

THE No.1 VIDEOGAME MAGAZINE

E G M

ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY 1UP.COM

NEW LOOK FOR
**ELECTRONIC
GAMING**
MONTHLY

INSIDE:

- WII REVIEWS
- BULLY
- SPLINTER CELL
DOUBLE AGENT
- DEF JAM: ICON
- CIPHER COMPLEX
- METAL GEAR SOLID 4
ON XBOX 360?



> 17-PAGE BLOWOUT!

HALO 3

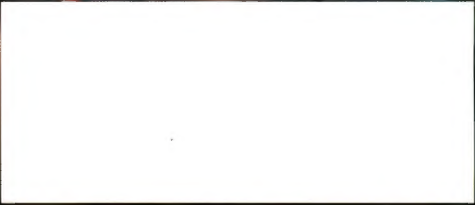
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Alternative Holiday Guide

Stuff for everyone from your best bud
to the guy who slept with your gal





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MATURE 17+

M

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Intense Violence
Strong Language



PLAYSTATION 3



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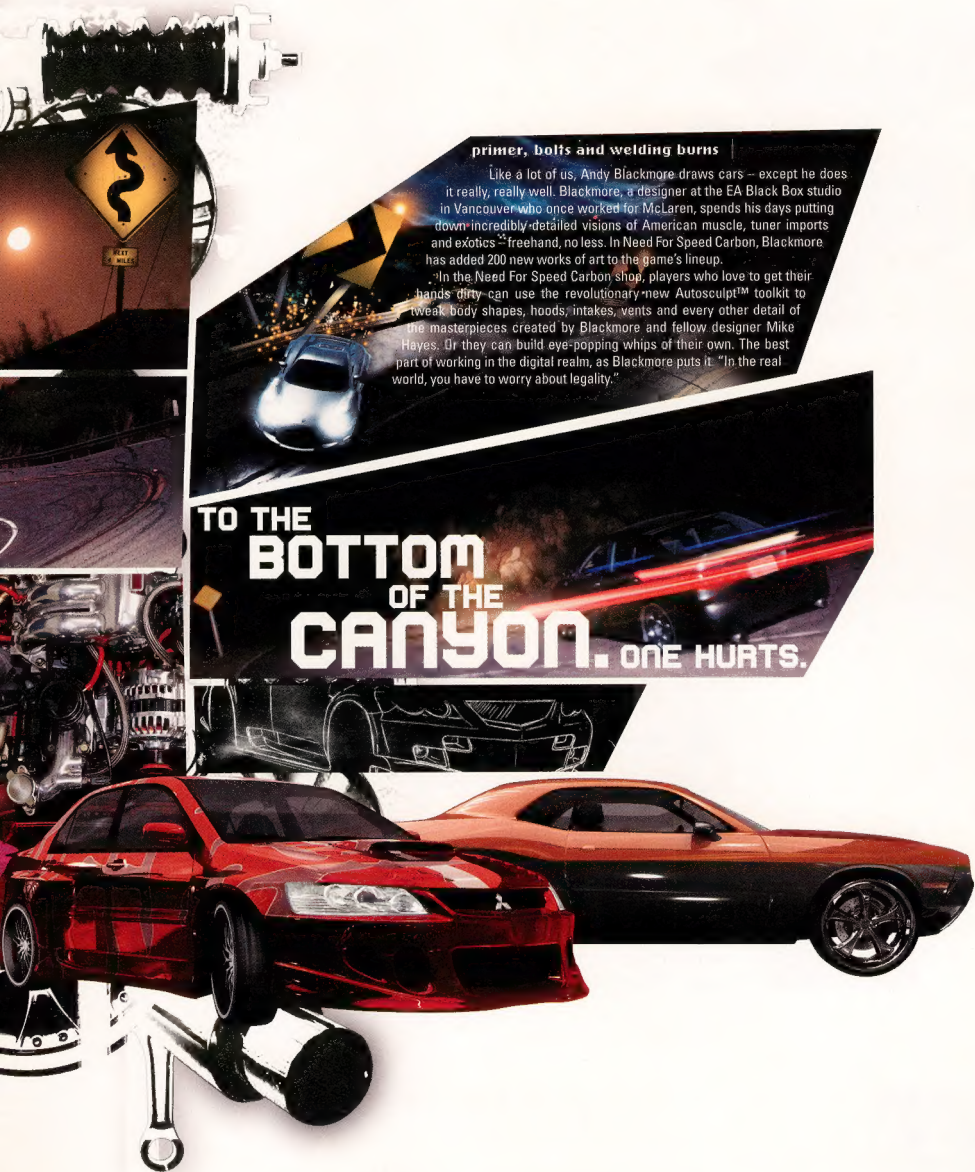
 DEVELOPMENT START | DATE OF RELEASE
 01 | 03 | 05 | 11 | 01 | 06

primer, bolts and welding burns

Like a lot of us, Andy Blackmore draws cars – except he does it really, really well. Blackmore, a designer at the EA Black Box studio in Vancouver who once worked for McLaren, spends his days putting down incredibly detailed visions of American muscle, tuner imports and exotics – freehand, no less. In Need For Speed Carbon, Blackmore has added 200 new works of art to the game's lineup.

"In the Need For Speed Carbon Shop, players who love to get their hands dirty can use the revolutionary new Autosculpt™ toolkit to tweak body shapes, hoods, intakes, vents and every other detail of the masterpieces created by Blackmore and fellow designer Mike Hayes. Or they can build eye-popping whips of their own. The best part of working in the digital realm, as Blackmore puts it, "In the real world, you have to worry about legality."

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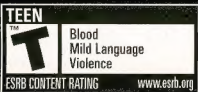
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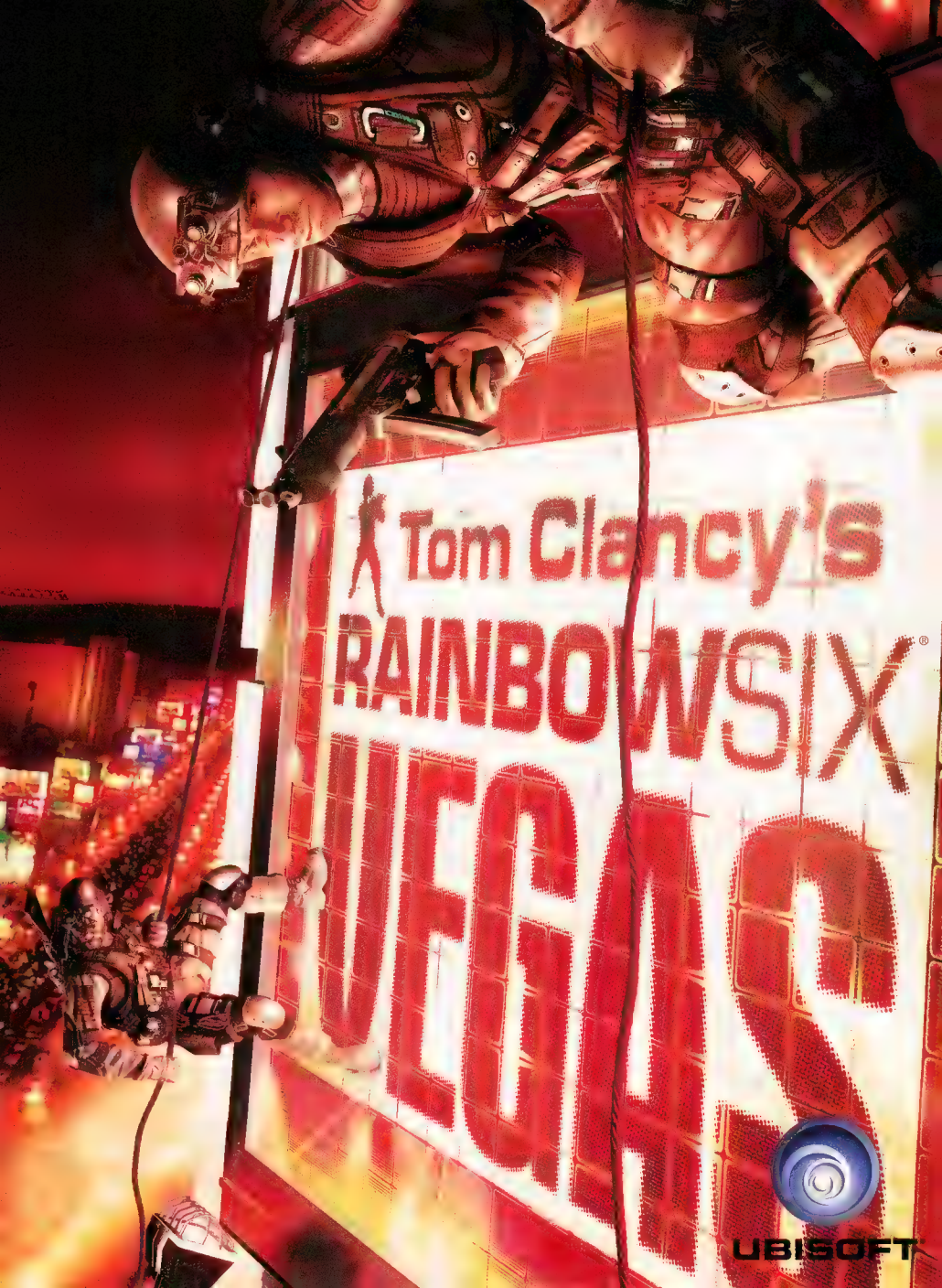
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Tom Clancy's
RAINBOW SIX

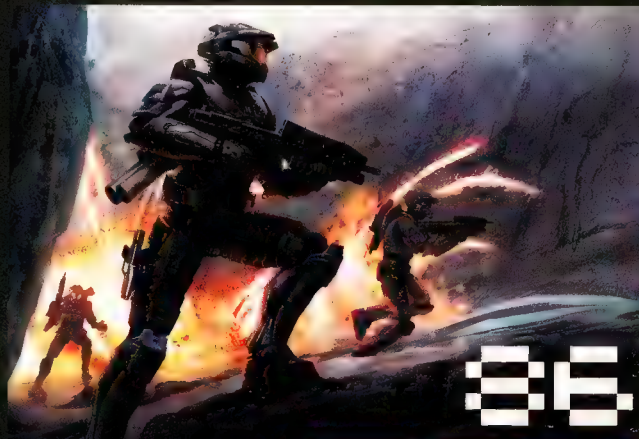
VEGAS 2



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► electronic gaming monthly



I'M THE FIRST PERSON IN THE WORLD outside of the developers at Bungie Studios to get disintegrated by *Halo 3*'s new Spartan laser (you'll learn what that is later in the issue)—and the significance of that is not lost on me. We played *Halo 3*, for crying out loud. *Halo 3*! No, I haven't been drinking Kool-Aid in Microsoft's cafeterias, but when people (coworkers and you guys, the readers) tell me that they would've killed to have been in my place...to have had a chance to play the game...and (and some of you sound dead serious), I know the series is something really special.

So a special game like that deserves special coverage. It starts with the issue you're holding right now, and it continues on **EGM210.1UP.com**, where we'll be diving hardcore into all things *Halo 3*: interviews, walkthroughs of the new maps, journals of our day spent at Bungie, how we fared playing against them at their own game, and lots more. With this massive amount of *Halo 3* coverage, it'll be like you were there playing the game with us. Which means you can erase all those thoughts about killing me, right? Right?

Also, I welcome all of you to the newly redesigned *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. You'll notice it fits a lot more nicely with our website, 1UP.com, and it's a lot cleaner and more organized now. Yeah, I know the changes will be very jarring to all our longtime readers, but the content's still as rock 'n' roll as ever. We hope you like the new EGM, and as always, we'll be checking out your feedback on our message boards (boards.1UP.com) and in our inbox (EGM@ziffdavis.com).

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief

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LETTERS

> launch woes, cock fights, and unplugged gaming



■ If a hot chick sees you reading this page, Mr. Beholder will surely scare her away.

> TRIVIAL ISSUE

This month's EGM question:

Valhalla is the spiritual successor to what map?

E-mail the answer to EGM@ziffdavis.com (subject head: Trivia; EGM #210) for a chance to win rad gaming prizes.

Them's fighting words

Of all the next-gen systems, the Nintendo Wii seems to be the coolest, but now I'm worried that it won't be able to properly handle fighting games. I'd say that about 80 percent of the games I play with my gaming buddies are fighters: We're constantly playing everything from *Mortal Kombat* to *Soul Calibur*, and I love organizing tournaments to test our skills. But that Wii controller is just too weird.... The PS3 and Xbox 360 pads are fine for fighters, but how are we supposed to pull off moves and combos with that wacky remote? —Aaron King

While the Wii-mote isn't well suited for playing arcade ports like *Street Fighter II* or *Soul Calibur*, Nintendo's optional Retro Controller should work just fine with any one-on-one classics that wind up as downloadable games on the Virtual Console. And as far as new fighters go, don't necessarily court the Wii out. 3D fighting games designed with the system's unique control setup in mind actually work surprisingly well—scope our review of the new *Dragon Ball Z* game on page 118.

Saving throw versus shame

Why do you guys always make fun of *Dungeons & Dragons*, especially when it's advertised in your own magazine? I play *D&D* with friends, and most of them are also into videogames. Board games and pen-and-paper role-playing games are some of the safest, most creative activities that a group of teens can do together. There are plenty of other things you could mock readers for besides their hobbies. Get some new material. —Forrest Pearson



■ Who said that you can't look cool while playing fighting games on the Wii?

Actually, you'd be surprised by how many seemingly cool EGM staffers harbor forbidden *D&D* secrets. Dig deep and you'll hear

about epic 10-year-long *Forgotten Realms* campaigns, strategies for vanquishing beholders, and how to use a slide rule to calculate your THACO. And it gets even geekier—one high-ranking editor (think: "final boss") routinely blows mad cash on nerdy board games like *Puerto Rico* and *Illuminati*. But don't think that we're hating: Our incessant mockery stems from our own deep-seated feelings of embarrassment and self-loathing.

Yo hablo DS

I was struck with an idea upon seeing Nintendo's creative non-game, *Brain Age*. Simply put, Nintendo must make a game that teaches and tests a person's ability to learn a new foreign language. Wouldn't that be a stupendous gaming experience for all people? Do you think Nintendo is up for it? —El Smarto

As it turns out, they already were up for it—in Japan, at least. Earlier this year, Nintendo published five titles in the *Tabi no Yubisashi Kaiwachou* "Point and Speak Phrasebook" series—English, German, Thai, Mandarin Chinese, and Korean. These handy DS carts offer a ton of useful phrases for travelers, automatic text translation, and even a mode that speaks the phrases for you (have your DS ask for directions to the toilet). So far, Nintendo of America won't comment on whether they'll adapt these titles for America, but the success of other Touch Generations offerings (*Brain* >



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■ Sonic and Princess Elise, moments before they consummate their forbidden union.

Age, *Sudoku*) bodes well for future "non-game" releases.

Child speaks out against interspecies romance

If Sonic falls in love with Princess Elise in the new next-gen *Sonic* game, I'm gonna barf. —Raven Smith, age 12

Take note, Sega: Even little kids are disgusted by the rumored romance between "tude-filled mascot Sonic and the sultry Princess Elise (voiced by Lacey Chabert). Even if their relationship stops short of blossoming into full-on bestiality, we'd still like to see fewer human beings in future *Sonic* games. Sure, we laughed when the President

of the United States vowed to kill Shadow the Hedgehog (in that antihero's own ill-fated platformer, no less), but the long-winded, overwrought, and human-filled cut-scenes in the next-gen *Sonic* seem horribly out of place.

Gotta torture 'em all

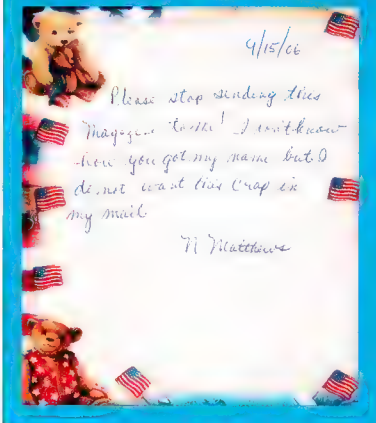
Am I the only one who finds *Pokémon* games sickening? Violent games like *Grand Theft Auto* and *Resident Evil* receive a lot of flak for poisoning the minds of our kids, but *Pokémon* is just as bad! No matter how you break it down, the game's a glorified cock-fighting simulator. We're teaching kids to trap critters and make them maul, burn, and electrocute one another for our enjoyment. Have the atrocities of Abu Ghraib and Gitmo made torture that acceptable? And when the fighting is all said and done, the poor *Pokémon* have to live inside tiny plastic balls.... How humane is that? —nastynate

C'mon, dude—these lovable furballs have been rending each other's flesh (much to the enjoyment of their trainers) for over a decade now. And look for the irreparable psychological damage to continue when the new *Diamond/Pearl* editions hit the DS in spring 2007. Look on the bright side, though: When Nintendo finally gets around to genetically engineering actual *Pikachus* for military use, we'll have millions of kids looking to enlist. Mission accomplished! ☛

■ Pikachu—America's last defense against the horrors of global terrorism?

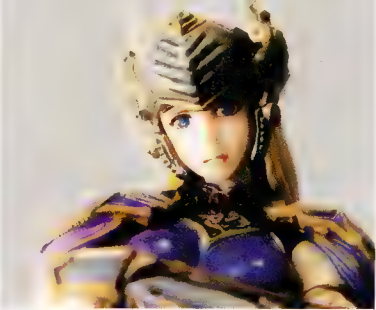
FRUSTRATING PROGRESSIVE LETTER OF THE MONTH

Sometimes we receive letters from irate subscribers. Usually they're non-writers on stationary that's the-damned-est.



VALKYRIE PROFILE 2 CONTEST

Square Enix's excellent *Valkyrie Profile 2: Simeria* slipped under the radar of many role-playing fans, but it's not too late to embark on this memorable PS2 adventure. One reader will win an ultimate VP prize pack containing five autographed *Valkyrie Profile* figurines, an autographed banner, and copies of both VP: *Lenneth* (PS2) and VP2 (PS2). A few runners-up will receive slightly less amazing prize packages. How do you make off with these goodies? Simply e-mail us at EGM@zdnet.com (subject head: VP contest; EGM #210) and we'll select the winners at random.



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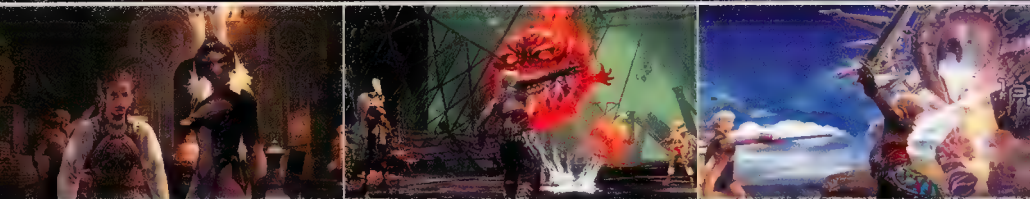
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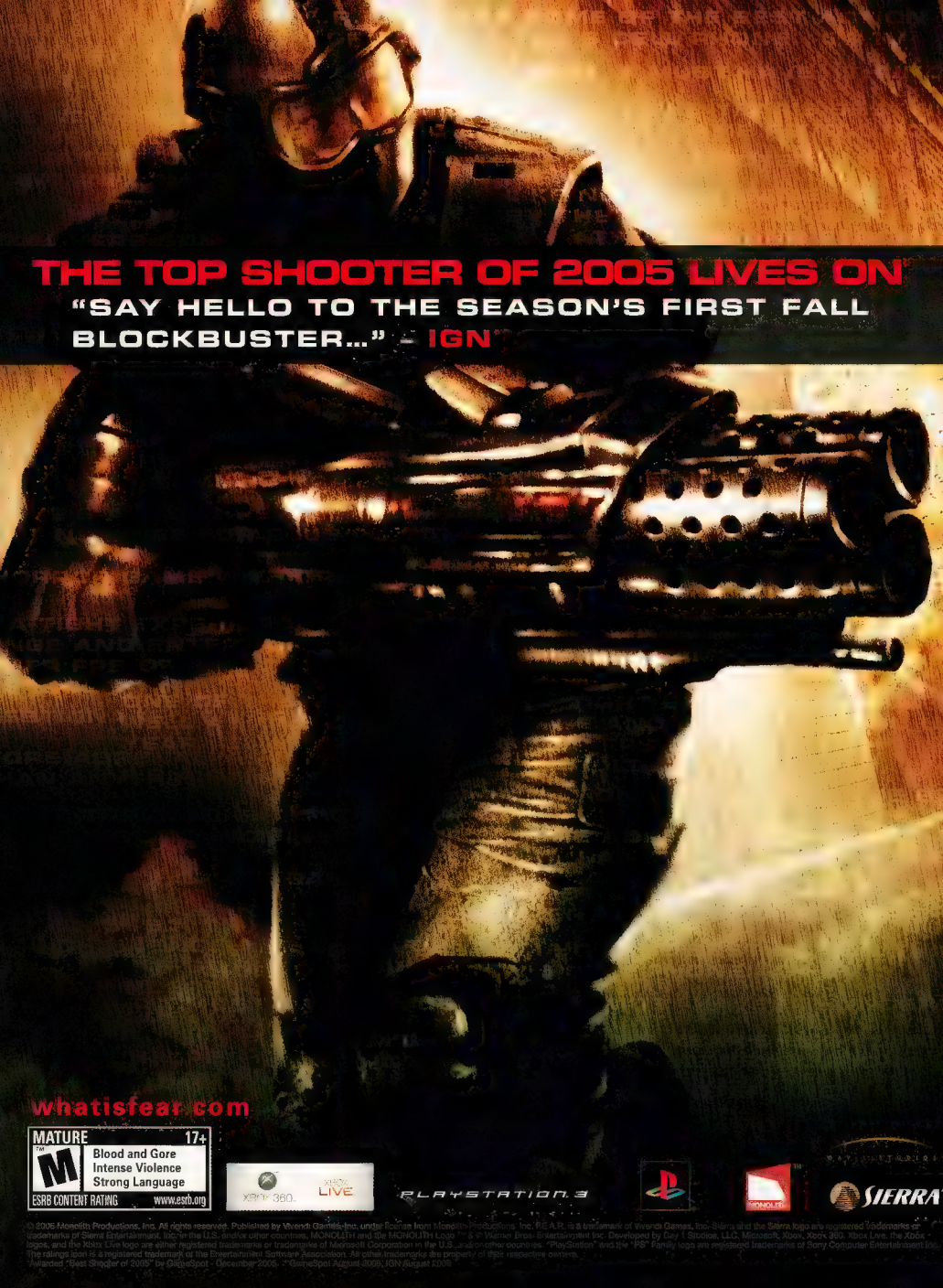


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PLAYSTATION 3



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THE LONG PORTS TO THE LEFT...

Launch Day SURVIVAL

How to secure a PS3 and Wii in 24 hours or less

By Jon M. Gibson & Erik Henriksen

If you're unable to score a PS3 or Wii on day one, don't cry. OK, cry, but then pick up Gears of War for the Xbox 360.

FINDING A NEW SYSTEM ON LAUNCH DAY IS TOUGH—just ask Xbox 360 owners. And since EB Games/GameStop only gave out limited preorders for the PlayStation 3 and Wii, things aren't looking too peachy. What does this all mean? Basically, you'll be waiting in line for some cold, long hours if you want to join the next-gen camp. So if you plan on braving the wild on the first day, this guide could possibly save your life...or at least score you a sweet system.

Survival tips

1 Choose your location wisely

Veterans of launch (L-Day) unanimously agree that only suckers camp

out at popular establishments like EB Games. It's close. It's easy. It's *stupid*. To truly reign victorious, don't be afraid to drive a few (hundred) miles to a crappy Circuit City (in the desert). You may just find yourself wading in a pool of excess next-gen hardware.

2 Confirm supply

Waiting around is pointless if there aren't enough consoles to go around. Before your store of choice closes, ask a sales representative how many systems that particular location is receiving in the morning. After he answers, proceed to mace him, then demand to know the "real amount." If he repeats the original number, he's probably telling the truth. *Probably*.

3 Wait with a friend

But make no mistake—so-called "friends" on L-Day are to be considered enemies. While your lifelong pals may prove useful when your bladder is about to hemorrhage, don't entrust them with anything more than placeholder when you absolutely, positively have to make a beeline to the pee line.

4 Bring entertainment

Don't be in such a rush to get in line that you foolishly forget to bring along something to keep you sane. A portable time-waster (DS, PSP, portable DVD player, etc.) is the best tactic for burning away midnight anxiety. Just make sure you charge your bat-



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Def Jam:
Next-gen
bling



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Gift Guide:
Naked girls
included



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Rumor Mill:
Snake to
the 360?

teries before you make the trek—only a doofus brings a dead DS.

Bring padding

Almost all gamers suffer from a common affliction—sensitive asses. Without proper cushioning (or a nice lawn chair) to provide comfort through the long hours, that big ole bubbly mass could become your adversary. A numb and tingly backside will drastically inhibit your motor skills, amplifying your chances of tripping and getting trampled by the oncoming herd of nerds.

Bring reading material

With your DS battery on the verge of juicing out, you should consider a backup entertainment source. Believe it or not, a book can wow you in the same way that *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* can. But that also requires you to know what counts as a good book (i.e., something without pictures). Ah, screw it, just bring your pop's nudie mag.

Scout your position

Since some stores may not experience a rush of overnighters, it's best to do a few drive-bys throughout the evening to avoid waiting outside if you don't have to. This is a job best reserved for the youngest, most impressionable person in your clique.

Tasty treats

Over eight hours in line promotes quite a big hunger, so allow us to suggest some energy-sparking rations: Power Bars, shrimp on a stick, 100 meters of Fruit by the Foot, sweet and sour lamb riblets, a nice piece of fish, and/or lots of Red Bull. These should keep your tummy satisfied as dreams of HD graphics (or arthritic arms) dance in your mind's eye.

Luck (and lots of it)

If you follow these tips, you'll be in pretty good shape for getting a brand spankin' new console. But even with our help, only one person can determine your fate: Lady Luck. Walking away with a Wii might be pretty easy, but if you hope to come home with a PS3, you might want to get on your knees and pray until your voice dies....

PROTECTING YOUR INVESTMENT

Why you may want a warranty

You've spent countless hours obtaining that console. You're bleary-eyed, distressed, and possibly delusional. Still, it's important to maintain composure when the salesperson poses that ever-important query: "Would you like to purchase an extended warranty?" Don't be so quick to say no—read up on why warranties may save your ass.

Is it worth it?

"Most consoles come with a 90-day warranty. If a system doesn't fall in 90 days, it's not going to fall within a year," says Steve Logan, who repairs systems at Old School Gamer, his console junkyard in Canada. His suggestion: a two-year or longer warranty deserves your extra dough, because most manufacturing glitches will be covered by the initial point-of-purchase policy.

Should I buy?

Among the repair pros, Nintendo's hardware gets high marks for being the most reliable, with Microsoft's being only somewhat dependable, and Sony's pretty shoddy. Though, after witnessing the first batch of 360s endure a distressingly high number of lock-ups and a batch of PS3s repeatedly overheat at September's Tokyo Game Show, the safe bet is to buy the warranty.

DAY-ONE DISASTERS

Classic launch follies from our gaming past

Sega Saturn (1995)

Before Sony joined the party, Sega tried to trump the electronics giant's upcoming PlayStation by forgoing a traditional holiday launch, releasing the Saturn in the summer of 1995 without...uh...telling anyone. The idea, while ambitious, proved to be a cosmic disaster. Not only were consumers clueless the system was even out, but so were also several major retailers that wanted to sell the damn thing. The lesson learned? Publicity: It's kind of a good thing.



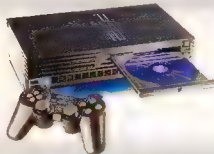
Sega Dreamcast (1999)

Sega screwed up the Saturn launch pretty bad, but it got another chance with the Dreamcast—and, well, it messed that one up, too. Even though Sega reportedly made \$98 million on day one, hardware and software glitches still riddled the Dreamcast. But the worst offense? Games like *Sonic Adventure* and *Blue Stinger* managed to somehow ship with blank discs inside. Ouch.



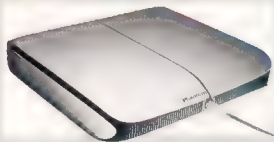
PlayStation 2 (2000)

Like we're seeing with the PS3, severe hardware shortages plagued the PS2 launch as well...especially in Europe. Just scoring a PS2 across the pond meant dodging thousands of rampant dorks. In France, for instance, riots ensued once stores opened on day one, putting three unfortunate kiddos in the hospital... without PS2s, no less.



The Phantom (20??)

Some systems never have a chance: Gizmondo, N-Gage, and the Atari Jaguar were all failures before consumers could even cash in their thoughts. But only one console tanked before its own launch—in a name befitting its fate, The Phantom—a "revolutionary" PC gaming console for your TV—disappeared before it had a chance to officially suck. ☹



That's cool...



Famicom controller microphone

Regardless of your maturity level, some things will always remain funny: a swift kick to the groin region; slapping someone really hard in the face for no reason; and recording a couple-second clip of your muffled voice onto a miniature Famicom controller microphone, tiptoeing behind someone, nuzzling it against their eardrum, and then cranking it.



Trip to Atlanta with marbles.

Shutting a bully up

Eccentric lawyer Jack Thompson tried (and failed) to send Rockstar's latest controversial creation, *Bully*, to detention—a recent court ruling in Florida deemed playing the game will not turn kids into wedgie-pulling hooligans.

DRINK UP

Do you think the industry is suffering from a lack of originality? A lot of the same old content? **Sequelitis? Absolutely.** Absolutely. As a consumer, it's a challenge to parse through all the different choices available to find those great games out there? **Absolutely.**

— Reggie Fils-Aime, Nintendo of America president and COO, extols the value of originality... while recasting 12 new *Mario* games.



Quote source: AOL Games



+ FOREIGN OBJECT / JAPAN

Love Love HAMSTER

Helping improve trans-species relations



Platform: So it's Nintendogs, eh?

Nintendo DS That's an affront to the honor of... someone. We can't decide whether

Likelihood it'll come here: We do love cute, little critters...so maybe



it'd be Nintendo or Digital Kids, makers of this game and way too many other portable hamster-raising sims over the years. These guys definitely know pint-sized furballs... and apparently how to rip off other popular pet games—the resemblance to *Nintendogs* simply cannot be denied. In the style of Nintendo's now-classic time-waster, you choose from several colors of rodents, then gradually get to know your pet by talking into the mic and using the stylus to feel him up regularly. The

twist: Hamsters, as it turns out, are a lot smarter in Japan, so your pet will pick up your spoken words and start learning English...er...Japanese.

That doesn't strike me as all that realistic. Oh, but it's in a videogame; it must be true! They talk in a little squeaky voice and everything, and with a little guidance from the in-game tutorial, you'll be discussing the merits of wood shavings, tube mazes, and plastic hamster wheels in no time. OK, so it sounds a little weird, but it definitely has potential. Now, if you'll excuse us, we're off to go to teach our ferret calculus.

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THERE'S A REASON NIGHTMARES HAPPEN IN THE DARK.

Mankind has no one else to turn to. Nowhere else to run. The planet is falling apart. Its people cornered within the only safe area remaining. The Locust Horde has risen and they won't stop coming. They won't stop killing. The government turns to whoever they have left. The sick, the wounded, the imprisoned. An inmate named Marcus Fenix. Once left to die, he is now humanity's last hope. He can take comfort in but one fact. The human race isn't extinct. Yet.



GEARS OF WAR

ATURE 17+



Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Strong Language



Microsoft
game studios

XBOX
LIVE

Jump In



XBOX 360



> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

Cipher COMPLEX

Watch out, Snake and Sam—someone's trying to sneak into your houses. By Robert Ashley



■ Don't let the motion blur fool you; all of our *Cipher Complex* screens are the real deal.

