

THE No.1 VIDEOGAME MAGAZINE

E G M

NEW LOOK FOR
**ELECTRONIC
GAMING**
MONTHLY

INSIDE:

- MOTORSTORM
- SSX BLUR (WII)
- GHOST RECON
ADVANCED
- WARFIGHTER 2
- THE DARKNESS
- TOMB RAIDER:
ANNIVERSARY

ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY **1UP.COM**



> 30-PAGE SPECIAL FEATURE

PS3 & Wii

What's **NOW!** What's **NEXT!**

- > Launch games reviewed
- > Previews of what you'll be playing next
- > Hardware comparisons

We pick which one is best!

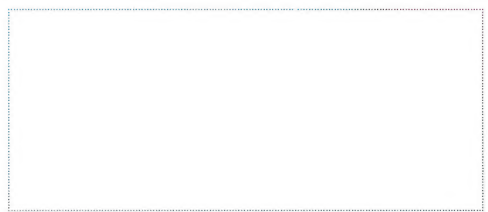


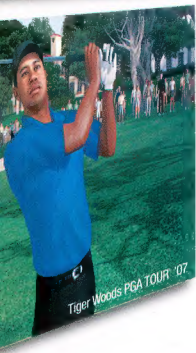
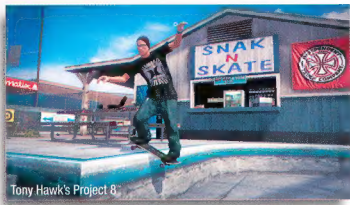
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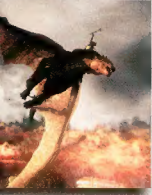
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Genji: Days of the Blade



Call of Duty 3



NBA '07



Ridge Racer 7



NHL 2K7



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Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas



Sonic the Hedgehog



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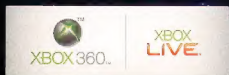
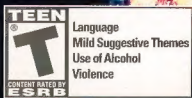
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(CONT.)

> EDITORIAL

Launch Déjà Vu



The Xbox 360 has a year head start over its next-gen competitors (but many analysts think Sony will win the long-term battle). It's online-enabled right out of the box, runs on a Windows-based operating system, supports a keyboard, and is home to a pretty high-profile online shooter. (Hmm...sounds like...the Dreamcast!)

The Wii is new and gimmicky—it's nothing like any system we've seen. The console's small, but you can put it on a stand to have it sit taller. It comes with a tennis game. The biggest complaint? The graphics aren't easy on the eyes. (Hey, it's the Virtual Boy all over again!)

The PlayStation 3 is physically big with a price to match its girth. It promises the most advanced graphics on the market, but the games don't look as good as you'd think they should. Its manufacturer is traditionally better known for nongaming electronic goods. (Déjà vu? It's...the 3DO!)

Of course, I'm just playing around here. No one really thinks any of these systems will follow in the footsteps of those oldies to an early demise. But the current console makers can learn valuable lessons from past mistakes—history is always our best teacher (which must make history teachers the Jedi of the educational system or something).

I've never been one to back down from making a prediction as to who will end up No. 1 down the line—but for the first time, I honestly can't decide. The 360 is on a roll. The PS3 has the strongest brand power. The Wii offers the mass-market-friendly gameplay. Who knows how this will end up?

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief



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Bully Afterthoughts

We interview the meanies behind Rockstar's *Bully*.

Resistance: Fall of Man Interview

What's up with the PS3's number-one game?

SuperGuides

Strategy guides for *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*, *Resistance: Fall of Man*, and *Gears of War* from MyCheats.com, the guys who know cheating.



And check out our podcast on EGM.Live.1UP.com and our message boards at boards.1UP.com.

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LETTERS

irate prisoners, PS3 shortages, and Gorf couture

▷ TRIVIAL ISSUE

Inmates debate Uwe Boll

While people can clearly tell that something they've made is inarguably really good (take, for example, Lead Designer Cliff Bleszinski's homicidal glee over *Gears of War*), doesn't anybody realize when something that they have produced is, without question, really bad? Take filmmaker Uwe Boll: Surely he's figured out by now why his films are never successful at the box office (or, for that matter, anywhere else). Across the board, everyone knows that if a movie has Uwe's name attached to it, words can't begin to describe how ridiculously horrible it is.

—Jonathan Stoffel,
Miami Correctional Facility

This month's **EGM** question: What *Zelda* game received the lowest total review score from **EGM**?
E-mail the answer to **EGM@ziffdavis.com** (subject head: Trivia: EGM #211) for a chance to win something real classy.

I feel that not enough people stick up for Uwe Boll. Let's face it: The genre of film he chose obviously proves he isn't in it for an Academy Award, for crying out loud! This was his vision, and personally, I enjoy his films because I know what to expect when I watch them. You will never admit it, but deep down you enjoy watching these flicks. It's like enjoyable torture for you.

—Jim Pedrol,
Oregon State Penitentiary



Director Uwe Boll casts his *Okami* and *Twilight Princess* movies in one fell swoop.

Sounds like you two should find a prison shower somewhere, invite Uwe Boll, and hand him the soap.

Desperately seeking a PS3, periods

Do you know how hard it is to get a PS3 in Aurora really hard because every day after school I ask my mom to take me to so many places to see if they have the PS3 but they all tell me the same thing they don't take any preorders for the PS3 and I probably

won't get one anyway because my mom doesn't work only my dad does and he doesn't make a lot of money to buy me one so I'm begging you will you send me one? —Alex C. Muniz

You're telling us that with all the money you saved on punctuation, you still can't afford a PS3? Here's some periods—plus a bonus ampersand—to sell on eBay:&

He's got the Blu-ray blues

I've heard some Xbox 360 owners take cheap shots at the PlayStation 3's Blu-ray technology, saying that it's an unnecessary format destined to go the way of Betamax. So what? Even if Blu-ray doesn't pan out as the standard format for movies, would that really affect the PS3 as a game machine? Remember back when we used to play games on cartridges? As long as my copy of *Contra* worked, I don't remember having a problem with my NES being unable to play movies. And correct me if I'm wrong, but Blu-ray is still a step up from DVD in terms of storage space, yes? —Ben Leong

You're right about Blu-ray giving developers additional storage space for their games. Although the current crop of PS3 games occupy 25GB single-layer Blu-ray discs, we'll soon see double-layer 50GB titles become standard. Whether 50 gigabytes of game makes for larger, richer-sounding, and more beautiful play experiences than 4.7 >

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Next-gen gaming: No fatties please

Before playing with the Wii, these giddy co-eds had to get out of bed via forklift.

With the advent of the Wii peripherals like EyeToy, and even to a certain extent the motion-sensing features of Guitar Hero's awesome controller and PS3's new gamepad, it would appear that gamers will be getting more physically active while interacting with their games. For one

welcome this change. I'll be the first to admit: I'm my beloved pastime promotes sedentary lifestyles, and I myself am overweight simply because for rather water one swing on the grappling hook that you pull and do jumping jacks. Thanks to Nintendo's innovation of the

the swinging jacks sword and getting much-needed exercise. Bring on the new generation!

—Glen Green

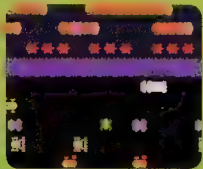
Gotta admire your positive attitude, man—we've been curious if plus-sized gamers would warm up to the Wii's physically intensive new control methods. But don't go expecting Bowlix-style results from *Wii Sports*. Even if you begin a hardcore conditioning circuit with these games you'll probably end up just giving your right arm a strenuous workout—which you've probably already been doing since age 13 anyway.

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■ Blu-ray discs are neither blue nor shoot rays, but they give you a killer manicure.

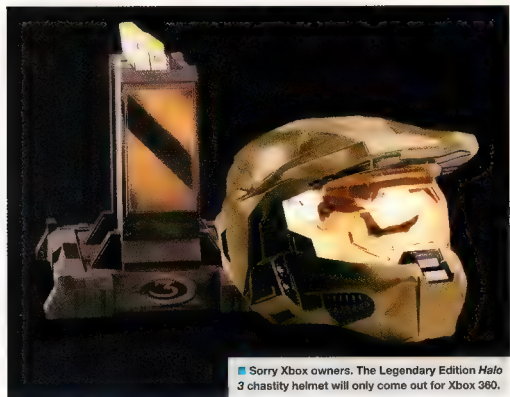
gigs (the size of standard DVDs) still remains to be seen, but the pure mathematical edge definitely adds up in Sony's favor. We've actually received several letters about this new format war, so we'll delve deeper into the brewing Blu-ray versus HD-DVD debate next issue.

World's biggest Halo fan now on suicide watch

I'm the world's biggest fan of *Halo* and *Halo 2*, and I have a question concerning the release of *Halo 3*. I know *Halo 3* will not be coming out until 2007, but I have heard rumors that the Xbox will be declared officially obsolete somewhere around December of

2006. But I own an Xbox, not an Xbox 360...will I be left high and dry when it comes to *Halo 3*? —WhiteBlade6

Ready for a trifecta of *Halo* buzz-kills? Sorry to burst your bubble of endearing naïveté, but *Halo 3* has been an Xbox 360 title ever since we started reporting about it way back in 2005. And to add insult to injury, we'll go ahead and officially declare your Xbox obsolete starting...now. From here on out, it's just caribou hunting and *Hannah Montana* games on Xbox. Oh, and to make your day even worse, turn to page 30 for disturbing news about some killer new *Halo 2* maps. ☠



■ Sorry Xbox owners: The Legendary Edition *Halo 3* chastity helmet will only come out for Xbox 360.

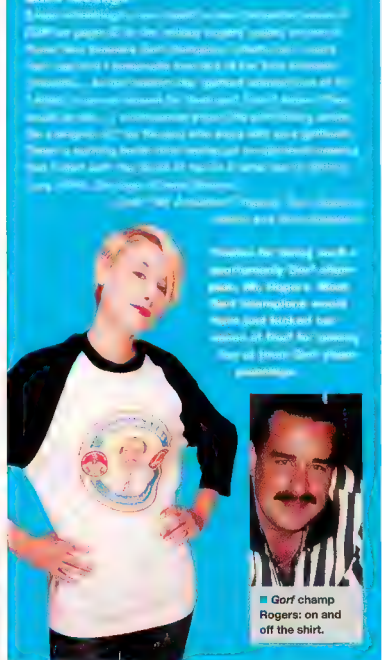
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FIGHT THE POWER

Gamers UNITE

A new organization is giving gamers a voice—for a price—in the battle against antigame legislation, but should you pay up and be counted? By Crispin Boyer



You got your sex in my violence: Blame GTA: San Andreas' Hot Coffee mod for the recent upswing in anti-game legislation.

TOKYO'S ZOMBIES ARE WELL HIDDEN THESE DAYS, lurking in the inner reaches of game shops and perching atop the highest shelves. Some are even hiding behind cuddlier monsters. "In one store that displayed a poster [for Capcom's zombified hit *Dead Rising*], the majority of it was hidden by a Pokémon display," says Jonny Ram, a U.K.-born Tokyo resident who writes for Japan-centric gaming site Game-Science.com.

It's a scenario that has more than just undead-rights activists groaning. *Dead Rising*—a top-selling Mature-rated Xbox 360 game here in the States—must be hidden away in its country of origin because of its Z rating, a new Japanese adults-

only classification enforced by law. Selling the game to minors is a punishable offense (whereas the U.S. Entertainment Software Rating Board system, like movie ratings, is voluntary). With the Z rating come rules about how games can be promoted in Japanese stores. "The lack of display will certainly prevent casual buyers from seeing [*Dead Rising*]," Ram says.

Enter the Electronic Consumers Association, a new U.S. nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting gamer advocacy and watchdogging gaming legislation so that what happened to *Dead Rising* in Japan won't happen to M-rated games here. Who are its members? Well, you—if you pay the \$20-a-year membership fee

(at www.theeca.com). ECA founder Hal Halpin, previously the head of the Interactive Entertainment Merchants Association, says he figures a half million members are enough to make a difference, citing the success of 500,000-member-strong political-action group MoveOn.org.

Filling the void

Halpin is under no illusion that average gamers are gung ho about gaming advocacy. That's why, starting in January, the ECA is offering members discount coupons for games and magazine subscriptions, plus health-insurance plans and job-placement assistance. "Even if not for the political aspect, we're hoping that the value



PAGE
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Crystal clear
first look at
SSX: Blur



PAGE
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Hi-def David
Caruso hits
Xbox Live



PAGE
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Play Halo 3
sooner than
you think

proposition of joining the ECA will become a no-brainer," says Halpin. "If you pay your \$20 and we instantly give you back over \$200 worth of value, you'd be an idiot not to join." The ECA will cover topics unrelated to politics, too, such as looking into the legality of new-console bundle deals.

But make no mistake: Gaming legislation is the ECA's focus, especially now that *GTA: San Andreas'* Hot Coffee copulation simulation has given both Democrats (who typically rally against videogame violence) and Republicans (who tend to despise videogame sex) a collective yippee-kay-ay in attacking the industry. "This year we had three bills make it past state legislatures," says GamePolitics.com's Dennis McCauley, who is providing content for the ECA. "Last year they had three. In the six years before that, they only had three total. Hot Coffee pushed a lot of legislators that were on the fence." Politicians are changing their tactics, too, creating bills that equate games with porn or even targeting gamers themselves (see the Shock and Law sidebar).

Halpin hopes to establish nationwide ECA chapters made of members on call to testify in legislative hearings about violent videogames. The idea is for legislative committees to hear from actual gamers instead of just industry shills. "Gamers have lacked an organized voice," says McCauley, adding that publishers, developers, and retailers have their own organizations. "There's been a bit of a void."

And when it comes to politics, filling voids with voters is everything. "However consumers and constituents come together to voice their opinion, that's important," says Leland Yee, the California assemblyman who inked his state's gaming law. "I wouldn't dissuade anybody from organizing to voice their opinion. It's just that you want to make sure that opinion isn't being manipulated by an ulterior motive or other outside influence."

It's a point not lost on Halpin, who's aware that critics of game-biz advocacy group the Entertainment Software Association can discredit it because the industry pays its bills. "Gamers feel like the publishers are funding it and running it," he says, "and therefore it can't be as objective

as something that's independent." The ECA, on the other hand, gets its money from its members—the gamers themselves—although it will work with publishers to educate consumers on issues like game ratings.

Not your problem?

Game ratings and legislation? Zzzzz. It's easy not to care, especially when ESA President Doug Lowenstein predicts that gamers will eventually assume positions of power, thus spelling game over for all this legislation. (McCauley says don't count on it: "There's a body of work that holds

that liberal-thinking people tend to become more socially conservative once they think in the role of parents.")

And what's the big deal if selling violent games to kids becomes a crime anyway? It would just be enforcing the voluntary rating system already in place. We'd ask *Dead Rising's* Japanese zombies that question—if only they weren't so hard to find in that country's game stores. "To put legal restrictions on games would be to single them out for a chilling effect," says McCauley, "a block to freedom of expression that other mediums aren't subject to." **A**

ADVOCACY ABCs

Four sites that'll keep you in the fight

The Electronic Consumers Association

www.theeca.com—Twenty bucks a year buys membership in this nonprofit organization that promises to look out for your rights as a gamer.

Videogame Voters Network

www.videogamevoters.org—A project of the Entertainment Software Association, this site organizes letter-writing campaigns to politicians.

Game Politics

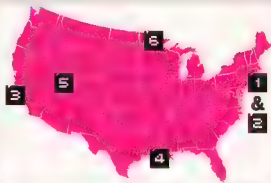
www.gamepolitics.com—Philadelphia Inquirer columnist Dennis McCauley tracks and analyzes all game-related legislation and controversies.

National Institute on Media and the Family

www.mediafamily.org—A different (more like opposite, actually) perspective on these issues, focusing on violent games' effects on kids.

SHOCK AND LAW

The six most dangerous pieces of gaming legislation



1 & 2 Double trouble

Two bills are working their way through the U.S. Congress: Hillary Clinton's Family Entertainment Protection Act, which would penalize the sale of Mature-rated games to minors, and the Truth in Video Games Rating Act (of which there's a Senate and House version), which calls for a reform of the ESRB's rating system.

3 Sudden death

California Assemblyman Leland Yee's law, which bans the sale of "ultra-violent games" to kids, snagged a preliminary injunction at the Federal

District Court—the first level of challenge for state laws. Nevertheless, "the fact that it's taken quite some time for the court to decide [on the constitutionality of this law] suggests to me that this is an extremely strong bill," Yee tells us.

4 Oh, that guy again...

Louisiana's game statute, passed in August and promptly enjoined by Federal District Court, is worth watching simply because it was written by antigaming lawyer Jack Thompson.

5 Playing dirty

This Utah House bill is representative of a dangerous new trend in proposed gaming legislation: equating violent videogames with pornography, thus circumventing gaming's constitutional protection as a form of free expression.

6 Gamers in the crosshairs

Back when he was Minnesota's attorney general, Governor-elect Mike Hatch, a major opponent of gaming violence, initiated an appeal of a struck-down law that fines the underage buyers—not the sellers—of violent videogames.

Legislation tracking courtesy of GamePolitics.com



- 1 I know it's kinda girly, but I'm a huge fan of flowers.
- 2 People say I'm green with envy, but they're obviously color blind.
- 3 Keeping a slim-n-sexy figure ain't easy—I suggest taking up sports.
- 4 Halloween is my least favorite holiday—a big boo to ghosts!
- 5 I'm used to cleaning up dirty work; it's part of my job.

Who am I?

Luffy from Super Mario Bros.



Credit source: Newsweek



+ FOREIGN OBJECT/JAPAN

Detective EVANGELION

Seriously, is there anything giant robots can't do?

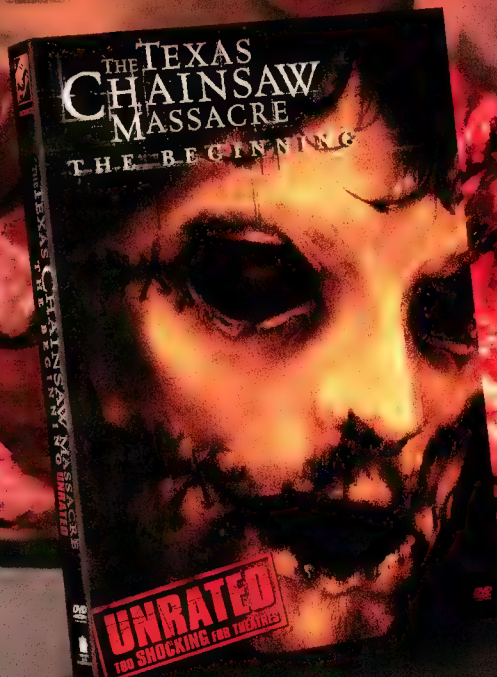
Platform: PS2
Likelihood it'll come here: Sorry all you anime addicts—no chance in hell (or heaven).
Japan is still making Evangelion games? Damn straight. Hell, this year's the 10th anniversary of the mind-crushing robot anime's premiere—reason enough for ya? Over the years, the *Eva* show's spawned everything from run-of-the-mill mech-action games to crazy Tamagotchi-like affairs where you have to "raise" waifish *Eva* pilot Rei Ayanami into something resembling a well-adjusted woman. This time around, hero Shinji Ikari becomes a special investigator for NERV, the shadowy organization from the series. It seems that some no-good "Angels" have been murdering people across Tokyo-3, and it's up to him to crack the case.

How do I do this? Mostly via the time-honored Japanese graphic-

adventure method (popularized in the U.S. by *Phoenix Wright*) of talking to people and confronting them with evidence or testimony. Instead of *Phoenix Wright*'s courtroom sequences, though, you have Shinji and his friend/rival Kaworu saddling up their units and fighting Angels in 3D arcade sequences—a much more direct approach to dealing out justice, if you will. The case also exposes Shinji to the seedier side of life on Tokyo-3, complete with minigames based around rhythm and bowling (and you know how run-down those Tokyo bowling alleys are). And for the super serious *Eva* nut, a premium box set containing a sketchbook and wristwatch is also available. The price for this crazy collectable? Only 26,040 yen (that's about \$218 for us Yanks).

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> **PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK AND HANDS-ON**

SSX ELUA

Taking control of the mountain **By Bryan Intihar**

Platform: Wii, Xbox 360, PS3
Release date: 11/11/09
Developer: EA GAMES
ESRB rating: E10+

FOR MOST PEOPLE, THEIR EARLIEST MEMORIES of snowboarding look back to their first time attempting to get on the lift. In reality, snowboarding involves a lot of a combination of physical, psychological, and technical skills. It's a sport that's both fun and challenging, and it's a sport that's both fun and challenging. It's a sport that's both fun and challenging. It's a sport that's both fun and challenging. It's a sport that's both fun and challenging.

"Right now, any of the three is a good choice," says Intihar. "The Wii controller is a perfect fit for steering and tricks—the analogy to controlling a snowboard is really intuitive."

will only bring the best. And when it comes to the Wii, Intihar says, "The Wii's unique control scheme makes the snowboard feel like a natural extension of your body. It's a sport that's both fun and challenging. It's a sport that's both fun and challenging. It's a sport that's both fun and challenging."

the best of snowboarding. And when it comes to the Wii, Intihar says, "The Wii's unique control scheme makes the snowboard feel like a natural extension of your body. It's a sport that's both fun and challenging. It's a sport that's both fun and challenging. It's a sport that's both fun and challenging."

> **The Wii controller is a perfect fit for steering and tricks—the analogy to controlling a snowboard is really intuitive.**

—Chris Kohler

THE ÜBERTRICKS

Designing out your inner artist

One figuratively walled stage is getting considerably "90-foot" in SSX. How do you do it well? One you can't do your best when you're kept downstage is better said than thought. Snow's Stage with the big jumps is just one particular example. The most complex the stage, the greater the talent and the payoff.

How did it level? Excellent.

This feature seems so easy to do since it's the one we'd imagine the studio producing. Right? Wrong. It's almost that it didn't think of the possibility of it. Now, they should've thought about it, we're talking about you.



■ If you eat s***, just "drumbeat" with the Wii Remote and Nunchuk to recover.



THE OTHER STUFF

Details on the rest of the SSX Snow party

The scenery: And so in SSX it's all the Snow, including mountains are a single mountain with numerous back & throughs. Unfortunately, not all of them will be present. The sequel is also the best of the SSX Snow and it's the best of the SSX Snow and it's the best of the SSX Snow and it's the best of the SSX Snow.

The multiplayer: Snow is a great example of just how good multiplayer can be. SSX Snow is all about playing your way. Snow's Stage is the best of the SSX Snow and it's the best of the SSX Snow and it's the best of the SSX Snow.

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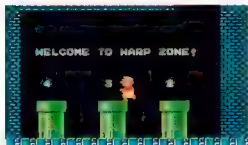
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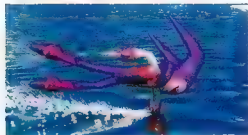


Got a hilarious or hilariously horrible game-related clip? Put it up on GameVideos.com and your work may wind up featured in this very spot. This month, we've got rapping Nintendo fans, a homebrew *NIGHTS 2* trailer, pint-sized *Halo* pro LiL Poison, and more...check 'em all out at GameVideos.com/EGM.



LOL: Snazzy Top 10 Secrets

The boys from ScrewAttack.com run down the best videogame secrets. Sorry *Contra* code, you don't win.



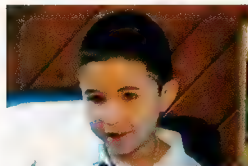
FTW: NIGHTS 2 trailer

1UP.com blogger Jan Neves wants a *NIGHTS* sequel so badly, he actually made a trailer for the (nonexistent) game!



WTF: Tendo Luv

Polarizing fanboy hip-hop ode to Nintendo. Love to hate it or love to love it. By Ffejory Plexco and Kip Beats.



1337: LiL Poison TV interview

Eight-year-old *Halo* pro featured on the evening news. His winnings have already paid for college.



+ ONLINE SCENE

Milking the Boob Tube

What's next? Sanford and Son on your DS? By Mary Jane Irwin



Batman Forever can be yours forever! Actually, just for a day....

SCREW TIVO; you can now download your favorite television shows and movies while you're chainsawin' fools in *Gears of War*. But don't think your 360 is going to replace your cable box, though—think of it more as a way to keep your ass glued to the sofa. "It creates more affinity and reasons to have Xbox Live in the home," says Scott Henson, director of platform strategy for Xbox Live. "The ambition that we have is to make it mass market," he explains. "We want game consoles to mean something to everyone."

Right now several television channels (MTV and Comedy Central) and two movie studios (Warner Bros. and Paramount) are signed up, but it may take a while before the Xbox Live Marketplace becomes a virtual Blockbuster.

"We're only releasing 50 [movies] on Xbox Live over the next six months," says a source within one of Microsoft's content partners. "Everyone wants to see how secure

the Xbox network is before we put more content on it." The movie studios fear plundering by software pirates, which is mostly why you can only rent (but not buy) high-definition movies.

Despite the scare, Henson says Xbox's digital rights management is the advantage Microsoft has over Sony's large content library. "The only way it [digital distribution] is going to happen is if Sony has made that bet on security," Henson says. "We built that infrastructure four years ago—it's not a switch you can just flip on."

