this mean planned obsolescence for the PlayStation 3's flagging Blu-Ray format?



"Finally, a violent videogame you can trust to help raise your kids. **Oh, damn—he just saved that guy right between the eyes!** He blessed his f***in' head off!"

—Daily Show correspondent Rob Corddry extols the virtues of the biblically based Left Behind PC game, which may be headed to home consoles in 2007

SPINY ARCADE WWW.PENNY-ARCADE.COM



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QUOTATION SOURCES (COUNTERCLOCKWISE, STARTING WITH PHIL HARRISON): WIRE, MCV, MANICHI DAILY NEWS, SHACKNEWS, THE DAILY SHOW

>> MECHASSAULT 2 (XB) DEVELOPER DAY 1 STUDIOS HAS SIGNED A DEAL WITH LUCASARTS TO CREATE A NEW NEXT-GEN FRANCHISE. ... >>>

GOD.
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HUNTER.
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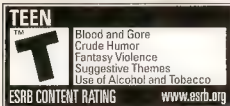
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rumor mill

Scratching the scuttlebutt

Rounding up all the rumors for the month ain't so easy. Dissecting the truth from the trash takes some practice, but after all my years in the dirt-digging biz, I'm a seasoned pro. So I was shocked when a few pissy peeps started to doubt my rumormongering skills. Well, truth be told, kiddos, my track record isn't as spotty as you may think. Sure, some dirt never grows, but that's no fault of The Q. If you wanna blast around the blame, set your sights on the developers and the publishers, because while most of my rumors are true, they may not end up coming to fruition because of reasons I know...but you, I'm afraid, will never understand. But enough jibber-jabber—let's get to the good stuff.

—The Q

Madden madhouse

Monster publisher EA has dipped its hands in just about every videogame genre: sports, role-playing, fighting.... Hell, they even planted their seeds in the evolution-world-simulator field. But one game genre still remains untapped: survival-horror. That's right—I hear **EA is digging through its closet of scares for a new**

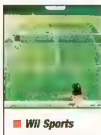
next-gen survival-horror game. No word on what the game is about, but let us hope it has nothing to do with football. Though pumping shells into the bloated mug of Madden does sound fun.

Stepping up to the plate

With all the Wii buzz going around, it's supereasy to hear some juicy deets about Nintendo's upcoming casual console. For instance, my sources tell me that *Wii Sports* is going to pack more than just your typical tennis and baseball. In fact, it looks like *Wii Sports* is going to sport over 30 different games in one sweat-inducing package. The obvious sports games are easy to guess, but you have to wonder what else it's going to offer. Horseshoes? Jacks? Synchronized swimming?

Portable problems

With all the hubbub over Nintendo's DS Lite, it's sometimes hard to remember Sony also has a slick portable system. Thankfully, games like *Killzone: Liberation*



■ *Wii Sports*



■ *Killzone: Liberation*

and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories* should keep portable pundits chipper. But while these two games look hot, the PSP's future is not—I hear several big-time third-party publishers are giving up on the PSP.

Exclusive Evil

So all we know *Resident Evil 4* reanimated Capcom's popular survival-horror series, but what exactly do we know about *Resident Evil 5*? Zip! Well, until I managed to unearth this tidbit—so I hear Sony may have caroused Capcom into making *Resident Evil 5* a PlayStation 3 exclusive. While we're on the talk of exclusivity (and zombies), I hear the sequel to Capcom's Xbox 360 zombie romp, *Dead Rising*, may also set up shop only on the PS3.

Resident Evil 5 may sign an exclusive lease with the PlayStation 3.

Q-TIPS

- Tetsuya Mizuguchi, the maestro behind *Rez*, *Space Channel 5*, and *Lumines*, knows his music games. And ever since *Rez* hit the PS2, fans have been rabid for a sequel. Well, now they can shut up: It appears a *Rez* sequel is coming to either the PS3 or Wii.
- Over the years, *Street Fighter*'s toughest competition has been busting out the sequels (it's been almost a decade since *Street Fighter III* hit the arcades). Thankfully, Capcom is finally pumping up for a true sequel—my kick-ass sources tell me *Street Fighter IV* is actually going to come out next year.
- Square Enix has been tight-lipped about the upcoming *Final Fantasy XIII* games, but not tight enough for my rumor spies. I hear a "huge" DS game is going to be announced this fall—and, if my secret sources are correct, it'll be a strategy-role-playing game based on *Final Fantasy XIII*.



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PlayStation®2



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OCTOBER 2006

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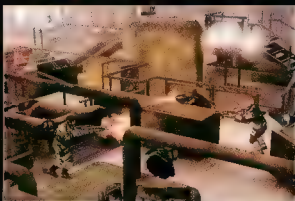
At least cosplayers can fit in one day this month



CRACKDOWN

XB360 • Microsoft

Grand Theft Auto equals big bucks, so Microsoft contracted one of the guys behind the popular series to make an open-world game for its new machine. You can tackle these gang-ridden streets solo or with a bud online, and every action will evolve your character's stats (for instance, clobber enough foes and you'll eventually be able to throw cars).



KILLZONE: LIBERATION

PSP • Sony CEA

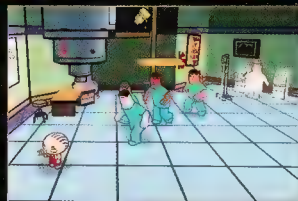
Thank you, Guerrilla Games: It's so nice to see a developer adapt a franchise for Sony's handheld rather than butcher it. This means no awkward first-person shooting here: *Liberation* is a pure (and easy to control) action game played from a third-person, top-down perspective. A co-op mode allows you to bring a friend to this firefight, too.



GOD HAND

PS2 • Capcom

Development powerhouse Clover Studio (*Viewtiful Joe*, *Okami*) and *Resident Evil* creator Shinji Mikami are responsible for this supremely weird brawler with ridiculously over-the-top combat. Now, you'd think that with such smarties behind it, *God Hand* would be a surefire hit, right? Well, from what we've played so far, the controls and camera still need a ton of work.



FAMILY GUY

PS2/XB/PSP • 2K Games

When Fox resurrected *Family Guy* (good call, guys), you knew it was only a matter of time until someone gobbled up the videogame rights. In this action-adventure title, you'll play as Peter, Brian, and smart-ass baby Stewie and cause all kinds of chaos (and probably annoyingly scream "What the deuce?") around their hometown of Quahog, Rhode Island.

>> UBISOFT HEARTS THE Wii!—IN ADDITION TO THE LAUNCH TITLES *RED STEEL* AND *RAYMAN RAVING RABBITS*, UBISOFT ANNOUNCED FIVE



LUMINES II

PSP • Buena Vista

The sequel to last year's techno-heavy puzzler is really bringing out the stars, as it'll have music tracks (and videos—a series first) from headliners such as Beck, Gwen Stefani, and the Black Eyed Peas. Unfortunately, recent *American Idol* winner Taylor Hicks won't be sending his "Soul Patrol" after *Lumines II* players.

MORTAL KOMBAT: ARMAGEDDON

PS2/XB • Midway

A while back, we asked series cocreator Ed Boon which of his komatants he'd rather nix: rent-a-cop Stryker or generic ninja Ermac. In the case of *Armageddon*, his answer doesn't matter—this one will feature every single warrior from the franchise's history. And if you need a break from the bloody action, you can always take a spin in the all-new kart racing mode. (Oh, and for the record, Boon chose Stryker.)



SUPERMAN RETURNS

XB360/PS2/XB • EA Games

It was a rough summer for the Man of Steel: First, his movie underperforms at the box office, and then his game—an open-world affair that has Kal-El flying all over Metropolis and using his super-duper powers to save helpless civilians—gets sent back to the fortress of development solitude for a few extra months. But after seeing *Supa's* interactive return recently, we question if he'll even be ready by this October....



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 07

XB360/PSP2/XB/GC/PSP • EA Sports

Tiger may be "the man" on the real links, but man, did he ever land in the rough (and couldn't get out) in his next-gen debut last year. This edition promises to have double the number of courses and crowds that finally bring the environments to life. Maybe it's just us, but check out the onlookers in this screenshot—don't they look like dead cardboard cutouts? **DM**

MORE OCTOBER RELEASES

.HACK//G.U.

PS2 • Namco Bandai

BLITZ: THE LEAGUE

XB360/PSP • Midway

CHILDREN OF MANA

DS • Nintendo

DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2

PS2/XB • THQ

EVERY EXTEND EXTRA

PSP • Buena Vista

FINAL FANTASY XII

PS2 • Square Enix

JUSTICE LEAGUE HEROES

PS2/XB/PSP • Warner Bros.

LUMINES PLUS

PS2 • Buena Vista

MAGICAL STARSIGN

DS • Nintendo

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

XB360/PS2 • Sega

POWER STONE COLLECTION

PSP • Capcom

RESERVOIR DOGS

PS2/XB • Eidos

SPIDER-MAN: BATTLE FOR NY

DS/GBA • Activision

SPYRO: A NEW BEGINNING

PS2/XB/GC/DS/GBA • VU Games

TOKOBOT PLUS

PS2 • Tecmo

TONY HAWK'S DOWNHILL JAM

DS/GBA • Activision

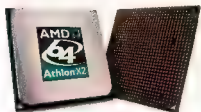
OTHER GAMES FOR NINTENDO'S UPCOMING CONSOLE, INCLUDING A NEW *FAR CRY* TITLE AND *MONSTER 4X4 WORLD CIRCUIT*... >>



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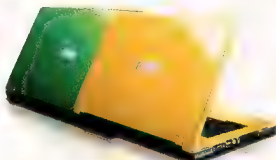
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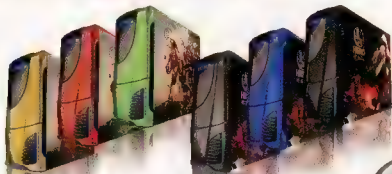
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OF THE



Superheroes aren't necessarily super friends—we pit **Marvel: Ultimate Alliance** against **Justice League Heroes** and declare an early winner.

In the real world, sporting a slick pair of spandex tights can lead to lots of laughing, finger pointing, and sometimes even a severe beating. But it works completely the opposite way in comic book land; donning that same ridiculous getup there will have folks calling you a hero. Luckily, two videogames will help minimize the fashion faux pas and maximize the do-gooding, as comic publishers Marvel and DC are both leasing their stars to almost every system this fall.

So, to get you ready for the upcoming villain-thwarting and world-saving, we profile **Marvel: Ultimate Alliance** (PS2/Wii/360/PS2/XB/PSP/GBA) and **Justice League Heroes** (PS2/XB/PSP) and compare them to see which one—at least at this point—is closer to claiming superhero supremacy. >

—Michael Donahoe

THE HEROES

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

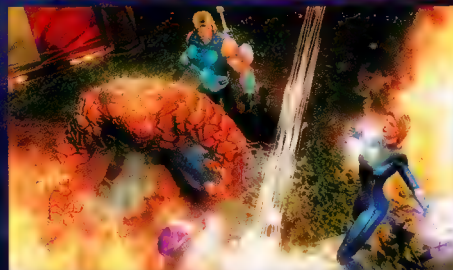


■ All of our *Ultimate Alliance* screens are from the PS3 and 360 editions. Which is which? It doesn't matter—visually, those versions are indistinguishable.

You can't go wrong with the oddball ensemble that comprises *Ultimate Alliance's* megastar lineup, mainly because developer Raven Software wasn't picky when choosing its heroes. Hell, the studio chucked in practically every Marvel character known to fans—the cast of costumed freaks peaks at 140 (though only 20 of those are actually playable). While hardcore comic buffs will go gaga over some of the more obscure characters like Dr. Strange and Nick Fury, most will probably stick to playing as the Marvel mainstays (Spider-Man, Wolverine, Captain America, and so on). Yeah, the smorgasbord of heroes is a great idea, but expect most of the D-list dopes to show up for their quick cameos and bolt back to parts-unknown-by-people-with-social-lives.



■ Re-create a classic Marvel team like the Avengers and you'll start the game with a slight stat boost.



JUSTICE LEAGUE HEROES



■ No one in the *Justice League* can compete with Batman's gadgets...or his bank account.

Though this game doesn't pack the playable punch (in terms of quantity) of *Ultimate Alliance*, *JLH's* crusaders are hardly chumps. Also, you won't find any half-assed fighters riding Superman's coattails in this group (well, that's if you ignore Zatanna, the one character whose special powers consists of—get this—saying words backward). Magical wordsmiths aside, *JLH* houses some of the most iconic names in the comic book biz, including Batman, Wonder Woman, and the Flash. Even lesser-known Justice League members such as the Green Lantern, Martian Manhunter, and the Green Arrow are intriguing characters (and unusually fond of the color green).



ADVANTAGE: MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

Though *JLH* has a tight-knit group of good guys, not even Supes and his pals can take on *Ultimate Alliance's* massive cast of costumed crime-fighters.

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- 57029 BAKER GAGE
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- 57031 BORN TO BE WILD
- 57032 BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS
- 57033 DANCE, DANCE
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- 57037 MOVE ALONG
- 57038 MR. BRIGHTSIDE
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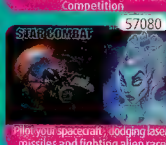


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THE VILLAINS

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE



If it weren't for bad guys, the super life would quickly get super boring. But don't worry—*Ultimate Alliance* features a crapload of 'em.

The game throws you plenty of fodder in the form of the Masters of Evil, a devious group headed up by the tin-headed Dr. Doom. Expect to find a mishmash of baddies from all walks of villainous life here. Basically, name a popular costumed adventurer and his w/ her archnemesis probably answered Dr. Doom's take-over-the-world job posting.



JUSTICE LEAGUE HEROES



Superman and Batman may pop into people's minds when they think of superheroes, but, sadly, the villains in *JLH* slip into pop culture oblivion. In fact, only the most hardcore DC diehards will smile when they duke it out with a giant talking gorilla (fans of the Flash will know we're referring to Gorilla Grodd... all you others are probably scratching your heads like big, dumb apes). The only bad dude casual players may recognize is longtime Superman adversary Brainiac. The others (like Queen Bee and Killer Frost) will make you wish Bruce Wayne's alter ego had called upon his awesome enemies for the game.



ADVANTAGE: MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

Gorilla Grodd, Killer Frost, Queen Bee—even the Justice League would agree that their foes are pretty pathetic when compared to *Ultimate Alliance's* villains.

Check it out:
www.espn.com/videogames



Welcome to Sports Gamer Paradise

Reviews

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Pigskin Dreams

Weekend special edition offers an early look at fall football. This Power you can see college and pro football in the same area. [Story](#)

AP Photo/Brain Bahannon

2005 NFL Schedule

Spotlight

NFL Cards

It's time to tag back to the NFL with a summer getaway to training camp. We've got you covered with our team-by-team travel guide.

Simulations

HEADLINES

- [MLB2K6 360 glitches causing series](#)
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THE STORY

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

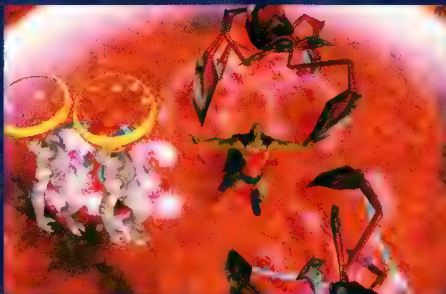
Dr. Doom's plotting a scheme for world domination? Wow, that's deep. Sarcastic aside, at least *Ultimate Alliance* offers a break from its clichéd story with optional character-specific comic-book missions, many of which feature classic battles. For example, if you unlock Mr. Fantastic's mission, you'll play out how he escaped from Arcade's Murderworld and fought the walking, talking muscle Bulldozer in the process.



■ Another *Fantastic Four* movie in the works? Now that's a stretch.

JUSTICE LEAGUE HEROES

The story for *JLH* got some special treatment from Dwayne McDuffie, game writer by day, DC Comics writer by night. McDuffie's story has Brainiac searching out an all-powerful artifact that'll help put the Justice League out of business. And since the game focuses on a core set of characters, its narrative has less of a broad, overarching approach than that of *Ultimate Alliance*. McDuffie himself has written stories for *The Justice League*, so all of the characters' dialogue should read like they would speak in the comics, as opposed to your generic, "Yeah, let's go kick some butt!" crap.



ADVANTAGE: JUSTICE LEAGUE HEROES

What did you expect? Publisher Warner Bros. Interactive had a comic writer pen the script. You can't get more legit than that.

"MY HERO IS MORE SUPER THAN YOUR HERO BECAUSE..."

No other comic creator deserves as much credit as Marvel legend Stan Lee. You know, the guy who created every character you ever dressed up as for Halloween. We visited with both him and DC comic writer (and the story writer for *Justice League Heroes*) Dwayne McDuffie to ask them the ultimate comic questions.



STAN LEE

The Incredible Hulk vs. Superman

"If I wrote the story, I guarantee the Hulk would win. The way I established the

Hulk, the more he fought, the stronger he got. And Superman has a certain amount of strength and that's it. I assume at some point he'll get worn out, but *never* the Hulk."

The X-Men vs. the Justice League

"The X-Men without question. I'm trying to remember who the hell is in the Justice League! I feel silly having to answer this. A child would know the X-Men would win."

Who's the one DC superhero you'd bring to the Marvel team?

"Superman. He seems to be the strongest and has more powers he can use—he can fly, he's bulletproof. So I'd feel safer with him as my bodyguard than if I had Robin, the Boy Wonder."



DWAYNE MCDUFFIE

The Incredible Hulk vs. Superman

"Superman. So the Hulk gets angrier and angrier, and stronger and stronger. Well, Superman would grab him by the ankle and pitch him into the sun. The Hulk would be mad as hell...as he's flying into the sun."

The X-Men vs. the Justice League

"Oh, no contest, the Justice League. The DC characters are about two orders of magnitude more powerful than the Marvel characters."

Who's the one Marvel superhero you'd bring to the DC team?

