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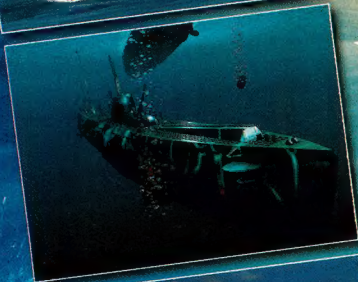
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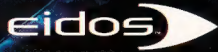
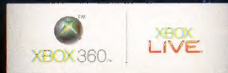
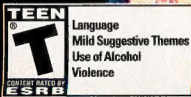
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Baby Games



> electronic gaming monthly



**Afterthoughts:
The Legend of Zelda:
Twilight Princess**



**WarioWare:
Smooth
Moves**



**Lost Planet:
Extreme
Condition**

THEY SAY HAVING A BABY CHANGES EVERYTHING, and if my recent maternity leave is any indication, they're right. First of all, having a baby in the fall was a bad call—I missed out on our reviews of all the blockbuster holiday games. And having a baby during a launch year? Not too smart, either; people generally front up on camping out in line with a newborn.

What's really changed, though, is my perspective. For the first time in years, I experienced the holiday onslaught as an outsider. I hung out with stay-at-home moms and learned that they're none too thrilled at the thought of their babies growing up to be gamers. I watched the evening news and learned that mainstream media outlets tend to completely miss this industry's true depth. I failed to preorder and learned how genuinely frustrating it is to be left empty-handed when all you want is a shiny new next-gen system.

So while the baby was certainly worth the trouble, my time off made me eager to get back to *EGM*. I want to show my new mom friends our stories on *Zelda*, *Castlevania*, and *Viva Piñata* (whose makers we interviewed this month) and see if they'd really mind their kids spending time with those games. I want the mainstream press to scope our massive **Best Year Ever** feature—the sheer quantity and variety of games proves this medium can't be summed up by one label. And I really want to dig into the **latest Wii and PS3 games** we've been reviewing. By the time you read this, I hope you've gotten yours, too.

—Jennifer Tsao, Managing Editor

> THIS MONTH'S EGM EXTRAS

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2007 Preview: Videos
You've read the previews in our "2007: Best Year Ever" cover story. Now see some of the games in action, courtesy of GameVideos.com.



EGM Live* Podcast: Holiday 2006
The winners and losers of this past holiday season.

Lost Planet SuperGuide
Lost on the *Lost Planet*? MyCheats.com's guide will help you through the cold.

Oears: Magical Glitches
Invisibility, self-mutilation, long-jumping, and more!

Celebrities' Miis
GameVideos.com shows you how to create your own celebrity Miis on the Wii.



Also check out our podcast at **EGMLive.1UP.com** and our message boards at **EGMboards.1UP.com**.

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LETTERS

> **WNBA hotties, fangirl name-calling, and our good pal Fabio**

> TRIVIAL ISSUE

This month's EGM question:

What was the lowest-rated game to win the Game of the Month award in EGM?

E-mail the answer to **EGM@ziffdavis.com**

(subject head:

Trivia: EGM #212) for a chance to win something potentially spectacular.



The homoerotic waiting is the hardest part

You guys weren't kidding when you complained of crappy load times in *WWE Smackdown vs. Raw* for the Xbox 360. Before every match, I find myself staring at a loading screen emblazoned with half-naked men for what seems like five minutes. After playing the game for three hours, I'm pretty sure that I'd spent at least one of those hours waiting for the damn thing to load. What gives?

—Alex C. Muniz

We're not the only whiners complaining about obnoxious load times recently—several letters like this one have poured in from gamers fed up with the glacial pace of many next-gen games. Sure, patience is a virtue, but when you're waiting several minutes to suffer through a few disappointing seconds of *Sonic the Hedgehog*, it's enough to make you want last gen back. Or, in Alex's

case, when you're forced to stare at greased-up dudes locked in a flesh pretzel for hours on end...you write into *EGM* to brag about it.

Kids ask the darndest things

Do videogame consoles have souls? I'm only 13 years old, but every night I find myself wondering about whether I'll still be able to play my PS2 after I die. Will my console's afterlife depend on what kind of games I played on it? I mean, if you played *Grand Theft Auto* on it all day, will it end up in hell? If I played kiddie crap like *Bratz* and *SpongeBob*, would it go to heaven? I have cancer, so if you publish my letter, I would be very pleased.

—Eduardo Gutierrez

Wow, this one's kind of rough. If an underage kid like you has been playing lots of *GTA*, odds are your PS2 will be headed straight for an eternity in the fiery abyss. The good news? It'll have plenty of Xboxes



■ Are *SpongeBob* games the secret to eternal redemption? Probably not.

(for the system's M-rated games) and Jaguar CDs (just on general principle) to play with in Hades.

The rosy view from a Nintendo fan's ivory tower

I am writing to thank all the Sony fans who made asses of themselves on PlayStation 3 launch day. I watched on the news as those in line were shot, trampled, and stabbed just so people could get their hands on a PS3—and most of these folks weren't even buying it to play games, but only to make a profit on eBay. All this chaos has given [antigaming attorney] Jack Thompson more ammo for his argument that videogames make people violent.

When the Wii launched two days later, it sold out and did extremely well, but since no one was shot or stabbed over it, the Wii launch didn't get as much attention as the PS3. Still, the difference between the gamers buying the Wii and the PS3 was mind-boggling. Nintendo fans were all pleasant and polite, and it seemed like most of the people who got a Wii actually wanted to play it. We Nintendo fans are often criticized for playing "childish, kiddie" games, but at least we know how to act like civilized human beings.

—Katie Bailey

Sure, the PS3 launch got a little more press due to high demand, extremely short supply, and a few bouts of isolated line violence (a shooting, a stabbing, and a BB-gun >

> LETTER OF THE MONTH

Where the ladies at?



■ Move over, unrealistic *DOAX* ladies...this reader prefers the heroines of the WNBA.

It seems to me that gamemakers are making a huge mistake by ignoring the masses of female athletes. As an example, there has never been a good squad-based volleyball videogame. And even if you can get past the ogletfest that is a driving force behind most beach-volleyball games of today, any volleyball player will tell you that 2-on-2 is a world apart from 6-on-6 team volleyball. I feel that this new generation is the perfect time for game companies to correct their mistake. The Wii would be a great home for a volleyball game

that takes advantage of bump, set, and spike mechanics with the Wii-mote. And with the high-capacity discs used by the PS3, developers should be giving the option of providing both the men's and women's divisions in future versions of NCAA basketball. Imagine trying to get both of your school's teams to the Final Four in the same season!

Developers could at least make downloads of women's teams for interested gamers. Collegiate women's teams—or even the WNBA rosters come springtime—would make a

quality Xbox Live Marketplace purchase for basketball games, getting additional mileage out of an old game while saving on the packaging and distribution of a new game. So, game developers—get on the ball. There's a whole untapped wellspring of female volleyball, soccer, basketball, softball, and even lacrosse players out there waiting for their time in the videogame sun. There are at least a half dozen in my own family, and they bug me about it all the time.

—Jason Glaser

OK, dude—we'll back your feminist crusade if it nets us a killer volleyball game for the Wii. But we do worry that guys weaned on idealized videogame sports starlets might not find the genuine articles as enticing (or feminine). Still, your noble letter earns you a free game. Enjoy.



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■ This Nintendo fan's improvised bullet-proof vest was totally unnecessary in the lines for the Wii.

drive-by), but the PS3 debut hoopla wasn't far removed from that of the PS2 or Xbox 360. Yet many firsthand reports (like Katie's letter) characterize PS3 buyers as either opportunistic eBay peddlers or violent low-lives while canonizing Nintendo fans as altruistic saints. Can't Wii owners enjoy their funky new console without acting like holier-than-thou elitists? Do you think PS3 fans are getting a bad rap? Let us know.

Tool time

I was perusing *EGM* #211 when a picture on page 39 distracted me. It was a screenshot from *The Darkness* showing some ghoul grabbing at a guy's head. Scrawled on the wall nearby was, "Me? The Chosen One? They Chose Me. I didn't..." Naturally, I finished that last part in my head: "and I didn't graduate from f***ing high school." Developer Starbreeze must be pretty big Tool fans. Those are

lyrics from the song "Rosetta Stoned" on Tool's newest album, *10,000 Days*. Check it out. —Seth

Our readers don't miss a thing. We got more letters about this Tool lyric than anything else this month, further cementing our popularity with the all-important "disaffected loner" demographic. And really, are you surprised that the guys at Swedish developer Starbreeze enjoy the gloomy musical stylings of Maynard Keenan? We're lucky the whole soundtrack isn't by Entombed. ☛



■ If *The Darkness* is even half as disturbing as a Tool video, we're officially terrified.

> LOW BATTERY

PS3 on eBay: The console that plays YOU!



Jeremy 'Norm' Scott



■ Fabio's loins: thoroughly girded.

With my **PS3** water model that Fabio...
 making the appropriate...
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> OOPS!

In Issue #211, we said that Fox McCloud wasn't part of the Super *Smash Bros. Melee* roster. Our bad—the furbal was indeed a playable character in the GameCube fighter. For the mistake, Fox, we'll stop poking fun at your high-pitched, prepubescent sidekick, Slippy...for exactly seven minutes.

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PAYTRON

WANTED
FOR SPACE PIRACY





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Gears of
War keeps
on grindin'



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Weirdest
Science:
geek chic



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Blu-ray vs.
HD-DVD:
format fight



Who let the dogs
back out? *Nintendogs*
pranced proudly back
onto charts with a
"new" Dalmatian and
Friends version.

THE 2006 HOLIDAY SHOPPING SEASON played host to a particularly brutal videogaming conflict: Amidst two new system launches, a solid lineup of triple-A current-gen titles, and plenty of top-quality portable diversions, competition for your gaming dollars felt fiercer than ever. Overall industry sales were definitely up from the previous year, but not everyone came home a winner. Here's a closer look at what went down.

Nintendo beats everyone

Nintendo managed to pull a startling coup—the combined appeal of Nintendo's wildly popular portables (DS Lite and GBA) and the freshly launched Wii vaulted Mario's handlers to the top of the crucial November sales charts compiled by the NPD data research firm. Over half of all hardware purchased during the month hailed from Nintendo, with the DS Lite selling a stunning 918,000 units and the aging Game Boy Advance moving another 641,000 systems. This victory validates the corporation's controversial "blue ocean" strategy—creating unique, affordable products to attract new gamers rather than directly engaging Sony and Microsoft in a competitive high-tech arms race. "I'm more surprised by the success of the GBA than either of the other two," explains analyst Michael Pachter of Wedbush Morgan Securities. "It implies that when the DS comes down in price to \$99 and \$79 we'll see a huge sales spike there as well."

The Wii's impressive debut (a 476,000 unit sellout) easily trumps the PS3's supply-strapped launch and nearly bests the Xbox 360's half-million November sales. A solid attach rate of two games with every Wii (compared to an average of only one game with each PlayStation 3) bodes well for future software sales, and roughly 65 percent of all new Wii's went home alongside a copy of Nintendo's own *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*. And despite a free pack-in (*Wii Sports*) and the unavoidable appeal of *Zelda*, third-party titles such as *Red Steel*, *Monkey Ball*, and *Rayman Raving Rabbids* performed remarkably well.

Nintendo's wand-wagging console remained a hard-to-find Xmas-list

must-have throughout December, with analysts predicting another million units would be sold by the close of 2006. Early in the month, a voluntary recall (overzealous Wii players were breaking the Remote's wrist straps) proved harmless, serving only to keep the console in the news.

So, what made the Wii such a huge hit? Positive word of mouth, glowing praise from mainstream media, and a comparatively low price point all contributed to this instant success. The affordability factor could be what pushes the Wii even further forward in the coming months. "I believe that the masses really like low price points with great software, and Nintendo's success speaks to the health of the industry overall," adds Pachter.

PlayStation 3's paper launch

After suffering numerous painful delays and plenty of nasty critical backlash for its hefty price tag, Sony's next-generation PlayStation finally arrived in stores on November 17th. Well, at least a few units did...despite promises of 400,000 PS3s for the U.S. debut, a scant 197,000 systems actually made it to store shelves. Or, more appropriately, they went directly into the hands of lucky campers, prepurchasers, and crafty eBay entre-

preneurs hoping to turn a quick 'n' dirty profit. The minuscule initial shipment and high price directly impacted software sales—the most popular title, *Sony's Resistance: Fall of Man*, moved only 66,000 units, and the average PS3 buyer went home with only one game. Ouch.

But these meager sales don't necessarily reflect consumer indifference to the console. To the contrary, demand for the console far outstripped supply, making the PS3 an elusive, luxurious piece of high-end hipster tech. Sony's production problems unfortunately made it an unattainable goal for nearly every shopper. "The sell-through of the PS3 is irrelevant," explains Pachter. "They sold every unit shipped—had they shipped 800,000, they would have sold out, and you would have asked if Sony's head start over the Wii was defensible." And it certainly continued to sell out through the month of December: Analysts predicted that Sony would manage to get another 600,000 systems into the hands of eager buyers.

But that still leaves the PS3 firmly trailing the Wii and 360 in the sales race. Sony has become its own worst enemy by allowing crippling production delays to hamper its chances for impressive out-of-the-gate success.



Jonathan Mann, aka GameJew, seized control of L.A.'s first Wii, upsetting Mel Gibson, Borat.

Until the console is readily available, it's basically impossible to gauge just how much impact the lofty price and limited game library will have on sales. The long-term outlook for the PS3 remains tentatively rosy, assuming that Sony is serious about its predicted 10-year life span for the system. As more games appear and the price comes down, the chances of repeating the past PS1 and PS2 successes will seem more realistic. "We won't see a \$599 price point on the PS3 forever, after all," reminds Pachter.

Microsoft's lofty expectations

As planned, Microsoft cleverly intercepted the big Sony and Nintendo launches with *Gears of War*, Epic's highly anticipated (and unabashedly gorgeous) postapocalyptic Xbox 360 shooter. Over a million gamers quickly snapped it up, instantly making *Gears* the best-selling Xbox 360 game of all time. Plus, *Gears* also triggered a rush of Xbox Live Gold sign-ups, with a 50 percent increase in the paid subscription rate in the wake of its release. New third-party Xbox 360 titles fared well, too—*Call of Duty 3*, *Need for Speed Carbon*, *WWE SmackDown*, and *F.E.A.R.* all performed admirably at retail.

Yet, despite tons of success on the software side, November hardware sales fell decidedly short of both analysts' and Microsoft's own predictions—gamers snapped up roughly 511,000 consoles, a figure noticeably short of the 750,000 to 1 million forecasts that many analysts predicted. Supply certainly wasn't a problem—Xbox 360s were readily available everywhere. "I think that most of us, myself included, thought that there would be a lot of substitution, with people buying 360s because they couldn't find Wiis or PS3s," says Pachter. "Instead, it appears that the substitution favors the GBA, DS, PS2, and PSP, so I can only conclude that people are opting to go cheaper while waiting for their Wii or PS3."

Still, never count out the possibility of a holiday miracle. Two consecutive months of the Xbox 360 underperforming at retail didn't keep the analysts from making optimistic December sales predictions of 1.3 million units. It's a plausible scenario, considering the platform's strong software lineup and rampant availability. But with 360 stock levels already high, critics wonder whether Microsoft may simply be flooding the channel with hardware in an effort to reach its long-promised global sales goal of shipping

10 million systems before the end of 2006. Will these unsold systems languish in stores until Microsoft makes that inevitable price cut? "Microsoft will continue to do well with the 360, and it will continue to be a steady seller," Pachter predicts. "But it doesn't look like the 360 will be the dramatic winner that many predicted."

Game over for the PSP?

Although Sony's PlayStation Portable saw a sales surge in the month of November with 412,000 systems sold, it's still taking a royal beating at the hands of the DS. Nintendo's quirky dual-screen handheld is now beating PSP in every territory, with a particularly insurmountable lead in its Japanese homeland. With its parent-friendly price and growing library of kiddie games (what's a *Hannah Montana*, anyway?), the DS is quickly inheriting the GBA's younger audience. Plus, left-field games such as *Brain Age*, *Nintendogs*, and *Animal Crossing* continue to draw throngs of nontraditional gamers to the DS fold, further widening the gulf between the two portables' markets.