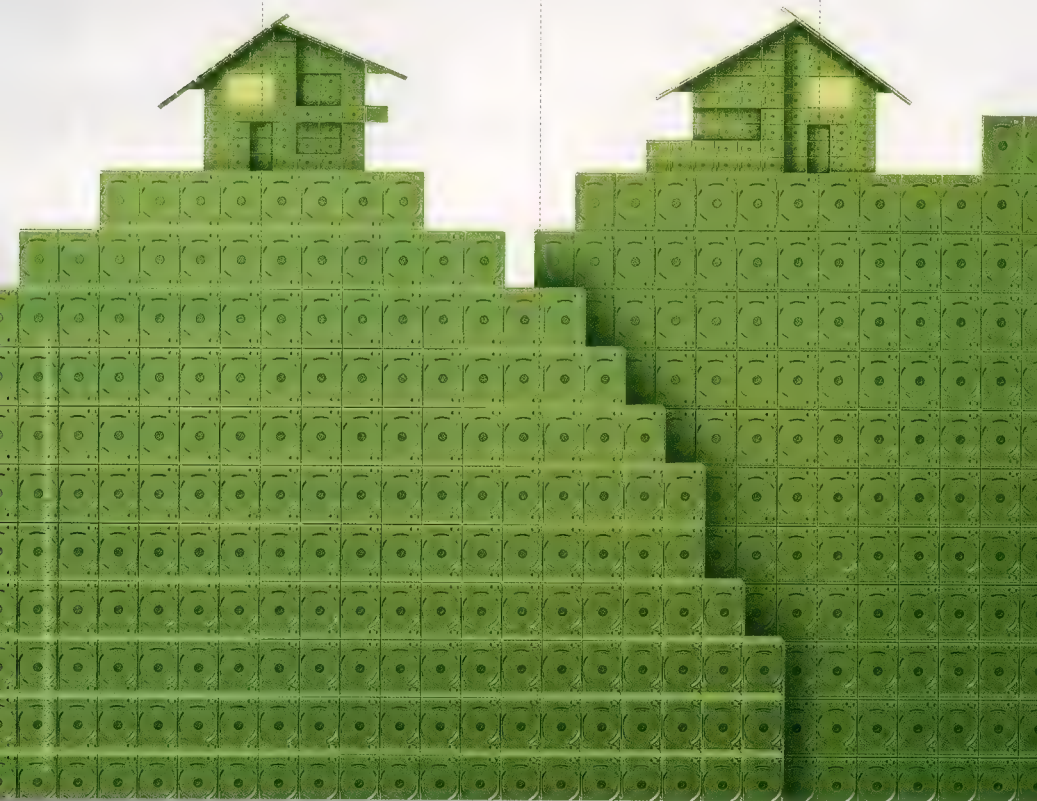
According to our sources, the PlayStation 3's infrastructure is still screwy, but that doesn't mean it doesn't plan to provide downloads, too. In fact, Sony is already offering HD movies in Japan. "Sony is going to pick up on this trend," says John Smedley, president of Sony Online Entertainment. "The system has been designed to take care of all kinds of digital content. It's been designed that way for a reason."

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XBOX 360.



> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS AND INFO

MotorStorm

Ridin' dirty on PS3 By Shane Bettenhausen

Platform:
PS3

Publisher:
Sony CEA

Developer:
Evolution

Release Date:
March 2007

THIS MUD-CAKED RACER WOULD HAVE EASILY STOLEN THE SPOTLIGHT from its PS3 launch-day racing rivals...had it actually been available on day one as originally intended. Instead, new PS3 owners had to make do with a tantalizing downloadable demo that offered a brief taste of *MotorStorm's* raucous off-road thrills. Sure, that was a clever tease, but now we'll have to wait until March before truly joyriding across the craggy peaks of Monument Valley. And although we've all had plenty of time to master the subtleties of that demo, we're still filled with questions about the final game. Luckily, Evolution Studios Producer Simon Benson has the answers we're seeking.

Since the entire game takes place in Monument Valley, Utah, can we expect to see any diversity among *MotorStorm's* locations? Do they even have any type of weather out there?

Simon Benson: [Laughs] They sure do have weather out there—we

had to cancel one reference trip due to the amounts of snow! Seriously, though, each stage in *MotorStorm* has an incredibly strong sense of individual identity. Some stages are placed on the tops of mesas and give a thrilling sense of vertigo; others are right in the mud-filled basins and valleys. The surfaces in *MotorStorm* are all distinct so that some are largely different types of rock formation; others are far less solid and can be deformed. We wanted to move away from the old visually driven idea of "this stage is snowy, this one is in a town" and show that variety really comes from the look and the feel of the stage.

Also, *MotorStorm* is a festival out in Monument Valley, and each stage has degrees of "human influence" in terms of man-made structures and

human presence. This allows for even more diversity.

Racing with so many different vehicle types (trucks, dune buggies, ATVs, dirt bikes, etc.) means that everyone has a different ideal racing line. Are some crafts better suited for specific tracks, or is it an even playing field?

SB: Each stage has stacks of different routes, shortcuts, and surface types that constantly pose advantages and disadvantages to each vehicle class. This is one of the ways we've created a nice sense of difficulty progression—we can pose really cool challenges. So, we might say, "You're on the Raingod Mesa track, but you're in a rally car and

❖ **We wanted to move away from the old visually driven idea of "this stage is snowy, this one is in a town"...**

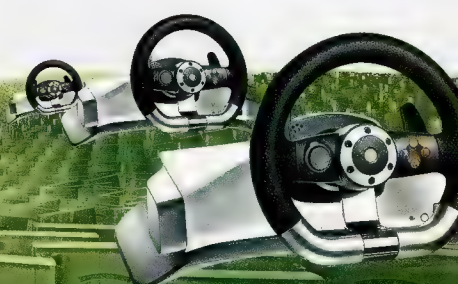
—Producer Simon Benson



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 XBOX 360.

everyone else is on a bike, so they have a surface advantage and you have a risky speed advantage—now figure out how to win."

We heard that the game's minor delay stems from tweaks being made to the online mode. Can you tell us what kind of game types, downloadable content, and options we'll be seeing there?

SB: We've got hugely ambitious plans for online. Although we can't really be specific right now, we want to ultimately offer the player all of the options and additional content that they'd need to completely customize the online experience, to encourage the growth of clans, and to allow *MotorStorm* to live online way beyond the box.

There also seems to be a little confusion on this point, so can you explain how *MotorStorm* utilizes the PS3's Sixaxis motion-control mechanism?

SB: Our philosophy has been to offer three types of steering control. One will be just using the D-pad, another will involve the D-pad and analog stick, and the last will use the PS3 motion control. It really is all about tailoring to personal tastes—we don't want one method to be better than another, just different. So we put all our efforts into fully tuning the Sixaxis wireless controller as a steering method rather than diluting our effort across many functions.

After checking out the demo and this batch of screenshots, we're convinced that *MotorStorm* is a graphical beast. Now convince us that the gameplay will match those impressive visuals.

SB: The last six games we made weren't all released in North America, so not a lot of you guys know about them, but they always received massive praise for their graphics and rendering technology on the PS2. This was always going to be a focus for us on next gen, but in terms of gameplay, we could also start to look more at damage, at vehicle-to-vehicle interaction, and at systems such as boost. Sure, the pressure was there to create balanced, in-depth gameplay to match the visual beauty, but it felt more like a really cool challenge to the design team rather than a daunting exercise. 🙌



■ Think the demo is too slow? Don't worry; in the full game, vehicles run faster as you go up in class.



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THE BIG ONES

Quick updates on the most anticipated titles



Halo 3

XB360 • Microsoft • Fall 2007

This first-ever screen (yes, it's the real deal) of *Halo 3*'s campaign mode is hardly the biggest news concerning the 360 blockbuster. This spring, Microsoft will have a multi-player public beta for *Halo 3*, which we hear will include a matchmaking function...and possibly a cost to participate.

But the beta won't be the only form of fraggin' between Spartan and Covenant forces this spring: Brand-spanking new *Halo 2* multiplayer maps are on the way, but they'll only work when playing the game on a 360. Did you hear that? It's officially the final nail in the Xbox 1's coffin.

EGM MESSAGE-BOARD POLL

If Microsoft charges to participate in the *Halo 3* beta, how much would you be willing to pay?



Pay? For a beta? F*** that!



Super Smash Bros. Brawl

Wii • Nintendo • Fall 2007

The latest trailer of this four-way fighter (check it out at GameVideos.com) reveals another member of its cast: Fox McCloud. He was actually part of the original *Smash Bros.* roster, but ditched out of the sequel to appear in two so-so *Star Fox* titles for the Cube.

Oh, and remember last spring when *Metal Gear* architect Hideo Kojima mentioned how Solid Snake wouldn't be able to fight Shigeru Miyamoto's Mario in *Brawl*? (Kojima felt it was dishonorable for his character to beat up on his mentor's creation...or some crap like that.) Well, that virtual truce is over—the new footage shows the tubby plumber giving Snake one serious beatdown.

During the game, Fox gets all Morpheus and taunts with a "just bring it" gesture. The *Matrix* is so played out, Mr. McCloud.

Final Fantasy XIII

PS3 • Square Enix • Late 2007/Early 2008

Most tend to forget that *FFXIII*, the first part of Square's "Fabula Nova Crystallis" saga, started its life on the PS2. But technically, little remains from that version. Director Motomu Toriyama recently said in a Japanese mag that "the battle and gameplay systems were restarted from scratch when production moved to the PS3."

On the *Final Fantasy Versus XIII* front, not much is happening...at all. That game's director, Tetsuya Nomura (*Kingdom Hearts*), told the same publication it would be a long time before anyone will see real-time footage of this action-RPG. Our prediction for release: 2008 (and make that a very late 2008). ☹

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 XBOX 360.



Photograph by Annie Musselman

■ Even his house needs a strategy guide: Hodgson designed a secret gaming lair—complete with a switch-activated hidden door—for his northern Oregon abode.

▶ TAKE THIS JOB

Strategy-Guide Writer

Our monthly look at the jobs you want *By Mark E. Anderson*

This month: David Hodgson, strategy-guide author at Prima Games with 11 years experience, both in the U.K. and the U.S.

Notable guides: *Metal Gear Solid*, *Half-Life 2*, *Jade Empire*, *God of War*, *Scarface*, *Knights of the Old Republic*, *Burnout Revenge*, *The Godfather*

What's a strategy writer?

"A focused gamer with excellent writing ability," Hodgson says, "who can plow through a game, resist the temptation to take shortcuts, and deliver a [guide to the game] within a time frame...without going crazy."

Job data

Salary range: Around \$3,000 to \$4,000 per guide for those just starting and \$8,000 to \$10,000 for established writers. It depends on the game as well. "A role-playing game is obviously a lot more work than a sports guide or a shooter," says Hodgson. "I do about eight to 10 per year, depending on how burned out I'm feeling. Each takes about three weeks of hellish, intense work."

Recommended education: "It's a weird sort of job with no specific training required," says Hodgson, who majored in History, "but the ability to write with a strong command of the English language is even more important than being a good game player. You've got to be able to write succinctly—it needs to flow."

Location of most jobs: Anywhere. Prima, for instance, has authors across the country. Every so often they'll visit a game's developer, in which case they're put up in a hotel.

Current level of demand: "You have to wait for a guide author to die or to get burned out to get his job,"

says Hodgson. "people actually write these things—fewer than 30 make a living at it. Brady, Prima, and Sybex are the only real [strategy-guide] publishers in the U.S."

Hodgson's typical day

"I play games more thoroughly than anyone except testers," Hodgson says. "You play a level through. Then you go back and play for two minutes, you pause it, and you write down what you just did. And somewhere in there you take screenshots—usually at the end [of your deadline], because sometimes the game changes visually at the end." Of course, focus is of the utmost importance. "You have to avoid distractions like, 'going outside' or 'driving.' Time management is key," he says. "I spent the last three days

taking 500 screenshots—very specific screenshots that explain visually what's going on." And the best part? "Pants are optional," says the mostly work-at-home Hodgson, "and I've got a very short commute—from my bedroom to my home office."

How'd he get the gig?

"I think myself and [Bungle Content Manager] Frank O'Connor tie the record for working on the most game mags that have gone under—my record is 15," says Hodgson. "After the last one I said, 'There's no security here; I'm going freelance.' I did my first guide with GameFan Books and realized I enjoyed it. [Prima] signed me on contract in September of 2000, so now I'm contracted to do so many books per year." For some of those, he even wears pants. ❦

TOOLS OF HIS TRADE

Debug consoles (for pre-release games) and a PC: For, like, playing games and typing words, respectively.

Screenshot-capture system:

Hodgson uses a military-spec videocard that he claims is used by hospitals for surgery. It's able to take

up to 1080p resolution video with sound at up to 60 frames per second. It is, of course, attached to high-def television.

Home theater surround-sound system:

"Sometimes strategy is sound-related as well, so I try to play in 5.1 surround

Cups of tea:

"I usually have about five a day," says the U.K.-born Hodgson. "That's usually when I take a break to relax."

Showers (optional):

"You're usually pretty tired by the end of it," says Hodgson.

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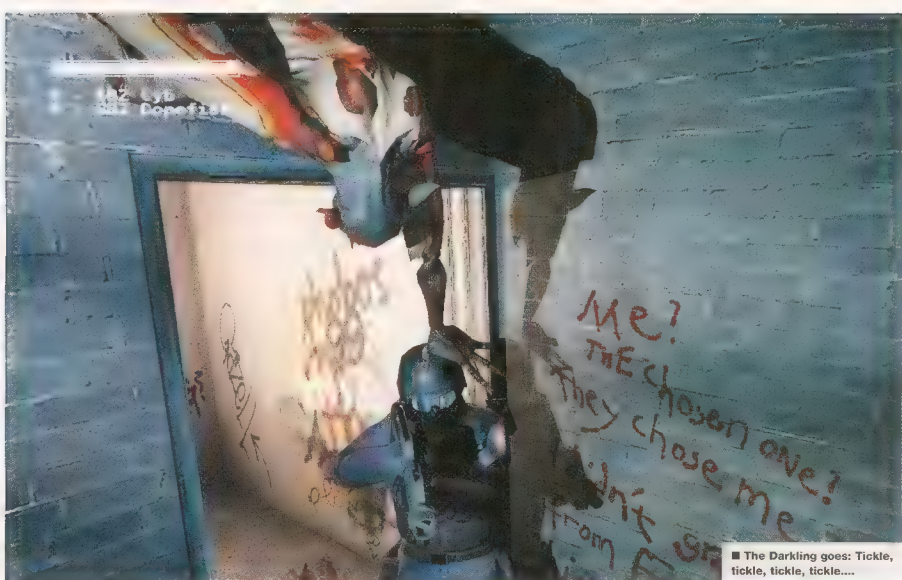




> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS AND INFO

The Darkness

We shine the light on this shooter's mobsters-versus-monsters multiplayer



■ The Darkness goes: Tickle, tickle, tickle....



Platforms: PS3/XB360
NOW THAT ALL OUR FANCY GAME BOXES and handhelds connect to

that series of tubes called the Internet, a new standard has been quietly

adopted: Gamers, it seems, now expect all software to come with some form of online multiplayer. This sounds like a great idea. (And that \$10 price hike has to go somewhere, right?)

But in the case of *The Darkness*, a first-person shooter coming to both the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, the game's creators might be throwing the baby out with the bathwater, ditching the best aspects of their game when it's time to play online.

The Darkness has rightly received a lot of attention for its unusual take on the shooter genre. In this game

based on the comic of the same name (see sidebar), you'll take control of Jackie Estacado, a young mafia hit man possessed by a dark force called, um...The Darkness. In the story-driven solo experience, you'll use a unique combination of traditional firearms and Jackie's evil powers, chief among them a pair of snakelike demon arms that seem to have a life of their own.

But the jet-black tentacles,

along with his other tricks, won't be making an appearance in the online multiplayer component of *The Darkness*. In fact, Jackie won't be an available character. In his place, mobster henchmen will populate levels inspired by settings from the single-player game, competing in traditional first-person shooter modes like capture the flag, deathmatch, and team deathmatch.

➤ **The twist is shape-shifting. You can shift between a Darkling character and a human character at will.**

—Product Manager Patrick Liu

THE STRIKE OF ONE WORDING IS
A POEM OF TWO WORDS:
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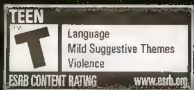
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UBISOFT

"The advantage of being a Darkling is that you can run a lot faster," says Liu. "You can crawl into holes that humans can't. You can cling to walls and ceilings...and jump extremely far." Of course, it wouldn't be fair if these creepy critters didn't come with disadvantages. "Darklings die very easily," says Liu. "If you can hit a Darkling, they will probably die. And they can't carry weapons, but they can claw people." At the touch of a button, a machine-gun-toting lug of a mobster turns into a speed demon. Watching him scurry up the walls, leaping from rooftop to rooftop, it's easy to see how the interplay between slow, heavy firepower mobsters and fast, vulnerable Darklings might play out in interesting ways. Still, we can't help but wonder what it'd be like if some of the unique gameplay mechanics from the solo campaign made it in here, too. ☞



■ And to think that an atomic sit-up (Google it...or don't) was the sickest thing we'd ever seen in a locker room.

Public relations
 The Darkness promises more...
 (This section contains blurry, low-resolution text that is mostly illegible due to the image quality and blurring effects.)



THINK IN YARDS. NOT INCHES.



WHY MAKE ANY SIX FOOT FOUR LINEBACKER PETITE? WITH THE SANYO PLV-Z5 HIGH CONTRAST HOME PROJECTOR, EVERY BIG PLAY IS TRUE-TO-LIFE. A 2X OPTICAL ZOOM PROJECTS EIGHT-FOOT IMAGES (THAT'S ALMOST 3 YARDS) FROM A MERE TEN FEET AWAY. SUPERIOR IMAGE BRIGHTNESS PROVIDES YOU THE ABILITY TO SEE EVERY HIT IN HIGH-DEFINITION CRYSTAL CLARITY. THE INDUSTRY'S FIRST TWIN IRIS SYSTEM BOASTS CRISP, BRIGHT PLAY-BY-PLAY. WITH A THREE-YEAR WARRANTY, WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED. INSTALL IT YOURSELF. THEN LET THE GAMING BEGIN.

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> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS

Ghost Recon ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2

A better tomorrow **By Eric**

Platforms:
PS3/XB360
Publisher:
Ubisoft
Developer:
Ubisoft
Release Date:
March 2007
(Yeah, right)

YEAH, YOU BETTER PUT IN SOME UPGRADES if you're going to slap a new number at the end of your game's title. But Ubisoft isn't exactly known for taking its time with its sequels. How many *Splitter Cells*, *Rainbow Sixes*, and *Ghost Recon*s have we seen in the last five years? Don't bother counting—you won't have time for that with the follow-up to near-future military shooter *Advanced Warfighter* due right around the corner. Here's what the developers have planned: for No. 2...

New Classes: Your squadmates now have more distinct differences than just "a slightly bigger gun." Snipers go long distance, antitank infantry carry the heavy-duty gear, and the new medic class can heal to

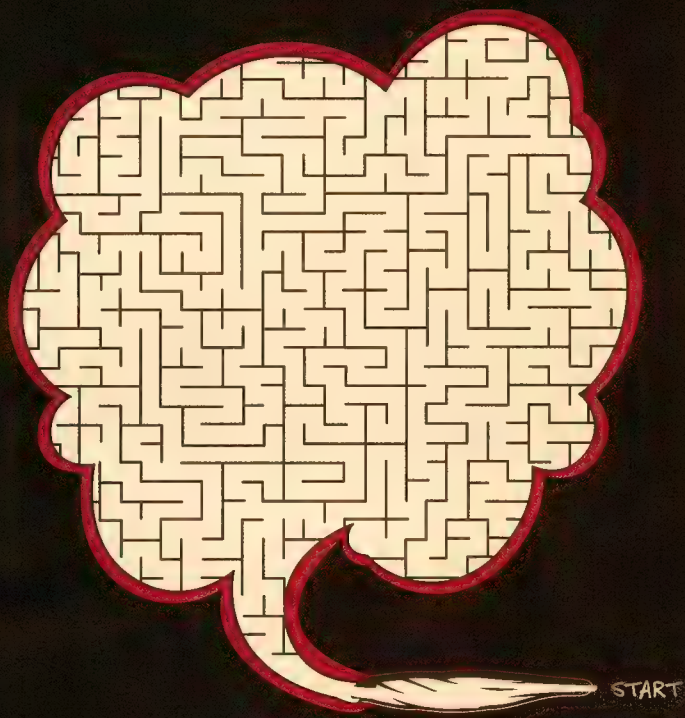
give all the boys some extra staying power.

New Tools: You're able to call in airstrikes (we hope destructible environments come with that), and you get a new drone called the Mule. This ground-support bot carries weapons and ammo for you, is heavily armored so you can take cover behind it, and scouts the environment for some local recon work.

Improved Graphics: It's hard to imagine just how much better this military shooter can look, especially based on these screens, but the dev team has a small dictionary's worth of technical jargon they're throwing into *GRAW2*: ambient occlusion, depth sprite, god ray (god rays?!), and more. We're not going to explain

them all, but it's all about the little details for the sequel's eye candy. Oh—we'll see weather, too, such as sandstorms or heavy rain.

Better A.I.: We questioned the developers on a variety of A.I. issues (teammates stepping into your line of fire, escorted VIPs wandering into danger, predictable enemies), and they're already addressing the problems from the first *GRAW*. "Enemies in *GRAW2*...will flank you, reach vantage points to engage you from a favorable position," says Senior Producer Philippe Bayle. "Your teammates, when put in recon mode, will be much more cautious than they were in the past. Pathfinding is greatly optimized..." If they can smarten up the A.I., the sequel will look very bright, indeed. **A+**



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RUMOR MILL

Rolling up the rumors By Quartermann



Resurrected rumors

Even back in the day, my rumors became a reality. Don't believe me? Well, I let loose the fact that the first 3-D *Metro*'s wouldn't be developed in Japan, but instead, here in America. I also pointed out that the Unreal Engine would be used on consoles.

WELCOME TO THE NEXT-GENERATION...OF BANKRUPTCY! I hope all you high-rolin' kiddos are enjoying your pristine PlayStation 3s and Wii's. The wait was long, sure, but at least we can now officially cut the "next-gen" crap for good. The Q, however, doesn't care what frickin' generation it is—while y'all are wildly waving your arms around with those goofy motion controllers, I'll still be here sniffing out the latest scuttlebutt. Hell, maybe one day I'll pick up these new systems and see what all the hubbub is about. Until then, I'll just sit back and count my pennies.

Sticky balls

With the Wii ushering in simplistic games for the masses, some may forget about the easy-to-play *Katamari Damacy*. Well, Namco Bandal sure isn't—it appears the publisher is rolling out **three new *Katamari Damacy* games in 2007**: one for the PS3, one for the Wii, and one, weirdly enough, for Xbox Live Arcade.

Turning war around

Gears of War is currently chawsawing the crap out of the competition, and for good reason—it's a killer game.

So killer that I already dug up dirt on the inevitable sequel. Get this: I hear Microsoft is crafting a brilliant plan to flip-flop *Gears* and *Halo* every year, so **expect *Gears of War 2* in 2008 and a new *Halo* game in 2009**.

Count the COMS

Military shooters never seem to cease fire...especially the *SOCOM* series. We're already reviewing *SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals Combined Assault* in this issue, but word on the battlefield is not one (or two), but **three new *SOCOM* games are in the works**. One of those will be landing on the PSP (big whoop!), but the other two will be dropping on the PS3. Not only that, but I also caught wind that one

of the games will ditch the traditional third-person combat and instead go down the real-time strategy route.

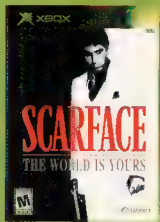
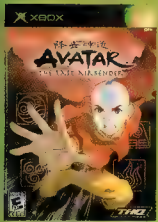
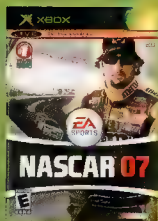
Mii crossing

Nintendo's online plans may be a little wonky, but at least they got something right: The user-created "Mii's" are a fun (albeit bizarre) way to set up an online personality. Right now, only a few select games incorporate the pint-sized personalities, but that will soon change. Yep, I hear **Nintendo is molding its Mii's to be your online characters in the next *Animal Crossing* game**. Eventually, all the shirts and accessories you collect for your Mii will transfer over to other games (like *Wii Sports*), too. ❁

> Q-TIPS

- Like the oldies? Well, looks like Hudson is releasing a TurboGrafx-16 pack with 3D remakes of *Bonk*, *Adventure Island*, and *Super Star Soldier* for the PS2.
- The colorful candy-filled animals from *Viva Piñata* are gearing up to take the streets—I discovered **Hare is working on a *Viva Piñata* kart-racing game**.
- EA may have fumbled the NFL license—my rumor spies caught wind that **NFL may drop EA once its contract expires in a few years**.

NEW GAMES. ORIGINAL XBOX.



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Wii

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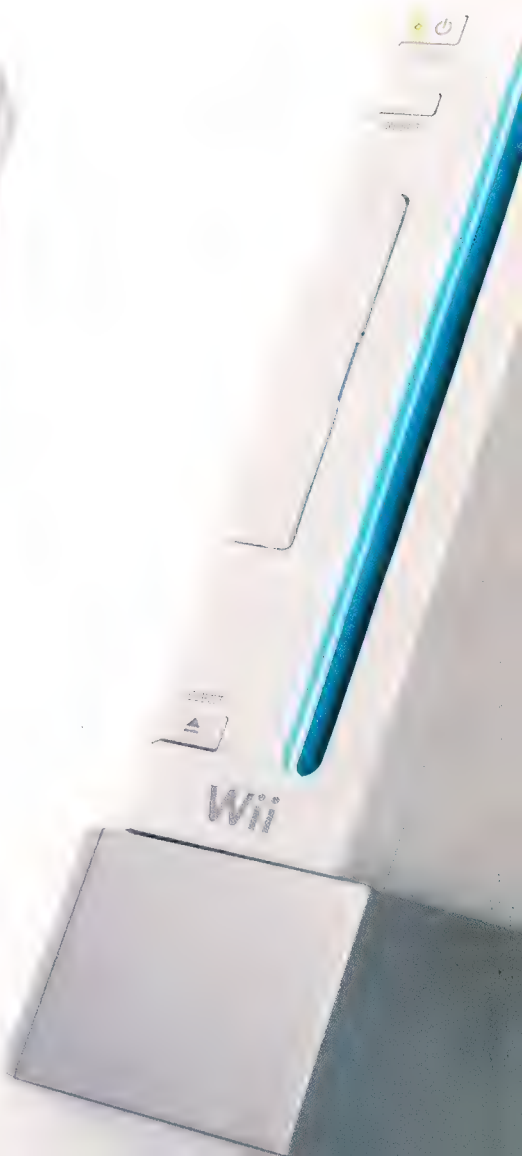
PS3 & Wii

Picking a winner

The new videogame consoles from Nintendo and Sony might seem as different as apples and oranges, but *EGM* dares to pick its favorite fruit. But before we make that fateful choice, we'll first give you our honest opinions about both systems' launch games, compare hardware functionality, and show off some of 2007's most promising titles. 