"For power, Dr. Strange." >

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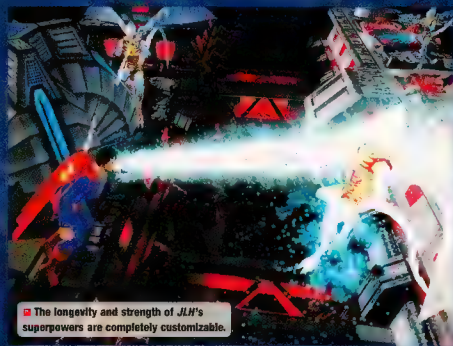
MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE



■ That Human Torch sure thinks he's hot s***.

Since it's being made by the same guys who did the *X-Men Legends* series, *Ultimate Alliance* plays a lot like those action-RPGs...except with an added emphasis on fist-cuffs. ("You can now grab guys and sock them a bunch of times," says Grutzmacher.) But just because this one plays more like an old-school brawler than a wordy role-player doesn't mean you won't be evolving your superheroes, as you'll find plenty of upgradeable powers. For instance, Spidey can eventually gain the ability to shoot out two webs and then slingshot himself across the screen.

JUSTICE LEAGUE HEROES

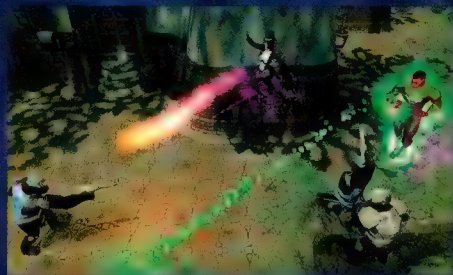
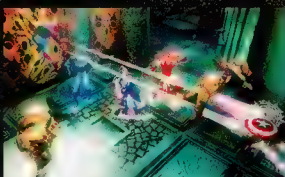


■ The longevity and strength of J.L.H.'s superpowers are completely customizable.

J.L.H.'s developer also has an action-RPG pedigree; Snowblind's résumé includes *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* (PS2/XB/GC) and *Champions of Norrath* (PS2). The formula doesn't stray too far from these games: You pick a hero from the league and battle a bunch of evildoers, but instead of traditional medieval hack-n-slash, you perform a little comic pop-n-pop. Plus, the game's experience system ensures that you can play any way you like. "As you level up the powers, you can then customize them more to your play style," says Producer Jason Ades. "So you can make it so Superman's heat vision lasts forever, but it doesn't do a ton of damage. Or you can have it last for a shorter time, but do loads of damage."

WII POWERS

While the Wii version of *Ultimate Alliance* will look practically identical to its next-gen counterparts, the console's unique controller will have you playing it a bit differently. "Many of the characters' actions are mapped to gestures made with the controller," says Associate Producer Chris Williams. "On any of the other platforms the player has to perform a button combo such as X, X, Circle. However, on the Wii, the player has access to these moves even outside of a combo, so the player can simply give the Remote a quick flick upward and watch their character uppercut an enemy clean off his feet." Executing superpowers will also require select movements with the Wii Remote or Nunchuk. "To make Captain America throw his shield," explains Williams, "the player holds down the modifier button on the controller then makes a thrust gesture." Better stay alert around those acting out the Hulk smash or it could be lights out for you.



ADVANTAGE: TIE

Both games furnish the thrill of bashing buttons to kill endless rounds of enemies, so it's impossible to pick a knockout winner. Gamers win, the games tie.



EARLY WINNER:

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

J.L.H. has a super team, but it's hard to match the plethora of characters and options in *Ultimate Alliance*—online co-op, comic missions, and the ability to create your own team...hell, it's enough to give some nerdgasms.



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HERO WORSHIP

Raiseth thy Bics and cranketh thy "Freebird"—we go behind the music of **Guitar Hero II**, a rawk-of-ages sequel that strikes all the right power chords...

By Crispin Boyer, Jennifer Tsao, and Michael Donahoe

When the lead rocker of the mega-selling six-string phenomenon *Guitar Hero* bangs a business idea from his head, it's probably a good idea to listen. "I'm going to start a record label that sells nothing but blank CDs," says Marcus Henderson, the guitarist whose blurred-finger fret-work powers many of the game's tunes.

"What, like blank CDs people can record their music on?" we ask.

"No, they're locked, non-recordable," Henderson says. "How much will you charge for them?" we ask.

"\$6.99. We're going to be the first record label to sell 1 million blank CDs. It's in protest to all the CDs filled with bad, bad music in stores right now."

In the likely event Henderson's enterprising protest doesn't rake in millions, he can always fall back on his gig with *Guitar Hero II*, the rocked-and-loaded PlayStation 2 sequel guaranteed to be America's loudest game when it hits November 7.

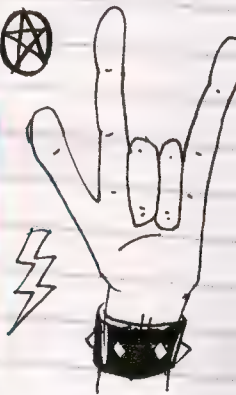
"*Guitar Hero* is my band," says the wiry Henderson, formerly of punk-metal rockers Drist and now the go-to guitar virtuoso for RedOctane, *Guitar Hero*'s publisher. And, as it turns out, the sequel fights Henderson's good fight against mediocre music simply through sheer tonnage: 40 songs from every school of rock, from screaming Guns N' Roses to countrified Allman Brothers to mock-rocking Spinal Tap to angsty Nirvana. "We're continuing to keep music out there that may get swallowed up by all the crap that's being forced to America and the world right now on the radio," says >

ULTIMATE GUITAR HERO CONTEST!

Think you're the next Eddie Van Halen? Now's your chance to show off those guitar skills. *EGM*, 1UP, and GameVideos are teaming up to bring you the Ultimate *Guitar Hero* contest. Submit your best *Guitar Hero* videos for a chance to win kick-ass *Guitar Hero II* prizes. Head over to <http://guitarhero.1up.com> for all the details!



There will be an encore: Worked-up fans will scream for one more song when you finish your set at each venue.



Sketches by Alexander/Demo

➤ Henderson. "I mean, you have kids going to Hot Topic and getting their look and makeup and just assimilating themselves to a scene instead of developing their inner voice. When you're more into being cute on stage, it's time to go back to square one, grab *Guitar Hero II*, and focus on the masters."

Monsters of rock

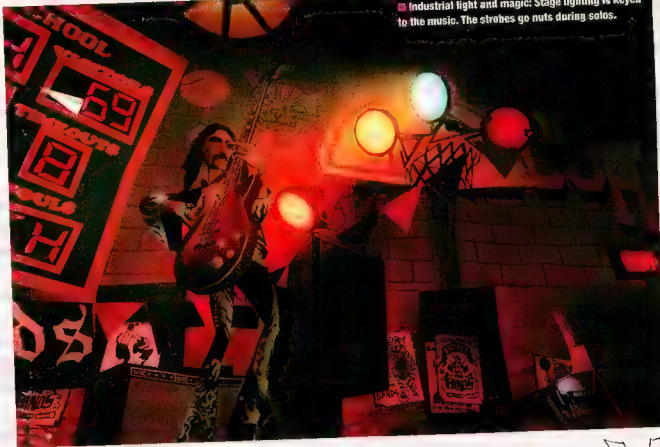
EGM is revealing 12 of these masters and their songs in this cover story, which—along with the 12 tunes already unveiled—brings the total of announced hits to 24 (see sidebar at right for the full setlist). That leaves 16 more songs for RedOctane to reveal between now and the game's release, not including the bonus tunes players may purchase with cash earned in the game's souped-up career mode (the bonus music will come from much bigger, more marquee bands this time). We've played many of the still-to-be-announced songs, which range from classic rock to thrashing punk to stuff that's playing on your radio right now. "I think 40 songs is the sweet spot between budget and what you can do with a really good setlist, to reach out and grab enough people," says Producer John Tam, adding that the new multiplayer ability to strum bass or rhythm guitar along with lead effectively doubles the gameplay content for most songs.

Guitar Hero II's setlist is hashed out by RedOctane, developer Harmonix, and the session musicians who must re-record each tune to strip out the guitar portions for gameplay purposes (although Primus' "John the Fisherman" is the real deal; the band provided its original master tracks to RedOctane's recording engineers). Picking the tunes is a process of "spirited debate," says Henderson, between the East Coast-based Harmonix and the Sunnyvale, CA, HQ of RedOctane. "Because they're in Boston and we're in California," says RedOctane's Tam, "there's this East Coast/West Coast balance to it."

Sometimes this think tank gets with a minimum of fuss. Everyone agreed including the Allman Brothers: "Jessica" would be a worthy experiment in how far they could take *Guitar Hero* into southern-rock territory. And settling on "Freebird" was a cinch. It's "Freebird," for crying out loud. ("It's one of the hardest songs in the game," says Tam, and after playing its marathon guitar solo, we agree.) But other times, the music-selection committees could barely even agree to disagree. Case in point: Both camps knew an Anthrax song was essential to *Guitar Hero II*, but they battled over which max-distortion hit to go with: "Caught in a Mosh" or "Madhouse." "Any time you have one of your personal favorites, a song you grew up with, you want that song," says Associate Producer Ted Lange. "For almost half the songs, we had a lot of push and pull." In the end, they went with



You start the game in a high-school gym. You end it at a trippy outdoor festival called Stonehenge.



Industrial light and magic: Stage lighting is keyed to the music. The strobes go nuts during solos.



"If it's super hardcore and requires ultra-high gain, that's my tune."

—Guitar Hero II guitarist Marcus Henderson

Discography

The songs you'll be playing

KILLER

METAL!!!



Song Title

As made famous by...

You know this song because...

"Heart-shaped Box"

Nirvana

You've listened to the radio in the last 10 years

"John the Fisherman"

Primus (original recording)

You always wanted to rock the air bass guitar Les Claypool-style

"Trippin' on a Hole in a Paper Heart"

Stone Temple Pilots

Singer Scott Weiland entered drug rehab the same time this single hit

"Madhouse"

Anthrax

Rhythm guitarist Scott Ian is everywhere right now

"Shout at the Devil"

Mötley Crüe

It was in heavy rotation in your big sister's record collection

"Message in a Bottle"

The Police

It's from the band's second album, and it rocks more than you think

"Tattooed Love Boys"

The Pretenders

The tune's got oddball timing (which makes it really fun to play)

"Surrender"

Cheap Trick



Ticket scalper Mike Damone sings it in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*

"Tonight I'm Gonna Rock You Tonight"

Spinal Tap

Stonhenge is your favorite dwarven tourist trap

"Crazy on You"

Heart

It's got a classic riff you'll recognize instantly

"Jessica"

Allman Brothers Band

It's a little bit country...

"Freebird"

Lynyrd Skynyrd

Maybe you don't, even if you've mock-requested it at a live show

"Beast and the Harlot"

Avenged Sevenfold



It's like God and Satan collaborated on a metal song

"Misirlou"

Dick Dale

You've seen *Pulp Fiction*



"Laid to Rest"

Lamb of God

This metal act's grunty vocalists scares your parents

"Them Bones"

Alice in Chains

It flattered your flannel and your dirty hair and your heroin addiction

"Psychobilly Freakout"

Reverend Horton Heat

The frontman hits you over the head with the song's name from the get-go

"War Pigs"

Black Sabbath

You respect your heavy metal elders, sonny

"Strutter"

KISS

It's old-school KISS. Like, from their first album

"Who Was in My Room Last Night?"

Butthole Surfers

(It's OK—you probably don't)

"You Really Got Me"

Van Halen

It's really a Kinks song!

"Sweet Child O' Mine"

Guns N' Roses

It's a wistful reminder of Gn'R before Axl went balsa!"t

"Can't You Hear Me Knocking"

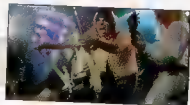
The Rolling Stones

You're either a hardcore Rolling Stones fan...or you're Keith Richards

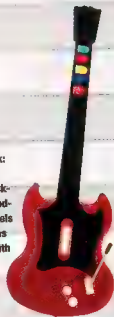
"YYZ"

Rush

It's a complex instrumental—and it's super fun to play co-op



■ The SG strikes back: *Guitar Hero II* will be packaged with a black-on-red Gibson SG-modelled guitar, which feels and plays the same as the one that came with the first game.



➤ "Madhouse," a debate that Henderson now figures was pointless. "You can't really lose with any Anthrax song and those heavy thrashing riffs," he says. "That's kind of the criteria. The song has to play well in the game. Generally we want to see a kick-ass guitar solo. And if you don't look like a total rockstar goofball jumping around with the guitar controller, then the song's not going to cut it. It's like passing an audition: You gotta look good playing the song."

Well, that's part of the formula. "Popularity and street credibility are also important," says Tam. Take "Heart-shaped Box," the Nirvana tune included in *Guitar Hero II*. We wondered why the team didn't go with the more anthemic "Smells Like Teen Spirit." "A lot of times when you go with the most obvious songs," Tam says, "the problem is it's so played out that it's almost too familiar to people. When you pick a hit, but it's a lesser-known hit, it actually gets a better emotional response."

Of course, the grind of song licensing—the wheeling and dealing with the ego-powered, makes-the-kraken-look-like-a-guppy monster that is the record industry—ultimately had the greatest sway over what you play in *Guitar Hero II*. Although RedOctane's music-licensing guy had an easier time getting bands on board (thanks to the first game's runaway success), major supergroups from U2 to Quiet Riot to Led Zeppelin proved too prickly to pin down. Sometimes the sought-after song was just too expensive to license. Sometimes its rights were split between band members scattered hither and yon... or unreachable for other reasons. "Our clearing guy has told me stories of trying to call [band members] in jail to get their 2-percent cut," says Tam. "I'm not making this up." Sometimes it came down to a simple band feud. The team pined for a bona fide Van Halen song, beyond just the band's included cover of The Kinks' "You Really Got Me," but the rift between Van Halen's former frontman and the rest of the band got in the way. "With my understanding from our clearing guy, it's because of David Lee Roth," Tam says. "And we don't want 'Van Hagar' songs, OK? We want early Van Halen. Obviously, I'm dreaming of the day when we can figure out a way to make 'Panama' work." That day's not here yet, but RedOctane is not giving up on Van Halen or the other groups who slipped through the cracks—even though the team knows it's impossible to please all players. "You can't make people 100 percent happy," says Tam, "but as long as this game keeps on spurring a million conversations on what song would be the best one to play, as long as [fans are] still fighting to hear [their favorite songs], they'll be interested to see what we do next time." And that leaves us with the question we've been asking RedOctane since the first *Guitar Hero* sauntered on stage: When will we get

ROCK!!



Reinvigorating the rock

New modes that'll make you mosh

1. Co-op — Becoming a head-banging hero is no longer just a solo act. Along with the versus mode from *Hero's* debut, you can now join forces with a bud on the bass (or rhythm guitar for some songs). During a tune, you'll share a combo meter with your bandmate, and to activate your collective starpower, you'll have to coordinate your rock-outs for some synchronized shreddin'.



2. Practice — Even heroes need practice taming the beasts of rock. Thankfully, now you can master specific sections of finger-cramping ditties in the new practice mode. Along with the ability to pick different sections of the song (intro, chorus, solo, and so on) you can slow down specific parts so you can perfect the ideal fingering to fight off any tune holding you back.

3. Career — Working your way up to a guitar god is a little different this time. You'll still build your street cred from the bottom, but now you'll start below the bottom; the first round of songs starts you off in a high school battle of the bands. You'll end each session with an encore. And now the game will really take you on tour—each venue is set in a different city. A map tracks the cross-country progress of your tour bus.



WARRIGS



➤ Sharper image: *Guitar Hero II* supports 480p for crisper digital TVs and Pro Logic II (for crowd noises).

WHEN THE CLOCK IS TICKING,
PRAY HE FINDS YOU FIRST.



RUSH CITY

WRITTEN BY
CHUCK DECK

ILLUSTRATED BY
TIMOTHY GREEN II

COVERS BY
JOCK

SEPTEMBER 2006



dccomics.com
COMIC SHOP LOCATOR SERVICE:
1-888-COMIC-BOOK

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► to jam on Europe's spectacularly cheesy synth hit "The Final Countdown?" "I kind of have plans for that song," says Tam, "but I can't tell you about it. If and when I do something about that song, I will tell you, personally, first. That's a promise."

Guitar Heroism

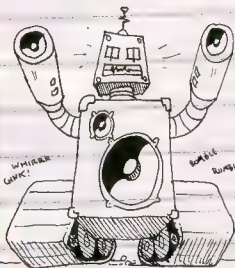
"We are jamming today," says Henderson, gripping the neck of an acoustic guitar with a tattooed, whiphandle-lean arm. He just finished taking us on a "world tour" of RedOctane's office, playing personalized rock ballads for every cubicle dweller while we provided clumsy backing on bass guitar. It's just the warm-up for today's headlining event: Henderson's heading to the nearby WaveGroup—the studio that records all the cover tunes for the game—to lay the last few wailing solo tracks for the final song. "It's more sweet than bitter," he says of today's farewell performance. "It's been a grueling four months of recording. The degree of difficulty is so much higher this time. Some songs are seven to 10 minutes long."

That difficulty, he says, translates into the game. "Songs on expert [difficulty] are finger-pretzel mindbenders—more difficult than playing on an actual guitar," he says. "I remember reading on forums [after the first *Guitar Hero* came out], 'I got this game yesterday, and I cleared it all on expert in three hours.' Right, so either you're lying or you're exactly who we're making *Guitar Hero II* for." Fortunately, the new training mode lets you practice entire songs—or just the tricky parts of them—until you're ready to rock for real.

Henderson says the recording process was even more painstaking this time, with the already anal WaveGroup engineers and studio musicians tracking down exactly the right instruments and other gear to duplicate the songs. A punk and metal guitarist since his first gig at Taco Bell at age 13 (his pay: "A Burrito Supreme and nachos"), the 33-year-old Henderson laid down the tracks for the heavier stuff in *Guitar Hero II*. "It's just like a videogame," he says of his recording routine, which starts in his bedroom where he thrashes through solos until he has them nailed. "Once I get all the pieces and put them together, I go fight the boss. And when the boss is slain, I'm rewarded with another level—another song." Today's tune, he says, is the final boss. "You'll know it when it arrives," he says, unable to reveal the name of this monster. "This is a major, major guitar ass-kicker. It has no less than 11 guitar solos in it."