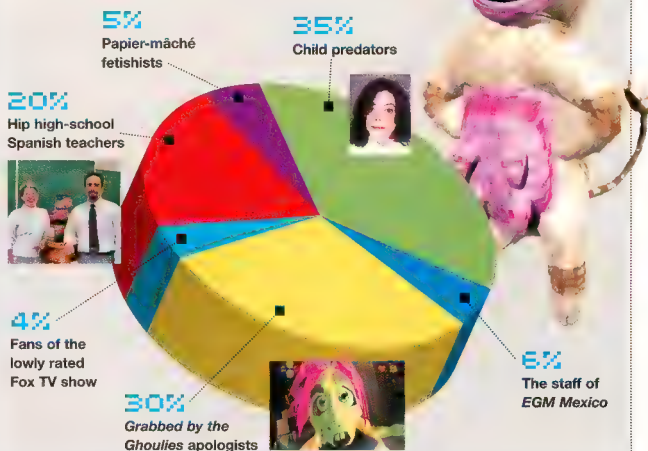
"I'm not sure it's a handheld war," says Pachter. "Sony is trying to make a portable console, and Nintendo has a handheld gaming device—this has the effect of segmenting the market, with more advanced gameplay on the PSP attracting more advanced (that means older) consumers, and less advanced gameplay on the DS attracting less advanced (that means casual, which could be younger or quite a bit older) players." So, while Nintendo successfully courts kids, hipsters, and grannies, Sony struggles to convince the PlayStation generation to pony up \$200 to play portable versions of PS2 games. Frankly, that strategy doesn't seem to be working. "Sony is doing something wrong," says Pachter. "Their PSP could play more simple games, but they don't seem to know how to get those to market...and the price point on the PSP (still \$199) is too much higher than [that of] the DS for people to seriously consider as a gift for a 10-year-old." Given the PSP's unfortunate situation, one has to wonder if we'll see either a full redesign or all-new follow-up from Sony in 2007... ❦

Want to hear more about 2006's big winners and losers? Our editors delve even deeper with a special EGM Live® podcast available at EGM212.1UP.com.

THE ELUSIVE PIÑATA DEMOGRAPHIC

How to dismantle an Xbox 360 bomb

Microsoft's critically lauded *Viva Piñata* had both a killer pedigree (it was created by Rare, developer behind *GoldenEye* and *Banjo-Kazooie*) and a high-profile licensing deal (a Saturday-morning cartoon, toy line, and Halloween costumes), but Xbox 360 owners steered clear of it this holiday shopping season. Ignored by the space marine-loving Xbox populace, *Piñata* did find a home with a handful of lucky gamers. Here's a look at who actually bought *Viva Piñata*.





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➔ AFTERTHOUGHTS

Gears of WAR

Shootin' the s*** by Greg and Shawn Elliott



Cliff Blaszinski is Gears of War's lead designer. He loves Epic Games, he enjoys torturing his foes, he's a streamer, and he long walks with Optimus Prime.

IT'S SORTA GOOD TO LOVE HATE. THING GOING ON. One minute, you're having a grand ol' time playing Gears of War with your friends, the next you're spewing curse words faster than your onscreen persona's losing his blood and internal organs. Why is this game so much fun and so problem-ridden at the same time? Will the developers fix anything? And what's up with the inevitable sequel? We ask Cliff Blaszinski; answers.

EGM: Gears of War is the best-looking game on any console right now, so why do you not include it in Gears of War 2?

Cliff Blaszinski: Well, first off, we haven't actually committed to saying that we're doing a sequel yet. So see what you're doing there....

EGM: But Gears' ending says there's a sequel.

CB: Well, I don't know about you, but I want to kill more stuff. I think there's a pretty good chance that we might be doing something after this

EGM: Graphically speaking, is there room to improve?

CB: I think there's more that we could squeeze out of the 360. You get used to the limitations and potential that this console has, and then you can really start exploring. I guarantee that, in the future, the technology of what we do here will squeeze every bit of coolness out of [the 360]. If there's a follow-up, it'll definitely look better than the first.

EGM: The "Mad World" trailer is pretty cool, but you never have that big encounter in the game, and you never really explore the human, emotional side of the story like the commercial hints at. False advertising?

CB: I think those themes are there in the game; they're just very secondary as far as the sense of desperation that occurs with the war, massive displacement as far as these stranded guys that are cast off from humanity.

The thing is, we didn't want to beat

people over the f***ing head with the story elements in the game and have them sit there watching four hours of cut-scenes in a row before they can go down the next hallway. We believe that players can infer a lot about what's going on in the universe, that it gives them reason to explore the ancillary marketing materials that we made available on the website [gearsowar.com]. Ultimately you buy the game to play it and enjoy it and have fun, and if our biggest problem is that people want to know more about the universe, that's a good problem to have in my opinion.

EGM: You're a big fan of Resident Evil 4, but just how much influence did it have on Gears? Blind enemies, the camera, the mine-cart sequence, a boss that you kill by sinking him into "lava".... Did we miss anything?

CB: There's a fine line between what some people claim is paying homage and what some people claim is just a straight rip-off, right? When I go

back and play *RE4*, its pacing was actually a bit more methodical than what we wound up with. *Gears* has a kind of crazy pacing...more of an action-movie feel—we wound up leaning on the action side more than the suspense side, whereas *RE4* swung back and forth more quickly between the two.

Ultimately there's definitely overlap between the two, but we're not the [only other] game to have blind enemies or a third-person camera. It's just a matter of evolving what things you think are cool and taking them to the next level, introducing them to a new generation that might not have seen these experiences.

EGM: Are artificial triggers unavoidable? Like when Locusts pour out after you take over a turret, or that box that blocks the train that magically disappears only after you clear out all the enemies in the area. How do you deal with these situations as a game designer so they don't feel too fake?

CB: The key is misdirection. It's like magic, right? Just like a magician uses a pretty girl. Any time the player sees something interesting in front of him, you can have all sorts of stuff going on behind the scenes.

You have to have what are essentially "gates" to make sure a player doesn't just sprint through the entire game, à la *Quake done Quick*. The areas where the players don't notice this are the ones that have the most whiz-bang action, and everything just flows together seamlessly. As a designer, you use misdirection and make sure there's all sorts of cool stuff with choppers and explosions so that the player is preoccupied and doesn't realize that he's carefully being "gated" along throughout the cinematic experience.

EGM: What's up with Dom? He sure needs a lot of saving...

CB: In hindsight...Dom got a little eager in spots. We probably should have made him ease up on the caffeine a little bit.

EGM: Do you think assigning "solve puzzle" to the ∇ button underestimates the audience's intelligence, where you make it too easy to track whatever they need to track at the time?

CB: It does and it doesn't. We wound up having different timers on



different difficulties for a lot of the ∇ -point adventures. So if you're playing on casual, the tip on where to go would actually come up relatively quickly, whereas on hardcore it would appear later or not at all. We're using the different difficulty methods to separate those who want a slightly more spoon-fed experience versus those who don't.

A lot of gamers are so used to this arbitrary definition of what "challenge" is that they're used to being beaten down as if they're the most hardcore gamer, and they're OK not knowing where to go and like spending hours just trying to figure out what the hell they're supposed to do in a game. I'm OK with giving players tips. This is how we expand our audience. We're a business. We want everybody to buy the game.

EGM: Is there a lot of concern over how violent the game is?

CB: Funny thing is, I've heard more complaints about the language than about the violence. Some people are OK with the fact that you're shooting and chain-sawing them, but they don't want to hear the words "s****" or "goddamn." It's such a funny standard of where your average American gamer is. Who am I to say what people want, though? I mean, the customer is always right. But I find it incredibly amusing. You can cut people's heads off all day long as long as you don't show a breast or

say a dirty word. It's a catch-22—it's the fear of the language that makes that language powerful, so if nobody cared about the cusswords there wouldn't be any cusswords, right?

EGM: Why so few modes in multiplayer versus? And the three that are available are essentially the same...

CB: It's one part wanting to keep it simple and just one part time [constraints] and making sure...the game had to ship at some point. We're talking about some possible extensions to the versus [via downloadable content], but nothing's been officially announced yet.

EGM: Do you think melee attacks are too useful in multiplayer? They all stun on that initial hit.

CB: If the players mash A fast enough, they can actually dive away from the stun occurring. If you're actually that good and can get that close to enemies, then you deserve to kill them. At that point you could have chain-sawed them, you could have grenade tagged them, you could have shotgun blasted them—you could have used any number of different attacks. If you keep the enemy at a distance, then it's basically a nonissue. That's where teamwork really comes in. If people are watching your back and checking your corners and everything, you'll >

Some people are OK with the fact that you're chain-sawing them, but they don't want to hear "s**" or "goddamn."**

—Cliff Bleszinski

be OK. If you just start lone-wolfing it, well, good luck.

EGM: Grenade taggers often die in the act of tagging, but since taggers are awarded a kill and taggees aren't, the game actually doesn't discourage suicidal play too much.

CB: Well, the next step right now is to just make grenade tagging a lot harder to do. From my own experiences online, I've found grenade tagging to be very frustrating—people grabbing it and then just diving and the game devolving from there. So we're nerfing that back a bit, but we still want it to be a viable tactic. You take the risk of getting that close and you get the reward. But keen players who really know how to aim, they can keep players with shotguns and grenades at a distance very, very easily, because they just aim for the head, have an active-reload clip, and take them down in a nanosecond.

EGM: Can you talk more about why *Gears* doesn't support friends in ranked matches?

CB: It's basically a rule from Microsoft. They wanted to prevent players teaming up and padding the ranked matches and getting on top of the leaderboards.

EGM: We talked to the Xbox Live team, and they told us it's really up to developers—that if they really want to build it, they can. It seems like you guys are blaming Microsoft, and Microsoft is saying it's really up to you guys. Their upcoming *Shadowrun* will support team ranked matches with friends. So what gives?

CB: There's been enough of an uproar in the community, I've seen relentless amounts of comments on message boards about it. As far as I know, it was not allowed [by Microsoft]. It could just be a left hand not talking to the right hand type of situation, but gamers aren't going to let the damn thing die. If it keeps coming up...you know how we are as far as supporting our community. We commit to our products; we don't let it go.

EGM: Does that mean you will incorporate team rankings in *Gears of War* if you can?



Blaszczak's favorite map? Train Station. Favorite killing ways? Sniper head shot and Torque Bow with perfect reload (which makes it 30 percent faster to aim).

CB: Those talks are ongoing.

EGM: Did you deliberately design *Gears'* multiplayer to favor chance or chaos in order to make the game more accessible to a broader base? Like when two chain saws go head-to-head—it's a coin toss as to who's going to win that fight. Why not make the game more tactical, so a player knows exactly who's supposed to win in that situation?

CB: For me a lot of those scenarios ultimately boil down to the X-factor. When you're playing a real-time strategy game, and you have two evenly matched players, the one thing that can push it away from a stalemate is that random crate that appears on the battlefield and gives one player an advantage. I think it's good for players who are generally better to be able to defeat other players, but if there's a little bit of a random factor in there to allow the s***y guy to occasionally beat the guy who's really good, I think that, in the name of fun, it's an occasional trade-off that's OK to make.

EGM: Epic Games has a history of making competitive shooters like *Unreal Tournament*. *Gears* is fun to play with friends, but it probably won't see major action with the pro leagues....

CB: The game was never designed to be *Unreal Tournament*. It was always designed as one-third single-player game, one-third co-op, and one-third versus multiplayer. The fact

that versus has taken off as such a success is a pleasant surprise for us, but it was never something that we had planned to be CPL- [Cyberathlete Professional League] or World Cyber Games—worthy in that regard. It's always been just a "jump in, kick around, and have fun with friends" game. It's not really the kind of versus that we designed for people to play for six figures. That's why we do *Unreal Tournament*.

EGM: Still, can't you make a game that appeals to the casual audience and is precise enough for tournament-level play?

CB: I think that's something we could potentially iterate on [for a sequel] and nail everything perfectly for extremely high-level competitive play, with high yield for players.

There are always ways around it. The superweapon in your classic shooter is that X-factor of chaos that allows the s***tiest of players to occasionally kill the best players. And what do they do for tournament play? They just disable the superweapon. You can always make small changes—this is the rule set for the hardcore, and this is the rule set for casual players...something that'll maintain the hardcore but invite the more casual to play. But we try to keep them in separate pens whenever possible....

Go to EGM212.1UP.com to see videos of some crazy *Gears of War* magic—invisibility, long-jumping, self-mutilations.... Epic's looking to fix some of these glitches any day now.



Vinsanity by Carter
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> THINGS THAT MAKE YOU GO WTF?

Weirdest SCIENCE

Eight new far-out experiments in gaming geekery

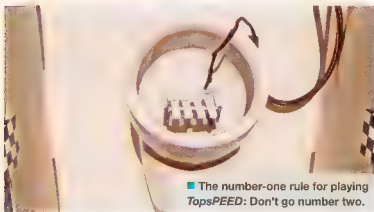
By John Brandon and Jon M. Gibson

Great games can make you think, sure, but sometimes great thinkers can make games, too—especially if your idea of games is a pee-powered gear-shifting simulator and a version of *Tetris* that builds your biceps. So, for the third year in a row, we travel the globe in search of scientists and students who clearly have too much time on their hands.

Pee in a pod

Here's a game where the strategy tip, straight from the designer, is to drink a lot of beer before playing. "Liquids aren't used much in today's interfaces and I found it an interesting idea," says John van Terheijden, a Leiden University grad student in the Netherlands (where else?). "One thing led to another and the idea of using pee came to mind."

His concoction is *TopsPEED* (the pun kinda hits you like a bucket of warm liquid, huh?), a game where you urinate on four tiny seesaws in an enclosed urinal to shift gears on a racecar, which appears on an overhead monitor and shows rpm and mph. The faster you switch gears, the more the car accelerates. There's even an engine sound that roars louder as you race but, thankfully, there's no force feedback.



■ The number-one rule for playing *TopsPEED*: Don't go number two.

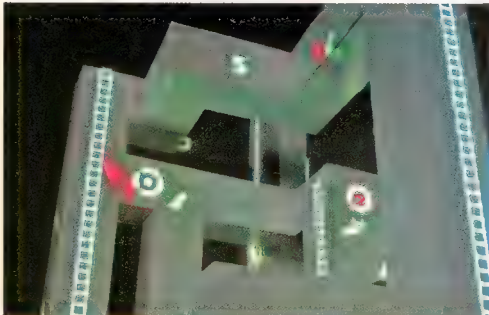
Kicking the habit

The Wild Horses Center in the Netherlands (yes, those guys again) is like a detox facility for addicted gamers. The recovery program lasts up to six weeks and treats afflictions of mostly the PC variety. "The most addictive games are *World of Warcraft*, any role-playing game, *Counter-Strike*, and *Quake*," says Keith Bakker, director of the center, which opened just last year. "The symptoms of addiction are loss of friends, bad grades in school, loss of self-control, and mounting debt from all the online-gaming fees." Bakker plans to build an online game-addiction center soon and wants to hear from players with stories to tell about their own game addictions. Just send an e-mail to danielle@smithandjones.nl. And if you don't get help at Wild Horses, please, get help somewhere.



Block party

Two Milan, Italy, grad-school guys with names like Victor Szilagy and Tristram Sparks must be quirky cool, right? Their *xBlocks 3D* project is like the bastard child of *Tetris* and *Super Mario Bros.*, projected on a large 3D sculpture and controlled with standard console joypads. The interconnected blocks form a maze in physical space crawling with flickery blue monsters. "There are two ways to win," says Szilagy, "either by getting to your opponent's base, or by catching them in the maze." Power-ups increase your speed or upgrade your weapon. But if you wander the maze too long, the monsters will eat you for lunch.



■ Perfect for lofts and small warehouses.

Seven-block biceps

While benching the bulky PlayStation 3 may seem like a sensible workout for your average muscle-nerd, Tim Tucker blasts his lats old-school. To cap off his Master's of Science in Human-Computer Interaction at Indiana University, he rigged up an "exploration in the area of entertainment fitness"—basically, a sweaty version of *Tetris*. After spending 650 bucks and a few months tinkering with a computer, some pulleys, remote controllers, and weighted buckets, Tucker had his phys-ed killer app—and the muscles to prove it. He realized that the simple mechanic of lifting weights to shift the onscreen pieces made people forget they were working out at all. Just take care to lift that extra-heavy straight piece with your legs.



■ Tired of getting sand kicked in your face? Hmm. Well, this thing probably won't help.

Lean, mean grillin' PS3

Who says your PlayStation 3 has to collect dust once you've beaten best-of-the-batch launch game *Resistance: Fall of Man*? Not Aussie 17-year-olds James Kingham and Brendan Foley, who noticed something very as-seen-on-TV about the system's concave casing. "Ever since the final design of the PS3 was announced, people have been joking that it looks like a George Foreman grill," says Kingham. One long Sunday afternoon later (not to mention \$1,000 blown on grillin' parts and an imported PS3), the duo had completed their 2,000-watt, meat-heatin' masterpiece. It's roomy enough for two bloody T-bones, four kosher wieners, and a few whiskey-lathered memory cards.