Platforms: PS3/Xbox 360
Publisher: TBD
Developer: Edge of Reality
Release Date: Late 2007

FOR ALL THE PAINSTAKINGLY RE-CREATED FIREARMS, the lush rendering of tropical war zones, the precise physics of shrapnel tearing through flesh—for all the celebrated realism of war games, they never seem to have much to say about real war. And it's not like developers should have a problem finding source material. As we play these games for their adrenaline thrills and high drama, the world outside our screens is embroiled in real conflict, firing real guns, dropping real bombs, and facing real, violent death. We use the battlefields of war as our virtual playgrounds, and on them we play the kinds of games little boys play with plastic rifles. Substance, it seems, is entirely optional, which is why it comes as a surprise to hear that *Cipher Complex*, a military espionage game for the PS3 and Xbox 360, will dive into the motivations of modern war-making.

It's all business

"I was thinking about war and about the business of war," says Mark Bristol, storyboard artist for movies

such as *Memento* and *The Thin Red Line*, and now lead narrative designer of *Cipher Complex*. "I was thinking about corporations that are in the business of war and must facilitate war to see profits. Their shareholders are almost in collusion with war, and we're seeing that very evidently in our current world situation." Apparently, *Cipher Complex* won't be avoiding the touchy subjects that these types of games so often tiptoe around. "The game will engage you viscerally, but we also want to engage your mind," says Bristol. "It's not all just popcorn and bubble gum." . . . As we face an enormous screen in the offices of Austin, TX developer Edge of Reality, the lights dim in anticipation of, one might think, a dazzling show of next-gen visual prowess. Instead, the team plays a trailer for *Why We Fight*, a 2005

documentary exploring the dangers of war-dependent American military contractors and manufacturers. "This goes way back to President Dwight D. Eisenhower's farewell address to the nation," says Bristol. Eisenhower's silver-and-black image stares intensely from the screen as he delivers his famous warning; "in the councils of government, we must guard against...the military-industrial complex." This is the "complex" in *Cipher Complex*. "Cipher," on the other hand, is the code name for John Sullivan, the game's hulking, knife-wielding tough guy. While tracking down a Russian nuclear warhead in northern Iraq just months before the U.S. invasion in 2003, Agent Cipher finds himself shot in the back of the head, betrayed by an arms dealer named Anakov. Surviving for years in a coma, our

The game will engage you viscerally, but we also want to engage your mind.

—Lead Narrative Designer Mark Bristol

hero then gets a wake-up call from the U.S. military when that same nuclear warhead suddenly shows up at a disused Russian military base on a tiny, volcanic island off the coast of Siberia. This is where the game, and the showdown between Cipher and his betrayer Anakov, takes place.

"We want people to want to become this guy," says Creative Director Thomas Coles. To make that connection with players, the dev team once again looks to the outside world, to the powerlessness many people feel in the face of a world where conflict is on the rise. "It's all very frustrating to read this kind of stuff in the newspaper and feel like you can't do anything," says Coles. "Through a character like this, you feel like you get to do something about it." Do something about it, indeed. With a giant hunting knife and a clutch of instant-death maneuvers, Cipher prowls the island compound, snapping necks and disemboweling unsuspecting enemies at will. "It's very cathartic and satisfying," says Coles.

Less hiding, more hunting

The *Cipher Complex* team say they want a shot at the title in a genre where big-budget players *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear Solid* currently dominate, a gutsy move for a small, independent developer mostly known for ports and licensed games. Edge of Reality has been quietly socking away a war chest of cash while working on...less interesting games (for instance, *Over the Hedge*), waiting to make its move into an original project. First, the company had to come up with an idea worth betting it all on.

"We found a hole in the stealth genre," says Coles. "Stealth games are pretty much games of hide-and-seek. But we're big action fans, so we thought, 'How do we get more action into a stealth game? We've spent a lot of the last year cracking that nut.'" The most obvious break from the stealth norm is the addition of an adrenaline meter, which regulates the player's use of supercharged moves, the most radical of which is a lightning-fast dash. Given the proper amount of adrenaline, the player can slow the action down to a crawl and then aim a silhouette of Cipher anywhere within a certain range. Upon releasing the button, Cipher flies across the floor to wherever you've aimed, such



■ This guy would've been better off just giving Agent Cipher the lunch money.



NOT-SO-TROPICAL ISLAND

Cipher Complex will drop players into a non-tropical setting: a Russian military base built into the collapsed remains of a volcanic island. "A lot of games take an environment and then just toss it away," says almost idiosyncratically Creative Director Thomas Coles. "It should say on the back of the box, 'We have 10 levels that don't mean anything because they're just different-colored backgrounds. We want to do one environment

really, really deeply and give it a lot of character. The *Cipher Complex* team is going to make their setting a full-fledged character of the game, moody and destroyed." The base is collapsing, says Coles. "It's been sitting still here in the ocean since 1982. Seventeen years later with no maintenance, this place is a death trap. This place is a hellhole. The place is interesting. Interesting enough, he hopes, that players stop "take a look

and really go to know what the setting is." That's not something you get an opportunity to do in most games, says Coles. "You're here in one place for 30 minutes and then it's over." It's turned into "the modern equivalent of having skills level, age level, sword level." That's been done to death, so we decided to make a different approach and make our location special. Just making the sheer 300-foot cliffs

as a place of safer cover or behind some unlucky schmuck.

"Bam! I'm in behind him, and he never even saw what was coming," says Coles. "It gives me that added reach. What previously would have been me sort of plodding over there now becomes something very dynamic." The idea here is getting players to take risks, to leave the shadows more often and boldly leap into action. "In a normal stealth game, you're kinda huddled in a corner, hoping you're not going to get spotted," says Coles. "This is a game about hunting, not hiding." This seems like an apt metaphor as we watch Agent Cipher slink and circle his prey; his posture is distinctly animal, like a tiger ready to pounce. At close range, the combat is more along the lines of *Ninja Gaiden* than *Splinter Cell*. Attacks fly at superhuman speed as the camera swoops and pans for dramatic effect. Adding an extra layer of strategy, your adrenaline meter slightly refills when you perform a stealth kill. This makes it possible—with the right timing—to fly around a room and string together combos of sneaky takeouts. "A skilled player would be able to play it like a *Tony Hawk* level," says Technical Director Rob Cohen.

But with all of this emphasis on aggressive action, will *Cipher Complex* lose that cat-and-mouse drama for which these games are known? "Rather than 15 minutes of tension, it might be a few minutes of tension followed by action," says Cohen. "It's punctuated." The tension and danger come courtesy of heavily armed soldiers. A couple of bullets like any real human being—will put Cipher down for the count, making encounters with the opposition particularly dangerous. "We don't want a blastfest, where [the action is constant]," says Cohen. "We want you up and down!"

Ben Jackson, the man in charge of *Cipher Complex's* combat, grips a 360 controller, zipping Cipher from one victim to the next and clearly enjoying himself. "Games like *Metal Gear* and *Splinter Cell* are almost fun to play, but they're just too slow-paced," he says. "They're missing the action element to make them really engaging. There's just so much room for improvement." So, wait—is Edge of Reality making a big, spare-no-fun action game or a well-researched commentary on the perils of war profiteering? Maybe that's what makes *Cipher* so complex. ■



■ *Cipher Complex* will also have an online mode, but that's all the developer is willing to say right now.



Read It!

Extending EGM

When you're done reading this issue, fear not, the end is not near. Head over to EGM210.1UP.com to catch even more *Halo 3* coverage (in case 17 frickin' pages wasn't enough for ya). On the site, you'll find all the footage from our trip to Bungie, including video interviews and juicy multiplayer discussions.



Hear It!

Epic podcast

This holiday season you'll be playing one 360 game: *Gears of War*. So we sat down with the chatterbox behind the game, "CliffyB" Bleszinski, on our weekly podcast to talk about why his game is so hot. To hear all the jibber-jabber, check out our page at EGMLive.1UP.com, then head over to our podcast club at EGMLive-club.1UP.com to discuss CliffyB's hair-frosting techniques as well as answer our weekly trivia question.

Watch It!

Late visit

Last month we promised a behind-the-scenes look at *Gears of War* developer Epic's office. OK, so it's a little late, but hey, at least we stuck to our word. Zip over to EGM209.1UP.com to check it out now.



+ ONLINE SCENE

School Spirit

Displaying your colors on the 360

The themes are kinda ugly, and the 360 banner ads block the team logos.

SCHOOL PRIDE IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT...and can be insanely annoying when dealing with overzealous football freaks. Just look at our boss, Dan "Shoe" Hsu; this guy ain't exactly the biggest sports fan, but he won't shut the hell up about the University of Michigan (his alma mater) and its football team. So you know it made Shoe and the rest of the maize-and-blue

nation very happy when EA made available several school-specific *NCAA Football 07* themes for Xbox 360 dashboards. Check out which Division I universities, as of September 27th, are climbing up the download ranks. Oh, and if you know anything about Michigan football, you can imagine how our head honcho feels about which school is currently No. 1.

- | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Ohio State | 13. USC | 25. Louisville |
| 2. Notre Dame | 14. Penn State | 26. Texas Tech |
| 3. Texas | 15. Nebraska | 27. Washington |
| 4. Michigan | 16. Auburn | 28. UCLA |
| 5. Miami | 17. West Virginia | 29. Purdue |
| 6. Florida State | 18. Virginia Tech | 30. Oklahoma State |
| 7. Florida | 19. Iowa | 31. Cal |
| 8. Tennessee | 20. Arkansas | 32. Georgia Tech |
| 9. Alabama | 21. Clemson | 33. Colorado |
| 10. Georgia | 22. Wisconsin | 34. Boston College |
| 11. LSU | 23. Oregon | 35. TCU |
| 12. Oklahoma | 24. Arizona State | |

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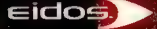
MATURE 17+
Blood
Drug Reference
Intense Violence
Language
Sexual Themes



PlayStation 2



avalanche



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PLATFORM SPECIFICATIONS



super power full

It takes a documentary, produced every week by an in-house video crew, to help EA producer Jeff Peters keep track of the huge array of powers and attack combinations that the 140 developers working on *Superman Returns*™. The Videogame have put together. “*Metallo*, for instance, is 60 stories tall,” he says, “so you might want to fly around the city a little bit, maybe down to the port, and find something really massive – a ship, for example – pick that up and hurl it at him.” Each villain has different strengths – and unique vulnerabilities – so attacks that devastate one enemy won’t necessarily work against another.

“With a villain like *Riot*, you may want to keep your distance,” he says. “You could do something like grab a fuel truck, throw it toward him, then blow it up with your heat vision just before it hits him.” If the ensuing explosion happens to set an apartment building on fire, Peters suggests leaving the fight for a moment to airlift a fire engine to the scene so it can douse the flames, then rejoining the battle. “There are so many different things you can do,” Peters says. “It all adds up to this amazing feeling of freedom.”



flight manifest

When he was 13, EA level designer Zach Wilson used to blow his entire \$10-a-week allowance on *Superman* and other comic books. For the last two years, he’s been tight’s-deep in processor cycles and aerodynamics with the rest of the team working on *Superman Returns*, giving life to the *Man of Steel* with his own personal branch of physics – from takeoff to 800-m.p.h. flight through the densely packed streets of Metropolis to midair hand-to-hand combat.

“The hardest thing with flight in a 3D environment is to make it look realistic and make it easy to learn at the same time,” EA’s state-of-the-art development methods gave Wilson & co. the tools to nail that balance between realism and playability. “Gamers can be so skeptical,” Wilson says. “I understand – I used to be those guys. That’s what motivates us: to prove to the world that we can pull it off.”





TITLE



FACTOID: 148 game creators

INFORMATION
www.BeSuperman.comDATE OF RELEASE
11/22/06

SUPERMAN RETURNS.

THE VIDEOGAME



new world mortar

Before EA concept art director Phil Straub and his team could construct Metropolis in the game environment of *Superman Returns*, they needed a map. Building on 2D maps supplied by DC Comics, EA created a detailed 3D representation of the city—first on paper, then in clay, then out of papier-mâché and wood and finally out of bits, pixels and polygons. Eighty square virtual miles of playable space.

And playable means seriously playable: billboards, fire hydrants, cars and tractor-trailers, lamp posts—you can use nearly every element in the environment as a shield, a weapon—or, in *Metallo's* case, a toothpick.

lurking villains

> LISTEN UP

That's cool...

Xbox 720?

The PS3 and Wii are on everyone's minds right now, but Microsoft is thinking about something else—the next Xbox. Sure, the 360 is only a year old, but that isn't stopping Microsoft from getting a head start on the next next-gen. Microsoft EMEA VP Chris Lewis recently told British gaming site Kikizo that the company is working on the successor to Xbox 360. "So that's happening right now," said Lewis. "You'll see more over time." Sounds good...now, when can we put down preorders on this one?

360 ways to rawk

Microsoft is banging its head to the band—*Guitar Hero II* is heading to the 360 next year with new downloadable content.



Smoking a new halfpipe

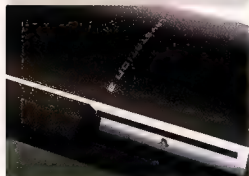
Sorry Tony Hawk, you're no longer the only trickster in the park—EA's new skateboard game, creatively titled... uhh...*Skate*, is coming to the Xbox 360 and PS3.



> OVERHEARD

"We do not care."

—Sony Computer Entertainment President Ken Kutaragi responds rather succinctly when asked whether Xbox 360 and Wii might outsell the PlayStation 3 this holiday season



COVER SOURCE: JVC



> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS

Def Jam: ICON

Remixing its rap for the next gen

By Michael Donahoe

Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: EA GAMES
ESRB Rating: M
Release Date: 11/19/08

DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY IS THE FIRST in a new line of action games from Electronic Arts' Fight for NY series.

EA GAMES' *FIGHT FOR NY* IS THE FIRST in a new line of action games from Electronic Arts' Fight for NY series. The game is set in a gritty, urban environment and features a cast of iconic hip-hop artists. The game is set in a gritty, urban environment and features a cast of iconic hip-hop artists. The game is set in a gritty, urban environment and features a cast of iconic hip-hop artists.

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That sucks...

Sour shredding

Guitar Hero II may already be on its farewell tour—MTV recently snatched up developer Harmonix for a superstar price of \$175 million. With publisher RedOctane owning the *Guitar Hero* name, we may see MTV release its own virtual rocker under a different moniker. Sounds good in theory, but when you factor in MTV, we'll likely get a shoddy cash-in filled with loads of radio rubbish.

Sucking a series dry

Crap-movie director Uwe Boll recently let it slip he's working on a sequel to *BloodRayne* that will likely bite. Or suck. Actually, probably both.



No cutting

Don't expect a price drop for the PSP any time soon—Sony recently stated its fledgling portable system will stay firmly at \$199, even though the DS Lite is currently killing the competition. Sony's answer to that: By the end of the year the PSP will have 230 games in stores. Oh really? Too bad 225 of those games suck ass.



■ *Icon* will be the first *Def Jam* game to include online fights.

and also some... [The text is mostly illegible due to the blue background and low resolution.]

... [The text is mostly illegible due to the blue background and low resolution.]

... [The text is mostly illegible due to the blue background and low resolution.]

... [The text is mostly illegible due to the blue background and low resolution.]

Everything in the environment is animating and pulsating to the beat of the music... — Electronic Arts

OVERHEARD:

"We want to appeal to mothers who don't want consoles in their living rooms, and to the elderly and to young women. **It's a challenge, like trying to sell cosmetics to men.**"

—Nintendo President Satoru Iwata prepares for the challenge of luring senile old geezers to the Wii



Quote source: Bloomberg



> HOLIDAY BUYER'S GUIDE

Something for EVERYONE

And we mean everyone! We pick 13 holiday gaming gifts perfect for friends, enemies, and all the folks in between....

By Scott Steinberg, Jon Gibson, Rob Fox, & Shawn Smith

Meslo photography by Michael Sartori



Wraptunes!
Whether your gift is gaudy or nice, wrap it in this "Paper Invaders" space bug-adorned paper from www.whimsypress.com (\$4.50 per sheet) to make it extra game-y.

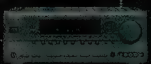
BECAUSE NOTHING SAYS "I LOVE YOU"

like a \$2,000 TV, and nothing says "I vaguely acknowledge your existence" like a \$4 novelty game from a fast-food joint, we present a holiday shopping guide for every flavor of relation in your life—from dearest friend to most dastardly fiend. It's all part of our annual effort to spread holiday cheer without boring you to tears. We'll let other magazines tell you that shooter fans will crave *Resistance: Fall of Man* and that the Nintendo Wii is so hot right now. For our money, nothing is hotter than a faceplate that turns your Xbox 360 into an Atari Jaguar—as long as you give it to the biggest jerk in the world.

HD armageddon!

Chances are you won't land a PS3 for both yourself and that guy who saved your life back in Gulf War I this holiday, so why not prime him for Sony's new system with this monster 50-inch, 1080p HDTV and an eardrum-blowing audio setup?

Sony Grand WEGA SXRD KDS-50A2000 HDTV • www.sonystyle.com • \$2,500
Onkyo TX-SR604 receiver • www.onkyousa.com • \$500
Epic Midi 175 7.1 speakers • www.axiomaudio.com • \$1,830



BEST
BUDDY

CLOSE
FRIEND

FEEL THE INTENSE POWER OF

THE NEXT GENERATION IS OVER A HUNDRED HIGH-DEF GAMES AND COUNTING. Whether you want to shoot or strategize, race or roleplay, play sports or play with your kids, Xbox 360™ has the game to answer your every whim, rush, and glory-soaked desire. xbox.com

HAVING WAY TOO MANY OPTIONS TO CHOOSE FROM.



PRODUCTS RANGE FROM
EVERYONE TO MATURE
E-M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

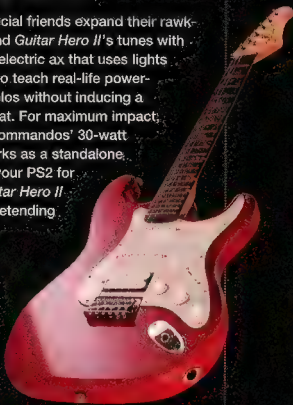
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Jump in.

 XBOX 360.

Rock-it science

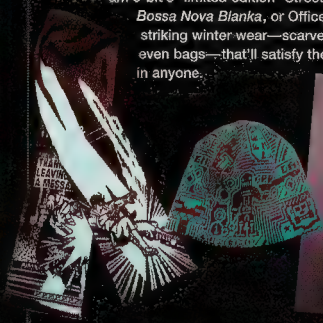
Help extra-special friends expand their raw-god potential beyond *Guitar Hero II*'s tunes with this fully functional electric ax that uses lights and a PC program to teach real-life power-chord-shredding solos without inducing a vodka-scented sweat. For maximum impact, plug into The Ant Commandos' 30-watt amplifier, which works as a standalone amp or hooks into your PS2 for garage-shaking *Guitar Hero II* sessions. It's like pretending to rock—for real!



TAC Amplifier • www.theguitarmania.com • \$40
Fretlight teaching guitar • www.fretlight.com • \$500

Dressing up

Despite accusations of excessive sweating, pudgy guts, and unkempt *everything*, gamers have a god-given right to dress for nerdy success. Try these on for size: I am 8-bit's "limited edition" *Street Fighter* T-shirt, *Bossa Nova Blanka*, or Office Lendorff's striking winter wear—scarves, hats, and even bags—that'll satisfy the pixel hound in anyone.



Pixelly winter wear • www.officelendorff.com • \$60 and up
Bossa Nova Blanka T-shirt (right) • www.iamb3it.com • \$28

ONLINE GLANMATE

OFFICE SECRET SANTA

ACQUAINTANCE

Arts and warcrafts

With massively multi-player role-playing games creeping onto consoles, hardcore fans will look for any way to connect with their custom characters. Enter www.mmoart.com, a cadre of talented pro illustrators who will render your handcrafted online hero in pencils or inks, then send you the suitable-for-framing, one-of-a-kind masterpiece. Prices vary depending on the complexity of the project. This awesome *Phantasy Star Universe* character we commissioned would run you \$400.



Custom-character art • www.mmoart.com • starting at \$100

Illustration by
Domina Pirogac

Getting schooled

Acquaintances will take this gift in one of two ways: either as a welcome opportunity to improve their *Halo 2* and *Super Smash Bros. Melee* skills, or as a mean-spirited "you suck at games!" jab. Either way, they'll likely appreciate the professional help from this site's squad of pro-gaming coaches, who players can hire by the hour to bone up on the two games mentioned.



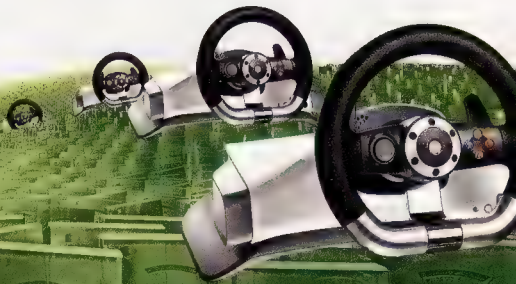
Gaming coaching session • www.gaming-lessons.com
• starting at \$25 an hour



FLY AWAY, WIRE.

FLY AWAY.

THE NEXT GENERATION IS A WIRELESS WORLD. Stand up for freedom and sit down wherever you want. With the Wireless Headset, Wireless Racing Wheel with Force Feedback, Wireless Controllers, and more, all optimized for the Xbox 360™, you can play around while you move around. xbox.com



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Jump in.



XBOX 360.

Play girls

In our mostly male industry (not counting those Swiffer-equipped housewives tending to their *Sims*), gaming and naked ladies go together like peanut butter and naked ladies. This 12-month Nerdcore calendar proves it with glossy—and classy—oversized photos, retro arcade and console delights, and dozens of called-out geeky holidays (such as *Mario* creator Shigeru Miyamoto's birthday, Comic-Con, and so on).



Nerdcore 2007 calendar • www.totallynerdcore.com • \$25

Oh, snap!

Sucking at games is one thing, but sucking at trash talk? That's what you're telling the recipient of this contraption, a dongle that snaps to your Xbox 360's controller and broadcasts a collection of prerecorded and custom sound bites to online opponents. Our advice: Preload a few clips—a girl squealing, baby crying, or maybe a long, juicy fart—before you're finished with the gift wrap.



SmackTalk • www.digitalinnovations.com • \$30

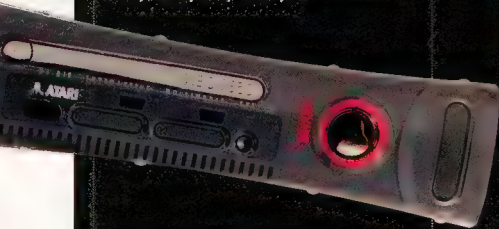
NEIGHBOR

EX-FRIEND

CHILDHOOD BULLY

S*** faced

Here's a gift that keeps on misgiving: Buy Nyko's GameFace 360 custom-faceplate kit, design an appropriately embarrassing Xbox 360 plate—such as our homage to the horrid Atari Jaguar console (download the template at jaguar360.1UP.com)—and give it to your favorite a**hole. Act insulted if you ever catch him replacing your DIY design. "But I made that just for you!" you'll say.



GameFace 360 custom faceplate
www.nyko.com • \$20

Burger time

Give the gift of marketing synergy, neatly encapsulated in three games involving bumper cars, Burger King's monarch sneaking up on girls and hitting them with food, and the Subservient Chicken kart racing with Brooke Burke. Bonus points if your giftee is Brooke Burke.



Burger King Xbox 360 games • Any Burger King • \$4 each

ADD HD DVD TO YOUR XBOX 360™

and tune everything else out with the Xbox 360™ HD DVD Player. Experience six times the resolution of DVD at up to 1080p and up to six times the disbelief, for one clearly affordable price. xbox.com

THEN ADD SALT TO YOUR POPCORN.



King Kong on HD DVD and Universal Media Remote included for a limited time.

HD DVD

THE LOOK AND SOUND OF PERFECT™

Jump in.

XBOX 360™

Dressing down

We're sure Todd Rogers, his close friends, and his immediate family are proud to wear a shirt proclaiming him world champion of the classic arcade shooter *Gorf*. Same goes for all the Twin Galaxies champions you'll find on T-shirts at the high score—chronicling publication's online store. But would the average gamer be down to advertise a bunch of middle-aged men's lifetime achievements? No? Perfect!



Twin Galaxies jerseys • www.cafepress.com/galaxiesgifts • \$19

Spill checker

Taken at face value, this cheap, no-frills, largely impractical (how many people own stand-up arcade games?) cup-cradling gift doesn't even hold water in the "it's the thought that counts" category. But, hey, at least it *literally* holds water, and it's related to video games. For those reasons alone, you can feign umbrage if your jerk of a giftee bitches.



Folding Arcade Cup Holder • www.foldingcupholder.bravehost.com • \$4.50

THE GUY WHO SLEPT WITH YOUR GIRLFRIEND

Console-ation prize

Not only would you *not* buy an impossible-to-find PlayStation 3—or any of the primo A/V gear highlighted at the top of this list—for a mortal enemy, but you'd also go out of your way to make him feel the burn of a PS3-free holiday. Hence, we recommend the hot-at-the-flea-market Game Station, a chintzy stand-alone console that plays 60 amazing built-in games. Fishing! Shooting! Disappointment!

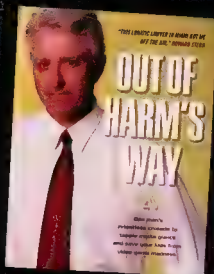


Game Station • www.dreamgear.net • \$20

WORST ENEMY

Saving the worst for last

To paraphrase the saying, keep your friends close and your enemies entertained with cheap, rotten gaming gifts. That's been our mantra for this gift guide. But what about extra-special final-boss-level baddies like anti-games-cru-sading Miami lawyer Jack Thompson? Fortunately, he created his own perfect gift: this tome chronicling his efforts to "save your kids from videogame madness." "When I die," he writes in his dedication to students killed in a school shooting, "I shall read this book to you in heaven." Sounds more like hell to us.




JACK THOMPSON

Out of Harm's Way • www.tyndale.com • \$20

EXPRESS YOURSELF THE WAY NATURE INTENDED.

WITH YOUR FACE.

THE NEXT GENERATION  SEEING FRIENDS FROM MILES AWAY. The future of gaming is here, and it looks like your buddy Keith. Video chat with family. Personalize your gamer picture. Practice your smirks. With the Xbox Live™ Vision Camera, those closest to you get even closer. xbox.com



Jump in.

 XBOX 360™

THE STORY OF YOUR FIGHTING IS
A POEM OF TWO WORDS:

YOU SUCK.

REDSTEEL



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www.RedSteelGame.com | Available November 19th

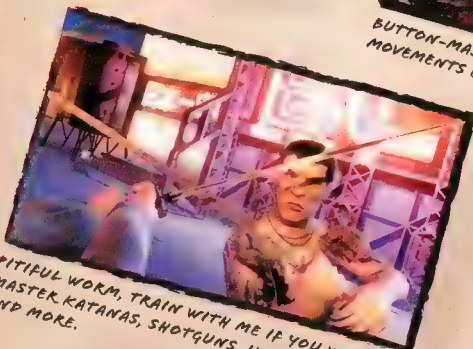
I CAN TRAIN EVEN YOU AT THE RED STEEL DOJO OF PAIN.



⊕
REAL
MOVES



BUTTON-MASHING IS OVER. MASTER YOUR WEAPON
MOVEMENTS EXPERTLY OR BLEED PROFUSELY.



PITIFUL WORM, TRAIN WITH ME IF YOU WISH TO
MASTER KATANAS, SHOTGUNS, UZI'S, REVOLVERS
AND MORE.



⊕
MULTIPLE
WEAPONS



⊕
HEAD-TO-
HEAD



LET'S SEE WHO IS WORSE IN MULTIPLAYER
BATTLE: YOU OR YOUR LOSER FRIENDS?

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(773-7855)



THE LAST THING GOING THROUGH YOUR-



UNTOLD LEGENDS
DARK KINGDOM

THE ULTIMATE NEXT-GENERATION ACTION-RPG EXPERIENCE.
AVAILABLE NOVEMBER 2006

Engage your senses in a world so immersive that it blurs the boundaries between gaming and reality. Brought to life through true HD graphics, heart-pounding combat and in-game cinematic storytelling, players will find themselves in a world of beauty, betrayal and deceit,

where only you can end the long-standing oppression of a tyrannical king. Get ready to experience Untold Legends Dark Kingdom - the ultimate next-generation action-RPG. A game that will lead you so far into the darkness, you may never want to find your way out.



PLAYSTATION 3

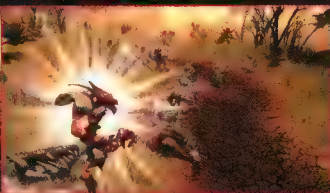
ENEMY'S HEAD WILL BE YOUR SWORD.



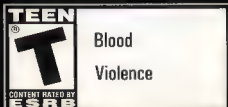
Full Online Support: Go online and play cooperatively with your friends or acquire additional game content

Engaging Action-RPG Combat: Devastate enemies with chained melee attacks, mind-blowing spells and powerful special attacks

Next-Gen HD Graphics: Embark on a fantasy adventure as it unfolds in true high-definition



www.uldarkkingdom.com



Game experience may change during online play.

That sucks...



Closing time

Like good games? Capcom apparently doesn't: It pulled the plug on artistic developer Clover, the group behind *Okami*, *Viewtiful Joe*, and *God Hand*.

Underachievements

Caring about your 360 achievements is one thing. But paying people to prove you don't suck is another thing. Pathetic. That's not stopping Levelmy360.com from increasing the gamer score of crappy gamers for a fee. For blowing 200 real dollars, you can earn yourself 3,000 fake pride points.

Missing links

Nintendo must hate Americans—not only did Europe get the bitchin' black DS Lite before us, but now they're also getting the Opera Internet browser first. Lame!

> GUESS WHO

- 1 I love and adore, but I just like to pretend I'm made of a warm liquid.
- 2 Working against the boss who, but I sure do dislike those who.
- 3 I've been known to wear someone's clothing. What? Like dresses. DKT
- 4 Working through it, but... Working through it, but... Working through it, but...
- 5 I sure did think my job had what you'd think I would think about.

Who am I?
at www.ea.com



PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

Crossfire

Who's got your six? The both of you

By Bryan Intihar



Platform: XB360

Publisher: Eidos

Developer: Pivotal Games

Release Date: 2007



Find an online friend, and you can play through *Crossfire*'s campaign mode together via Xbox Live.

BY THE LOOKS OF IT, publishers and developers finally have a hard-on for something other than making open-world affairs: buddy games. Already this year, we've seen EA reveal its mercenary (and somewhat homoerotic) duo in the upcoming *Army of Two* (PS3/XB360), plus Eidos' *Kane & Lynch: Dead Men* (XB360) will star quite the paranoid pair. Go ahead and add another, *Crossfire*, to the ever-growing twosome genre.

Still, this one does have some key differences from those previously announced titles. While *Army of Two* and *K&L* are of the third-person action kind variety, *Crossfire* is strictly a first-person shooter. Also, at any point during a mission, you can instantly switch from playing as either the sniper Walsh or the up-close-and-personal Laing, both CIA special operatives who carry out jobs that the government prefers keeping off the books (kidnapping hostiles, paying informants for a terrorist's whereabouts, and other stuff like that). But say you enjoy sticking to

one guy—commanding the other will be a cinch. "You can get your partner to act just by pushing the command button while looking at something," says Senior Programmer Sebastian Grinke. "Just using one button, you can issue orders to follow, take cover, open a door, push a switch, use a computer, use suppressing fire, or take out an enemy helicopter." The dev team is also experimenting with some more advanced directives, such as telling the other to lay down smoke or distinguish a group of enemies with his grenade launcher.

Friendly banter, though, will be one characteristic that *Crossfire* shares with its fellow buddy games. "We've injected humor into the game that I think is quite realistic," says Grinke. "The guys will compliment each other on a good shot by saying something like, 'Right between the eyes, Walsh!' And if you take out an enemy who's aiming at the other agent, he'll thank you for that, too." Oh, Miss Manners would be so proud....