Yikes. But as fanatical as Henderson, and WaveGroup are about capturing each song's sound—right down to maintaining a database of soundalike vocalists for every famous lead singer—it's a little-known fact that these tunes suffer a small degree of hi-fi infidelity. "Some bands don't want to be emulated perfectly," explains Tam. "It's just in our contracts ►

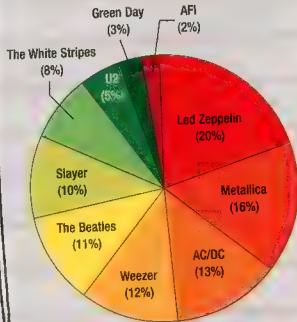
Err guitar: It's easier to tell when you screw up this time. Miss a note during a combo and the scrolling fretboard shakes for a sec.



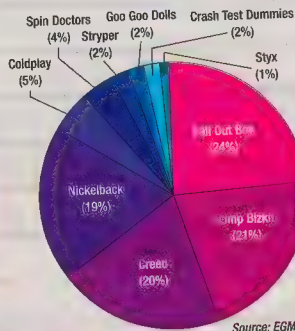
Most requested

Dream until your dreams come true

Which band that didn't make the cut would you like in the game? game



Which band are you most glad didn't make the cut?



Source: EGM Poll

NYKO HAS YOUR XBOX 360 COVERED

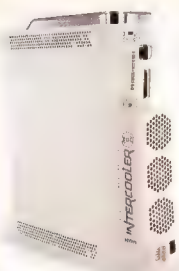


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your own faceplate designs online.
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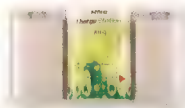
Every Xbox 360 may be created equal, but yours doesn't have to stay that way. Surround yourself with today's coolest accessories at www.nyko.com.



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multiReader
Compact multi-card
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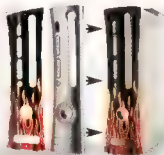
charge station
Dual port rapid battery charger
with two NiMH battery packs



Intelligent Remote
Full feature learning remote



powerkit
NiMH battery pack
and USB play and
charge cable



GAMEFACE
Customizable faceplate
and skin kit

► [with them.] Another reason boils down to pure gameplay concerns. "The endings for all our songs have this rock-concert crash-out," Tam gives as an example, "because you want to end it feeling energized. You can't end it with a radio fade: That would put you to sleep."

We've played many of *Guitar Hero II*'s tunes ourselves. They capture not only the spirit of the rocking original versions, but they're also incredibly fun to play. Clearly, the session musicians' grueling work has paid off. "I can't believe I spent that many hours in my bedroom with my guitar alone. Without a girl," Henderson says.

Sunnyvale rocks!

Something is awry at RedOctane. Cubicles are decidedly un-thrashed. Not a single employee has died of a drug overdose, lost a limb in a horrific car crash, or choked on vomit. It goes against everything we've learned from watching VH1's *Behind the Music*. After all, the company has had its garage-band beginnings (in game rentals and peripheral sales) and experienced superstardom with the first *Guitar Hero*. Hardcore fans might even say RedOctane sold out when Activision recently bought the company (Tam insists the acquisition means only good things, such as increased resources for supporting the inevitable downloadable songs of future versions). Following the *Behind the Music* career curve, isn't the *Guitar Hero* phenomenon due for its crash and burn? "We're only on the sophomore record—I'd say we still have five years left," jokes Henderson. "We'll leave a goddamn good-looking corpse."

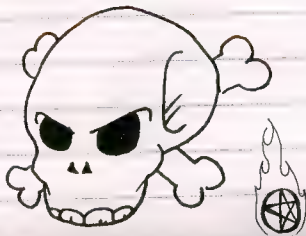
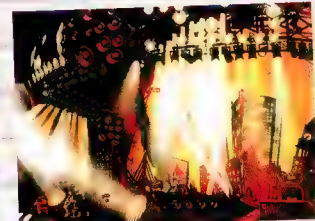
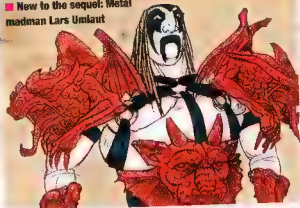
And even if the series does flame out in spectacular rock-god fashion, it could leave behind a legacy that inspires tomorrow's Eddie Van Halens. "I predict we will see a generation of kids who will play real guitars better than the generation before them who didn't have the benefit of *Guitar Hero* to act as training wheels," says Clark Vogeler, guitarist for alt-rockers The Toadies. "Funny thing is, I spent a week in Portland playing *Guitar Hero* with members of The Shins and Modest Mouse, and we ran into Josh Homme from Queens of the Stone Age. I asked him about having their song 'No One Knows' in the game. He responded with a frustrated, 'I can't even play my own song!'"

All that matters to Henderson, though, is that people *are* playing Homme's song—and every other song in the series. The *Guitar Hero* setlists are, he figures, the ultimate weapons in his war against crappy music. "By the time *Guitar Hero VI* comes out," he says, "hopefully there will be a new generation raised on the music that preserves the legacy of rock 'n' roll and metal. When it's my turn to pass the torch, I want to make sure there are waiting hands to grab it and carry that thing as far as it will go."

► After the lousy sales of the PS2 hard drive, RedOctane scrapped the idea of selling downloadable songs online. It's a plan they'll revisit when the series hits the new systems.



► Now to the sequel: Metal madman Lars Ulrich



Guitar Hero fan club

Five f***ing awesome tributes

Gamers are famous for creative tributes to their hobby, and *Guitar Hero* has proved suitably inspiring fodder. We asked Producer John Tam to tell us about some of his favorite fan-created homages.

The Real Musician

www.guitarherotabs.com

A couple of rabid fans out there went to the trouble of detailing the more challenging *Guitar Hero* routines in tablature (notation that helps guitarists practice notes and fingering). They even checked with RedOctane first to make sure they weren't going to get sued. Tam says RedOctane supports these fan efforts, especially as they don't use copyrighted material. "There's no reason to stomp on guys that do that," says Tam.



The Hacker

www.myfavoritebutton.net/guitar.html

This crafty college student connected his guitar controller to a sequencing program on his PC, which then enables him to assign different sounds to the buttons on the guitar. From there, it's just a couple button presses to beautiful music. Tam alerted Harmonix to the kid's work: "I said, 'When you're ready to look for a job, send a résumé,'" says Tam. "They love what he's done."



The Guy With Blisters on his Fingers

www.gamevideos.com/egm

When you watch this video, prepare to see fingers flying. You may find yourself wondering how this could possibly be real...and your suspicions would be well-founded. "That's fake," says Tam. "He's doing hammer-ons and pull-offs where there's no hammer-ons and pull-offs. And he's not strumming the lead note on some of those..."



The Last Guitar Hero

www.gamevideos.com/egm

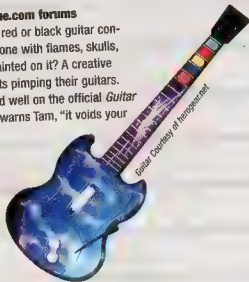
This is one of those video efforts that looks like it really took some time—and passion. It tells the classic tale of rock 'n' roll—the love of the music, the inevitable fall into drug addiction, and the inspirational rebirth. "I live rock 'n' roll, I breathe rock 'n' roll, I piss rock 'n' roll," spouts a coke-addled lead character. Complete with ZZ Top-inspired fake beard!



The Michelangelo

Check the GuitarHeroGame.com forums

Why settle for a boring old red or black guitar controller when you can have one with flames, skulls, and alien demons spray painted on it? A creative movement is afoot of artists pimping their guitars. The community is alive and well on the official *Guitar Hero* forums. "Of course," warns Tam, "it voids your warranty." 🐼



■ Sponsored heroism: Beyond the licensed guitars and drum kits from the prequel, you'll see ripped-from-real-life amps and even sponsored tour venues (such as the Vans Warped Tour).



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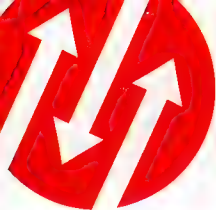
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GAMEVIDEOS.COM





review crew

cute as they may be, these slimes would maul you given the chance

THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS...

It's been a busy month, with plenty of interesting games. *Saints Row* does the whole "flattery through imitation" thing quite well, making the wait for *GTA4* much easier. *Lego Star Wars II* handles the beloved original trilogy in its unique way. Madden once again delivers the expected goods. Meanwhile, *50 Cent* brings in-game branding to a new high.

And yet, despite this menagerie, only one game qualified for an award, and it's perhaps the most bizarre of all (quite impressive, considering we also reviewed instant cult fave *LocoRoco*). But the baby-game-seeming—but surprisingly deep—*Rocket Slime* takes the crown...and yeah, we're as shocked as you are. Just proves that you can't judge a game—ah, screw it. If you're into quirky action-adventures, check out this DS entry.

—Greg Ford, Reviews Editor

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DRAGON QUEST HEROES: ROCKET SLIME

THE REVIEW CREW

Surprisingly nice people in real life

DAN "SHOE" HSU • Editor-in-Chief

Shoe hates film director Sam Raimi for messing up this issue's cover story. What a mess!

Now Playing: Anything that's not *Spider-Man*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



SHANE BETTENHAUSEN • Exec. Editor

Three years and 200 gameplay hours later, Shane finally found Jesus—literally—in *Xenosaga*.

Now Playing: *Yakuza*, *Xenosaga II*, *Vertua Fighter 5*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



JENNIFER TSAO • Managing Editor

Someone's not feeling phlogenic these days (she's no Britney or Demi). Luckily for Jen, that Xbox Live camera isn't out yet.

Now Playing: *Contact*
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



CRISPIN BOYER • Senior Editor

Crispin is either 1) bitching about the PS3's price on the *EGM* podcast, or 2) directing air traffic. Let's hope it's 1.

Now Playing: *Okami*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



BRYAN INTIHAR • Previews Editor

Bryan's newfound interest in blogging has the *EGM*er, according to himself, "blowin' up."

Now Playing: *Okami*
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com



GREG FORD • Reviews Editor

Greg's definitely scared of Bry explodin'... mostly 'cause he'd have no one to spearhead future *Madden* reviews.

Now Playing: *Saints Row*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



MICHAEL DONAHOE • News/Features Ed.

Michael went to Comic-Con for research, but he mostly spent time posing with freaks.

Now Playing: *Rocket Slime*, *Dead Rising*
Blog: egmiked.1UP.com



ADAM GÖTHELF • Editorial Intern

Playing the *EarthBound*-esque *Contact* reminded Adam to call up Nintendo for a little chat regarding a few "mothers."

Now Playing: *NBA 2K2*
Blog: egmadam.1UP.com



MARK MACDONALD • Editor-at-Large

Dead Rising: \$60. Xbox 360: \$400. Pretend revenge on the Babbage's manager who fired you 12 years ago? Priceless.

Now Playing: *Okami*
Blog: mark.1UP.com



ROBERT ASHLEY • Staff Reviewer

Why do we play videogames? Robert thinks it's because we feel powerless in the real world. He's a wuss.

Now Playing: *Tetris DS*
Blog: robertashley.1UP.com



ROBERT COFFEY • Staff Reviewer

After enduring *50 Cent*, Robert decided to take a vacation. Hopefully, he doesn't end up sleeping with the fishes.

Now Playing: In *Kauai*
Blog: citizen_pain.1UP.com



JON DUDLAK • Staff Reviewer

T-minus 58 days till Jon gets married, so he's marking his territory with bulky old consoles.

Now Playing: *Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow*
Blog: Coming soon!



JAY FRECHETTE • Staff Reviewer

Distraught over the size of gaming T-shirts, Jay is on a high-calorie diet to gain weight. Beats having to buy clothes.

Now Playing: *Tetris DS*
Blog: jayfresh.1UP.com



DEMIAN LINN • Staff Reviewer

Another videogame hockey season ends in partial disappointment. Why did *NHL '94* have to be so good?

Now Playing: *NHL 07*
Blog: egmdemian.1UP.com



PATRICK MAURO • Staff Reviewer

This syndicated satellite-radio guy played so much *Madden NFL 07* this month that carpel tunnel syndrome began to kick in.

Now Playing: *Madden 07*
Blog: What do you think?



GREG SEWART • Staff Reviewer

The yearly release of EA's NASCAR game brings out Stevy's inner redneck. Yee-haw!

Now Playing: *Dead Rising*, *NASCAR 07*
Blog: stewy.1UP.com



THE RATING SYSTEM & AWARDS

10-7
GOOD

6.5-5
FAIR

4.5-0
BAD



Platinum
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 with unanimously "good" scores.



SHAME OF THE MONTH
The lowest-rated game with unambiguously "bad" scores.

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



■ The valiant assistance from 1UP.com's battalion of writers assures us monthly victory against deadlines. ■ Your little home base for reviews we don't have room to



■ Nothing says "badass but fashionable" like a gun on a chain.

No Respect
Saints Row's respect system proves interesting but limiting. You earn respect for completing side missions and defend-your-territory pushbacks, with bonuses for blinging out your created character. Unfortunately, you have to spend respect to play story missions. It's kinda annoying that you need to finish multiple activities when you want to go on a mission kick.

■ Xbox 360

ONLINE

SAINTS ROW

Attack of the beautiful clones

B. FORD: For wannabe thugs in upper-middle-class houses countrywide, *Saints Row* will seem like a sleek glock from the gods. This game delivers what any fan of the genre that *Grand Theft Auto* built (open-world, mission-based driving/shooter hybrid) could hope for in a next-gen entry—provided that doesn't include innovation. Visually, its varied boroughs impress with a grungy splendor (provided you've got an HDTV). On-foot shooting, so often a misguided endeavor in this genre, is actually enjoyable, ditching clumsy lock-on methods for an ever-present and easily manipulated reticule. And the list of goods goes on (see sidebar on the opposite page for a more comprehensive breakdown). The most notable inclusion, though, is the game's hit-or-miss online mode (see sidebar below). The result: *Saints Row* brings you into a stunning, addictive world that you'll easily lose yourself

in with demonic (or lackadaisical, depending on how you play) gloe. Too bad it's such a familiar world; developer Volition focused more on refining the genre than changing the landscape. Both the story (help your gang capture the city, one district at a time) and means will induce déjà vu in veteran players. And, naturally, the game has its share of minor flaws, including graphical glitches, a criminal lack of midmission checkpoints, and no controllable boats or planes—what gives? But the quality of what's here sucked me in for the 20-plus hours it took me to beat the game, and I'd have no qualms wasting away a few more.

SHOE: I've been having a hell of a time trying to figure out why I don't love this game. Yes, *Saints Row* technically fulfills my "how to improve *GTA*" wish list (for the most part). But something's missing here. The *GTA* "soul" just ain't there.

Is it the city? No, *Saints Row*'s metropolis is huge, detailed, and a breeze to navigate thanks to the awesome GPS-like navigation system (I now can't live without it). Is it the theatrics? Nope—the cinemas and acting are top-notch here. It must be the irreverent way *GTA* tackles gang/mafia life. Naw, *Saints Row* has that covered, too. Going on suburban drug runs with an airhead soccer mom says it all. Hmm...seems like *Saints Row* has got "*GTA*" down pat.

I guess that's the problem. Like Greg says, it's all familiar. What defines the game's personality? What makes it unique? It's hard to find *Saints Row*'s soul when all I can see is it trying so hard to steal *GTA*'s. I had a lot of fun looking for it, but in the end, I came up empty handed.

1UP.COM—SHARKEY: Sure, it seems like the developers had a *GTA* rip-off checklist they

Doing Time Online

A tour of *Saints Row*'s tangle of online modes

Gangsta Brawl: A standard free-for-all or team-based deathmatch. Herky-jerky play leads to unsatisfying combat in the weakest mode.

Big ASS Chains: Kill enemies to earn chains, which you bring to designated areas to score. The team-based variant offers some strategic thrills.

Protect The Pimp: A team-based mode. One team must escort the pimp to an exit; the other team tries to stop them. Tight interior levels ratchet up the suspense.

Blinged Out Ride: Teams compete to be the first to upgrade then drop off their car. This wide-open mode makes liberal use of

cars and can result in some tense tug-of-war matches.

Go-Op: A paltry two stages deliver enjoyable shenanigans for two players. One's a straight-up battle to the exit. The other involves methodically lugging time-sensitive, weapon-limiting boxes across the stage.



Reggie24 Killed Nogari60
Reggie24 gets a multi-kill!

Good: HD visuals, good gunplay, online multiplayer
Bad: Where's the creativity?
Our Fave Side Activities: Drug trafficking, hitman, hostage, theft



THE VERDICT
BEST OF 2010

8.0 8.0 7.0

G. FORD SHOE SHARKEY

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Volition
Players: 1 (2-12 online)
ESRB: Mature

www.saintsrow.com



Sandbox Scruffs

What does *Saints Row* do better, worse, and the same as genre king *Grand Theft Auto*?

Stick

- GPS minimap
- Gorgeous graphics
- Save-anywhere ability
- On-foot shooting
- Recharging health
- Minimal load times
- Online multiplayer
- Character creation

A'ight

- Solid driving controls
- A.I. (getting stuck in places)
- Voice acting

Whack

- No controllable planes, or boats
- Nearly mute protagonist
- Respect system limits openness



adhered to religiously. And yes, the game features some of the most stilted dialogue and insulting racial stereotypes ever. But hell, *Saints Row* is actually an all right game. Like Greg says, it's pretty much exactly what you'd expect of an early-next-gen *GTA* title, if such a thing existed, which isn't a bad thing. Plus, it's not completely bereft of innovation, featuring a character editor that allows for the self-insertion we've always wanted in such an expansive world; at the price of a practically mute protagonist. But other than that and some passable multiplayer (co-op is, sadly, limited to two missions), don't expect anything more than filler while we wait for the next actual *GTA*. ☹



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■ Triple dekes are possible in *NHL 07*. The Flying V...well, not so much.