■ Rated S for salmonella.

Ghost buster

We think students at the Nara Institute of Science and Technology in Japan must have played too much Luigi's Mansion. Their *Shadow Chaser* game is part ghost-sucking gun, part psychological experiment. As you race around capturing the projected virtual ghosts—which look like tiny Pokémon—with a special vacuum cleaner, your backpack fills up with their "weight" and the gun's barrel gets clogged. You can hear the goblins' footsteps through a headset as they try to evade your capture. "The purpose of the project is to give users another way to perceive the existence of objects," says student Yoshinobu Nakano. Sounds deep and fun. Ehhh, we think.

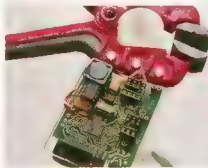


■ This game sucks.



Space clamp

Forget driving wheels: The Control Freak lets you use any physical object as a game controller, including bus seats, recliners, tree limbs—anything you don't mind clamping it onto. "I had the idea of a device that could turn objects into controllers by sensing movement," says Haiyan Zhang, a graduate student at the Interaction Design Institute in Ivrea, Italy. "I'd like to eventually add a gyroscope for more precision in the sensing." The clamp prototype uses something called an accelerometer and transmits movement coordinates over a wireless signal. What's next? Home-console controllers that sense movement? That'll be the day....



Head game

To quote one famously tongue-twisted former vice president: "Not to have a mind is being very wasteful." Enterprising engineers at Washington University in St. Louis are picking up what Dan Quayle put down. They hooked up an Atari 2600 to the brain of a teenager with epilepsy, allowing him to control *Space Invaders* with nothing but thought patterns. Amazingly, the system provides precise back-and-forth control in fine increments. "The patient's electrode array on the surface of his brain is wired directly to a biosignal amplifier," explains Tim Blakely, who helped design the interface. "The computer detects a specific pattern of neuron firings." Blakely found Atari electrical circuit maps on the Internet to get the thought-reading matrix working, and he has expanded the system's compatibility to include simple online games. Here's a thought: Will Nintendo pick up this technology for its Wii successor?



■ The brain scanner's inventor plays *Space Invaders* the old-fashioned way.



■ We don't know where this guy stuck his motion sensor. And we don't wanna know.

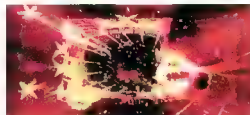


From future blockbusters like *Halo 3* to...*Space Giraffe*, we've got your game-related video needs covered over at GameVideos.com. This month, marvel at a hamster trapped—like a furry *Tron*—in a game, and see what happens when a Wii sensor bar has an unfortunate run-in with peanut butter over at GameVideos.com/EGM.



1337: Halo 3 ad discussion

Halo übernerds Mark MacDonald (GameVideos) and Luke Smith (1UP.com) deliver a frame-by-frame breakdown of the recent *Halo 3* TV ad. Drooling not pictured.



WTF: Space Giraffe

You may be wondering what a *Space Giraffe* is. Turns out it's a super-psychedelic shooter with *Tempest 2000* overtones by cult-famous developer Jeff Minter, and it's "mental."



LOL: 8-Bit Wonder Hamster

Screw hamster wheels—any hamster that doesn't have its very own 8-bit-style platformer *Habitrail* to run around in is obviously deprived.



FTW: Wii-Speriments

1UP Labs puts Wii under the microscope, stress-testing the Wii-mote, showing you how to jury-rig a homemade sensor bar, and more.

+ ONLINE SCENE

And the Survey Says...

From ' the people By Michael Donahoe

What's the most annoying part of Xbox Live? What game do you NOT want to see on the Virtual Console? What PS1 download do you NOT want to see? What's the coolest thing about Xbox Live? Can you easily invite friends into online games? What's the most annoying part about Nintendo's online service? Friend Codes

What Nintendo game do you want online the most?

A Super Smash Bros. Brawl

Who is charging too much for the classics?

A Wii (\$5-\$10)

What's the most annoying part of Xbox Live?

A Online games riddled with childish idiots

What PS1 download do you want the most?

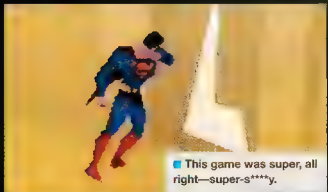
A Final Fantasy VII

What PS1 download do you NOT want to see?

A Any Army Men game

What game do you NOT want to see on the Virtual Console?

A Superman 64 (Nintendo 64)



This game was super, all right—super-s****y.

What's the coolest thing about Xbox Live?

A Can easily invite friends into online games

What's the most annoying part about Nintendo's online service?

A Friend Codes

What's the most annoying part of PlayStation Network?

It's not Xbox Live

55%

No Achievements

6%

Can't see what friends are playing

8%

Can't do other things when downloading stuff

25%

Can't invite friends to play your game from the Cross Media Bar

8%

PLAYER 1:

Got the latest tips & tricks
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PLAYER 2:

Got vaporized
by Player 1.



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Shallow software



> THAT SUCKS



Second chance to suck

Great, just when our wounds started to heal from *Red Steel*'s wonky samurai slashing, publisher Ubisoft put up a job posting on its website looking for developers to take a stab at sequel. Maybe some extra time will keep this Wii shooter from missing its mark the second time around, but even so, we'd rather this series lay down its sword and surrender.

Classic cop-out

While we're all wild on the Wii, it didn't exactly launch with any long-lasting games other than *Zelda*. But the Virtual Console makes up for it...or at least it does in Japan—the classic lineup overseas tragically trumps our shoddy collection. While we're playing *Pinball* (NES) and *Soccer* (NES), they're enjoying *Super Castlevania IV* (SNES), *Contra III* (SNES), and a handful of other hits.



+ AFTERTHOUGHTS

Castlevania: PORTRAIT OF RUIN

Talking secrets with Castlevania's count
By Michael Donahoe



The bonus Sisters mode is unlocked after obtaining the good ending...you know, killing Dracula.

DAMN THAT DRACULA! No matter how many times the nefarious neck-biter gets whipped to death, the bastard always seems to rise from his ashes to set up another sprawling house of horrors. So after slashing down Drac's for the umpteenth time in *Portrait of Ruin*, we asked series producer Koji Igarashi to spill the secrets on his latest vampire game.

EGM: Where did Jonathan's hilariously awesome, but completely useless "paper airplane" and "cream pie" attacks come from?

Koji Igarashi: After we had brainstormed the initial list of sub-weapons and magic spells, we noticed that they were all pretty standard and wanted to spice things up. I'm sure there are some people that are against it, but I'm not afraid to interject a little bit of humor into *Castlevania* series.

EGM: Is it possible to complete the bonus Sisters mode without getting the bad ending (i.e., Brauner chomping down on both sisters)?

KI: Sisters mode is a special side quest to the main game, so there are no additional endings.

EGM: Unlocking the Old Axe Awn nice. But since he was an unlockable in *Symphony of the Night*, did you consider choosing a different enemy?

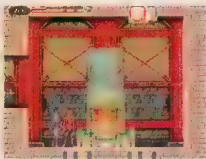
KI: Absolutely. There are several other enemies that we considered, including the Merman and different types of skeletons. We had to leave them out in order to complete the game in time, but I certainly won't rule them out for other games!

EGM: OK, let's go over all the unlockables that are in the game:

> SECOND SYMPHONY

Portrait of Ruin continues the non-linear style set by the last four portable *Castlevania* adventures. But before these recent titles took to the road, *Symphony of Night* (PS1) was actually the first game to radically change the series' castle-crawling. Instead of the straightforward levels from the earlier games, *SOTN* incorporated the figure-it-out-yourself level design made famous by *Metroid*. And now that Konami is bringing *SOTN* to Xbox Live Arcade, both *Vania* vets and series newcomers can revel in its return.

But what other secrets is Konami hiding in its coffin? Big ones! Check back here next issue to get the exclusive scoop on the next *Castlevania* installment. Trust us—if you're a fan of *SOTN*, you'll want to sink your fangs into this killer exclusive.




So we know Richter Belmont, a young Maria Renard, the two sisters (Stella and Loretta), and the Old Axe Armor are playable, but what about Eric Lecarde? He totally has to be an unlockable character, right?

KI: I agree that Eric would make sense to be an unlockable character as well, but he is not. It is a shame that such a dashing man, so skilled with spears and magic, has to meet his end in *Portrait of Ruin*.

EGM: We know you're a big fan of *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* (NES), and we noticed how *Portrait of Ruin* tried to throw in more levels, but some folks are complaining the different stages aren't challenging enough. Will the next *Castlevania* game incorporate more early NES-style levels with an increased difficulty?

KI: One of our goals for the game was to bring a greater variety of environments to the series, and I think we succeeded with the different motifs and new locations. I feel it is the richest-looking game we have made since *Symphony of the Night*.

As for the difficulty, we have to be very careful about how hard our games are. We absolutely do not want to freeze out anyone new to the series with a game that is incredibly difficult, but we also want to provide a challenge that has been with the series over its 20 years. This is why we include bonus difficulty settings in all our games. There is a hard version of *Portrait of Ruin* that is really very difficult to complete. In our office, anyone who finished this hard version of the game received a standing ovation, so please try it and then let me know if there are still issues with the game's challenge level. 

> THE GAME OF LIVES




5 Lives: Ted Price

If you own a PS3, you don't have to be a genius to know *Resistance: Fall of Man* is the only launch game that matters on that system. But you've gotta have brains to tackle our tough questions. Since developer Insomniac's CEO Ted Price is pretty smart, we asked him to be the first person to play our game of 5 Lives. Here's how it works: We test a developer's knowledge by asking them five random questions. If they get one right, great. If they get one wrong, they lose a life. And if they answer every question correctly, they get a special prize: Their self-esteem remains untarnished.

1: Name the three types of insomnia.

Ted Price: The kind of insomnia you get when you drink 12 Diet Cokes, the kind of insomnia you get when you're up all night worrying about something at work, and then that kind of hereditary insomnia that you can't do anything about.

EGM: Correct.


Lives remaining: 



2: What's the name of the evil dragon in *Dragon's Lair*?

TP: Haven't even played through that—I've played that game like three times. Didn't get very far...Homer?

EGM: Incorrect. It's Singe.


Lives remaining: 

3: Put these three levels from your first game, *Disruptor* (PS1), in order: Antarctica, Dream Circle, and The Chemical Factory.



TP: Chemical Factory was the earliest. Antarctica was next, and then the dream sequence was closer to the end.


EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining: 

4: What recent game completely ripped off *Ratchet & Clank*?

TP: *Ruff Tragger*.

EGM: Correct.


Lives remaining: 



5: So Ted, is the Price really right?

TP: If you ask Insomniac, they'd probably say only sometimes.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining: 

Game Over: Congrats Ted, you've set the high score! You should totally write the strategy guide for our game.



> BLU-RAY VS. HD-DVD

Blue STEAL

Is Blu-ray winning the high-def disc jam?



Not another one. China has announced its own high-definition disc format, bound to outsell all the others based on that nation's population alone.

DON'T WASTE YOUR POPCORN ON HIGH-DEFINITION VIEWINGS of *Fantastic Four* or *The Devil Wears Prada*. The real entertainment comes from watching the two high-def disc formats—Blu-ray and HD-DVD—slug it out for home-theater supremacy. And the stakes couldn't be higher. Sony is counting on the PlayStation 3 to drive massive market penetration of its Blu-ray format, thus earning a killing in home-movie licensing cash. Microsoft—which released a \$200 movie-playing HD-DVD drive for the Xbox 360 in November—is backing the other team.

So far, manufacturers of stand-alone players have not been forthcoming with sales numbers for either hardware or movies. Bill Hunt, editor of online DVD resource The Digital Bits (www.digitalbits.com), believes that's a sign that both formats are underperforming compared to expectations.

And in this battle, sales numbers—rather than picture quality—mean everything in establishing the dominant format. "There are tiny differences," Hunt says, "but overall, it's a wash. Once you get to the level of 1080p video [the ultra-crisp resolution supported by these discs], both formats deliver."

Seeing blue

Blu-ray player delays and the PS3's low initial release numbers aren't expected to factor much into the format's long-term future. PS3s will continue to be in high demand, and the system easily represents the largest single installed player base, which bodes well for the Blu-ray format. "Blu-ray is in a better position because more people are interested in purchasing a PS3 than in purchasing a stand-alone HD-DVD player," says Wedbush Morgan Securities Analyst Michael Pachter. "That inter-

est will continue for several years. That means that the studios will see a Blu-ray installed base much larger than the HD-DVD installed base, and they will ultimately be compelled to make the best economic decision, which is to support Blu-ray."

At this time, only one studio—Universal—hasn't committed to the Blu-ray format, while HD-DVD has yet to attract Fox, Disney, MGM, Sony, and Lionsgate. Hunt adds that the bigger-name electronics manufacturers, such as Sony, Panasonic, and Pioneer, are still supporting Blu-ray over HD-DVD. Once more titles become available, the higher-quality hardware will likely attract consumers who remain on the fence.

Right now, however, the movie catalogs for both formats are roughly equal. In the middle of December, Amazon.com had 203 HD-DVDs and 196 Blu-ray discs available for sale or preorder. Hunt expects many

significant studio announcements at January's Consumer Electronics Show, with studios increasing the frequency of both new releases and high-profile catalog titles:

Still, you can predict where many high-profile movies will land just based on studio support. Disney blockbusters, such as *Toy Story* and *The Incredibles*, as well as Fox's *Star Wars* saga will likely make their appearance exclusively on Blu-ray. Other hits, such as *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *The Matrix* films, and the *Indiana Jones* series, should appear on both formats simultaneously, assuming there isn't a clear winner once the studios get around to giving consumers the films they really want. Whether those movies come now or later, Pachter says the outcome will be the same. "Blu-ray wins in a landslide," he says.

Playing the renters

Major video-rental chain Blockbuster isn't ready to side with Blu-ray just yet. The chain's online store carries every title released for both formats, as well as in 250 of its retail locations. "At this time there are about 40 titles in each format in our participating stores," says Blockbuster spokesman Randy Hargrove. "We will move forward based on consumer acceptance."

Mail-order video-rental giant Netflix is adopting a similar stance, offering HD-DVDs and Blue-ray titles as part of its standard subscription plan. "We support both formats and will continue to do so," says spokesman Steve Swasey, "although we wish there was not a format war, since in this case the consumer loses."

Even game developers who work with both standards and Blu-ray discs aren't sold on Sony's format, despite it being the only megastorage disc available on the consoles. (PS3 Blu-ray discs can hold more than five times the content of the standard dual-layered DVDs used by the Xbox 360.) "Most games still use a ton of compression—not just to fit on a disk but to load faster," says Todd Howard, executive producer of Xbox 360 role-playing epic *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, which is also coming to the PlayStation 3. "So drive speed matters more to me, and Blu-ray is slower." (The PS3 *Oblivion* team compensated for the slower drive by duplicating data across the Blu-ray disc, making it faster to find and load.) "Now, with games that have a lot of prerendered [high-definition] cut-scenes, Blu-ray is key," Howard adds. "Those types of things

eat a lot of disk space. But we tend to stay away from [that type of content] anyway, so it's not much of an issue for us."

Blu-ray's vivid future

Ultimately, the final arbiter in the format fight may go to the one industry that drives technology on Blu-ray: porn. The backing of the adult video biz, after all, helped determine the outcome of the VHS vs. Betamax battle in the late 1970s, lit the Internet ablaze in the early '90s, and propelled DVD to the title of fastest-selling consumer electronic product



of all time.

And when it comes to adult entertainment in high definition, the future looks blue. Vivid Video, one of the world's top adult entertainment companies (like you don't know who they are) has fired the first volley, committing to its first Blu-ray release—due in early 2007—and deciding to wait a while longer on HD-DVD.

Of course, maybe seeing those adult stars in so-crisp-you-can-see-every-pore-and-pimple high-def isn't such a good thing. Eh, we don't really feel hungry for popcorn anymore. **A+**

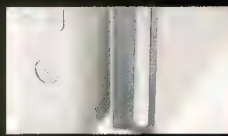
DISCS O' TECH

The nuts and bolts of both discs...