NINTENDO WII

Looks aren't everything



The Wii Difference

There's no getting around the fact that Nintendo's Wii is a weird machine. (Hell, even the name is freaky.) While Microsoft and Sony strive to deliver whiz-bang high-definition visuals and sound in their next-gen consoles, Nintendo takes a very different approach with the Wii. The system's inner workings don't stray too far from the GameCube's last-gen tech (a calculated maneuver to keep hardware costs down), but the interface—an innovative motion-sensing wireless remote—fundamentally changes the way you play your games.

Couch potatoes should be worried: With the Wii, your days of vegging out while leisurely holding a gamepad are history. Most Wii games have you mimic real-life motions (throwing a football, swinging a sword, steering a car, and so on) to manipulate onscreen action. Coupling the remote with the add-on Nunchuk accessory opens up even more control possibilities, like independent moving and aiming for first-person shooters or dual fisticuffs for boxing.

After putting Wii's launch titles through the paces, we're definitely impressed with the controller: Simpler minigame fare like *Wii Sports* and *Rayman Raving Rabbids* feels instantly instinctive, and even comparatively traditional games like *Zelda* benefit from the newfound freedom and creativity. Despite the system's obvious graphical shortcomings, we believe that the Wii's paradigm-busting controller and top-quality first-party software will allow it to hang tough alongside the far beefier Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3.

Wii: Pros and Cons

- + At \$249.99 (bundled with a free game, *Wii Sports*), it's more affordable than its competitors
- + Wii Remote delivers a fun, refreshing way to interact with games
- + Built-in Wi-Fi support enables free online gameplay, web browsing, and additional functionality (see sidebar on page 62 for further details)
- + Exclusive home of Nintendo's revered first-party franchises (*Zelda*, *Mario*, *Pokémon*, et cetera)
- + Nintendo's impressive library of back titles coming to Virtual Console as downloadable content (see page 69 for further details)
- Most games look no better than GameCube titles; HDTV support tops out at a lackluster 480p
- Third-party support seems fairly weak at this point...will it be the GameCube all over again?
- Nintendo's inexperience in the online gaming arena is already delaying debut of network play
- Too many ill-conceived PS2-to-Wii ports shoehorned onto the system



Turn the page for our **Wii game coverage**

Wii Sports: © Nintendo; Mario Kart: © Nintendo; Rayman Raving Rabbids: © Ubisoft; Zelda: © Nintendo

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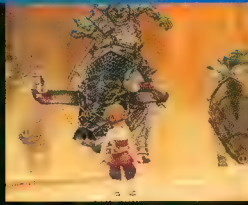
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WII: REVIEWS

Starring...Zelda! (Oh, and some other games, too)



Wii

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Nintendo ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICT'S
(OUT OF 10)

JEREMY

10

EXCELLENT

CRISPIN

10

EXCELLENT

SHANE

10

EXCELLENT

The Good: Huge, involving...and the Wii Remote works great

The Bad: A little predictable in places
Hate ugly graphics? Fork over \$30 for component cables

The GameCube's *Twilight* makes a stunning dawn for the Wii

➤ **JEREMY:** *Twilight Princess*, the newest chapter in Nintendo's long-running *Zelda* series, is a huge game. And not just huge in importance—it's the reason to buy a Wii—but in scope as well. It's a massive quest that'll last you 60 hours or longer. Every moment, every detail, is enjoyable, and new gameplay twists (like Link's ability to transform into a wolf, complete with its own feral attacks and clever new abilities) only add to its depth. The minute I saw the end credits roll, I was eager to start over and do it again.

That's no small feat, considering I've always been lukewarm on the 3D *Zeldas*. But *Twilight Princess* is the perfect encapsulation of a 20-year-old series. It brings together everything that made *Zelda* so popular over the

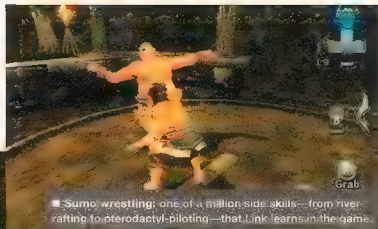
years: the action, the exploration, the puzzles, the scope, the quirky humor.

What haven't been brought over are the missteps. And that's no small feat, since Nintendo audaciously reinvented the game halfway through development to make use of the Wii's unique controller. The possibility of failure loomed large, but *Twilight Princess* sidesteps disaster. The controls are perfect, wonderfully streamlined and precise, enabling the series' most fluid, intricate, and *involving* combat.

And although Link is the leading man (and/or wolf), it's his companion Midna who steals the show. A stubby, sarcastic imp, Midna's dialogue ranges from amusingly condescending to simply amusing, and her personality develops over the course of the

adventure. Considerably so, in fact, since her fate is tied closely to the game's surprisingly substantial story.

Twilight Princess walks a careful line between innovation and familiarity. Once in a while, you'll start to feel like things are borrowing too much from previous adventures, only to forget your complaints once you're thrust into a completely unexpected situation. The game derives many of its core elements from its predecessors—a dark realm, transformation, a sudden change in the game world—but they're all thoughtfully reworked here. Familiar situations and locations only strengthen the story's impact for seasoned players. Tracking a mischievous sprite through a maze-like forest as "Saria's Song" plays or



■ **Stump wrestling:** one of a million side skills—from river-raiting to interodactyl-piloting—that Link learns in the game.



battling through the empty halls of Hyrule Castle to a mournful version of the castle theme should send a shiver down the spine of any *Zelda* fan.

The result is a game that's epic. That word that gets thrown around far too often, but it really means something here: Hyrule is huge, and the quest spans its breadth, sometimes even taking you to lands beyond its borders. The real marvel here is that all of the in-game real estate has a purpose; there are secrets, as the saying goes, where fairies don't live—and in *Twilight Princess*, that's everywhere. You can warp around the countryside if you're rushed, but when the rewards for hiking or hoofing it on horseback are so great, it almost seems a waste to skip around. Be it an optional sub-dungeon or heart piece tucked tantalizingly out of reach, the land of Hyrule

is made to explore at leisure.

Twilight Princess is a rarity: a game that spans 60 hours and never once feels boring. Between the immaculate gameplay, the devious puzzles, and the gripping story, it's simply the best *Zelda* ever. And that's saying a lot.

✚ **CRISPIN:** I approve of Jeremy's message—*Twilight Princess* is the most rich, deep, fun, and emotionally resonant game I've played all year. It's also not for everyone. It's not, for instance, for the geriatric gamers Nintendo shows waggling Wii Remotes in ads. You'll never have to worry about your Aunt Carol dropping by to beat the lava-dungeon boss. As a launch game for the Wii, this marathon adventure will do nada to nab the mainstream audience Nintendo is keen on luring with the system's

Tingle speaks!

The man who would be a fairy sounds off on the little green guy's omission from *Twilight Princess*

That outfit, that goatee, that paunch... You've seen this Tingle cosplayer—aka Sean Kaleta, an Indiana art-store manager—in too many pages of *EGM*. But what's the world's biggest 30-year-old, totally married (sorry, ladies) Tingle fan to do when Nintendo nixes the quirky elf from the next big *Zelda*? Let's ask...

So why Tingle instead a more manly character? Like Princess Zelda?

Tingle: Being a big *Zelda* fan, I wanted to have a Halloween costume related to the game, but one that only serious gamers—or serious nerds—would recognize. It took me two days to make with stuff that I bought from work.

Are you boycotting *Twilight Princess* because Tingle's MIA?

Tingle: Set up a picket line because of [Nintendo's] completely insane disregard for poor Tingle?

No, I won't boycott this time. But if they dare not release Tingle's Japanese DS game here in the States....



■ Giving us the Tingle (left to right): Kaleta in uniform, posing with someone else dressed as a freak, and his man-child inspiration.



Twilight Princess may not have Tingle, but it does have this guy (right), who's just as disturbing. Does this mean we'll see a new cosplay outfit in your future?

Tingle: I don't think my next costume will be one of the Tingle replacements. Next time, maybe I'll dress up as *Twilight Princess* producer Eiji Aonuma.

Speaking of Aonuma, we showed your Tingle pic to him last year. His response: "I'm pretty sure men over 30 shouldn't do this." Zing! Your 30-second rebuttal....

Tingle: Dear Aonuma-san, I'm amazed that a man such as yourself could forget to include my dear Tingle in your epic game. But then again, some men over 30 suffer from lapses of memory. Maybe you were intimidated by the developers of *Gears of War*? Or did you think that the competition was going to send their *Bully* after you? But, in the end, I forgive you. Everyone makes mistakes. And, Aonuma-san, I'll be expecting my Wii in the mail.



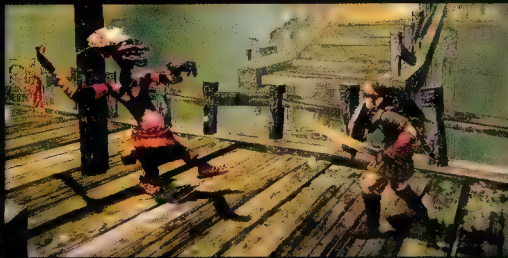
simple, revolutionary controls.

But for all the hardcore gamers that lined up to buy a Wii, well, I'm sure you've beaten the lava-dungeon boss by now. Or maybe you're just starting out, petting goats and taking your first tentative Remote-shaking sword swings in the intro dungeon. Or maybe you've just gotten past the third dungeon, where *Twilight Princess* really throttles up and piles on new toys and tweaks that complement all the nostalgia-mining.

Yeah, the drab graphics never fool you into thinking this is anything but a GameCube game, and some of the character design made me shudder (why are all of Hyrule's children so fugly?). But the gameplay here—the dungeon design, the sense of exploration, the boss battles—transcends the visuals. No games, not even the open-



■ Link's nifty new boots have him dancing on the dungeon ceilings.



world *Grand Theft Auto* series, give you this much variety or such a sense that anything can happen. *Twilight Princess* instills childlike wonder that will have even grizzled gamers saying, "Oh yeah, this is why I play games."

So it's too bad those fogies from the Nintendo ad campaign won't experience the "eureka!" moments of solving puzzles or the simple pleasure of hearing familiar sounds crackle from the Wii Remote's speaker. They don't know what they're missing.

➤ **SHANE:** Never before have I seen a better argument for longer game-development times. Giving the *Twilight Princess* team an extra year (and a whole new console) to play with has resulted in the finest, deepest, and most memorable *Zelda* you've ever played. And skeptics who feared

tacked-on Wii controls will be pleasantly surprised by the instinctive, visceral, and rewarding Wii-mote gameplay. When you're violently flailing the thing to repeatedly stab your sword into a boss's exposed eyeball, you won't care how silly you look—you'll think only about how unbelievably fresh and exciting it feels.

Sure, the basic series ingredients appear initially familiar: Link learns the ropes in a sleepy forest town, rides his trusty steed across Hyrule field, and spelunks musty labyrinths lookin' for loot. Yet Nintendo crams such an unimaginable amount of content into this time-tested framework that single dungeons in *Twilight Princess* routinely offer as much creativity and challenge as other developers' entire games. Between all the puzzles, subweapons, minibosses, and unparalleled big boss

Link to the Pabst

A *Twilight Princess* drinking game...



■ Link's PBR endorsement deal: lucrative

OK, of-age gamers—we know you know how this works: Grab your favorite spirited beverage and take a swig every time one of the below conditions is met during *Twilight Princess*. Underage gamers, please replace "spirited beverage" in the above sentence with "Sunny Delight."

Take a drink every time...

...you have to change your Wii Remote's batteries (expect to do it at least twice).

...you waste an hour on a puzzle that is totally obvious in retrospect. In fact, drink twice. You deserve it.

...that strangely slutty bartender Telma makes you feel funny inside.

...Midna laughs at you from the Remote's speaker.

...a story twist, puzzle, or piece of music gives you franchise déjà vu (expect a hangover headache in the morning).

...you find some rupees but don't have room for them in your wallet.

...you own a boss.

...a boss owns you.

...you fail to kill every shadow monster simultaneously and must start over.

...that mailman in the short shorts runs headlong into you.

...you wipe out on the "Dreidel of Death."



...Link drinks anything.

...Link doesn't speak when spoken to (better get in line for a liver donor—you're hammered).

encounters, each of these nine mazes feels so well designed that it makes competing games like *Kameo* (XB360) and *Shadow of the Colossus* (PS2) seem lazily made in comparison.

But don't think the game adheres to a predictable dungeon-crawling formula; you'll quickly discover that *Twilight Princess* is packed with above-ground surprises and innovations, too. Unparalleled pacing means that you're never doing the same thing for more than an hour or two—and in a game that quite literally takes 60-plus hours to complete and actually improves as it progresses, that's an astonishing feat.

For everyone who thought we'd never see a *Zelda* better than *Ocarina of Time* (N64), prepare to have your mind blown...and your Wii purchase instantly validated.

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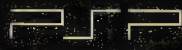
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Wii

TONY HAWK'S DOWNHILL JAM

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Toys for Bob
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+



The Good: Controls brilliantly

The Bad: "Respawn" button is a major problem

Jackass Quota: Fictional skater Crash gets hurt for fun

Only downhill from here

➔ **JENN:** In *Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam*, Activision gives its series a Wii-fied makeover as cartoonish Tony races against several fictional pros—the skaters crouch low and clobber one another as they zoom downhill toward the finish. Holding the Wii controller sideways, you guide your skater down the perpetual slope with a gentle rocking of the remote. The motion is natural and intuitive, and the controller senses every tilt and jostle.

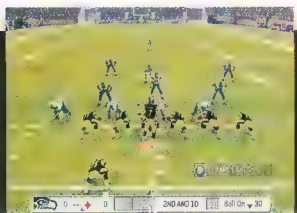
The game's momentum is lost only when your skater deviates from the course and gets trapped in a bizarre dead zone. The developers provided a respawn button (I call it "The Bugfix"), which was necessary to keep the game from being busted. Unfortunately, even respawning takes

precious split-second away from your plummet, resulting in a lot of cheap defeats, which I could happily do without. Provided you can look beyond this hang-up, though, *Downhill Jam* is accessible fun.

➔ **JAMES L:** If you were to tell me that my beloved *Tony Hawk* would be revamped into some sort of race game with more of a *SSX Tricky* feel to it, I'd throw my extreme-sports drink in your face. But much to my surprise, I loved every minute of playing *Downhill Jam*. After I tried to forget all my *Tony Hawk* habits and got used to the new Wii controls (the two buttons each handle different tricks), the new format never felt confusing. I found that the sensitivity was tuned just right

so that I'm not tilting the controller left and right like some seesaw from hell.

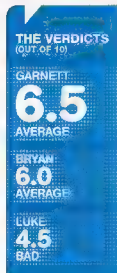
➔ **BROOKS:** I'm also a *Downhill Jam* believer. Thanks to the ease of maintaining your balance with the remote, I could happily nose-grind all day, but that's not what *Jam* is all about. Adrenaline junkies and aerial acrobatics will no doubt satisfy their extreme-sports palate thanks to some of the most well-thought-out track designs I've come across in an action racer. Shortcuts such as breaking through windows or traveling through large pipes lead to many close races, so it's anyone's game, really. Bonus points for the use of the remote's speaker for crashes and grinds. *SSX vets* will feel right at home with *Downhill Jam*.



Wii

MADDEN NFL 07

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



The Good: Running the ball, lots of modes

The Bad: Defense is a mess

Two: Number of times scratching our nose lead to a pass interference call

Illegal use of hands

➔ **GARNETT:** The first time I "threw" a completed pass using the Wii Remote for a big gain, I thought, "Wow, this is cool." The first time I had to try and defend that pass, I thought, "Wow, this sucks." And that about sums up my *Madden* experience on Wii. On offense it works, but the catch is that even *Madden* vets still have to figure out how to do it. For all the talk that the jump to Wii would make the series less complex, well, it doesn't.

To get all of *Madden* in here, the developers put in as many gestures as the refs on the field use, and you'll also be pointing and clicking like a PC gamer in order to set up special situations like hot routes. And it all falls apart on defense. Trying to get in position to make a play—particularly

in the secondary—is more frustrating than ever. At the end of the day, I can't say I'd rather play this way.

➔ **BRYAN:** A little while back, I asked *Madden's* makers what was their No. 1 goal with the franchise. Their answer: Make it more accessible. And with the Wii being billed as the "everyman's console," I thought maybe that goal would finally come to fruition. Man, was I wrong. This edition is anything but a pick-up-and-play experience, and while I enjoyed playing offense after getting the hang of things (especially juking with the Nunchuk and passing with a flick of the Wii-mote), I always felt totally helpless on defense. The developers should have spent more time fine-

tuning the controls. But at least they crammed in all the modes (franchise, Superstar, and so on).

➔ **LUKE:** Sure, Garnett, completing long passes or dink-and-ducking your way down the field with wrist-flipping crossing patterns is amusing, but like you said, that amusement transfers to the people watching as you get cut to shreds on defense. Moreover, it's telling when the best part of franchise mode is the training camp, a series of minigames where your players gain attributes—or, put another way, the kind of challenges you often skip just to get to the actual gameplay on a proper console. Playing is believing, and in *Madden* Wii's cathedral, I haven't been evangelized.

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Wii™



UBISOFT™



RED STEEL

Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Developer: Ubisoft
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS
 (OUT OF 10)

MICHAEL
5.0
 AVERAGE

G. FORD
4.5
 BAD

ROBERT
6.0
 AVERAGE

The Good: Fun for five minutes, shooter controls work well

The Bad: Frustrating for five hours, disconnected sword fighting

Wait for: A lightsaber game

Stained steel

➔ **MICHAEL:** *Red Steel* doesn't cut the crap—it sticks its sword straight into it. Everything about this waggly first-person shooter is generic junk: dumb enemies, lame levels, and truly terrible graphics (the Wii can do much better folks). Even the highly touted sword fighting swings and misses—unlike other wacky Wii controls, the blade strikes never felt quite intuitive.

But at least I had no trouble pulling the lead—the standard FPS controls translated rather well (you move your gun-ho gajjin with the analog Nunchuk while you aim with the Wii Remote). Even simple things like reloading (done by shaking the Nunchuk) made the experience entertaining...until the repetitiveness sliced my fun in half. Once you strip away

the nifty new controls, you're left with a flawed shooter that does nothing I haven't seen a million times. And though multiplayer is fun, four-player splitscreen is sooo two gens ago.

➔ **G. FORD:** Mmm...yeah. I'm gonna have to go ahead and disagree with Donahoe on the sword fighting—it's not a total miss. It's not *great*, granted (just look at my score)—it has a disconnect in that your sword doesn't move with the remote. Rather, you take a swing and then it follows suit, almost like you had pressed a button. But the actual face-offs make use of blocks, parries, and special moves and provide an appreciated break from the absolutely bleh shooting. The level design doesn't help. Expect by-

the-book tours through hotels, factories, docks, and warehouses. Too bad the trip through the fun-house mission was the only one that was...uh, fun.

➔ **ROBERT:** Yes, *Red Steel* is guilty of terrible taste. And maybe it's because I so loathed the game's *Reading Rainbow* story-time segments and cheesy characters that I was surprised (and entertained) by its gun-n-sword concept. It really does nail an interesting control scheme. *Red Steel* is an example of what works and doesn't work in a Wii game: Actions that feel responsive and immediate (the shooting bits) work great. Actions that feel disconnected from your physical movements (the sword fighting) make you feel (and look) like a jackass.

WII: ONLINE

Channel surfing

Traditionally, Nintendo's been about as Internet-savvy as your grumpy grandpa—only two games (different versions of Sega's *Phantasy Star Online*) ever went online with the little-seen GameCube network adapter. But the winds of change are finally blowing. Wii comes standard with built-in Wi-Fi support (hardwired folks can buy an Ethernet adapter) to play multiplayer games and access Nintendo's WiiConnect24 service, a suite of "channels" that pushes information, communications, and content to your console even when turned off. But before you get all psyched, here's the buzz kill: No online games are due out in 2006 (*Pokémon Battle Revolution* will be the first in '07), and several of the channels weren't ready in time for launch. Still, the potential for Wii to offer a compelling collection of online options remains intact....



Thousands Flock to Marvel at Talking Cow

DES MOINES, Iowa--Thousands have descended on a small family farm outside Burt, Iowa to witness one cow's incredible moo. Shocked onlookers report hearing

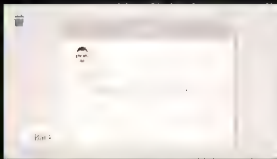
News Channel: Get breaking headlines pumped directly to your console. Debuts January 27.



■ **Shopping Channel:** Download classic games for the Virtual Console. Available now.



■ **Forecast Channel:** Plan your next expedition into the scary outside world. Starts Dec. 20.



■ **Wii Message Board:** Send and receive notes from your console or cell phone. Available now.



WII SPORTS

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

Making spectators into sportos

➔ **ANDREW P:** Leading up to a new system launch, publishers like to talk about "tech demos" that are specifically designed to convince the public that their system is so awesomely powerful. The graphics or physics impress, sure, but you won't find much of a game underneath. So think of *Wii Sports* as a "fun demo" for Nintendo's new system—the five sports included are light and fluffy, but as far as exhibiting what the motion-sensing controller is capable of, they're pretty convincing. Some of the sports are better than others: Bowling, for example, is the standout: swing your arm back and forward like you would a real ball, twist your wrist to apply spin, and let go of the B button. It's an incredibly natural feeling. Tennis

and Baseball are similarly intuitive, though not nearly as deep as their real-life counterparts. The least fun of the group are Boxing and Golf: Both have the right idea but would obviously benefit more from being developed into full-fledged games (like, oh, *Punch-Out!!* maybe?). And really, that's the whole idea behind a demo.

➔ **BRYAN:** Sorry, guys, but I'm not giving this one a free pass just because... well, it's free. Out of all the events, I can only imagine myself grabbing a brewski and hitting the virtual bowling lane with Andrew (which is pretty damn amazing—turning the Wii-mote ever-so slightly lets you put perfect spin on the ball). The rest of this shallow minigame collection either tires

really quickly (Baseball, Tennis), feels a bit too sensitive (Golf), or has the right idea but misses the punch (Boxing). I like the concept behind this pack-in, but *Wii Sports* simply ends up being an overly publicized demo.

➔ **G. FORD:** Well gee, Bry. I'm sorry this so-not-for-the-hardcore game didn't scratch your sporto jock-sim itch. Of course Nintendo dumbed down these games to provide levels—it's made for grandmas and toddlers to enjoy, as well. So no, I won't be flailing for months on end—though I will mess with Baseball and Tennis when I do—but this is the game I'll play with my parents and relatives and other nongamers...and as long as they don't beat me, it's all good.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

ANDREW P:
6.5
AVERAGE

BRYAN:
5.5
AVERAGE

G. FORD:
7.0
GOOD

The Good: Grandma can play, comes with the system

The Bad: Zero depth
Coolest Feature: Seeing your customized Miss wandering the sidelines



EXCITE TRUCK

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Monster Games
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Truckin' good time

➔ **ANDREW P:** First the DS, now the Wii—we're getting used to that awkward Nintendo system introductory period. *Excite Truck* is the big N's first example of how racing games can (or should?) work on the Wii, and when you first pick up the controller, turn it sideways, and wait for the race to start...you're not exactly sure how this whole thing is supposed to work.

The light turns green, you hit the gas button and approach the first turn...and you just...turn. It works. It feels weird, yeah, because the controller isn't rooted to a steering column, but soon enough you're passing opponents and boosting off jumps like you've been doing this all your life. As a racing game, *Excite Truck* is a glorious celebration of dumb. From

the horrendously generic '80s guitar riffs to the yeeeeee-haw! feeling you get as you boost to a jump, boost in midair, and boost when you land...you can't accuse Nintendo of false advertising: Because you're always doing something, *Excite Truck* is pretty much always exciting. It's not terribly deep, but like tearing around on your uncle's ATV, it's fun while it lasts.

➔ **CRISPIN:** Andrew's right about one thing: The wuss-metal music here makes hair-metal artists Winger sound manly (load your custom tunes pronto!). But I think I got a little more out of *Excite Truck*'s nitro-boost control system, which has you timing the turbo button and tweaking your truck's air-time angles to squeeze extra oomph

from your ride. It's deeper than you'd expect—not to mention a great showcase for the tilt-and-tumble controller. Strip away the motion-sensing magic, however, and you'd be stuck with a generic rally racer that sure wouldn't get by on its looks.

➔ **G. FORD:** I can see why Nintendo wants you to rev up this joy ride—it's point-heavy progression is easy enough for any drivers' ed dropout to get a grip of. You score by breaking realism's rules—pulling off stunts, grabbing air, etc. Combined with a slew of unlockable vehicles, it keeps you going...for the first tank. The shallow modes, including bare-bones multiplayer and running through rings, won't have you rushing for a refill.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

ANDREW P:
7.0
GOOD

CRISPIN:
7.5
GOOD

FORD:
6.5
AVERAGE

The Good: Simple, fun racing with intuitive controls
The Bad: Butt rock soundtrack, generic courses
Wii Will Rock You: Load your own tunes!



Wii

ELEBITS

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

THE VERDICT'S (OUT OF 10)

JAMES L.
7.0
 GOOD

JEREMY
4.0
 BAD

JARED
4.5
 BAD

The Good: Trashing your room with a gun from the future

The Bad: Weak multiplayer, half-baked missions

Too Many Bits: Not enough game

Short circuits

➔ **JAMES L.:** Like a narc trying to find that stash of blow hidden away in the couch cushions, you'll be tossing around furniture searching for adorable little blobs in this first-person-action game. But you do it with a gun from the future! Zapping shoeboxes and tossing them aside with your tractor beam is intuitive and fun as hell. Sucking up the colorful cutie-pie Elebits made me feel like a Ghostbuster. The game's high point is when your gun becomes upgraded to the point where you can use it to throw around larger objects, like streetlights and mattresses. I do wish that the game would have stayed within the *Katamari*-like goals and just have ever-expanding environments with a time restriction. Instead,

the game presents you with lame challenges and restrictions, such as setting a noise limit and having you delicately blast around your mom's precious china—it's like they want you to tiptoe around and not wake up all the game's potential fun.