■ *NHL 2K7*: Imagine this scene, but set to the *Titanic* theme.

Xbox 360

Xbox 360

NHL 07 VS. NHL 2K7

Nobody's winning the Lady Bing in this battle

It's no secret that hockey ain't exactly the hottest sport in the United States (NBC ratings had to be cringing after those sad ratings for the Stanley Cup finals). And the performance of NHL videogames last year definitely didn't help; both EA's and 2K's games underwhelmed in '05. Are *NHL 07* and *NHL 2K7* comeback material, or should sports just wait for basketball season?

BRYAN: Man, EA's got some serious balls for basically changing the way we play hockey games. Shooting with the right analog stick, no turbo, using the face buttons primarily to change offensive and defensive strategies—it all may seem foreign for the first few periods, but quickly thereafter, those new mechanics and gameplay alterations feel damn good.

DEMIAN: I'm right there with you, Bryan. The game feels totally alien at first—right

trigger to pass, that's crazy talk—but the controls are actually really simplified (in the elegant sense more than the dumbed-down sense) and accessible. *2K7*'s controls, which are basically the same as last year's, feel clunky in comparison. I miss the turbo button in *07*—skaters will kick it up a little if you skate in a straight line, but the difference is too subtle.

TODD: I've passed up more empty net goals in *07* because of the new control stick than anyone, but I'm still in love with it. Hockey gamers have been starved for innovation like this for 11 years. It feels next gen. Which is something that can't be said for *2K7*'s game—what a snoozer!

BRYAN: Oh, so *2K7*'s new music-driven audio didn't pump you up? I know what the developers were going for (have the music, just like in a great sports flick, add to the drama), but these tunes do little to get my adrenaline goin'. Much like the rest of the game.

TODD: No joke. One second I'm being lulled to sleep by *2K7*'s boring gameplay, the next I'm looking around the room to see who turned on the *Titanic* soundtrack. *2K7* is so disappointing. Not only is the new Pressure Control farcical—it basically legalizes full-blown interference—but the player faces are ridiculous. Who's that red-bearded lumberjack? Oh, it's Peter Forsberg. I guess.

DEMIAN: I wasn't lulled to sleep at all, what with *2K7*'s superfast pace and constant one-timer and seriously BS wrap-around

goals (love how the forward's stick clips through the goal post, too). But what happened in this dogs-marrying-cats world where *2K7* is the arcade one and *NHL 07* is the slow, deliberate, simmier one? Well, simmy, except that your defensesmen usually refuse to get involved in the offense at all, no matter how much you swear at them.

BRYAN: Yeah, EA's game definitely makes some boneheaded mistakes on the ice: Players jump offside a bit too much, you'll only win like 10 percent of the face-offs against the A.I., and the fighting...well, as the late great U.S. Olympic hockey coach Herb Brooks once put it, these guys look like two monkeys humping a football.

TODD: Boneheaded mistakes aside, when it comes to scoring goals, variety is the key. With *07*, you can play the game different ways—crash the net, shoot from the point, crank it in from the slot—and it invariably leads to different types of goals. With *2K7*, it's one-timer after one-timer (cue *Braveheart* soundtrack) after one-timer. It kills any potential drama.

DEMIAN: Wait, I need to go back to the boneheaded mistakes for a minute, because that's exactly why I can't give a really glowing score to either one of these games. Both *2K7* and *07* screw up too many of the fundamentals, from overly arcade, shooting-gallery gameplay (*2K7*) to limp-wristed passes and goalies scoring on themselves (*07*). Oh dang, anyone want to talk about franchise modes? Not it. If it ain't gameplay, I don't care.

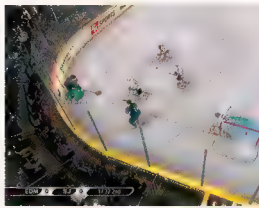
TODD: It's easy for Demian to live for the moment, since he's a Red Wings fan. As a fan of the hapless Blues, I find franchise modes particular appealing. While EA's is slicker and I like how it focuses on players' game-by-game improvement, *2K7*'s is deep. It gets the edge because signing a free agent isn't a button press, it's a negotiation. Which makes the offseason a game of its own, and one worth playing.

BRYAN: Whatever—you stick to silly conversations with overpaid, toothless athletes. I'll go to *07*'s ice and play a real game of hockey.

DEMIAN: I also have to give the nod to *07* over *2K7*—for the first time in many years. The revamped control is an interesting step forward; now all that's missing is a thick layer of polish. And *2K7*: time to innovate. More is not better at this point. ❄️



■ We couldn't get *NHL 07* online, so we'll let you know next issue if we hit any problems.



■ Dynamic new camera angles? Hey, 2K, let's get a bit more innovative next season, OK?

THE VERDICTS OUT OF 10	NHL 07		
	8.0	7.5	8.0
	BRYAN	DEMIAN	TODD

Publisher: EA Sports
Developer: EA Canada
Players: 1-4 (2 online)
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.easports.com

THE VERDICTS OUT OF 10	NHL 2K7		
	6.0	6.5	6.5
	BRYAN	DEMIAN	TODD

Publisher: 2K Sports
Developer: Kush
Players: 1-4 (2-8 online)
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.2ksports.com



@NLINE

Xbox 360

MADDEN NFL 07

One superstar away from greatness

Next-gen BS? Madden 07 on 360 will feature downloadable content in the form of alternate uniforms and historic stadiums. But it's kinda strange that after years of the current-gen Madden including such content, we're now stuck downloading it. Will these uniforms and stadiums at least be free? As of press time, EA isn't talking, but we're pretty sure—actually, extremely sure—that you'll have to pony up some dough for the upcoming content. (And that blows).

BRYAN: Lemme send a big congratulations to Mr. Madden—the coach-turned-broadcaster-turned-vidgame-endorser recently got elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Now, does the 17th edition of his gridiron game franchise also deserve a spot in Canton? Well, almost.

As you'd expect, another year of learning the ins and outs of the 360 has translated into the developers producing a more polished brand of football. Everything now moves smoother, and subtle graphical enhancements (better-looking grass, improved field degradation) and new animations (like running backs dragging defenders for a few extra yards) add to the realism. More important, though, unlike 06's "revolutionary" precision-passing system, 07's big-ticket gameplay addition actually works. Taking control of your lead blocker and pancaking an aggressive linebacker can do wonders for your running game, especially when trying to break one outside. And it's not like you have to give up the glory if you assume this blue-collar role; press the B button anytime during the play, and you'll take control of the ball carrier.

Yet while 07's blocking mechanics keep up Madden's storied tradition, the game's ego-filled Superstar mode—which focuses on a single player's career rather than the team's fortunes—disgraces it. The problem mostly lies in the new position-specific camera angles: Playing from these unique perspectives (which you can't adjust) either feels incredibly awkward or simply turns you into a spectator. I'm not the biggest fan of the current-gen franchise mode (who gives a crap about changing concession prices?), but with Superstar's flaws, maybe that's the one EA should've brought over to this version instead.

PATRICK: Meticulously checking the attributes of fullbacks and O-linemen in 07 may sound like a recipe for loneliness, but that's simply not the case. I couldn't get enough of the innovative Lead Blocker controls, and sometimes, I'd never mind switching to the oft-ignored brute in the trenches to lay someone out. Outside of the standard four-quarter fare, I'm right there with Bryan on the revamped Superstar mode; nothing about it really could hold

my attention long enough to earn a bust in the Hall of Fame (not to mention the camera issues). Ultimately, though, gameplay rules, and the Lead Blocker feature revolutionizes routine matchups, which, coupled with the run-enhancing highlight stick (distinct jukes for shifty backs are now mapped to the right analog stick), breathes new life into the franchise.

1UP.COM—GARNETT: At a quick glance, this year's Madden looks the next-gen part: impressive lighting effects, detailed players, fluid animations. But, like the old saying goes, looks can be deceiving. The more time I spent with 07, the more I realized that someone forgot to teach it some football fundamentals: The secondary doesn't always respond fast enough to swat commands, lead blockers will occasionally run past defenders to lay a pointless hit downfield, and shoddy blocking schemes can't adjust to unexpected defensive fronts (which translates into too many OB-hungry blitzers). That's not to say I'm totally down on this otherwise solid gridiron sim, but my tolerance for these kinds of mistakes is really being tested. >



Good: New Lead Blocker controls
Bad: Superstar mode's camera system
Weak 2: Our prediction for when the Madden cover course will hit



THE VERDICTS (out of 10)

7.5	8.5	7.0
BRYAN	PATRICK	GARNETT

Publisher: EA Sports
 Developer: EA Tiburon
 Players: 1-2 (2 online)
 ESRB: Everyone

www.easports.com

MADDEN NFL 07 (CONT.)



Not so Super

A position-by-position analysis of Madden NFL 07's busted Superstar mode



Quarterback — Good luck being a field general with a crappy camera that makes it nearly impossible to see open receivers downfield.



Wide receiver — Wouldn't be so bad if, in the words of Keyshawn, you could demand your quarterback to throw you the damn ball!



Defensive lineman — Hey, developers, how about including more than two moves for getting to the quarterback...or at least two that work?



Secondary — Hands down the hardest position to play in this mode, as man-on-man coverage is a complete guessing game.



Running back — Taking the ball between the tackles works OK, but you'll continually get your bell rung from offscreen defenders on sweeps.



Offensive lineman — After you've delivered your first pancake block, you'll be more than ready to retire from this uneventful career.



Linebacker — You'll get a good look at the action, but that doesn't mean you'll be contributing to tackles (the game moves too fast for that).



Punter/field-goal kicker — The one smart move the developers made with this mode: You can't play as either of these p****y positions.

Don't Forget Ugly Little Brother

Still haven't scratched up enough coin for an Xbox 360? No biggie. The current-gen edition of *Madden NFL 07* (PS2/XB/GC) still has plenty of game. It, too, comes packed with the all-new Lead Blocker controls, and some of the camera angles in Superstar mode are less problematic than the ones in the next-gen version (especially when playing the quarterback position). And if you're not into building up one specific player, you can always stay busy with the ridiculously deep franchise mode. ★★





■ No, this is not a Final Fantasy X screen.

Xbox 360

ONLINE

ENCHANTED ARMS

More like Mild Arms

Good: Brisk strategic battles that accommodate different play styles
Bad: Excruciating talkiness that kills momentum
Coming Up Craps: The lame and unnecessary casino minigames



ROBERT C: *Enchanted Arms* is a big, sloppy ball of overenthusiastic good intentions, a slobbering, overeager puppy that tries to lick your lips right off your face when a simple tail wag would do. And yet, despite the insane amount of pointless banter, despite the jarring halts in forward momentum, despite an absurdly over-the-top gay character that sets a new world record for swishiness, I liked it. A lot.

Somewhere over the 40-plus hours of gameplay, this sweeping RPG and its characters won my begrudging affection. Against my better judgment, I somehow became interested in the convoluted plot and the intricate backstories of the beleaguered hero, Atsuma, and his pals. Sure, they spoke five lines when one would do, but they grew on me. They wouldn't have if the meat of the game, the brisk turn-based combat, sucked. But it doesn't, thanks to a large pool of potential party members you can swap in and

out of your party. Aside from adding a "gotta catch 'em all" addiction to the gameplay, they create a wealth of strategic opportunities. The game's depth is what won me over—in spite of the clumsiness in other areas.

JAY: I remember when I used to love this genre. I remember spending hours running in circles to activate random battles to level up my characters. I remember endlessly pressing the X button to advance through line after line of awkward dialogue between stereotyped characters mixed up in yet another generic fantasy plot. Playing *Enchanted Arms* brought back fond memories, yes, but it also reminded me why I can't get into standard Japanese RPGs anymore. Other than the addition of online multiplayer, in which you can take golems you've collected and battle in mind-numbingly slow turn-based battles against other players,

Enchanted Arms is the same by-the-numbers experience that was fun in 1997. The romance may still be alive for Robert—but frankly, I'm bored.

1UP.COM—GARNETT: For a Japanese role-playing game on the decidedly un-Japanese 360, this turned out to be surprisingly predictable experience. It's no different from the similar RPGs that specialty publishers bring over for the PS2. Nothing about the presentation goes beyond what's been done in current gen. And the low-tech delivery of much of the dialogue by flat character silhouettes on still backgrounds almost kills the otherwise intriguing story (if you're a fan of the techno-magic hero saga, that is). The chesslike turn-based combat, though, with plenty of options for attack skills and equipment to mix it up, kept me interested. That depth makes this at least worth a look for tacticians, as well as RPG fans.



THE METACRITIC SCORES

7.5	5.5	6.5
ROBERT C.	JAY	GARNETT

Publisher: Ubisoft
 Developer: From Software
 Players: 1 (2 online)
 ESRB: Teen

www.ubi.com

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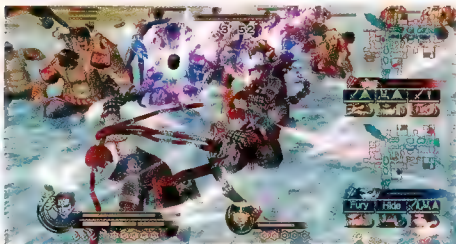
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XB360/PS2

ONLINE

SAMURAI WARRIORS 2

The cancer of supersized combat



THE VERDICT
6.0
 ROBERT A. JAY MILKMAN

Publisher: Koei
 Developer: Omega Force
 Players: XB360 1-2 (2 online),
 PS2 1-2
 ESRB: Teen

www.koei.com

Good: No one strained themselves during the game's creation.
Bad: Slowly numbs your brain until you lose the ability to love.
The PS2 Version: Looks worse, no online, otherwise the same.



ROBERT A: Why am I bored when I play *Samurai Warriors 2*? I'm never bored. I'm perfectly satisfied staring into space and picking my toenails for hours at a time. But here I am, engaged in something that exists solely for the purpose of entertainment, and I feel like a teenager dragged along on a family vacation. [In a grating, teenager whine]: "Aw, not another Lego brick castle to get lost in, not another batch of scarecrow enemies to butcher, not another marathon horseback ride across the sea's "colored land of nowhere."

Samurai Warriors, like so many sequel-farming franchises, has no big idea. It's a collection of "features" (new characters, new throwaway modes) that supposedly make it more fun than its glit of predecessors (under the *Dynasty Warriors* alias, in this case). At its heart, the game is the same as always. You run across bland battlefields, hacking through crowds of enemies and risking repetitive-stress injury. Worse, this particular version loves to send you ill over the map to protect your troops and escort feeble-minded allies (who often die first because the mission objectives and level map are so confusing). Someone please nail this coffin shut.

JAY: Playing this game is like taking a high dive into a pool that looks bottomless—and realizing on your way down that you're headed into the shallow end. *Samurai Warriors 2*

initially seems solid because it's loaded with extras, including unlockable characters, numerous modes, upgradeable weapons and skills, and lots of things to buy. Get past the menus and gorgeous cut-scenes, though, and it's nothing but "been there, done that" boredom. You repeatedly run through boring environments fighting the same dumb A.I. enemies while listening to some horrendous voice acting. The different characters may offer separate story lines, but each level is more of the same. *Samurai Warriors 2* offers nothing over any other single-button-mashing sequel. Pass.

TUP.COM—MILKMAN: I'm torn. On the one hand, *Samurai Warriors 2* is the more liberal, fun, younger brother of Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* series (which basically puts it on par with Capcom's *Devil Kings*, minus the sense of humor), but on the other hand, this feels like a really cheap cash-in on Koei's part. I mean, how many times has it made this damn game? At least it controls well, and the smooth graphics—which, on 360, look like polished PS2 models, which is basically what they are—aren't hard on the eyes. But the camera is zoomed in too close (*Devil Kings* and *Ninety-Nine Nights*' cameras are superior), the voice acting is still straight out of high school, and I could live without the *Monopoly*-style "sugoroku" party game.

PS2/XB

ONLINE

NASCAR 07

Firmly in neutral



THE VERDICT
7.0 **6.0**
 GREG S. DEMIAN JOHN

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

www.easports.com

Good: Great pack racing, every track included
Bad: PS2 version runs poorly, online races
MIA: Fan favorite Carl Edwards



GREG S: Huh? Two years now and still no Xbox 360 version of *NASCAR*? Anyway... *NASCAR 07*'s two new features don't do much for me. The adrenaline meter—which boosts your stats when you get in "the zone"—is ineffective and feels gimmicky, while the new driver-stats system doesn't make any noticeable difference during gameplay, which is pretty much the point, right? But the core mechanics are better than ever, despite feeling a tad dated. You still play through four major *NASCAR* series as you work to become a Nextel Cup champion. You still sign driving contracts, manage your own teams, and set the price of your merchandise. You still get the same slightly stunted four-player online experience.

NASCAR 07's biggest plus is with car handling. Gone are 06's fidgety cars and loe-like tracks, replaced by a much more realistic tire-wear model that still punishes you for staying out too long on old rubber but doesn't just flat out wreck you for it.

Oh, avoid the PS2 version if you can. The choppy graphics are too ugly to handle. On Xbox, though, *NASCAR 07* is a fun way to drive in circles. Now...next gen, please!

DEMIAN: I don't bleed red, white, and *NASCAR* like my friend Greg Stewart up there, so for me, the fact that Mark Martin's Roush team livy sports AA's logo instead of Viagra's really isn't that riveting. *NASCAR*

07 is little more than a roster update, and for someone who nearly fell asleep while leading the pack around Daytona, that's not good news.

And it's especially not good news when *NASCAR 07* leaves so much room for improvement. Stuff like the online races that support only four players. In this day and age! And the dumbed-down gameplay—I'm talking *after* you turn off the option to have the game do all that pesky braking for you, too. I'm trying so hard not to end with the old "for fans of the genre only" cliché, but...it's just so damn true. Sorry, Stewart!