PRICE	PRICE	\$200 for the Xbox 360 add-on; \$400-plus for a stand-alone unit
\$500/\$800 for the PS3; \$1,000 and up for stand-alone players	STORAGE	30GB (dual layer)
50GB (dual layer)	NUMBER OF AVAILABLE MOVIES FOR 2006	More than 200
More than 200	RESOLUTION	Up to 1080p
Up to 1080p	CORPORATE BACKERS	Toshiba, NEC
Sony, Matsushita (Panasonic), Philips	HARDWARE MANUFACTURERS	Toshiba, Sanyo, Onkyo, Kenwood, Mitsubishi
Sony, Panasonic, Philips/Magnavox, LG, Mitsubishi, Pioneer, Samsung, Sharp	STUDIO SUPPORT	Universal, Paramount, Warner Bros.
Sony (Columbia Tri-Star and MGM), 20th Century Fox, Disney, Paramount, Warner Bros.	BEST FLICKS TO SHOW IT OFF (SO FAR)	<i>King Kong</i> , <i>Batman Begins</i> , <i>Serenity</i> , <i>Apollo 13</i> , <i>Miami Vice</i> , <i>The Bourne Supremacy</i> , <i>U-571</i> , <i>The Adventures of Robin Hood</i>
		
<i>X-Men: The Last Stand</i> , <i>The Wild</i> , <i>Kingdom of Heaven</i> , <i>Pearl Harbor</i> , <i>Alien vs. Predator</i> , <i>Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby</i> , <i>The Princess Bride</i>		

PLAYER VS. PLAYER

Wired magazine AV-gear reviewer Daniel Dumas pits PS3 against Xbox 360.



The 360 HD-DVD player

After an easy set-up and navigation via the familiar Xbox 360 dashboard, flicks like *Serenity* and *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* played tag-free even when in-movie special features were activated. Colors, however, were slightly muddled and fine details were a little fuzzier compared to other HD-DVD drives.

Bottom line: Among the worst players out there, but what do you expect for only \$200? (Stand-alone units cost twice that.)

The PS3 Blu-ray player

The image quality is fantastic—sharper than the 360's HD-DVD counterpart. After subjecting ourselves to the hellish landscapes of *Silent Hill* and (shudder) *Little Man*, the color contrasts were nigh flawless—you could almost feel blood splattering in your face. Still, the interface suffers from Sony's counter-intuitive layout, but it's definitely improved from the PS2 as a movie player.

Bottom line: A good player compared to stand-alone units.

Viva Piñata

Even though *Viva Piñata* is packed with tons of pretty piñatas, not all of the planned animals made the candy cut. So we asked Lead Designer Gregg Mayles at developer Rare what content had to get whacked.



Piñatas: "If we had managed to incorporate all the originally planned piñatas, there would have been 166 of them, but the game would still be in production now—and for several more years. We originally had many subgroups of species—several types of Spider, for example—that we simply reduced back to a single example when we quickly realized there was no way we could justify having that many and retain the level of quality we desired. The 60 that were chosen from the 166 remained unchanged throughout development, but even so, working out how 'only' 60 species interact with each other and their environment was a real challenge."



Other stuff: "One of the first ideas we cut was the ability for your garden to run in real time even when the Xbox 360 was switched off. Although this sounded like a very cool idea, we felt that, in reality, it would offer very few positives but many negatives, due to the 'anything can happen' nature of the gameplay. Bad elements like fights, weeds, pests, and ruffians would reduce the garden to a wasteland with the player unable to deal with them due to [the player] not being there. Other cut elements we had plans for were piñata training, more piñata special abilities, imaginary offline gardeners (for players not on Live to trade with), and a Helper that grew on a tree."

TAKE THIS JOB

Production Designer

Our monthly look at the jobs you want

By Evan Shamoon

Production Designer
 The production designer is responsible for the overall look and feel of a game, including the art style, color palette, and lighting. They work closely with the art director and other departments to ensure that the game's visual style is consistent and high quality.

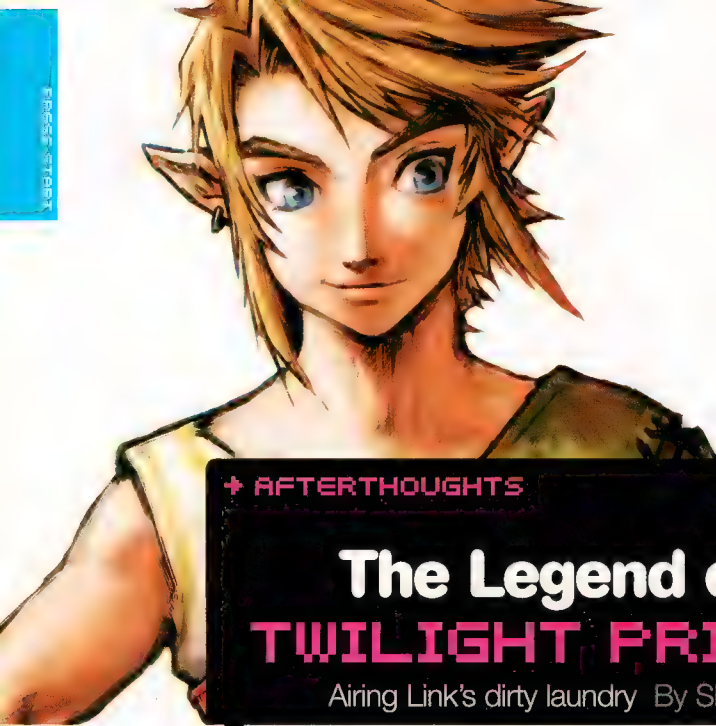
What's a production designer's job like?
 Production designers are responsible for the overall look and feel of a game, including the art style, color palette, and lighting. They work closely with the art director and other departments to ensure that the game's visual style is consistent and high quality.

Job title
 Production Designer

Responsibilities
 Production designers are responsible for the overall look and feel of a game, including the art style, color palette, and lighting. They work closely with the art director and other departments to ensure that the game's visual style is consistent and high quality.

Skills
 Production designers should have a strong understanding of art and design, as well as excellent communication and collaboration skills.

Education
 A degree in art, design, or a related field is typically required for this role.



➤ AFTERTHOUGHTS

The Legend of Zelda: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

Airing Link's dirty laundry By Shane Bettenhausen



Bill Trinen is one of Nintendo's top localization managers. Although he claims that the eerily familiar *Twilight Princess* character Shad (above) isn't based on him, he also insists that the Ooccoo (see page 40) doesn't have breasts.

PACKED WITH GIANT DUNGEONS, HIDDEN DOODADS, and a cast of freakshow characters, Nintendo's *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* thrusts players into elf-teen Link's most engrossing quest ever. Venturing through Hyrule left us with plenty of burning questions, so we sat down with Nintendo of America Localization Manager Bill Trinen for the behind-the-game details on Link's many loves, Midna's hot bod, and if the GameCube-quality graphics do the job. Warning: loads of spoilers ahead.

EGM: This is the first Teen-rated *Zelda*. It must have been tempting to just roll up your sleeves and make with the dick jokes.

BT: [Laughs] Well, we kind of reserve the toilet humor and fart jokes for the *WarioWare* series. I think it was pretty obvious once the graphical shift [to a more realistic-looking game] occurred that it would be difficult to get an E [for everyone] rating. But I don't think that means we want to change the focus of the game, the core of what *Zelda* is and has been.

EGM: We can't help but think how much better the game would look on the PS3 or 360. Wouldn't that power help convey the story better?

BT: ...I'd rather see *Twilight Princess* with the graphics it has—with the visual direction and the art direction that the art team has gone with—rather than a shiny bump-mapped [rendering technique to create realistic surfaces] Link face that's reflecting light off it in all directions.... It's a question of, if you've got a beefed-up, more powerful system, do you want to spend a lot of that processing power on creating...graphics, or do you want to take advantage of that power to create a better interactive experience? I think that with the *Zelda* team, they're always going to choose to take advantage of this processor to do what we can to make the interactive experience better.

EGM: This game has more narrative than any other *Zelda*, yet Link remains the silent hero throughout. Do you think we'll ever see a *Zelda* where Link speaks?

BT: Part of what the development team has always felt is that Link the character is the link between the player and the game, and as such they never really want to give him too much personality, because they feel that trying to impose too much personality on him would just distance the player from the character....

And I also just feel that *Zelda* is really a triple-A franchise and a world-class game. If we were to try to do voice acting, I would expect not just the best voice acting you get in videogames, but really high-quality, movie-caliber acting, and obviously that's very difficult to do. Part of that is because of the way the development team is continually working on things right up to the end, and using every last minute to continue to make changes and refine the story.

EGM: Speaking of the story, Midna's a great character—the perfect foil for Link. Did you know she would become so hot at the game's end?

BT: [Laughs] We knew pretty early on that she was going to be changing

form.... When we were getting early versions of the game, we would use the debug menus to skip through and look at all the character models. We kept going back every week, trying to find when they added the final Midna model. We were just like, "Wow," when we saw it.... [Laughs]

EGM: Were you afraid she'd almost steal the show, because she's so fun compared to Link?

BT: She does have a really fun personality, and that was something that we really tried to highlight. When we talked with [the team] about it, they were very clear that she is—up through the first three dungeons of the game—very mysterious.

EGM: Her motives are suspect.

BT: Yeah. And she's not willing to share information with Link, and when she does...she does it out bit by bit. It was really important to build up this idea that perhaps she is just using Link for her own ends.

EGM: I think all players feel that, "Well, maybe I'm just a pawn in Midna's game here."

BT: Exactly. I think that was the intent from early on. And then [the team] kind of told us that once you get past this point in the game, then at that point she starts to warm up a little bit toward Link. And then, from there, they gradually get closer and closer. The writers and the development team really wanted us to highlight that as well in the English version. We spent a lot of time going over the text, and of course meeting with them, talking with them during the process.

EGM: Another crazy new character that we love is the postman. He's bringing sexy back to Hyrule with his short shorts. What's his story?

BT: Well, he's gotta have short shorts, because he does a lot of running. You know, hardcore distance runners all wear short shorts. It's kinda what they do. Hyrule's a big land, so he's running pretty long distances.



EGM: He's actually hidden all over Hyrule, chilling in different places.

BT: Yeah. The first time I went back [into the game] I was just kind of putzing around town, seeing what all had changed while I was gone. I find this mailman. I'm like, "What is the deal with this guy? This is crazy." And he's sitting there like, "Aww—this letter is too hard to read. I'll just throw this one away." I think it's almost the secret life of mailmen, what they do with the mail.

EGM: Another great new character is Telma the barmaid, and we were kind of feeling this weird, unresolved sexual tension between her and Link. Admit it: It's there in the game and you guys put it there.

BT: [Laughs] I don't necessarily say that's a sexual tension between her and Link so much as she's a flirtatious woman. Because, you know, Link's obviously a handsome young man.

EGM: We're not used to feeling these feelings as Link. He's a very innocent, pure boy. She's old enough to be his mother.

BT: Well, [Twilight Princess Producer Eiji] Aonuma said early on that, you know, with the more realistic graphics you're going to have to deal with more realistic themes in your game. [Laughs] And at the same time [Telma] tells you outright at one point that she's actually interested in Renato.

EGM: So she's just toying with Link.

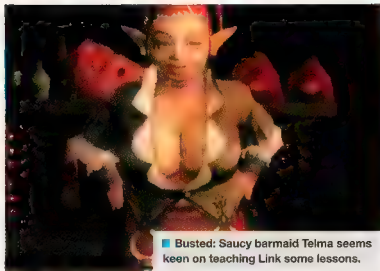
BT: Yeah, she's just being a little flirtatious.

EGM: But that was in the Japanese version, too? You didn't add that?

BT: Oh, definitely not. There are certain moments where Link takes glances at her that sort of caught us off guard as well.

EGM: Maybe this means you can look forward to some Telma cosplay—maybe even some mailman cosplay—in the future.

BT: [Laughs] The mailman...I don't know if I would look forward to that or not.



EGM: The guy who dresses up as Tingle [see our review of Twilight Princess in EGM #211], he'll probably now dress up as the mailman. And speaking of Tingle, he's not in this game! What's with that? Were you upset?

BT: I dunno. I mean, Tingle comes and Tingle goes. He's got his big balloon, and he kinda floats around in the sky. You never know where he might land.

EGM: On a serious note, the beginning of the game in Ordon is too slow—the tutorial just takes too long to wrap up.

BT: For people who are probably longtime *Zelda* fans, I can understand why they would say that. But I think what they may be missing in that tutorial is that it's not so much that it's teaching you the game—it's also setting up the situation of what exactly is going on in Hyrule. It's setting up the idea of the story of the twilight pushing out.... To be honest, this game has done that setup a little better than *Ocarina of Time*, which was obviously a fantastic game and fleshed that out very well....

And I also think that, given that this *Twilight Princess* is obviously one of the first games on Wii...the tutorial serves a dual purpose: One is to take people who have been playing games for many years, who are accustomed to a standard controller, and try to bring them over to the new style of interface that's offered by the Wii Remote and the Nunchuk. At the same time [it must take] when you maybe are buying a console for the very first time—and have never really played videogames—and try to teach them both how to play videogames, as well as how to use this controller. >

> Hardcore distance runners all wear short shorts. It's kinda what they do.

—Nintendo's Bill Triner on the postman's "sporty" look

EGM: So you do consider the Wii version the definitive version?

BT: Correct. We had to go back and do screenshots for the manuals in the GameCube version, and at one point I sat down with the guys to capture the screenshots. I was trying to play the game and get some footage, specifically of the aiming with the distance weapons like the slingshot, and for the first five minutes I couldn't even do it. The aiming with the analog stick just felt so bizarre and foreign to me all of a sudden, despite the fact that I played *Ocarina of Time*, *Majora's Mask*, and *Wind Waker* with that kind of control.

EGM: Back to the new characters, who do you find creepier: Fyer the cannon guy or Ooccoo the chicken-like teleport thing?

BT: Uhhh, yeah, the Ooccoo are pretty weird,

and Fyer I find to be kinda funny, because he's a depressed clown. But the one that I found creepier was Falbi [the taller depressed clown to the left].

EGM: But those Ooccoo...why do they have breasts?

BT: Those aren't breasts—that's plumage.

EGM: C'mon—it doesn't look like breasts to you at all?

BT: I dunno what you're talking about.

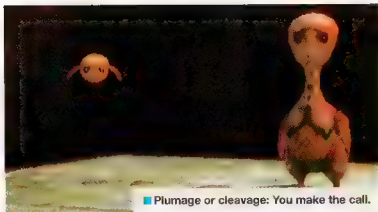
EGM: Like a giant pair of women's breasts on a chicken?

BT: No! It's plumage. They have them on the back, too, if you look at them.

EGM: So is it our sick, twisted minds that see breasts every time we see the chicken things?

BT: Well, you guys are videogame-magazine editors. [Laughs]

EGM: We also have to wonder after the ending: Are Link and Princess



Zelda ever gonna hook up? It is a Teen-rated game, after all...

BT: [Laughs] Well, you have to wonder, how unrequited is it really? Just because a scene doesn't necessarily happen on screen before your eyes, that doesn't necessarily mean the scene has never happened.

EGM: You just totally revealed that Link and Zelda are having premarital sex.

BT: You know, like a lot of times a book will end, and the ending is kinda left up for the reader to interpret. You have to fill in the holes yourself. **BT**

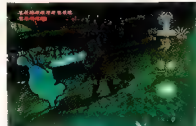


TWILIGHT'S LAST GLEAMING

Five Tasks that'll extend your Hyrule hang time

Twilight Princess is the Energizer bunny of videogames: It just keeps going and going until—poof!—you've lost 60 hours of your life and burned through a half dozen double-A's in your Wii-mote. But let's hope you have a little juice left for these bonus Hyrulean hijinks...

Cuckoo cuccos—Attacking chickens in previ-



ous *Zelda* games has always driven the temperamental foul absolutely mental. But whacking them with your sword in *Twilight Princess* produces a more interesting result—a literal bird's-eye view of what it's like to be the cock of the walk.

Catch 'em all—You probably wasted an afternoon casting for bass and catfish in the Hyrule fishing hole (in the Upper River area).



But when you're done reeling in minnows, it's time to land the biggest fish of all: the monster Hylian

Loach. But first you'll need the frog lure, which you win by beating the ball-rolling minigame found in the fishing cabin (examine it on its shelf). Then leave the fishing-hole area and keep returning until you hit the summer season (seasons change every time you re-enter). Rent a canoe and cast the frog lure into the lily pads at the north end of the lake. With enough patience—and some serious fishing skills—you'll land the big one.

Talk to the animals—Wolf-form Link is the C-3PO of the animal kingdom, capable of conversing with every creature great and small. Be sure to talk to Epona, Link's horse, for some translated neigh-saying, and chat up the ducks at the fishing hole to help score a valuable prize.