➔ **JEREMY:** Hey James, wanna ditch those launch goggles? *Elebits* didn't make me think "Wannabe *Katamari*" so much as "Oh, not again."

Remember 2004's DS launch? Lots of good ideas that made use of the system's unique features but desperately needed actual game content? Welcome to 2006's Wii launch. The core elements of *Elebits* are really fun, but it feels like an early version of a much more substantial game. And

the few furtive attempts to implement substance basically boil down to punishing the player for having fun. It ultimately amounts to a promising rough draft—but a rough draft nonetheless.

➔ **JARED:** James said the magic word: "Katamari." Much like *Katamari Damacy*, *Elebits* is continually taking baby steps toward bigger and better things, only without the personality. For one thing, as the game expands, it takes a visual beatdown with choppy graphics and a seriously restricted visual distance (bringing back thoughts of Nintendo 64 limitations). Then, by the time you're throwing houses around, the game's concept has worn so thin that it isn't nearly as rewarding as it should be.



Wii

TRAUMA CENTER: SECOND OPINION

■ Publisher: Atlus ■ Developer: Atlus
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICT'S (OUT OF 10)

A. FITCH
6.5
 AVERAGE

DEMIAN
7.5
 GOOD

SAM
7.0
 GOOD

The Good: Responsive controls

The Bad: Frustratingly vague explanations

Dr. Demento: Would make a more competent A.I. assistant

Diagnosis: Murder that incompetent nurse!

➔ **A. FITCH:** *Trauma Center: Second Opinion*, a "Wii-make" of last year's cult-classic DS title, actually makes a decent transition to the Wii. The controls are responsive and logical—for example, squeezing the two Wii Remote action buttons to control the forceps really immersed me in the action. I felt like a real doctor as my palms started sweating and my hands started shaking—I had an emotional investment in my patients.

But I wanted to euthanize my useless nurse assistants, who seemed like graduates from the Dr. Nick Riviera School of Malpractice. Actually, that's insulting to good Dr. Nick—at least he always explains to Homer exactly how he's going to amputate the wrong arm. *Second*

Opinion's assistants tell you what to do (well, sometimes...), but oftentimes, they don't tell you how! More than once, I flailed around with the remote and accidentally stumbled across the correct controller motion. No, that's not "challenging"—it's bad design.

➔ **DEMIAN:** I missed the DS version of *Trauma Center*, but I may have to go back and check it out after playing this, my second favorite Wii game so far (no points for guessing No. 1). *Second Opinion* puts your surgical tool selection on the Nunchuk stick, so when the more complex operations start up you'll settle into an almost Zen-like rhythm.

The dialogue gets silly, and I don't understand why the doc depends on

the nurse to figure out what to do—though I guess it beats studying a medical textbook before each stage...

➔ **SAM:** I agree with Andrew that the Wii-mote works great for controlling the various surgical procedures (this is the type of game that just makes perfect sense on the Wii), but *Trauma Center*'s tool selection can be really cumbersome and the instructions lacking (Demian must be a surgical savant or something). It's a really fun experience that, at times, unfortunately feels like more trouble than it's worth. Also, playing the game on a large screen now, I found the constant sight of blood and open wounds kind of unsettling at times. It's definitely not one for the squeamish.

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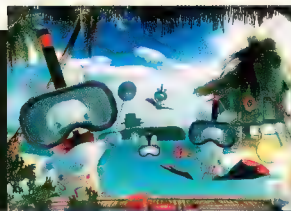
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RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS

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



Creating good habbids

➔ **G. FORD:** As you play through *Raving Rabbids*, you'll encounter some bizarrely diverse minigames. One minute, you're yanking worms out of a rabbit's...er, rabbit's porous teeth, and the next you're slowly scanning floppy-ear-filled risers for the one singing out of tune, then smacking some sense into him with a shake of the remote. And it's from this clever task set and whimsical graphics that *Raving Rabbids* gets its charm. Also, it's hard not to be amused...or red-faced...as you pump the two remotes up and down to make your character run; *Raving Rabbids* makes good use of a variety of hand-shaking and arm-swinging motions.

But while the games are creative and controls effective, it'd be

even sweeter if more of the 70-plus minigames (which include a good chunk of reworkings of earlier tasks) were multiplayer friendly. Why so few four-player simultaneous tasks? Single-player story mode's a kick, sure, but it's most useful in unlocking the games to play with friends.

➔ **MICHAEL:** Greg may groan about the lack of four-player simultaneous games, but I'm cool slinging my arms alone—the minigames are solo friendly. I'm not cool, however, with the lack of single-player variety—you basically play four minigames and then battle a boss (an on-rails plunger-shooter or a ho-hum race on a wild warhog). Repetitive? You bet, but at least *Raving Rabbids* makes nifty use

of the Wii controls. Hell, just screwing around with the rabbids is fun, if not disturbing. What wacky carrot juice were the developers sipping when they created these bunny beatdowns?

➔ **ROBERT:** Rabbids—the bug-eyed, brain-dead, creepy-cute stars of this show—are awesome. I wish I could hit one in the head with a shovel in real life. Their irresistible charisma is a big part of *Raving Rabbids*' appeal. Sure, the games are fun, and you'll find plenty of gems (I especially liked the competitive *Simon*-style game) and a few duds (who knew closing outhouse doors could be so infuriating?). But in the end, *Rabbids* feels more like a Wii-mote demo than a full game—not enough flesh on the bone.

THE VERDICT'S
(OUT OF 10)

G. FORD
7.0
GOOD

MICHAEL
7.5
GOOD

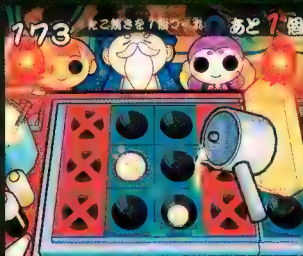
ROBERT
7.5
GOOD

The Good: Cartoon graphics, mostly fun minigames
The Bad: Not enough four-player simultaneous action
Wack Happy: The carrot juice minigame

WII: ABROAD

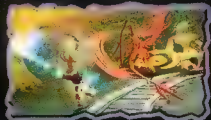
Big in Japan?

Given the Nintendo DS' stupendous success in Japan, few were surprised that the Wii launch easily trumped the PlayStation 3's hometown debut: Gamers there have totally gone gaga for quirky casual games, so the Wii's unique control method and genre-busting software provided the perfect recipe for instant sellouts. Nintendo shipped 400,000 consoles to retail on day one, and promised to keep restock flowing throughout the holiday season (globally, 4 million Wii's are expected to make it to stores by the end of 2006). In stark contrast to Sony's meager software offerings, Wii landed in stores alongside a massive lineup of 17 games...12 of which won't appear Stateside until 2007. Sure, some of these are licensed kiddie fare such as *Tamagotchi* and *SD Gundam*, but lucky Japanese gamers also get to play totally legit games like *Wii Play* and *WarioWare: Smooth Moves* a full month before they hit the U.S. Plus, several interesting day-one third-party titles like *Necro-Nesia*, *Wing Island*, and *Festival Master* make us envious of our Japanese counterparts. Luckily, we hear that most of these will eventually appear on our shores.

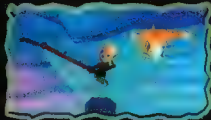


■ Japan gets all sorts of random stuff (clockwise, from top left): Namco Bandai's *Festival Master* collects wacky minigames (like cooking octopus balls), *Kororinpa* rethinks the ball-in-a-maze concept with motion control, *Necro-Nesia* takes a sketchy stab at survival-horror, and *Wing Island* channels the aerial high jinks of *Pilotwings*.

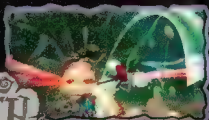
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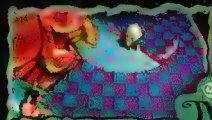


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WII: REVIEWS WRAP-UP

Even more reasons to wave your wand



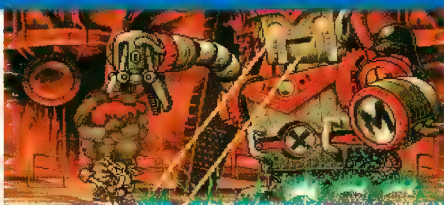
Wii

SUPER SWING GOLF

Publisher: Tecmo ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

True golf fans shouldn't bother with *Wii Sports'* bogey of a minigame. *Super Swing Golf* controls as intuitively as you could hope—you hold the Wii-mote in your hands like you would the handle of a golf club and wind up. It's accurate enough to re-create that nasty slice of yours, in fact. Fortunately, a *Hot Shots Golf*-style quirkiness pervades the proceedings to keep your inner Jack Nicholson in check.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Hard-to-read greens make putting a pain, but everything else will have you feeling like a regular Lee Trevino.



Wii

METAL SLUG ANTHOLOGY

Publisher: SNK Playmore ■ ESRB: Teen

Twitchy arcade shooters may be rare these days, but at least *Metal Slug Anthology* slaps together seven classics in one trigger-happy package. The games themselves look no different, but they sure as hell play differently—the developers worked in six wacky Wii control schemes. Most are a little wonky, but at least you can use the classic GameCube controller if you ain't down with the different ways to play.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Well, you get seven (awesome) games for only 40 bones. Now, we're no mathematicians, but that sounds pretty good.



Wii

GT PRO SERIES

Publisher: Ubisoft ■ ESRB: Everyone

The developers of *GT Pro Series* were right to choose a stylized, colorful look for their racer on the underpowered Wii, but they should have gone a lot further. Looking at this game's flat, primary-colored world for more than five minutes will put anyone to sleep. Playing the game won't keep you awake, either. *GT* shoots for *Gran Turismo*-style driving realism, but finicky controls (despite tons of sensitivity options) render the game nigh unplayable.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** The Wii should be able to handle a serious driving sim, but it's going to need a lot more effort than what's here.



Wii

MONSTER 4X4: WORLD CIRCUIT

Publisher: Ubisoft ■ ESRB: Everyone

Despite its incredibly generic name (and look), *Monster 4X4* is a great example of how the Wii's motion-sensing controller makes been-there-done-that ideas feel fresh. It's simply an arcade racer played on a set of nothing-special tracks. But the game's tilt-to-turn controls are spot-on and more interesting than standard analog-stick steering. And for added absurdity, it comes with a steering wheel-shaped cradle for the Wii Remote.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *Monster 4X4* is surprisingly fun...and similar to the superior *Excite Truck* controlwise, but with less an emphasis on nonstop boosting and grabbing air.



Wii

SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT

Publisher: Ubisoft ■ ESRB: Mature

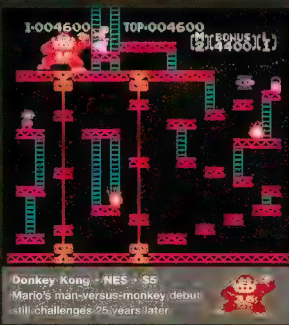
Squeezing a button-hog like *Double Agent* onto the Wii's minimal controller is like trying to cram an elephant into a Mini Cooper. Surprisingly, it *almost* works. With remote gestures replacing the missing buttons, all of Sam Fisher's moves arrive intact. Too bad the camera asks for way too much involvement, essentially replacing the right stick with your right hand. You're in for visual chaos if you can't keep your arm ninja-still.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *Double Agent* is basically a Wii-damaged version of the PlayStation 2 game. Sam's next Wii mission should be custom-built for the oddball box.

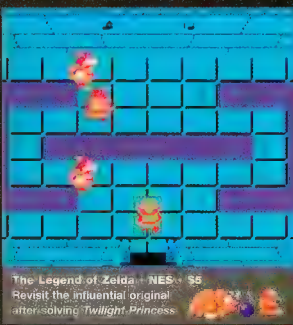
WII: VIRTUAL CONSOLE

10 oldies worth your download dollars

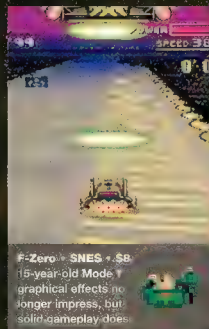
By the end of 2006, Nintendo will offer at least 30 classic games on its Virtual Console download service, with an additional 10 titles debuting each following month. That's quite the software cavalcade, especially when compared to the slow content trickle we've seen for Xbox Live Arcade and PlayStation Network. But don't be fooled by the glossy glow of nostalgia—not all of these antiques deserve a second look. To help guide your shopping, we've chosen 10 venerable classics worth your cash and six fossils best left buried.



Donkey Kong • NES • \$5
Mario's man-versus-monkey debut still challenges 25 years later.



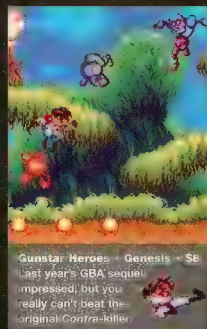
The Legend of Zelda • NES • \$5
Revisit the influential original after solving *Twilight Princess*.



F-Zero • SNES • \$8
15-year-old Mode 7 graphical effects no longer impress, but solid gameplay does.



Super Mario 64 • N64 • \$10
Ditch that janky DS port and replay this genre-busting platformer on the Wii.



Gunstar Heroes • Genesis • \$8
Last year's GBA sequel impressed, but you really can't beat the original *Contra*-killer.



Ice Hockey • NES • \$5
Pick a team of fat guys and dominate this simple yet addictive sports classic.



Dungeon Explorer • TG-16 • \$6
Kill some time with this surprisingly deep, *Gauntlet*-meets-*Zelda* multiplayer dungeon hack.



Bonk's Adventure • TG-16 • \$6
The crazy caveman's big comeback starts with this solid platformer romp.

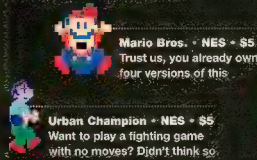


SimCity • SNES • \$8
This user-friendly update of the PC classic offers plenty of depth.

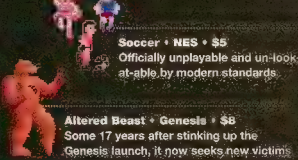


ToeJam & Earl • Genesis • \$8
Grab a buddy and meander through wad, random levels as two bizarre aliens.

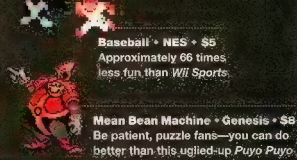
Six Virtual Console games to avoid: Just because they're old doesn't mean they're classics



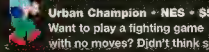
Mario Bros. • NES • \$5
Trust us, you already own four versions of this.



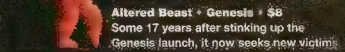
Soccer • NES • \$5
Officially playable and unlook-at-able by modern standards.



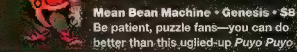
Baseball • NES • \$5
Approximately 66 times less fun than *Wii Sports*.



Urban Champion • NES • \$5
Want to play a fighting game with no moves? Didn't think so.



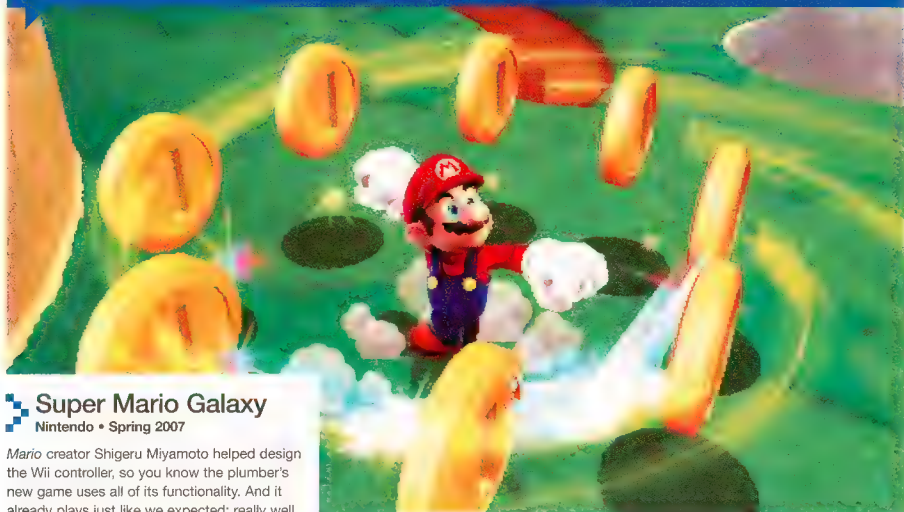
Altered Beast • Genesis • \$8
Some 17 years after stinking up the Genesis launch, it now seeks new victims.



Mean Bean Machine • Genesis • \$8
Be patient, puzzle fans—you can do better than this ugliest-up *Puyo Puyo*.

WII: COMING SOON

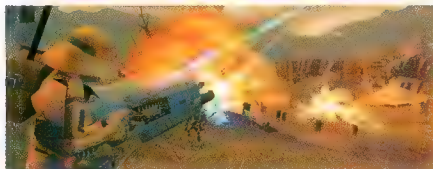
Hey, third parties, where the hell are ya?



Super Mario Galaxy

Nintendo • Spring 2007

Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto helped design the Wii controller, so you know the plumber's new game uses all of its functionality. And it already plays just like we expected: really well.



Battalion Wars 2

Nintendo • Spring 2007

It's the same mediocre strategy game as the GC installment, but with the addition of online play. When did pseudosequels start getting full numerical upgrades? (See also: *Full Auto 2*, *Ridge Racer 7*)



Big Brain Academy

Nintendo • Spring 2007

Not smart enough on your own? Then have a brainiac friend join you in *Academy's* new co-op mode. Too bad that so many of the tasks are ripped from the DS edition.



Cooking Mama: Cook Off

Majesco • March 2007

This surprise DS hit brings its winning recipe to the Wii and adds a multiplayer mode and several more international dishes for you to prepare. Sounds way better than the GC leftovers on these pages.



Metroid Prime 3 Corruption

Nintendo • Spring 2007

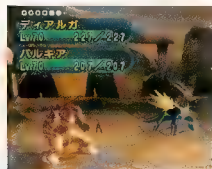
Bounty hunter Samus Aran is digging her new Wii moves, such as thrusting the Nunchuk forward to disarm an enemy or opening a door with a simple turn of the Wii-mote. And so are we.



WarioWare: Smooth Moves

Nintendo • January 2007

Minigame-heavy titles are flooding the Wii launch, but this is the one we all really wanted. Luckily, the wait isn't too long for *Smooth Moves*, which has more than 200 microgames (flinging a pizza, driving a car, etc.) and a mode that supports up to 12 players.



Pokémon Battle Revolution

Nintendo • Spring 2007

Revolution will be first Wii game to have online play and use the DS as a controller. But if it ends up just having battles à la *Colosseum* (GC), then we'd rather drop this pocket monster than catch it.

Sonic and the Secret Rings

Sega • March 2007

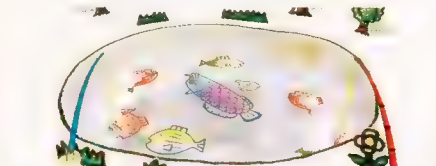
Unlike the PS3 and 360 *Sonic*, *Secret Rings* (formerly *Sonic Wild Fire*) ditches that whole "adventure" element and concentrates on the hedgehog's greatest asset: his blazing speed. Good decision.



Mario Strikers Charged

Nintendo • Spring 2007

Smells a lot like *Battalion Wars 2*, as *Charged* is essentially a warmed-over *Cube* port with some Wii-specific mechanics for scoring goals and stopping them.



Wii Play

Nintendo • January 2007

It's yet another minigame collection, including Table Tennis and Shooting Range, that comes packed with an extra Wii-mote. Now, if it only packed in more gameplay (nine challenges just ain't enough).

PLAYSTATION 3

Is next-gen luxury really worth it?












The PS3 Difference

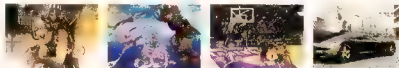
During the past 10 years, the PlayStation brand has been the undisputed leader in the home-console race. Seriously, Sony's game machines are everywhere—the PS1 and PS2 each sold over 100 million units worldwide, handily besting all competitors in their way. Despite this history of domination, however, the PS3 still doesn't feel like a surefire success. A tragic combination of broken promises, hurtful delays, and those lofty price points (\$499 for the base model and \$599 for the deluxe unit) has created some nasty backlash among many hardcore gamers.

Now that it's finally here, we can judge whether the PS3 ranks as a worthy entry in Sony's impressive dynasty. In terms of pure computational muscle, Sony's console outperforms the Xbox 360 and demolishes the Wii, yet its complex, proprietary hardware poses more challenges to developers. So, while the PS3 should eventually sport the best-looking games, the differences appear negligible for now. The PS3 does have a leg up in terms of bonus functionality, though: Its built-in Blu-ray player lets you watch snazzy high-def movies without buying an expensive add-on, the PlayStation Network allows for free online gaming and commerce, and the Sixaxis controller sports its own type of motion-sensing technology. Plus, packing every PS3 with a built-in hard drive means faster load times and universal access to downloadable games, music, and video.

High demand and short supply led to a guaranteed PS3 sellout at launch, but whether or not it can continue Sony's winning legacy will depend solely on its software. The largely unexciting day-one lineup might have been enough to appease early adopters, but winning the war will require some heavier ammunition in 2007....

PS3: Pros and Cons

-  Packed with cutting-edge tech like 1080p HD video output, Blu-ray movie playback, and 7.1 surround-sound audio
-  Motion-sensing Sixaxis controller has plenty of potential to deliver innovative gameplay
-  Built-in Internet support enables free online gameplay, web browsing, and additional functionality (see sidebar on page 78 for further details)
-  Sony's strong first-party exclusives (*Gran Turismo*, *God of War*, *Ratchet & Clank*, etc.) will only appear on this platform
-  Several key third-party titles (*Final Fantasy XIII*, *Virtua Fighter 5*, *Metal Gear Solid 4*, *Devil May Cry 4*) remain exclusive to PS3
-  Considerably more expensive than its competitors
-  Lack of force feedback in Sixaxis controller
-  PlayStation Network not yet as feature-rich as Xbox Live
-  It's tough to appreciate the high-def visuals on a standard television



Turn the page for our PS3 game coverage

Skim to page 77 for the final PS3 vs. Wii judgment



PS3: REVIEWS

A launch worth loving...or 600 bucks?



PlayStation 3

RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Insomniac ■ Players: 1-40 ■ ESRB: Mature



The Good: Weapons to satisfy any taste, multiplayer

The Bad: Too by-the-book otherwise

Alternate Ending: Gets us hot for the sequel

The game no PS3 owner should resist

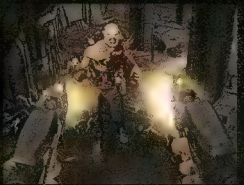
➔ **GARNETT:** Play any first-person shooter these days and you're bound to make some comparisons. But these parallels to other games, *Half-Life 2* in particular, mount to become a distraction in *Resistance*. Instead of getting wrapped up in its world, I kept picking it apart, looking for the next inevitable connection. That undermined the ability of its fiction to fully realize its potential. Which is too bad, since the alternate-history version of 1951, where the bizarre, humanoid Chimera have swarmed across Europe, poses plenty of intriguing questions.

But having *Half-Life 2* on the brain also works in a positive sense. *Resistance* nearly manages to match that modern classic stride for stride in the moment-to-moment experi-

ence. The action strikes the same seductive ebb and flow through each area that makes it hard to put down. Firefights build, culminating in spectacular shoot-outs, and then you get a chance to explore and get composed. Progression overall doesn't go nearly as well, though. Cut-scenes awkwardly break up the levels, sometimes after only a few minutes of play, creating a herky-jerky pace. They look and sound fantastic, though. Insomniac effectively controls your view as you come out of each break to smooth the transition back into your control. Even measured against my high expectations, the presentation comes through—mostly. It's not just a matter of the individual graphics looking pretty. Insomniac furnished the environ-

ments with plenty of objects to make them feel complete. Just don't get too close to anything, 'cause the textures don't hold up well at short range.

While the combat isn't stop-n-pop, you won't last long without making good use of cover, especially since your enemies certainly make no hesitation to hide. Their A.I. doesn't amaze with its tactics, but they do recognize when they have overwhelming numbers to charge with or when they're getting beaten and need to fall back and take up defensive positions. Once you get them pinned, though, they fall into a pretty predictable peek-a-boo routine. And occasionally, if you get the drop on them, you can pick off enemies at long range without their buddies becoming alarmed.



Why's it gotta be like that?

After solving *Resistance*, we asked Insomniac CEO Ted Price for some answers

Why did you elect to do co-op as splitscreen only?

TED PRICE: We, who have played a lot of co-op games, felt like it was more fun to be next to the guy you're playing with, saying, "Dude, c'mon, take those guys out, cover me!"... We felt like offline co-op would satisfy the people who like to play co-op with their friends in a social setting.

But honestly, do you think people really want splitscreen co-op? We understand it's fun to play with a friend next to you, but...

TP: What I would recommend is you try it.

Fair enough. So what weapon, bullet for bullet (besides the sniper rifle), packs the most punch?

TP: I think the LAARK...

OK, discounting the sniper rifle and the rocket launcher. Between the Bullseye, the Auger, and the Carbine.

TP: The Auger is very powerful; it's more powerful than the other two. Generally, the comparison that we've been making in the office is [between] the Carbine and the Bullseye, because they have similar rates of fire but slightly different behavior. The Bullseye is slightly more powerful—it has a wider spread angle—but if you get closer to the enemy, you'll take them down a little bit more quickly than you will with the Carbine. But the Carbine's better at greater distances.

Check out the full interview on EGM211.1UP.com

The main reason *Resistance* will be in my PS3 for some time to come, however, is its multiplayer. Using the wide arsenal of creative weapons against live opponents and, conversely, have them using the same weapons against you ups the ante. The team-based modes take the most advantage of this, as different guns are better suited to various roles. The 40-player max, though, may be overkill. It's nearly impossible to coordinate teams of many more than a dozen. The level design for these big matches also got overzealous, spreading out too much. When 40 people occupy a single multiplayer battlefield, I don't expect to go as long as 30 seconds without seeing another soul.