LUMINES™

III

• Nominee, Best Puzzle/Trivia/Parlor Game of E3 2006
- Game Critics Awards

• Nominee, Best PVP Music Game of E3 2006
- IGN.com



FEATURING VIDEOS
& MUSIC FROM

BECH

BLACK EYED PEAS

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS

FATBOY SLIM

THE GO! TEAM

GWEN STEFANI

HOOBASTANK

JUNIOR SENIOR

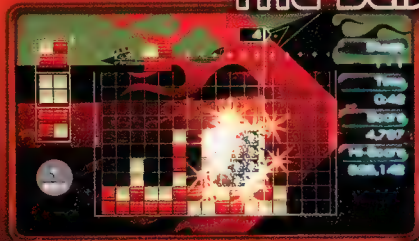
JUNKIE XL

MISSY ELLIOTT

NEW ORDER

STIGMATO INC.

THE BLISS IS BACK!

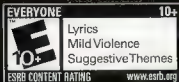


ALL NEW: STAGES, SHINS, MUSIC AND AVATARS.



ENHANCED GRAPHICS WITH STREAMING VIDEO.

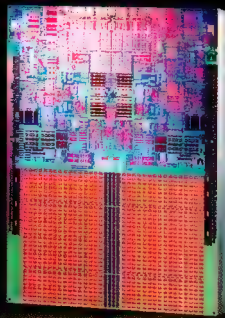
CREATE SPECTACULAR COMBOS IN MIND-BENDING ENVIRONMENTS WITH
CUTTING-EDGE MUSIC FROM SOME OF TODAY'S HOTTEST ARTISTS!



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www.bvg.com









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THE WORLD'S BEST GAMING PROCESSOR.**
It's your chance to multiply everything you love about gaming.
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World of Warcraft® at www.intel.com/go/gaming





Sure, we've got the trailer for that new *Halo* strategy game over at GameVideos. But we've also got a Bollywood Xbox 360 commercial and a clip of a *GoldenEye 007* mod for *Half-Life*. Check 'em out at GameVideos.com/EGM.



1337

Half-Life: GoldenEye 007 mod
GoldenEye 007 levels recreated using the *Half-Life* engine. We need this right now, please.



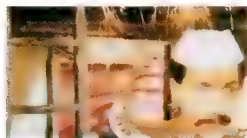
FTW

YMCK Tetrominon music video
Tetris-inspired 8-bit beep-tabulous video from YMCK. Never heard of them? You need to.



ZOMG

Heroes debut trailer
This ultra-styled teaser for the upcoming Wii game from developer Suda 51 (*Killer 7*) is a must-see.



WTF

India Xbox 360 TV ad
Fairly disturbing TV spot for the Xbox 360 in India. They had us until the Reed Richards elastic neck part.

The Big Ones

We hate waiting for these games, too

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

PS3 • Konami • Fall 2007

The latest MGS4 trailer (which finally features actual gameplay and the surprise appearance of what seems to be a young Snake) didn't exactly blow everyone away; several thought the animations looked too robotic for a next-gen game. Still, the footage (peep it at GameVideos.com) did showcase some of Snake's new moves, including hiding in barrels, blindly tossing grenades while lying on the ground, and ordering his II'I robotic friend, Metal Gear Mk.II, to taser a guard in the family jewels.



Fable 2

XB360 • Microsoft • 2008

After Peter Molyneux failed to deliver on his promise that the original *Fable* would be the "greatest role-playing game ever" (which led to the developer receiving death threats—seriously), he isn't talking so boldly about the sequel. Still, Molyneux did recently discuss some cool new features for *Fable 2*, such as unconditional love (you can now build relationships with your children), the ability to accumulate real wealth such as land and castles, and more believable combat (so, for example, you'll see your hero shorten the swing of his sword if he's standing near a wall). He's also shooting to give us our first real glimpse of the game in March.

Grand Theft Auto IV

PS3/XB360 • Rockstar • Oct. 16, 2007

Looking for a reason to buy the 360 version of this much anticipated open-world game? Rockstar gives you two—the publisher announced that it'll eventually release two exclusive *GTA4* episodes through Xbox Live. According to Rockstar, each contain "hours of entirely new gameplay." Wonder if anything special is in store for the PS3 edition, and whether this means fans will have to dish out even more cash for the entire *GTA4* experience.

Final Fantasy XIII

PS3 • Square Enix • 2007

Despite several rumblings that No. 13 won't see the light of day in 2007, we're still hearing from Square Enix that this role-playing juggernaut will land on the PS3 next year. Well, at least in Japan....

In other *FF* news, we've learned a few more details regarding *Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings* (DS). This portable RPG will mainly focus on young Vaan and Penelo's relationship, and airships will play a big role throughout.



▶ RUMOR MILL

Slippery Snake

A solid opportunity for the 360 By Quartermann



Resurrected Rumors

10 years ago, I successfully guessed the future of the *Mortal Kombat* series by letting slip that *Mortal Kombat 4* would finally make the jump to 3D. The game didn't turn out so good, but at least my rumor did.

I also lit the fuse on *Bombberman* coming to the Nintendo 64 and informed importers that an arcade-perfect port of *X-Men vs. Street Fighter* would be hitting the Saturn.

MY JOB COULDN'T BE EASIER—three big gaming events in the span of a month? Man, I remember when I used to actually work for my gossip. I really can't complain—after fishing for facts at Nintendo's Wii event, the Tokyo Game Show, and Microsoft's X06, I've managed to catch some massive, megaton rumors. Get a change of pants, for the scuttlebutt I'm about to spread is going to knock off your knickers. Pants or not, these rumors are worth it—trust me.

Switching gears

Fanboys always have their favorites, and most Sony lovers are proud to brag about the PS3 snagging the exclusive rights to *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*. Unless it comes out on the 360, that is. Yes, as crazy as it may sound, I hear Konami is forcing the game's head honcho, Hideo Kojima, to port *Metal Gear Solid 4* over to the 360.

High roller

I hear someone is gambling on a new movie game. Yep, looks like the comic-turned-flick *Sin City* is coming to both the Xbox 360 and PS3. This isn't a cheap cash-in, either—

both series creator Frank Miller and folks from the movie will be lending their talents to the project.

Why not?

Lately, the 360 has been the breeding ground for *Grand Theft Auto* clones—both *Saints Row* and *Just Cause* owe their sandbox stylings to Rockstar's infamous series. But *GTA* is missing one thing *Just Cause* has: a stupidly unrealistic grappling gun. That alone made it worth latching onto—enough so, in fact, that **Eidos looks to have green-lit *Just Cause 2***.

No second chance

Wonder why a sequel to *The Chronicles of Riddick* was never

made? Blame publisher Vivendi—seems like it didn't realize *Riddick* was good, and once it did, developer Starbreeze already began work on *The Darkness* (360/PS3).

God of bulls***

Crying is for babies—and, apparently, David Jaffe games. The cocky *God of War* creator once boasted he was making a PSP game that would make us open the waterworks. Well, our eyes are still dry, especially now that the mystery tearjerker is no more. But wait, was it even real? Apparently not. **The whole PSP "crying" game was just a ruse to hide the fact he's actually working on—big surprise—*God of War 3* for the PS3.**

> Q-TIPS



The *Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* is brand new, but I have the scoop on the next one—the second *Wii Zelda* won't star Link, but instead, the fruity fairy, Tingle.



Apparently, *Assassin's Creed* was never meant to be a PS3 exclusive. Yep, I hear Sony asked publisher Ubisoft to keep the 360 version a secret as a special favor.



Microsoft might gobble up another developer—after the success of *Dead Rising*, it's looking to open its checkbook to consume Capcom. ☹

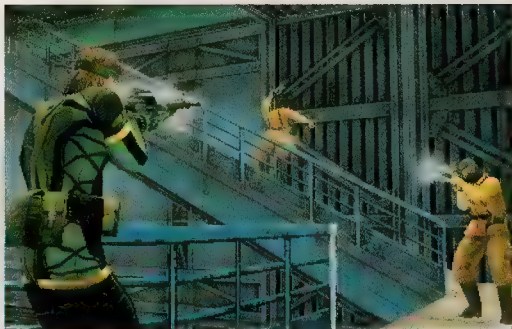
Jungle Fever

+ COMING SOON

December '06

Hope you enjoy the portable stuff

Need a reason to hang out in Starbucks besides the orange-mocha Frappuccinos? You'll be able to download different *Portable Ops* characters from specific Wi-Fi access points.



Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops

PSP • Konami

This fit-for-the-road *Gear* ditchs *Acid's* strategic card battles and delivers a more traditional stealth-action adventure set six years after the events of *MGS3* (PS2). Also, the A.I. guards you recruit during the solo campaign will act as your compadres in the game's multiplayer mode. But here's the rub: If these guys bite the bullet online, they're gone from your squad forever. Tragic.

OVERHEARD

"Sony says the next generation starts when they say so. I say that's bulls***. *Gears of War* is the first second-generation game for Xbox 360 and it looks very fine. You will never see launch titles that look this good."

—Epic Games Vice President Mark Rein, unshamefully plumps his company's first next-gen offering



Quote source: www.ign.com



Fight Night Round 3

PS3 • EA Sports

After delivering a next-gen knockout on the 360 this past spring, EA's superb prizefighter now steps into the PS3 ring with an all-new first-person mode and... well, that's about it. Hey, it's a port—you're lucky just to get this alternate (and much-requested) boxing perspective.



Kirby Squeak Squad

DS • Nintendo

Apparently, poking fun at Kirby's body ain't the worst thing you can do to him—that'd be stealing his strawberry shortcake (yes, that really is *Squeak Squad's* plot). Sugarcoated narrative aside, in this platforming adventure you'll use the DS touch screen to access the pink fatty's different abilities.



Custom Robo Arena

DS • Nintendo

Nuts and bolts replace blood and guts in this gladiator arena, where you'll completely customize your robots from head to toe (via the DS touch screen) before marching them into battles. And once you've built a contender, you can head online and challenge other DS owners and their metal warriors.

> BY THE NUMBERS

Frag Friendly



24,528

People that played *Halo 2* online on October 15, 2006

1,056

Online games *EGM's* Dan "Shoe" Hsu has played

10

Matches *EGM* has played against developer Bungie

6

Number of those 10 matches *EGM* handed Bungie their asses



Star Wars: Lethal Alliance

PSP/DS • Ubisoft

Ever wondered what it takes to build something like the Death Star? Then play *Lethal Alliance*, as stealing the plans to the Empire's massive (and yet-to-be-operational) space station is the main goal here. You'll split your time between playing as Jedi Knight Twi'lek Rianna Saren and her security droid Zeeo, two characters only the *Star Wars* kid probably recognizes.

> GREATEST/LAMEST



Memory Lane: "CliffyB" Bleszinski

We chained down *Gears of War's* lead designer to tell us a gaming memory that made him smile...and one that made him grimace.

Greatest Moment:

"I'm haunted by the fact that *Zelda* (NES) was able to emulate the sense of discovery that I had in the woods of New England as a boy."

Lamest Moment:

"I could not stand dealing with 'tank controls' in the older *Resident Evil* games. Oh, the humanity! Thankfully, Capcom nailed it in *Resident Evil 4*."

> MORE DECEMBER RELEASES

Cabela's African Safari
XB360 • Activision

DS Air
DS • Nintendo

Monster Bomber
DS • Majesco

Death, Jr. and the Science Fair of Doom
DS • Konami

GoPets
DS • Konami

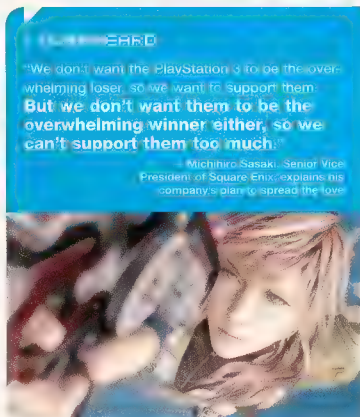
Rampage: Total Destruction
DS • Midway

Diddy Kong Racing
DS • Nintendo

Hotel Dusk: Room 215
DS • Nintendo

Fullmetal Alchemist: Dual Sympathy
DS • Destineer

M.A.C.H.
PSP • Vivendi Games



Game source: The New Street Journal

WHEREVER IT'S DELTA FORCE

JUICE UP THE INTENSITY

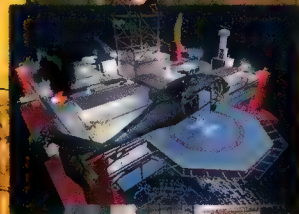
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PlayStation 2



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ACTUAL SCREENSHOT

PLAYSTATION 3



XBOX LIVE

EVERYONE	10+
E 10+	Fantasy Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING	www.esrb.org

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THE NEW LOOSE!

PS3 VS. Wii LAUNCH GUIDE



Sony's next-gen behemoth bares its teeth against Nintendo's quirky "new-gen" creature



DURING ONE FATEFUL AUTUMN WEEKEND, THE ENTIRE GAMING LANDSCAPE WILL CHANGE.

On Friday Nov. 17, Sony unleashes the long-awaited PlayStation 3, a pricey cutting-edge console packed with next-gen features. Then, two days later, Nintendo delivers its innovative Wii, a so-called "new-gen" console that emphasizes creative gameplay over high-end visuals. With two massive launches assailing the already crazy holiday shopping season, no gamer is safe from these monsters' wallet-destroying impact.

We're here to help determine whether either of these launches warrants your cash and effort. While these two consoles may initially seem wildly different (the PS3's price tag starts at twice that of the Wii, after all), a few startling similarities put them in direct competition: Both

feature free out-of-the-box online access and revolutionary motion-sensing controllers that fundamentally alter how you'll be playing games from here on out. But which launch will have the bigger impact? Which console has a better launch lineup? What about the software outlook for next year and beyond? Is any of this worth camping out overnight for?

Well, don't pack the tent just yet. We've spent quality time putting these swanky new consoles through the paces, and our side-by-side comparisons of the PS3 and Wii launches don't pull any punches. Turn the page to see these two monsters fight tooth and claw....



HARDWARE WARS

PlayStation 3

Hardware analysis: Sony has touted its shiny black monolith as the world's most advanced gaming system to date, and they're right. As the heart of the PS3, the proprietary CELL chip (made up of eight independent processor cores) gives developers a highly customizable processing environment that handily outclasses both the Xbox 360 and Wii in terms of raw mathematical computation. But at the same time, this unique chipset requires more specialized programming techniques. Translation: It's tougher to develop for than its competitors, and multiplatform games might not look any better (or might even turn out worse) on PS3 than on Xbox 360. Still, the PS3 is a powerful beast that harbors more untapped potential than its competitors. Sure, it's expensive...but high-end electronics generally are.

Wii

Hardware analysis: While Sony touts the technological superiority of the PS3, Nintendo has constantly downplayed the Wii's processing power, choosing to instead focus on its innovative new control mechanism. In fact, the detailed inner workings of the Wii still remain shrouded in mystery...perhaps Nintendo doesn't want people clueing into just how similar this is to a GameCube. Even so, in the hands of the right team, this hardware can pull off some amazing stuff (just look at *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*). But with many third-party Wii games looking like last-gen leftovers, the term "next gen" doesn't always feel entirely appropriate here. In terms of pure processing muscle, the Wii comes in a distant third to its competitors. Luckily, the size of its price tag also ranks a distant third at a mere \$249.99....



The hard drive

Both the basic and premium PS3 packages include hard drives (20GB and 60GB respectively) for storing music, video, and downloadable games. Plus, developers can utilize the hard drive to improve loading times in games....

Blu-ray drive

Even if the ability to play high-resolution Blu-ray movies doesn't excite you, the benefit of using this new storage medium for games can't be discounted. While Wii and Xbox 360 games fill 4.7GB DVDs, Blu-ray discs can fit a whopping 50GB of data.

The hookups

Of the three next-gen consoles, the PlayStation 3 offers the greatest variety of output options, including high-end HDMI. Also, the PS3 is currently the only console to output games at the highest HDTV resolution, 1080p.

Which PS3 will you get?

Like the Xbox 360, Sony's PlayStation 3 will ship in two different configurations. But since the console's expected to be in such short supply at launch, odds are you'll take whatever you can get....

	Basic	Premium
Price	\$499	\$599
Hard drive	20GB	60GB
Blu-ray drive	yes	yes
HDMI output	yes	yes
USB 2.0	yes	yes
Memory Stick/SD/CompactFlash	no	yes
Wi-Fi	no	yes
Snazzy silver accents	no	yes

TAKING CONTROL

PlayStation 3

Controller analysis: Although it may look a lot like a DualShock pad, the PS3's Sixaxis controller feels remarkably evolved thanks to its incredibly lightweight design, ergonomically redesigned triggers, and cordless functionality. And while the lack of any vibration technology surely sucks, the built-in motion-sensing technology definitely impresses. Since developers seem to be adopting movement-based controls much faster than anticipated (many launch games support it), the PS3 could potentially steal some of Wii's trailblazing limelight.

Wii

Controller analysis: The Wii's bizarre input device brazenly smashes your preconceived notions of how games are played—it's more like a sleek, futuristic TV remote than the dual-analog-stick controllers we've become accustomed to. Some games simply use the Wii-mote as a pointing device, while many others utilize its motion sensing and accelerometer technology in amazingly clever ways. Playing the Wii certainly feels new and unique, but while the controller delivers instantly instinctive control for simpler fare, wrapping your head around more complex control schemes (generally incorporating the add-on Nunchuk accessory) can be tricky. But given Nintendo's success with the similarly ambitious DS, we're expecting some truly innovative stuff here.



Launch availability

If you look back at recent launches, you'll see that demand for new consoles almost always outstrips supply. If you want to score a PlayStation 3 on day one, break out the camping gear—Sony will ship roughly 400,000 units to the U.S. that day. If you end up empty-handed on Nov. 17, don't despair—Sony does hope to ship an additional 800,000 PS3s by year's end.

Comparatively, we expect the Wii debut to cause fewer headaches. It's true that EB/GameStop has already sold out its initial allocation of Wii preorders, but it shouldn't be impossible to track one down the morning of Nov. 19: Nintendo is committed to shipping a million consoles for launch, with another 3 million expected (worldwide) by the end of 2006.

Built-in Wi-Fi

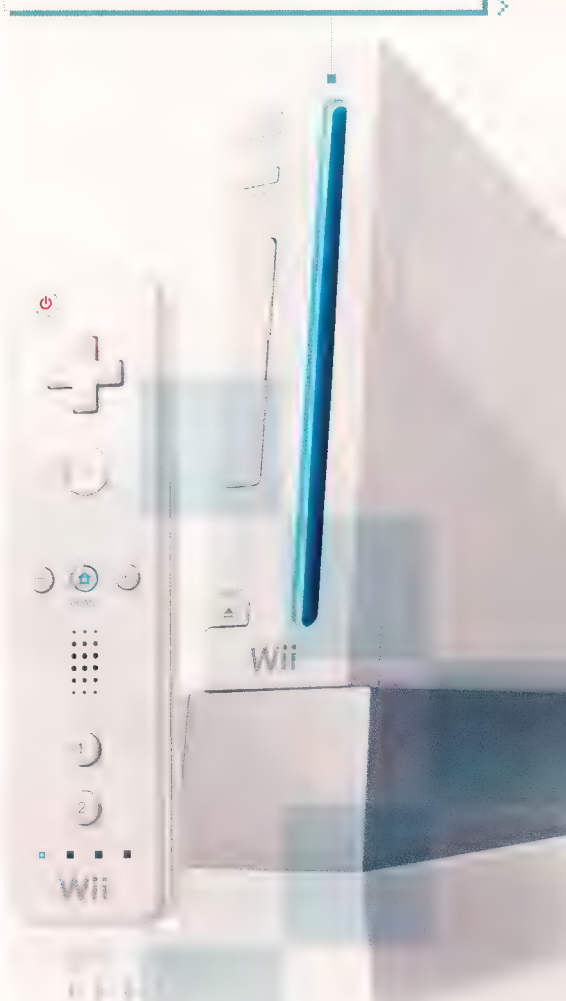
In an uncharacteristically forward-thinking move, Nintendo chose to include Wi-Fi support standard in every Wii. (The premium PS3 is the only other console to offer this functionality out of the box.) Ironically, no games featuring online play are expected to ship this year...

Free game

Nintendo bucks recent trends by bundling *Wii Sports*, a collection of four crowd-pleasing minigames, with the Wii. You'll want to spring for at least one more controller set (\$40 for the remote, \$20 for a Nunchuk) for multiplayer.

Missed connections

The fun-centric Wii isn't concerned about your high-end HDTV or pricey Dolby Digital 7.1 surround system—in fact, it won't really take advantage of either. The Wii's HD output peaks at 480p, and you'll only be rockin' in Dolby Pro Logic II pseudo-surround (the same technology GameCube used).



GOING ONLINE



The PS3's menu system borrows the PSP's cross media bar interface.

PlayStation 3

Online plan: Out of the box, you'll be able to connect your PS3 to Sony's new PlayStation Network, a free service for matchmaking, community, and online purchases (music, movies, and games) and downloads. You'll also be able to create multiple online profiles on one PS3, manage a list of friends, send private messages (text, audio, and video), and browse the Internet free of charge. A few aspects of this service, however, remain sketchy. As of press time, it's unclear if the so-called "entitlements" (game-specific awards for completing various tasks, much like Xbox Live's achievements) will be implemented. Also, we've heard reports of third-party publishers struggling to support PlayStation Network, so some launch games expected to offer online play (like *Tony Hawk's Project 8*) will be offline-only on PS3.



Wii's channel-based navigation system has a deliberate TV vibe.

Wii

Online plan: Traditionally, Nintendo's never been much for online gaming (the GameCube had two online games... ever), but Wii appears poised to finally bring Mario and Co. into the multiplayer arena. Wii will use a modified version of the DS' Wi-Fi Connection software to facilitate online matchmaking. (Most likely, you'll only be able to play against players who give you "friend codes" first, just like with the DS.) Like the PS3, the Wii will offer online gaming free of charge. Other elements in Nintendo's online plan include WiiConnect24, a feature that allows your Wii to receive pushed content downloads even when the system is turned off, and the Wii Browser, a modified version of the Opera web browser optimized for the Wii-mote. This comprehensive online plan has one massive flaw, though: No games shipping in 2006 are expected to offer online play. Oops. ❖



WHAT IF YOUR ACTIONS IN A GAME CHANGED THE COURSE OF YOUR REALITY?

Something strange is occurring in the online video game The World. There are phenomena occurring in The World that go against in-game laws. Players who die in the game are feeling the effects in reality.

Assume the role of Haseo, and start a dangerous journey to uncover the truth. Fight Player Killers, create parties, join guilds, and develop new hacking skills. Find the mysterious Tri-Edge, seek revenge, and reveal the truth.

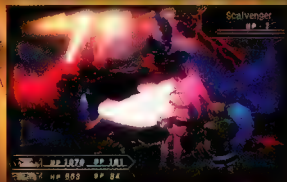
You are Haseo, The Terror of Death.
Welcome to The World.



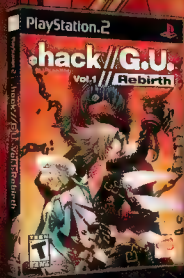
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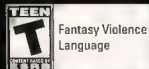
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PlayStation 2



BONUS POINTS



Adam Sandler, like you've never seen him before: in glorious 1080p.

PlayStation 3

Extra functionality: Yep, your old games still work—Sony promises full backward compatibility with all PS1 and PS2 games (you'll need to pick up a \$15 memory card adapter to import your old saves, though). The PS3 isn't just a game console, though: It also plays Blu-ray movies, Sony's proprietary high-definition movie format that offers crisper images and better sound than DVDs, and Super Audio CDs, Sony's audiophile surround-sound music format. You can also use the PS3's hard drive to store video, audio, and photos—all of which can be accessed wirelessly using your PSP. Sony also plans to ship a next-gen EyeToy camera in 2007.



Hey, she looked pretty hot on the Mii Channel...

Wii

Extra functionality: While the GameCube was essentially a cute plastic cube that played games, the Wii offers a surprisingly wide range of functionality. The Wii interface divides these different uses into "channels," including the Mii Channel (design a custom avatar that represents you both online and in games), Weather Channel (get real-time weather forecasts), and Photo Channel (organize and share your pictures online). The Wii also provides full backward compatibility with GameCube games (a small panel on the console's side lifts up to reveal four controller ports), but doesn't actually play DVDs (unlike originally announced).



DOWNLOADS



Sony plans to focus on original downloadable games like *#Ow*.

PlayStation 3

Downloadable games: Concrete details remain scarce on this front, but Sony has made vague promises of one day having PS1 and PS2 games available via the PlayStation Network. And Sony Computer Entertainment President Ken Kutaragi has stated that Sega Genesis and MSX (an obscure Japanese PC from the '80s) games will make their way to the service eventually. So far, Sony has showcased only two original downloadable PS3 titles—a soothing action/puzzler called *#Ow* and a simple arcadey shooter named *Blast Factor*.

Wii

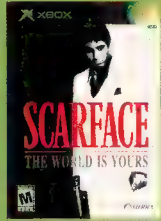
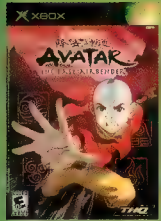
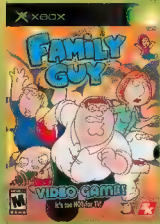


Virtual Console shoppers should invest in Nintendo's Retro Controller (\$20).

Downloadable games: Although you won't be playing any Wii games online this fall, you'll certainly want to log on and do some shopping. Nintendo's Virtual Console store will launch with around 30 titles, with classics hailing from NES, Super NES, Nintendo 64, Sega Genesis, and TurboGrafx-16. Game prices will range between \$5-10, and Nintendo promises to release at least 10 new titles each month. With a killer library of established winners to draw from, Nintendo should easily win the downloadable gaming battle....



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RP-M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

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GAME TIME!

PlayStation 3

EXPECTED LAUNCH LINEUP:

Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII • Ubisoft
 Call of Duty 3 • Activision
 College Hoops 2K7 • 2K Sports
 F.E.A.R.: Extraction Point • Vivendi Games

Full Auto 2: Battlelines • Sega

Genji: Days of the Blade • Sony CEA

Madden NFL 07 • EA Sports

Marvel: Ultimate Alliance • Activision

Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire • Namco Bandai

NBA 07 • Sony CEA

NBA 2K7 • 2K Sports

NBA Live 07 • EA Sports

Need For Speed Carbon • EA Games

NHL 2K7 • 2K Sports

Rainbow Six Vegas • Ubisoft

Resistance: Fall of Man • Sony CEA

Ridge Racer 7 • Namco Bandai

Sonic the Hedgehog • Sega

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion • Bethesda

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07 • EA Sports

Tony Hawk's Project 8 • Activision

Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom • Sony Online

DUE BY THE END OF 2006:

Fight Night Round 3 • EA Sports

Gran Turismo HD • Sony CEA

MotorStorm • Sony CEA

2007 AND BEYOND:

Assassin's Creed • Ubisoft • Spring 2007

Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway • Ubisoft • Spring 2007

Devil May Cry 4 • Capcom • Summer 2007

Final Fantasy XIII • Square Enix • Fall 2007

Final Fantasy Versus XIII • Square Enix • 2008

Grand Theft Auto IV • Rockstar • October 2007

Half-Life 2 • EA Games • Spring 2007

Heavenly Sword • Sony CEA • March 2007

Lair • Sony CEA • March 2007

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots • Konami • Fall 2007

Ninja Gaiden Sigma • Tecmo • Spring 2007

Ratchet & Clank 5 • Sony CEA • Fall 2007

Tekken 6 • Namco Bandai • Fall 2007

Virtua Fighter 5 • Sega • March 2007

Warhawk • Sony CEA • June 2007

White Knight Story • Sony CEA • Fall 2007

Wii

EXPECTED LAUNCH LINEUP:

Barnyard • THQ

Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII • Ubisoft

Call of Duty 3 • Activision

Cars • THQ

Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2 • Atari

Excite Truck • Nintendo

GT Pro Series • Ubisoft

Madden NFL 07 • EA Sports

Marvel: Ultimate Alliance • Activision

Metal Slug Anthology • SNK Playmore

Monster 4x4: World Circuit • Ubisoft

Need for Speed Carbon • EA Games

Open Season • Ubisoft

Rapala Tournament Fishing • Activision

Rayman Raving Rabbids • Ubisoft

Red Steel • Ubisoft

SpongeBob SquarePants: Creature from the Krusty Krab • THQ

Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz • Sega

The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess • Nintendo

Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam • Activision

Trauma Center: Second Opinion • Atlas

DUE BY THE END OF 2006:

Elebits • Konami

Far Cry Vengeance • Ubisoft

Splinter Cell Double Agent • Ubisoft

Super Swing Golf • Tecmo

2007 AND BEYOND:

Animal Crossing • Nintendo • Fall 2007

Battalion Wars 2 • Nintendo • Spring 2007

Big Brain Academy • Nintendo • Spring 2007

Disaster: Day of Crisis • Nintendo • Fall 2007

Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: The Crystal Bearers
 Square Enix • Fall 2007

Fire Emblem • Nintendo • Summer 2007

Mario Strikers Charged • Nintendo • Spring 2007

Metroid Prime 3: Corruption • Nintendo • Spring 2007

Pokémon Battle Revolution • Nintendo • Spring 2007

Project H.A.M.M.E.R. • Nintendo • Summer 2007

Resident Evil: Umbrella Chronicles • Capcom • Fall 2007

Sonic and the Secret Rings • Sega • Spring 2007

Super Mario Galaxy • Nintendo • Spring 2007

Super Smash Bros. Brawl • Nintendo • Summer 2007

WarioWare: Smooth Moves • Nintendo • January 2007

Wii Play • Nintendo • Spring 2007



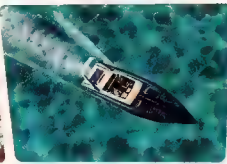
*Bolted titles denote exclusivity



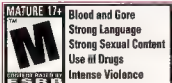
Nice lists, but what do they mean? Turn the page for our detailed analysis.

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PlayStation®Portable



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PlayStation 3

Software outlook: The PS3 launch lineup feels a bit like a beefed-up version of the Xbox 360's opening-day buffet—you'll find plenty of sports games, racers, and shooters...but not a lot of true, triple-A exclusives. With its slick visuals, cool weaponry, and free 40-player online action, *Resistance* stands poised as the obvious must-have title for most gamers, but *Call of Duty 3* could pose a minor threat (*COD2* pulled a surprise upset against *Perfect Dark Zero* on Xbox 360, after all). Choosing a racer might prove tougher: If *MotorStorm* or *Gran Turismo HD* were day-one games they'd get instant recommendations, but as it stands, you're forced to choose between the latest by-the-numbers *Need for Speed* and *Ridge Racer* installments. And while the copious multiplatform releases and Xbox 360 ports might not seem enticing to 360 owners, stuff like *Oblivion* and next-gen *Madden* should wow gamers who haven't taken the next-gen plunge until now.

The PlayStation 3's 2007 lineup inspires confidence with a killer lineup of big-name exclusives (*Final Fantasy*, *Metal Gear*, *Virtua Fighter*) alongside a cavalcade of impressive multiplatform fare (*Assassin's Creed*, *Half-Life 2*, *GTA IV*). While it's entirely possible that some of these titles could slip into 2008, we still expect PS3 to have an incredibly strong and diverse library by the end of 2007.



■ Clockwise, from top left: *The Eye of Judgment*, *Coded Arms Assault*, *Heavenly Sword*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Madden NFL 07*, *Gran Turismo HD*

Wii

Software outlook: The freebie *Wii Sports* bundled with each console will surely deliver lightweight living-room high jinks, but those seeking weightier fare won't be disappointed: Long-awaited GameCube-to-Wii transplant *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* is rumored to eclipse even fan-favorite *Ocarina of Time* (N64) in terms of scale. *Zelda's* presence also lessens the sting caused by Mario's absence (*Super Mario Galaxy* won't debut until mid-2007), but the lack of a traditional platformer (or at least one that isn't based on a kiddie cartoon, mind you) stings. But if you're looking for creative, wacky games designed around the Wii's unique input device, you're in luck—bizarre titles such as *Trauma Center: Second Opinion* and *Rayman Raving Rabbids* will be crowd-pleasing showpieces for the zany new system.