Hole in the ground—Still got some fight in ya after your sword duel with Ganon? Load **III** save before the final battle



and head to the aptly named Cave of Ordeals, a grueling 50-stage monster-bashing marathon located in the southeastern Gerudo Desert (see Link's map location in the screenshot). And if you're really hardcore, you'll go through it twice—the second version has even more foes.

Soul search—Gathering 20 Poe souls for



Castle Town's creepy Jovani is a cinch. The hardcore get all 60 (and you need to complete the Cave of Ordeals to find the final few). What's the payoff for all that work? Infinite Rupees—if you do this trick after delivering to Jovani the 50th Poe soul. Simply enter his now-deserted hotel in Castle Town, collect the 200 Rupee gem there, leave Castle Town, return and collect another 200 Rupee, leave town, and so on. Repeat until you've maxed out your wallet.

Found your own bonus business in Twilight Princess? Show the world at www.MyCheats.com. Just bring up the game's cheats page and start adding your own tricks and secrets, Wiki-style. Or just see what discoveries other *Zelda* gamers have made.

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RUMOR MILL

Digging through the dirt By Quartermann



Resurrected rumors

If you think my rumors record ain't great, then check out this oldie: A few years ago, I successfully guessed the PC classic *Half-Life 2* would eventually make its way to the Xbox long before anyone else knew.



DAMN, IS IT ALREADY 2007? After a hectic year (and an even crazier holiday) I now have time to feast on all the fall games I missed out on now that the winter drought is sucking our systems dry. But no need to worry—one thing sure isn't on reserve. Yep, you guessed it: My never-ending supply of scuttlebutt. Even though the gaming landscape is barren the next few months, I've managed to scrounge up a nice big heaping of winter rumors for y'all to rummage through. So enjoy my fresh 2007 gossip while I enjoy last year's old games.

Dough rising

If you remember a few months back (October issue if you're a little brain-dead), I had a tidbit that the reanimated return of *Dead Rising* would land exclusively on the PS3. Well, seems Sony's plans met an early grave. Yep, my undead sources tell me **Microsoft delivered a marvelous moneyhat to Capcom in order to keep *Dead Rising 2* a 360 exclusive.**

PSP playing a new role

2006 was not a good year for the PSP. Between the steady stream of terrible games and competition from

the impossible-to-touch DS, it almost seems like the PSP should pack its bags. I'd be ready to help out, too, if I hadn't uncovered that **Square Enix is whipping up a wild lineup for the PSP this year.** These guys are serious, too! I'm talking new games, remakes of old classics, and an all-new, unexpected *Final Fantasy* spin-off that will make fanboys flip.

Crossing platforms

Before the PS3 joined the console race, Sony's beefy system gobbled up a bunch of great exclusives like *Metal Gear Solid 4*, *Devil May Cry 4*, and *Virtua Fighter 5*. But now that publishers are seeing the system sales, the thought of exclusivity ain't so lucrative

anymore. In fact, I caught wind **many PS3 "exclusives" will either be pushed to 2008 or will also appear on the 360** to cover both the development costs and small user base of the PS3.

Different downloads

Retro junkies may be drooling over the Wii's Virtual Console, but let's face it: The games are just ports. Sony, on the other hand, is getting publishers to create new content. **Capcom, for instance, looks to be making several interesting games for the PS3's service.** What games? Well, I've heard rumblings of a remake of *Street Fighter 2* (with all new sprites) along with an updated NES classic. 🎮

> Q-TIPS

- 🔍 *Sly Cooper* developer Sucker Punch has been pretty quiet. But not quiet enough—I discovered its first PS3 game isn't *Sly*, but something new.
- 🔍 *Guitar Hero* has to drop its current developer, Harmonix, but I heard dirt on its new one. **One of Activision's trickiest studios will handle the next GH.**
- 🔍 Developer Epic's next frag-heavy shooter is currently a PS3 exclusive. Or at least it was—I learned ***Unreal Tournament 2007* is also heading to the Xbox 360.**

LUMINES™

III

9 out of 10



"even better than the original"

-Game Informer



9 out of 10

"Mizuguchi has done it again"

-IGN

5 out of 5

"Lumines II comes out of the gate strong and never lets up in creating a perfect puzzle game..."

-GameDaily.com

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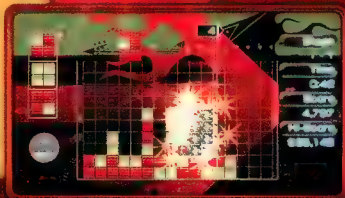
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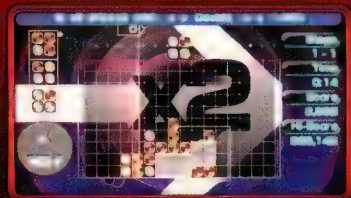
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The graphic features the text '2007 BEST YEAR EVER' in a bold, bubbly, 3D-style font. The '2007' is bright cyan with a black outline. 'BEST YEAR' is a gradient from cyan to purple, and 'EVER' is a gradient from purple to pink, all with black outlines. The text is surrounded by black ink splatters of various sizes and elegant black flourishes that swirl around the letters. The background is white with a dark horizontal band behind the text.

2007 BEST YEAR EVER

Illustration by Alejandro Chavetta



Wanna see 2007 in motion?
Head to EGM212.1UP.com
for videos of several of the games
reviewed in this feature.

COVER STORY

THE YEAR IN PREVIEW

Best year ever? Sounds like something an overzealous high-school cheerleader would write in her friend's yearbook. But after surveying this year's monster-game lineup for the Wii, PlayStation 3, and Xbox 360, we can't help but wave our pom-poms and scream, "Go, 2007, go!" *Halo 3*, *Grand Theft Auto IV*, *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Metal Gear Solid 4*, *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, *Metroid Prime 3*, and many more heavy hitters...oh yeah, 2007 is gonna be the big one. Actually, make that the best one. Ever.

Let's begin with this winter and *Virtua Fighter 5*.... ➤



WINTER

Virtua Fighter 5 PS3/XB360 • Sega

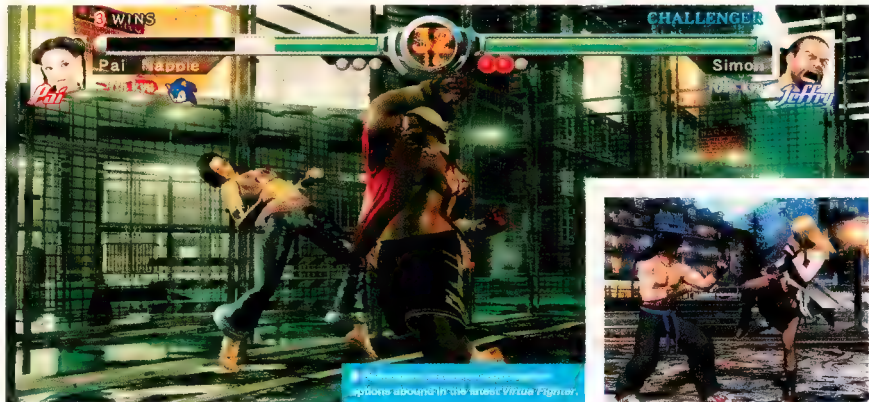
A full 14 years after *Virtua Fighter* gave birth to the whole 3D fighting scene, Sega's franchise remains the most respectable way to get your face smashed in at the local arcade. While button-mashing noobs can achieve a modicum of success at the *Tekkens* and *Mortal Kombat's* of the world, a skilled VF player can eviscerate uninitiated foes in seconds flat. This latest installment, *VF5*, doesn't tinker with the winning formula much at all—two new competitors, agile Mexican luchador El Blaze and spunky Monkey-Fist gal Eileen, join the diverse returning cast for another round of realistic 1-on-1 martial-arts action.

Looking back at the previous arcade-to-console VF ports, you'll notice that none of them truly replicate their coin-op cousin. *VF4* and *VF4: Evolution* (both for PS2)

came awfully close—visually, these games suffered only a slight downgrade during the trip home, and a bevy of new, clever single-player modes helped extend the games' appeal. But **this VF finally matches the arcade version's good looks and, as expected, includes a large supply of additional features.** "With the technological capabilities of the PS3, we really think we did a great job making it look exactly like the arcade version," explains *VF5* Producer Noriyuki Shimoda. "Plus, we were able to add some features that are not included in the arcade version, such as the commentary mode and quest mode." Commentary mode adds real-time play-by-play by two announcers to either single or versus play. Some might find these quips a bit distracting, but the often funny and insightful wordplay actually

personalizes the proceedings while dishing up trash-talking fodder. The quest mode brings back all the best aspects of *VF4*'s beloved single-player game (A.I. opponents based on top VF players, plenty of tournaments to complete, and oodles of unlockable outfits and accessories).

Sadly, fans' most requested feature—online play—isn't a possibility here. "Our stance still remains firm in regard to online play," Shimoda explains. "We are really focusing on making this game the perfect arcade conversion, which is unfortunately not possible with complete online yet because of the latency issues." Couldn't we at least have some sort of online leaderboard system to help expand our *VF5* bragging rights? Maybe that'll show up exclusively in the 360 version, which is due out this summer....



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Mass Effect

XB360 • Microsoft

The final frontier sure ain't fantasy—while on *Mass Effect*'s intergalactic voyage, you won't find any effeminate elves or dangerous dragons. Rather, you'll find space...and lots of it. "*Mass Effect* kicks off to a jaw-dropping opening gameplay prologue," says Project Director Casey Hudson of developer BioWare (*Stars Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*), "and by the end of it you'll be face-to-face with a spectacular interactive map of the Milky Way." Scoping out the solar system is definitely one of the main attractions in this massive role-playing game. But even though the ride may seem like a virtual vacation, your trigger finger sure won't be relaxing. "There are four classes of conventional

weapons that you can equip, in addition to various types of grenades, tech weapons, etc.," says Hudson. "All of your equipped weapons fold up into compact shapes for storage directly on your character, and can be retrieved with a press of the D-pad." Don't get too cocky with your cool space weapons, though—**all your actions (good or bad) play a major role in the outcome of not only this game, but also the planned sequels.** "Your style of play throughout the game will result in diverging endings that determine the fate of humanity itself," says Hudson. Man, as if saving our own ass weren't pressure enough.



■ *Ghosts of Recon* #410: "Nope...but *Mass Effect* does have a bit more shooting than most RPGs."

Sonic and the Secret Rings

Wii • Sega

Coming in the wake of Sonic's disastrous self-titled next-gen offering, *Secret Rings* seems like a godsend. While *Sonic the Hedgehog* painfully juggled a cavalcade of overly ambitious yet underdeveloped elements, *Rings* aims to rethink the gameplay of classic Sega Genesis *Sonic* with a Wii-note twist. Here, you hold the controller horizontally as you steer the titular mammal through all manner of platforming perils. "Our goal was to create a simple, engaging game that brings Sonic's speed and personality alive in an entirely new way," explains Director Yojiro Ogawa. "The game is very fast-paced and Sonic is using his speed to constantly run forward, but there are alternate paths players can take within levels and different ways to complete the levels." At first, *Rings*' fixed camera, narrowly focused level design, and largely on-rails gameplay might seem oversimplified, but it's far more instinctive, addictive, and fun than any 3D *Sonic* game in recent memory. Plus, **Sega plans to augment the single-player action with over 30 multiplayer minigames** that make use of the Wii's controller in creative new ways.



SECRET RINGS



Crackdown

XB360 • Microsoft

If you think you're sick of hearing *Grand Theft Auto* comparisons, you've got nothing on *Crackdown* Producer Phil Wilson: "Too many mediocre rip-offs of an outstanding franchise have definitely made people wary, but it's still annoying when it's assumed that any open urban action game will play the same," he says. So what's his game do differently? ***Gears of War*-style jump-in-and-out-whenever co-op play** for one. Additionally, the developers have intentionally kept the main mission structure simple for you and your supercop pal (both of whom have upgradeable abilities). Though taking out gangs always involves assassinating the leader, "*Crackdown* is all about the free-form experience," Wilson says. "There is no correct way to take out a gang boss because there are never any failure conditions other than death."



Medal of Honor: Airborne

PS3/XB360 • EA Games

The History Channel called: It wants its war back. But that ain't gonna happen in '07, as this year issues in yet another glut of *World War II* first-person shooters. So what's the hook in the latest *Medal of Honor*? Aerial assaults.

These aren't dogfights or B-52 bombing runs, though. Rather, **these are real parachute-in-and-watch-your-feet-dangle moments while dropping into a German-stuffed war zone**. The jumps are dynamic leaps out of planes and onto the battlefield, where troops—both friend and foe—relocate and adjust to your position. *Airborne* also offers a lot of freedom as to where you touch down; you can drop in behind enemy lines and fight back to your platoon or land near your buds and help them pave the streets with Nazi blood across the five true-to-life military aerial operations.



Forza Motorsport 2

XB360 • Microsoft

Gran what's that? Who knows how many months or years until the next real *Turismo* game comes out, and it's hard to care when *Forza* is just around the bend. "*Forza Motorsport 2* will deliver the most realistic racing simulator available," says Dan Greenawalt, and while we expect that kind of potential hyperbole from the game's lead designer, the Xbox 360's new force-feedback racing wheel will definitely help Greenawalt and co. deliver. *Forza*'s got a lot going on off the track, too. **"We're planning to break new ground by making the community site a true extension of the game itself,"** says Greenawalt. Players will be able to organize a race series with their friends and trade custom-tuned and -painted cars, then swap over to the *Forza* online site and post pictures of their in-game exploits or do some old-fashioned scoreboard and stat browsing. Any volunteers to design the Team *EGM* livery?



Burnout 5

PS3/XB360 • EA Games

Car carnage—happy developer Criterion isn't just lifting the hood on the *Burnout* series and adding some prettier motor oil (like the studio did last year on the 360); it's completely rebuilding the engine. "There's no restrictions on what we do," says Lead Designer Alex Ward. "We're only restricted by our own stupidity." No. 5 will be an open-ended affair (think *Test Drive Unlimited*, except with a lot more wreckage), where Ward promises, "There's something amazing to do around every corner." You can also expect pileups that are worthy of being called "next gen," and neck-breaking crashes that result in vehicles literally snapping in half. "Cars are being built from the ground up," says Executive Producer Matt Webster. "And that's just for one reason: so we can tear them apart."



> PLAYSTATION 2

Still kickin'

The Xbox and GameCube may have prematurely called it quits, but the PlayStation 2, last generation's console champ, still has some fight left in it. Here are the games that'll help keep one of the best consoles ever alive during the best year ever.

Lumines Plus (Buena Vista • February 2007)

The PSP continually samples from the PS2 library. But now it's time for the taker to become the giver, as the techno-laced puzzler *Lumines Plus* will come to the console with skins not found in the original.

MVP 07 NCAA Baseball (EA Sports • February 2007)

The lack of an MLB license hasn't stopped EA's ball-players from innovating on the baseball diamond. *MVP 07* introduces some new pitching mechanics, which we're already diggin'.

Dawn of Mana (Square Enix • March 2007)

The long-standing role-playing series says buh-bye to the PS2 with a game that reminds us a lot of *Kingdom Hearts*, thanks to its fast-paced fighting system and stylish cartoon graphics.

God of War II (Sony CEA • March 2007)

For his videogame debut, the pasty white Kratos proved to be a force in and out of the bedroom. We expect nothing less here, as *GOW2* will have a heftier supply of boss battles, plus all-new weapons and items (wind bow, Icarus wings, and more).

Persona 3 (Atlus • April 2007)

Atlus' cult role-playing series (which falls under the *Shin Megami Tensei* umbrella) gets even weirder; *Persona 3* takes place at a school, and you gotta adhere to its rules (in between battling shadow creatures, naturally).

Burnout Dominator (EA Games • Spring 2007)

If you don't have enough dough for a PS3 or 360 to play *Burnout 5*, *Dominator* does boast one feature from its next-gen big brother: You can build rivalries with other drivers populating the streets.

Guitar Hero II: 1980s Edition (RedOctane/Activision • Spring 2007)

This expansion hasn't been officially announced yet (trust us; it's coming), but just the thought of jamming to all '80s tunes has us itchin' to rock some spandex.

Tomb Raider: Anniversary (Eidos • Spring 2007)

Anniversary isn't just a spiffier version of Ms. Croft's 10-year-old PS1/Saturn raid. It'll also pack a deeper narrative, more complex puzzles, and some of her new moves (like the grappling hook) from last year's *Legend* (XB360/PS2/XB).

Wild Arms 5 (TBD • Summer 2007)

This RPG's combat promises to be user-friendly, not to mention more forgiving (it lets you pick up right where you left off after dying in boss battles).