Since the ending left me salivating for the sequel, I have every reason to believe Insomniac will return with

a perfected follow-up. For now, *Resistance* delivers a launch classic, but not quite the hoped-for *Halo* killer.

→ G. FORD: While Garnett was spending his time making connections to other games, I was enjoying the dozens of thrills Insomniac packed into *Resistance*. My favorite part: slipping behind the wheel of a speedy, high-flying jeep, thump-thumping over Chimera while storming a series of lookout points to unlock some obstructing gates. Clearing a path and then jumping out with my gun of choice—be it the shoots-through-walls Auger or the Fareye sniper rifle, which has a secondary function that slows down time for easier head shots—was intense and fully satisfying. And be it the Jeep, bitchin' tank, or the Chimera's buglike off-roader,

the vehicles break up the action so well and have such smooth handling that I would have loved to have seen them implemented more.

Resistance is a shooter, though, a good one, and its weapons and run-n-gun action understandably form the game's focus. Granted, those expecting a weapon set of *Ratchet* scale (Insomniac's crazy-ass action-platformer series famous for its otherworldly ordnance) will be a tinge disappointed, but what's here displays a decent amount of creativity, with sometimes outside-the-box secondary functions (particularly with the ones you open on a second playthrough).

But while *Resistance* does plenty right, including mostly manic multiplayer and that effective ebb and flow of action and downtime that Garnett mentions (done so well that I didn't >

RESISTANCE: CALL OF NAU (continued)



This is my rifle

Become a master-at-arms to dominate online



Resistance's broad assortment of weapons is fun to play with, but to rack up the frags online you have to learn how to get the most out of it. That starts one gun at a time. Resist the temptation to run through and grab them all at the start of each match. Master the one that best fits your style, know where it is on every level, and head there from the get-go.

Pay particular attention to developing how you can use secondary fire. For instance, the Bullseye is a good weapon to learn first if you're playing a Chimera. It delivers a high rate of fire with decent power, but lacks the accuracy of its human counterpart, the carbine. Don't forget the secondary fire lock-on marker, though. Sure, it looks cool to use it to fire around corners, but at medium range, a well-placed tag as your first shot will let you quickly put an entire clip into your target and bring them down.



even realize—or mind—its near lack of bosses until I thought about it afterward), it never rises above the level of a thoroughly enjoyable shooter. In fact, despite compelling reasons to replay the game, I never felt that itch. One thing that would have helped: online co-op. Sure, playing with a bud next to you makes for good times, but even better would be getting a screen to yourself, with that smarts on the other side of a headset. But I've complained far too much for such a satisfying game: *Resistance* is by far the best reason to own a PS3.

➔ **JOE:** All this talk about *Half-Life 2* and *Halo* killing misses the point, I think. Is *Resistance* derivative? Sure, to an extent. Is it *distractingly* derivative? No way. Rather than comparing it to other games in the genre, con-

sider the game on its own merits. It's really quite staggeringly competent (and I'm not even going to qualify that with "for a launch game"), with exceptional production values, satisfying depth, and a whole damn lot of replay value due to the selection of intel collectibles, skill points (à la the *Ratchet* series), and that fantastic multiplayer (which includes one-death-and-you're-done matches and all-out fragfests).

More important, though: *Resistance* is just fun. The balance between epic, large-scale battles and claustrophobic, corridor-creeching segments is dead on, as is the balance between frantic firefights and ominous exploration. I found the pacing and the variety to be exactly my speed; I never came across an area where it felt like a level ended prematurely, nor did I find myself stumped for more than a few

moments here and there. (To be clear, this is on medium difficulty—playing on hard is *much* tougher; I can't even imagine what the unlockable superhuman difficulty will be like.)

To me, the game fails to excel in just two areas: First, I found the story just the slightest bit clichéd; even though the specifics haven't been done in games before, the overall feel is the same sort of alien invasion that's threatened videogames since *Space Invaders*. And second, while a great variety in enemies exists, the fact that the majority of the Chimera you face are of the similar bipedal Hybrid variety brings on the occasional feeling of monotony. But in the end, *Resistance* is a smart, pretty, enormously satisfying shooter. No, it doesn't break much new ground, but as long as the game's fun, does it really matter?

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PlayStation 3

GENJI: DAYS OF THE BLADE

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Game Republic
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen



This blade's a tinge dull

➔ **SHANE:** PlayStation 3 detractors have latched onto *Genji* as ■ whipping boy for the disappointing launch lineup, but in reality, it's merely a competent *Onimusha* clone that's unfortunately lacking in next-gen ambition. Visually, it's arresting stuff: Flames flicker realistically, waterfalls flow idyllically, and blades of grass undulate seductively in the wind. Get this baby running on an HDTV and the aesthetically gorgeous environments will impress even stalwart cynics. Sadly, the predictable swordplay (hack, slash, repeat), confusing camera angles, and rote level design (find another key, eradicate another 30 enemies) make it feel decidedly last-gen. The developers did attempt to evolve the first *Genji*'s gameplay by includ-

ing four distinct playable characters that you can switch between on the fly, but only lead slasher Yoshitsune offers a rounded mix of offense and defense. As it stands, *Blade* delivers a moderately engaging yet ultimately forgettable samurai romp.

➔ **RAY:** Shane may call the game "competent," but that doesn't make it worth getting. For all of *Blade*'s lovely environments, I never got the feeling that I was playing a PS3 game. This is partly due to the choppy action: The characters display no momentum as you jerk them back and forth—where as the smoother transitions and additional animations? Also, the motion-controlled dodging just plain sucks—I ended up using the right analog stick

instead. Finally, the vague puzzles and unhelpful map also had me questioning whether this was next gen.

➔ **TOM:** You're being way too kind, Shane: *Blade* is the poster child for launch-lineup disappointment. Developers are supposed to step it up for the next gen. Luscious graphics (must-see HD!) and a fun, if flawed, combat system aside, *Blade* feels like a step down. A crappy fixed camera, recycled levels, uneven pacing, and graphic glitches (the walking-through-walls syndrome) make for a game that feels like it wasn't ready to ship. *Blade*'s greatest sin, though, is its lack of online play or even two-player co-op. *Genji: Days of the Blade?* More like *Genji: Rushed Out the Door*.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

SHANE
6.0
AVERAGE

RAY
5.0
AVERAGE

TOM
4.5
BAD

The Good: Slick visuals, rich customization

The Bad: Uncontrollable camera, repetitive levels
Literary Inspiration: *The Tale of Genji*

PS3: ONLINE

It's live, but not yet kicking

The PS3's PlayStation Network vastly improves on the PS2's half-assed online play by offering an integrated suite of matchmaking, messaging, and commerce akin to Xbox Live. Wait a second, though—don't celebrate yet. For the time being, the service still feels pretty rough around the edges—functions like voice/video messaging, cross-game invites, and entitlement management (similar to Xbox Live's achievement system) have yet to be fully implemented. If you and a friend are playing different games, you'll have to return to the PS3's main menu (the cross media bar, aka XMB) in order to read any messages or invites he or she sends you. Some games, like *Dark Kingdom*, even require a separate login through a third-party service (Xfire). The upside? Unlike Microsoft's service, this one won't cost you a cent. Plus, Sony promises regular updates to enhance the service and address gamers' concerns, so don't be afraid to be vocal with your complaints. If this network hopes to truly compete with Xbox Live on a feature-for-feature basis, Sony's at the base of an epic uphill climb.

■ The PlayStation Store impresses with a clean, easily navigable interface, up-front pricing (in real dollars!), and plenty of trailers, demos, and downloadable games.

■ The PlayStation Network does offer one feature: weirdly lacking with Xbox Live—Web browsing. Here, you can view multiple windows and even stream video.

■ You can only check to see if your friends are online from the PS3's main menu. Bummer.



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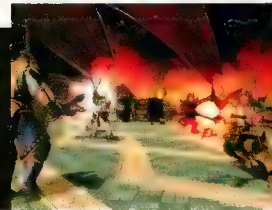
MAGIC
The Gathering®

TRADING CARD GAME

PlayStation 3

UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOM

■ Publisher: Sony Online ■ Developer: Sony Online
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen



Legends best left untold



The Good: Online co-op
The Bad: Devoid of innovation or charm
Most Memorable Character: The lame, murderous camera

➔ **SHARKEY:** It doesn't get more by the numbers when it comes to action-RPGs than *Dark Kingdom*. We get to choose from the obligatory lithe assassin, wizened mage, and big dumb guy with a hammer and then cut down endless swarms of undead, giant spiders, rock golems, and other critters straight out of the big book of fantasy clichés. Which could be fine. Vanilla fantasy isn't that much of a shortcoming if the game is fun and has a good presentation. *Dark Kingdom*, however, showcases unimpressive graphics, a camera that wants us dead, and bottomless pits that are only too happy working hand in hand with said camera.

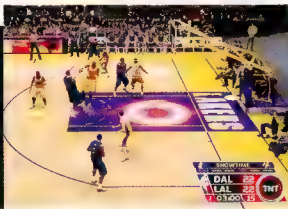
The game's only saving grace is the inclusion of multiplayer co-op, if only

in that misery-loves-company way. Watch out for the frustrating puzzles, though. I encountered one relatively early that was actually busted when two players worked on it. Only when I gave up did my cohort get past it.

➔ **DANA:** It might be by the numbers, but Sony Online didn't even get all the numbers right. The waves of boring enemies and blue-tinted environments get old fast, and the graphical glitches are embarrassing—if this is the next generation, I'll hang out with the old dudes. My least favorite part of the game is the ridiculous lack of health potions. It's awesome getting stuck with no health and a wave of enemies between you and the next recharging station.

If you've already hacked through any of the *Champions of Norrath* or *Baldur's Gate* PS2 games, then you'll find little here to hold your interest.

➔ **ANDREW F.:** Maybe it's because my experience with these games isn't as deep as Sharkey's or Dana's, but I... no, actually, I was still pretty bored. If this is your first fantasy hack-n-slash ever, then you probably won't notice the lame itemization, unimaginative quest design, and the same combat over and over and over again. But yeah, you'll quickly notice that camera. Give me a character, some stats to modify, and some things to kill—and I'm satisfied. But *Dark Kingdom* doesn't do anything more than it thinks it has to.



PlayStation 3

NBA 07

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Sony CEA
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone



The Good: The graphics
The Bad: These guys can't play defense
Pretty Much Busted: Performing jukes with the PS3 tilt feature

Where's the D?

➔ **BRYAN:** *NBA 07* is a lot like the Atlanta Hawks: After multiple seasons in the cellar, this baller is finally showing some potential. The move to the PlayStation 3 has definitely resulted in quite a nice face-lift, as its emotive NBA superstars easily outshine *2K7*'s models (one look at each game's sharpshooters Dirk Nowitzki or the Dallas Mavericks and you'll know what I'm talking about). Also, I really can't wait to download new challenges taken from this year's real NBA season (which Sony will update weekly) and re-create them here.

But as with all teams slowly on the rise, a few bad habits do persist. And in *NBA 07*'s case, they're all on defense. Since you can't break down and get in good position, opponents

have way too many clear runs at the basket, which translates into easy points. And forget about your big men coming over to help; these lanky, dim-witted SOB's never fill the lane, nor do they box out for rebounds.

➔ **GARNETT:** Has the standard for basketball games fallen so low that it's now OK for them to be broken? Because this one is, and I don't just mean in terms of the atrocious defense. After scoring a basket, players literally teleport to the other end of the court to get in defensive position. A sports sim has absolutely no excuse for that kind of blatant cheating. And no amount of flogging about with the PS3's Sixaxis controller would allow any moves other than the spin to

come out. Yeah, the game's pretty—consider that half the battle. Now, we just need the basketball-fundamentals parts.

➔ **GIANCARLO:** I didn't know Sony started making *NBA Jam* games! Seriously, *NBA 07*'s defense is pretty atrocious when you play a run-n-gun style, although it does show a few flashes of intelligence when the defenders actually decide to play passing lanes and stop you from making blind passes every five seconds. Still, the weak D, in combination with a shot meter that essentially guarantees an easy three-pointer with any decent outside shooter, makes *NBA 07* less of a full basketball game and more of a shooting contest.



RIDGE RACER 7

■ Publisher: Namco ■ Developer: Namco
 ■ Players: 1-14 ■ ESRB: Everyone



The Good:

Supertight controls, fast action

The Bad: Just like the last few Ridge Racers

Who's: The voice chat?

Been down this road before

► **MILKMAN:** Depending on your perspective, *Ridge Racer 7* is either the highly polished apex of the series or just a glamorous rehash capitalizing on the freshness of the PS3 launch. Now, when faced with the option of playing a dreary driving simulator like *Gran Turismo* or going bats*** insane around rocky mountain canyons behind the wheel of a nitrous-fueled demon, well, I'll take demon, thanks. Arcade-style racer *Ridge Racer 7* is nothing if not packed with options, including the ability to customize your rides (finally) with engine and body parts, paint jobs, and decals. The usual assortment of vintage *Ridge Racer* tracks returns, along with some all-new courses. The real replay value, however, arrives in the online play,

where a worldwide network of gamers can compete to be the one true Ridge Racer. Yes, you'll encounter a touch of the overly familiar sameness you get when you play any *Ridge Racer*, but it's like slipping on a well-worn pair of jeans: It feels fine every time.

► **SHANE:** Really, Namco? You're sure you want to call this *Ridge Racer 7*? I'd feel more secure dubbing it *Ridge Racer 6: Director's Cut*, seeing as it adds only a handful of original tracks, additional tunes, and new car customization options to last year's (already derivative) Xbox 360 offering. Sure, if you have access to a whiz-bang 1080p HDTV, then you'll spy a greater visual upgrade, but even then the series' spartan aesthetic keeps it from

looking particularly real. At least the gameplay remains rock-solid—perfect control, absurd drifting, and an exhilarating sense of speed combine to make a truly addictive experience.

► **GIANCARLO:** The great thing about *Ridge Racer 7* is that it plays exactly like a *Ridge Racer* game should. Drifting is still the main gameplay element, and it's executed well and still requires a decent amount of skill. At the same time, that feeling of familiarity makes me wish that *Ridge Racer 7* had something truly new to make it really feel like I hadn't played this game years ago, because the added slipstream or even the nitrous feature—pulled from the PSP game—had me itching for a new pair of jeans.

PS3: ABOARD

Big in Japan?

If you thought the U.S. PS3 launch suffered from hardware shortages and slim software pickings, be glad you weren't in Japan. Over there, throngs of dedicated gamers (and homeless people hired by opportunistic scalpers) braved torrential downpours in order to score one of the scant 68,000 systems shipped on day one. Only five games were available—*Genji: Days of the Blade*, *Ridge Racer 7*, *Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire*, *Resistance*, and *Sega Golf Club*. Three days later, another title, Konami's yawn-inducing *Mahjong Fight Club*, limped onto shelves. So far, game sales have been much lower than expected (maybe everyone's downloading demos, watching Blu-ray movies, or selling their PS3 to the highest bidder), but perhaps Japanese gamers will warm up to planned December releases *MotorStorm* (sans online play) and *Armored Core 4*.



■ This ho-hum arcade port was the worst-selling PS3 launch game in Japan. Odds are we won't be seeing it Stateside anytime soon.



■ The first rule of *Mahjong Fight Club* is...uh, you don't really give a damn about mahjong, do you?



■ Maybe robo-on-robo combat sim *Armored Core 4* will inspire Japanese gamers to purchase games for their PS3s.

PS3: REVIEWS WRAP-UP

The rest of the PS3's sporty lineup

PS3

FULL AUTO 2:
BATTLELINES

Publisher: Sega ESRB: Teen

The Xbox 360 car combat-racing game crashes the PS3 party with new arena-style stages, power-ups on the tracks, and more clearly marked shortcuts (making the races feel less linear). But this version also comes with a lot of the same maps from the first game, making the "2" in *Full Auto 2* feel like a bit of a rip-off.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** We're not pleased about all the recycled content, but we're looking forward to this one anyway. It's still fast, frantic, and fun (we never understood why so many people didn't like the original). Plus, it's a whole new game for non-360 gamers.



PS3

NBA 2K7

2K Sports ESRB: Everyone

This season's premier roundballer puts up big numbers on Sony's new console, even if the game—from a graphics perspective—isn't any different from its Xbox 360 counterpart. It still plays and moves better than the competition, and unlike a lot of the sport ports that shoehorned in tilt functions for the PS3, flicking your wrist here (in this case, to shoot free throws) is actually an improvement from the old mechanic.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** The best of the b-ball bunch, but the new way to shoot from the charity stripe isn't enough reason to buy 2K7 if you already own the 360 edition.



PS3

MOBILE SUIT
GUNDAM:
CROSSFIRE

Namco,Bandai ESRB: Teen

This big-mech shooter is a big-ass mess, managing to feel more last-gen, perhaps even last-last-gen, than next-gen. Recycled character palettes punctuate the bland visuals. The action runs in such a choppy manner that it's nearly unplayable. Even as you're walking across the land, the camera jerks and stutters with your every movement. On top of that, the mobile suits are extremely unresponsive to any controller input.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *Crossfire* is an embarrassment to the *Gundam* name, reinforcing the notion the game was a rush job for the PS3 launch. The series deserves better.



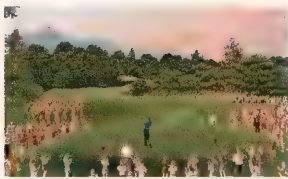
PS3

NHL 2K7

2K Sports ESRB: Everyone 10+

Squint and you might notice that the 360 game has a slightly hazy thing happening that the PS3 version eliminates. Or you might not; the difference is that small. What you will notice is that, on defense, you can violently move the controller in a particular direction and your guy will attempt a corresponding body check. Usually. But checking in 2K7 is so easy that this technique doesn't change much. The Sixaxis motion business also works when you play as the goalie to change position and then zero in on a shot.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Same game, but with some extraneous controller-tilt stuff.



PS3

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 07

EA Sports ■ ESRB: Everyone

Tiger earns an award during the PS3 launch, but it's probably not something this golf sim would keep on its mantel. *07's* motion-sensor feature is hands-down the most useless of all those we checked out in the sports category. Tilting the controller puts spin on the ball, but it very rarely works the way you want it to, and you're better off jamming on a button to spin faster. Everything else here is pretty much the same as in the course-light 360 version.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *07* had a relatively rough outing in its earlier next-gen outing, and nothing changes on the PS3.



PS3

MADDEN NFL 07

EA Sports ■ ESRB: Everyone

If the PS3's guts are really more powerful than the 360's, then *Madden* doesn't help demonstrate it. *07* looks a bit worse on Sony's machine, as some of the finer details have been lost in translation. The tilt functions here aren't that special, either; seriously, is your buddy on the couch really gonna believe you're hiking the ball when you're pulling back on the controller like a freakin' moron for a fake hike? And remember those terrible position-specific camera angles from the Superstar mode? They're still terrible.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** If you have both consoles, the 360 *Madden* is the clear-cut choice.



PS3

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

EA Sports ■ ESRB: Teen

Aside from adding some silly tilt mechanics for your illegal moves, EA's prizefighter steps back into the next-gen ring with an all-new mode: first-person boxing. And we like—*Round 3* moves surprisingly well from this up-close-and-personal perspective, plus it's easier to recognize when your fighter is in trouble (the screens starts getting all blurry). Landing big punches in this view takes some practice, but, overall, it's a great addition (career mode makes it even better).

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *Round 3* bucks the PS3 sports port trend and actually shows up in better condition than it did on the Xbox 360.

PS3: DOWNLOADABLE GAMES

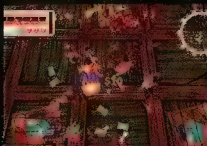
Sony's answer to Xbox Live Arcade delivers some oddly familiar fare...

What's Out Now



Blast Factor

Yeah, *Blast Factor* is basically a blatant rip-off of *Mutant Storm* and *Geometry Wars*, but hey, those games weren't terribly original to begin with, and the new motion-based wave mode adds depth.



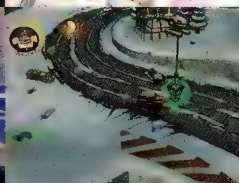
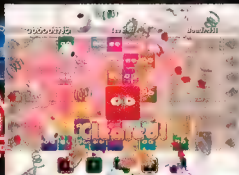
Cash Carnage Chaos

While Xbox Live Arcade users get to relive token-munching glory days with the coin-op classic *Smash TV*, PS3 players must make do with this ho-hum clone with lousy ported-over-from-PSP graphics.

Flow

Wait a sec...this isn't like anything on Xbox Live Arcade. With its trippy minimalist visuals, new age tunes, and silky Silexian motion control, *Flow* reinvents that classic *Snake* game in full 3D.

The Next Wave



The second wave of downloadable games (plus by the end of 2006) features three puzzlers aimed at casual types—*Go! Puzzle* (upper left), *Go! Puzzle* (upper right), and *Lemmings 2* (lower left)—and an upgraded port of PSP racer *GripShift*. If you're looking for something more exciting, wait for Sony's *Calling All Cars* (lower right), a whimsical multiplayer car-combat game from the guy who brought you *God of War*. Plus, look for a stream of downloadable PS1 games in 2007. You'll only be able to play them on your PSP, but Sony promises full PS3 compatibility down the line...

PS3: COMING SOON

More question marks than sure-fire hits



Virtua Fighter 5

Sega • March 2007

The supremely technical fighter already looks (and plays) like a spot-on port of the arcade version. Expect some PS3-exclusive modes, too.



Bladestorm: Hundred Years' War

Koei • February 2007

Dynasty Warriors, *Ninety-Nine Nights*, and now *Bladestorm*—when will companies realize that cramming a ridiculous amount of enemies onscreen just isn't doing it for us anymore?



Devil May Cry 4

Capcom • Spring 2007

The metrosexual Dante actually isn't the star of *DMC4* (though he's still playable); the just as fashionable Nero and his magically enhanced arm take center stage in this slick beat/shoot-em-up.



Gran Turismo HD

Sony CEA • Spring 2007

Instead of a true sequel, we're stuck with two versions of *HD: Premium* (featuring new yet limited content) and *Classic* (lots of cars and tracks from previous *GTs*, and you can pay to download more).



Heavenly Sword

Sony CEA • March 2007

Until we see something outside of *Heavenly Sword's* thrillingly brief arena battle, this *God of War*-esque experience will go down as one of the best demos we've ever played...and that's it.



Ninja Gaiden Sigma

Tecmo • Spring 2007

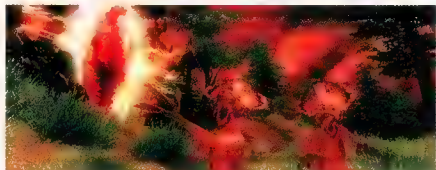
Sigma (or what we like to call *Ninja Gaiden* version 3.0) adds a new playable character (the dominatrix-looking Rachel), plus a few extra stages and weapons to this phenomenal hardcore action game.



Lair

Sony CEA • March 2007

The makers of those *Star Wars Rogue Squadron* titles hit the PS3 skies on the back of a dragon, and are using the motion-sensing abilities of the controller to maneuver these fire-breathers.



The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

Bethesda • February 2007

This epic adventure that originally came out on the Xbox 360 now includes the all-new Knights of the Nine faction (this group's like the Goody Two-shoes of the *Oblivion* universe) and more side quests.



Unreal Tournament 2007

Midway • June 2007

This deathmatch-heavy first-person shooter takes a page from its PC roots and offers user-created content (such as multiplayer maps) that you can download via PS3's online network. Very nice.



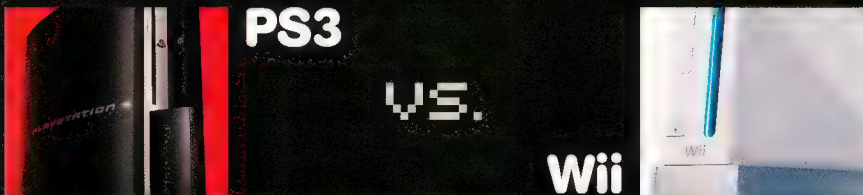
Warhawk

Sony CEA • June 2007

The dogfighting portions are lookin' good, while the new on-ground combat...uh, not so much. Smart move, Sony, on delaying this one (*Warhawk* was originally scheduled as a launch title).

APPLES TO ORANGES

Just how different are these competing consoles?
Let's just say that they'd better not try to mate.



Cost

\$499 with 20GB hard drive; \$599 with 60GB hard drive

\$249 (includes *Wii Sports*)

Processing Power

Eight-core Cell chip running at 3.2 GHz

Broadway chip running at 729 MHz (4x slower than the Cell)

Game Media

50GB BD-ROM

4.7GB optical discs

Maximum Resolution

Up to 1080p via HDMI

Up to 480p via component cables

Backward Compatibility

Plays 97 percent of all PS1 and PS2 games

Plays all GameCube games

Other Features

Blu-ray movie playback; DVD playback; Super Audio CD playback; free PlayStation Network access; PSP interoperability

Free WiConnect24 service; DS connectivity

Target Demographic

PS2 owners; eBay entrepreneurs

Nintendo fans; kids; old people

Defining Online Experience

Forty-player *Resistance: Fall of Man* deathmatch

The unbridled whimsy of a Mii Parade

Number of Games Available by End of 2006

19 (seven exclusive to PS3)

31 (11 exclusive to Wii)

Number of Games Based on Cartoons

1

Average EGM Review Score for Launch Games (out of 10)

6.1

6.4

FINAL WORD

Still haven't made up your mind on which console is right for you? Here's what we choose



Dan "Shoe" Hsu
Editor-in-Chief

It's huge, it's expensive, and no one knows yet whether Blu-ray will overtake HD-DVD. PS3? It can wait...especially if you're looking to eBay to supply you one. The Wii offers a totally new style of play. It's not loaded with killer games yet, but hey, at that price, it's not a huge risk.

Shoe's pick: Wii



Shane Bettenhausen
Executive Editor

Up until now, I've been the staff's biggest PS3 proponent, but the Wii's surprisingly engaging launch lineup can't be denied. The system's just so affordable, fresh, and funky—it's guaranteed to keep you playing until the PS3 becomes a more worthwhile investment in mid-2007.