TUP.COM—JOHN: Is it a game or is it a simulation? Yet again, it's neither, and Tiburon has failed for the second year running to strike the glorious balance it achieved with *NASCAR 06*. At least it ditched last year's "total team control" nonsense. While Stewart politely forgives the online play as "slightly stunted," I can't be so kind. I was the guy in second place while Demian led at Daytona, and the problem for me was that I just *couldn't* catch him. Not because he's a better driver, but because the "simulation" just crumbled. I should have been able to tack into his draft and surge forward, but that's only feasible when he's not jumping around the track, freezing up, or turning invisible. Yes, Greg, it needs to be on 360 next year, but it also needs so much more.



XB360/PS2/XB/GC

LEGO STAR WARS II: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY

For the youngling at heart

Good: Co-op gameplay, clever puzzles.
Bad: Blah laser blasting, vincible levels.
Beat the First One? Your PS2 or Xbox save unlocks characters



CRISPIN: If you're the kind of dark-sided gamer who evil-grinned when angry Anakin cut down all those Jedi kindergartners in *Episode III*, then this is not the game you're looking for. Move along. Move along. For everyone else, however, blasting through the three "good" *Star Wars* flicks morphed into Lego play sets is a perfectly satisfying experience. Sure, *The Original Trilogy* technically qualifies as a "baby game," with its happy-go-lucky characters, slapstick humor (stormtroopers in a hot tub? Now I've seen everything!), and often simplistic, shoot-everything gameplay. But many puzzles will surprise bona fide adults with their complexity. You'll need to cooperate with your side-kicks, for instance, to raise platforms with the Force or launch them onto higher ground with the new vehicles. It makes for a game that's best played with a second person (despite the camera going wonky at times).

Jawas, Ewoks, asteroid monsters—everything is lovingly given the Lego treatment here. Only the vehicle levels, with their slippery controls and convoluted objectives, put a damper on things. Power through them and you're left with a highly replayable, secret-packed game that even dark-siders can use as a reliable babysitter.

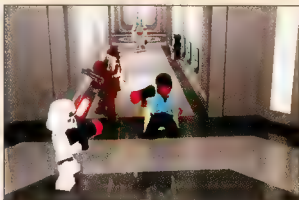
MICHAEL: You have to give credit to the brilliant blockhead who forced this awesome yet fundamentally bizarro idea on LucasArts. Sure, this sequel is every bit as ridiculous as the original, but that's what gives it its playful charm. Witnessing Gamorrean guards rock out, air-guitar style, is the type of hilarious hijinks you won't see in an "adult" *Star Wars* game, but for *Lego Star Wars* it actually makes sense. Plus, it's just more fun to play in levels based on the original trilogy. If only the spastic new ship battles weren't a complete mess to control. And, if

you're a completist, may the patience be with you—it will take a good week or two before you blow your blaster on all the secret goodies.

1UP.COM—SAM: I don't know how any *Star Wars* fan (which is, what, pretty much everyone?) could not love this game. Like Michael said, it's got everything that's great about the original *Lego Star Wars*, except it's much longer and is about the *Star Wars* movies that, well, didn't suck. The game is pretty standard action fare for the most part, but the Lego characters somehow make it way more fun. Terrific puzzles pepper the adventure, and, like these other guys, I found myself continuously entertained by how the designers incorporated elements of the films into the gameplay (taking some rather humorous liberties along the way). Your A.I. buddies can be clueless at times (but that's the hollow plastic heads), so definitely play with a friend.



■ The 360 version looks slightly sharper and much "shinier." You decide if that's worth the extra \$10.



THE VERDICTS FOOT OF 10	6.5	7.5	8.0
CRISPIN	MICHAEL	SAM	

Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: Traveller's Tales
Players: 1-2
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.lucasarts.com

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*According to GameRank.com 2002-2006 average review scores of NBA simulation.

PlayStation 2

XENOSAGA EPISODE III: ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA

That's German for "let's wrap this mother up"



THE CRITICS' CHOICE

7.5 **7.0** **8.0**

MICHAEL SHANE RAY

Publisher: Namco Bando
Developer: Monolith Soft
Players: 1
ESRB: Teen
www.namcobandagames.com

Good: The mech battles, cool cut-scenes

Bad: Very linear, too much talking

Let's pretend: The misgendered *Episode II* never existed



MICHAEL: Color me confused! I successfully trudged through this space-age role-playing saga, and I'm still trying to figure out what the hell happened. Saving the world is one thing, but once *Zarathustra* chucked in all the religious jargon, my comprehension fell victim to its bewidering bucket of nonsense.

But even though I'm still trying to figure out why everyone wanted to kill God (what did he ever do, anyway?), the game smartly packs in a massive database covering all the series' plot points for those who have a few hours to waste. Or you can just play the game and pray you understand it enough to enjoy the religious ride—it worked for me.

So I didn't understand the plot, but I did master the game's fun but entirely unambitious battle system. I still prefer *Episode II*'s button-combo setup, but the new system works fine (though bosses take eons to beat). Plus, the E.S. battles (over-the-top fights in giant mechs) trump those in both the previous episodes. My main complaint? The series is ending prematurely with this entry. But for my sanity's sake, maybe that's for the better.

SHANE: *Xenosaga*'s long, strange trip comes to an early yet oddly satisfying end with this climactic finale. Scaling back the series' original six-game vision forces *Zarathustra* to quickly motor through a gaggle of crucial plot points, and we finally get the blatantly

Biblical payoff that clears up most of the game's lingering mysteries. Sure, several of the major revelations were cribbed from anime classic *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, but no other RPG has ever offered such an absurdly epic, nuanced tale. Unfortunately, this time much of the narrative arrives via lame voiceovers instead of cut-scenes—trudging through these talky bits might test your patience, but the excellent dungeons, efficient combat (which recaptures the fun of *Episode I*, after *Episode II*'s departure), and deep character customization nearly reach *Final Fantasy* caliber.

1UP.COM—RAY: It's too bad the *Xenosaga* prequels are so problematic, because *Zarathustra* will inevitably get less respect than it deserves. For starters, the battle system isn't trying to be different this time around. It's speedier and rather sensible in regards to leveling and character management. The database menu is a nice way to get caught up on the story, but it's a shame it's the only way. If you're new to the series or just forgetful, you'll likely be stuck reeking before actually getting to play, which ain't so fun. But beyond that, you'll find a comparatively robust sci-fi RPG here. Shockingly, that's enough to see past the hours of classically self-righteous narrative starring all those ridiculously named characters.

PlayStation 2

YAKUZA

You didn't need that pinkie finger anyway



THE CRITICS' CHOICE

6.0 **8.5** **8.5**

JON SHANE MILKMAN

Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega
Players: 1
ESRB: Mature
www.sega.com

Good: Big-city diversions give you a break from the structured story

Bad: Frequent bouts of long load times, repetitive combat

Development Formula: *Shenmue* + *The Bouncer* + *GTA*



JON: Nothing draws gamers into a story-rich action game like hitting them with a barrage of confusing Japanese names and organized-crime hierarchy specifics from the start. *I think my name's Kazuma, but this Shinji dude is calling me Aniki, and I'm pretty sure we're in the Dojima clan even though my friend just murdered the head of it...*

You can definitely feel the sprawling *Shenmue* (Dreamcast) influence as you wander the rough nighttime streets, trying to piece together the details of your good-hearted gangster life after a 10-year stint in the klink. Meanwhile, belligerent hoodlums and citizens forgo fights for the most inane reasons when you're simply trying to hit the batting cages, escort your orphan friend to safety, or scare up some grub for a starving pooch—you know, real gritty gangster stuff. Combat, though it evolves over the course of the game and offers simple but repetitive fun, requires no strategy or skill, and you always have ample funds to buy all the life boosts you need. Take time out to shop for a pimp bracelet, get drunk, and enjoy the nuances of the sprawling city, and you'll find *Yakuza* to be a more palatable title.

SHANE: Gee, Jon...I'm really sorry that Sega didn't radically rework this phenomenally detailed re-creation of Tokyo's underworld to make it more palatable to your close-minded Western sensibilities. Seriously, you really

missed the point here, man. *Yakuza* delivers a superbly paced, mature, and well-acted narrative in the spirit of classic Japanese gangster flicks. Sure, the deep story line and hyperdetailed setting initially overshadow the gameplay—brawling feels limited initially, yet it becomes far more rewarding as you unlock new maneuvers and master the gleefully violent "Heat" finishing moves. And although you can motor through *Yakuza*'s visceral fistfights and well-directed cut-scenes in a feels-to-quick 12 hours, you'll want to keep coming back for the plentiful secrets and side quests (including a robust system for romancing the ladies).

1UP.COM—MILKMAN: Wait, does Jon also think Vito in *The Godfather* should be named "Chip" because, you know, what's up with all those Italian names? You don't pick up *Yakuza* if you don't want to play a game about—wait for it!—Japanese gangsters, action-game fan or no. Assuming you *do* want to live the life of an underground mobster in Tokyo's Kabukicho district, what you'll find here is an excellent adventure with solid (but not perfect) combat, a rich story line (thanks to crime novelist Hase Seishu), and painstakingly accurate visuals. *Yakuza*'s not really a 3D brawler; it's not as stylish as *Shenmue*; and it's no *Grand Theft Auto* in terms of interactivity with the world, but it expertly combines key elements of each.



PlayStation 2

RULE OF ROSE

This rule was made to be broken

Good: Creepy visuals, unique soundtrack
Bad: Uninspiring gameplay, long load times
A Poor Man's: *Haunting Ground* (PS2)

SHANE: Apparently nobody bothered to tell *Rule of Rose's* developers about the existence of Capcom's disturbingly similar PS2 survival-horror outing, *Haunting Ground*. Startling parallels abound: from the clueless blonde heroine stuck in a stately British manor to her loyal canine sidekick who lends a paw to solve puzzles. And while *RoR* offers some legitimately terrifying bits (like when you see evil undead grandfathers try to rape you... while on fire), *Rose* feels rather soulless.

At first, *Rose* seems like scary stuff: a lush opening CG cut-scene showcases the game's bizarre adventures; a group of diabolical young girls who call themselves the Aristocracy of the Red Crayon. These little minxes kidnap and torture protagonist Jennifer at the story's outset, yet the premise falls flat. Despite its Mature rating, the game plays it disappointingly safe—nothing here will shock or irritate, despite a warden who's subtly

among the noble teens. Instead, you get a short, straightforward adventure game with predictable puzzles and tedious, sloppy combat. Dedicated adventure-game fans (you know, the kind who play through offbeat PS2 fare like *Black Tower* and *Echo Night*) might derive some enjoyment from *Rose*, but *Haunting Ground* actually did a better thing: better the first time around.

JON: In my opinion, with the freaky British kids and nonsensical plot, I can get into the twisted, yet mostly unremarkable, atmosphere. And I can appreciate the canine companion, even though he pretty much walks you through the game with his wonder-rose. But *Rose's* combat model and boss battles take this game from adorable to deplorable just when you think it's gotten things right. It's a chore to get our heroine to face the right direction as she timidly waves knives, pipes, and pliers in the vague direction of

brains-miniguns; laughably unnecessary, spastic bosses offer more of the same challenges. The rule of *Rose*: worth playing for a lark, nothing more.

TURCOM:—ROBERT C. I expect just two things from my survival-horror games: a shot at survival and a little horror. *Rose* provides neither. All too often, fights are stupidly unfair, with tiny areas loaded up with enemies you simply can't dodge. *Rose* is the unfriendly camera angles and the graphics' inability to show you if you have an attack lined up, and you've got an unbeatable formula for frustration (especially since you'll have to trudge long distances back to failed fights, thanks to its sparse save points).

For a game so confident of its creepiness, it's amazing how little *Rose* accomplishes. Killer kiddies and murder, our devil-babies should be way scarier than the dull silliness here. At least the cut-scenes and music are nice.



THE VERDICT
 (out of 10)

SHANE 5.0
 JON 5.0
 ROBERT C. 4.0

Publisher: Atlus
 Developer: Punchline
 Players: 1
 ESRB: Mature

www.atlus.com

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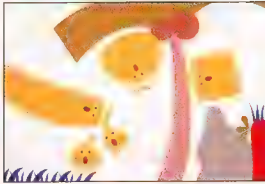
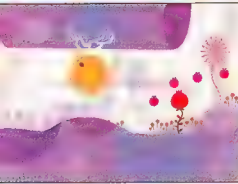
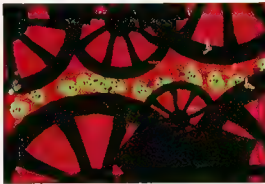
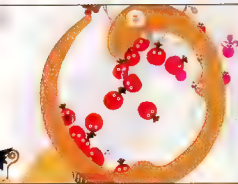


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PSP

LOCOROCO

One-trick blob



THE VERDICTS
GIVE IT A

6.5 **7.5** **8.0**

SHOE JENNIFER SAM

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

www.locoroco.com

Good: Unbelievably cute—show this to your girlfriend!
Bad: Unbelievably cute—don't show this to your guy friend!
Turn It Up: They sound even cuter than they look.



SHOE: Sony takes a classic genre (2D side-scroller), fits it with clever gameplay (you move your characters by tilting the entire world left or right with the shoulder buttons), and flattens the whole thing into a construction-paper fantasy world made up of solid shapes and colors. At first, you might think it's another *Katamari Damacy*—a quirky, Japanese-weird game that everyone will fall in love with. And you'd be right...at first.

You navigate little LocoRoco blobs to climb steps, swing on vines, bounce on...uh...bouncy things, slide down hills...all to collect useless collectibles and other LocoRoco (to turn your booger-sized globs into Jabba-sized globs, which affects your physics and where you can go). It's fun, challenging, and unique...but any game high you get from this will wear off within an hour.

LocoRoco goes nowhere, fast. The stages are practically indistinguishable from each other, introducing hardly any new gameplay elements along the way. With all this sameness, your only motivation to keep on rolling is to finish with faster times, more stuff collected, or more secrets discovered. It's just not enough for me—although I'd still recommend you try it out for that first-hour high...

JENNIFER: *LocoRoco* is a simple game, one that doesn't challenge you except, perhaps, in perseverance—pick it up, and you'll be

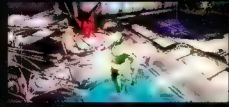
able to blow right through its whimsical, intuitively designed levels. Many will enjoy this relaxing pace, but it's not for everyone. The game can feel way too simplistic, lacking *Katamari Damacy's* deceptive complexity. Nor is it addictive enough to justify the limited gameplay—this is no meditative *Tetris*. But these complaints shouldn't be mistaken for dissatisfaction. *LocoRoco* is fun, and on your first play-through, you'll definitely find only about half of the colorful blobs and creatures hidden throughout the levels. I don't think this is a breakthrough for the PSP but I enjoyed it.

IUP.COM—SAM: I've been a fan of *LocoRoco* ever since I dubbed it the "happiest game ever" at the Tokyo Game Show last year—it's one of those rare experiences that just feels right from the moment you first lay hands on it. Unlike most other PSP titles, *LocoRoco* is a game I haven't felt like I've played a million times before. Sure, it's based around traditional platforming elements, but everything feels so fresh here, thanks to the clever world-tilting mechanic and brilliantly colorful visuals. The game doesn't have a whole lot of substance or payoff to complete challenges, but for a pick-up-and-enjoy title, this is somewhat forgivable. It's the most fun I've had with the PSP since *Lumines*—that first-hour high kept going for me.

PSP

RENGOKU II: THE STAIRWAY TO H.E.A.V.E.N.

A flaming stairwell to hell



THE VERDICTS
GIVE IT A

3.0 **2.0** **1.0**

MICHAEL GREG S. JANE

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

www.konami.com

Good: Customizing A.D.A.M. is kinda cool
Bad: Short and painfully repetitive
Please, No More: Stupid A.C.R.O.N.Y.M.S.



MICHAEL: Before I dismantle this far-fetched futuristic android, I need to ask: Did we really need another *Rengoku*? Now, I never played the first game, but judging by how hellish its sequel is (and the first game's poor reviews), I think it's my god-given right to officially name the original *Rengoku* the worst game I never played.

Regardless, it looks like I didn't miss much—the sequel features the same limb-customizing fighting and a ho-hum multiplayer mode, but whatever enjoyment you might get from rock-n-sockin' a bunch of fugly-ass bots is negated with its horribly repetitive, if not punishable, game design. Each of the eight levels has you doing such monotonous things as 1) opening doors, 2) fighting enemies and 3)...wait, that's it. Seriously.

But the torment doesn't end here. The more time I spent with the game, the deeper I delved into its defects. Sure, the brain-draining combat is pretty bad, and yeah, the sorry sci-fi environment got old really quickly (like, after the first level), but when the game tried to preach a completely pretentious plot—one that even alludes to the famous literary work *Dante's Inferno*—I knew it was not created for winners, but for sinners.

GREG T: The first *Rengoku* had the most fitting subtitle in the history of videogames: *The Tower of Purgatory*. Nothing could have described the painful experience any better.

And now we have a sequel that does very little to fix the first game's mountain of problems—backtracking to save, repetitive stages...although you can now use the analog nub for movement. The fabulous potential of controlling a robot capable of fitting almost any weapon to any appendage is completely wasted on room-to-boring-room combat gameplay that would have been just as stale 15 years ago. Not even the admittedly cool character design and above-average graphics can save this game from eternal damnation.

IUP.COM—JANE: An angst-filled android slughters other androids in a vaguely futuristic setting derived from *Dante's Inferno*. Sounds promising, but *Rengoku* has no tortured souls—unless you count the unlucky players who buy this game. The gameplay in a nutshell is: Kill robots. Level up. Get marginally better weapons. Repeat *ad infinitum*. Customization offers some fun—you can mount a chain saw to your forehead, for example—and eventually melee combos unleash serious damage. These are small rewards for suffering through excruciating level design and cryptic cut-scenes.

Existentially speaking, maybe that's the point of the game: Hell is a place where the player, like Sisypheus, fights a never-ending stream of robot enemies without any real progress. Be good, and don't end up there.