Once the initial zeitgeist of waving your controller at goofy party games wears off, you'll probably start craving something more substantial. At this point, the extended forecast for Wii software still seems distressingly GameCube-esque. Nintendo will supply tons of top-quality first-party offerings, but third-party support still appears pretty weak compared to PS3 and 360.

And what's the point of having built-in Wi-Fi support without any online games? *Pokémon* and *Battalion Wars 2* will be the first titles to offer multiplayer action....



■ Clockwise, from top left: *Call of Duty 3*, *Elebits*, *Red Steel*, *Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam*, *Rayman Raving Rabbids*, *Marvel Ultimate Alliance*

Winner:
PS3
Most Promising Software Lineup



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Wii

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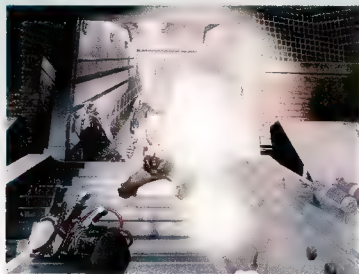


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UBISOFT

LAUNCH-TITLE SHOWDOWNS

Which of these new consoles will have the games that best match your personal gaming tastes? We take one title from each console's launch-window lineup and pit them against one another in a battle for your almighty gaming dollar.



◀ PS3
**Resistance:
Fall of Man**

VS.

Wii ▶
Red Steel



Itchy trigger finger?

These two new consoles will launch alongside two brand-new first-person shooting franchises—will either one deliver the goods? Ubisoft's inventive *Red Steel* meshes precise Wii-mote gunplay with swing-happy swordplay while managing to look markedly better than most of the Wii's other initial software. As a test-run for the Wii-mote/Nunchuk control method that will power first-person Wii games for years to come, *Red Steel* appears to be a success...but will the level design and A.I. hold up? We're skeptical, and the lack of any online multiplayer action seriously hurts the game's long-term appeal. We're far less worried about Sony's *Resistance* (from *Ratchet & Clank* developers Insomniac)—with a solid single-player campaign, an arsenal of wickedly creative weapons, and speedy 40-player online matches, it has all the ingredients of an instant (if somewhat derivative) classic.

Winner:
PS3

Resistance:
Fall of man



◀ PS3
**The Elder
Scrolls IV:
Oblivion**

VS.

Wii ▶
**The Legend
of Zelda:
Twilight
Princess**



Seeking adventure?

Bethesda's *Oblivion* made a massive impact on the Xbox 360 earlier this year by consuming hundreds of hours from gamers' lives with its profoundly engrossing and unfathomably long adventure. As launch titles go, this one's a doozy—you can easily spend months traipsing through this open-ended role-playing epic. Plus, this PS3 version sports a few minor graphical improvements and snippets of new content not found in the 360 original. But as cool as *Oblivion* might be, it's no *Zelda*. *Twilight Princess* boasts addictive wand-waving combat (recently reworked to be more user-friendly), surprising new powers for hero Link, and the series' longest quest to date. Change-adverse stalwarts who're holding out for the conventional GameCube version (hitting some two weeks after the Wii debuts) should open their hearts and embrace the gameplay evolution here. ▶

Winner:
Wii

Legend
of Zelda:
Twilight
Princess





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LAUNCH-TITLE SHOWDOWNS (CONT.)



PS3
MotorStorm

VS.



Wii >
Excite Truck

For the mud-flap set...

We're not sure when off-road games became a crucial first-party priority, but both Nintendo and Sony will bring mud-splattered racers to their new consoles this fall. *Excite Truck* succeeds with its intuitive, simple motion controls (you hold the Wii-mote horizontally and steer by tilting) and speedy, rollicking gameplay that feels vaguely like *Burnout*. Sure, it's enjoyable stuff, but dated, GameCube-quality visuals keep it from truly impressing. Meanwhile, *MotorStorm* dazzles with phenomenally lifelike graphics—of all the PS3 games coming out this year, this one looks the most "next-gen." When played from a first-person perspective, *MotorStorm* pours on the effects, with dizzying motion blur, blistering lighting, and plenty of airborne mud. Plus, like *Excite Truck*, this game also utilizes motion steering...but unlike Nintendo's racer, this one ships with full online multiplayer support.

Winner:
PS3
MotorStorm



PS3
Tony Hawk's Project 8

VS.



Wii >
Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam

Looking to grind?

After shilling the same old grind for nearly a decade, Activision finally mixes things up for the venerable *Tony Hawk* franchise. *Project 8* reinvents the *Pro Skater* formula by greatly enhancing the visuals (everything looks far more realistic than in previous games) and completely reworking the trick system. Now, nailing a trick demands that you independently control your skater's left and right feet to rotate and flip the board (via the two analog sticks). And the PS3 version offers another exclusive twist—you can also pull off tricks using the Sixaxis controller's motion sensors. While that's a nifty addition, we find the lack of any online mode (present in the Xbox 360 version) troubling. Ultimately, it's kind of a toss-up between *Project 8* and Tony's Wii-exclusive romp, *Downhill Jam*. This title strays far from the *Pro Skater* mold, offering instead an *SSX*-inspired race/trick hybrid that makes excellent use of the Wii-mote for its over-the-top trickery.

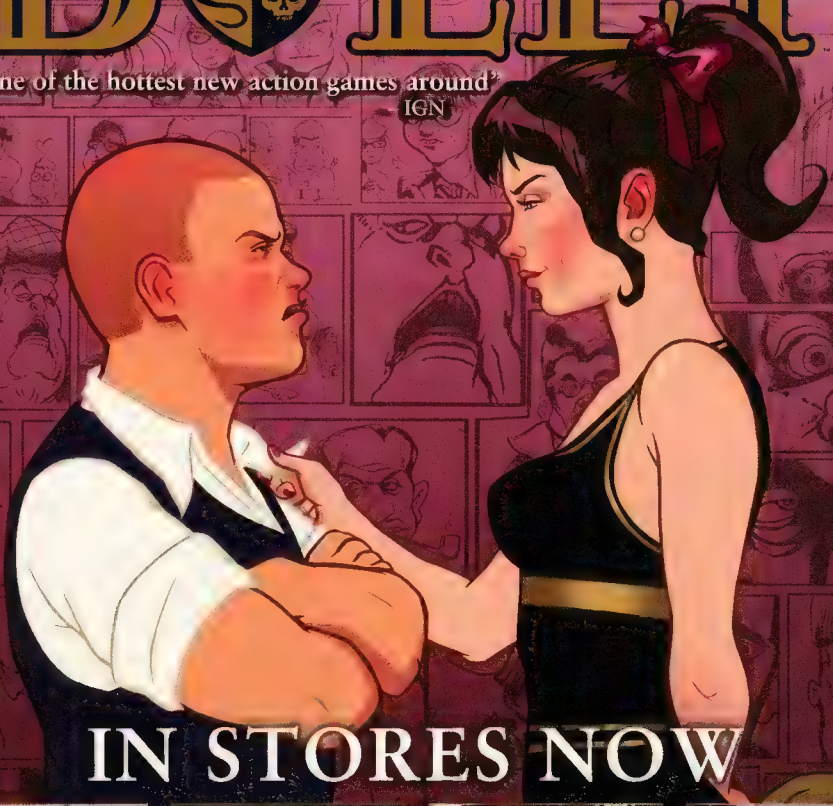
Winner:
Tie



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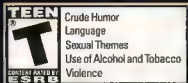
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PlayStation 2



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LAUNCH-TITLE SHOWDOWNS (CONT.)



< PS3
Gran Turismo
HD

VS.



Wii >
GT Pro Series

Calling all gearheads...

Intended to tide gamers over until the release of *Gran Turismo 5*, *GT HD* essentially updates *GT4* with hot next-gen visuals. Here, you'll get ultracrisp 1080p resolution, gorgeous backdrops, and those long-promised 3D spectators who scatter to avoid being run down by your pricey supercar. Sony's controversial microtransaction business model—the bare-bones game will be cheap but you'll have to purchase extra cars and tracks individually—could potentially piss fans off. Unsuspecting suckers who lay down \$49.99 for Ubisoft's abysmal *GT Pro Series* will feel even more cheated, though: Imagine Capcom's cruddy last-gen toon-shaded racer, *Auto Modellista*, only twice as boring and three times as ugly. Steering (with the aid of an included wheel peripheral that hooks up to your Wii-mote) feels imprecise and floaty.

Winner:
PS3
Gran
Turismo HD



< PS3
Madden
NFL 07

VS.



Wii >
Madden
NFL 07

Still ready for some football?

With millions of *Madden* fans already three months into their '07 football experience, how many will be willing to double-dip this year? If you haven't yet played the Xbox 360 version, the PS3 *Madden* might be worth investigating—vastly improved visuals (compared to the current-gen pigskin sims) and some gimmicky motion-controller moves (hiking the ball, dishing out tackles) make it feel fairly fresh. The Wii *Madden* might actually warrant a second investment for hardcore football fans: It uses the motion-sensing controller in so many clever ways (passing, hiking, stiff-arms, jukes, catching, and victory celebrations) that it really feels like an entirely new, much more arcadey experience. Playing through an entire season like this might be gesticulation overkill, but it's amazingly fun in small doses, especially against a friend.

Winner:
Wii
Madden
NFL 07

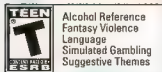


TALES OF THE ABYSS



A TALE OF HONOR AND SACRIFICE, DUTY AND CHOICE,
WHAT IS WRITTEN AND WHAT WILL BE.

Luke fon Fabre, sole heir to a family of aristocrats was kidnapped seven years ago, and the shock left him with no memories of his life before. He has since led a quiet, boring life within the family's residence, learning little of the world beyond the palace walls. Suddenly thrust into the outside world, Luke is caught in the workings of the Order of Lorelei, keepers of the prophecy known as the Score. No longer sheltered by the palace, Luke must get along in the confusing and often hostile world. He knows nothing about those who might be his friends, or those who already are his enemies. He has not yet noticed the evil that is drawing close to him.



PlayStation 2



LAUNCH-TITLE SHOWDOWNS (CONT.)



PS3
Call of Duty 3

VS.



Wii >
Call of Duty 3

Get your World War II on...

Activision's *Call of Duty 2* snatched the top sales spot during the Xbox 360 launch, but its sequel will face stiffer competition on PS3 and Wii. *COD3* doesn't stray too far from the established formula, thrusting the player into the most chaotic moments of the Normandy Breakout as a variety of Allied troops. Once again, gameplay blends climactic scripted sequences with frenzied, fast-paced shooting action. The PS3 version handily outclasses its Wii cousin with gorgeous visuals and 24-player online action (the Wii version is offline-only), and it even manages to implement some rudimentary motion control (for the new hand-to-hand moves). Sure, the Wii port of *COD3* offers a revolutionary motion control scheme (Wii-mote aims, Nunchuk moves), but this port suffers from a significantly nasty visual downgrade that simply can't be overlooked.

Winner:
PS3
Call of Duty 3



PS3
Marvel:
Ultimate
Alliance

VS.



Wii >
Marvel:
Ultimate
Alliance

Squeeze into some tights...

This supersized follow-up to the popular *X-Men Legends* series expands its roster to include other Marvel Universe stars, including Spider-Man, Captain America, Thor, and Ghost Rider. You'll find over 20 controllable heroes in total (with another 120 characters making nonplayable cameos), but the underlying action-RPG gameplay sticks pretty close to the dungeon-crawling *Legends* roots. Neither the PS3 nor Wii version looks particularly "next-gen," but both offer simple, addictive gameplay. The inclusion of online play (albeit without the voice chat of the Xbox 360 game) gives the PS3 *Alliance* the slight edge over the Wii offering: repetitive, mundane games like this become infinitely more fun and replayable with some buddies. Plus, the tacked-on Wii-mote motion controls barely function...it's far easier to simply press the buttons to perform attacks.

Winner:
PS3
Marvel:
Ultimate
Alliance



After the launch-day madness subsides, which next-gen console will reign supreme? Next month, our editors will choose between PS3 and Wii.

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Dirt God Commandments

Thou shall race all offroading vehicles:
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Thou shall do sick freestyle tricks off jumps.

Thou shall not mud pants while getting big air.

Thou shall customize vehicle to make faster.

Thou shall race in all terrain: snow, dirt, sand,
forest and especially mud.

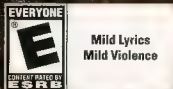
Thou shall not wash ATV unless thou washes it with mud.

Thou shall strive to become a pro racer.

Thou shall feed on adrenaline for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

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PlayStation 2



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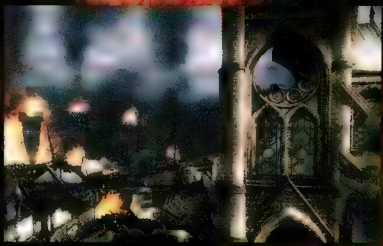
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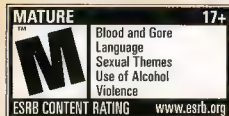
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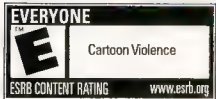
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KILLING SPACE

HALO 3

Brokeback riding! Man-cannons! Triple-wielding! (And only one of those is made up.) We spend a day playing **Halo 3** against the guys that made it. Now this is war!

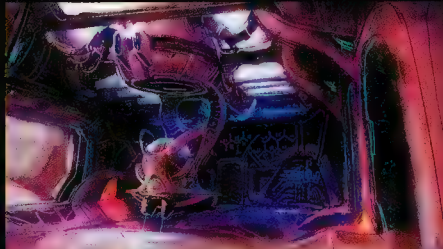
By Crispin Boyer & Dan "Shoe" Hsu



IT LOOKS LIKE A PINE-SCENTED PARADISE FROM THE AIR, your

typical *Halo*-flavored Shangri-la of cedar trees, waterfalls, and emerald meadows. But a half-ton, blue-armored Spartan will only stay airborne for so long, and as gravity yanks us earthward, we see what looks like scurrying iridescent red and blue insects resolve into fellow Spartans exchanging volleys of energy beams and good ol'-fashioned lead. Touchdown. We hit the grass shooting, our assault rifle spraying at a red-armored enemy who double-fists two alien guns that hurl molten spikes. We die hard, dozens of DayGlo rods sunk deep into our MJOLNIR battle armor.

Illustration by Isaac Hsu
Cover illustration by Eric S. Ross



■ Flashdance: Your screen will flash in the enemy's direction when you're taking fire—not that it'll help this dude. Above: concept drawings for Snowbound and High Ground, two of the new multiplayer maps for Halo 3.



Our feet tap with impatient energy as the boop-boop-booping timer counts down the seconds to respawn and another chance. A bluish grid flickers across our visor—we're back in the game, respawning at our base in blue-team territory. Just as we're stepping into the man-cannon for another catapulting launch downrange, a teammate leaps on the horn of the Warthog parked out back. Sure, we'll be his gunner. We climb into the vehicle's turret as he revs the 28th-century Hemi and kicks up mud. We're nearly to the whitewater stream—a more sheltered route to the enemy's flank—when a telltale pinprick laser lights up a fender. Uh-oh. Someone out there is targeting our 'Hog with a shoulder-mounted Spartan laser. The driver

dives out before the pencil-thin beam primes to devastating intensity and send fiery Warthog parts flying.

Boop-boop-boop. Blue grid. Respawn. Back to the man-cannon and—whoosh!—it kicks us in an arcing trajectory to the middle of the map again, the battle rushing up to meet us. Hey, there's the guy with the Spartan laser! Time for a little payb—aaack! Some smartass in a four-wheeler runs us down from behind, about the lamest way to die in *Halo 3*. Watching the battle from the sidelines, Marty O'Donnell, the composer and audio director for *Halo* series developer Bungie, shouts an incredulous "Someone just got owned by the Mongooses!"

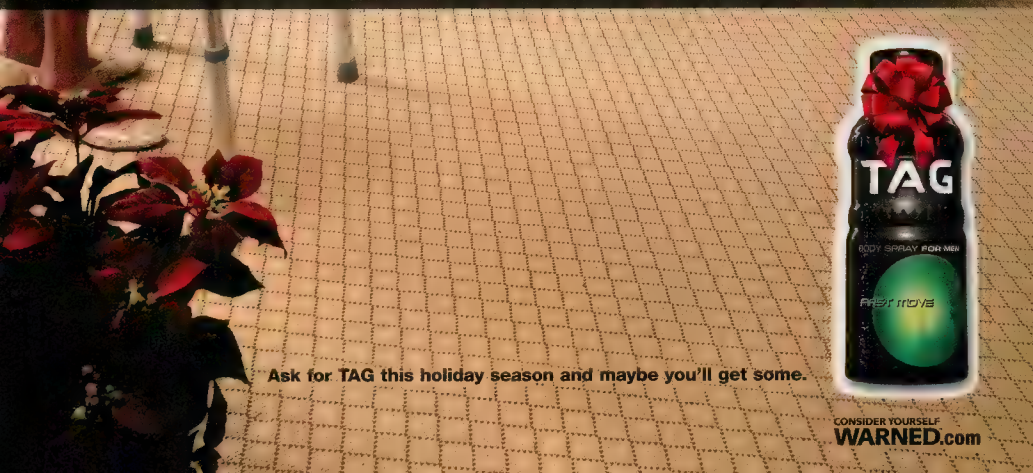
OK, time-out. Can you blame us for playing like n00bz here? Five of

us have trekked to Bungie's studio—a teched-out Seattle-area workspace converted from an old hardware store—today for an exclusive frontlines report on the multiplayer battles of *Halo 3*, 2007's mightiest game for the Xbox 360 (and arguably any system). What we get is a call to arms, a demand for a rematch against Bungie, whom we destroyed several times previously in *Halo 2* multiplayer. And we couldn't be more on their turf: wielding new weapons like the spiker and Spartan laser mentioned above, tearing across unknown maps on the new four-wheeler Mongooses, and getting the hang of terrain novelties like the man-cannons and door shields. Fortunately, although we're shooting first (we do have our honor to defend), we're asking questions



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not much later, and we've emerged with the most comprehensive look at *Halo 3* you'll find anywhere. As for whether our honor emerges with us or we just end up as Bungie's blast-fest dummies, you'll have to wait until we call "time in" to find that out. In the meantime, here is how "combat evolved" evolves yet again....

Straight(er) shooter

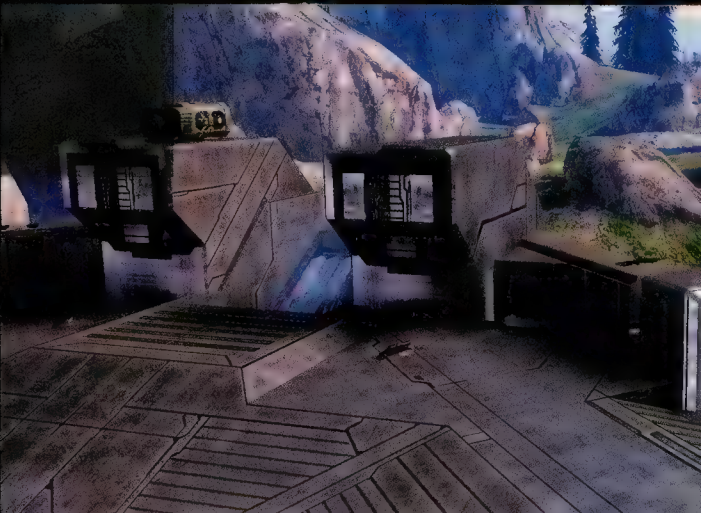
For a game that doesn't ship until 2007 (and not until the fall if *Halo* launch history is anything to go by), *Halo 3* is coming right along. It's running smoothly. It's a blast to play, with lots of new features for hardcore fans. It doesn't look astonishingly better than *Halo 2*, although we're told this sequel hasn't received its final coat of graphical effects (later in the day, we glimpse the much more spectacular-looking single-player campaign—see page 106).

Bungie has three multiplayer maps ready for us to explore (investigate them yourself starting to the right and on pages 94 and 100)—all part of a demo the developer will open to 10,000 Microsoft employees-turned-playtesters in about a month. But before we even get to the new weapons or control scheme or trio of maps, Bungie Design Lead Jaime Griesemer starts us off with something old. "When people saw Master Chief with [*Halo 1*'s] assault rifle in the teaser trailer, [which you can download in the Xbox Live Marketplace]," he says, "they had all kinds of theories: Is it a flashback? Is it Master Chief as a child? We're not talking about that today. But what we will say is when we started working on the multiplayer game in *Halo 3*, the first thing we tackled was, 'What is the best [weapon] to spawn with? It's absolutely the most critical weapon to get right.'"

In the first *Halo*, players start default multiplayer matches with the assault rifle, an underpowered full-auto gun that even Griesemer describes as "useless." *Halo 2* spawns players with the submachine gun, which fans deride as a "pray-and-spray" weapon for its long-range weaksauses, although you can double its firepower by wielding a gun in

➤ **We call them man-cannons because it makes us giggle.**

—Multiplayer Design Lead Tyson Green.





MAP TIME: VALHALLA

Tall pine trees and taller waterfalls accent this alpine-valley battlefield. On opposite ends of the map, two bases that house guns and vehicles. A machine-gun turret sits in the middle. The setup may feel familiar to *Halo* fans.... "It's our successor to Blood Gulch," says Multiplayer Design Lead Tyson Green. "A lot of space, a lot of emphasis on terrain that's fun to drive on in a vehicle...that means a lot of jumps and interesting things to drive around." *Halo 1*'s Blood Gulch (and its sequel, *Halo 2*'s Coagulation) were always fun for big-team battles, but running in the open was suicide. Snipers ruled these maps—a little too well—so Bungie designed Valhalla to be safer for foot traffic.

(1) The rocky outcroppings mean you won't be sniped as often from unseen enemies across the level. (2) A Spartan laser (which spawns in the center of the map) narrowly misses its target. (3) A flying man! How does he do it? (See No. 5.) (4) This driver's taking a flag carrier back to their base in the new Mongoose, a fast, nimble ATV designed for two to get to snipers, flags, and so on in no time. The way the passenger is positioned behind the driver can look a little...well.... "We call it 'riding brokeback'...uh...because it's dangerous," jokes Design Lead Jaime Griesemer. (5) Man-cannons! "They're meant to be a way to get around the map without resorting to teleporters, which aren't that interesting," says Green. Step into one of these (each base has two) and—liftoff!—you fly through the air and land closer to the middle of the battlefield. While you're floating up there, you can survey most of your surroundings, but you're also an easy target for snipers. You can drive Mongoosees (or is that Mongoose?) and Warthogs into the man-cannons as well. A Mongoose will fly fairly far (though not as far as your body), but the Warthog will just flip over and crash 30 feet outside of the base—hey, it's not called a "Warthog cannon"...

PRESSING ISSUES

We wrap our hands around Halo 3's new control scheme.

Right means right, and left means left...right? That's Bungie's take on *Halo 3*'s revamped controls. "We're trying to associate the left bumper with your left hand and the right bumper with your right hand," says Griesemer. So if you're dual-wielding, for example, you can reload each weapon independently by tapping that corresponding bumper button. "If you're firing with the weapon in your right hand and want to reload the weapon in your left hand," Griesemer explains, "you just tap the left bumper and you'll reload while you're still firing [with your right weapon]. That'll allow you to manage your ammo a little better." It makes sense and feels natural, even if it took us some getting used to. Bungie says it'll offer the classic control scheme if you hate change.

So where does this leave our old do-all button, Mr. X? Mysteriously enough, the X button was labeled "classified" in a diagram that we saw, and Bungie won't offer any hints. We did overhear Griesemer ask a fellow developer after a match against us, "How many times did you hit X during that?" to which the other guy laughed and replied, "Tons—I wish it was active in this [version]." Intriguing.... Our best guesses: a temporary shield boost or a sprint button (a feature originally planned for *Halo 2*).



Left bumper

- Switch grenade type
- (Hold) pick up left weapon for dual-wielding
- Reload left weapon

Left trigger

- Throw grenade
- Shoot left weapon

Right trigger

- Shoot right (or two-handed) weapon

Right bumper

- (Hold) pick up right (or two-handed) weapon
- Reload right (or two-handed) weapon



each hand. So for the spawn weapon, in *Halo 3*, Griesemer came up with a few rules. "It shouldn't do head shots," he says, "because then the game is just about head shots. And it shouldn't be dual-wieldable, because then the game becomes about dual-wielding. And it's really important that whenever you spawn, if someone is shooting at you with whatever weapon they have, you're at least able to fight back."

His speech out of the way, Griesemer sets us free to test-fire *Halo 3*'s spawning weapon, the newly retooled assault rifle. "Don't just think because it looks like the *Halo 1* assault rifle, it must be useless," he says. "This is a new model, with a new designation number." We squeeze off some rounds. It definitely

sounds more lethal. It holds less ammo than the original assault rifle but it works at longer range, ripping through opposing Spartans' personal energy shields, then perforating their armor. Still, as veteran *Halo* players, we're trained to look for a punchier weapon—something short-range like the shotgun, long-range like the sniper rifle, or all-purpose like *Halo 2*'s battle rifle—as soon as we spawn. And sure enough, as we wander the new map called Snowbound, we find all those weapons.

But we also find something much more intriguing.

Field work

Enemy Spartans, one red and the other blue, face off on either side of a bluish force field shimmering

across the entrance to an underground base. Simultaneously, they bring up their assault rifles and blaze away at each other at point-blank range. Neither is hurt; the pulsing field between them soaks up their bullets. The red guy on the base's interior thinks he's crafty and chucks a grenade. Not a good move—it deflects off the field and skids back in his direction. He leaps back in time to avoid the brunt of the explosion. Blue Boy on the outside gets craftier: Inching to the force field, he eases partway through it—the wall of energy sizzling against his armor but otherwise causing no harm—just far enough to hurl a grenade at the red Spartan. But his opponent's no dummy: He leaps through the energy shield just before the grenade

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explodes. Now both Spartans are outside of the force field, staring dumbly at each other.

Silly scenarios like this one—more Abbott & Costello than Jack Bauer—play out again and again once we discover *Halo 3*'s new door shields, which allow players to pass through unscathed but absorb gunfire and repel grenades (well, most grenades—more on that in a bit). These force fields add a new level of pandemonium to the classic kill-the-guy-with-the-skull Oddball mode. Inevitably, whoever scoops up the skull begins a mad dash from one door shield to the next, with everyone else in zippy pursuit or trying to head off the Oddball carrier at the next shield. The only thing missing is zany Benny Hill music.

But door shields aren't the only new terrain feature we see today. Remember the man-cannons from the beginning of this story? Much like the jump pads in the *Quake* shooters, these antigrav-powered catapults (which Bungie will likely rename in the final game; they just call them man-cannons now because it makes them giggle) hurl Spartans hundreds of feet. Bungie says they're using man-cannons as a "more interesting" alternative to teleporters "because you can do things like this," says Multiplayer Design Lead Tyson Green. He nudges a fusion core—the *Halo* equivalent of an exploding barrel—into a man-cannon, which promptly catapults the glowing canister halfway across the new Valhalla map. Now, the chances of actually dropping a fusion core onto an enemy via man-cannon are slim; it would take a titanic combo of luck and timing. But during our day, we do see one player score an explosive direct hit on a Warthog.

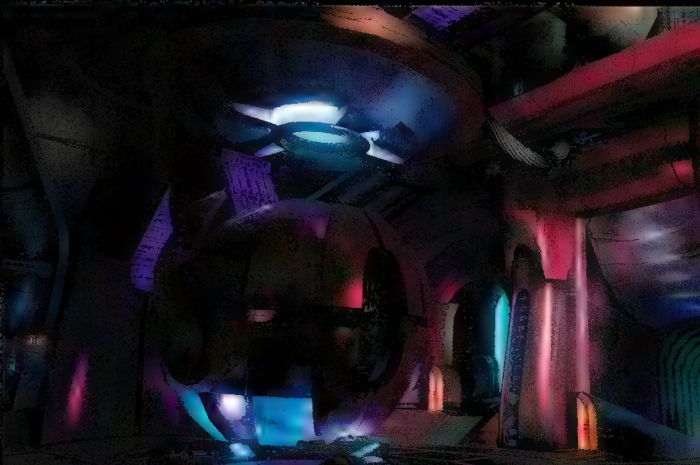
Too bad his own teammates were driving it.

Brute force

It looks more like a weapon from the 10th century than the 26th. A slim, 2-foot cylinder of dull, rusted metal topped with batwing-shaped spikes, the kind of thing a *Lord of the Rings* orc would wield to inflict bloody

➤ Don't just think because it looks like the *Halo 1* assault rifle, it must be useless.

—Design Lead Jaime Griesemer





MAP TIME: SNOWBOUND

The Covenant set up shop on this icy beach above a Forerunner installation. It's a huge-looking map, but the actual playing area ain't so big. "One of the things we're able to do [on the Xbox 360] is have these wide-open environments," says Multiplayer Designer Lars Bakken. "The artists can go nuts, and they don't have to terminate the level with a cliff wall or something like that." So how do you have a wide-open stage that's not actually wide open? By placing automated sentry guns at the perimeter. Step out of bounds and you'll hear an alarm. Go farther, and you'll get smoked.

(1) A rainbow of Spartans converges outside one of Snowbound's bases. Note the shotgun strapped on this guy's back: Now you can see stowed-away weapons on the other character models, so you can tell what everyone's packing. "Other than looking cool, it's tactical," says Griesemer. "You can tell if someone's stowing a shotgun or just the [submachine gun]." (2) The sniper rifle's sitting in this tunnel. But watch out.... Like the shotgun elsewhere on this map, it's surrounded by explosive, respawnable fusion coils. One stray explosion will set these off, killing anyone nearby. (3) This guy thinks he's so clever, waiting for the battle rifle to respawn. Back from *Halo 2*, the battle rifle is still a sought-after weapon in multiplayer (see more about *Halo 3*'s guns on page 104). A second battle rifle spawns on the roof of this map's other base. Snowbound matches often start with someone from each team scrambling up the structures to grab the battle rifles—and then turning them on each other for a long-range gunfight. (4) One of those automated sentry guns we mentioned. Best give them a wide berth. (5) These shield doors (which lead you underground, inside Snowbound's bases) are new to *Halo 3*. You can freely run through them, but they stop all attacks, leading to some hijink-y moments during close-up skirmishes.

PRO ACTIVE

Professional Halo players tell us what they want from Halo 3. We find out if they'll get it.

For a growing subset of hardcore gamers, playing *Halo* is more than an adventure—it's their job. Practicing relentlessly to compete for tournament prizes and endorsement deals, these pro players push the game to its breaking point. "I love hearing the problems that the pros run into," says Griesemer, "but not so much their solutions, which don't necessarily translate back into the mass market." Nevertheless, we pinged three (well four, actually—two of them are twins) pros to see how the most hardcore of hardcore would perfect Halo's combat. Below, just a few of their suggestions, and whether Bungie will listen...



The pro: Lil Poison

An 8-year-old *Halo* prodigy who's trounced the competition in tournaments since he was 5, Victor de Leon III will even give you lessons if the price is right.

What he wants: "Some music would be cool. Take out the 'cow' the Elites. And bring back Hang 'em High!"

Will he get it? "No one here wants music in multiplayer," says Bungie Audio Director and Series Composer Marty O'Donnell, "because it can be distracting, but we've been experimenting with adding a celebratory [musical] flourish to accompany kills and victories—and players can always just put in their Britney Spears CDs if they want." As for "the cow," the team admits that the character model for the alien Elite has some hit-detection problems that make it an easier target in *Halo 2*—a complaint they're addressing for the sequel. And when we mention popular *Halo 1* death arena Hang 'em High, Griesemer is a big tease: "It was a great map—one of Bungie's favorites—but I really don't know what our plans are."