Shane's pick: Wii



Crispin Boyer
Senior Editor

Goochie-goo, PS3, you giant grill-shaped baby. You'll grow up so fast, but what can you do for me that I can't find better on Xbox 360? What a cute online network. Careful with those baby steps! At least the Wii gives me something different—even if some games are for actual babies.

Crispin's pick: Wii



Bryan Intihar
Previews Editor

I'm in Nintendo's camp this time 'round because of *Zelda*. And even though the rest of the Wii lineup is suspect, I'm curious to see how other gamemakers use this new tech. As for the PS3, what's worth playing besides *Resistance*, *Fight Night*, and uh...the *MotorStorm* demo?

Bryan's pick: Wii



Greg Ford
Reviews Editor

Seeing as the Wii actually has some variety in its lineup—from "new way to play Tony" *Downhill Jam* to "I think I'm gonna puke" *Trauma Center* to "just get it" *Twilight Princess*—I feel like I'm getting some value out of my gaming dollar. PS3, you've outpriced me...for now.

Greg's pick: Wii



Michael Donahoe
News/Features Editor

Sure, Wii games may look like the PS3's s***, but at least Nintendo's casual experiment launched with more than one game worth playing. Right now, the PS3 can't deliver enough fun to justify its \$600 price. But later, I'd totally trade in my wacky Wii for a chance to play *Final Fantasy XIII*....

Michael's pick: Wii



And the overall winner is...Wii

In a landslide upset, the oddball Nintendo Wii sweeps EGM's voting to conquer Sony's pricey high-end PS3. It wasn't a one-game race, though. Sure, *Zelda*'s brilliance was a factor, but *Resistance* didn't fare too badly, either. And if you look at the overall launch lineups, the average review score for both systems' offerings hovered around a slightly above-average 6.0. Put simply, Wii just has the edge in terms of delivering uniquely fun gameplay, whereas, so far, the PS3 hasn't done much to differentiate itself from or improve upon the Xbox 360.

Does our recommendation ultimately carry any weight? We're not Miss Cleo, but our previous attempt at predicting the future was a success. Back in EGM #149, our editors were also forced to choose between two shiny new consoles—Nintendo's GameCube and Microsoft's Xbox. The Xbox won out (in a very close race) and went on to outsell the 'Cube. Perhaps history will repeat itself again....



TEEN	
T	Alcohol Reference Fantasy Violence Mild Language Partial Nudity Suggestive Themes
ESRB CONTENT RATING	www.esrb.org



PlayStation 2



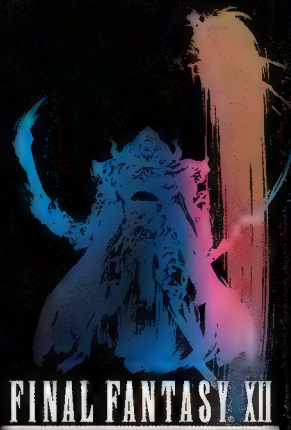
SQUARE ENIX

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DISCOVER THE SECRET
THAT WILL UNRAVEL AN EMPIRE



IN STORES OCTOBER 31, 2006.



FINAL FANTASY XII

WWW.FINALFANTASYXII.COM

REVIEWS

> superhero tights, phantasy fights, protecting piñata rights, and do-rags

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GEARS OF WAR



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THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS

THE GEARS ARE TURNING

And our chainsawed asses burning...

IF YOU'RE HERE LOOKING FOR PS3 AND WII REVIEWS, you've come to the wrong place. No, don't leave... why you gotta be like that? We just put 'em into our PS3 & Wii cover story (starting on page 52)—handy, huh? You'll find all the big launch games reviewed there and quickie blurbs on the rest. Oh, that's also where you'll find our Game of the Month, which happens to be our first Platinum award winner in quite some time. Wii control doubters (yours truly included) can now commence feasting on crow. *Zelda*...it's good to have you back.

But besides biggies *Zelda*, *Gears*, and *Resistance*, the game that has us most abuzz is...*Viva Piñata*? Sweet gorf, are we in a Bizarro world, or has Rare made its finest game since *GoldenEye*? Here's a hint: Check it out, but be sure to be offline when you do so to avoid the inevitable ribbing from your manly *Gears*-playing pals.

—Greg Ford, reviews editor

> HOW WE RATE

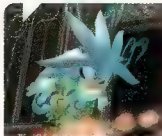
- 10 to 9 Excellent
- 8.5 to 7 Good
- 6.5 to 5 Average
- 4.5 to 3 Bad
- 2.5 to 0 Terrible

> 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.





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A case
of motion
sickness



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Game
that falls
flat



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We'd
totally
hit that



THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

All work and all games makes the Review Crew tired...



Dan "Shoe" Hsu

Editor-in-Chief

Shoe lost a bet to Bryan, hence the hat. Revenge? He's thinking a Gears chain saw where the sun don't shine would suffice.

Now Playing: *Gears of War*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



Crispin Boyer

Senior Editor

En route to the lines for the new consoles, Crispin made a wrong turn and got a free "personality test"—and a spaceship ride!

Now Playing: *Zelda, Gears*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



Greg Ford

Reviews Editor

Greg thought acting like a professional would make deadline a breeze. Gears—and a temper—made sure that didn't happen.

Now Playing: *Resistance, Gears*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



John Davison

Editorial Director, 1UP.com

John's obsession with *Viva Piñata* is slowly becoming borderline scary. Take a shower!

Now Playing: *Viva Piñata, Gears of War, Wii Sports*
Blog: jwhdavison.1UP.com



Garnett Lee

Managing Editor, 1UP.com

Managing frantic deadlines through two crazy console launches has Garnett wishing for a device that slows time.

Now Playing: *Final Fantasy XII*
Blog: GL4.1UP.com



Jeremy Parish

Features Editor, 1UP.com

Mr. Parish is currently "recovering" from a "difficult" week of sitting at home doing nothing but playing *Zelda*.

Now Playing: *Zelda, FFVII, FFV*
Blog: toastyfrog.1UP.com



James Lee

Staff Reviewer

Strangely enough, Jimmy was in the same line with Crispin to get a personality test and somehow walked away with *PS3*.

Now Playing: *BK's Sneak King*
Blog: egmwiley.1UP.com



Shane Bettenhausen

Executive Editor

After tearing into the PS3 and Wii Xmas-morning style, Shane's inner child took over.

Now Playing: *Zelda, Twilight Princess, Castlevania, DDR*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



Bryan Intihar

Previews Editor

Ohio State's victory over Michigan was sweet. Shoe's bio picture—even sweeter.

Now Playing: *Resistance: Fall of Man, Gears of War, Zelda*
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com



Michael Donahoe

News/Features Editor

Now that Michael owns a Wii, he can finally convince his grandma to get off her lazy ass to play him in *Wii Sports*.

Now Playing: *Zelda, Gears*
Blog: egmhoe.1UP.com



James Mielke

Executive Editor, 1UP.com

Milky isn't ready for next-gen because current gens are still fine to him. He'll spend the holidays with the classics.

Now Playing: *Gears of War*
Blog: milkman.1UP.com



Andrew Pfister

Reviews Editor, 1UP.com

Andrew never wants to hear the word "launch." Unless it's "launch uncooperative PR peeps into the Grand Canyon."

Now Playing: *Gears, Zelda*
Blog: andrewpf.1UP.com



Andrew Fitch

Staff Reviewer

Andrew once rode in an elevator with *Metal Gear* mastermind Hideo Kojima. Alone. And asked him nothing. What an idiot.

Now Playing: *FFXII, Killer 7*
Blog: copydesk-fitch.1UP.com



Jared Rea

Staff Reviewer

Nobody had the heart to tell Jared that *Piñata Island* doesn't exist. Next up: *Santa Claus*.

Now Playing: *Viva Piñata, Elite Beat Agents*
Blog: jared.vox.com

Also on deck...

Sam Kennedy
Editor-in-Chief
1UP.com

Luke Smith
News Editor
1UP.com

Jenn Frank
Community Whatzit
1UP.com

Scott Sharkey
Staff Writer
1UP.com

Mark MacDonald
Director
GameVideos.com

Demian Linn
Manager/Producer
GameVideos.com

Ray Barnholt
Staff Reviewer
MyCheats.com

Robert Ashley
Staff Reviewer

Tom Byron
Staff Reviewer

Brooks Huber
Staff Reviewer

Dana Jongewaard
Staff Reviewer

Patrick Joyn
Staff Reviewer

Joe Rybicki
Staff Reviewer

Greg Sewart
Staff Reviewer

Giancarlo Varanini
Staff Reviewer

Todd Zuniga
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.



Xbox 360

GEARS OF WAR

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Epic ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Mature



The Good: The crazy graphics!

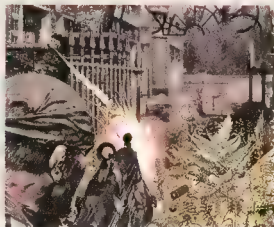
The Bad: Other games' graphics after you play *Gears of War*.
Oh, Yeah: The rest of the game is pretty damn good, too

A bloody great time

➔ **SHOE:** Bryan's keeled over and helpless, desperately hanging on to his remaining pints of blood. Decision time. I could go over and stomp his head into the ground and earn extra points in the process, or I could play it safe and finish him off with my assault rifle from behind this stone pillar before his buddy can save him. Ah, screw it. Safety be damned—I want those style points. I run over to him, and as I'm performing the up-close execution move, I notice his teammate charging out from around the corner with a chain saw revved up and ready for my soft chest. Most of my insides end up covering the television screen, but I don't mind. I knew the risks and was just happy to have a chance to humiliate my coworker.

It's small interactions like these that make *Gears of War* such a bloody pleasure to play with your friends. From deciding whether to revive a friend or execute a foe...whether to go melee-attack crazy or to snipe from afar...when each kill is so important (multiplayer supports only up to 4-on-4, with everyone getting one life per match), the intensity and excitement are so much greater here than in most other shooters. And with each death being so viscerally violent—heads explode, guts spill—the fist-pumping-in-air "aw, yeah!" victorious moments never seem to end. Two weeks straight of playing *Gears of War* over Live, and my friends and I are still whoopin' and hollerin' after a match ends on a particularly vicious hit.

Don't like playing with others? That's too bad, because co-op campaign mode is also an awesome experience. Most co-op shooters artificially insert a second player into an existing single-player framework. Like *Halo 2*...its campaign mode and story line were never about Master Chief and his buddy, right? In *Gears of War*, however, you always have a partner, whether he's A.I. or human controlled, and many scenarios work around that dynamic (such as a scene where one player must use a spotlight to keep the other one lit so he doesn't get eaten up by the light-phobic Kryll). I'm envious of gamers who get to face the blind, rampaging Berserker (who hunts by sound and smell) or screeching Wretches (whose f'ed-up scream



A Close Shave



You hear it all the time over Xbox Live: "That's bulls***!" Players everywhere love using the chain saw but are frustrated at the same time when they feel they should've won a saw-vs-saw head-to-head. How do the priorities work? It's not based on who reved up first.... "A bunch of factors are taken into account to determine the winner of a tie," says *Gears of War* Producer Rod Fergusson. "Angle of attack is certainly one of them. However, a perfect tie results in what is ultimately a coin toss to determine the winner."

That's not something pro-level players want to hear, but Fergusson goes on to say, "The smart player never has a tie. Rather than risking a chain saw tie, it's much better to put a couple of bullets into your attacker and chain saw them while they stagger back."

still haunts my eardrums) for the first time with a friend on the other end of the headset. Playing through the story by yourself is great, too—the *Doom 3*-style frights, the *Resident Evil 4*-ish boss moments are exciting enough—but your A.I. teammate seems to need more help than he's able to offer (though he's never as bad as we've seen in a series like *Ghost Recon*).

I can go on and on about the exciting action in the campaign mode (like dropping a Locust drone to his knees in the dark to let the Kryll feast on him), the great moments I've experienced in multiplayer matches (exploding three foes at once with one orbital laser beam), and the insane graphics (best I've seen on a console, period)...but I have other things on my plate right now. Bryan's bleeding out again.... I have to go stomp his head.

→ **BRYAN:** I should absolutely hate *Gears of War*. Tactical combat, a big emphasis on using cover, one-death-and-your-done multiplayer—all three have always been high on my list of gaming pet peeves. But ironically, these aspects make up much of the reason why I absolutely love it.

While *Gears* is totally a thinking man's shooter, it feels way less methodical than, say, a *Ghost Recon*. Whenever I describe my encounters here—whether it be from the rockin' (albeit brief) campaign mode or multiplayer—I end up comparing them to a game of chess...but one that's haulin' ass at about 120 miles per hour with a ton more gore. Enemy-spawning emergence holes have completely surrounded my built-like-a-bricks***house supersquad—quick, what's the plan? A fugly Locust mans a tur-

ret, but I can't get to him because if I step into the darkness, those flesh-eating Kryll will tear me to pieces—think, dammit, think! Surprisingly, coming out alive in these wonderfully intense situations doesn't revolve around who's fastest on the trigger. Rather, it's all about who's fastest at learning the lay of the land (which the game does an unbelievable job at varying throughout) and discovering its strengths and weaknesses before your opponent. And because *Gears* is structured as so, its self-proclaimed "stop-and-pop" gameplay works perfectly here. Even after finishing the game twice, I still get a kick outta watching the camera violently rock as I "roadie run" to cover, bouncing up only for a mere moment to blow someone to bits with my John Rambo-esque Torque Bow, and then



quickly moving on to the next safe zone. And everything I've mentioned just makes the multiplayer portion, where one wrong move will earn you a seat in the spectator lobby (usually with a severed body or crushed skull), that much more stressful...yet in the best possible way.

Like I said, I should hate this game. But instead, the only things I despised were Shoe's sadistic curb stomps....

➔ ANDREW P: Shoe's more forgiving than I am...but just a little. Gears is a great experience throughout, in both the five-act campaign and solid team-based multiplayer. But it's only truly amazing under the right circumstances. When talking about the A.I. of your squadmates, "intelligence" is being generous—they'll often run out from cover guns blazing, repeatedly hop

back and forth over obstacles for no good reason, and in a very "gamey" move, they'll magically pop back to life as soon as a room is cleared. This isn't really an issue when playing on the Casual difficulty, because you'll be good enough to take care of business yourself. But on Hardcore, you need all the help you can get later in the game. The right condition for the campaign? Play through it cooperatively with a friend on Hardcore—that way, when someone dies, you have an actual human to blame.

Multiplayer is tons of fun, but again, under the right conditions. Because everything is team-based and games can end quickly, it's important to know who's got your back and where everybody is located. All it takes is one rogue (or mute) squadmember to FUBAR the entire operation.

Coming Soon



"We're Epic Games," says Vice President Mark Rein, when we asked them to confirm that downloadable content is on its way. "If history is any indication, we're one of the most generous developers in the business that continue to support their games long after shipping. We're definitely going to have some great DLC, but we're not ready to commit to what that is or when it is coming. But we are testing some right now."

We sure hope so, because the three extremely similar modes that come with *Gears of War* aren't going to cut it for too long. Stuff we hope to see:

New weapons: One or two won't hurt, just to change the dynamic of each map.

New maps: Duh.

New modes: The one-life-per-player thing works well, but we need more modes, period. How about something simple, like capture the flag? And while they're at it, how about letting the host change settings without dumping everyone from the room?

Fixes: This one is more for the Xbox Live tech folks, but fixing voice chat would be huge. Also, we'd like to see team-based matchmaking (clan support) and improved hit detection ("Huh—I could've sworn I sniped that guy in the head....").

But when talking about *Gears* as a whole? Shoe's absolutely right—it's an incredible experience throughout. Though the story doesn't quite break free of the sci-fi cliché, Epic really captured that gritty, war-torn atmosphere. Incredible art and sound, and even small things like the camera shaking during the "roadie run," make it feel like you're embedded with these guys. And the graphics are so good that, in a way, you don't even notice them. That sounds like a weird thing to say, but *Gears* is the first game to demonstrate to me that the true mark of awesome graphics isn't defined by textures or running smoothly or resolutions, but by how *natural* everything looks. You lose yourself in the game because everything looks the way it should, and that allows you to focus on shooting things up real good. 🦘



Do you know who voices main dude Marcus Fenix? It's John Di Maggio, aka Bender the great!



Xbox 360

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sonic Team
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Don't call it a comeback

➔ **SHANE:** Sonic's 15th birthday bash has turned out to be more of a bust. Despite Sega's triumphant claims that this 3D *Sonic* update would right the wrongs of the last few efforts (*Sonic Heroes*, *Shadow the Hedgehog*), this eponymous next-gen offering actually exacerbates most of those games' more obnoxious failings. Here, Sonic still shares the spotlight with a cavalcade of chirpy critters (several of whom control terribly), hams it up in laughable, overlong cut-scenes, and plummets off edges to his doom due to slippery control and horrendous camera angles. Yup, sounds like a modern *Sonic* game, all right.

It's a shame, really, because a few well-designed stages, such as Radical Train, rekindle the magic of *Sonic Adventure* (DC).

And since you can opt out of playing as also-rans Shadow and Silver, the main game feels far more focused than recent efforts. The developers have buried a good *Sonic* game in here, but only the most patient players will actually discover it.

➔ **MILKMAN:** Though it doesn't happen often, I totally agree with Shane. With each new *Sonic* game it releases, Sega moves closer to assassinating the very character that once distinguished the company. Ironically, despite trying to expose Sonic to a broader audience, Sonic Team has now managed to render his next-gen game almost completely unplayable. Since when does breakneck speed combined with a completely unhinged camera equal playability? It doesn't, and for the first time in history, hardcore gamers and casual consumers alike will find keeping Sonic on track a near impossibility.

➔ **JARED:** Perhaps in response to our complaints about how broken the 3D *Sonic* games have been, *Sonic the Hedgehog* features a few on-rails segments. The only input required from the player: left, right, or jump—but thanks to a horrible camera, even these events control terribly. I could've dealt with the much-lauded adventure elements, subpar graphics—even that clown Shadow—but the bottom line is that this feels more like some hack job created by a bunch of Sega interns as opposed to a game from a competent development studio.

The Good: Sonic's action stages, diverse soundtrack

The Bad: Sonic's crappy friends, floaty control, awful camera, multiplayer, load times

Wait for It: *Sonic and the Secret Rings* (Wii)

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XBOX 360

DEAD OR ALIVE: XTREME 2

Publisher: Tecmo ■ Developer: Team Ninja ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Mature

All you'll get is a case of blue balls

➔ **JARED:** As someone who managed to dump over 70 hours into the original *Dead or Alive: Xtreme*, this one hurts. A lot. The primary method in which you earn fan service (that is, the next-to-nothing swimsuits and the like), the volleyball, has been significantly downgraded—if you can believe that. All the helpful assists from the original have been turned off, rendering this bouncy beach sport an unbearable mess. The biggest addition, Jet Skiing, fares no better, as it too is high unplayable, with unresponsive controls and some rather atrocious physics and collision detection. Sadly, the dating-sim aspect has also been tarnished, as the girls are unbelievably picky, even when they have no right to be so. (Damn it, Lisa! You

LOVE red!) The final spit in this turd sandwich comes from a lag-infested, bare-bones online experience in which your offline customizations don't even carry over. The hell? If the original *DOAX* was supposed to be a love letter to fans, this sequel is most assuredly the breakup.

➔ **MICHAEL:** What a titty tease! For a series that glorifies top-heavy teenagers, it's ironic the gameplay is so frickin' flat. Wait, did I say gameplay? Well, I guess you can consider dressing up checks a game...if you're 10. And are a girl. Seriously, all this game needs is a pink Corvette and a pretty pony, and you'd have the best *Barbie* game since, well, the last *Barbie* game. But somehow, this is actually made for

males. Hmm, what's more fun on the 360: silly butt battles or gruesome chain saw carnage? Do I need to ask?

➔ **DEMIAN:** Look at those things go, zooming this way and zinging that, like two big F-yous to the laws of physics. But once the novelty of a zero-gravity tit simulator wears off—which, for me, was about 30 seconds in—it all gets very unexciting. The volleyball's bad, the minigames are meh, and you'll spend more time buying crap and gift-wrapping it than ogling digital flesh.

Let's not forget the real victims—those 13-year-old boys who think they're dropping \$60 on a sure thing, but are actually buying a shopping sim. May your future romantic disappointments be less expensive. **A-**



The Good: Self-shadowed breasts, no scar tissue

The Bad: Every element that involves user input

Superior: The original *DOA: Xtreme*



Xbox 360

VIVA PIÑATA

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ Developer: Rare
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone

THE VERDICTS
 (OUT OF 10)

JOHN
9.0
 EXCELLENT

MICHAEL
8.0
 GOOD

JARED
9.0
 EXCELLENT

In da gadda da viva, honey

✦ **JOHN:** Emotional engagement in games is unusual, to put it mildly. For something to tug on the heartstrings to the degree that *Viva Piñata* does is stunning. The game is more than a cute reimagining of *The Sims*, though; it's an emotional sandbox that forces you to examine your own sense of ethics as you slowly move the line of what you feel is "acceptable" in order to succeed. Sure, you can play it dispassionately—but to do so is to deny yourself its brilliance.

Rare has certainly recaptured its former glory here, and in producing one of the most misunderstood games of the year—it's basically a garden/animal behavior simulator, with emphasis on attracting colorful, animated animals—it has also produced one of

the finest in its history. To dismiss it as "just for kids" would be foolish. In fact, its most glaring problem is that its complex resource-management gameplay conflicts with its Saturday-morning-cartoon demeanor.

✦ **MICHAEL:** John's right—*Viva Piñata* may look like disposable kiddie crap, but beneath the kitschy paper is a supersweet game. Tending your garden is only as simple as you want it to be (i.e., you have to go nuts in order to see everything). In fact, part of the fun is tweaking your piñata pad just to see what different animals you attract. Actually, I'm lying—the best part is watching those candy-filled critters go at it. Sexual intercourse has never been depicted so gosh-darn cute. Too

bad you can't explore the world more, though—my garden felt like a confectionery prison.

✦ **JARED:** A positively brilliant game in every respect, *Viva Piñata*'s only notable flaw is a lack of robust online options. Trading critters is great (especially for showing off your schwaag), but being able to visit your friends' gardens would have put it over the top. Otherwise, it has the most ingenious characters I've seen in a game, and I love that you can inject so much personality into them by naming them, applying accessories, and generally ensuring their well-being. An incredibly addictive, entirely engrossing experience, *Viva Piñata* is the most enjoyable title I've played this year.

The Good: Deep, emotionally engaging cutscenes

The Bad: Too complex for kids, too cute for gamers

Face It: You are not too cool to enjoy this



Xbox 360

TONY HAWK'S PROJECT 8

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Neversoft
 ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS
 (OUT OF 10)

TODD
9.0
 EXCELLENT

JAMES L
8.5
 GOOD

JENN
8.0
 GOOD

Eight reinvents great

✦ **TODD:** Since its inception, I've been up over the *Tony Hawk* series because it's such a gamer's game, built on the fundamental construct of trying and trying and trying to execute a task until you nail it. With *Project 8*, Neversoft has created its masterpiece (finally outdoing *THPS4*). This game drips, like those before it, with gnarly skater authenticity, but the organic list of challenges keeps nonskaters like me enthralled. The new Nail the Trick feature—where things go all slow-mo—is captivating, the rankings system that leads you through the game is unobtrusive and smart, and I love the way the difficulty levels are embedded in the game (grind to point A for amateur, farther to point B for pro, and farthest to point C for sick).

As for complaints: The online games are too few, and the create-a-player disappoints by locking me into looks that didn't fit my sensibility. Don't hipsters skate?

✦ **JAMES L:** Finally, we've got a 360 *Tony Hawk* game that looks like a 360 game. I appreciate that the developers at Neversoft continue to experiment with the series, even though some of those experiments have gone horribly wrong (anyone miss the BMX bikes from *American Wasteland*? Exactly). So while Nail the Trick hasn't completely won me over—you can only do fun tricks, no grabs or grinds—I like where they're going with it. And sure, the variety in difficulty levels is dandy, but I wish they had more fun with the

level designs. I'm tired of grinding in schools and city halls—give me the haunted houses and pirate ships.

✦ **JENN:** Forget the haunted houses. I just wish *Project 8* had better collision detection. It's tough to predict whether errantly bumping into a corner will result in mere teetering, a painful face-plant, or being inexplicably, glitchily catapulted several hundred feet into the air. Given the otherwise responsive controls, these little slips aggravate me. At least the hilariously bizarre ragdoll physics make cartoonish topples and injuries entertaining. And that's *Project 8*'s magical, masochistic paradox: When you're upright, you feel invincible, and when you genuinely wipe out, you cackle.

The Good: Nail the Trick rules

The Bad: Create-a-player is limited

Finally a Hawk Game Better Than: *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4*



Xbox 360

CALL OF DUTY 3

Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Treyarch ■ Players: 1-24 ■ ESRB: Teen



The Good: Team-based online multiplayer with vehicles
The Bad: Uninspired campaign
Watch: History Channel late at night for inspiration

One day this war's gonna end

➔ **GARNETT:** After playing *Call of Duty 3*, I wonder if maybe it isn't time for a break from WWII first-person shooters. Nothing beats the ping from an M1 Garand, sure. But who other than history buffs would enjoy fighting obscure battles in France? They hardly give the series' trademark epic style much of a chance to get going. Far too familiar and recycled missions—fighting through trenches, blowing up artillery, driving in a frantic jeep chase, and so on—don't help, either.

And where its predecessor created the illusion that you were able to choose how you wanted to approach each tactical situation, this time I felt hemmed in at every turn. Still, the action is reliably solid...it's just a shame some levels seem to end as

they hit their stride. So while single player won't bring me back, the excellent multiplayer will. The new team-based modes—with vehicles—could make this the sleeper Live hit.

➔ **CRISPIN:** I'll be joining Garnett on the multiplayer battlefields, which are certainly chaotic (and well-designed) enough to give gung-ho gamers a home if they want a deferment from *Gears of War's* less lively online war zones. But I disagree about the single-player campaign: From its beautiful billowing smoke to its relentless engagements to its killer tank battles, solo play has just enough stuff to give you that thousand-yard stare. It all makes for a perfectly well-constructed game that'll probably go MIA among

this fall's higher-profile releases and system-launch hoopla.