Kingdom Hearts II: Final Mix (Square Enix • Fall 2007)

Well, you'll definitely give a crap if you're a *Kingdom Hearts* nut; *Final Mix* not only adds some new cut-scenes and boss fights (Sora will go 1-on-1 with his doppelganger, Roxas), but it also includes a 3D version of *Chain of Memories*, the card-filled strategy game originally released on the Game Boy Advance.



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XBOX 360



Def Jam: Icon

PS3/XB360 • EA Games

Rocking jaws in *Icon* takes more than a pair of hurtin' bombs—the real pain belongs to the beat. “The music driving the environment is not just a visual effect,” says Executive Producer Kudo Tsunoda. “It’s a core element of our gameplay.” **Each level houses a slew of dangerous booby traps that are triggered by the tempo of the tunes,** so throwing punches is only half the ass-kicking. “Every environment plays differently depending on what music is playing while you are fighting,” says Tsunoda. “Since the music is different, and since the environmental hazards are triggered by the music, the rhythm and beat of each environment changes when the music changes.” You can even upload your own songs, in case you ever wanted to bash heads to Barbra Streisand or Britney Spears—your pick.



Lair

PS3 • Sony CEA

Gamers may not be sold on the PS3 joyypad's motion-sensing capabilities just yet, but Julian Eggebrecht sure is. **“The flight controls in Lair feel so much better via motion control,”** says the Factor 5 president about the developer's first non-*Star Wars* game in many years. “The Sixaxis also gives you much more precision than you could ever have with the limited range of an analog stick.” Outside of the flight mechanics, the dragon-on-dragon action has also been expanded to include a greater variety of attacks, which you'll really need when facing several different species of fire breathers and other aerial beasts.



MotorStorm

PS3 • Sony CEA

That launch-day downloadable demo gave PS3 owners a brief taste of *MotorStorm*'s filthy off-road action, but the finished product reveals plenty of last-minute polishing. Improvements abound: **The eerily photorealistic visuals now zoom by at a smoother clip,** and the surprisingly adept enemy A.I. (which was basically turned off in that demo) pulls some truly nasty tricks, like having two opponents team up to box you in and send you hurtling over a cliff. The touchy (and thankfully optional) Sixaxis motion control isn't for everyone, but the ample variety of vehicle types, ranging from dirt bikes to massive trucks, means that you'll find something here that fits your driving style. Plus, the addition of online play (for eight players) highlights the wickedly fun *Road Rash*-style dirt bike/ATV fisticuffs and high-risk shortcuts through the perilous Monument Valley courses.





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 **XBOX 360**



WINTER

ALSO IN WINTER

With the holidays here, you might miss the gaming fun season has. Here are some suggestions for you to get back into the habit (and of course your gaming accounts). **Overwatch** (3.5) is a team-based, free-to-play, first-person shooter that's been a hit since its launch in 2016. It's a great way to get back into the habit of playing with friends. **Overwatch** (3.5) is a team-based, free-to-play, first-person shooter that's been a hit since its launch in 2016. It's a great way to get back into the habit of playing with friends.

Multiplatform

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PS4

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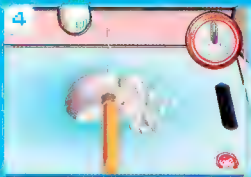
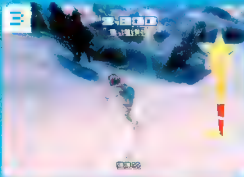
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XBOX 360



SPAINING

Blue Dragon XB360 • Microsoft

Sure, the 360 has been having a good run over here, but it didn't even make a dent in Japan until the release of *Blue Dragon*, an actual Japanese-bred role-playing game made by bigwigs like Producer Hironobu Sakaguchi (the father of *Final Fantasy*), artist Akira Toriyama (*Dragon Ball Z*), and composer Nobuo Uematsu (the father of *FF*'s music). With that power trio behind it, *Blue Dragon* looks like a fine fusion of old-school and modern RPG mechanics, which includes turn-based battles (old school!) but no random skirmishes (new hotness!).

Blue Dragon's signature, the use of "shadows" (unique creatures for each party member that perform the actual

fighting during combat), is pretty snazzy. "By 'charging' the shadows, you'll have more effective magical abilities and various skills," says Sakaguchi. "This puts the characters on the back burner, but they will be able to make good use of numerous battle strategies, such as recovering right after an enemy attack. We placed a lot of emphasis on the speed and the tempo of combat. The game is turn-based, but because of this particular development, the game offers more fluid gameplay experiences." The battles here will also receive a new wrinkle—you can now select (via pressing the right trigger) just how many of the enemies in a particular

group you'd like to fight. It sounds kinda weird, but it also sounds like a way to streamline the combat when level-grinding (consequently, you can easily avoid these fiends when needed).

Now, for a game designed with the Japanese market so much in mind, some may worry that *Blue Dragon*'s kiddie art style might alienate U.S. gamers. But not Sakaguchi. "I think we were able to achieve a real-time graphic quality that is fairly close to that of the Pixar movies," he says. "I also believe that we created a beautiful worldview that will resonate with people of all generations."



Blue Dragon's episodic structure splits up the most of the workload during skirmishes.

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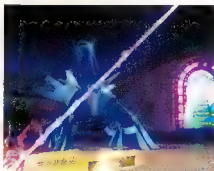
Jump in

XBOX 360

Pokémon Battle Revolution

Wii • Nintendo

By now, first-generation Pokémaniacs are declaring majors and guzzling beer bongs at frat parties, yet somehow the franchise is still hot with the kiddies (recent DS outing *Ranger* broke the top 10 in videogame sales). *Battle Revolution* could be another weapon in this arsenal of slow-but-steady domination. Besides offering a battle-based game system (à la *Pokémon Colosseum*), **the online component could make this the Wii game everyone's talking about.** It's one of the first Wii titles to feature online play (and annoying, game-specific friend codes)—you can spar with other trainers on the Internet and customize your trainer's look and costumes. *Battle Revolution* will also use the Wi-Fi link-up with the DS—you'll be able to import your pocket monsters from the upcoming *Diamond* and *Pearl* handheld games).



Shadowrun

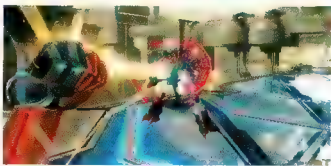
XB360 • Microsoft

Microsoft is conducting its own civil war: Mystical first-person shooter *Shadowrun* is the first title to let gun-loving 360 and PC gamers take shots at each other via the Live Anywhere service. The PC competition may scare off some (because of the expected advantage of using a mouse and keyboard), but developer FASA promises a fair playing field. "We started with a standard mouse/keyboard control scheme and a controller setup similar to *Halo*," says Lead Designer John Howard. "At first, the controller actually had an advantage, but we figured out what was going on and spent a few weeks dialing in the balance." And if the game looks different from its earlier showings, it's because FASA ditched the cartoony characters. "Originally, we'd tried a more exaggerated style," says Howard, "which we decided wasn't right for the game." We agree.

Metroid Prime 3: Corruption

Wii • Nintendo

If Hollywood director John Woo ever gets around to bringing *Metroid* to the silver screen, the open casting call for Samus Aran will now list a few more prerequisites. First-person adventure *Corruption* introduces some impressive Wii-specific moves to the bounty hunter's repertoire, such as unlocking doors with a twist of the Wii Remote and knocking away an enemy's shield with a flick of the Nunchuk. The actress also better be able to memorize her lines; this will be the first *Metroid* game to have spoken dialogue (well, at least the kind that wasn't some incomprehensible alien babble). And lastly, she should forget *Echoes'* (GC) multiplayer because 1) it really sucked, and 2) the developers recently mentioned such a feature would be very different here...if they do multiplayer.



Mercenaries 2: World in Flames

PS3 • TBD

Mercenaries 2 should probably carry a big, fat disclaimer stating "not for structural engineers who are faint of heart"—thanks to the PS3 and its bajillion processors, you can blow the crap/rivet/scaffold/rebar out of any building in the game. Additionally, since *World in Flames* takes place in bright and beautiful Venezuela, you'll get very colorful explosions to boot.

While the folks at developer Pandemic were proud of delivering a solid, open-ended experience in the original (PS2/XB), they also realized that the game was lacking in factors like story, character, and even setting. "In our first game, the North Korean setting was a pretty interesting, surreal environment," says Senior Producer Jonathan Zamkoff. "But in the end, we didn't feel as we though we'd developed a

world that felt like a living, breathing place. In contrast, *Mercenaries 2* is jam-packed full of life, from bustling urban epicenters to exotic locales juxtaposed with military encampments." Zamkoff admits that the three playable characters in the previous game had mostly cosmetic differences, and he swears this new trio will have more unique characteristics, including how the various factions (we're guessing that'd be the Venezuelan madmen who've taken over, the rebellion against said madmen, and people who want to make money off of both the madmen and the rebels) will treat the players. Factions will issue missions (ranging from capturing fugitives to smuggling in guns to initiating prison breaks) and will offer different types of equipment to the player (one will give you a bunker-buster,

while the other will let you drop the Mother of All Bombs), which in turn makes each play session unique as you decide whom to work for and when.

As much as we love tearing apart buildings with explosives, it's actually the game's co-op feature that has us the most excited.

If some crazy Venezuelan renegades are holed up in a bunker, you can smack them with suppressive fire while your cowboy-not-domestic-partner flanks them. Or one guy drives while the other mans the turret, or perhaps one plays chicken with the enemy while the other sneaks by and plants C4. Zamkoff promises that "almost all of the free-play jobs" in *World in Flames* can be completed *Tango & Cash*-style (minus the horrendous dialogue).



COVER STORY



Command & Conquer: Tiberium Wars

XB360 • EA Games

OK, real-time strategy has never been the sexiest of genres. But EA is looking to build off the momentum it garnered with its 360 RTS *The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth II* (which nabbed our Game of the Month award last August) with its latest in the legendary *Command & Conquer* series.

"*Tiberium Wars* still follows our philosophy of 'One Button to Rule Them All,'" says Senior Producer Mike Glosecki, "by allowing players to do all of the basic commands—selecting, moving, and attacking with their units—by just using the A button." Keeping it simple, in addition to some multiplayer modes not found in the PC version, is what EA hopes will help rope in more casual but cerebral-minded gamers.

> GRUDGE MATCH

Made for TV

We're not just getting bombarded with blockbusters like *Halo 3* and *Grand Theft Auto IV* in 2007; Hollywood's following suit. And you know what that means—lots of licensed garbage. So, do any of these games have a chance to outperform their big-screen counterparts? Let's take a look-see:

Spider-Man 3

Movie: Sandman, Venom, some form of the Goblin... how can it be bad?

Game: Let's face it—it's going to be the same as the last two

Winner: Movie

Transformers

Movie: Have we learned nothing from *Garfield* about turning cartoons into live-action/CG hybrid movies?

Game: Hey, if they can spin this beast into some kind of coherent game, god love 'em

Winner: Game

Harry Potter

Movie: *Harry Potter and the Mountain of Cash*

Game: *Harry Potter and the Mountain of Cash: The Game*

Winner: J.K. Rowling

Ghost Rider

Movie: Nick Cage takes his *Face/Off* again, this time with sweet flaming-skull effects

Game: Can we possibly stomach another superhero beat-em-up?

Winner: Movie

Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End

Movie: Film based on a ride

Game: Game based on a film based on a ride

Winner: Movie

Shrek the Third

Movie: Given its pedigree, this one's bound to be worth the \$10

Game: It's gotta be kid-friendly, so don't expect any hardcore fights, puzzles, or naked ogres

Winner: Movie



Ninja Gaiden Sigma

PS3 • Tecmo

Man, talk about milking a game for all it's worth—*Sigma* will mark Tecmo's third take at the spectacular *Ninja Gaiden*. So why does a PS3 port deserve your attention (and recognition as a game that'll help make this year so awesome)? Well, because it isn't being treated it like an ordinary port.

For starters, developer **Team Ninja** has built an all-new graphics engine for *Sigma* that's completely customized for the PS3's powerful innards. And, as you can tell

from these screenshots, the game is looking even better than the already dazzling original and remixed edition, *NG Black*. But what veterans of the series will salivate over is even prettier: The buxom blonde sidekick, Rachel—who was previously eye-candy only—is now a playable character (her portions make up roughly 20 percent of the game). Plus, she'll have her own upgradeable weapons (just like main ninja Ryu Hayabusa) and unique options such as customizable hair. You know, in case you didn't like her ol' granny beehive.

Beyond the visual overhaul and playable blonde bombshell, *Sigma* offers expanded combat opportunities, pitting Hayabusa against soldiers on motorcycle and fully implementing the water-running and aquatic battles hinted at in the first *Gaiden*. Also redone are the cinematics, but for game-play purposes. CG sequences now run in real-time for the sake of adding interactivity to what were previously static events. So now after witnessing a cut-scene, players can jump right into the fray instead of impatiently waiting for the game to load.



► Hey... This jumpkick does a still a bit on a deer.





STREET

ALSO IN SPRING

But *Resident Evil 4* isn't alone. We'll report on a host of the season's coming titles like you find in our guide.

Resident Evil 4

Like *Resident Evil 4*, you're going to continue to see a lot of the kind of action-oriented, linear experience we've seen in *Devil May Cry* and *God of War*. It's a genre that's been around for a long time, but it's still going strong. In *Resident Evil 4*, you play Leon S. Kennedy, an FBI agent who's been sent to investigate a mysterious outbreak in a rural village in Spain. The game is a mix of action and survival, with a focus on combat and puzzle-solving.

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Wii

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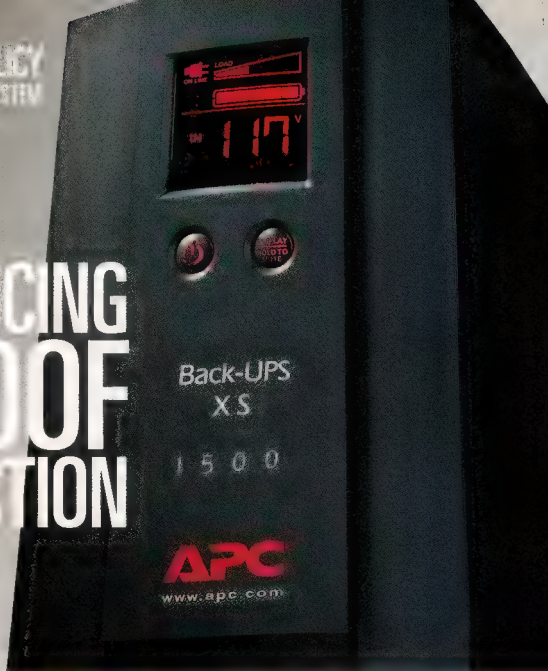
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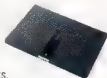
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SUMMER

BioShock

XB360 • 2K Games

BioShock's concept of "an underwater city started by an Ayn Rand fanatic and formerly populated by superpowered people before they wiped most of themselves out in a civil war" sounds pretty damn refreshing compared to games about either interstellar soldier dudes or inner-city bang-bang bad boys. On top of the great setting, developer Irrational will also be giving us plenty of emergent gameplay to complement the story.

That phrase, "emergent gameplay," gets thrown a lot by gaming eggheads, but *BioShock* provides some of the clearest examples. Just taking down a Big Daddy, one of those crazy Jules Verne-era deep-sea divers, is an exercise in seizing opportunity from random situations. For

example, say while running from a Big Daddy you trip the alarm, which then sends security bots after your ass. One option is to disable the alarm, hack the robots, and use them as new buddies to fight that tin man. Or maybe you'll shoot a conveniently placed propane tank, use your telekinesis (one of many powers, or "plasmids" in the game world) to pick up and light a nearby stuffed teddy bear on fire, and hurl said "Molotov Teddy" (Irrational President Ken Levine's term) at the Big Daddy. Or maybe some bad dude who tosses grenades wanders on to the scene, and you use telekinesis to redirect the grenades toward the towering enemy. Oh, by the way—the Big Daddy is so, er, big that it could conceivably take all

of the above to put him down.

None of those situations are scripted affairs—they're examples of simple things that could just happen and how a smart and resourceful player responds. Levine's goal with *BioShock* is to make players think, "Hey, why the hell wasn't I able to do these things in a first-person shooter before?" Or, "If I've been able to do some of these things before, why wasn't I able to do them all in one game before?" Since Levine followed through on an old promise to make psychic monkeys some of the scariest enemies in gaming (for the PC-only *System Shock 2*), we have good confidence that *BioShock* will make you wonder the same thing about the last few games you've played.



• Not that Molotov Teddy. It's made of *BioShock*'s underwater metropolis.