The pro: Mary Jane PMS

A Verizon-sponsored pro, she runs the *Halo* divisions for the all-female PMS clan.

What she wants: "Allow use of Xbox Live Vision camera in game lobbies. Create a playlist designed around future tournament settings...using smaller maps and balanced weaponry. And get rid of the cheaters!"

Will she get it? Negative on that camera feature, but MJ's other demands are doable. The game's customization options will let her build any tournament-ready mode she likes. As for defeating cheaters, the Bungie guys won't say much, lest they give anyone a head start in plotting unfair play. "We're going to stay flexible," says Green, adding that they're hard-coding less into the game so they can deal with problems as they arise. The team, for instance, is looking at ways to identify cheaters beyond just their gamertags (such as flagging players with dozens of banned identities on their 360s). Warns Griesemer: "It's always going to be an arms race; you're never going to solve the [cheating] problem completely."



The pros: Team OGRE

Twins Dan and Tom Ryan won the *Halo 2* world championships in Singapore last year.

What they want: "A set timer for weapons [to respawn], meaning they come back every minute or two, like in *Halo 1*, rather than [respawn] after they're used up, as in *Halo 2*. It'll give incentive to move around the map."

Will they get it? "One thing we took into account is making sure you can't just trivially control a weapon or powerful element of the map," Green says of *Halo 3*'s revamped weapon-respawn system. "That isn't saying we're going to abandon that, because there's something important to you controlling map zones and resources. But it should never be a situation where the only reason you're controlling the sniper-rifle respawn [zone] is because the rifle is in your backpack. That's a flaw." Bungie's fix? Add random elements to the weapon-respawn process, plus a quota system in which a power weapon might have only two spawn points—but up to five of the guns can be carried simultaneously by players on the map.



head trauma. And, yep, this new toy in the *Halo* universe will do you in if it thunks into your cybernetic skull. But the really wicked part: It could kill you even if it hits the wall in front of your cybernetic skull.

It's called a spike grenade, and it joins the frag and plasma grenades in *Halo 3*'s arsenal of chuckable explosives (you can only carry two of each grenade type now instead of four). You'll know if someone tosses the spike grenade at you. It falls through the air with a "whoop-whoop-whoop" beating-wing sound. And unlike the Covenant plasma grenades that stick only to enemies or vehicles, the spike grenade latches onto *anything*: walls, floors, ceilings, door shields, and other players. It doesn't pack the explosive power of

the other two grenades. Instead, the spike grenade focuses its punch of molten shrapnel into a cone-shaped death zone, kind of like a claymore mine. The idea is you can hurl it at the wall or ceiling in front of you, turn a corner, and let the spike grenade surprise your pursuers.

This kaboomstick is part of what Griesemer calls the Brute sandbox of weapons (which includes the Brute Shot grenade launcher from *Halo 2*). Remember the Brutes? Big as silverback apes and just as charming? Locked in civil war with the Covenant Elites? Well, now more of their cruel weaponry is joining the human arsenal of conventional guns and the Elite's collection of energy weapons. We don't see any Brute vehicles in multiplayer combat dur-

ing our day with Bungie (although single-player is another story—see page 106). In fact, the only other Brute *anything* we play with is the dual-wieldable spiker we faced in battle at the beginning of this story. This aptly named weapon fires a full-auto stream of superheated rods and is about as powerful as the human submachine gun. It just looks and sounds much, much nastier. "We call it high-technology, lowbrow," says Griesemer. "They're using plasma and antigravity to do things like throw 2-foot spikes through the air. They're simple people, the Brutes."

Gravity optional

We keep our eyes on the perimeter autocannons lining one boundary of the Snowbound map. Designed as



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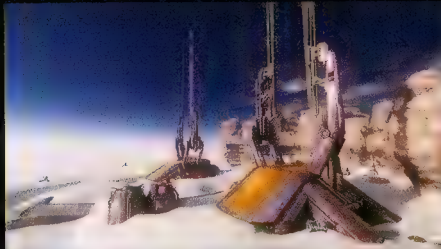
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■ None of the levels we played were set on Halo ringworlds. A clue about the single-player story? We doubt it.

❖ a new way to define the size of the battlefield (as opposed to simply a sheer mountain wall or bottomless drop), these turrets will turn on any player who wanders too far from the war zone. Bungie tells us the cannons aren't working today, but we keep our distance anyway. We're playing a new team-game variant called Elimination, which combines long respawn times with a low win count to force players to be very, very careful. "Everybody, don't die!" the Bungie guys keep hollering at each other. Because either team needs only five kills to win the match, every sure shot counts, and every second *not* spent respawning helps the team. It's more lenient than *Halo 2*'s die-once-and-you're-out variant

Elimination, and thus more fun.

In fact, subtle-but-more-fun defines much of what we see in *Halo 3* today. The spiker, spike grenades, door shields, man-cannons, and even the new four-wheeling Mongoose—a cutting-room-floor vehicle from *Halo 2* finally fully gassed for the sequel—are all welcome tweaks to the series' multiplayer formula. Technically, this combat is evolving, and we know more vehicles and weapons are in the works.

But we've yet to see a major twist

on par with *Halo 2*'s upgrade to dual-wieldable weapons. Environments in the three maps we play don't appear any more destructible. You still can't carry more than two weapon types at a time (don't let the three guns on the lead Spartan in this cover story's opening illustration fool you—that was just "artistic liberty," according to Bungie). The motion-tracking radar and voice-proximity communication work the same. Bungie isn't adding computer-controlled bots to the mix to fill out the player count, which unfortunately still stands at ❖

❖ ***Halo's* not really a game that works with too many people.**

—Griesemer on *Halo 3*'s 16-player limit



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THE FIGHT IS FAR FROM OVER

Halo 3: the gooey center of a universe spreading faster than the Flood.

Just because *Halo 3*'s teaser trailer concludes with the phrase "finish the fight" doesn't mean that after this game, Master Chief and co. will retire to Florida for some shuffleboard and food-nipple buffets. "When we talk about *Halo 3* being the final act in the trilogy, it's not the end of the universe," says Griesemer. "It's more the story that started with *Halo 1*."

Here's how this ring plans to expand over the next few years.



HALO



Halo: Ghosts of Onyx

Actually, you can watch the *Halo* universe expand right now: Make LeVar Burton proud by reading Eric Nylund's latest *Halo* novel (available now in paperback for \$13). Just don't blame us if this action-packed tome chronicling the Human-Covenant War makes the interminable wait for *Halo 3* even tougher.



Peter Jackson's other Halo project

The movie (see below) isn't the only *Halo*-related endeavor for this big-time Hollywood director. Bungie and Jackson's new studio, Wingnut Interactive, are working together on another entry in the series. "Will be it a sequel? A prequel? A side story? We won't squeal," said Bungie Community Manager Frank O'Connor on the developer's website. "But we can tell you it will be a blend of gameplay and storytelling quite unlike anything the games industry has ever seen before." Hmm, a blend of gameplay and storytelling—hasn't that kind of wording become like the kiss of death in this biz?

Anyway, we're also hearing that this collaboration may be connected to the oft-rumored massively multiplayer *Halo* game.



Halo Wars

Most tend to forget that the original *Halo* started out as a real-time strategy (RTS) game before transforming into the premier first-person shooter. *Halo Wars* (which will hit the 360 sometime after *Halo 3*) brings the franchise back to its roots, with longtime PC developer Ensemble Studios (*Age of Empires*) heading up the project. The main goal here: to do for strategy games on the console what *Halo 1* did for first-person shooters. "*Halo Wars* was created for the Xbox 360 from the ground up," says Ensemble. "This meant we didn't have to make compromises or shoehorn in artifacts from a Windows PC game. We were able to take all of the best aspects of RTS games, make them work perfectly on the Xbox 360, and exclude the rest."

The Halo movie

This blockbuster may have *Mr. Lord of the Rings* as its executive producer, but it's got a relative unknown directing it. *Halo* (coming to a theater near you in summer 2008) will be Neill Blomkamp's first feature-length film, yet that doesn't concern Jackson. "We wanted a director who we would get excited about their version of *Halo*," he said to entertainment website *Ain't It Cool News*. "There were people that we thought, 'Well, their version of *Halo* doesn't really excite me all that much.' But then when Neill came along, and we saw what he'd done and we'd spoken to him. Believe me, he's doing something that is very, very different from what people are imagining...."

Still, don't expect this rookie to stray too far from the source material; Jackson has already confirmed that the Flood will appear in the flick, and we've gotten wind that Blomkamp's team has produced actual drivable Warthogs. Wonder what kinda gas mileage those beasts get....

16 players max. "*Halo*'s not really a game that works with too many people," Griesemer explains. "When you've got 31 other guys on your team, you're not going to be the hero very often."

None of this means a big twist isn't coming. One mystery we don't solve today is just what the X button—previously the reload/action workhorse—does in the revamped control scheme. "It does absolutely nothing right now," Griesemer says, "but it will not ship that way, and that's all I can say." We have our own ideas (see the Pressing Issues sidebar on page 92).

Ultimately, however, *Halo 3*'s big twist could be the one you create yourself. The customization options

this time go beyond tweaking game types, weapon sets, and just a few player characteristics. Want a match in which everyone—not just the Oddball carrier—runs twice as fast? Bump up the player speed. Gravity got you down? Cut it in half for lunar-like leaps across the maps. Bungie is introducing a suite of "player traits" that party leaders can tweak when setting up an online game. You'll start off with base traits that apply to all players: things like the aforemen-

tioned speed and gravity settings, vitality, shield strength, motion-sensor traits, spawning weapons, even appearance (such as players looking like they're on fire).

You then get an additional layer of features to futz with depending on the game type. In Team Slayer (*Halo* parlance for deathmatch), for instance, "you can apply traits to the team in the lead," Green says, "and then a different set of traits to the actual player in the lead. You can do

It does absolutely nothing right now, but it will not ship that way, and that's all I can say.

—Griesemer on *Halo 3*'s mysterious use of the X button.

some interesting things with that."

An obvious "interesting thing": Have the player or team in the lead move more slowly, stand out physically from everyone else (again, the fire thing), or suffer other such setbacks. Bungie calls it the Underdog variant. "We often play a game like that where the winning team wins by just one point every time," Green says. "It just balances everything out."

Or take a mode like Capture the Flag or Oddball: Once you set the base settings for everyone in the game, you can tweak the abilities of the flag or skull carrier. We try a variant called Tankflag, in which everyone moves at normal speed except the flag carrier, who crawls along as if his Spartan MJOLNIR armor needed a lube job. Fortunately, the flag carrier also gets a boost in defense and toughness. So picture a red flag carrier surrounded by a swarm of blue guys, inching along, smacking them aside, and sloooooowly making his way to his base before finally succumbing to the enemy onslaught. (Incidentally, you can flip-flop these settings so that the flag carrier zips along at a blurring speed but will die from a carefully aimed shot).

The tweaking options are such a step above *Halo 2*'s that we get an exasperated "goodness gracious" when we ask Green to list them all. "Not only does this give us a lot of tools for building lots of preset games," he says, "but it also totally opens it up to fans actually working on the game. They're going to find some kind of combination of player traits in a game like *Slayer* that'll completely change it, and they don't have to rely on honor rules, such as so-and-so can't pick up a weapon because he's a zombie [a popular player-created *Halo 2* variant]. They'll use player traits to control that sort of thing. You won't be able to pick up weapons because the game says you can't pick up weapons."

We try a variant called Ninjaball, which, like Oddball, has everyone gunning for the skull and trying to hold it for the winning time limit. Ninjaball's twist, however, gives the skull carrier Olympian leaping powers along with a nitro-boosted speed

➤ **It totally opens it up to fans actually working on the game.**

—Green on *Halo 3*'s customization options

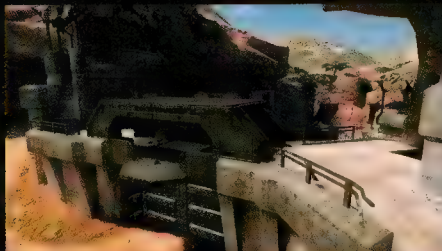




MAP TIME: HIGH GROUND

The spiritual successor to Zanzibar, High Ground is perfect for five-on-five single-flag CTF (capture the flag). It has one walled-off base, set in a desert valley, with multiple entry points to defend.

(1) This bunker leads underground, directly inside the base. You can enter it through a closed trapdoor on the roof that you can blast open with gunfire or grenades—or you can just go inside this huge, gaping hole. (2) The invading team starts off with a Warthog near its spawn point outside of the base. But don't be so eager to bring it in just yet! (see No. 4). (3) New to Halo 3 (and not shown here) are "service numbers." These customizable one-letter, two-number designations (example: "F69") float above teammates' heads to help you identify individuals more easily than with Halo 2's icons (which had players shouting, "You, with the half-Triforce, half-pot-leaf thingie!"). Why not just use players' gamertags to show who's who? Because they can get too long and cumbersome. Why not more letters so you can make up your own short nickname? We think you know the answer to that. (4) That's not a bug crawling on your magazine. That's a spike grenade flying through the air. (5) The base has a turret that's ready to take out any 'Hogs trying to get in (or any Ghosts trying to get out). Use a sniper rifle to get rid of the guy manning the machine gun. And grenade that turret to get rid of it for the time being! (6) The base defenders start off with a Ghost, which is about to get hijacked by team purple here. (7) Behind this rock is a small, cracked pipe that you can crawl into to sneak into the base. (8) Hey, who opened the front door to the base? Some crafty invader from the other team must have hit this switch (9), which pops open the main gate for easier ins and outs.



■ Ammo saver: The Spartan laser will penetrate multiple targets. Pray your opponents approach in single file.

increase. The result: Nabbing the skull gives us a giddy feeling of suddenly developing superpowers in the normally slow-paced world of *Halo's* combat. Which begs the question: Now that you can set every player to max speed rather than just the Oddball character (an option in *Halo 2*), why would anyone want to go back to the series' relatively plodding running pace? "In our ranked Xbox Live playlists, a player will seldom find games which are so fundamentally different from our core game," Green says. "Getting too used to a different speed or higher damage or even no motion sensor could handicap a competitive player."

The player-trait system will even drive the power-ups: the invisibility-granting camouflage and the

defense-boosting overshield. If you want, you can load a single power-up with everything—maximum shields, invisibility, super speed, extra damage, superhuman leaping, fiery graphical effects, etc.—thus making it the most important thing for players to nab on the map.

Green pauses, thinking, then adds, "You can even invent a power-down—and have it slow a guy down rather than boost his shields." Power-downs? Maybe that's *Halo 3's* big twist. The point here is that, even though the game will ship with the same two basic power-up types, "it'll be like having a lot more of them," Green says, "because you can go and change them to be appropriate for whatever game type you're setting up."

Meeting your match

So let's say you've created the ultimate custom *Halo 3* game type, one that's packed with players on fire, ingenious power-downs, and brilliant rule combinations that would make Bungie's multiplayer designers clamor for your résumé. Just as in *Halo 2*, you can name it, save it, and whip it out anytime you want to invite friends into your one-of-a-kind variant. But now you can go one better: You can advertise it. Bungie has revamped *Halo 3's* Xbox Live interface to include a hopper just for custom game types. Here, you can post your DIY variants along with how many players you're seeking—for example, say you only have four friends online and need to recruit another four. "It's like the >

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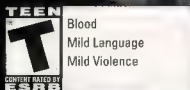
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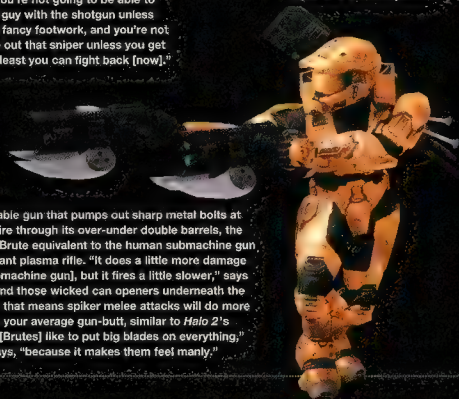
Guns, new and old, rule Halo 3

**Assault Rifle**

The old rifle from *Halo 1* is back, taking the submachine gun's place as your default spawn-in weapon for multiplayer *Halo 3*. Before you roll your eyes, know that it's more accurate this time around. Griesemer explains: "It's fairly good at a much wider range. But...you're not going to be able to take out that guy with the shotgun unless you do some fancy footwork, and you're not going to take out that sniper unless you get close, but at least you can fight back [now]."

**Spike Grenade**

Similar to the spiker, spike grenades help round out the Brutes' subset of weapons. When you throw one, it'll stick to all surfaces—even shield doors (see page 95), so you can toss it right at the force field, run through, then hear it explode in the face of pursuers). Spike grenades blast out—you guessed it—spikes in a conical explosion, like a shaped charge. So the damage reaches farther, but it doesn't affect as wide an area. You can even safely stand right next to the explosion.

**Spiker**

A dual-wieldable gun that pumps out sharp metal bolts at high rate of fire through its over-under double barrels, the spiker is the Brute equivalent to the human submachine gun or the Covenant plasma rifle. "It does a little more damage [than the submachine gun], but it fires a little slower," says Griesemer. And those wicked can openers underneath the barrels? Yes, that means spiker melee attacks will do more damage than your average gun-butt, similar to *Halo 2*'s Brute Shot. "[Brutes] like to put big blades on everything," Griesemer says, "because it makes them feel manly."

Spartan Laser

Meet our new favorite toy: a shoulder-mounted, long-range cannon that needs a couple of seconds to prime. Hold down the right trigger, keep that targeting laser pointed at someone you'd like to invite to your BBQ, and wait for a small meter to fill. Two seconds later...boom! Your target is fried with a searing blast. The Spartan laser is meant to be an anti-vehicle weapon, but you can take out infantry with it, too. In the current version of *Halo 3*, it's more accurate than a sniper rifle (although snipers are much faster on the draw). Bungie says they may tweak this gun so players don't lean on it to kill on-foot enemies—they'd rather you use it to make twisted metal.

BACK FOR MORE

- **Submachine gun:** It shoots faster (at least for now) and looks more...pointy.
- **Battle rifle:** Yup, the BR exists alongside the assault rifle, for a slower-shooting but longer-range alternative.
- **Needler:** "[We didn't make the] needler...powerful in *Halo 2* because you can dual-wield it," Griesemer says. "The needler for *Halo 3* is not dual-wieldable. That means we can make it balanced and make it usable."
- **Energy sword:** "We're definitely looking at ways to balance [it]," says Green. "[Still], when someone has one and they're going on a tear with it, you know [it]. It's a power weapon! But we still have to keep it controlled and keep the duration finite."
- **Pistol:** Will we see *Halo 2*'s respectable magnum? Or *Halo 1*'s overpowered, oddly long-range monster? Bungie's quiet on the subject but does acknowledge that hardcore fans are looking for a return of the original.
- **Grenades:** As of right now, players can carry only two of each type, down from four in *Halo 2*. "[This encourages] people to cycle around the map more," says Griesemer. "You constantly have to resupply them."

✧ off-requested matchmaking for custom games," Green says. "If you want to play some crazy variant that you can't find in the hopper, what you can do is create that game, advertise it on Xbox Live public, and then see if people want to play it. Or go the other way: Check to see if there are any of those particular types of games going on."

In addition to the public browser for custom variants, you'll get a new social matchmaking system that lets you hop into unranked Bungie-crafted games, as well as a section of ranked games for players seeking opponents of a similar skill level. Meanwhile, Bungie is revamping the leveling-up system to deal with two common *Halo 2* snafus: bored players who start new accounts to

whup newbies in ranked games, and cheapskates who burn through one free two-month Xbox Live Gold trial membership after another, never bothering to invest in a single online identity. In other words, Bungie wants players to feel so connected to their online Spartan that they'll stick with him for the duration of their online war.

Halo 3's massive roster of unlockable achievements is a start, because players would lose 'em if they started a new account, but Bungie also hopes to hold long-term interest by tying the sequel's level-up system into the game's fiction.

"You're recruited into the Spartan program," says Green, "so you start out as a recruit, and over your number of games, regardless of whether

they're ranked or social or custom games, you earn experience points and go up in rank."

This ranking system works in two ways, rewarding you for being a kill-scoring badass and simply spending a lot of time playing lots of games, regardless of the game type. "So we have two paths you have to go down," says Green. "One is about winning, and the other is just about playing a lot and having fun. People who don't spend a lot of time in ranked matchmaking can still go very high in the experience rating."

If this ranking system sounds kind of nebulous (it certainly does to us), it's because Bungie is still sorting out the details. We know the experience-points part of the equation—the one rewarding you for frequent

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ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

"Don't blink," says Griesemer as he plays a 20-second movie clip of *Halo 3* for us once...and only once. It's the only footage anyone has seen of the single-player game since the debut trailer. Frantically taking notes without taking our eyes off the screen, we watch as Master Chief tears around the outside of a huge industrial compound in his Warthog. Gunfire is coming from all directions from various Covenant craft, including a hulking purple Wraith and what looks to be a new Brute Ghost (we're calling it that 'cause it's a bulkier version of the classic hover bike, and a big Brute's climbing into it).

The first thing we notice is the improved graphics. The multiplayer stuff we played looks great, but it doesn't scream "next gen" to us. In fact, we'd have to put it next to *Halo 2* running on the Xbox 360 to tell you what has improved in the visuals department (though it's all work-in-progress, and Bungie is nowhere close to being finished). But the single-player video shows signs of wow. The large factory has a realistically grimy yet shiny look to it, with more complex architecture than we've seen before in *Halo* (such as intricate latticework). And so much more is happening onscreen now—ships flying overhead, lasers everywhere, multiple enemies all around—so it's safe to assume chapter three's skirmishes will be more frantic and exciting.



playing—will take the form of sub-ranks within each rank (from sergeant to master sergeant, and so on). "We're talking about ways to use all these things in combination to avoid the scenario where every time a new playlist is rolled out, everybody's automatically treated as level one again," says Green, describing a common problem with *Halo 2*. "If you just get in a new hopper and you're skill level one, but your experience level is high, people are going to know you're a badass, that you've played a ton."

People are going to know you're a badass (or not) right after each game, too: The postmatch lobby displays new stats, such as the top three medal winners, each player's kill/death spread—even how many

times you were splattered by particular weapons. The lobbies themselves are more user friendly. You can view all the recently played game types and play them again, or save them for later. Everyone in the party can see a rough breakdown of what the party host is putting together for the next game.

The best feature, though, gives more power to the people. If enough players in the lobby don't like what the host has set up for the next game, they can veto it. Not only will this voting process save you from playing the same map until the Covenant's kingdom come, it'll also help Bungie keep track of crowd-pleasing game variants. "We've set [the veto feature] up to get some feedback," says Griesemer. "So it's

like, 'Wow, everybody doesn't want to play such and such. Maybe we should remove it from the hopper.'"

Time in

Boop-boop-boop. Respawn. We're back in our pine-scented paradise, and we're rallying. One *EGMer* snipes two red Spartans in a row. Double kill! Another lasers a Warthog packed with reds. Triple kill! That makes the score a punishing 25-11. The match ends. We win, our fists pumping in victory while we melee attack any nearby enemy on screen, just to rub it in. We will leave Bungie's studio today with our honor intact. It's a fairy-tale ending of victory earned through pluck and teamwork and unconventional tactics we can't print here without giving away

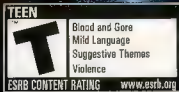
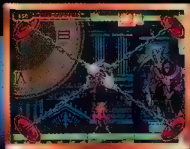
There are two sides to every ghost story.
It takes two to take back the castle.



Castlevania

Portrait of Ruin™

Leather meets magic in the follow-up to the best-selling Castlevania DS adventure, Dawn of Sorrow. Take control of Jonathan, a young vampire hunter and Charlotte, a powerful spellcaster and journey through magical portals created within Dracula's castle. Defeat twin vampire sisters, an ancient vampire lord and uncover the mysteries of a noble spirit trapped within the accursed walls.



NINTENDO DS™



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3 WEEKS OF HALO 3!

The story continues online at EGM210.1UP.com, where you'll find all this.



WEEK 1

Monday, Nov. 6

The Bungie trip: Our *Halo 3* blowout begins with the EGM crew's travelogues and impressions.

Wednesday, Nov. 8

Map analysis for the hardcore: We dissect *Halo 3*'s battlefields in even greater detail.

Friday, Nov. 10

The 1UP Show: We turn our cameras on the *Halo 3* developers for extensive interviews.

WEEK 2

Monday, Nov. 13

Playing for keeps: Bungie addresses fan cries, and then they take on EGM in *Halo 3* multiplayer.

Wednesday, Nov. 15

Halo's fifth anniversary: We look back at the series and explore the *Halo/ Marathon* universe.

Friday, Nov. 17

The 1UP Show: We analyze what's new in *Halo 3* from a hardcore-player's perspective.

WEEK 3

Monday, Nov. 20

Halo 3 single player: Everything we know so far about the solo campaign, including new details!

Wednesday, Nov. 22

The *Halo 3* podcast: An all-*Halo 3*-edition podcast featuring a special guest from Bungie.

Friday, Nov. 24

Hands-on *Halo 3* preview: This is the big one: Our full impressions after playing hours of *Halo 3* multiplayer against each other and Bungie.

all our secrets.

At least, that's the story we'd be telling if not for one other feature Bungie is building into *Halo 3*: saved films. Now everything that happens in a multiplayer match—or even the single-player story—is on record, saved as a movie to the hard drive or a memory card for later scrutiny. And because these clips are game-engine reconstructions of collision, ballistics, and movement data rather than actual recordings of game footage, they eat up very little memory space.

Save films add a new level of Monday-morning quarterbacking to postgame lobbies, where entire teams can huddle and watch what they did spectacularly right and embarrassingly wrong in the previous game. While the party leader controls the speed of

the replay (fast-forwarding, rewinding, or even pausing it), everyone in the game views the action from whatever perspective they prefer: first-person, third-person, or from a fly-it-yourself bird's-eye view. It's a very cool feature that will not only improve your playing—it looks killer, too. Slowing down or pausing a movie is like entering bullet time or a 3D snapshot. You see energy bolts hanging in the air, explosions frozen in time, Spartans in midleap.

And, unfortunately for our honor, you see one of Bungie's red Spartans totally owning us with a Mongoose. ☹

Special thanks to EGM's *Halo 3* clan for their help with Bungie questions and countless hours of "research" for this story.

HEAD GAMES

If representin' your love for *Halo* is a higher priority than getting laid, check out *Halo 3: Legendary Edition*. It's a Master Chief replica helmet—smaller than life-sized, but "big enough to fit a cat's head into," jokes one Microsoft PR person. Inside: *Halo 3*, plus three discs of documentaries, gamertiles, dashboard themes, high-resolution cinematics from the first two games, director's commentary, and more. It's perfect for fans with blind wives...or to keep guard over grandma's ashes on the mantle. Price: TBD.



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Get unprecedented gaming realism. Mitsubishi HDTV feature 1080p DLP® imaging—the definition of high definition. And to put you even deeper into the action, screens up to 73 inches. Mitsubishi1080p.com

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RATING PENDING

RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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4

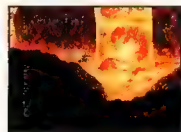
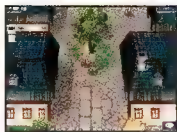
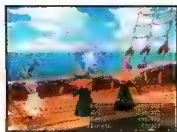
CHARACTERS

23

JOB CLASSES



FOUR SOULS SHALL BE BLESSED WITH LIGHT, AND SO IT SHALL BEGIN...



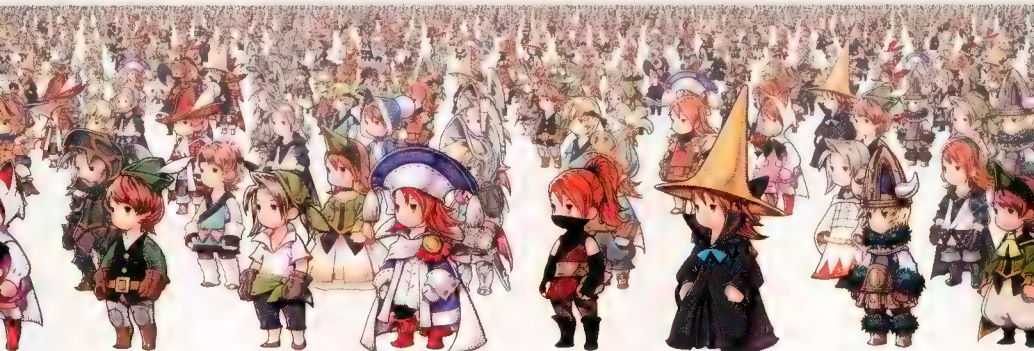
- A dynamic job system brings a nearly infinite number of party variations. Each character can assume any of 23 jobs found throughout the adventure.
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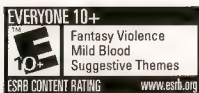
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POSSIBLE PARTY CONFIGURATIONS

The logo for Final Fantasy III, featuring a blue and white illustration of a character with a large cape and a sword, positioned above the text "FINAL FANTASY III".

FINAL FANTASY III

IT'S A WHOLE NEW GAME.



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NINTENDO DS™

REVIEWS

> panty-throwing guitar licks, schoolyard pricks, hippie chicks, and mortal kicks

134 GUITAR HERO II

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> THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS

YES...WE'RE READY TO ROCK

The calm before the next-gen storm

WHEEEE! Next gen is finally here. Oh...wait, we don't actually have our own hardware to play this stuff on yet? Shee-*. OK, so we didn't get all the reviews we wanted, but we did get extended playtime with some Wii games, so you'll see the first reviews right here. The publishers wanted to just demo their final games for us—we wanted more time to get you some actual reviews, which involved some finagling on our end but means we know we got our scores right. Be wary of other *Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz* and *Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2* reviews, eh? Oh, and peep 1UP.com come launch time for reviews of all the biggies (and check Reviews Wrap-up for our impressions based on near-final time with 'em).

But really, who needs next gen? We've got three Game of the Month winners this issue, all on current gen. Round one goes to the fogies.

—Greg Ford, Reviews Editor

> HOW WE RATE

- 10 to 9** Excellent
- 8.5 to 7** Good
- 6.5 to 5** Average
- 4.5 to 3** Bad
- 2.5 to 0** Terrible

> SCORES AND AWARDS

Reviews: You can also find the lead **EGM review** on 1UP.com. The second and third reviews—you'll find those here.

Awards: We dole out awards to games based on their scores. Platinum: all 10s; Golds: 9.0 average and up; Silver: 8.0 average or higher. Game of the Month goes to the highest-scoring game with unanimously "Good" scores, and Shame of the Month is the reverse. Simple.

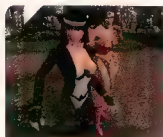




Games of the Month:
A hot, sweet, gaming threesome.



Air Ball of the Month:
NBA Live 07 sinks the waste basket.