➔ **MARK:** But Crispin, a shooter set in WWII? How could a concept that originally possibly go unnoticed? Seriously, though, if you aren't sick of this genre (a big if), give *COD3* a shot. Single player is *COD2* with the action turned up to 12 (it was already at 11)—it has more squadmates, more drama, more vehicle segments—just more *stuff* going on all around you. It's nothing that strays far from the formula, mind you, but you'll notice a lot of nice little touches, my favorite being the more tactile charge-setting minigame. Multiplayer likewise plays it safe with incremental improvements that add up to a great, if familiar, online game. 🎮

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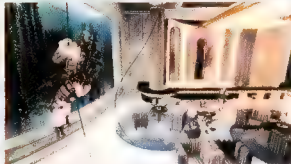
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Xbox 360

RAINBOW SIX VEGAS

Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Developer: Ubisoft ■ Players: 1-16 ■ ESRB: Mature



The Good: Multiplayer, cover system
The Bad: Story mode starts out weak
Go HD: Game looks bad in standard def, but awesome in HD

What happens in Vegas doesn't just stay in Vegas

➔ **JOHN:** Words of warning: You need to give squad-based shooter *Vegas* some time to grow on you, particularly in the fairly short single-player campaign. In a mission that feels like a weak *Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter* knockoff stage, the game starts slowly in Mexico before hitting the Strip. More story-driven than previous *Rainbows*, *Vegas* halfheartedly attempts to draw you in with a campaign that's easily ignored until the cheesy, *Halo 2*-esque ending.

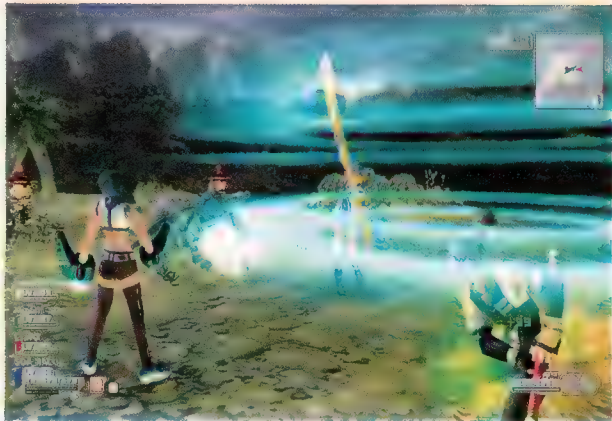
Surprisingly, *Vegas* has a lot in common with *Gears of War*. The imaginatively designed levels necessitate a similar methodical approach to battle, and the controls, which use the left trigger to pull you into all-important cover, are arguably *much* more intui-

tive than *Gears'* A-button-controlled sticky cover system. It's the extremely competent multiplayer that will suck up most of your time, though. The cop campaign mode is excellent, while the new attack-and-defend mode forces *SOCOM*-esque team play.

➔ **LUKE:** Time? Growth? We're talking about shooters, John—not piñata gardens. Yes, the campaign requires methodical play—largely due to the punitive way it teaches players where enemies are. It's not uncommon after you clear a room to see a door swing open and then get killed by foes you didn't know existed. I agree that *Vegas* earns its stripes in multiplayer. Tons of modes (team survival still rules) are enhanced by a dollhouse full

of character customization options—including camera support to get your own mug in there. But while it's fun to play dress-up, multiplayer alone can't carry *Vegas* to the no-limit table.

➔ **SHOE:** Luke, if you're getting killed after you clear a room, then you didn't finish the job. You're gonna punish the game for being slightly unpredictable? That's what I love about Vegas. It's way more dynamic than previous *Rainbows*: Enemies react more realistically and don't always appear in the same spots when you restart (even seemingly scripted events may not happen consistently). But I disagree with both of you—multiplayer's bland. The best parts are the wide-open, multipathed Vegas solo stages. 🐘



XB360/PS2

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sonic Team
 ■ Players: 1-5 ■ ESRB: Teen

Fading star

✦ **MILKMAN:** While the graphics (primarily on 360—they're fine on PS2) don't look next gen, and despite the fact that Sega sucks at storytelling, *PSU* is almost in every way an improvement over *Phantasy Star Online*. The combat and enemies in this RPG are faster, the customization options are deeper, and the game features an item-synthesis mode that *PSO* never dreamed of. Best of all, *PSU* boasts an extra mode that simulates the online experience offline—without the need for an online connection—offering something games like *Final Fantasy XI* never could. Sure, noobs like Shane and Bryan might gripe that portions of the game aren't accessible out of the box, but if you're one of those types who hits the level cap in a week, you really need to get some fresh air. Enjoy the offline stuff, and when you're ready for prime time, go online.

✦ **SHANE:** Noob? Having thoroughly played (and loved) every possible iteration of *PSO* for 500-plus hours total, I approached

PSU with lofty expectations...which weren't met. Sure, I applaud Sega for attempting to transform the single-player experience into something meatier, but poor voice acting and clumsy storytelling lend the proceedings a cheesy B-movie vibe. The online mode still warrants your attention, though: *PSO* vets will dig the larger parties, deeper combat, and complex item-synthesis system. It's a shame that technical problems (unreliable servers, patchy voice chat) and poor decisions (much of the promised content won't be available for months) make this feel like a very pricey beta.

✦ **BRYAN:** Wait, someone out there (looks at Milkman) actually enjoys *PSU*'s story mode? That's kooky talk. But that mess isn't what really bothers me—the online play doesn't quite cut it. Specifically, it's insulting to series fans like myself that Sega handicapped the online content out of the gate. Also, the new item-creating bots aren't as appealing as the now-absent over-the-shoulder mags, and the visuals don't stack up to *PSO*! Like Shane, I'm diggin' the six-man parties and evolved combat (longer combo strings, first-person shooting), but I just expected more.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

MILKMAN:
8.0
GOOD

SHANE:
7.0
GOOD

BRYAN:
6.5
AVERAGE

The Good: Deep, simple online RPG with offline benefits
The Bad: Lacks the polish of a Square Enix RPG
Bring Back: *PSO*'s mags



[GEEKED AT BIRTH.]



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Xbox 360

SUPERMAN RETURNS: THE VIDEOGAME

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: EA Tiburon
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

Super blows

✦ **SHARKEY:** Where to even start? Well, I can try to find a few nice things to say about *Superman Returns*: The intro stage for this actioner is nice. Metropolis is really big and looks pretty from the air.

Of course, once you finish the intro and fly down into that city, you might notice that, yeah, it's big...but also made up of the same small handful of buildings throughout. Some of those textures that look so good from the sky are actually fuzzier than what you'd find in a Nintendo 64 game when you're standing on them. And the enemies? The game has about four types of them. Funny enough, the most enjoyable thing to do—destroying the environment—you're penalized for (unless you're in the rampage-like Bizarro mode). At least it's short. Admittedly, that's more a bonus if someone's paying you to play it than if you have to shell out 60 bucks.

✦ **GREG S:** Well, EA did try to add an extra dimension to *Superman* by using experience points to constantly evolve his abilities. The game, though, is way too monotonous, leaving you floating around Metropolis waiting for the next event to trigger itself. Even the minigames—while fun (I love destroying the city while playing as Bizarro)—don't do enough to break up the plodding progression. I don't totally agree with Sharkey; *Superman's* fun to pick up and play for a few minutes, though that's hardly a hearty endorsement.

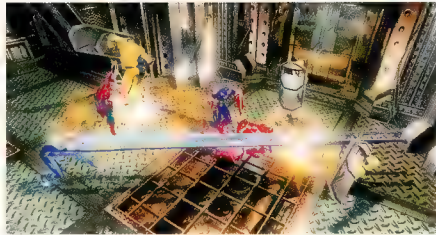
✦ **DEMIAN:** If Superman spent more time flying around the city and zero time fighting repetitive enemies, his game would be way better.

The other guys covered *Superman's* big-picture issues—I'll be specific. In one mission, you have to protect three blimps from dragons (don't remember that from the movie...). I tried wholesale dragon slaughter, but couldn't get them all and each blimp exploded one by one. Eventually, I switched to my superbreath and just blew the dragons away from the blimps. As if on a timer, the almost untouched first blimp suddenly burst into flames. Ditto the second. But I kept blowing, and the third blimp survived long enough to end the mission. Nice game design there, guys.

The Good: It's short, destroying buildings

The Bad: Everything else

Cursed Tights: Not the worst *Superman* title ever...



Xbox 360

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Raven
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen

It's hailing heroes

✦ **SHARKEY:** Can you name more than two dozen Marvel superheroes off the top of your head? Yeah, it's a lot...more than enough for Activision to include all the big ones in *Ultimate Alliance* while still leaving space for some obscure favorites. Sweet Christmas, it even crammed Luke Cage in here. Better still, unlike certain superhero beat-em-ups ("cough" *Justice League Heroes* "cough"), they don't all play like the same guy wearing different tights. They're actually balanced without being homogenous. On top of that, you get a crazy number of unlockable missions, costumes, side goals, and a nice RPGish leveling system. It's a big game. But...it's still a beat-em-up at heart. Yeah, you've got a ton of guys to play with, but they're still beating up wave after wave of identical Doombots. Nothing but truth, justice, and the American way keeps you from simply finding a single attack or combo that works and just mashing it forever.

✦ **MICHAEL:** Playing through *Ultimate Alliance* won't just tingle your nerd senses, it'll give you a full-on nerdgasm. Like Sharkey said, the massive lineup sports enough spandex to keep the WWE stocked for decades. But while your teammates may be heroes, they sure don't act like 'em—the toughest villains I faced weren't Dr. Doom or Galactus, oh no! My biggest threat was the dreaded bottomless pit—superfling, spider-webbing, nor keen reflexes could save my clumsy A.I. klutzes from falling off ledges. So word to the world-savvy wise: Play co-op online with buds who actually have brains.

✦ **BRYAN:** Even though *Ultimate Alliance* doesn't cause me to blow my comic-book load like Michael, I'm much more of a true believer in this superhero game than in developer Raven Software's *X-Men Legends* titles (which laid the groundwork for what's here). The backdrops are more diverse, the *God of War*-like quick-time events add some much-needed flavor to boss encounters, and item maintenance is now kept to a minimum. But the three-quarters overhead camera needs to go; the game looks (and plays) better during those stints when the perspective drops to eye level.

The Good: Lots of playable superheroes

The Bad: A corresponding load of identical enemies

Padding the Hero Count: Moon Knight and Luke Cage?

THE VERDICTS
 (OUT OF 10)

SHARKEY

3.0
 BAD

GREG S

6.0
 AVERAGE

DEMIAN

5.0
 AVERAGE

THE VERDICTS
 (OUT OF 10)

SHARKEY

7.0
 GOOD

MICHAEL

8.0
 GOOD

BRYAN

7.0
 GOOD

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PlayStation 2

SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS COMBINED ASSAULT

Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Zipper ■ Players: 1-32 ■ ESRB: Teen



The Good: Co-op, new multiplayer maps
The Bad: Looks and feels just like the previous game

Missing: Some sweaty cut-scenes from G.I. Jane

Retreating back to SOCOM 3

➔ **JAMES L.:** Last year's realistic military-shooter *SOCOM 3* was great, but I felt tricked after popping in the so-called sequel, *Combined Assault*. The game is a lot like the previous one, with a key difference: the "combined assault." Thankfully, this four-player co-op feature offers the only fun to be found in the campaign mode. This is good since the A.I. from the previous game returns—your teammates do a horrible job hiding their ass while under fire and often end up crawling for no apparent reason. Oh, sure, the game features the unique crosstalk feature, in which mission achievements on your *Fireteam Bravo 2* PSP game influence objectives in *Combined Assault* when you sync 'em up. But I find no incentive to pur-

chase two mediocre games and have them talk to each other while playing—unless they're discussing ways to offer me more fun.

➔ **MARK:** According to my informal survey of *SOCOM* online player handles, 62 percent of *Combined Assault* players are habitual marijuana smokers. Which is good, because more sober players might get hung up on the fact that this full-price PS2 title is little more than a mission pack for last fall's *SOCOM 3* (the PS2's best online game). It probably doesn't bother DoobieHouserM.D. that the series' once-impressive graphics now lag behind what we know the PS2 can do. And members of clan MonstaHit420 will be far too busy with those awe-






some co-op missions (with no-button voice chat, no less!) and insane number of maps, modes, and options to complain about the absolutely crappy interface that buries all these features.

➔ **PATRICK:** These guys nailed it: *Combined Assault* does well by its co-op play, meaning you don't have to rely on idiotic A.I. teammates to progress. Otherwise, it offers incredibly solid military-shooter action. Jimmy's dismissal of the crosstalk is unwarranted, though, and it just means he's missing out on some excellent unlocks and interesting sequences. No, neither the series' engine nor the interface are aging gracefully, but you'll find so much to play with here, it's well worth it. ☛

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Vonage



PS2/XB

THRILLVILLE

■ Publisher: LucasArts ■ Developer: Frontier
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Nothing thrilling but the title

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

TODD:
5.5
AVERAGE

GREG S:
5.0
AVERAGE

JAMES L:
3.0
BAD

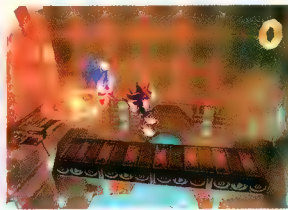
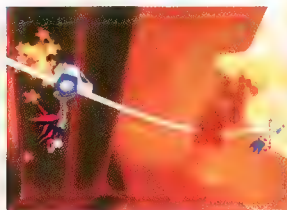
The Good: Lots to do, good interface
The Bad: Boring minigames, cyber coasters not fun
Should Be Called: Sims Coaster: Mario's Tycoon Party

➔ **TODD:** An ambitious mix of *Mario Party*, *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, and *The Sims*, *Thrillville* plops you into the role of managing a theme park left to you by your nutty uncle. I admire how much is packed in—including boring and nauseating rides, fairly interesting staff-hiring activities, and surprisingly engaging chats with parkgoers (regardless of what these other guys think)—but none of it feels new. Nor is it delivered in an organic, sensible manner, as front-loaded tutorials tell you what you need to know well before you need to know it. The game is centered on loads of average minigames, which the A.I. is inappropriately good at. Piecing together a go-kart track or minigolf course you'll play once is the best of this game's

busy work, but constructing a coaster is beyond pointless. If you bother to hop aboard, you'll scream at how dumb the ride turned out.

➔ **GREG S:** Todd's totally wrong. Not about the game being confusing and boring—I agree with that. But chatting up parkgoers is engaging for only about 10 minutes, which is about how long it'll take for you to exhaust every obscure factoid and lame compliment that make up the game's conversation tree. *Thrillville* isn't nearly deep enough for players that thrive on the usually detail-orientated "Tycoon" genre, nor is it exciting or accessible enough for those just trying out the park-builder thing for the first time. It's just mediocre all around.

➔ **JAMES L:** Man, seems that if *Thrillville* isn't making you tend to a meter, it's forcing you to play some lame minigame, like putt-putt or a round of *Bubble Bobble* gone bad. Some of these games, however, are downright hilarious such as training staff members by having them put on a cheerleader outfit and then dance to your rhythm game. Greg is a wise man, though: Talking to the guests gets tiring (plus, it's hard not to feel like a predator when you talk to the kids). Their happiness means *everything* to you, to the point where you even try to set them up on dates. Sure, the goal of these games is to keep your guests pleased, but is it really asking too much if I want to have a little fun while doing it, too?



PSP

SONIC RIVALS

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Backbone
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everybody

Not so happy feet

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

MILKMAN:
3.0
BAD

SHANE:
6.0
AVERAGE

JAMES L:
3.0
BAD

The Good: Attractive visuals, deep challenge mode
The Bad: Too short, overly repetitive, frustrating jumps
Try Instead: *Sonic Rush* (DS)

➔ **MILKMAN:** Wow. If it weren't for the unexpected quality of *Sonic Rush* on DS, I'd swear that Sega was slowly trying to kill off its once-treasured mascot. Seriously, I'm not sure what the developers were aiming for here. The camera is pinned to a side-scrolling view (no crime there), but instead of offering the usual jump-and-run platform mechanics of the 2D games of old, each stage is a forced race against another character. The high-speed levels—in which you must occasionally punch your rival out of the way—are peppered with speed-sapping obstacles (ice blocks, for example), enemy drones, and slapdash platform elements, all designed to provide "challenge." What *Rivals* really requires is the rote memorization

of each stage's idiosyncrasies before victory—and any sense of satisfaction—sets in. It's like an old-school *Sonic* game minus anything that made those games good.

➔ **SHANE:** These guys don't appreciate what's going on here. *Rivals* takes one of the coolest *Sonic* levels ever—the madcap race against Metal Sonic in the cult classic *Sonic CD*—and builds an entire game around its frantic footrace mechanic. Vibrant, stylish graphics, boppin' tunes, and copious loop-de-loops successfully rekindle that old-school *Sonic* charm, yet slightly sketchy control and obnoxious memorization-based gameplay threaten to derail the woefully short single-player game. The format works

far better as a two-player contest, though: Once you both know the levels, sabotaging your opponent with power-ups lends the proceedings an addictive, *Mario Kart*-esque edge.

➔ **JAMES L:** I don't want to brag, but I'm awesome at *Rivals*. All I have to do is memorize each stage, hold down that right button, and jump once in awhile. If you too want to become this good and offer me a challenge, all you need is one distinct quality: a gluttony for punishment. Imagine trying to run a race, but suddenly getting stuck on a series of tricky jumps and then trying to overcome the insane frustration of falling off cliffs. Fun. Milky has no idea what Sega was trying to make here, and I don't have an answer.

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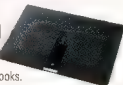
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PSP

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY STORIES

Publisher: Rockstar Games ■ Developer: Rockstar Leeds ■ Players: 1-6 ■ ESRB: Mature



The Good: Great story, huge world, building an empire
The Bad: Same old shooting/control problems
Look Up: For this game's collectible

Vice, vice baby

✦ **G. FORD:** Oh man, you are never gonna believe which rock star lends himself rather prominently to Rockstar's latest open-world opus. Wait, you already know? Right...Phil Collins. Yeah, *GTA: Vice City Stories*—prequel to the "I [heart] the '80s" *Vice City*—has been out for over a month now, and a lot of you have already figured out the biggest news ain't about the "Sussudio" guy—it's the lack of the big fix to the obviously flawed melee and on-foot shooting controls. But the cars still handle beautifully, and most everything else delivers, from great voice acting to an eclectic soundtrack to the anal cops. Minor tweaks, like being able to buy back confiscated weapons, give the game some juice, and the empire-build-

ing side quests give it a big hunk of meat—you can spend hours taking over and developing side businesses, like prostitution or smuggling, through optional minimeissions. The whole of what's here still stuns in the uncompromising *GTA* way, putting it—with sister game *Liberty City Stories*—leagues above anything else on the PSP.

✦ **SHOE:** Those old flaws are chafing me like a pair of shrunken Jordaches. Four *GTA*s since number three... and I'm still cursing the aiming? And *Vice City*'s twisty streets, awkward dead ends, and broken spots (where a car can get hung up for good) turn leisurely drives into fiery wrecks. It's frustrating, but I still have to agree with Greg: You get an impossible

amount of game for your PSP buck. It feels too familiar at first, but when you reach the empire-building gameplay, you'll wonder how this much fun can fit into one tiny disc....

✦ **JOHN:** I agree completely. This is a significant improvement over last year's game, no doubt, but one of us has to mention multiplayer, as it's the game's weakest link. While the modes are imaginative, they're a let down by the fact that the playable area has no limit. Hunting down opponents across half the city gets old fast, meaning the team-based fetch quests are little more than a novelty, as opposed to a robust alternative to the single-player game. Still...it doesn't ruin the fact that this is one of the PSP's best. 🍌

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA



BRAD MELTZER ED BENES

COVERS BY MICHAEL TURNER & J. SCOTT CAMPBELL

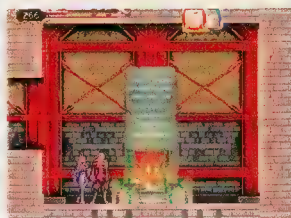
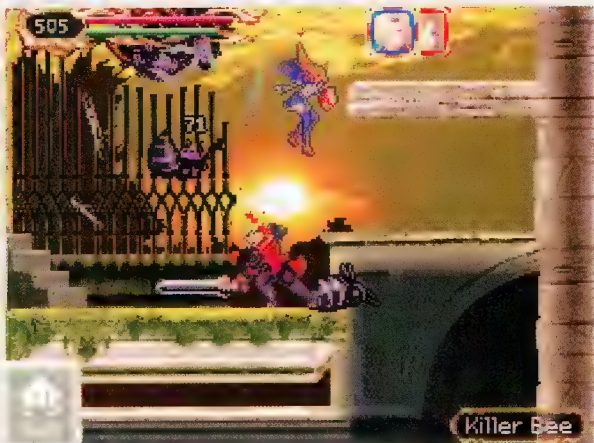
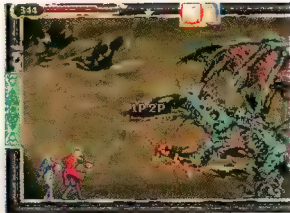
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DS

CASTLEVANIA: PORTRAIT OF RUIN

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



The Good: Mixes up the formula, awe-some bonuses
The Bad: Too repetitive and uneven, dopey dialogue
Obsessives: Everything is catalogued

Art appreciation

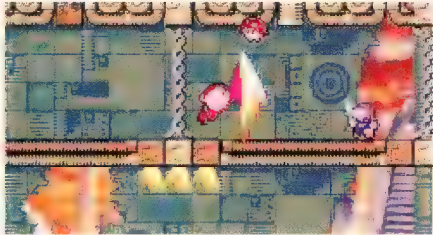
➔ **JEREMY:** Keeping a 20-year-old franchise fresh is tricky work. *Portrait of Ruin* mixes up the formula by moving the familiar side-scrolling combat and exploration out of Dracula's musty abode and into various haunted works of art. The game's good bits are *really* good, like the exceptional dual-character system, each with their own advantages—it makes *Portrait* feel a little like *Castlevania III* (NES) on steroids. More so than you might expect, actually, despite the overall *Symphony*-esque open-ended format, much of the game is broken into NES-style individual levels. It's a nice attempt to merge the modern *Castlevania* style with the classic feel, although it falls short of the source material. The stages lack challenge

and feature way too much copy-and-paste design, especially in the game's second half. Still, the monotony pays off: The unlockable bonus modes are genius. Overall, though, *Portrait* is a slightly disappointing step back from 2005's superb *Dawn of Sorrow*.

➔ **SHANE:** Although it doesn't have quite the bite of the previous DS installment, *Portrait* still manages to surgically tweak the "Metroid-vania" formula enough to make it feel fresh and unique for even veteran vampire hunters. The new dual-character mechanic allows for plenty of inventive puzzles and combo attacks, while the more free-form level design lets you explore some decidedly un-*Castlevania* maps. Predictably slick

graphics, haunting tunes, challenging bosses, and pinpoint control once again make this a perfectly engrossing DS quest. If Konami opts to forge a third DS entry, though, perhaps a true multiplayer mode is in order....

➔ **MICHAEL:** Sure, *Portrait of Ruin* ain't perfect, but at least it does something the previous GBA *Vanias* have neglected to do: stick a stake in the monotony. Both the character-switching and the pseudolevels make the main castle-crawling play less like a rotting corpse. Yeah, Shane, true Wi-Fi co-op would be pretty bitchin', but the game doesn't really lend itself to two-player thrills. My only complaint: Konami needs to chuck the terrible anime art design in the coffin. ☠



DS

KIRBY SQUEAK SQUAD

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: HAL/Flagship
■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Classic Kirby...with an upset stomach

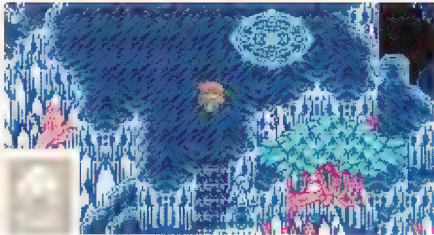
A FITCH: Last year's brilliant *Kirby: Canvas Curse* worked because it was specifically developed with the DS in mind, with you controlling Kirby with the stylus. *Squeak Squad*, on the other hand, is just a Kirby platformer with slapped-on stylus support. It's a good Kirby platformer, though, capturing the old-school feel of games like *Kirby Super Star*—but with a twist: You access the contents of Kirby's stomach on the touch screen with the stylus to power him up. Cute in theory...aggravating in execution! This forces you to take your eyes off the top screen in the middle of battles, which wouldn't be so bad if Kirby's innards actually detected the stylus more than half the time! The rest of the controls, thankfully, are superb.

Otherwise, this is the most complete Kirby side-scroller in some time, with upgradeable copy abilities, interactive environments, and tons of hidden content. Too bad the pink bugger's stomach behaves like it made a late-night Taco Bell run—it's that damn combative!

MILKMAN: To hate a Kirby game is to hate fun, especially a game as well-animated and responsive as this one. But with each and every Kirby game comes a sense of "been there, done that." I've inhaled all sorts of enemies, absorbed their powers, and used those powers to solve myriad puzzles before. Why I'd choose to do it over and over again for the mere benefit of some different stylus controls is beyond me...but I do. This is actually quite a good game, especially for younger gamers who haven't played the last five Kirby games. But veterans of this solid series will find little that's new.

JAMES L: Yeah, what's up with the game not doing anything nearly as innovative with the touch screen like *Canvas Curse* did? At least we find out that, despite popular belief that he's filled with yummy custard, Kirby actually just holds power-ups in his stomach. The multiplayer games are nothing special and more of a game of "Who can scratch the s*** out of their screen with their stylist the fastest?" Frankly, playing with the contents of Kirby's tummy will just have you hungry for something of more substance.

The Good: Fun power-ups, classic Kirby gameplay
The Bad: That classic gameplay, where's the innovation?
The Most: Emascuating title imaginable



GBA

FINAL FANTASY V

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

Finest fantasy

✦ JEREMY: This fall has been a little *Final Fantasy* crazy, but the quality of the entries (*III*, *V*, and *XII*) makes it hard to complain. *FFV Advance* may seem the least of the trio, but don't be put off by its simple graphics or the fact that it's on the GBA—it's one of the series' best, and this is a better-than-perfect port.