■ PSP

50 CENT: BULLETPROOF G-UNIT EDITION

We ain't gon' party like it's yo birthday



THE VERDICTS out of 100	6.0	5.5	6.0
	MARK	SHANE	ROBERT C.

Publisher: VU Games
Developer: High Voltage
Players: 1 (2-6 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Mature
www.50centbulletproof.com

Good: Real music and videos from Fiddy
Bad: Aiming system, repetitive action
Mediocre: Just about everything else



MARK: An overhead shooter mash-up of *Dead to Rights* and *High Voltage's* own *Hunter: The Reckoning*, Fiddy's PSP game falls in the same way his songs succeed: by taking one element and repeating it over and over. Your abilities to take human shields and disarm your foes hide this flaw fairly well for the first few levels, but *Bulletproof's* gameplay quickly settles into a repetitive groove of mindless gunfire. The flawed targeting system (both yours and the bad guys') and the fact that enemies suddenly appear in bunches from offscreen lead to frustration as well. Further compounding the problem, enemies hardly change throughout the game—even boss es look and feel like regular foot soldiers but with more health.

And while real 50 tracks and music videos serve as a welcome distraction, I'd gladly trade them all for just a few interesting level designs, weapons, or objectives (it's mostly "find the key" or "kill 'em all" stuff—even switch puzzles are rare).

SHANE: As the only guy on this review who actually owns some 50 Cent CDs (unironically, even!), I suspect that Mark and Robert can't fully appreciate how effectively *Bulletproof* capitalizes on [L]E license. The underlying game, a mediocre blend of top-down *Unltd Legends* hack-'n-

slashery and 50's PS2 brawler, won't blow you away, but it's serviceable stuff plagued by some unfortunate camera angles and iffy targeting.

In terms of being fan-oriented product, though, this UMD truly impresses—you can easily unlock the mother lode of G-Unit goodies, including a customizable soundtrack featuring just about every song 50 has rapped on (even most of his guest appearances) and plenty of music videos. More publishers should make their PSP software this value-added.

TUP.COM—ROBERT C: Dear Mr. Cent—you are a crybaby. So you got shot nine times. Boo-hoo. I encountered scores of bare-chested enemies in your game that shing off multiple shotgun blasts without complaint. *That's* impressive. You know what your big problem is? You act tough and throw around a whole lot of naughty words, but the action here is limp when it should be bruising, tepid when it should be scorching. At least the cinemas have some flair. I know your secret, Mr. Cent—you're no street tough; you're a college graduate with a degree in marketing. *That's* why this is a relentless branding experience (it's true, Shane). Next time, devote less UMD space to songs, videos, and licensed G-Unit clothing and squeeze in an actual game.

■ DS

MARIO HOOPS 3-ON-3

Air plumber



THE VERDICTS out of 100	6.5	6.0	6.0
	JAY	BRYAN	MILKMAN

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Square Enix
Players: 1 (2-4 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Everyone
www.nintendo.com

Good: The touch controls (most of the time)
Bad: Teammates don't do jack on the court
Football: The sport Mario should tackle next



JAY: I slowly dribble up to the top of the key. Peach takes a defensive stance and makes a swipe at the ball—my ball. I double-tap the left side of the touch screen, which results in a quick crossover, breaking the princess' ankles and giving me the open lane. Bowser rushes to meet me at the hoop and he brought a friend: a red shell. He fires away, but it's too late. I drive to the basket—which happens to be a giant piranha plant—and double-swipe up with the stylus, causing me to leap into the air for the dunk as I swipe the stylus side-to-side to collect some extra points (in the form of coins) before slamming the rock back to his home.

Welcome to *Mario Hoops*, basketball with coin-collecting, shell-throwing, and supermove-performing athletes from the Nintendo homeland. Like I described, all of your actions are done with the touch screen, and when it works, it works great. But if you're not precise with your strokes, look out—it'll be turnover city. Also, aside from the tournament mode, you won't find much else to do here. I love unlocking characters, but once that was done, I didn't have much reason to go back except for multiplayer.

BRYAN: Mario and his Mushroom Kingdom pals definitely have some serious ups (sending one down with authority with a quick tap up on the touch screen—and

raking up coinage—never gets old), but man, Nintendo's crew should've spent more time learning the basics of the game. Seriously, this one might as well be called *Mario Hoops 1-on-3*, as your teammates don't know the first thing about moving without the ball or helping out on D. And that becomes a major problem when challenging the tougher squads that are well trained at playing suffocating defense and finding the open man. Jay's right on about the hit-or-miss touch controls, too; on too many occasions, I'd pass when I meant to shoot and vice versa.

TUP.COM—MILKMAN: Sure, it takes a little while to acclimate yourself to *Mario Hoops'* unconventional control setup, but once you get past the learning curve, the game's pretty fun and something that would only ever work on the DS. The graphics here are sharp, with good-looking character models and bright, colorful courts. But the game's debt to other *Mario* titles—primarily the *Mario Kart*-style tournament tree and themed courts—quickly becomes annoying. Who wants to play ball on an ice court where everyone's slipping and sliding? And I gotta agree with Bryan on the team situation; would it kill these guys to hustle after loose balls and rebounds or try for a steal?

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DS

ONLINE

STAR FOX COMMAND

Commands but does not conquer

Good: Intuitive controls, replay value, hot energy play

Bad: Repetitive single-player game

You'll Miss: The classic *Star Fox* lovefest

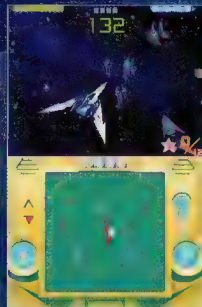
MARK: Not content to make *Star Fox*'s handheld debut "just" another on-rails space shooter, Nintendo took some risks with *Command*, for better and for worse. The new strategy bits between sorties (where you and the computer take turns moving troops on a map screen) are a blast, as you balance the strengths of your different ships, the speed of your opponents, and the risks of going out of your way for power-ups and special missiles. But the actual combat is disappointing: the "levels" are dull, wide-open, and (mostly) empty environments where your job is invariably to kill X number of enemies in Y seconds. The primitive graphics certainly don't help (most enemies look like abstract art), and the ticking clock never lets you relax and enjoy yourself. At least the game feels good—*Star Fox* works surprisingly well with the touch-screen: Simply point where you want to go, scribble back and forth for a laser-deflecting spin, tap twice high

or low to control speed, and so forth. *Command* has great replay value as well, with a simple, engaging multi-player dogfight and branching paths in its short single-player game—if only the levels were exciting enough to make you *want* to unlock them all.

G. FORD: I agree with Mark on most of his points: The seemingly out-of-place strategy segments work quite well, and no, the bland graphics don't impress. But he gave a pass on the controls. They work great for moving, spinning, and throttle control, sure, but factor in the more advanced controls and things deteriorate quickly. Dropping bombs and pulling off the trick turns make for finger-contorting confusion as you have to watch both screens while tapping the correct areas on the touch screen. Oh, as always, artificial time limits suck. Yes, it's supposed to represent fuel here, but since when do all the ships in a fleet share the same tank on separate missions? Not buying it. On

the whole, *Command*'s an average shooter buoyed by some considerable bursts of innovation.

TUPCOM—ANDREW: Given this franchise's off-base track record as of late, what I liked most about *Command* was just how much it reminded me of *Star Fox* on the Super Nintendo. Which is odd praise, given that *Command* is a quasi-strategy game/arena shooter instead of a pure on-rails action-shooter. Sketching flight paths and clearing out fog-of-war was jarring at first, but as the single-player campaign branched out, I was totally sold on the *Star Fox*-meets-*Advance Wars* concept, just like my two wingmen-up there (a shame, though, that multiplayer contains no such strategy element). Less easy to adapt to was the stylus control of the Arwings: The stylus is merely an acceptable substitute for a proper analog stick, but doesn't provide innovation as much as it does hand cramps.



Hey furries, get a load of this hot fox!

THE USRINGS
OF
CRITICS

6.0 6.5 7.0

MARK

G. FORD

ANDREW

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Q-Games
Players: 1 (2-4 via local Wi-Fi)
2-6 via online Wi-Fi
ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.starfoxcommand.com

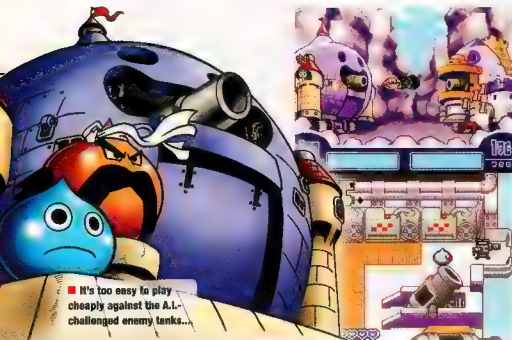


DS

DRAGON QUEST HEROES: ROCKET SLIME



Blue ball to the rescue



It's too easy to play cheaply against the A.I. challenged enemy tanks...

THE VERDICTS (out of 10)

7.0 **8.5** **8.5**

SHOE MICHAEL JEREMY

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix/TOSE
Players: 1 (2 via local Wi-Fi)
ESRB: Everyone

www.square-enix.com

Good: Pacing—the game's constantly introducing new features.
Bad: Too kiddie, too easy
Multiplayer: Uses your single-player tank, so it's usually unbalanced



SHOE: Slimes, the rats of the *Dragon Quest* world, are headlining their own adventure game whose art style, dialogue, and character names (Fangummy Bob? Gootrude?) were custom-made for robotomized 5-year-olds. Sounds great, huh?

My first hour of *Rocket Slime* consisted of painfully kiddie conversations, simplistic gameplay involving stretching my blue bloop to slingshot into enemies, and snagging seemingly useless items (like apples and catnip). It was horrible—I wanted someone to jam a Fisher-Price ice pick into my brain...

I'm glad I didn't take that brain-trauma route, though—the game gets better over time. Turn out those items serve as ammo in Gortzilla-sized tanks for battles against computer bosses. You'll find ballistics that give you different tactical advantages (such as mirrors that reflect back enemy attacks). You'll recruit a crew to man the cannons or infiltrate the opposing tank. You'll learn to mix ingredients to build new, rarer ammo types.

Rocket Slime is still a kids' game that will hardly challenge anyone (no matter what these two slime lovers will tell you)—including kids. But this one's got some subtle depth buried beneath that baby-puke exterior—it got me, a nonrobotomized, way-older-than-5 dude, addicted enough to be happy I played this game to the end.

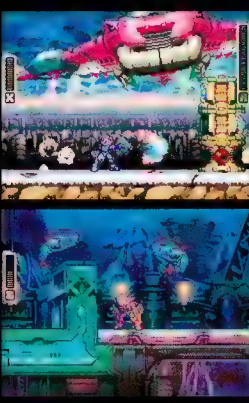
MICHAEL: Shoe's right on: Don't let this cutesy glob of goo slip off your gaming radar. It's not just for thumb-suckers—oldsters should get a kick out the plethora of awesomely bad puns riddled throughout the game. (Sublime, Chrono Twigger, Don Clawleone...I'd give more, but I don't want the pun police on my ass. And while I was enthralled by both rescuing my slime buddies and tricking out my tank, I have one major complaint: Where the hell is the stylus support? For a game that requires you to stretch a frickin' slime repeatedly, it's nonsensical that you can't sling 'em yourself. But when it comes to fun, this is a sweet, sticky ball.

TOP.COM—JEREMY: *Rocket Slime* is that rarest of breeds: a kids' game that completely rocks. Sure, the main adventure is basically a low-carb version of *Zelda*, but two elements elevate this experience to excellence. One is the brilliantly over-the-top translation, laden with incontinent puns and in-jokes that perfectly complement the ridiculous premise. The other: the tactical tank battles, which use the upper screen to transform the standard slime-snapping action into a war game. Angry duos, beware—you'll encounter more goofy cheer in this one game than in most consoles' entire lineups.

DS

MEGA MAN ZX

ZX appeal



THE VERDICTS (out of 10)

6.0 **7.0** **7.5**

MICHAEL JAY JEREMY

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Inti Creates
Players: 1
ESRB: Everyone

www.capcom.com

Good: Collecting different forms, nifty anime bits
Bad: Short levels, horrible map system
Use Mega Man Zero 3 and 4 (GBA): To open optional bosses



MICHAEL: Yippa, it's a new *Mega Man* game! Good thing, too, because I was getting a little worried Capcom wouldn't meet its *Mega Man* quota for the month. Not that it's hard to blast these babies out...hell, I'm convinced every time a Capcom developer coughs, a new *Mega Man* game pops out.

So ZX isn't actually much different from the 900 *Mega Man* games you've already played. OK, so you can choose your character before you start...big deal! Honestly, it doesn't really matter who you choose—boy or girl, you're still going blast a bunch of robots until your thumb goes numb. And yeah, so Capcom tries to break the mold by dumping the traditional levels for a shoddy "mission" structure borrowed from past *Zero* games. Sounds pretty sweet, too—until you realize it's just an excuse to make the game shorter by tacking together a string of short minilevels. And good luck finding where the hell you're supposed to go—usually, maps help you find something, but in ZX, they only point you to frustration.

Thankfully, the game doesn't fiddle with the familiar *Mega Man* framework—you still do all the fun things: running, shooting, and, well...you should know the rest.

JAY: This latest case of sequelitis attempts to keep things fresh by making a few minor changes to the familiar *Mega Man* formula. Notably, the nonlinear world gives some

freedom to the series—but at a cost. Like Michael said, trying to find the new area where the next mission takes place results in a frustrating guessing game and lots of backtracking. The different biometal forms have some cool abilities, sure, but it's a shame the levels never put them to creative use. Rarely do you need to switch to another form to solve a puzzle or beat a boss. And compared to past *Mega Man* titles (especially the *Zero* series), ZX can seem pretty simple. I didn't mind that, though, considering this is the first *Mega Man* game that didn't frustrate me to the point of therapy.

TOP.COM—JEREMY: Quick lesson: That's "ZX" as in "sechs," as in "German for six," as in "the number of *Mega Man* spin-offs we're up to now." Don't write this off as a rehash, though—ZX is a much-needed change of pace for Capcom's creaking franchise, a lovingly crafted adventure that combines the style of the *Zero* games with the freedom and side quests of the *Legends* series. A surprisingly engaging dual-perspective story is the tasty cherry on top, tying the franchise's various series together. The graphics may be dated, but the controls are perfect, the power-ups brilliant, and the difficulty tough but balanced. ZX manages to recapture what made those NES originals so darn appealing.



DS

CONTACT

Touched by an alien

Good: Interesting story keeps you coming back for more
Bad: Badly in need of a quest log or hint system
Best Bad Guys: Attacking refrigerators!

JENNIFER: *Contact* is one odd little role-playing game. Not because of the premise—you play a boy who's tasked with helping an eccentric scientist fight alien forces by collecting power cells throughout a variety of island environments. Nor because of the gameplay—combat is a simple but effective one-click attack system, augmented by a variety of class-based special powers. What's odd here is the quirky personality and unusual story.

Things start off fairly contrived, and the mindless—and useless—chat-ter of your scientist friend on the top screen (you manipulate enemies and levels on the touch screen) can be irritating. It's too bad the developers didn't better utilize this setup for hints or guidance; the most frustrating thing about *Contact* is that you can spend hours wandering around levels because you missed a hidden door or unlockable outfit on a previous island. I found myself dying for the garrulous

scientist to give me any real clue.

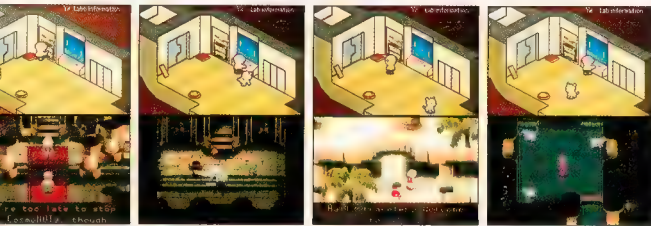
But the multiple perspectives telling the story—from the scientist to the villains to, ultimately, your own character—give the game a uniqueness many RPGs lack. The fun twists and turns (my fave was the Japanese electronics store level) kept me exploring and discovering loads of side quests and new items. Multiplayer boils down to minimally visiting a location to hang out with friends—not exactly essential.

ADAM: *Contact* offers a creative island-hopping adventure that stands taller than many recent portable RPGs. I agree with Jen that a few of the islands aren't very exciting given the unclear objectives. But it's manageable, and the eclectic cast helped me practically overlook that fault.

Unlike Mr. Parish below, I find the battle system to be one of the game's strong points (albeit a bit tricky initially). The touch-screen controls and midflight

levelling kept me engaged throughout. Overall, *Contact* is a bright spot in the poorly lit DS role-playing cave.

1UP.COM — JEREMY: *Contact* is mostly brilliant. Mostly, it's too bad about the bad parts, because they drag a lovingly crafted game from "exceptional" to merely "very good." If only the battle system weren't a simplified, *Diablo*-style hack-n-slash affair; if only the story were long enough to make full use of the dozens of skills and hundreds of items you accumulate. Because, really, the rest of the game is superb: a cleverly written adventure that blissfully ignores the fourth wall, makes sparing but effective use of the DS' unique hardware functions, and feels like a love letter to classic games as varied as *EarthBound* (SNES), *StarTropics* (NES), and *Gauntlet*. Brain-dead battles aside, *Contact* is at once satisfyingly original yet curiously familiar.



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

7.5 JENNIFER
7.0 ADAM
8.0 JEREMY

Publisher: Atlus
 Developer: Grasshopper
 Players: 1 (2-8 via online Wi-Fi)
 ESRB: Everyone 10+

www.atlus.com



(Jennifer)



(Adam)



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REVIEWS WRAP-UP

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

Cooking Mama

DS • Majesco • ESRB: E — It's *WarioWare* with troubling gender stereotypes! Follow step-by-step recipes to create scrumptious dishes ranging in complexity from instant ramen to fried octopus dumplings over udon. Each of the over 60 recipes included here is broken down into a series of supershort minigames, which use the DS technology well. You drag the stylus to crack eggs into a bowl, tap it fast to chop vegetables and peel shrimp, blow on your DS to cool down veggie stew, and more. *Cooking Mama* isn't all mindless fun, either—you might actually learn a thing or two about cooking. (No joke—who knew about that trick for *steaming* sunny-side up eggs by tossing a little water in the pan and covering it for a few seconds? It actually works!) A couple of the minigames—peeling potatoes and stir-frying—don't always control quite as well as they should, but ultimately that doesn't lessen the game's zany appeal.