Highest Spandex Quotient:
Justice League Heroes

THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

So you can put faces with the names you love to hate



Dan "Shoe" Hsu

Editor-in-Chief
Shoe's always injuring his hands (this time from paintball), which wouldn't be a huge deal except that his livelihood (and love life) depends on functioning digits.
Now Playing: Halo 3, Splinter Cell Double Agent
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



Jennifer Tsao

Managing Editor
When not busy tending to the needs of her recent offspring, Jen spent the month kickin' out the jams with various handheld rhythm-action games.
Now Playing: Lumines II, Elite Beat Agents, Cooking Mama
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



Bryan Intihar

Reviews Editor
Think game journalists get everything for free? Pff—Big B waited in line (at 5 a.m., no less) to preorder a PS3 and Wii just like every other loser.
Now Playing: Resistance: Fall of Man, Phantasy Star Universe
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com



Michael Donahoe

News/Features Editor
SmackDown vs. Raw made Michael long for the days when wrapping your arms in multi-colored tassels and summoning warrior spirits was cool.
Now Playing: Gears of War, Guitar Hero II
Blog: egmikid.1UP.com



Robert Ashley

Staff Reviewer
Robert loved Bully, but he hated being bullied when he was the only kid in Grand Prairie, TX, sporting MC Hammer pants and a peace symbol shaved into the back of his head.
Now Playing: Bully, Wii Sports
Blog: robertashley.1UP.com



Patrick Mauro

Staff Reviewer
Screw the Adam Morrison 'stache. This syndicated radio sports nut plans on going for Chad Johnson's blonde Mohawk instead. We approve.
Now Playing: NFL Street 3, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07
Blog: Thanks, but no thanks



Shane Bettenhausen

Executive Editor
Shane's been stocking up on sundries in preparation for the PS3 and Wii launch camp-outs. Buy in bulk and save!
Now Playing: Yoshi's Island DS, Virtua Fighter 5, The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



Crispin Boyer

Senior Editor
Crispin planned to stock up on sundries in preparation for the PS3 and Wii launch camp-outs. He got distracted in Walgreens "prize wonderland" aisle.
Now Playing: Guitar Hero II, Halo 2, Halo 3, Bully
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



Greg Ford

Reviews Editor
Even though Greg reviewed Bully this month, he only reached rage levels while playing old-school megatough Yoshi's Island DS.
Now Playing: Bully, Dead Rising, anything on Wii or PS3
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



Jeremy Parish

Features Editor, 1UP.com
After a gang of rogue polygons killed his family in cold blood, Jeremy vowed to become EGM's retro specialist and boycott all 3D games. (Except, you know, the good ones.)
Now Playing: Yoshi's Island DS
Blog: toastyfrog.1UP.com



James Lee

Staff Reviewer
Young Jimmy Lee is scared of many things...this issue's redesign top among them. Also: balled monkeys, the amount of organs he'll have to sell to nab a PS3, scallops.
Now Playing: With Wii
Blog: egmwill.1UP.com



Todd Zuniga

Staff Reviewer
After a two-year stint in NYC, Todd Zuniga's back in SF, where he can complain about sports games without all the horn honks distracting him.
Now Playing: NHL 07, NBA 2K7, Winning Eleven 10 (import)
Blog: opiumtodd.1UP.com

Also on deck...

John Davison
Editorial director
1UP Network

James Melike
Executive Editor
1UP.com

Garnett Lee
Managing Editor
1UP.com

Matt Leone
Reviews Editor
1UP.com

Andrew Pfister
Reviews Editor
1UP.com

Scott Sharkey
Staff Writer
1UP.com

Karen Chu
Staff Reviewer
1UP.com

Mark MacDonald
Director
GameVideos.com

Demian Linn
Manager/Producer
GameVideos.com

Richard Li
Cheats Editor
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Brooks Huber
Staff Reviewer
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Staff Reviewer

Jon Dudlak
Staff Reviewer

Andrew Fitch
Staff Reviewer

Patrick Joynt
Staff Reviewer

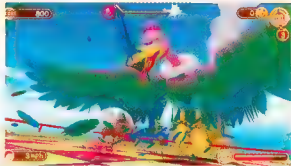
Jared Rea
Staff Reviewer

Ryan Scott
Staff Reviewer

Greg Sewart
Staff Reviewer



Want more?
Looking for a review of a game we didn't have enough time or room for? We've got you covered. Check 1UP.com for all your up-to-date review needs. Bravo.



Wii

SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA BLITZ

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sega ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

JAMES L.
6.0
AVERAGE

MICHAEL
6.5
AVERAGE

JEREMY
7.0
GOOD

The Good: Some innovative minigames, mostly simple controls

The Bad: Single-player difficulty, not all minigames a ball

The Story: Bizarre but amusing

Still worth monkeying around with

➔ **JAMES L:** Wrapping your head—or should I say wrists?—around this puzzley game of monkey-stuffed balls takes some getting used to. Holding the Wii-mote horizontally, you carefully maneuver the course to keep your precious ball from rolling off the edge. But since my motor skills are about as skilled as those of a thumb-sucking primate, it was hard to get a grip on all the monkey s*** going on. Halfway through the story mode, the stages get insanely difficult, and I had a tough time making myself continue the balancing act with the controller. It doesn't help that when you clear a level, you're awarded with repetitive boss fights. For me, boredom in the story mode set in quicker than my average time of death: about 30 sec-

onds. Thankfully, dozens of minigames keep the arm-flailing party going, covering events like boxing (which has you literally punching the air) and Frisbee golf (be sure to release the A button, not the controller, after making your toss motion—like I nearly did).

➔ **MICHAEL:** Frustration—that's the feeling that kept me from squealing like a poo-throwing banana eater. Like Jimmy says, *Banana Blitz's* levels range from somewhat simple to dumbfoundingly difficult. Mastering the tricky Wii controls doesn't help, either—performing simple actions (like turning around) is a chore using the Wii Remote. But while the main stages slipped, the 50 multiplayer minigames held it steady. Not only are the games

fun (well, most of them, at least), but they also make good use of the wacky Wii controls. So long as you stick with the multiplayer, this game is a decent monkey-filled ball.

➔ **JEREMY:** I think young James missed the point. Sure, you've got a single-player mode here (and it's pretty good, if unreasonably hard in the latter half), but the meat of this ballgame is multiplayer. Wii, like the DS before it, will be glutted by minigames until developers come to terms with the unique controller—and *Monkey Ball* has 50 of the bad boys, making it the Wii's 800-pound minigame gorilla. Sure, they're not all winners, but some of them (like monkey bowling) are addictive, creative, and fun. 🍌

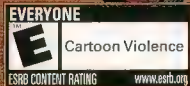
ANY MORE REALISTIC AND YOU'D BE GROUNDED FOR MAKING SUCH A MESS.



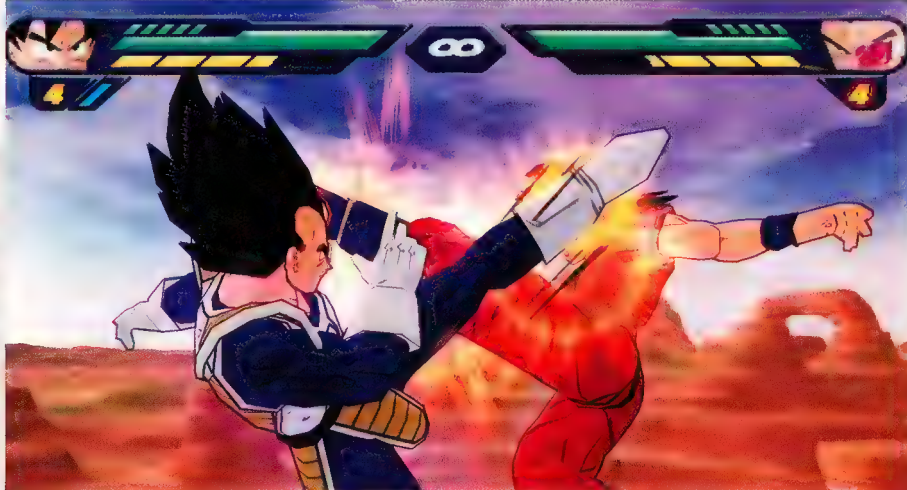
Elebits

Exclusively for
Wii

When you hunt for Elebits you're bound to make a mess. The Wii Remote lets you throw stuff around like crazy while looking for them. So pick it up and go Elebits hunting. And don't worry. You won't get in trouble for trashing the place.



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Wii

DRAGON BALL Z: BUDOKAI TENKAICHI 2

■ Publisher: Atari ■ Developer: Spike ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

Blondes have more fun

THE VERDICTS

(OUT OF 10)

RICHARD:

7.0

GOOD

SHANE:

6.5

AVERAGE

MICHAEL:

7.0

GOOD

The Good: New fighting-game feel, environments

The Bad: Steep learning curve

Supple Wrists: Long bouts may cause carpal tunnel syndrome

→ **RICHARD:** *Virtual On*'s dual sticks taught me the wonders of being ambidextrous. *EyeToy: Play's Boxing Champ* gave me a Tae Bo workout. And now, *Tenkaichi 2*'s Wii Remote setup has turned me into a Kamehameha-acting roleplayer. At first, it was funny—and embarrassing—to mirror the same attack moves performed by Goku, sending my arms through air with the controller as though unleashing a powerful beam attack in real life. But this overzealousness offers a refreshing take on the seldom-deviated fighting formula. And it doesn't seem too ridiculous when you're fighting in memorable environments. Hide behind a rock to avoid fireballs, execute your ultimate superattack to unleash the apocalypse

on Earth—these immersive qualities fit the fidelity of the show.

Too bad blocking is a pain. Sure, the motion sounds simple (move the remote upward), but it wasn't reliable. Otherwise, my childhood fantasies of sending a spirit ball from my hands are finally fulfilled. Cosplaying is out of the question, though.

→ **SHANE:** *Tenkaichi 2* isn't one of those immediately instinctive Wii games poised to redefine the genre with its simple, motion-based gameplay. Nope, this 3D fighter forces you to wrap your head (and hands) around a shockingly deep control system utilizing nearly every button on the Wii-mote and Nunchuk. Once you ascend this steep learning curve, the

input system works rather well—spastic fireball free-for-alls feel newly visceral and three-dimensional. Plus, dedicated *DBZ* fans will surely dig the 100-plus unlockable characters.

→ **MICHAEL:** Richard is right—this game slaps away your self-esteem as you goofily pantomime devastating fireball attacks with a...uh...plastic remote. But while you'll look like a frazzled fanboy at first, by the time you master the motions, it becomes surprisingly fun in an I-swear-I-won't-ever-do-this-in-public way. Richard didn't mention the robust story mode: Chronicling the entire *DBZ* saga, it's essentially the however-many-million TV episodes condensed into a bunch of drama-dripping fights. 🐉



THE
HISTORY
CHANNEL

CIVIL WAR

A NATION DIVIDED

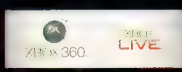


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CHAOS OF THE WAR THAT DIVIDED A NATION!



ACTIVISION

activision.com



PlayStation 2

PC
CD-ROM
SOFTWARE

TEEN
ESRB CONTENT RATING
Blood
Violence
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Xbox 360

SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Developer: Ubisoft Shanghai ■ Players: 1-6 ■ ESRB: Mature



The Good: Multiplayer is fast-paced, easier to play
The Bad: Inconsistent A.I.
Huh?: Why are we wearing spy gear as a prisoner?

I spy bad A.I.

➔ **SHOE:** In the first minute of *Splinter Cell Double Agent*, series veteran and protagonist Sam Fisher says, "It's time for me to retire."

He should seriously consider it. I'm stressed out as it is playing his single-player spy game—I can't imagine what his old-man heart is going through. Some of that stress comes from really intense scenarios: I'm scaling the side of a high-rise in Shanghai during a downpour, and an enemy helicopter is slowly panning its spotlight over the face of the building, trying to find me before I can sneak in. Or I'm deep undercover in a terrorist base, walking around nonchalantly as part of the gang ("Double Agent," right?), looking for opportunities to hack into their computers when no

one's peeping. It's edge-of-your-seat spy-thriller stuff in game form.

But that's "good stress." The game also has plenty of the other kind.

I feel like an ulcer's coming on when I have to deal with *Double Agent*'s wildly inconsistent artificial intelligence. Some enemies can't see me standing a foot away from them, just because, magically, light can stop abruptly in *Splinter Cell*'s world. Others immediately notice and shoot me from across a room, through a thick haze of smoke, when I barely poke out from around a corner. I eventually just started saving everywhere, because I couldn't control when I was going to be caught by the enemies, no matter how well I was playing. Knocked that guard

out? Save! Picked that lock? Save! Scratched my ass? Save! It's not as if *Splinter Cell* has ever been a showcase for brainy A.I.—I just expected more from the next-gen debut.

The story progression is a mess, as well. Early on, for example, the agency tasks me with infiltrating a terrorist network by planting me in jail so I can meet and earn the trust of a member who's already there. Sounds cool, but as soon as the chapter starts, the guy already trusts me. Yup, just like that. I must be the luckiest disc in secret-agent history (that, or my disc is missing big chunks of the story...).

So single player is a mix of exciting moments, frustration, and disappointment. Multiplayer? Much better.

Double Agent greatly simplifies ➔



Now Playable: Multiplayer!



One of our favorite multiplayer games is back, this time with three spies looking to hack computer files and three heavily armed mercenaries out to stop them. The developers streamlined the gameplay because the old formula saw too many newbies getting slaughtered. So if something used to slow spies down, it's gone: No more motion sensors, security cameras, mines, and laser tripwires. The spies no longer have the shocker gun and are faster and more nimble now, too (point being, spies should be hiding and escaping, not fighting). Mercs lose some tools (mines, spy traps, the old directional noise detector), but get some new help from a handy built-in motion-sensing visor, which catches spies on the move without having to switch to a different vision mode. Gadgets are simpler, too: Spies get one (smoke or flash grenades, health needles, or jammers to throw off mercs' proximity radars), and mercs get two (frag grenades and a remote-controlled, exploding drone).

The multiplayer game moves at a faster pace now, but the long-term appeal may take a hit with the lighter depth and lack of variety in modes and objectives (all spies do now is a generic timed hack at one of four stations per map). We're still digging it, though.

the previous two games' (*Pandora Tomorrow* and *Chaos Theory*) spies-versus-mercenaries gameplay and adds two more players, for a faster-paced and easier-to-play (but dumb-down) 3-on-3 experience (see Now Playable: Multiplayer sidebar).

Spies can run around so much more freely now that they don't have to worry about some hidden mine blowing their legs off. They also have to act more like...well, spies: They're no longer equipped to take on the mercenaries as directly, so they have to be more stealthy than before, which is the way it should be. This makes the game less frustrating for both camps, yet still keeps a lot of the mode's intensity.

But make no mistake: Hardcore fans of the last two titles will not like the changes...not at first, at least.

I, for one, am eager to slip into my

spy tights for more Xbox Live action. *Splinter Cell* still offers the most unique multiplayer around, and *Double Agent* will keep me happily entertained for quite some time—probably well past Fisher's retirement party.

→ MARK: No wonder Shoe and I make such a great spy team online—we think the same way when it comes to *Double Agent*, starting with the A.I. Obviously, the developers tweaked the enemy intelligence—the bad guys fall back and flank more often—so why not finally fix the alarm system, as well? One guard sees me and somehow, instantly, all his buddies nearby know exactly where I am? At least force him to call out or radio it in, a more realistic and enjoyable way of handling things that *Metal Gear Solid* figured out years ago. I also see the

same story holes as Shoe, though I must say this is still the most engaging (and least confusing) plot the series has produced yet. The game gives you pre-mission voiceovers that remind you exactly what the hell is going on—a great idea.

Gameplay largely relies on the old standbys—knocking out lights, picking locks, sneaking up behind guards—but *Double Agent's* excellent, exciting levels make you forget you've played it before. Almost every stage, right from the start, is so wildly different from the last that together, they make the previous games seem stale and predictable in comparison. Scaling a giant office building, busting out of prison, or deep into a cruise ship—are all presented in crisp detail, with fewer empty hallways and cramped ventilation ducts and more outdoor and

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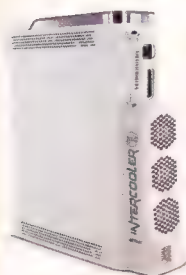


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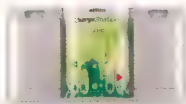
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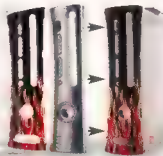


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Side Missions

In case the Xbox Live competition gets too cutthroat down the line, *Double Agent* offers co-op missions. Unlike the story-driven co-op campaign in *Chaos Theory* (which we would've preferred), these are set up like a series of versus matches, only with you and your friends going against computer-controlled mercenary bots. You can even compete within these "co-op" missions (for example, race to fulfill your objectives faster than your fellow spies).



■ **Sugged:** We experienced a couple of crashes online, and we encountered one bug that prevented us from finishing a mission.

open environments.

And yes, multiplayer has been dumbed down, but unless you were a hardcore *Chaos Theory* freak with 20 hours a week to train, that's a good thing. *Splinter Cell*'s online game was always genius in theory, but in practice, even one player much better or worse than the others ruined the delicate balance. *Double Agent*'s new six-player limit, less-complicated gadgetry (I, for one, hope to never see another proximity mine in my life), and slightly simplified controls should help level the playing field.

► **MATT:** Shoe, if you dislike *Double Agent*'s single player, you must want to kidnap *Splinter Cell*, *Pandora Tomorrow*, and *Chaos Theory*'s babies. Like Mark, I think this is by far *Splinter Cell*'s best single-

player campaign. The A.I.? Yeah, you can't predict enemies will react the same way each time you do something—sorta like, I dunno, *real life*. Do you really want this to delve into the puzzle-game mentality of the original *Splinter Cell* where you can mess with enemies, knowing exactly how they will react every single time?

Having to save a lot? Yeah, I do it too, but you fail to note that the actual number of seconds required to save has been massively cut back from *Chaos Theory*, and the new autorecharging health system makes it a much less annoying prospect, since you don't have to restart if you take a hit or two—that alone counters a ton of the trial-and-error issues that have been with the series since the start.

I'm less a fan of the new terrorist-headquarters missions. They help with

the storytelling, but you don't have much freedom when you're staring at the clock the entire time. The whole "having to complete three tasks in a set period of time so the terrorists don't suspect anything" is a mess for gameplay that—in this case—actually does screw with the save system (since if you take too long on one task, it hurts your chances on the others).

But really, storytelling is key here. We can argue feature for feature all day, but while it lasts, this is easily the series' most compelling plot. The game's a bit short on traditional missions, since the terrorist-headquarters segments replace them so often, and with simplified multiplayer (definitely for the better) and the lack of campaign co-op, the game lacks the meat of *Chaos Theory*. But what's in the box is at the top of its game. **A-**

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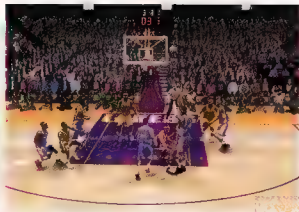
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Xbox 360



NBA LIVE 07

■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Developer: EA Canada
■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Crying foul

➔ **TODD:** *Live's* got a real sci-fi feel this year. Gravity has seemingly flipped for players with the ball; they struggle when speed-bursting. Yet once you soar for a dunk, players seem to spaz out and move at rocket speed. Jump shots are hurried and goofy, too—it looks like the developers left out frames of animation. This twitchiness even manages to make the new *SportsCenter*-worthy moves (like the ability to whip sweat off-the-elbow passes) seem weird. And it doesn't get any better with your back to the bucket; you can magically reverse field and easily fly high for a slam.

It's not all bizarre. Besides the detailed player models, the return of dynasty mode and the new ESPN content integration—real NBA high-

lights, *Pardon the Interruption* and other show clips—are *Live's* premiere assets. I wish I could've listened in during all four quarters, though. It would've been a welcome distraction.

➔ **BRYAN:** Remember that kid on the local blacktop who looked part of a legit baller (brand-new Air Jordans, authentic NBA team shorts, stuff like that), but the second he touched the rock he dribbled it off his foot? That's *Live 07*. This game may sport super-accurate players and arenas, yet you'll quickly realize that it's got no skills whatsoever. From the slow-as-s*** moving players to the incredibly laggy online games to the wonky animations anytime you shoot near the basket, *Live 07* borders on unplayable. It's

kinda ironic that the first EA title that nailed the ESPN integration gives you almost no other reason to play it.

➔ **PATRICK M:** A deep dynasty mode, the revival of All-Star weekend (meaning minigames such as the 3-point and slam dunk contests), nifty player-specific moves—you'll find lots to like here...if you actually don't *play* the game. I'm with these guys; it's almost as if the developers ran out of time making *Live 07*. Anyone going hard to the hole looks like they're playing *SlamBall* and jumping off a trampoline. And the rest of the time, players react at a snail's pace. In the end, *Live 07* reminds me a lot of Shaq at the charity stripe: It throws up way too many bricks.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

TODD:

5.0
AVERAGE

BRYAN:

2.5
TERRIBLE

PATRICK M:

4.5
BAD

The Good: Great ESPN integration
The Bad: Feels like I ball played on the moon
Can't Compete With: NBA 2K7



Xbox 360

FIFA 07

■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Developer: EA Canada
■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

FIFA finally kicks subpar gameplay

➔ **TODD:** *FIFA's* been a sickly presented dud for years, always playing catch-up in the gameplay department to *Winning Eleven*, which has been the best sports game on the market since 2003. But as *FIFA* leaps to next gen for real (I count the dismal *Road to the World Cup* as a marketing force), it's set a solid gameplay tone on the 360.

The controls are improved in terms of responsiveness, and the ball physics are much more realistic. Still, cleverness leads to exciting scoring opportunities in *Winning Eleven*; it often leads to turnovers here. I dislike having to dumb down my tactical approach, and players lack a killer instinct and seem too concerned with returning to their position.

Slight defects aside, the long-time

reason for choosing *FIFA* has been its licenses. But you'll find only six league licenses in place here versus 28 on current gen. That's a whopping difference. An even bigger deal: the paltry 37 international teams, with eight from World Cup 2006 missing!

➔ **BRYAN:** Damn, I was all ready to slam Todd and his disturbing *Winning Eleven* bias, but he's telling it like it is: good-but-not-great controls, a lack of squads, etc. But neither of these guys gives enough credit...er, make that any credit, to *07's* phenomenal animation system; players of varying proportions move differently up and down the pitch. I never thought I would get so much enjoyment out of watching them whiff at shots. Sure,

it sucks to miss a wide-open net, but getting bumped just enough to come up kicking air represents exactly what this series needs: more realism.

➔ **PATRICK M:** *FIFA* looks incredible but follows EA Sports' 360 trend—the next-gen product possessing a fraction of what the current-gen version offers. I did like dribbling down the pitch and quickly changing direction with the right analog stick, which gave me a far greater sense of ball control than any previous *FIFA*, but ultimately, *07* plays like all recent iterations of the franchise. Like last year, the whistle seems to blow on every tackle—too many play stoppages, too many free kicks, and not enough head butts or insults about one's sister.

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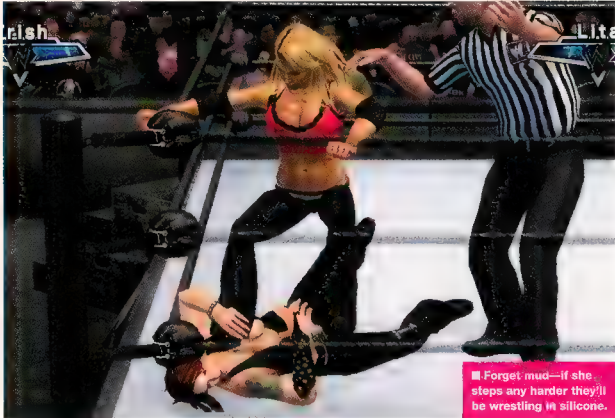
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XB360/PS2

WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2007

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Yuke's
■ Players: 1-4 (XB360), 1-6 (PS2) ■ ESRB: Teen

Touching men in a new way

➔ **MICHAEL:** After reusing the same tired control scheme for the last few *SmackDown* games, developer Yuke's finally gives it a muscle-stretching massage. The fresh take works wonders—molding man-sandwiches is now a cinch thanks to intuitive analog controls. A simple flick of the right analog stick gets you straight to the grappling, making it incredibly jobber-friendly, while the new ultimate control moves only add to the awesomeness—moving the analog stick back and forth to whack a wrestler into the turnbuckle enhances the already striking realism.

So it's got new ways to play, sure (though we weren't able to try it online), but *SmackDown* isn't a true champion—the laughably bad load times (it has to load each and

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

MICHAEL:
8.5
GOOD

GREG S:
7.0
GOOD

JARED:
7.0
GOOD

every entrance) gave me a bad case of PSP fever. And though you can almost smell the sweat dripping off the superstars, the animations are a little wonky. Still, *SmackDown*'s 360 debut garners a huge pop with grapple gurus.

➔ **JARED:** We all just played *SmackDown 2007*, right? I just wanted to make sure we're all on the same page since the only way I could tell was by the new control scheme. Michael is spot-on about the improvements. But, for as fresh as it seems, it also feels horrendously outdated in terms of story and characters. Veterans barely got a touch-up, and a good portion of the newcomers aren't even currently employed (such is the ever-changing WWE life). It's great...but also heartbreaking.

The Good: New control system
The Bad: Crappy load times
PS2 Version: Plays the same, looks worse (duh?)

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Xbox 360

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 07

■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Developer: EA Redwood Studios
 ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Just stroking it

➔ **GREG S:** The real-life Tiger is known for using the negative as motivation, so I wonder if his recent string of victories is due to seeing his videogame's pitiful next-gen debut last year. But he can't do that with *07*. This edition doesn't feel nearly as stunted, what with the whole host of game types (though we weren't able to test them online) and double the number of courses (still, it ain't nearly enough, as the current-gen *Tiger* takes this category 21 to 12).

Even the presentation got a welcomed face-lift. The courses look gorgeous, the crowd reacts perfectly to what's happening, and the golfers animate better than ever. Gameplaywise, things are pretty much the same. The analog swing meter is still frustrating and fantastic all at the same time, guaranteeing you'll never hit the ball as consistently as you'd like and constantly forcing you to guess the exact power of your swing.

➔ **BRYAN:** I'm not sure which golf game Greg was playing, because every time I whacked the ball into *Tiger's* crowd, it took the surrounding peeps a good five seconds to react accordingly (must be all that beer drinking while walking from hole to hole). But he's totally right about the 360's pathetic course situation; how come we're still stuck playing 10 extra bucks for less content? And don't tell me it's for the graphics—that only works for the first year on a new console. Anyway, *07* plays just fine, but once again this edition leaves you wanting (and expecting) much more.

➔ **PATRICK M:** The lifelike look of the limited courses, along with the overall presentation, highlights EA's latest golfer. And talk about showing your emotions—*07's* new facial technology has these pros expressing themselves throughout the 18 holes, although I doubt the actual Tiger would ever smile this much. I'm also glad to see shot shaping (such as fading or drawing the ball) return to the left analog stick, along with the new aiming mechanics. Now placing the ball where you want isn't so automatic, which makes rounds under par less routine and this *Tiger* much more realistic.

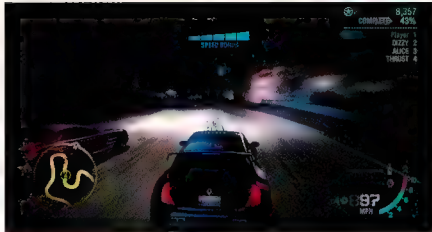
THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

GREG S:
7.5
GOOD

BRYAN:
6.5
AVERAGE

PATRICK M:
7.5
GOOD

The Good: Excellent presentation
The Bad: The current-gen version still has more courses
Really Bad: EA won't offer downloadable courses



Xbox 360

NEED FOR SPEED CARBON

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: EA Canada
 ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Teen

Evolution, not revolution

➔ **JOHN:** If I were completely cynical, I'd tell you that *Carbon* is little more than *Most Wanted* at night. Certainly classified under "evolution," it represents a refinement of the franchise. Core to this is the territory-acquisition mechanic that replaces *Most Wanted's* tedious blacklist as the central motivation. It's simple and lends itself nicely to the new racing crew feature. Borrowing from *NASCAR 07*, *Carbon* lets you instruct your buddy to run interference, adding an additional resource-management element to the game.

I don't want to gloss over the fact that drag racing has been removed or that the new canyon-race duels add some much-needed tension to an otherwise easy game, but the most significant improvement here is found online. Skip the usual stuff and head for the knockout pursuit game. Eight players race, and every lap ends with the guy in last place turning into a cop until it's a 7-on-1 pileup. It's great fun and forces cooperation unlike any other racer.

➔ **GREG S:** I totally echo John's complaints. Though *Carbon* is solid, it feels familiar. The only real challenge you'll encounter is dealing with your brain-dead teammates as they brake-check you in an attempt to allow you to pass. The action is still undeniably enjoyable, though, and it's definitely worth a play for anyone who hasn't tired of pimping out rides or doing the whole illegal street-racing thing. Personally, I'm right at my threshold.

➔ **DEMIAN:** Like Greg, I'm definitely hitting my limit with this street-racing stuff. But as long as people keep buying *Need for Speeds*, EA will keep cranking 'em out. *Carbon's* big changes really aren't too big—the new crew stuff is fine but whatever, and the canyon boss battles (two runs, you follow behind on the first leg and try to keep up, and then lead the way in the second run) are cool but rare. *Carbon* is seriously on borderline 6.5 territory for me, but it's just enough fun that I gotta go with the 7.0. Oh, I wasn't able to play the online modes due to technical problems, but if they turn out amazing (or horrible), I'll let you know next month.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JOHN:
7.5
GOOD

GREG S:
7.5
GOOD

DEMIAN:
7.0
GOOD

The Good: A serious upgrade for *NFS* online gameplay
The Bad: Dangerously close to being "more of the same"
The PS2/XB Versions: Look great, but PS2 not online(!)



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PlayStation 2

GUITAR HERO II

■ Publisher: RedOctane/Activision ■ Developer: Harmonix ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen



The Good: Killer songs, new co-op and practice modes
The Bad: Can't play career mode with a friend
Still Waiting For: "The Final Countdown"

Shred 'em all

➔ **MICHAEL:** If you're one of the few fret-fearing newbies who never jumped on the headbanging bandwagon, slip on a pair of socks, buddy—it's time to rock 'em off. *Guitar Hero II* doesn't mess with its brilliant formula of fun: Strap on a life-size guitar controller and strum along to over 40 licensed songs. But while the first game was, for the most part, a solo act, the sequel lets you bring in a bud to complement your chops on bass.

The introduction of a co-op mode helps mold it into more of a furniture-breaking party game—now any wannabe guitar gods can tame the six-stringed beast without fear of falling against a friend. And since the co-op mode enables players to choose their

own difficulty, virgin beginners can hang with the pros on expert, making it easier to convince the casual crowd to stop watching and start shredding. Even if first-time players are still shy, the new practice mode should help rock away any shaky egos—pick and choose any part of a song you want to practice. You can even slow down the speed to help you learn all those difficult licks.

Aside from the bitchin' new modes, *Guitar Hero II* is essentially the same game with new songs. Can't really complain, though—the set list for the sequel is better than the original's, mostly because of variety. Name a guitar-driven genre and it's most likely in the game: heavy metal, country, grunge, alternative, classic rock...

you need me to keep going? Yeah, I think not.

➔ **CHRISPIN:** You'll think twice about hollering for "Freebird" the next time you go to a live show. This epic Southern-fried anthem has morphed from ha-ha request to a finger-fatiguing final boss in *Guitar Hero II*. And it's not the only song that'll defeat your digits. Many tunes are longer, more complex (at least if you play on the hard or expert difficulties—easy and medium are still a rock in the park), and pack longer rock-power-building combo chains. It all makes the new practice mode Michael mentioned that much more crucial.

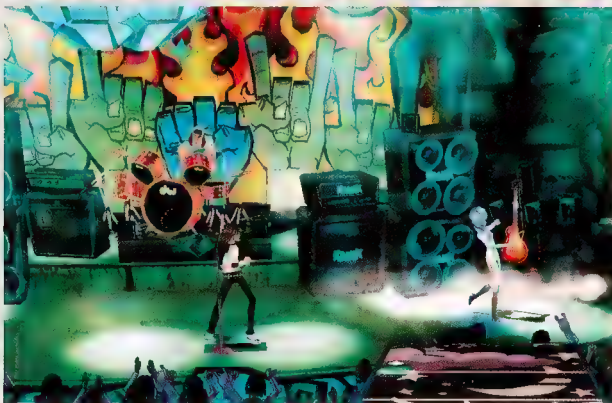
What he didn't mention are the new encores (the crowd clamors for one ➔



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*Not actually live.




more hit at the end of each venue's performance) and pro-gear sponsorships that pump cash into your tour-bus treasury—features that add rock 'n' roll realism to the game but little else. It would be killer, say, if the gear sponsorships actually tweaked your sound. But with a song list this good—even though it's missing the Metallica, Led Zeppelin, and Iron

Maiden power-chord trifecta—who cares if the whole game isn't a giant leap from its predecessor?