Square Enix smoothed over the glitches and slowdown that plagued last year's rerelease of *FFV*, refined the interface and backgrounds, and added plenty of meaty bonus content to make a perfect portable RPG. It scrapped the previous (abysmal) localization, too, making it much easier to appreciate *FFV* for what it is: a fond farewell to the series' old-school roots that gradually evolves from trite crystal quest to vast epic. And the sophisticated job system is still satisfying after all these years.

✦ SHANE: This fall's portable RPG showdown has gone all Civil War on us: *Final Fantasy V* must duke it out against *Final Fantasy III* (DS) for your valuable gaming dollar...and, surprisingly, the lower-fi GBA port actually wins out. It might not have *FFIII*'s snazzy 3D visuals or touch-screen play, but *FFV* pumps up the gameplay quotient with a masterfully designed job system, scads of challenging dungeons, and superspeedy battles. Plus, the new GBA-specific content here—four new job classes, reworked tunes, and an awesome 30-floor dungeon that wraps up the game's plot—easily makes this the definitive version.

✦ BRYAN: Last issue, I gave Jeremy a hard time for dissing No. 3's job system. But I stand corrected, my friend—this game's character customization system easily beats its nip/tucked DS cousin's scheme, as ability points (which you gain after successful battles) enable for much more diversity in your four-person party (so, for instance, your knight in shining armor can also learn another job's powers). I'm also a big fan of this game's pacing. It's much quicker than the role-playing norm, which helps immensely when getting through the anything-but-special story.

The Good: Classic old-school RPG action (with benefits)
The Bad: Slow to start, looks a bit dated
Avast: No more dopey pirate-speak for Farris

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

FITCH
7.0
GOOD

MILKMAN
7.0
GOOD

JAMES L.
6.0
AVERAGE

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JEREMY
9.0
EXCELLENT

SHANE
9.0
EXCELLENT

BRYAN
8.5
GOOD

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

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

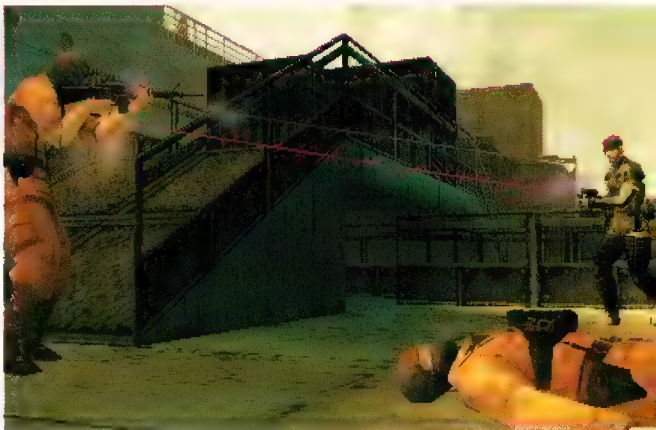
PSP

METAL GEAR SOLID:
PORTABLE OPS

■ Publisher: Konami ■ ESRB: Mature

Although *Portable Ops* doesn't mess with the *Metal Gear Solid* formula nearly as much as those card-based *Acid* games, series vets will still find plenty of surprises. The single-player game picks up after *MGS3*, but once you start amassing an army of playable characters, creating unique attack teams, and delving into the open-ended, mission-based story line, it all feels shockingly new.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *MGS* fans will go gaga for the single-player game, but the limited multiplayer action hasn't evolved much from *MGS3: Subsistence*.



PSP

STAR WARS
LETHAL ALLIANCE

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ ESRB: Teen

Wow, an original *Star Wars* game without a Hoth level! It must be a trap. Actually, no, it's a third-person action game that puts you in the role of a Twi'lek (one of those dancing alien chicks) and her companion droid trying to retrieve the original Death Star plans. The PSP version (the version we played—it's also coming to the DS) benefits from generous autoaim as you play through nice chunks of both platforming and shooting action.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Even with occasional spikes of unreasonable difficulty and merely OK boss fights, we still like to celebrate *Lethal Alliance's* nonport nature.



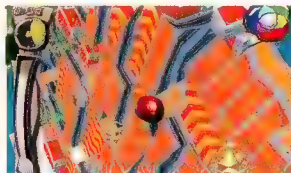
PS2

THE SOPRANOS:
ROAD TO RESPECT

■ Publisher: THQ ■ ESRB: Mature

This *Road* has a few too many dead ends. C-grade cut-scenes continually interrupt the flow of gameplay to the point of frustration. Lackluster environments, like the Bada Bing, really restrict any sort of exploration beyond a few small rooms. And the combat system—which feels more like drunk hobo boxing—gets repetitive after bashing in your fifth skull. Becoming a made man is more trouble than it's worth.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Fuggedaboutit—even though all the actors portray their characters from the show, it's not nearly enough to entice even the biggest gangster gurus.



PS2

MERCURY
MELTDOWN
REMIX

■ Publisher: Ignition ■ ESRB: Everyone

Whoa, what is this—a PS2 port of a PSP game? What bizarre port portal did we walk through? *Mercury Meltdown Remix*, a non-portable version of *Mercury Meltdown*, is a *Marble Madness*-meets-*A Boy and His Blob* (NES) puzzler. With over 200 levels of traps and enemies to navigate, it packs enough puzzles to keep you thinking for a while. But though it's fun, the PS2 version is weirdly missing the vital online components found in the PSP game.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** A moderately enjoyable puzzle title for those that enjoy their puzzle games devoid of any personality.



XB360

COLLEGE HOOPS 2K7

■ Publisher: 2K Sports ■ ESRB: Everyone

A complete visual reworking has this year's b-ball'er looking as good as it plays, in part because of endless player faces churned out by the new "FaceGen" feature. That means your point guard/future accountant and your center/future real-estate salesman don't look anything alike. The revamped dynasty mode is sweet, and online is swift with 64-team tournaments. But the greatest feature: "chant creator." What does it spell? J-O-Y!

✦ **BOTTOM LINE:** With no competition at tip-off (*March Madness 07* hits in February) and stellar everything, this is a definite lock for the Final Four.



PSP

SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS FIRETEAM BRAVO 2

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ ESRB: Teen




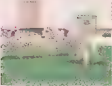
Before you can say the ridiculously long title of this PSP game, you'll find yourself enjoying that familiar *SOCOM*-y feeling of defending freedom...and all that other red, white, and blue crap. If you do get tired of it all, you can take advantage of the Crosstalk feature—groups of enemies you kill will be still dead in the equivalent mission in the PS2's new *SOCOM*, *Combined Assault* (you can incestuously use your save with it).

✦ **BOTTOM LINE:** This familiar tactical military shooter will keep you busy with some engaging missions, and fun multiplayer will keep the war raging on and on and on....

THE SALES CHART

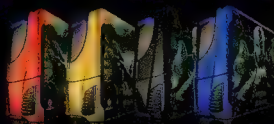
Amazon.com's Top 20 for Oct/Nov

Name Platform EGM Scores

1	Final Fantasy XII 	PS2	8.5	9.0	9.5
2	Gears of War	XB360	10	9.5	9.0
3	Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!	DS	8.5	9.0	7.5
4	Guitar Hero II (Bundle with Guitar)	PS2	9.0	9.0	8.5
5	New Super Mario Bros.	DS	9.5	10	8.0
6	Madden NFL 07	PS2	7.5	8.5	7.0
7	Bully 	PS2	10	8.5	8.0
8	Call of Duty 3	XB360	6.5	7.0	7.0
9	Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team	DS	6.5	6.5	8.5
10	Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	PS2	6.5	7.5	8.0
11	Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Red Rescue Team	GBA	6.5	6.5	8.5
12	Guitar Hero II (Game Only) 	PS2	9.0	9.0	8.5
13	Pokémon Ranger	DS	Not scored		
14	Nintendogs: Dalmatian & Friends 	DS	Not scored		
15	Nintendogs: Lab & Friends	DS	7.5	8.0	9.0
16	Mario Kart DS	DS	9.0	8.5	8.5
17	Big Brain Academy	DS	9.0	8.5	7.5
18	Animal Crossing: Wild World	DS	7.5	7.0	9.0
19	Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	PS2	Not scored		
20	Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	GC	6.5	7.5	8.0



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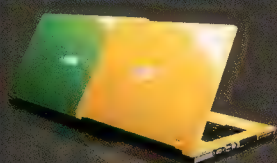


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GAME OVER

Where's Calvin pissing on a Wii or PlayStation 3 logo when you need him?



→ SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

The Eight Hillbilliest Games of All Time

Shut up and fish!



Although Seanbaby grew up on an Oregon goat farm, he is not a licensed redneck and believes Jean-Claude Van Damme could kick Walker Texas Ranger's ass any day of the week.

WHEN WE THINK OF GAMERS, WE MOSTLY THINK OF NERDS.

But what about all the frat boys putting quarters into *Golden Tee*? Or the sexy, shirtless women playing *Barbie Horse Adventures*? Or the men in dresses making out with each other to *Final Fantasy*? We should celebrate diversity in the gaming community, and this month I'm paying tribute to our gaming rednecks.

Why? Well, on a recent comedy special, Jeff Foxworthy said that being naked is great, yet not in every circumstance. After a comedic pause, he began listing every instance of bad naked. The second and final item: "When you're second in line during the toe-touching class!"

Now let me tell you why I thought this was so brave. Normally when you invent an activity for a joke, the absurdity of it is the comedic focus. For example, "It's bad to be naked during lowering-your-crotch-into-a-lobster-tank class." See what I did there? To make up something called

"toe-touching class," however, which doesn't exist yet has no ounce of comical absurdity, means Foxworthy allows the joke to rely solely on the listener's ability to invent a class that places their imagined head into the naked ass in front of them. It requires both a fantastic imagination and a total lack of understanding for what a human body does when it touches its toes—a rare combination.

To Mr. Foxworthy's credit, he probably meant yoga class. I imagine hillbillies make up their own terms for things that already have names simply to sound more stupid. And his joke totally works if hillbillies also put their mouths on nearby a*holes when they stretch. If that's the case, I sincerely apologize for the cultural misunderstanding. And in honor of Jeff Foxworthy's daring, maverick comedy writing, each of the following redneck games will receive its own "you might be a redneck" joke in as much the spirit of Jeff Foxworthy as can manage.

The King of Route 66 (PS2)

Rather than review this game, which takes everything not fun about long-haul trucking and combines it with everything not fun about videogames, I'd like to comment on its half-baked ditching of political correctness to curry favor among its target audience. Each ethnic character in this game is a stereotype: There's an Asian who can't talk right, a Mexican wearing a hat from Mexico.... My question is, why—in a game about truck-crashin' hillbillies—do I have to sit through this Looney Tunes caricature of racism? Every person who bought this game has a girlfriend with a black eye and a sheep with human herpes. What made Sega think these people wanted their PlayStation to be coy about its hatred of minorities?

Jeff Foxworthy memorial joke: "If you're peeing into something you're about to throw out the window of your cab, you *might* play this game!"



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Retro:
Weeping
wizards!



PAGE
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Grudge
Match: Cars
vs. life



PAGE
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Hsu & Chan:
Wii Man and
Blue Ray

Cabela's Alaskan Adventures (Xbox 360)

This game lets you travel north to our beautiful American wilderness and kill it. Some people are morally opposed to killing cute animals and to those people, I say this: If God wanted birds and fish to live, He wouldn't have made them suck so hard at not being murdered. And when you're done sawing the heads off dead animals and mounting them on your wall, go online to get a code that unlocks a minigame where your freshly-wounded animal looks up at you from your arms, its eyes seeming to understand what you've done for it, and then, slowly, you lean down and inhale the delicious essence of its final breath. Hail Ulfr, Master of the Hunt!

Jeff Foxworthy memorial joke: "If you've ever shot a moose, your sister, and your date, and you were all the same person, you *might* play this game!"

Sega Bass Fishing Duel (PS2)

Every time I think I'm starting to understand rednecks, something like this fishing game comes along. I cannot wrap my head around what kind of person would simulate sitting in a boat and waiting for fish on their PlayStation, much less two of them who want to share that hobby together. And while I'm on the subject, I can't wrap my head around why their women always confrontationally pull their shirts up when they first see Jerry Springer. Does it have to do with the heat of the studio lights, or is it for the addition of two deadly, flopping weapons to their combat arsenal?

Jeff Foxworthy memorial joke: "If there's a fish on your wall that sings songs to you, and in addition to that the batteries are dead because you have no personal responsibility, you *might* play this game!"

Lawnmower Racing Mania 2007 (XB)

If there's any doubt that the people who made this game aren't geniuses, here's an excerpt from the *Lawnmower Racing Mania* press

release: "What happens when you turn a household chore into the wild-west MOWtor sport to hit the nation in years? Grab your helmet, bore-out your cylinders, and get ready for the ultimate MOWdown!" When you're racing on top of whirling blades against many other people stupid enough to do the same thing, do they chisel the word "DUH" on your headstone? Actually, I imagine it's one of the lawn mowing puns that these people seem to like so much. Like, "This dead guy got run over by a lawn MOWER!" The fact that I came up with that after eight straight hours of thinking makes me wonder: If I should revise my theory that I'm smarter than lawn mower racers,

Jeff Foxworthy memorial joke: "If you're watching lawnmower races on a tiny TV sitting on top of an old, broken TV, you *might* play this game!"

WWE Crush Hour (PS2, GC)

A SPECTACULAR RAMMING MANEUVER!!!! *Crush Hour* is a favorite here at EGM, not only because it's a car-combat game where all the cars are driven by pro-wrestlers, but also because the long dialogue-loading times during the play-by-play commentary lead to completely irrelevant outbursts of stuttering nonsense. To illustrate, I'm writing this review in the style of *Crush Hour* commentary: "BY WILLIAM: REGAL!!!!!! It just goes to show that this game wasn't just designed for rednecks—they let them program it, as well. And great work! It couldn't appeal to them more if each wrestler-car came with a fat girl in the backseat who doesn't mind the taste of tobacco snuff and gum cancer. "WILLIAM REGAL SNATCHES UP!!!!"

Jeff Foxworthy memorial joke: "If you're reading this on a tiny magazine sitting on top of an old, broken magazine, you *might* play THE TWISTY-ROCKETS!!!!"

Test Drive Off-Road: Wide Open (PS2, XB)

One might think that they came up with the idea of a game about dirt and Metallica by working backward from redneck interests. But the truth is, rednecks don't mind driving on asphalt. All redneck racing, however, has to be off-road because if you get more than zero hillbillies near a road sign, they're required by genetics to stop driving and open fire on it. It's the reason they stopped putting deal schools near Keystone Light breweries. One of many, actually.

Jeff Foxworthy memorial joke: "If your favorite reading material is a piece of paper that says it's illegal to be within 200 yards of your ex-wife, you *might* play this game!"

NRA Gun Club (PS2)

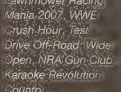
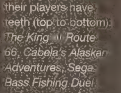
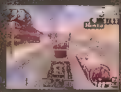
Leave it to the NRA to make the most boring videogame about guns that will ever exist. It seems obvious they released this paper-plate shooting crap instead of *NRA Water-Tower Sniper 2006* to promote their image as safety-conscious nonlunatics, but it may have backfired. Because you can't trust anyone who makes something that sucks this hard.

Jeff Foxworthy memorial joke: "If your reading material is a tiny piece of paper sitting on top of an old, broken piece of paper that says it's illegal to be within 200 yards of your ex-wife, you *might* play this game!"

Karaoke Revolution Country (PS2)

With songs like "My Give a Damn's Busted" and "Save a Horse (Ride a Cowboy)," it's obvious that this game is a tool used by rednecks to reveal homosexuals among their ranks.

Jeff Foxworthy memorial joke: "If you take naked toe-touching class at the local hairy-cowboy factory, you *might* play this game!"



I imagine hillbillies make up their own terms for things that already have names simply to sound more stupid.

10 Years Ago...

GAME OVER



On the cover: MechWarrior 2
Forget about supersmooth games running at 60 frames per second... back in '97, *MechWarrior 2*'s producer let us know how fast robots should really move—slow as s***. "A lot of real-time physics is used, and it takes a lot of calculations, so it's amazing the game can run at such speed [at least 20 frames per second]."



Game of the month: Dragon Force (Saturn)

Commanding 100-troop armies in this strategy role-playing game took over the lives of the editors...to the point where they, uh, had bizarre dreams about becoming kings. Just get a load of what editor Shawn Smith had to say: "I like controlling Wein because I could imagine myself as him if I was a monarch to some land."



Mortal matchup

Choosing between the Nintendo 64 and PS1 versions of *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* was apparently a big deal—we focused four pages (bigger than the cover story) on the differences until finally naming PS1 the winner.



+ RETRO

Off to re-see The Wizard...

...and two other awesomely terrible game-based flicks By Scott Jones



Joysticks (1983)
Big business is trying to shut down the local arcade, and only farting, obese teens can save it!



Arcade (1993)
A game created with real human brain cells begins sucking players into its virtual reality. The key word here is "sucking."

WHENEVER GAMES GET TURNED INTO MOVIES, things tend to play out like a bad date: lots of uncomfortable silences, countless moments of awkward interaction, and deep regret once it's over. But when Hollywood makes movies based on the culture of gaming, fans of so-bad-they're-great flicks know they're getting lucky. Take the new-to-DVD Fred Savage/Nintendo vehicle, *The Wizard*. Released in 1989, this road-tripping flick centers on Jimmy and Corey Woods, two brothers who run away from their crappy family. Corey (played by Savage) is the brains of the operation, while Jimmy

is a half-wit videogame savant. They get beaten up, Savage tries to make out with Jenny Lewis, and the whole thing ends in California where the half-wit has a showdown with a pud-head at a videogame competition. You'll never guess who wins.

The film's real star is *Super Mario Bros. 3*, which makes its public debut at the competition. Nintendo's Power Glove (current eBay value: \$19) doesn't fare too badly, either. And the lesson of the whole thing: We learn that footage of people playing videogames—or, more accurately, pretending to play games—is really boring to watch.

> WHAT HAPPENED TO THESE PEOPLE?



Jenny Lewis (Haley): Grew up to be totally hot. Oh, and she's also the lead singer in the bands Rilo Kiley and Jenny Lewis and The Watson Twins.

Luke Edwards (Jimmy "The Wizard" Woods): Played the role of "High School Guy" in *American Pie 2*.

Fred Savage (Corey Woods): Recently voiced Rusty the Reindeer in *Holiday: The Christmas That Almost Didn't Happen*.

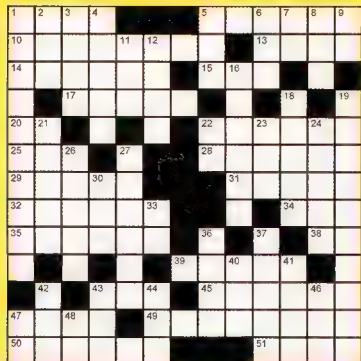


Christian Slater (Nick Woods): Went on to star in that terrific *Alone in the Dark* movie. Did we say "terrific"? We meant "pooptastic." Coops!



Jackey Vinson (Lucas Barton): His famous line, "I love the Power Glove" was sampled by HORSE the band in their song "Cutsman." Vinson—if that is your real name—has been M.I.A. since 1992's *Breaking the Rules*, when he played "Young Gene."

Hectic Holiday



ACROSS

1. *Rapala Pro Fishing* maneuver
5. Konami arcade-to-NES war game
10. Superhero romp *Marvel: Ultimate* _
13. *College Hoops 2K7* West-Coast college
14. Titular superhero alliance *Justice* _
15. Tool of the trade for 4 DOWN
17. Powerful *Fantasy Star* magic attack
20. 7 DOWN's home slate abbreviation, backward
22. Name for the Wii's main controller
25. *Tales of the Abyss'* _ Master ton
28. *Halo 2* flying Covenant troops
29. Dehydrated, like *Paper Mario 2* food items
31. PS2's _ *Elemental Force*
32. *Virtua Fighter 4* amusement center Sega Area _
34. Striking Lara Croft feature?
35. Forum topic
38. 2 million copies of this failed Atari title are rumored to occupy a desert landfill
39. *Daf Jam Fight for NY* music track _ Large
43. *Resident Evil's* Wong
45. *Pirates of the Caribbean* talk for "at the back"
47. *Resident Evil G-Virus* container, for one
49. Like *Castlevania's* Dracula
50. Driving genre
51. *Bicycle Casino* (Xbox) craps betting line

DOWN

1. PS3 war game
2. *Elder Scrolls* alcoholic brew
3. PS2's *Sega Soccer* _
4. Titular PS3 launch golfer
5. *Taiko: Drum Master* contributing rock band
6. White ball featured in *Bankshot Billiards 2*
7. *Madden NFL 07* Chiefs' city, for short
8. Keyboard "Ctrl" neighbor
9. *True Crime: Streets of* _
11. Typical *Madden* release month, for short
12. Upcoming *Halo* movie director Blomkamp
16. Life measurement
18. S2000 maker, to racing games
19. *Fall of Man's* main title
21. Shape-shift, as in *Altered Beast?*
22. Initials for Tarantino movie-turned-game
23. Cow-speak, in *Destroy All Humans!*
24. Perform a fighting game taunt
26. *Need for Speed Underground 2* meter
27. *Final Fantasy II's* Prince of Damcyan
33. *NCAA Football 07's* Irish, for short
36. *DDR* dancepad padding
37. Cyclops's *X-Men vs. Street Fighter* "blast"
40. Nintendo DS competitor
41. PS2 flight sim _ *Elite*
42. GBA's *Lady* _
43. Pro boxer referenced in *Fight Night*
44. Mean stat
45. AKA "hoop" in *NBA Ballers*
48. Power supply (abbrv.)

(Solution on page 120)

Elemental Master

EA Takes on the Periodic Table

It's true—carbon is used for more than making woven fibrous ground effects for your Honda Civic.

GAME OVER

Need for Speed Carbon

VS.

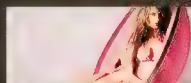
Basis for organic life



Gars look frigg'n' sweet on the PS3 and Xbox 360.

Advantage: Tie

Appearance



On its own, not hot. But you can't make supermodels without it!

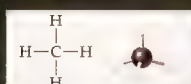
Advantage: Tie



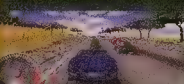
Drifting through canyons in boss battles

Advantage: Need for Speed

Neatest Trick

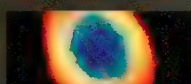


Um, bonding covalently with hydrogen to form methane?



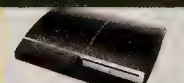
Series emerged on the slow-dying 3DO of the '90s

Coollest Origin



Emerged from slow-dying red-giant stars billions of years ago

Advantage: Carbon



Dropping \$500+ on a PS3 to show it off can't go over well

Impressing the Ladies



Properly pressurized, it becomes a bling-tacular diamond

Advantage: Carbon



Well, you'll just have to play *Ridge Racer 7*

Life Without It



You'd be a little puddle of calcium-laced water

Advantage: Carbon

Winner: Carbon

So next time you use a pencil or moderate the neutrons in a nuclear chain reaction, pay carbon some respect, yo.

+ NEXT MONTH

The Games of 2007

February Issue (#212) • On sale January 16



2007'S HEAVY HITTERS

So you managed to snag a PS3 and Wii—now what? Once you're done playing *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* and *Resistance: Fall of Man*, you're left with...well...a big collection of crap. Don't fret, though—good games actually are coming in the new year...seriously! In our massive preview feature next month, we're going to divulge all the details about the cream-of-the-crops games of 2007. By the time you've done reading, you'll know exactly why waiting for *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Devil May Cry 4*, and *Mass Effect* (and a slew of other eagerly anticipated games) will be insanely crappy...but so totally worth it.

Also, don't think we're just going to tease you with a bunch of far-off games in the much-too-distant future (man, *Halo 3* is soon good—oops, sorry). We'll be giving you info on several superb games coming out this very winter—such as *Virtua Fighter 5* and *Crackdown*. And if you think watching people play the Wii is strange, wait until you peruse the assortment of oddities in our latest “Weirdest Science” installment. We'll show you some guys that turned their PS3 into a \$600 grill, a special version of *Tetris* that builds your biceps, and a facility that treats game addiction. So we promised you this feature in last month's Next Month, but we think next month will be the real month this month...Wait, what? Oh, it must be that time of the month.

(All planned editorial content is subject to change.)

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PREVIEWS



- **Mercenaries 2: World in Flames** (PS3)
- **Ninja Gaiden Sigma** (PS3)
- **Mario Party 8** (Wii)
- **Virtua Fighter 5** (PS3)

REVIEWS



- **Lost Planet: Extreme Condition** (XB360)
- **WarWare: Smooth Moves** (Wii)
- **Full Auto 2: Battlelines** (PS3)
- **Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops** (PSP)

CROSSWORD SOLUTION

Answers to Hectic Holiday
on page 19

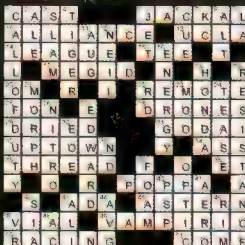


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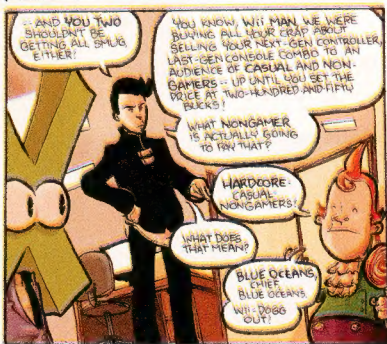
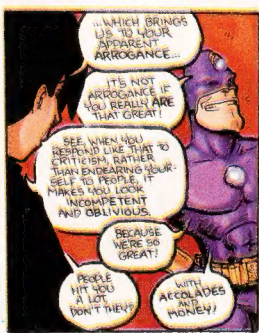
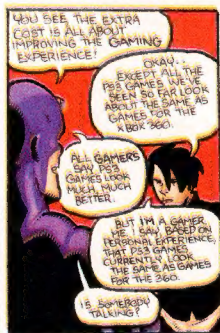
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