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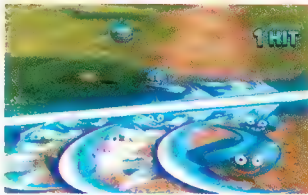
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Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors

Wii • Square Enix

Although Square Enix recently stunned fans by revealing that the next proper *Dragon Quest* installment, *DQIX: Guard of the Starry Night*, would land exclusively on Nintendo DS, the Wii will play host to its own slime-smiting adventure in '07. Just don't expect traditional *DQ* fare: *Swords* pares the RPG franchise down to a **first-person adventure that has you wielding your Wii Remote to swing your sword, hurl magic spells, and defend against enemy attacks.** Transforming the previously rote *DQ* combat into something this wildly interactive has a price, however—your progress through this world takes place on predetermined “on-rails” paths. So, while it'll never replace *Final Fantasy* as your RPG epic of choice, *Swords'* madcap battles and stylish visuals could make it a thrilling diversion.



Blacksite: Area 51

PS3/XB360 • Midway

“Just look up the term ‘black site’ on Wikipedia,” responds Harvey Smith, executive creative director of this aliens-versus-soldiers first-person shooter, when we ask about the game’s grim setting and story. After our online check brings up photos of Abu Ghraib and other plausibly deniable U.S. government installations, we know this politically charged game casts a dark mood—one felt by the squad you order around with one-button context-sensitive commands. “We want the intensity of a combat situation, as driven by the player’s actions, to influence the mood of the squad members,” Smith says. “**When morale is high...the squad is more aggressive, fires more often and more accurately, etc. When things are going to hell rapidly, the squad tends to enact the military rule of ‘CYA.’**” (Don’t get it? Hit up Wikipedia for “Cover Your Ass.”)

Rogue Warrior

PS3/XB360 • Bethesda

Having already played plenty with trolls and elves in *Oblivion*, publisher Bethesda is moving on to seals...er, SEALs. Tactical shooter *Rogue Warrior* casts you as an elite Navy soldier whose North Korean vacation is cut short when Kim Jong-il decides the Korean War deserves a do-over. But while the story mode combines elements of *SOCOM* and *Rainbow Six*, it’s the multiplayer that really makes *Rogue Warrior* stand out. Besides supporting up to 24 weekend warriors, maps are put together like a jigsaw puzzle, as each of the two teams pick a tile (ranging from tight indoor backdrops to wide-open battlefields), and the game randomly chooses the middle ground. As a result, you’ll find **more than 200 possible map combinations**, with promises of additional tiles available for download later.



Warhawk

PS3 • Sony CEA

It was supposed to take off with the PlayStation 3. Instead, *Warhawk*—a next-gen remake of the PS1 game of the same name, which mixes soaring dogfights with down-in-the-mud vehicle and infantry combat—was grounded until June. Even worse: Rumors flared that the all-new ground-bound bits were getting nixed. "That's 100 percent false," says Director Dylan Jobe. "The full scope of warfare is a key aspect to our next-gen re-imagining of *Warhawk*." Jobe admits that the prolonged incubation period will see some "edits" to the game, but they'll come with plenty of balance and polish.

In particular, developer Incognito is tweaking the motion-sensing controls that drew so much initial attention to the game (*Warhawk* was the poster child for the Sixaxis controller). Still, Jobe admits that pitching and yawing your joystick to

fly your *Warhawk* gunship will take some getting used to. "I think of it as the same 'paradigm pain' we all went through when we played PC shooters and switched from keyboard to mouse," he says. "Keyboarders started getting schooled by mousers—and eventually, mouse control won. I think we'll see the same thing with the Sixaxis and the flight genre."

So you have until June to get used to the idea of using your joystick like a flight stick (or just play *Blazing Angels*, which offers that feature now). And if nothing else, the game's failure to launch at launch will give you that much longer to invest in an up-to-snuff high-def boob tube. "The added pixel resolution that HD provides makes a big difference when spotting targets," he says. **"Playing *Warhawk* in HD is like being a pilot with amazing vision."**



▲ Although you'll never see your beloved *Warhawk* in HD, the console's new graphics capabilities are certainly worth celebrating. The *Warhawk* website went live today at www.warhawk.com.

2007 BEST YEAR EVER

FALL

Halo 3

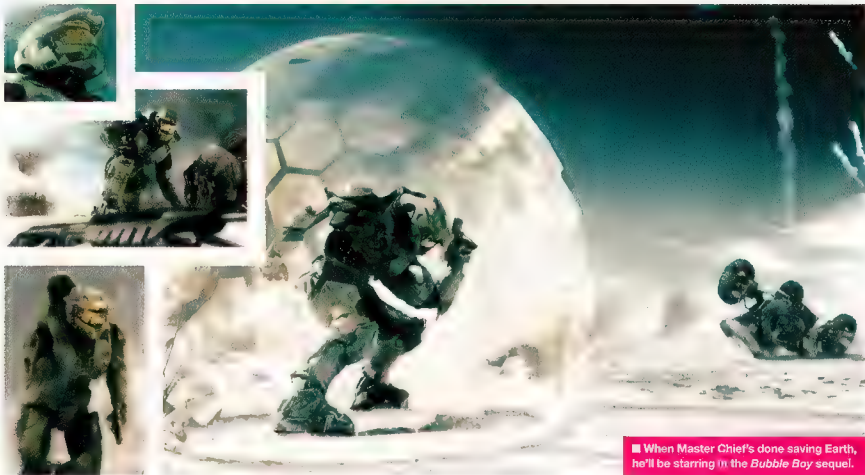
XB360 • Microsoft

It's the final act in Bungie's "epic trilogy." The developers have likened it to *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. It's the sequel to the Xbox 1 game that made more money in a day than blockbuster movies make in a weekend. With *Grand Theft Auto* going multiplatform and Sony pumping the brakes on *Gran Turismo*, *Halo 3* is unquestionably 2007's biggest exclusive gun. And Microsoft wants you to know that fact...now! The marketing bonanza for this first-person shooter has already begun, with its preorder campaign in full swing, a mystery-filled CG trailer, and this spring's multiplayer beta (for which you may have to pay to participate).

Now, about some of that trailer's ambiguities: Cagey Bungie reps posted on the Halo.Bungie.org message boards about the Chief's pistol, which in some images looks to be the overpowered M6D pistol from *Halo: Combat Evolved*. When one poster believed that the pistol was just the Magnum from *Halo 2*, a Bungie employee replied: "You sure? I've seen some other angles supporting the contrary belief which are far more convincing." The good pistol returns?

"The official name for it is actually the MJOLNIR Spherical-Shield-that-bursts-from-*Return-of-the-Jedi*-like-thermal-detector. It doesn't actually roll off the tongue,

so there's a high likelihood that the name will change." The "it" Bungie Community Lead Brian Jarrard is talking about is the trailer's greatest enigma: **a big bubble that protects the supersoldier** from an incoming salvo from one of the retooled Wraiths. Is this shield generator the secret to the X button? Is it just one item from a new school of ONI-powered gadgets? Ninjas from inside the "Pimps at Sea" (a codename for *Halo 3*) alpha said that, right now, "the X button is just Teamspeak." Expect that button's functionality to change...if Bungie wants their trilogy to end as strong as Mr. Jackson's did.



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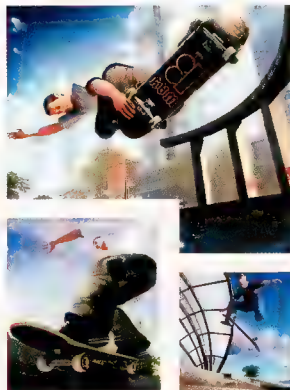
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Alone in the Dark

PS3/XB360 • Atari

The grandfather of all survival-horror games felt more like a dinosaur in its most recent console iterations (not to mention its craptastic movie). But *Alone in the Dark*'s next-gen debut should be chilling. The game's story revolves around Edward Camby's investigation of paranormal elements linked to the afterlife, but the setting—New York City's Central Park, which is already full of fright at night—is paramount. "People will feel disrupted because this game happens where people usually feel at peace," says Producer Nour Polloni. "It's a city in the city, and we wanted to create a myth around Central Park and raise the question of why there is such a vast space right in the middle of one of the most densely populated cities in the world." And, surprisingly, creepy creatures won't be the catalysts for all of the scares here. **"One of the approaches we're using to create fear is to work on people's phobias,"** says Polloni. **"Like fear of heights, suffocation, animal bites, and drowning."** Those things that paralyze them from reacting."



Skate

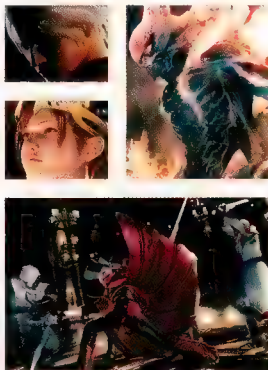
PS3/XB360 • EA Games

With *Tony Hawk*'s stranglehold on cyberskating, the creation of a competing thrasher makes us wonder if EA's banged their collective skull on a vert ramp one too many times. But the publisher is **smartly creating a skater that is everything Hawk isn't**. And it starts with more realism (meaning no easy-to-execute 900s), which is derived from a physics-driven animation system where the analog sticks do all of the trick work. "Skate isn't about frantic button mashing and memorizing button combos," says Executive Producer Scott Blackwood. "I hate memorizing things." Instead, the game relies on "feel," according to Blackwood, who adds, "You'd be hard-pressed to find another next-gen game that gives the player such a visceral and rewarding rush." Question is, can *Skate* capture the counterculture spirit that Activision's franchise has nailed game in and out? With a development team consisting of several former pro skateboarders, it's possible....

Devil May Cry 4

PS3 • Capcom

If you thought no one could be as badass (both in gameplay and hairstyles) as the wisecracking demon hunter Dante, prepare yourself for a young chap named Nero. *DMC4*'s new kid on the block (who belongs to some kooky religious order) also likes to showboat with two weapons, a sword named the Red Queen and a gun named the Blue Rose. But he's also got another tool of destruction, the Devil Bringer. **This supercharged right arm enables Nero to grab and attack enemies at greater distances, so it'll surely come in handy when plowing through legions of demons.** And speaking of foes, don't expect *DMC4*'s group (at the onset) to be as controller-smashingly difficult as those in the last game. "We'll teach you to use the gun, sword, and Devil Bringer to their fullest," says Producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi. "The difficulty curve will start below that of *DMC3*, but by the end, we hope to have guided users step by step up to that level." As Dante would say, "Bring it on."



Turok

PS3/XB360 • Buena Vista

Start penning those ticked-off letters now, paleontologists: Developer Propaganda Games is growing its thunder lizards larger than life for this set-in-the-future reboot of the tarnished *Turok* first-person-shooter franchise. "At several points in the game," says Propaganda VP Josh Holmes, "you'll engage a T-Flex creature that has grown beyond what would be realistic based on scientific data." But even if this futuristic shooter's titanic dinosaurs—products of genetic engineering run amok on an alien world—don't do you in, their little brothers will. "We have physics-based grass that allows you to creep up on enemies for stealth kills," says Holmes. "But the grass also has lizards and mini-raptors that'll run away if you encounter them. If enemies see them scatter, they'll know there's a threat and turn their weapons on you."

Fortunately, you can "convince" the dinosaurs to fight on your side. Pricking them with arrows makes them take out their anger on the nearest enemy. Even cooler: Your shotgun has a dino-luring-flare launcher. **Tag a bad guy—whether in single-player or the multiplayer modes—and he becomes a 6-foot drumstick to any nearby carnivores.**

Cool, but the thought of dino allies also brings to mind reptile-rider Tobias Bruckner, the cyborg cavalry captain boss of 2002's *Turok Evolution*, a game that put the "terrible" in "terrible lizard." "I guarantee we have no Tobias Bruckner," says Holmes, quick to distance his game from the character who's become the mascot for crappiness in our annual Game of the Year Awards (see next issue). "And no machine guns mounted on the heads of dinos, either."



■ *Turok for Two*: *Turok*'s sticky melee also supports cooperative play.

COVER STORY



Super Mario Galaxy

Wii • Nintendo

Nintendo's mascot sure has gotten the shaft during the company's last two console launches (his bro stole the GameCube spotlight in *Luigi's Mansion*, and then some mute elf took the Wii center stage in *Twilight Princess*). But when you're about to go intergalactic like the plumber intends to here, maybe some extra prep time isn't a bad thing.

Thanks to the Wii's funky new control scheme, this **Super Mario takes the hop-and-bop platformer formula and wonderfully rewrites it**. You'll use the Wii-mote to interact with these high-in-the-sky backdrops in all sorts of crazy ways, such as waggling it to hurl yourself from planet to planet and using the onscreen cursor to snatch items far out in the Milky Way. The dev team is even tinkering around with how using this joyypad in tandem can enhance multiplayer (they've mentioned how one person could move Mario with the Nunchuk, while another provides aid with the Wii Remote).

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

PS3 • Konami

Even with the scraps of info we've gleaned by rooting through the trash bins at developer Kojima Productions' offices (according to a note scribbled on a Moss Burger napkin, *MGS4* takes place in South America, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe!), a ton of details are still oh-so-mysterious (what's the deal with that younger-looking Snake? How does Raiden hold a sword in his foot?). This semi-gag order on *MGS4* only gets us more excited for its eventual release.

It seems like *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops* (check out the PSP review on pg. 98) and its recruitment mechanic was a sampler plate for *MGS4*, **as you can now freely choose which nation's army to be buddies with.** In fact, not only can you pick an ally (and consequently an enemy), but you can also totally be a *Metal Gear* misanthrope and choose to take down both sides. Your allegiance doesn't just affect the soldiers, as even the Gekkos (the term for the weirder and smaller hybrid organic/mechanical *Metal Gear*s seen in the trailers to date) will either attack or cease fire, depending on where your loyalties lie.

We also noticed that the spiffy Octo-Camo (which changes Snake's appearance based on what he's touching, which helps a lot with the "you're either in sight or out of sight in battle" motif that series creator Hideo Kojima is pushing) appears to be used much more "organically" than the heavily menu-driven camouflage system in *MGS3*. This actually reflects the overall control scheme, as Kojima wanted to make the mechanics less complicated than *MGS3*'s, and give the player more natural and direct control. With his promise to support the Sixaxis' motion sensor, we're giddy to think that stealthily leaning and aiming around corners can be accomplished with gentle tilting and triggering as opposed to making some weird gameclaw on your controller due to holding down 72 buttons at once. Another potential use of the Sixaxis sensor is to steer the little *Metal Gear* MK II robot that tags along with Snake—perhaps a flick of the wrist is all it takes for the little bot to send an electric jolt to the enemy's junk.



■ *Metal Gear*'s new camo gear will resemble whatever Snake is touching.



2007
BEST YEAR
EVER

Fable 2 is going to be an unprecedented life simulator, one that lets you grow your character from a small, impressionable child into a complicated adult (complete with emotional baggage) who affects the world around him or her in ways big and small.

Riiiiiiiiight.

Gamers may remember that the original *Fable* (XB) promised something quite similar but ended up being mostly an action-RPG—heavy on the action and fairly light on the roleplaying and simulation elements. Yes, you could run through a town and people would cower in fear if you were a bad guy or gaze admiringly if you were a hero. But it hardly qualified as a revolutionary videogame representation of the passage of time and life as we know it—as the game was touted during its years in development.

Lead Designer Peter Molyneux, however, is nothing if not ambitious, and he's again promising great things for *Fable 2*. **With so-called "dynamic regions," you'll be able to control the evolution of the world. Nurture it, and your small camp will grow into a booming metropolis.** Strike down its inhabitants at the outset, and all that will remain at the end of the game are the hills as nature left them. The combat will be more realistic, too—no more wildly swinging your battle-ax with no consequence. You'll be able to accumulate wealth, real estate, and belongings—or live life as a pauper. And this time around, your character can be male or female. You can now procreate, and your kids will love you no matter how evil your character gets.



> GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

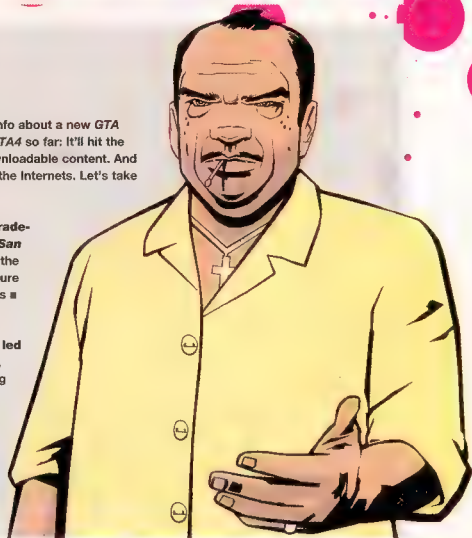
Separating the real s*** from the bulls***

For a series defined by its open nature, it's ironic that getting even the slightest info about a new *GTA* is more difficult than 100-percent *San Andreas*. Here's what we know about *GTA4* so far: It'll hit the PS3 and the Xbox 360 on October 16, with each version getting some unique downloadable content. And that's it. Still, that doesn't mean theories about this biggie aren't swirling around the Internets. Let's take a peek at some of the rumors:

- In late 2003, *GTA* parent company Take-Two Interactive registered the trademarks *GTA: Bogota* and *GTA: Tokyo* (in addition to *GTA: Sin City* and *GTA: San Andreas...hmm*). Particularly, the historic Bogota, Columbia—sometimes called the Athens of South America—has amazing potential, with a mix of colonial architecture and skyscrapers, a diverse culture, and large socioeconomic rift. Oh, wait...there's a Bogota, NJ, too? Let's just move on.