+ GARNETT: How much you like the new songs will ultimately be a matter of taste, but that same variety Michael digs kills some of the rock-god buzz. Tunes like "Tattooed Love Boys" and "Rock This Town" might be karaoke

fodder, but they sure aren't *Hero* worthy. I'm not ready for *Guitar B-Sides* yet, either. If you're giving me STP and Nirvana, I want the heroic hits.

And whatever reason it was that kept heroes like AC/DC, Zeppelin, and Satriani out doesn't qualify the likes of The Sword, The Living End, and Lamb of God as adequate replacements—especially not when the original featured SRV, Ozzy, and Hendrix. Megadeth was the only group worthy of an encore...really? I actually had to force myself to finish some songs this time out, which that I certainly won't ever go back to again.

Co-op mode alone makes this an award-winner (the game still rocks, despite my complaints about the playlist), but, as many an artist learns, it's hard not to suffer a little letdown after an epic debut. 

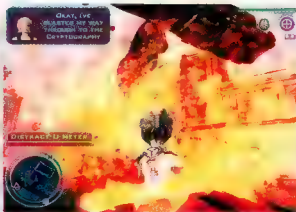


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PS2/XB

DESTROY ALL HUMANS! 2

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Pandemic
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

No big-head code needed here

THE VERDICT'S
(OUT OF 10)

G. FORD
7.5
GOOD

SHOE
7.5
GOOD

GARNETT
6.0
AVERAGE

The Good: Fixes a lot of the first game's problems

The Bad: That "more of the same" feeling

Co-op Play: Amazing, not world-shattering

➔ **G. FORD:** The original *Destroy All Humans!* alien-in-an-open-world concept made for a decent invasion, but it had its share of flaws that stuck out with all the subtlety of a chestburster at Sunday dinner. With *DAH2*, developer Pandemic corrects a number of these gaffes, though it can't quite shake that too-familiar sequel feeling (no thanks to minimal changes in weapons and mind powers).

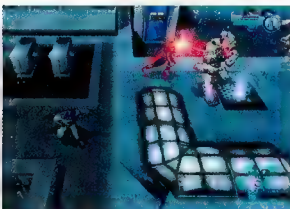
Simple fixes such as skippable saucer-landing/liftoff sequences and the axing of needless restrictions (e.g., collecting DNA to open missions) up the off-mission enjoyment. Also, a more engaging worldwide (and off-world) adventure replaces *DAH*'s increasingly boring missions and staid side quests, and it's matched

with an evolved main character. Who thought that crass E.T. Crypto could ever show some heart? *DAH2* still suffers from its share of frustrating escort missions, cross-map fetch quests, and ugly graphical pop-up, but Pandemic's strides make second contact more pleasing than the first.

➔ **SHOE:** Funny, because the relatively minor "skippable saucer sequences" was one of the "big" improvements that came to my mind, too. That means I'm also in the "more of the same" camp. But this didn't bug me too much because the game's signature humor kept me blasting, probing, and destroying. It's not ha-ha-out-loud stuff, but after chatting up and brainwashing hippies and beatniks in

lighthearted parodies of San Francisco and London, I knew I had to see more. Yeah, the gameplay's a bit flat, but personality goes a long ways here....

➔ **GARNETT:** These guys are too soft: What feels "too familiar" about *DAH2* is how it misses the mark. All the clever one-liners and satire (and is it really clever if the developers have to beat us over the head with it?) can't make up for the fact that it still doesn't capture the *Mars Attacks!* vibe it promises. The alien-flavored take on *GTA* might have been salvageable if it weren't so damn repetitive. Body-snatching and playing with Crypto's toys are fun at first, but you can disintegrate "monkeys" only so many times before it becomes a bore.



PS2/XB

JUSTICE LEAGUE HEROES

■ Publisher: Warner Bros. IE ■ Developer: Snowblind
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

A league they don't own

THE VERDICT'S
(OUT OF 10)

MICHAEL
6.5
AVERAGE

ROBERT C
6.5
AVERAGE

SHARKEY
5.5
AVERAGE

The Good: Customizable experience system

The Bad: No online co-op, repetitive combat

Could Have Used: Batman villains

➔ **MICHAEL:** It doesn't take a brainiac to realize the appeal of a Justice League game—hell, all you need to do is put Superman and Batman together, and bam: watch the fanboys freak. But while *Justice League Heroes* manages to include all the key members of DC's supergroup (including a few weird ones you've probably never heard of, like Zatanna), the game still needs saving.

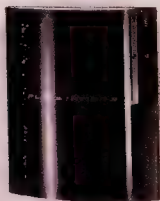
Slugging it out against an endless battalion of bad guys is fun for a bit... until you realize that each character essentially shares the same basic attacks. Luckily, the inventive experience system puts the main focus on the one thing that actually makes the game fun: the superpowers. But with-out the spandex and special moves,

JLH would be no different from any game involving brawny guys and hot chicks bringing about justice via their fists. As is, it's a heroic first effort for DC's dynamic franchise.

➔ **ROBERT C:** I've been playing *Gauntlet* with about 500 different names for about 500 years now. And I'm OK with that. At least this game is better than the last *Gauntlet*. I like the way you can combine power-up "boosts" to augment the superpowers you want the way you want. I just wish it made more sense—why does adding a "range" boost lower some powers' energy cost and not increase their, you know, range? Still, I actually enjoyed most of this game—though I could have done without that stupid

villain The Key and his interdimensional mushroom dorks.

➔ **SHARKEY:** We can't pretend that *Justice League* is anything but a mindless beat-em-up. Sure, you have a whole mess of heroes with upgradeable stats and whatnot, but don't worry about having to think. The characters are all but identical outside of a couple of unique powers and Superman hitting harder. Give them some extra health if you need it, and don't make the mistake of thinking that those slottable boosts are that important (regardless of how fun these other reviewers think they are to mess with). Then hit stuff until the game is over or you get bored and do something else. Probably the latter.



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PS2/XB

MORTAL KOMBAT: ARMAGEDDON

■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: Midway
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Mature

Kombat devolved

➔ **SHANE:** Playing to its base, *Armageddon* aims to please the dedicated *MK* fan community by stuffing 60-plus kombatants into another *Mortal Kombat Trilogy*-esque "dream match" fighter. Sure, some hardcore *MK* nuts (see: Brooks, a confirmed Scorpion cosplayer) will get a kick out of seeing a fantasy match-up between *MK3*'s boss Motaro and *MK: Deadly Alliance*'s drunkard Bal' Rai Cho, but hideously outdated visuals, a lame new "Kreate a Fatality" system, and oversimplified dial-a-combo gameplay quickly crash the party. And what's the use of having a huge lineup of characters when so many of them feel interchangeable? The cavalcade of palette-swapped ninjas (Smoke, Reptile, et al) has never seemed so laughable.

As with the previous *MK* installment, Midway again augments the core fighting action with bonus modes. Unfortunately, they suck. Konquest mode, a rudimentary action-RPG, and Motor Kombat, a wildly unfun kart racer, both look and feel like PS1 budget titles.

➔ **ROBERT A:** How to make *MK* cool again (if it ever really was): 1) Bring back digitized 2D characters. The 3D versions are ass-faced and generic anyway, and the cheesy "photo-realistic" technique is hilarious. Get yourself some out-of-work stuntmen from *Walker, Texas Ranger* and dress them up in spandex. Then, you might as well go ahead and...2) Make *MK* (explicitly) a joke. The *MK* universe is so ripe for satire! Bad Halloween costumes, ninja robots—it's all ridiculous. *MK*'s ultraviolence is now so tame, the fatalities so unshocking, that *Armageddon* gets an "E for Everyone's laughing."

➔ **BROOKS:** Man, what's with all the hate? *Armageddon* provides cheap thrills thanks to a seemingly endless character roster, a new aerial combo system, and plenty of gruesome deathtraps. And it's not just a retreat of past *MK* games—pummeling and dismembering near-death opponents with custom finishers feels refreshingly sadistic (although it's sadly at the expense of the character-specific fatalities). I do agree with Shane that the Konquest mode needs work—cheap enemy A.I. and no jumping (huh?) sting.

THE VERDICTS

(OUT OF 10)

SHANE
5.0
 AVERAGE

ROBERT A
5.0
 AVERAGE

BROOKS
7.0
 GOOD

The Good: Huge roster of playable characters
The Bad: Poor graphics, lame fatalities
Better: *Soul Calibur III*, *Tekken 5*



PlayStation 2

NFL STREET 3

■ Publisher: EA Sports Big ■ Developer: EA Tiburon
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Only pansies play on grass

➔ **TODD:** For the record, I'm bummed that *NFL Street 3* isn't next gen. Yeah, I know millions of PS2s are floating around, so obviously it's a smart business move. But after a two-year wait, I'm not worried about EA's financials as much as the logical continuation of the franchise. Yet what's done is done, and what's been done to improve *Street* is impressive.

My favorite part of *Street 3*—besides the fantastic art direction—is the sensible balancing of the Gamebreakers. In past installments, facing these big plays was code for "set your controller down and amput far around the room," because you couldn't do anything. But now nothing's guaranteed, plus these moves are more diverse, so you can make or break one tackle, try for an interception, or aim to throw a home-run pass. I just wish the credit system wasn't so idiotic. If I buy cleats, they should make my players faster, and gloves should make my players better receivers.

➔ **BRYAN:** Todd couldn't be more wrong about *Street 3*'s aesthetics—rather than each NFLer having a unique getup like in past editions (such as torn jerseys, knee-high socks, and so on), everyone just sports his team-specific, plain-Jane attire. And don't even get me started on the fictional squads; these gridiron gangs, with their absurdly striped tops, look more like old-school prisoners than pigskin players. Also, Todd's only half-right on the Gamebreaker front. While you'll now find more variety in supermoves, some are still wickedly unbalanced (especially the interception Gamebreaker).

➔ **PATRICK M:** It's hard to imagine rich athletes playing pickup football in some dilapidated field. But screw your imagination—*Street 3* delivers exhilarating action with more interactive environments, and weather now affects gameplay. Also, I like the new emphasis on jumping, which lets players launch themselves airborne from anywhere and off anything on the field. And sorry, Bryan, but Todd's completely correct about the Gamebreakers; stiff arms, lock on tackles, and other moves totally make this game.

THE VERDICTS

(OUT OF 10)

TODD
7.0
 GOOD

BRYAN
6.0
 AVERAGE

PATRICK M
7.0
 GOOD

The Good: Best Gamebreakers yet, great art direction
The Bad: Awful soundtrack, why not on next gen?
Take on the road: The PSP version



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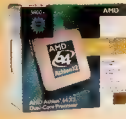


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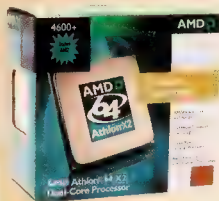


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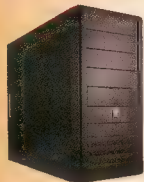


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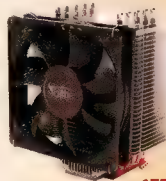
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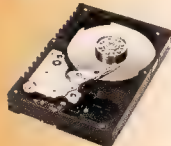
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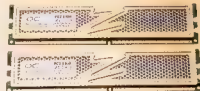
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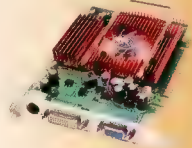
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PlayStation 2



TALES OF THE ABYSS

■ Publisher: Namco Bandai ■ Developer: Namco Tales Studio
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen

Tales, you win

➔ **SHANE:** The *Tales* franchise seems to hail from an alternate reality where *Final Fantasy VII* never happened. While other Japanese role-playing series have become grittier, darker, and more realistic, Namco's prolific franchise bravely soldiers on with candy-colored graphics, perky characters, and plenty of old-school allure. Sure, it's familiar fare, but unlike the disappointing *Tales of Legendia* (released earlier this year), *Abyss* successfully evolves the formula.

Combat has long been the *Tales* series' strong suit, and *Abyss* upgrades *Tales of Symphonia's* (GC) action-packed battle engine with full 3D movement, customizable elemental combos, and deeper A.I. options for your party. RPG encounters rarely

feel this visceral, speedy, and flat-out fun—leveling up never feels like a chore here. And although it still looks dated (bland textures and bouts of slowdown abound), *Abyss* gets by on the charm of its edgy anime aesthetic. Unfortunately, the game's low-budget localization hinders the storytelling—oodles of optional "skits" that were fully voiced in Japan now play out as slow, silent text.

➔ **JON:** Fruity characters, weirdo nomenclature, and wildly complex cooking minigame aside, I love this game's pacing. You're in and out of combat in a flash, and the story chugs along at a comfy pace. Having the ability to skip encounters and those lame skits Shane mentioned is a

lifesaver. *Abyss* defaults to basic role-playing conventions too often to be unique, but it's hard to hate this well-rounded, classic RPG.

➔ **A. FITCH:** "Bouts of slowdown" is your biggest complaint, Shane? How about *over 15 seconds of loading time on the world map!* Also, I agree that the localization hurts the story—but my problem's with the localization itself, not the chintzy budget. Uneven writing and questionable voice casting really took me out of the game at times—that's a shame, since *Abyss* otherwise tells a moving, engrossing tale. But it's hard to take it seriously when the highest-ranking member of a holy order sounds more like a Pokémon than a religious master.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHANE
8.0
GOOD

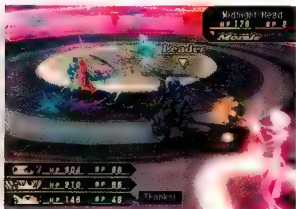
JON
7.0
GOOD

A. FITCH
7.0
GOOD

The Good: Fun combat, deep customization

The Bad: Load times, localization

Cool Minigame: An unlockable remake of arcade classic Dragon Buster



PlayStation 2

.hack//G.U. VOL. 1//REBIRTH

■ Publisher: Namco Bandai ■ Developer: CyberConnect2
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

Reborn, but not reworked

➔ **RAY:** *.hack//G.U.* is only one "volume" shorter than the original *.hack* RPGs (which got real boring, real fast over their four-game run), but a jump here in quality seems poised to ease the déjà vu this time around. *Rebirth's* setting is the sequel to *.hack's* fictional online RPG *The World*, which has seen a sharp increase in player-killers. The game has tons of story content, from fictional message boards to cutscenes that tend to drag on (but are skippable). And true to form, you're left with more questions than answers. In play, *Rebirth* moves much faster than a plodding real-life massively multiplayer online RPG thanks to the battle system's focus on quick and devastating combo attacks. *Rebirth* is certainly more fun than its predecessors—

whether that will last for the next two games remains to be seen.

➔ **SHANE:** The original *.hack* series collapsed under the weight of its own filmsy multigame concept—stretching roughly two games' worth of content across four discs yielded some seriously diminishing returns (both critically and commercially). Sadly, the new three-game *G.U.* series isn't off to a terribly promising start (sorry, Ray). Despite improved visuals, tweaked combat, and a darkly intriguing narrative, *Rebirth* quickly falls prey to the previous series' bad habits. After a strong start, the action devolves to tedium as you spelunk boring, repetitive dungeons fighting the same enemies over and over. Basically, you

can expect 10 solid, engaging hours and 15 more of dull padding. Maybe they're holding all the good stuff back for the final two chapters?

➔ **PATRICK J:** *Rebirth* teases with a flashier combat system and more dungeons, but I agree with Shane: Flash doesn't cover the lack of depth. Specifically, I'd love to see some more dungeon types. The "I can't quit you" moments come, instead, from the postmodern surrealism of playing someone who's playing someone and the spot-on renditions and caricatures of MMO culture—be a sociopathic jerk in *The World*, but be as sweet as you want "offline." Hopefully, the next game is easier to love, because I certainly see some passion here.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

RAY
7.0
GOOD

SHANE
5.5
AVERAGE

PATRICK J
7.0
GOOD

The Good: A prettier, faster, somewhat meatier sequel

The Bad: Too much loss to catch up on if you want the full experience

Expect: Multiple TV anime series



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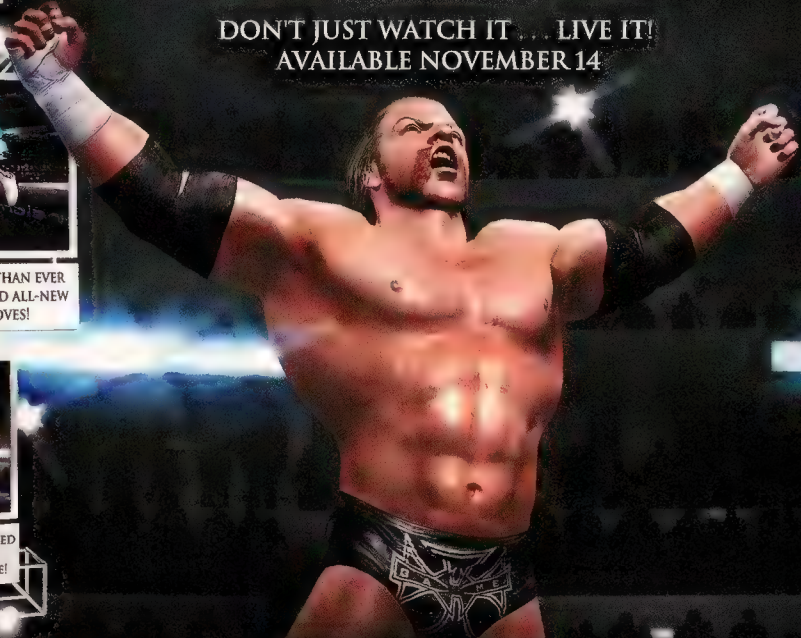
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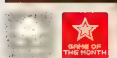
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PlayStation 2

BULLY

■ Publisher: Rockstar ■ Developer: Rockstar Vancouver ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

ROBERT A.
10
EXCELLENT

G. FORD
8.5
GOOD

ANDREW
8.0
GOOD

The Good: Makes "open-world" gaming feel new again

The Bad: Makes San Andreas look butt-ugly

Good Fun: Dodgeball matches

Jerk-of-all-trades

➔ **ROBERT A.:** Remember how exhilarating it was, cruising the streets of *Grand Theft Auto III* for the first time? It's hard to get back that sense of mind-blowing newness, especially now that the game's once-revolutionary, go-anywhere/do-anything design has calcified into just another genre. *Bully* (from the makers of *GTA*) breaks the old mold and recaptures that fleeting feeling in the process.

Turning away from *GTA*'s ever-growing urban sprawl, *Bully* focuses on a modest-sized New England town, blue-collar shacks by the river, mansions on the hill, quaint downtown shops and cobblestone streets, all radiating from a picture-perfect private school called Bullworth.

Images deceive, of course, so it's

no surprise that our protagonist, freckled, foul-mouthed Jimmy Hopkins, finds his new school full of self-centered, a**hole kids and hypocrite, blow-hard teachers. Through a series of missions that (gameplaywise) draw from practically every genre in gaming history, you'll get to know these characters (and their flaws) intimately.

It's amazing how well *Bully* nails a huge assortment of activities. Everything, from midway games to English class, is fun. Hell, just goofing around town—skateboarding, egg-ing cars, and tearing around corners in your go-kart—feels great. All the while, *Bully* has a smirking attitude that seems to say: "While you're off in fantasyland playing with dragons and space aliens, we're making adventure

games about the real world. And we're f***ing good at it."

➔ **G. FORD:** Robert nailed the expected *GTA* connection here, and with good reason. That blip-filled rotating world map acts as Rockstar's bad-boy Bat-signal, giving you the A-OK to joyfully jack two-wheelers with a tap of Triangle as you craft your path through Jimmy's wonder year.

But I was also pleased to see the influence of Rockstar's often overlooked licensed brawler, *The Warriors*. *Bully*'s fighting is decent, sure (the targeting, not so much), but it's the variable play styles Robert mentioned—a *Warriors* specialty—that make short-burst distractions, such as the analog-controlled tagging and lock-picking,



Bullworth Midterm Report

Jimmy Hopkins is a...



...Dick

The Terror of Bullworth

That terrible, redheaded miscreant does nothing but terrorize his fellow classmates, giving wedgies to the bespectacled, taping "kick me" signs to the backs of the hapless, and stuffing students into lockers and trash cans.

No-Good Vandal

No window is safe from Jimmy's slingshot. His dirty slogans can be found spray painted across town. Rare plants, valuable artwork, public property—nothing is sacred to that little monster.

...Saint

Good Samaritan

Jimmy loves to help his fellow students and neighbors with an assortment of tasks. Why, just the other day he helped a local chef catch crabs. The eating kind.

The Gift That Keeps on Giving

As an unapologetic romantic, Jimmy loves to flatter the girls of Bullworth with chocolates and flowers. Not that he minds the sloppy make-over sessions he gets in return.



seem so fun. This hodgepodge makes it easier to forgive the dunces, too, including the finicky button-matching shop class and the word jumble that misses legitimate words. Buh?

What these other guys fail to mention is the music, an important character in its own right. Its lively rises and brooding clips do their part to add to *Bully's* fairy-tale feeling. A good show

on the whole—Rockstar just needs to stop with the half-assed stealth bits.

➔ **ANDREW P:** While I definitely share Robert's enthusiasm for *Bully's* comparatively quaint setting, I was hoping that it would be even *more* focused on the inner social workings of school life: playing cliques against each other, fighting against teachers and

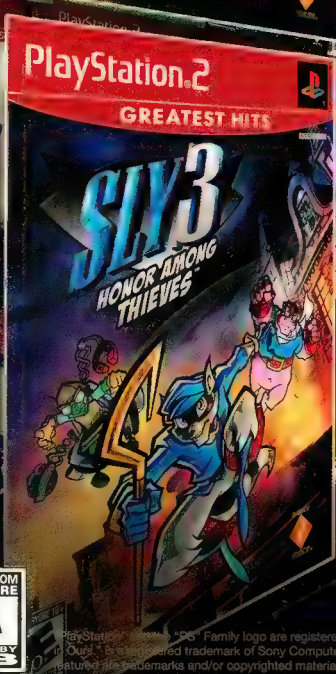
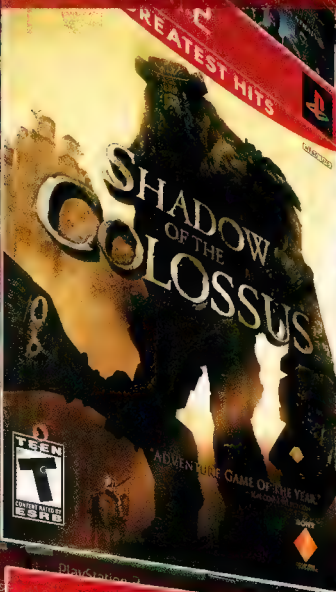
adults that "just don't understand," and developing deeper relationships with fellow students that went beyond simple phys-ed throwdowns and health-boosting kisses from one of four girl character models. Once the town opens up, it suddenly feels like, "Oh, I've done this before."

Yet, Rockstar still knows how to tell a compelling (and well-written) story that's nested comfortably in the open-endedness of it all. And just like with *GTA: San Andreas'* take on California, it's managed to nail the atmosphere of the setting. This is where the scholastic mayhem really shines through and gives the game its own voice. I wouldn't exactly say the company has "broken the mold"—mission structure, control oddities, and general aesthetic are trademark Rockstar—but it's filled it with new, tasty ingredients. 🍌



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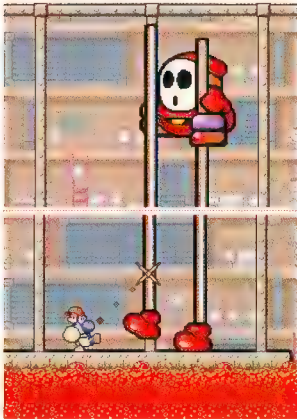
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DS

YOSHI'S ISLAND DS

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Artoon
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Achtung, baby

➔ **JEREMY:** I had high hopes for *Yoshi's Island DS* because (and this is an objective scientific fact) the Super Nintendo original was one of the best platformers—nay, *games*—ever made. Alas, this sequel doesn't quite pass muster. Developer Artoon captured the original's look and feel but scimped on the creativity and polish.

Besides the baby-swapping mechanic (each Yoshi-riding tot has his or her own abilities), this sequel rarely does *anything* that wasn't in the original. Worse, some new elements (rare as they are) nearly break the game, particularly the use of the dual screens. It's cool that the gameplay takes place across both screens, but the physical gap between them is matched by 100 pixels or so of dead space smack in the center of the play area. The resulting "hidden" hazards turn vertical and autoscrolling sections into nightmarish chores.

Yoshi's Island deserves an amazing sequel, but you'll only be amazed by how stagnant and sloppy this game feels.

➔ **SHANE:** Whaa, whaa, whaa...you guys whine as much as Baby Mario and

Co. Not only does *Yoshi's Island DS* successfully mimic the revered Super NES original, but it also manages to evolve the formula with its doubly tall stages, baby-switching mechanic, and creative boss encounters. Yeah, the level design becomes ridiculously brutal by the endgame (and that mysterious dead zone between screens causes plenty of headaches), but the game's tight control means that every time you die, it's your own damn fault.

➔ **G. FORD:** Well, yes, Shane. I suppose it's technically my fault that I didn't manage to land on the tiny, icy platform guarded not only by a feisty penguin, but a ginormous, bulbous bouncing creature who conveniently tumbled my way at just the right moment, as well. But you can't tell me you yelled that leap on your first try? Or 15th?

Sadistic late-level design aside (seriously, were the young'uns even considered here?), that baby-swapping action developed into a headache. Often, I realized I had to use the vine-swinging Baby DK instead of high-jumping Baby Peach only after I had passed a switching station a while back.

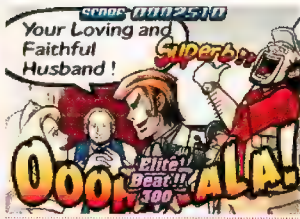
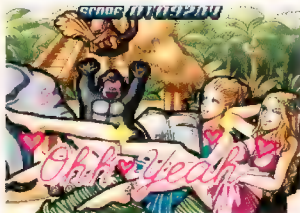
It's an adequate platformer (trust Jeremy's voice of reason, not Shane), yes—with solid controls and great first-half pacing—but I'd never choose this over the sublime original.



The Good: The same charming graphics and gameplay

The Bad: The gap between the screens? WTF?

Shut Up: Five babies, five uniquely annoying screams



DS

ELITE BEAT AGENTS

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: INIS
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

The leettest beat of them all

➔ **JEREMY:** Male cheerleaders are usually the guys who get stuffed into lockers when the jocks run out of chess-club victims. But not the Elite Beat Agents, a sort of morale militia that saves the day for lost puppies, frazzled movie directors, and even Leonardo da Vinci. They perform encouraging ninjutsu to the accompaniment of an impressive variety of tunes (from Avril Lavigne's faux punk to Chicago's schmaltzy pop). The player's job is simply to tap, stroke, and spin in time to the beat. It may *sound* simple, but even the easiest mode is tough. EBA has exactly two shortcomings: 1) squeezing 20-ish songs onto a little DS card does terrible things to the audio quality, and 2) the visual cues can be hard to follow when the action heats up, especially when they appear beneath your stylus hand. Minor complaints, though—this is the most creative and entertaining music game this side of *Guitar Hero*.

➔ **JENNIFER:** I'm not entirely sure I'd rank it up

there with *Guitar Hero*, but EBA definitely got me groovin'. I sorta expected it to be cake, a light and fluffy rhythm-action dessert—y'know, simple, perhaps a bit...forgettable? Man, was I wrong. Gameplay is basic but challenging, even on beginner songs and especially on tunes you're not familiar with (a practice mode would've been nice). Instead of getting bored or frustrated, however, I found myself wanting to learn routines to perfection, if only to unlock more songs and brilliantly silly cut-scenes.

➔ **MILKY:** Most of you never knew Nintendo's Japan-only rhythm-based game *Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan*. And that's OK, because *Elite Beat Agents*—while slightly less exotic (but much more pronounceable)—is the better of the two games developed by INIS (also responsible for cult fave *Gitaroo Man*). Perhaps the most insane rhythm and music game ever conceived, EBA features hysterical scenarios with multiple solutions (based on your rhythmic skill) that are worth playing over and over again. The cool 3D world map—navigated via the stylus—is another treat, but any game that features "YMCA" and Earth Wind & Fire's "September" is OK in my book.

THE VERDICTS
(out of 10)

JEREMY
9.0
 EXCELLENT

JENNIFER
8.5
 GOOD

MILKY
9.0
 EXCELLENT

The Good: Hilarious, challenging, addictive
The Bad: Not exactly CD-quality audio
Want More?: The import version has totally different tunes and events

Read the Splinter Cell books

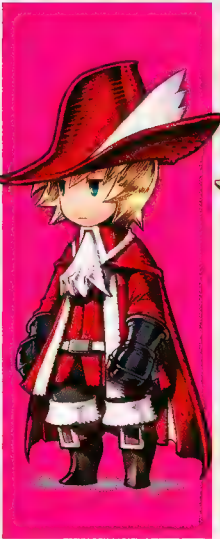


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DS

FINAL FANTASY III

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



The Good: Classic gameplay, visual splendor.

The Bad: We like our dungeons with save points, thanks.

The Missing Link: Between *FFI* and *FFIV*

The long-lost Final Fantasy arrives, face-lift in tow

➔ **JEREMY:** *Final Fantasy III*'s DS remake is a welcome arrival; the original NES game has never been released in the United States until now. Don't be fooled by the crisp 3D visuals, though—*Final Fantasy III* is a game that wears its old-school heritage on its puffy medieval sleeve. For those who like their RPGs challenging, *FFIII*'s unrelenting difficulty is a nice change of pace from contemporary cakewalks (whassup, *FFX*). Power-leveling rules *über alles* here: It's just you, four big-headed midgets, and two dozen character classes against a world of monsters. But the source material's age shows through at times. The story is little more than thin justification for tackling the next dungeon, and the simplistic job system feels

lacking coming so soon after *FFXIII* and *FFV Advance*. Even so, it's a must-have for RPG nuts of all stripes.

➔ **SHANE:** As someone who's been jonesing to play *FFIII* in my native tongue for the past 16 years, I'm pleasantly satisfied by this DS remake. Charming visuals, catchy tunes, touch-panel control, and a fleshed-out story line make it palatable to modern gamers, but the underlying game remains defiantly true to its 8-bit roots. That means you're in for a helluva fight—old-school RPGs are notoriously tough, so expect to do some grinding to avoid the "game over" screen. But *FFIII* proves that stopping to level up shouldn't be viewed as role-playing anathema: The game's addictive job

system makes plowing through the fun battles worthwhile.

➔ **BRYAN:** OK, I can appreciate *FFIII*'s pretty, bobblehead-esque graphical makeover and expansive job system (ignore what Jeremy says—you'll find plenty of depth in the character classes), but this RPG still falls just short of being an award-winning remake. A fleshed-out story line, Shane? C'mon—even with all the changes, the narrative is a snoozer. And while I don't mind a game being hardcore, *FFIII*'s dungeons are screaming for save points. Some might call me soft, but I bet even you folks will soon grow tired of searching out warp stones and praying you don't run into an enemy when you're close to flatlining. **B+**

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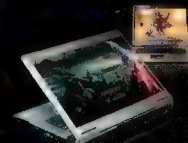
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PSP

KILLZONE: LIBERATION

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Guerrilla
 ■ Players: 1-6 ■ ESRB: Teen

Diorama of death

➔ **ROBERT A:** When a game isn't up to snuff, it's usually because of a failure of fundamentals—crap controls, sloppy technical issues, or just plain bad ideas. *Killzone: Liberation* has none of these problems, but it still manages to blow it.