Bottom line: Occasionally spotty control aside, *Cooking Mama* is yet another quirkily brilliant DS innovation. Too bad it's so short....



Painkiller

XB • DreamCatcher • ESRB: M
Pumping lead through an Iron Maiden video's worth of druids and skeleton priests, *Painkiller* is the speed-metal guitar solo of first-person shooters (with two earfuls of chugging hessian aggression to prove it). Thinking is for the weak and slow of reaction time.

Bottom line: All you need is 20 brain cells and a 12-pack to enjoy *Painkiller*'s relentless pace and campy evil themes.



Eureka Seven Vol. 1: The New Wave

PS2 • Namco Bandal • ESRB: T
Eureka combines *Virtual On*'s robot beat-em-up formula with a rudimentary *Armored Core* shop system. And, uh...high-school-esque "who's hooking up with who" discussions and borderline-enjoyable hoverboard sequences.

Bottom line: The lame love-triangle premise will bore teens and bewilder young'uns, and the dumb-b*st gameplay can't compensate.



FIFA 07

PS2/XB/GC • EA Sports • ESRB: E — The newest current-gen *FIFA* arrives with a new skill shot, allowing you to bend it like that guy married to that Spice Girl. Topspin, backspin, and more realistic ball physics seriously up the playability.

Bottom line: Creeping ever closer to the high bar set by *Winning Eleven*, *FIFA* isn't quite there yet.



IGPX: Immortal Grand Prix

PS2 • Namco Bandal • ESRB: E10+ — Namco has tossed aside the racing aspect—the computer handles the driving—in favor of a 3-on-3 high-speed brawl. It's complemented nicely by the various orders you can give your team, giving *IGPX* a depth not normally found in licensed anime shlock.

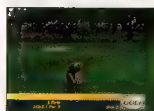
Bottom line: Nothing overly special, but still a good time.



ProStroke Golf: World Tour 2007

PS2/XB • Oxygen • ESRB: E — *ProStroke*'s makers boast that they've "revolutionized" the art of the virtual golf swing, but in reality, all they've done is mimic *Tiger*'s right-analog-stick controls and moved the camera so you're looking at the "real life" angle (right over the ball).

Bottom line: Not so innovative—plus, it's damn ugly.



A Hero Will Fly Again.

BATEN KAITOS ORIGINS

With the emperor assassinated and a legendary monster threatening every city, the world lies on the edge of ruin. Only a young spiritrider named Sagi and his two brave companions can stop a terrifying new evil from consuming everything they hold dear. Discover the beginnings of the Baten Kaitos universe in this prequel to *Eternal Wings* and *the Lost Ocean*. Only for Nintendo GameCube.



NINTENDO
GAMECUBE

DOLBY
PRO LOGIC II



Fantasy Violence
Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol

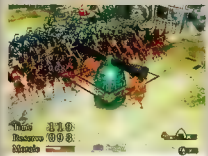
reviews archive

Tapping into the not-so-wayback machine

Great history numbers show on your drive.

CALL THEM CRAZY

Reviewing *LocoRoco* this month (see page 114), we couldn't help reminisce about other "out there" games that garnered hype because of their crazy premises. A bizarre concept doesn't guarantee great scores, however. Here's a look at some memorable entries (all scores out of 10).



Odama (GC)
5.5 • 6.0 • 10.0



Killer 7 (PS2/GC)
6.5 • 6.0 • 5.0



Katamari Damacy (PS2)
8.5 • 8.5 • 8.5



Seaman (Dreamcast)
6.5 • 9.0 • 8.5

GAME	SYSTEM	VERDICT	SCORES (out of 10)	AWARD
Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War	PS2	■ Great graphics can't make up for boring missions and a forgettable story	5.5 4.0 6.0	
And 1 Streetball	PS2/XB	■ All the moves and personalities of the sport but with none of the excitement	6.5 5.5 7.0	
Asterlisha Story	PSP	■ Looks and plays like a 12-year-old role-playing game—oh wait... it is	3.0 5.0 4.0	
Atelier III: The Azoth of Destiny	PS2	■ A niche role-playing game that, despite new features, still ends up feeling dated	8.5 9.0 7.0	Silver
Big Brain Academy	DS	■ Brain-buster with tons of manglepups and multiplayer	8.5 9.0 7.5	Silver
Blade Dancer: Lineage of Light	PSP	■ Another crappy portable role-playing game—nuff said	3.0 4.5 2.0	
Bombberman	XB360	■ Old-school fun, but lacks variety and, thankfully, the frightening Act: Zero makeover	6.5 5.5 7.0	
Bombberman Act: Zero	XB360	■ A colorhearted, future-shocky redesigned look lit the cherry on top of a crap game	3.0 3.0 2.0	
Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!	DS	■ A smart "game" filled with tons of brain teasers that graphs how smart you are (or aren't)	8.5 7.5 9.0	Silver
Capcom Classics Collection Remixed	PSP	■ Bright graphics and classic, classic games fill this portable powerhouse	8.5 8.5 9.0	Silver
ChronoTours	XB360	■ Big mechs with big guns in big, boring environments	6.0 5.0 8.0	
Crusty Demos: Freestyle Moto-X	XB	■ This poorly named Tony Hawk clone with bikes can't seem to break modernity	3.5 6.0 5.0	
Dance Factory	PS2	■ Changes your favorite tunes into denotepad-ready hump-squaking routines—poorly	3.0 7.0 2.0	
Daxter	PSP	■ This bright, beautiful action-platformer feels cramped by the PSP's limitations	7.0 7.5 7.5	
Dead Rising	XB360	■ Anything goes weaponwise. Though that won't stop your greatest foe—the clock	7.5 7.0 8.0	
Def Jam Fight for NY: The Takeover	PSP	■ A console port with hardly any new content and cheap A.I.—it looks good, though	5.0 7.0 5.0	
Deep Labyrinth	DS	■ A janky DS role-playing game with tacked-on stylus features—sigh	2.0 3.0 7.5	
Dig of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII	PS2	■ This first-ever Final Fantasy shooter couldn't hit the side of a chocobo barn	5.0 5.0 4.0	
Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories	PS2	■ The cult-classic strategy-RPG returns hardly revised from the first game	7.0 8.0 6.5	
Dreamfall: The Longest Journey	XB	■ This adventure title offers an immersive narrative but no game to go with it	4.0 6.5 4.0	
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	XB360	■ Flawed, but ultimately a fun RPG with a great story and a huge world to explore	9.0 9.0 9.5	Gold
Field Commander	PSP	■ Sure, it's rip-off of <i>Advance Wars</i> , but it's so good that you won't care	7.0 7.5 8.0	
Final Fantasy XI Online	XB360	■ This online-only sequel has all the things you love—and hate—about the genre	7.0 6.5 7.0	
FlatOut 2	PS2/XB	■ The poor man's <i>Burnout</i> series sequel serves you another helping of sloppy jockey	5.0 4.5 8.0	
Freedom Wings	DS	■ Flight sim meets RPG and sky pirates, but complicated controls hold it back	6.5 4.5 4.0	
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter	XB360	■ Amazing war-tit-hella-fun shooter with great multiplayer. Next gen is finally here!	10 9.0 9.5	Silver
The Godfather	PS2/XB	■ <i>Grand Theft Auto: Gangster</i> . Atmospheric, faithful to the films, but a bit cheesy	8.0 8.5 7.5	Gold
Hitman: Blood Money	PS2/XB	■ The best assassination simulator with some great level design but a hurried save system	8.0 8.0 7.5	
Kingdom Hearts II	PS2	■ Everything an RPG sequel should be, starring all your Squares and Disney favorites!	10 9.0 9.5	Gold
Legend of Heracles II: Prophecy, Moonlight Witch	PSP	■ A role-playing adventure that plays solid but still feels like more of the same	5.5 6.0 6.0	
Lemmings	PSP	■ The addictive puzzle returns with new levels and updated graphics	5.5 8.0 6.0	
Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle-earth II	XB360	■ A controller-friendly strategy port with lots of treats for Tolkien neds	8.0 7.5 7.0	
Major League Baseball 2K6	PS2/XB/GC	■ Reviewed the swinging and hitting but forgot to help fielding and baserunning	7.0 6.5 7.5	
Me & My Katamari	PSP	■ The PSP's control hubbie the Prince's ball-rolling, garbage-grabbing magic	7.0 5.5 7.0	
Metal Gear Acid 2	PSP	■ A short, streamlined, card-based tactical roleplayer that stars Mr. Snake	8.0 8.0 9.5	Silver
Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	PS2	■ A great story and worthwhile additional content raise the bar for rereleases	10 10 8.5	Gold
Metroid Prime Hunters	DS	■ Samus looks great on the DS, but she can be awkward to control in first-person	7.5 8.0 7.5	
MLB 06: The Show	PS2	■ Innovation isn't defined as finally adding a decade-old feature to your baseball game	6.5 6.0 6.0	
NCAA Football 07	XB360	■ A faithful update but with fewer features than the current-gen version	7.0 7.5 7.0	
New Super Mario Bros.	DS	■ A refreshing mix of classic gameplay with tons of multiplayer	10 9.5 8.0	Gold
Ninety-Nine Nights	XB360	■ Even nine nights would be pushing it to spend with this unoriginal hack-n-slasher	4.5 4.5 6.0	
Odama	GC	■ This mash-up of pinball and strategy (with voice commands) is more strange than fun	7.5 5.5 4.5	
Okami	PS2	■ Have yourself a howling good time with this Zelda-esque masterpiece	9.0 9.5 9.0	Gold
OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	PS2/XB	■ A solid arcade racer that's easy to pick up but lacks the variety of a <i>Burnout</i>	7.0 5.0 7.0	
Over II Fighters	XB360	■ This expansive fight sim offers realism—and not much else besides sporadic difficulty	5.0 5.0 3.0	
Pac-Man World Rally	PS2/GC	■ Pac-Man and friends offer an enjoyable (though unexceptional) ride	6.5 6.0 6.0	
Pirates of the Caribbean: The Legend of Jack Sparrow	PS2	■ Not even Johnny Depp's Capt. Jack Sparrow can save this game from mediocrity	5.5 6.5 5.0	
Pray	XB360	■ Despite creative ideas (portals, wall walking), this shooter runs out of steam too soon	6.5 7.0 8.0	
Point Blank DS	DS	■ It's a part of a light-gun game—but without the lightgun	7.0 6.0 7.0	
Rockstar Games Presents Table Tennis	XB360	■ Ping-Pong done right—but the lack of extras will leave you wanting more	7.5 7.0 8.5	
Ruff Triggers: The Vanocore Conspiracy	PS2	■ A <i>Ratchet & Clank</i> clone that copies everything but the charm	4.0 5.0 5.0	
Rumble Roses XX	XB360	■ Wrestling with sluts has never been more next gen or more pandering to pervers	7.5 6.5 3.5	
Splinter Cell Essentials	PSP	■ The controls might be difficult for some—Sam Fisher just doesn't feel right on PSP	2.0 7.0 6.0	
Sukikuden V	PS2	■ Slow to start and a bit dated, yet a compelling RPG with collect-em-all fun	6.5 8.5 6.5	
Super Monkey Ball Adventure	PS2/GC	■ The <i>Monkey Ball</i> series jumps the shark by tacking on tedious platforming	3.5 4.5 5.0	
Super Princess Peach	DS	■ A shiny new <i>Mario</i> -style adventure that needs to take the difficulty up a notch	7.5 7.0 8.0	
Tekken: Dark Resurrection	PSP	■ True-to-the-series bravia and quick loading times make for a great portable fighter	8.0 8.5 8.0	
Tetris DS	DS	■ Classic puzzle brought to the DS, but with only one new mode for the touch screen	7.5 7.0 9.0	
Tomb Raider: Legend	PS2/XB	■ The titular raider is back, swinging and clanging in this solid tomb-robbing game	8.5 8.5 8.0	Silver
Tourist Trophy	PS2	■ <i>Gran Turismo</i> on two wheels, this racer offers realism with a steep learning curve	6.5 7.0 8.0	
Urban Chaos: Riot Response	PS2/XB	■ With dated graphics and boring levels, this shooter never passes mediocrity	5.0 5.5 3.5	
Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins	PSP	■ Old-school cheap-death gameplay doubles as a convenient saving enhancer	6.5 7.0 6.5	
Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth	PS2	■ Port issues aside, it's the best role-playing experience on the PSP	6.5 8.0 8.0	
Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria	PSP	■ The six-years-in-coming sequel offers a dazzling but rewarding battle system	8.0 9.0 8.0	
Winback 2: Project Poseidon	PS2	■ A boring, low-budget stealth-action title that's more frustrating than fun	4.0 3.5 4.0	
X-Men: The Official Game	XB360/PS2/XB	■ Not even the X-Men can save this crappy mess of a game	4.0 3.5 4.0	

*Scores in red like previous Game of the Month winners.



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- Ben Franklin

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game over

gba shows van damme a thing or two about death.

SEANBABY'S UNDIGNIFIED DEATH THROES OF THE GBA

“One...last thing...before I die...
Babar to the Rescue—ACK!!!”



The Game Boy Advance might

be the best system ever.

It had all the best NES

and SNES games like

Final Fight One, *Mario*

3, *Zelda*, *Tactics Ogre*,

and *River City Ransom*,

plus it had original rad stuff

like *Ninja Five-O*, *Advance Wars*, and

WarriorWare. But, for the sake of pity, let

it die. Everyone making good games

has moved on, yet evil developers are

still smashing *Barbie* and *Cheetah Girl*

cartridges into it. I don't know what the

hell a *Cheetah Girl* is, but I think one

of them is Raven, and, oh snap, there's

no glory in a death that's *So Raven*.

Most of you are probably too young to

remember the 2600 going out like a

blitz with a glut of post-E.T. garbage,

but it's happening again. Here are five

awful games torturing the poor GBA on

its deathbed.

—Seanbaby



Garfield and his Nine Lives

Since the only glaring
failure here is how
the controls seem to

have no effect on Garfield, I knew I had to

focus my jokes there. But my first try was,

“Moving Garfield is like leading a fat person

through a maze by making donut sounds.”

But that doesn't make sense, and a while

ago I wrote that a game's controls were

so unresponsive it was like being Stephen

Hawking's thumb wrestling coach, so it

seemed time to retire the bad-controls

hyperbole. Now that I can only comment on

the game's slightly competent parts, I'll try

to paraphrase his press release: “This sassy

tabby has always been among the top five

cartoon cats who enjoy food, and this game

proves why: CATitude! We'll our ‘CAT’ to

Garfield! I want to kill myself in the face!”



Catz

This game is perfect if you always wished you could

pretend to raise a pet, but couldn't find the time. *Catz*

is designed for the very stupid, so it will take care of

most of the hard thinking for you. This freed up my

brain to realize that we as a society haven't come up

with an insulting way of describing people who play games about imaginary pet own-

ership. Shouldn't such a specific type of lonely nerd have a label?

Luckily, I've spent hundreds of hours inventing a social slur to describe them: “pet-

sturbator.” I think it could really catch on. For example, “I saw some guy and his GBA

petsturbating on the subway.” And if petsturbator doesn't stink, I wrote a backup: Phil

Collins. Because when he isn't busy autographing men's crotches, pretending to own a

cat is exactly the kind of thing singer/songwriter Phil Collins would do.

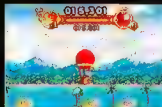
Fun Foreign Fact 1: In Vietnam, *Catz* goes by the name *Trainable Sandwiches*.

Fun Foreign Fact 2: In Vietnam, the unit of currency is the dong. So it's totally conceiv-

able to say, “Where did my dong go? I just put it in the bag. So a little second ago.” And

that would almost certainly lead to the follow-up question, “Vietnam, why did you let

Phil Collins name your money?”



Babar to the Rescue

If you bought this game strictly for exposure to

Babar, I have bad news for you. First, you don't

know how to read any of these words. Second,

the thing that you think is reading is actually Play-

Doh. And finally, during the first three levels a leg-

gameplay is seen from 4,000 miles away, so as far as nonbionic eyes can tell, this

game could be about anything. I personally chose “A shrieking whistle that will do

anything to make its own head shut up and then make it as a showgirl.” But it's not

all bad news for Babar fans. Check this out: 40 free Babars!!!

Take the Babar Challenge: Using two six-inch strips of construction paper and a

toothache, I dare you to have less fun than *Babar to the Rescue*.

VeggieTales: LarryBoy and the Bad Apple

When you're about to die, it's always a good idea to turn your life over to a god, just

in case. The release of *VeggieTales* is the result of the dying GBAs trying to get into

heaven on a technicality, because the alternative—someone actually intended for a

religious customer to be played with and enjoyed—is far too terrifying.

The Bible Part 2—Bible Harder: If anyone ever adds a sidebar to the Bible about

god-related videogames, I've started it for them: “And the Lord said, ‘Is this game

starring hopping vegetables about Me? Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch got a bet-

ter game than this, and I'm, like, God! Then lo, everyone's faces melted and heads

exploded except for the people with their eyes shut.”



Bratz: Forever Diamondz

If you're unfamiliar with Bratz, they're a group of alcoholic children who

dress for sex and love to shop! And when a system goes out on a game

called *Bratz: Forever Diamondz*, that's the human equivalent of living an

ordinary life then having your last words on Earth be, “Where's that underage prostitute

I solicited?!” Maybe it doesn't define you as a whole, but it's a bad one to go out on.