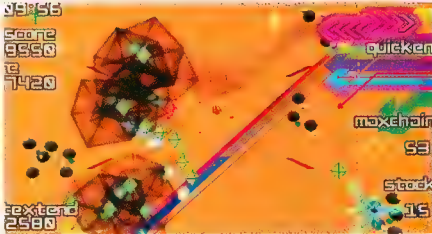
Rather than shoveling the original PS2 version of *Killzone* (a first-person shooter once saddled with the untenable title of *Halo* killer) onto the PSP and calling it a day, the developers of *Liberation* had the balls to try something different. They kept the action, the atmosphere, and the fascist World War II imagery, but they pulled the camera back to a better-for-PSP bird's-eye view of the battlefield. Running from cover to cover, you'll need to master the art of popping out at just the right time to blow away the enemy. It's a great foundation for a game. Unfortunately, *Liberation* seems unsure what to do with it, falling into a repeating loop of key hunts, escort missions, and increasingly impossible battles. Bummer.

➔ **JAMES L:** The big problem with the bird's-eye view that Robert adores is that it's tough to judge at what height enemy projectiles are coming at you. Unfortunately, this isn't the only way *Liberation* is lacking when it comes to depth. The multiplayer deathmatch is often ridiculous because most battles devolve into simple duck-and-shoot affairs like some lame paintball match. It doesn't help that the targeting system is a bit off and the autoaim is fidgety, which makes it hard to strafe and fire in the correct direction at times. At least you can drive tanks in the almost-fun co-op multiplayer.

➔ **SHARKEY:** "Almost-fun," James? Really? Maybe I'm a cheap date, but *Liberation* gets a couple extra points from me *because* of the co-op multiplayer. It's not just one or two missions you can play through with a friend, either, but the whole single-player campaign. Additional props to the developers for taking the game in a different direction instead of dumping the PS2 game on the PSP. It's just a shame that aiming with that analog nub can be so damn twitchy. Some kind of lock on would have been nice.



The Good: Surprising depth from an odd perspective
The Bad: Surprising deaths from the screen's edge
Ridiculous: Trying to dodge heat-seeking missiles



PSP

EVERY EXTEND EXTRA

■ Publisher: Buena Vista ■ Developer: Q Entertainment
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Psychedelic suicide shooter

➔ **ROBERT A:** Explaining *Every Extend Extra* can make you sound like a rambling acid casualty, but I'll give it a go: You've got this... thing, an abstract shape. It could be a spaceship. It could be a bomb. It could be the polygonal representation of a human soul. Who knows? Piloting this object, you dodge various other surreal and colorful oddities—floating cubes, pink skulls, and alien jelly-beans—in a manner not unlike the arcade shooters of yesteryear. But instead of shooting the "bad guys," you detonate yourself, hoping to take out clusters of enemies in long, winding chain reactions, before you repeat the process again...and again....

It sounds simple, if strange, but from these game rules come a surprising amount of satisfying depth. You won't love *Every Extend Extra* at first sight. I played it for hours before I "got it." Now that I have it, I don't want to let it go.

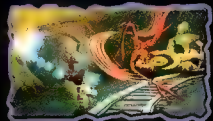
➔ **MICHAEL:** Man, I could have used Robert's tips when I first started this game, because the in-game tutorial did nothing to help me comprehend the painfully confusing *Every Extend Extra*. Sure, it seems basic enough, but once I got started, I felt as though my brain was put in a blender. Unlike easy-to-play puzzlers like *Lumines* or *Meteos*, *Every Extend Extra* strips away the simplicity for a randomized mix of music and frustration. My idea of fun does not involve a tedious repetition of something that makes no sense. Meh, Robert definitely "got it," and you know what...he can damn well keep it.

➔ **JEREMY:** *Every Extend Extra* is Tetsuya Mizuguchi's remake of a Flash-based rip-off of his own masterpiece, *Rez*. That's a pretty unusual lineage, but even more surprising is the fact that the man who created the elegant *Lumines* is also responsible for this complete mess of a game. Sparky graphics are nice, sure, but I like being able to see what the hell is happening even more. Luckily, the original, sparkle-free version of the game is included. Turns out it's fun when you can actually tell what's going on.

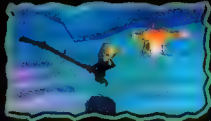


The Good: Acid trip without the brain damage
The Bad: Oh my God, my face just disappeared!
Afterthought?: The boring versus multiplayer mode

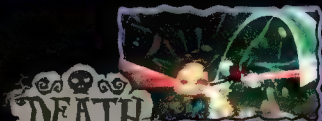
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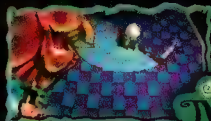
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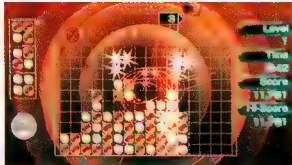
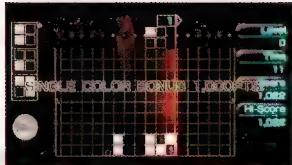
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PSP

LUMINES II

■ Publisher: Buena Vista Games ■ Developer: Q Entertainment ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

THE VERDICTS

(OUT OF 10)

JENNIFER
7.5
GOOD

RYAN
6.0
AVERAGE

KAREN
9.0
EXCELLENT

The Good: Some great new skins and music

The Bad: Not enough new stuff for a full-blown sequel
Oh Please: "Hollaback Girl"

Beat blocks redux

➔ **JENNIFER:** If you're seeking a revolutionary revamp from this block-rocking sequel, keep on dreaming—the core puzzling gameplay hasn't changed one bit in *Lumines II*. The original *Lumines* was revolutionary enough, though, so it's nice to simply have new skins and songs to savor. The beefed-up musical selection gives the game a more varied feel—choice cuts from big-ticket artists like Beck and The Black Eyed Peas mingle nicely with eclectic techno grooves.

And as with the first game, the different modes didn't do much for me—especially the unchanged multiplayer, which really needs work! (Would true online play be too much to ask for?) Still, the core single-player experience is as addictive and elegant as ever.

But I'm not down with watching videos while you play...it just clutters up the screen!

➔ **RYAN:** Like countless *Tetris* remakes before it, *Lumines II* sticks to what it does best. The same block-dropping, color-matching gameplay returns here, but a smattering of flashy new skins and chart-topping tunes provide more attractive trappings. Scenery changes notwithstanding, compelling updates remain minimal. The old puzzle mode returns with a few new shapes for you to create, while mission mode presents simplistic challenges of the "clear everything in three moves" variety. Finally, amateur composers can craft their own beats...though the idea's a fair

sight better than the implementation. *Lumines* nuts yearning for fresh music should find fun here. Everyone else: Just stick to the original.

➔ **KAREN:** Ryan's mantra about originality is apropos, but the game also offers lots of effective, subtle tweaks—like a vastly improved interface—that one should expect from a sequel. Touchy hardcore gamers may cry "sellout!" at the poppy skins, but the range of Western songs is wide (heck yeah, Chemical Brothers!), and the music videos double as rewards. *Lumines II* effectively smooths over the original game's pesky cracks (most notably, its slow-to-ramp-up difficulty curve), ensuring a smooth journey to puzzle-gaming Zen. 🎮

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ACE COMBAT X: SKIES OF DECEPTION

■ Publisher: Namco Bandai ■ Developer: Namco Bandai
■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen



Grounded story, airborne glory

➔ **JAMES L:** The arcade-flight-simulation *Ace Combat* series takes off for the PSP, and Namco loaded all the necessary elements to make you feel like you're actually in the cockpit as a pilot for the fictional Federal Republic of Aurelia. It's just too bad that being said pilot is so boring.

Once you take off and learn to tune out the continuous banter among the pilots (à la *Top Gun*...and equally as lame), the intense dogfights will have you giddy—though you won't be on cloud nine for long. Few enemies occupy the skies, and the ones on land and sea will have you swooping back and forth repeatedly, as it's frustratingly difficult to target them until you're at spitting distance. My thumb got so sore from the continu-

ous U-turns that soon I was looking for relief in the form of the eject button on my PSP.

➔ **MILKMAN:** The *Ace Combat* series has always been in the tough spot of being a reliable series that provides solid air combat while offering precious little exposition. With each episode, *Ace* has pumped more and more story into the games—and you know what? It makes little difference. It's hard to get it up for fictional nations going after other fictional (but presumably bad) nations. That doesn't detract from the solid single-player campaign, which, despite some cringe-worthy voice acting in debriefings, still manages to convey a thrilling sense of being in the cockpit during

aerial sorties. Make sure you have enough friends in wireless multiplayer, though, or expect long episodes of high-speed meandering in the skies.

➔ **DEMIAN:** Milky's right about the tedious/ridiculous story, but laughable cut-scenes are a hallmark of the *Combat* series at this point. I actively disliked *Ace Combat Zero: The Belkan War* on the PS2, but this game is different; it's actually competent and fun, despite the occasional difficulty spike.

Shame that the multiplayer is local Wi-Fi only—it's packed with modes (and the option to add A.I. bots), and you can also unlock additional airplane parts in it. This is one of the few non-puzzle or strategy PSP games that I'll keep coming back to.



The Good: Pimpable upgrades, fun air-to-air sorties

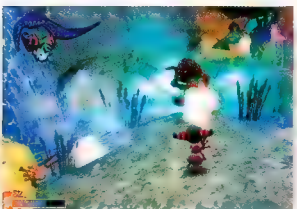
The Bad: Could use more combat

Favorite Top Gun Maneuver: Buzzing the control tower

PSP

DEATH, JR. II: ROOT OF EVIL

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Backbone
■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen



We've got a heartbeat

➔ **DEMIAN:** I'm tempted to brand *Death, Jr. II* as a kids' platformer, meant in the mostly insulting sense. It's hard to make time for a game that includes crate (or garden gnome, or whatever) smashing as a central gameplay mechanic—who wants to smash everything, lest you miss out on weapon upgrade points? I don't.

But aspects of *DJ2* are definitely (and disturbingly) adult, such as the characters—which include a dead boy and a wiseacre baby with stumps for limbs in a jar of formaldehyde. And some of the platforming bits later on get so technical that only adult-caliber swears could possibly get a person through them.... The controls just aren't fine-tuned enough to meet some of *DJ2*'s tougher demands.

It's not all complaints, though. *DJ2* is long, with environments ranging from twisted farmyards to some kind of demonic, moving-platform dimension that I damned to hell on multiple occasions, and it's got bizarre, diverse enemies. I enjoyed most of the combat and the general emo-quirky sensibility, but that's not enough to earn a spot on my must-play list.

➔ **ROBERT A:** First, the good. *DJ2*'s camera is infinitely superior to the original's (in that you can, you know, actually shoot stuff with accuracy). Also, I find it amusing when the game tries (too hard) to be funny but instead comes off creepy-kid demented. Demonic, man-eating waffle iron? Methinks someone watched too much

Ren & Stimpy. Still, I wish the developers got more ambitious. They've added no-frills co-op and a second character but stayed within the comfortable confines of mindless action.

➔ **JAMES L:** Yes, the zombie teddy bears are great, but I would've preferred more dynamic levels.... I didn't find them to be nearly as diverse as Demian did. This sequel thankfully acts more like a platformer by better balancing the fighting and platforming bits. Plus, more forgiving controls—so you're not doing a scythe-attack move when you're just trying to climb—and an improved camera keep your sanity in check. I'm not ready to call social services to take this kid away from my PSP just yet.



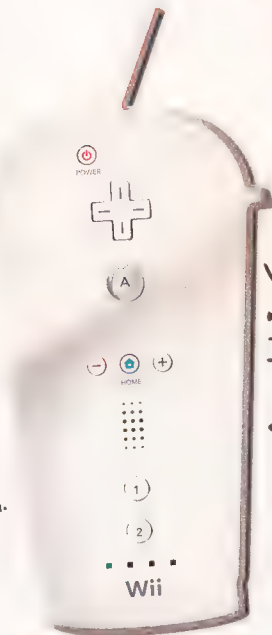
The Good: Weird levels, chickens with laser eyes

The Bad: You'll use the same techniques throughout

Toddler: Gets tough ...due to the controls

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Wii. KNOW YOU WANT ONE.



GAME OVER

➤ Press continue for launch duds, classic gaming dreams, and more



➤ SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

The 10 Worst Launch Titles

Welcome to the next generation...of crap!



When Seanbaby isn't training to knock the shit outta crap-movie-game director Uwe Boll, he's not listening to Phil Collins.

WHENEVER A NEW SYSTEM

LAUNCHES, most of us are so excited that we stop using the part of the eyeball that identifies terrible. Most nerds understand the brief obsession that follows the purchase of any gadget to get every possible thing for that gadget, even if they'd normally have no interest in it. It's why every single person alive bought five games when they got their very first cell phone, and you've never seen anyone playing a cell-phone game.

But I get as caught up in this launch buzz as anyone. On the day I got my Nintendo 64, I picked up the optional egg boiler, and I bought three Xbox 360s—one for playing, and two for putting into the Mad Catz Ultimate Xbox 360 Crusher. My point is, newness hype destroys our perspective. Still, with the power of hindsight, I've picked out the 10 worst launch titles of all time and offered quick-fix suggestions on how publishers and developers could've made them better.

10 Perfect Dark Zero (Xbox 360)

When the Xbox 360 launched, people were lined up outside stores for days. Then they got their \$600 bundle home and realized *Perfect Dark Zero* was unfinished, *King Kong* was boring, and every other title was a game they already had. I swear, two-thirds of us would've bought *Game-Shaped Plastic Non-Game* if someone put it in a 360 case. Still, *Perfect Dark Zero* managed to disappoint most everyone.

Here's what they should've done: Erased the disc and replaced it with a program that automatically makes the 360 boot up to *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved*.

9 Fighting Street (NEC Turbo CD)

Using the power of both Turbo CD and CD, this was a near-exact remake of the first *Street Fighter* cleverly disguised under the new name of

Fighting Street. Funny story: *Fighting Street* was their backup secret alias. Their first choice, *Street Fighter*, only with a *Moustache*, was thrown out due to confusion on how to spell the word moustache. And with that, I end the greatest-video-game review ever written.

Here's what they should've done: If, in 1989, anyone was upgrading his or her TurboGrafx-16 to prepare for the promising future of the console, they were far enough removed from reality that this game should've been packaged with an invisible Indian and a time-train ticket to the year 14 Pudding.

8 Donkey Kong Jr. Math (NES)

You got your third grade in my *Donkey Kong Jr.*! You got your *Donkey Kong Jr.* in my third grade! How did Nintendo bring the U.S. videogame industry back from the dead with this combination of a calculator



PAGE
170

Grudge:
Match:
Mr. Universe



PAGE
172

Retro:
Old-school
requests



PAGE
182

Hsu & Chan,
Combat:
Involved

and nothing? In *Donkey Kong Jr. Math*, you navigated your monkey through a complete lack of danger to add and subtract numbers. Numbers far too complicated to explain here. OK, I'll explain one: 14.

Here's what they should've done: Somewhere along the way, Nintendo should've asked any child, anywhere, how much math he or she wanted in their *Donkey Kong*.

7 Mortal Kombat Gold (Dreamcast)

In the *Mortal Kombat* and *American Ninja* tradition, this sequel was worse than the one before it. Which is amazing in this case, since the one before it was the same game. *Gold* is a remade, bafflingly worse version of *Mortal Kombat 4* for the special consumer who wanted to hate it all over again on their new Dreamcast.

Here's what they should've done: Since most of *MK*'s success is owed to publicity from outraged media watchdogs, the game would've done better if they added a character named White-Power Cancer Boy.

E Army Men Advance (Game Boy Advance)

I can't honestly remember if this was one of the *Army Men* games that was funny bad or boring bad. Since checking wouldn't do us any good, I'm happy to not do so.

Here's what they should've done: If people were still buying *Army Men* games after all the previous *Army Men* games, then the liquification of the entire consumer population was the only safe thing to do.

E Marky Mark: Make My Video (Sega CD)

The Sega CD brought the wonder of actual video footage to videogames. I think we all expected bad acting to be the first and only application of this technology, so you can imagine how surprised we were at *Make My Video*. Although I'm willing to bet that ushering in any new technology with Marky Mark would be shocking (unless it was a butt dildo), and getting over the insane fact that the

game exists, it's great for living out your video-editing fantasies. Along with literally five minutes of random, royalty-free video footage, both of Marky's hit songs were included: "ComeOn, ComeOn!" and "Grab Grab!" (The Junk-Grabbin' Song).

Here's what they should've done: Keep everything the same, but told gay people about it.

4 Altered Beast (Genesis)

If you weren't around in 1989, it's hard to explain how amazing games on the Genesis looked to an NES owner. We were so sure we were in the next generation of human achievement, we hardly noticed that *Altered Beast* was the duller second of your life spread over 35 minutes of total game. We must have figured our primitive brains hadn't learned how to process future fun yet.

Here's what they should've done: If I could think about *Altered Beast* for more than five seconds without falling asleep, I'm sure I'd come up with something brilliant.

E Cybermorph (Atari Jaguar)

When the Atari Jaguar launched, most of its marketing was based on its unbelievable 64 bits. That was double the bits of the original PlayStation, and one million the bits of a clock radio, the system *Cybermorph* was originally developed for. I don't really know what a bit is, so I can't tell you exactly how they were lying with this 64 number, only that they had to be. *Cybermorph* looked like a rejected Trapper Keeper design and, like all Jaguar games, was about flickery cardboard sculptures and their adventures in sucking.

Here's what they should've done: *Cybermorph* is a title that means

nothing, but means *everything*. Maybe it would've been more inviting with a descriptive subtitle like *Cybermorph: Galactoplanet* or *Cybermorph: Lazerouspace, the Meteorwubacca Chronicles*.

2 Street Fighter: The Movie (PS1)

Hell has a special place for the filmmaker who can combine Jean-Claude Van Damme and *Street Fighter* and make it suck. And there's a special place in that guy's toilet for the videogame developer who can take that and make it suck even more. Luckily, this vicious cycle of failure was broken by *The Book on Tape Novelization of Street Fighter: The Movie, The Game, As Read Entirely in Fart*.

Here's what they should've done: Before they shipped *Street Fighter: The Movie*, someone could've written "This has nothing to do with" at the top of each copy. It still would've sucked, but at least it would've had like an M. Night Shyamalan twist to it. Just like an M. Night Shyamalan-directed flick.

1 Night Trap (Sega CD)

In 1992, with the promise of live actors in our Sega games, no one was expecting *Golden Axe* starring Sidney Poitier and Peter O'Toole. I don't think anyone's expectations went as low as *Diff'rent Strokes*' Dana Plato in a "slumber party vs. creepy intruders" thriller, though. The then-alive star was just coming off an acclaimed role in *Bikini Beach Race* and brought with her slightly more star power and sex appeal than the first celebrity attached to the project: a Rue McClanahan pantsuit from the *Golden Girls* wardrobe.

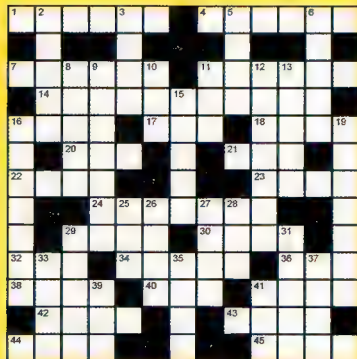
Here's what they should've done: Carefully snapped each disc and changed their company address.



➤ **[Mortal Kombat Gold] would've done better if they added a character named White-Power Cancer Boy.**

→ CROSSWORD

Halo Essentials



ACROSS

1. Classic role-playing game status affliction
4. Removing these could void your PS2's warranty
7. Halo's plasma and sniper
11. Madden's Favre, for one
14. New weapon in Halo 2
16. Resident Evil 2 & 4 star
17. 3DO lizard
20. Major League Baseball 2K6's Tampa Bay team, for short
22. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas gambling venue (abbreviation)
21. Gran Turismo VW
22. GameShark input
23. Ys hero
24. Like Sokolov in Metal Gear Solid 3
29. Project Gotham 3's high-rolin' Ferrari
30. Def Jam: Vendetta gal
32. Like Guile's Street Fighter stage
34. Ninja Gaiden CIA agent
36. Emulation abbreviation
38. Killer Instinct 2 fighter
40. Like Donkey in Shrek 2
41. Sid Meier's Pirates! locales?
42. *Bonk's Adventure* (TurboGrafX) power-up
43. Yugi uses a_ of cards in Yu-Gi-Oh!
44. Like Bible Adventures (NES)?
45. Gauntlet warrior

DOWN

2. Halo long-range shot
3. Aim at Ghoma's in The Legend of Zelda
5. Phantasy Star series weapon type
6. Like Trophy Bass lakes?
8. Halo bad-guy race
9. Castlevania whip-able item
10. Halo 2 default gun
11. Original PlayStation, for short
12. Halo holographic sidekick
13. Metroid miniboss
15. Final Fantasy VII leading lady
16. Popular Halo 2 multiplayer map
19. Metal Gear Solid 2 boss
25. SOCOM submachine gun
26. Kingdom Hearts hero lad
27. Unreal's Ion Cannon ammo?
28. Super Monkey Ball starring role
29. The Sims artistic creativity booster
31. Parasitic Pray gun
33. E. Honda's Street Fighter style
35. EA Sports network brand
37. Final Fantasy VII bomb-target reactors
39. PS2 adventure title Legend of
41. Outlaw Volleyball move

(Solution on page 181)

→ GRUDGE MATCH

The Next Mr. Universe

Girlie men meet buff barbarians

What with Dark Falz to contend with, the Guardians of *Phantasy Star Universe* probably take issue with He-Man and his crew calling themselves the "Masters of the Universe." Let's see who really rules the galaxy...

Phantasy Star Universe

VS.

Masters of the Universe



Attire



Anything goes so long as you're wearing tights

Stolen from the set of *Jet Grind Radio Advantage: PSU*



Sidekicks



Bumbling magician Orko comically f***s things up.

Partner Machinery can synthesize weapons to kick ass
Advantage: PSU



Homoerotic Undertones

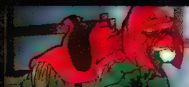


Ethan's fashion sense ranges from 'N Sync to Elton John

Wait, a dude is named Fisto?—we have a winner
Advantage: MOTU



Beasts of Burden



Native pyro Lunga can clear a path with fire

Battle Cat carries He-Man's ass—with an attitude!
Advantage: MOTU



Hangouts



Lobbies let you chill peacefully after battle.
Advantage: PSU

Castle Grayskull isn't much of a bachelor pad.



Winner: Phantasy Star Universe

He-Man may be the master of his barbarian universe, but PSU is light-years ahead when it comes to both heroics and hygiene.

GAMETAP AND TELLTALE GAMES PRESENT

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Their world is a steely cesspool of wild and demented miscreants. But funny! Sam & Max: the Freelance Police: keep the self-propelled guttertrash on the run — episode after episode, case after mind-boggling case. Grab your oversized hand cannon and catch the debut of Sam & Max: Season 1 on GametaP.



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Virtual Selection

Picking the classics from the crap By Jeremy Parish

Now that the Wii is actually here, old- (and new-) school gamers can get a taste of the past. But what oldies are really worth the bucks? Well, considering we've endured more trash than you'll ever play, we definitely know what games deserve to rot in bargain-bin hell. But we also know some good stuff. Here's a hodgepodge of picks that are worth your time and others you're better off staying far, far away from.

While you'll probably be spending most of your time falling your arms to *Wii Sports* and *Zelda*, the Virtual Console is a good way to revisit history. We don't know all the games coming to the service, but we do know to expect 10 games a month.

TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN

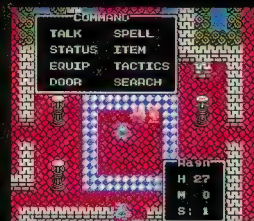
These gems can benefit from new life on the Wii.



Double Dragon II: No jumpers in this NES game, but it's all good... especially when you have a talent! retrobit.com



Castlevania II: Probably the best NES Castlevania; multiple paths, different bosses, and the music make it a winner.



Dragon Warrior III: Primitive graphics aside, this NES RPG was years ahead of its time. Now you may see why.

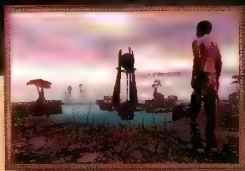


Secret of Mana: This innovative SNES adventure secretly teaches more than any tactical shoot-'em-up game.



Super Mario Bros.: Nintendo's SNES RPG never got the respect it deserved, but its obvious sophistication may dig it

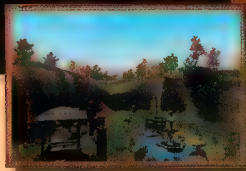
The makers of MYST invite you to tell the next story.



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Solve puzzles by yourself, with friends,
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VIRTUAL SELECTION (cont.)



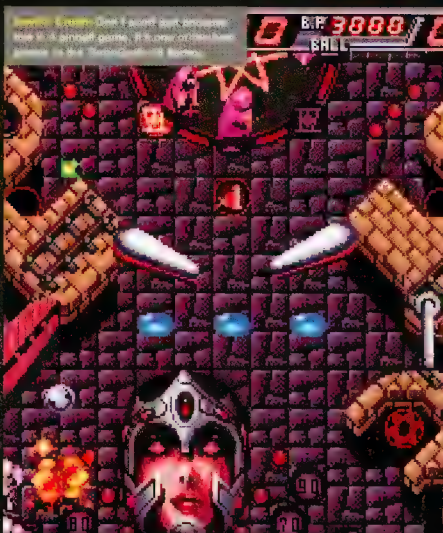
LEGOLAS is a hero. Sure, he isn't quite Aragorn, but he's a skilled warrior, a handsome guy, and he's got a cool bow and arrow.



LEGOLAS is a hero. Sure, he isn't quite Aragorn, but he's a skilled warrior, a handsome guy, and he's got a cool bow and arrow.



LEGOLAS is a hero. Sure, he isn't quite Aragorn, but he's a skilled warrior, a handsome guy, and he's got a cool bow and arrow.



DESTINED FOR EXTINCTION

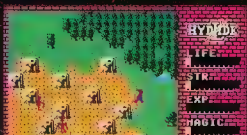
Let's hope these stinkers stay buried.



SHAQ-FU! Shaquille O'Neal. It's a game about a basketball player who can fight.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS is a game about a fantasy world.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS is a game about a fantasy world.



Any game with a furry mascot that's not Sonic.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS is a game about a fantasy world.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS is a game about a fantasy world.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS is a game about a fantasy world.

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PC

CONTROL

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GRIP AND RIPI!

GT Pro Series is a high-octane racing game developed exclusively for the Wii – and it comes packed with its very own steering wheel! Literally get behind the wheel of any of the 80+ licensed cars, and before you start making hairpin turns, you can go the garage to completely tune and trick out your ride. The toughest decision is what's next. Race through the intense single-player game? Go drift racing? Or sit down for some serious four-player split-screen? Don't be afraid to love that wheel, either – you can use it with other Wii racing games, too.

Grab your helmet (and the wheel) and get set for Wii racing.



GET REAL Over 80 real cars for you to modify and take for a spin.



DRIFT AWAY Even try your hand at high-octane drift racing!



RIGHT TURN Packed in with GT Pro Series and Monster 4X4 is the innovative steering wheel that turns your Wii Remote into a wireless steering wheel!

MONSTER 4X4

WORLD CIRCUIT

WHEEL AND DEAL!

Get ready for BIG racing thrills, Monster 4X4: World Circuit is pure arcade fun. Race off-road through Russia, Spain, San Francisco, Greece, and Egypt – all on tires the size of Rhode Island! Create traps on the tracks, knock barrels into opponents, and crush the competition under the weight of your mighty monster chasis. With 4-on-4 split-screen multiplayer and exciting mini-games like Monster Soccer you'll have trouble ever putting down that Ubisoft-exclusive steering wheel. In Monster 4X4: World Circuit might does make right!



STOMPZILLA You could use that cool steering wheel to go around – or you could just go over the top!



FREAK



You want Wii™, and more. Tuned for performance, maxed out for control. Ubisoft gets it – and here's the proof. Grip the Ubisoft®-exclusive steering wheel – designed by the pros at Thrustmaster – and you're ready for furious racing. And once you get your hands on Far Cry® Vengeance you'll be hooked. It's Ubisoft, Wii-style...

FAR CRY® VENGEANCE

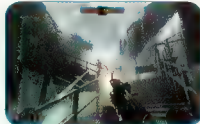
UNLEASH THE POWER OF WII



In Far Cry Vengeance, you're trapped on a tropical island swarming with rebel soldiers and dangerous creatures, all determined to hunt you to extinction. If you're going to survive this deadly walk on the wild side you'll need sharp wits, fast reflexes, and the Wii Remote and Nunchuk! With it you'll have **total control**, from **clawing** hand attacks to **tossing** grenades to **jumping** over traps and even **slashing** through enemies with your machete – **all with the revolutionary Wii controller!**



TROPIKILL The world is beautiful and oh-so-deadly.



THE HUNT IS ON Feel what it's like to be the predator – not the prey!

The award-winning Far Cry series has been rebuilt from the ground up to take full advantage of the Wii. You'll enjoy unparalleled gaming freedom as you drive ATVs, hovercrafts, even armed trucks and jet skis. You'll employ stealth to sneak through the enemy perimeter and draw closer to your prey. You'll wield a huge arsenal of weapon types and even savage, animalistic fighting techniques of your own – all with an intuitive control system that puts you right in the middle of the action.

And if you're a multiplayer fanatic, Far Cry Vengeance has you covered! Invite your friends over to go toe-to-toe, mano a mano, and see who's got what it takes to be last man standing.



HANDS-ON Far Cry Vengeance puts the control in your hands.

UBISOFT
Wii

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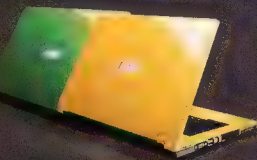
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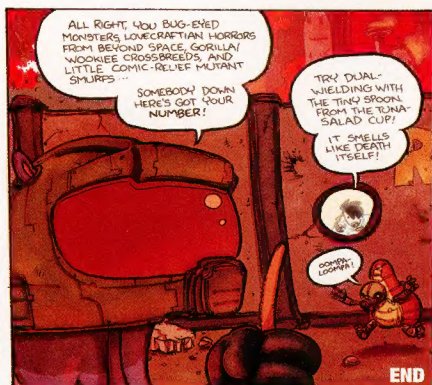
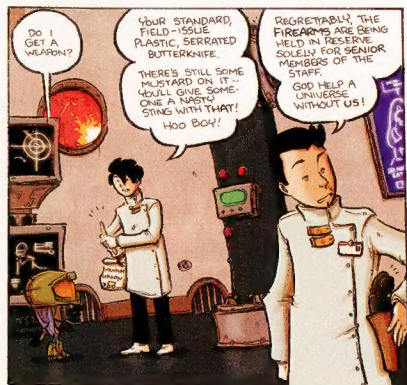
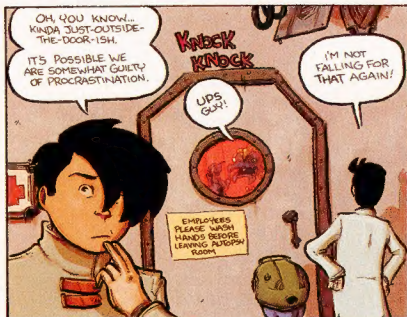
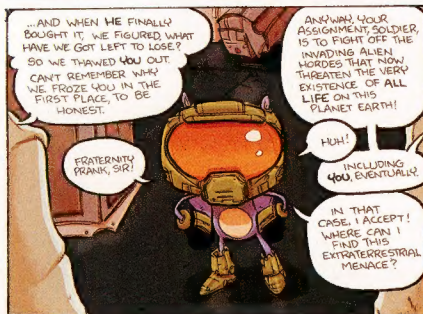
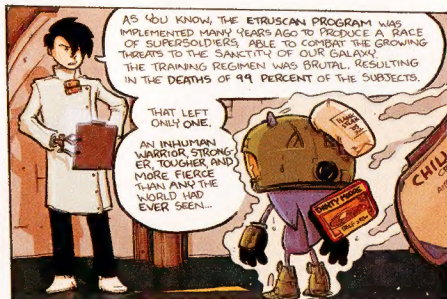
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