Gameplay: A directionless stroll through gender stereotypes—your girl plays with a

kitten, competes in a fashion show, and figure skates! Boys don't put up with this crap,

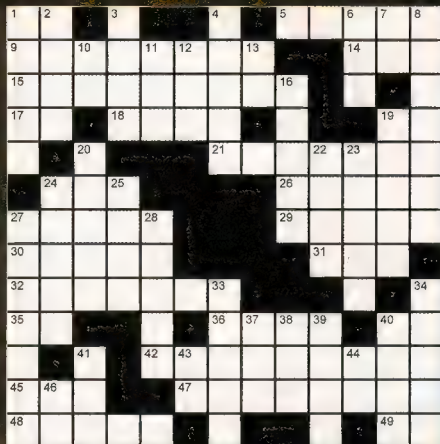
but if we did, our version would be *Dudez: Tractor Yeah*—players would drive cars, play

beer minigames, vote, shop for morning-after pills, and do math. ☿

You can get more exciting looks into the workings of comical game reviews like this at my brand-
new EGM Greatest Hits Uncensored website: www.seanbaby.com/egm

SUPERHERO SHUFFLE

(Solution on page 129)



ACROSS

- Xbox first-person shooter nickname *Flash*
- Spider-Man 3*'s Tophir
- Mario's is 400 seconds
- Stimpy's pal
- Peter Parker in costume
- Emma's *Metal Gear Solid 2* nickname
- What no one can do to PS1's *Mr. Domino*
- Xbox's *Operation Surinam* for short
- New *Spider 3* villain
- Trick
- Overwrite
- 5 ACROSS, as a supervillain
- Guitar Hero* licks
- Opening scenes
- DS stylus, in times
- WarWare Touché!* unique nasal ware
- GameCube plug-headed robot's initials
- Genesis *Aero-Bal*
- Madden offensive position, for short
- Green Goblin's *Spider-Man* "offspring"
- Main *Matrix* man
- Tetris* roots?
- Square Enix* fighter series
- Lord of the Rings* publisher

DOWN

- Mary-Kate or Ashley
- Mario transporter
- RPG inn features
- Hides and waits, to first-person shooter buffs
- PS1 RPG *the Laid*
- Street Fighter II* special version, for short
- NASCAR 07* power plants
- DS wireless play, or Wi...
- Six games, at least, in *Top Spin*
- US/Canada/Mexico region for short
- Really good EGM review score
- Silent Hill*'s Harry
- Clues, or cheats
- Obscure puzzle title *Magical*
- A little more than half of all gamers
- Like singer Russell Watson of *Castlevania: Curse of Darkness* soundtrack
- Left side of a *Pirates* ship
- Final Fantasy VII*'s Valentine
- Metroid* Samus' ball ability
- Slang for publisher
- Siemens 2004* African team
- Fable* was once known as Project _____
- CD... or DVD...
- What Pikachu *in* with commands
- NASCAR* rubber
- PS1 driver *The Italian*
- Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*' bigmouthed *Loco*
- SDCOM* difficulty rank, for short
- GC *Capcom* vs. *SNK* suffix

GRUDGE MATCH

Back to Ghou!



DEAD RISING

VS.



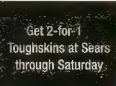
SUMMER SHOPPING

The only shopping time worse than the holiday rush is the back-to-school blitz. In fact, some might rather spend a week killing mall zombies than pushing through a crowd of Kiddies to snag that last Kim Possible backpack. Crazy? Perhaps not:

MISSION



Get the zombie scoop and live to write about it
Advantage: Dead Rising

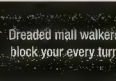


Get 2-for-1 Toughskins at Sears through Saturday

FELLOW SHOPPERS



Endless legions of undead mallrats
Advantage: Dead Rising



Dreaded mall walkers block your every turn

STORES



Swords!
Advantage: Dead Rising



Ice Cream of the Future (as in)

DANGERS



Well, there's, you know, the zombies.

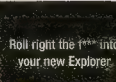


Being seen with your dad at Hot Topic
Advantage: Shopping

SHOPPING CARTS



Cut through zombie crowds like heavy cream
Advantage: Dead Rising



Roll right the 1st into your new Explorer

HOORS



72-Hour Mode is a real survival-endurance test
Advantage: Dead Rising



Get to Wal-Mart at 5 a.m. and get trampled in the rush!

WINNER: DEAD RISING

No surprise—we're confident any sane person would sooner spend the fall schooling zombies in the ways of a second death than shopping for Trapper Keepers and rubber cement. Hmm... Wonder if you could kill a zombie with a Trapper Keeper and/or rubber cement?



egm retro

(SUPER) POW

A rough old-school rivalry

Fifteen years ago this month, Nintendo launched its 16-bit Super NES in America. Much to Nintendo's surprise, it wasn't the runaway success that its predecessor had been; where the NES easily claimed 90 percent of the U.S. gaming market, the Super NES was caught off-guard by the Sega Genesis. Nintendo eventually claimed victory, but it was a long, difficult struggle. —Jeremy Parish

SEGA GENESIS Tech Talk

The Genesis was technologically inferior to the Super NES in almost every way. The screen could display fewer colors, fewer characters, and fewer graphical effects than the competition. The one area in which Geny excelled was clock speed; at 7.61 MHz, it was more than twice as fast as the Super NES. Even if you take the Megahertz Myth into account, it only took one level of *Sonic* to realize Genesis games felt faster... even if they didn't look or sound quite as nice.



■ Genesis won hardcore hearts with this near perfect rendition of *Strider*.

The Early Bird

Wonder why Microsoft made such a big deal about the Xbox 360's next-gen headstart? Look no further than the Genesis—it had a two-year lead on the Super NES in America. Sega made the most of that time while Nintendo happily raked in the cash with its aging NES...and found itself playing catch-up once it entered the 16-bit arena. (Of course, an early start isn't always a reason to celebrate, as Saturn and Dreamcast owners can attest.)

Heavy Hitters

What's a console without software? With Genesis, as with every system, it ultimately boiled down to the games—and these three in particular set the tone for Sega fans.

Madden NFL: OK, so EA's *Madden* series didn't get its start on Genesis. But for serious sports freaks, the two were peas in a single scrumptious pod. Sega owed much of its early success to this superlative gridiron sim.



■ In between shooting *Tough Actin'* Triacint commercials, Madden helped the Genesis score big sales.

Sonic the Hedgehog: With *Sonic*, Sega hit Nintendo below the belt in two very tender places. One, the game was fast, where SNES games of the same period were poky. Two, the furry speedster was cool, quite the opposite of the cuddly, safe, corporate mascot Mario had become.

Mortal Kombat: The Genesis version of *Mortal Kombat* made Nintendo look even less cool than *Sonic* had. Where Midway's combatants "sweated" when punched on Super NES, Sega let them battle in all their spine-rippingly gory glory (via a secret code).

Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics

Genesis' success demonstrates the power of effective marketing—Nintendo extolled gamers to play it loud, but Sega was loud, sneering that its console did what "Nintendo"™, and punctuating every hyper-MTV-style TV ad with the Sega Scream. And who could forget the seductive lie of "Blast Processing," which basically meant "we program our games to be very fast."

Defeat From the Jaws of Victory

So what kept Sega from winning? Sadly, the only one with the ability to defeat Sega was, well, Sega. In-fighting between the company's Japanese and American branches, plus wonky add-ons with little support (Sega CD and 32X) hurt its direction. So once pixels made way for the polygons, it was the Super NES that claimed victory in the 16-bit war.



■ 32X offered bad games and worse support.

ER STRUGGLE

SUPER NES

Under the Hood

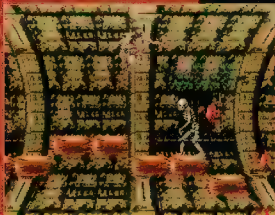
The Super NES had a pokey processor, sure, but everyone learned a valuable lesson from Konami's slowdown-laden *Gradius II* and made the best of things. Besides, everything else about the system left little question as to which console was the true 16-bit powerhouse: An amazing custom sound processor and graphics chip gave developers a whole lot to work with.

Hot Jargon

The Super NES was powered by jargon—but unlike Sega's "Blast Processing," Nintendo's actually meant something. The "Mode 7" graphics were built around one of the system's seven special hardware modes that enabled different graphical effects; the seventh allowed pseudo-3D rotation and scaling (an overly abused feature). Later, SNES owners learned to love the name Super FX, which referred to an extra chip that enabled actual 3-D polygonal graphics (*Star Fox*).

Super Software

Many people bought the Super NES based on the strength of the Nintendo brand name, but in the end, it offered the goods:



■ Though *Super Castlevania IV*'s spiny rooms made us sick, we dug the Mode 7 graphics.

Zero: Nintendo made use of those fancy Mode 7 effects to create a racing game with unprecedented speed and realism. Well, a kind of realism, anyway.

Street Fighter II: Capcom created an arcade phenomenon with the globe-trotting fighting game, and at the peak of that mania it was available on Super NES—and Super NES only.

Donkey Kong Country: How do you make an aging machine compete with next-gen 3D graphics far beyond the Super FX chip's capabilities? Simple—you fake it. Using the shameless voodoo trickery of Advance Computer Modeling, Rare revived Nintendo's



■ *Donkey Kong Country* proved that we really will buy anything if it's pretty enough.

original mascot and its 16-bit system in one swoop. *DKC* kept the Super NES alive longer than anyone thought possible.

Stay on Target...

Ultimately, the success of the Super NES had everything to do with Nintendo's single-minded vision for the console. Where Sega diluted the Genesis market with silly and impractical add-ons, Nintendo tinkered with the idea of a CD-ROM peripheral but ultimately decided against it. (Of course, that choice eventually inspired Sony to steal the idea to create the PlayStation, which made something of a Pyrrhic victory.)

But the SNES/Genesis battle was a tight race until the end—the closest console race ever, in fact. Tough competition equals vigorous innovation, and innovation equals better games. That in turn makes for happier gamers—and that's why the Super NES is so fondly remembered for giving us some of the best darned games ever. **B+**



■ The SNES may not have been able to match Sonic's speed, but *F-Zero* sure as hell tried.

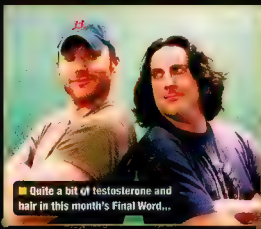


Illustration by Sean Beahm and Mike Cruz

FINAL WORD

Best damn sports talk period

Of annual *Madden* sales are of any indication, you are *always* ready for some football. So are these two chumps. Our two regular sports-games reviewers, Previews Editor Bryan Intihar and Staff Writer Patrick Mauro, spend most of their waking hours playing virtual piggskin—why do you think they look so...ungroomed? Let's see how they handle questions slightly tougher than "punt or go for it?" ...



■ Quite a bit of testosterone and hair in this month's Final Word...

If you could only have one series from now on, would you take NCAA Football or Madden NFL?



Patrick

NCAA Football: That's a little like asking if "you could only have your right hand or your left from now on." I'd keep my left and take *NCAA*. I believe/hope *Madden's* hugely innovative Lead Blocker Feature makes its way to the college game. Setting the price of foam fingers notwithstanding, *NCAA's* in-season recruiting blows anything *Madden* offers away from the field.



Bryan

Neither (for now): My allegiance will go to the first franchise that can deliver the one feature that everyone wants: Online Dynasty. I've had enough of those silly momentum meters and Owner modes—I'm waiting for the day I can set up a league with my buddies from back East and either bring home the national championship or the Vince Lombardi trophy...and totally rub it in their faces.

New Blitz (Blitz: The League) or old (NFL Blitz)?



Bryan

New Blitz: Juicing, betting on your own team, sending hookers to your opponent's hotel the night before the big game...*Blitz: The League* is everything those previous installments should've been. Also, it proves that you don't need some overly priced license like the No Fun League to make a great sports game.



Patrick

No Blitz: The last three *Blitzes* have been entirely different games. Talk about a franchise with an identity crisis. I'm sure the NFL will provide enough material (kind of like the recent story of the 300-pound Bengal who got pulled over for a traffic violation and wound up on the wrong side of a Taser) for another game, but with *Madden*, I got no time for this stuff.

NFL 2K series: Bring it back or don't need it?



Patrick

Bring it back! Nothing spurs innovation quite like competition. When Sega stopped making hardware and everyone could play *2K* on their PS2, no one ever bought another copy of Sony's *NFL GameDay*. It also forced EA to make a better *Madden*. As strong as this year's lone NFL game plays, it could be even better if a competing *NFL 2K7* existed. Bring it back!



Bryan

Bring it back: Yeah, license exclusivity sucks the big fat one. No matter what EA says, you know this lack of competition makes it much easier for them to stay on cruise control. It's a complete disservice to gamers. And don't tell me that we don't have room for more than one NFL game: Those 2.5 million copies of *NFL 2K6*—not to mention *Madden's* ridiculously high sales figures during the same year—prove that we do. Anyway, I don't think it'll be long until *2K Sports* brings out a non-licensed football title. My money's on next year...and it'll be something like an NFL Legends game.

Best old-timey football game: Intellivision NFL Football, Cyberball, or Tecmo Bowl?



Bryan

Tecmo Bowl: Football fans may debate *Madden* and *NFL 2K* until they are blue in the face, but no one can argue the greatness of *Tecmo Bowl*. And what made the game so fun (aside from running like a wild man with Bo "Knows" Jackson) was that it simplified the sport, as defense consisted of just choosing which play you thought the other guy was going to call. Sure, those hand-holding gameplay mechanics may be too dated for today's sports, but what a sweet Xbox Live Arcade title it would be!



Patrick

Cyberball: Nothing screams cool quite like bastardized 7-man football from the '80s featuring robots and an explosive ball. It could be a theme for a new *Blitz*. I took home top prize in a *Cyberball 2072* tournament in Pacific Grove, CA, back in 1989, which at this point is downright embarrassing to even admit. Unlike the football games of today, nobody cool ever played *Cyberball*.

Forget football: Videogame hockey, basketball, baseball, or soccer?



Patrick

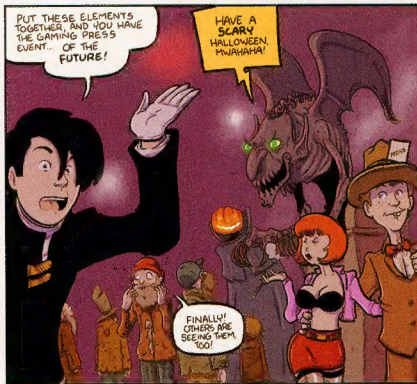
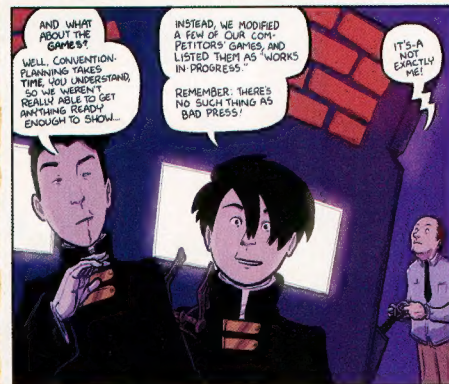
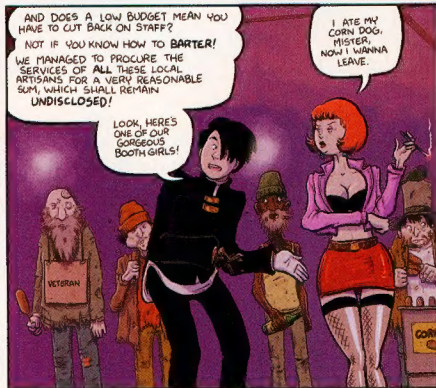
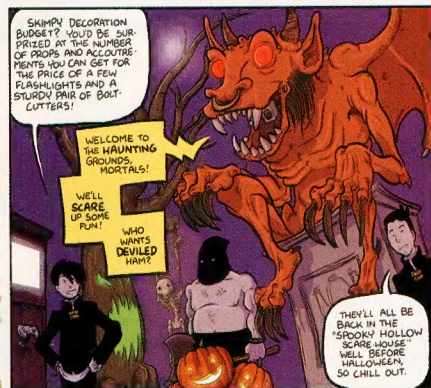
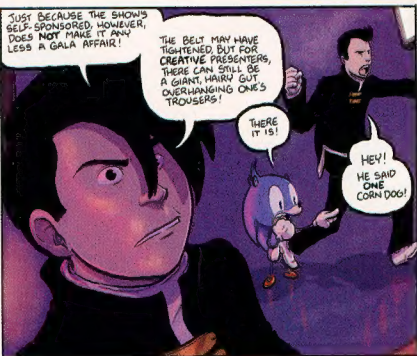
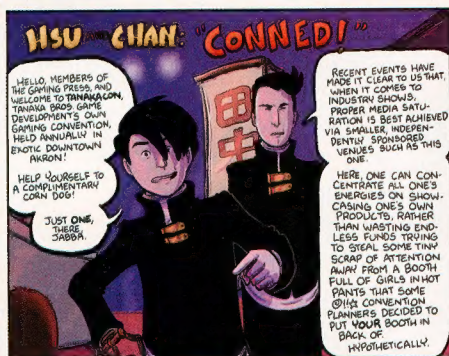
Hockey: A good head butt makes for strong entertainment, but soccer's lack of scoring ultimately frustrates me, even in videogames. Licensing issues forced out the wrong company in baseball. I love hoops, but the fresh focus on defense in *NHL 2K*, fun and intuitive analog controls in *NHL*, plus lifelike mullets in both titles will attract me to the ice.



Bryan

None of the above: Here's my chance to beg and plead for someone to make a college lacrosse videogame. The sport ain't popular enough, you say? Then why did almost 50,000 fans pack into Philly's football stadium (in the blistering heat, no less) for the NCAA Division I championship game? Even lacrosse's professional league is blowin' up. C'mon EA or 2K—just do it! ☘

➤ When Patrick's not reviewing sports games for EGM, he's busy being a daddy and hosting Sirius radio show "Patrick Mauro Video Game Review" on Channel 122. Check him out Sunday nights at midnight EST!





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