- Network-programming job positions posted on Rockstar North's website led to rumblings that *GTA4* may be a massively multiplayer online game. Yeah, an MMO is just what the series needs, because it doesn't have enough jerks filling its streets to begin with. While we are certain online will be a huge part of *GTA4* (those PSP modes were just a testing ground), it won't be the game.

- Regardless of location, the next game will focus on one city instead of a sprawling region. With the new systems offering so much more power, thoughts of busting intersections and myriad unique interiors abound. A city as alive as New York certainly hasn't been done justice yet. Done with enough detail, less could be a hell of a lot more.





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Color Options



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Color Options

iBypower recommends Windows Vista™ Home Premium

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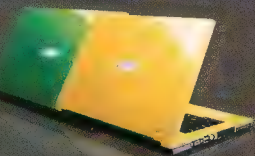
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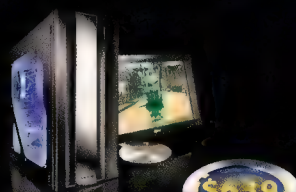
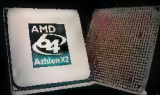
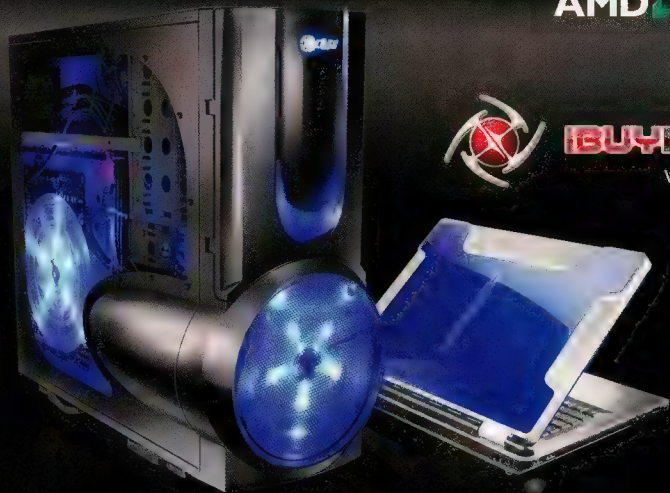
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REVIEWS

› smooth moves, hardboiled gumshoes, icy blues, college crews, and subpoenas

90
LOST PLANET:
EXTREME
CONDITION

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› THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS:

BATTLE OF THE BUGS

Walking into a roach motel from hell

AS EXPECTED, WII AND PS3 GAME RELEASES ARE SLOWING DOWN POSTLAUNCH,

but that's OK... 'cause we've got portables. Seriously, the PSP and DS lineups this month mostly shine. From litigation edutainment in the form of the DS' second *Phoenix Wright*, to Pokémon-like addiction from *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops* (which helped it achieve Game of the Month status), to the out-of-nowhere film noir masterpiece (according to one of our reviewers), *Hotel Dusk: Room 215*, portable games are hitting a sweet stride to kick off the new year.

One more thing, our *Wii Play* and *WarioWare: Smooth Moves* reviews are based on the Japanese versions of the games, which, aside from the text, will be the same when they hit Stateside, or about the time you'll be reading this issue.

—Greg Fard, 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

We give 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.

Keep in mind that a 10 does not mean a game is perfect, but rather it's the best score we can give. Also, 5.0 is average.





PAGE
86

Wii Play:
But we
won't like it



PAGE
87

**Golf: A nice
swing...but
a miss**



PAGE
97

Room 215:
Check into
this hotel



THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

Sadly, what you see is what you get



Dan "Shoe" Hsu

Editor-in-Chief

After Shoe saw how little competition was online in *Full Auto 2* (see pg. 88), he decided to dedicate his life to becoming the No. 1 *Full Auto 2* player in the world. It'd be the first time he's ever "won" something....

Now Playing: *Twilight Princess*, *CastleCraft*; *Portrait*, *Full Auto 2*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



Jennifer Tsao

Managing Editor

As a new mom, Jen supports games as learning tools. She's teaching her kid about biology (*Viva Piñata*), music (*Karaoke Revolution*), and reading (*Hotel Dusk*). But she has to draw the line somewhere—no *World of Warcraft* (PC) before naptime.

Now Playing: (see above)
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



Bryan Intihar

Previous Editor

After spearheading this issue's cover story (and looking at Crispin's new calendar), Bryan has no doubt that 2007 will be the best year ever!

Now Playing: *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*, *Elite Beat Agents*, *Resistance: Fall of Man*

Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com



Michael Donahoe

News/Features Editor

Michael was so impressed with *Hotel Dusk*'s supersleuthing that he decided to become a gumshoe himself...now if only he can choose the right gum for his new kicks: Bubble Gum or Bubblicious? Oh, the choices....

Now Playing: *Hotel Dusk*; *Room 215*, *Twilight Princess*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



Jeremy Parish

Features Editor, 1UP.com

Jeremy's reviews were ghost-written this month as he's currently in chocobo-holic rehab. "No one can eat just one!" he weeps. (We hear they taste like chicken.)

Now Playing: *Final Fantasy VI Advance*, *Ristar*, *Rogue Galaxy*, *Final Fantasy XII*
Blog: toastyfrog.1UP.com



Shane Bettenhausen

Executive Editor

If videogames are ever going to gain true mainstream media acceptance, our industry celebs are going to have to step it up. Note to developers Cliff Bleszinski and David Jaffe: Stop wearing panties immediately.

Now Playing: *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops*, *Virtua Fighter 5*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com

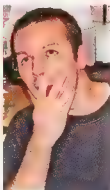


Crispin Boyer

Senior Editor

Five steps to awkward silence: 1) Play *Wii Bowling*. 2) Decide to go bowling for real. 3) Head to the bowling alley's karaoke bar. 4) Shout, "Are you ready to rock?" to the sulen drunks in the audience. 5) *Wii!*

Now Playing: *WarioWare: Smooth Moves*, *Lost Planet 2*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com

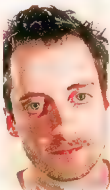


Greg Ford

Reviews Editor

Greg went the opposite route from Crispin. Applying his real-world "throw the ball as hard as you can through the pins" technique to *Wii Bowling* only resulted in him landing on his ass. He's just happy the cameras weren't rolling.

Now Playing: *Assault Heroes*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



Demian Linn

Managing Producer

GameVideos.com

Hoping to get Sony a piece of the Wii-injuries hype action, Demian's gotten increasingly reckless with his PS3 Sixaxis.

He nearly caught Bryan right in the groin after an enthusiastic NHL 2K7 check, but no dice. **Now Playing:** *MotorStorm*
Blog: egmdemian.1UP.com



Todd Zuniga

Staff Reviewer

Todd accidentally broke his bedroom window (and his ego) when his Wii-mote tragically flew out of his sweaty hand during a heated game of *Wii Golf*. He managed to save par, but at a terrible price.

Now Playing: *Winning Eleven*, *Wii Sports*, *Elite*
Blog: opiumtodd.1UP.com

Also on deck...

Garnett Lee
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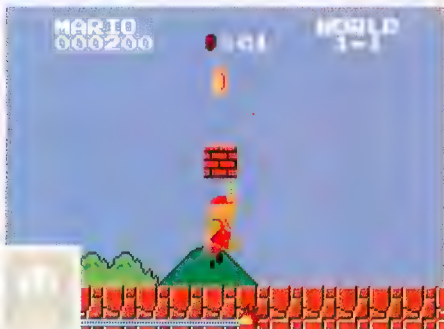
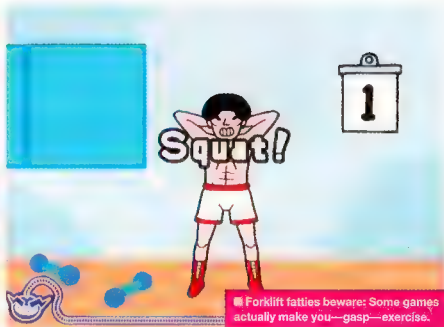
Brooks Huber
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Thierry Nguyen
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Giancarlo Varanini
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Wii

WARIOWARE: SMOOTH MOVES

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Nintendo/Intelligent Systems ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone



The Good: Fun for the whole family, if they're kinda weird.
The Bad: I hold the controller how?
Eww: World's first toenail-clipping minigame

Not as smooth as advertised

➔ **JEREMY:** When you buy a new house, you get housewarming gifts. When you buy a new Nintendo console, you get a *WarioWare* game. It's the same basic idea: a meaningless but pleasant little something to liven up your new purchase and entertain the guests.

Smooth Moves is an awful lot like everyone else's gifts this time around, though—a collection of minigames strung together to show off the ins and outs of the Wii Remote controller. Like *Rayman*. Or *Monkey Ball*. Or *Wii Play*. Or...well, not that it matters, since they're all biting off *WarioWare's* style in the first place.

And Mario's tubby doppelgänger still does it best. It's the random surrealism of the game that does the

trick. Or maybe it's the frenetic pace; you wouldn't think a fat guy would be so fast, but almost every minigame here lasts about five seconds or so, rewarding those with the ability to process a dozen new situations, determine their solutions, and complete them in a split second.

Unfortunately, *Wario* is uncharacteristically graceless this time around. *Smooth Moves* is really anything but; in all, the game features 19 different ways to hold the controller, many of which are completely ridiculous. Intentionally ridiculous, no doubt, but *WarioWare's* strength has always been instantly intuitive gameplay, which is somewhat lost when the game stops to tell you how to reorient yourself every five seconds.

Mostly, though, *WarioWare* delivers. It may not be the only game to put the Wii Remote through its paces, but it's certainly the most entertaining.

➔ **CRISPIN:** Sure, *Smooth Moves* does overload you with goofball ways to interact with the controller. And yes, the game grinds to a halt and hits you with lengthy explanations of each control type the first time you encounter it. But once you've digested the basics, you'll have reached Nirvana for the attention deficient. Manic, diverse, often old-school, and always hilarious, the minigames here are easily the most fun and funky in what's becoming a booming minigame industry on the Wii. Here's hoping *Smooth Moves'* fine line between innovation and ➤



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ADVANCE

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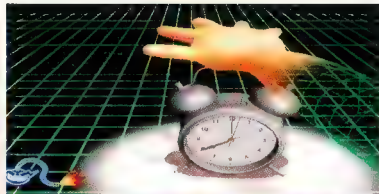
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Controllerpalooza

With nearly two dozen controller positions, many of which overlap rather pointlessly, it's safe to assume that not every one is a winner. And in fact, if you did make that assumption, you're right.

Most pointless: Hold it like a sheathed samurai sword and...unsheathe it like a samurai sword. Huh?

Most uncomfortable: Arms clutched kimbo, stand up, hula-hoop. (Or just sit and shake the controller—that works, too.)

Most likely to get you beaten up: Toss-up! Whether you're holding the Remote at the tip of your nose or atop your head, the result's the same: You look stupid and someone's going to punch you in your face.

Biggest irony: Half the controller positions make it impossible to wear that wrist strap Nintendo's so fussy about. Smashing your TV? Well, pilgrim, that's the smoothest move of all.



insanity (using the controller as your schnoz, for instance) inspires other developers to conjure new uses for the Wii-mote.

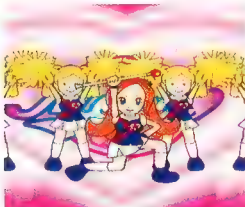
It's too bad that—considering *Smooth Moves'* gawker-drawing magnetism—the game doesn't encourage more group participation. Most of the multiplayer modes are competition-based, forcing everyone to take turns

in the same minigames from single player (although you do get a mean game of darts). The lack of simultaneous play certainly isn't a deal breaker. You'll just be wishing for something a little more to do once you burn through the main game in a weekend.

→ **ANDREW P.** Jeremy's right in saying *Smooth Moves* lacks the frantic pace

and momentum we've come to expect from the series, but I'm going to cut it some slack in that department for being the new kid. As soon as I got familiar with the various controller grips, I took a whack at the lightning-quick elevator mode—that's when the good ol' *WarioWare* madness came rushing back.

My beef is with the lack of game variety. The ones that are there certainly are fun and off-the-wall, but the game just doesn't have many of them (and some are just variations on the same theme). I'm especially disappointed in two things: the lack of Nunchuk/Wii-mote combo games (only one stage), and the relatively tepid selections for the Nintendo-nostalgia stage. *Smooth Moves* is a fun game, but I expect major improvements in the next *Wii Ware*. 🎮





Game Developers
Conference

07

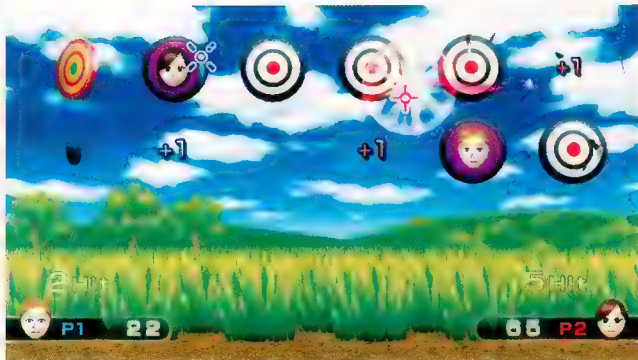
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■ Variety? Yes. Fun? Hmm, not so much...

Wii

WII PLAY

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



The Good: Anyone can play it, including grandma.
The Bad: You'll probably be bored in minutes, regardless of the game.
Don't: Play alone

Fun, until it suddenly isn't

➔ **DEMIAN:** Did you like *Wii Sports*? Hate it? Want to marry it? You're going to feel the same about *Wii Play*.

Play comes bundled with a Wii Remote for 10 bucks extra (\$50 total), so ratchet your expectations accordingly. Like *Sports*, *Play* is a Wii Remote tech demo barely concealed by a thin layer of minigames. You've got your fishing (yank up on the Remote when you've got a bite); your cow racing (hold the Remote horizontally, tilt forward to speed up, flick upward to jump); your *Duck Hunt*-esque balloon-shooting game (light-gun style); your laser *Pong*/air hockey (move the Remote to control the paddle); and your *Combat*-like tank battle game, which was my favorite and the only game to use the Nunchuk

controller. And then three other not terribly remarkable minigames that I don't have room to describe, but trust me—you're not missing much.

Play is for people who don't really like games, and as someone who really does, that's a problem. Sure, most of these minigames are fun... for about 10 minutes. But hey, maybe your grandma will want to marry it.

➔ **SHOE:** Demian's either feeling incredibly generous (*most* are fun?) or he's got some grandma in him. The majority of these minigames are most *un-fun*...even if you only give them 10 minutes. I'd only give two events a halfhearted thumbs-up—and only if you're playing them with a friend. Searching for or matching up Miis in a

crowd is casually entertaining (assuming you're also entertained by those games you'd find in the comics section of your newspaper). And playing 9-Ball works well with a friendly interface that lets you thrust the Wii-remote like a pool cue.

➔ **JENN F:** Demian pretty much nailed it. For someone who barely understands what a videogame even is (*Mom!*), *Wii Play* is probably the best playable instruction manual ever. But for anyone who's, uh, *ever played a videogame*, more than half of the nine minigames are about as much fun as a Remote calibration test. Still, even the suckiest games are OK in multiplayer, and, for that reason alone, it's ideal "family gathering" material. 🍷

SUPER SWING GOLF

■ Publisher: Tecmo ■ Developer: Ntreev/Tecmo
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+



Real golf feel—boredom included

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

TODD
5.5
AVERAGE

GARNETT
6.0
AVERAGE

BROOKS
5.5
AVERAGE

The Good: Swing feels like the real thing
The Bad: Jumpy backswing, excruciatingly slow pace
Reminds Us Of: The *Hot Shots Golf* series

➔ **TODD:** As a "sports guy," what nonjocks might find amusing—like people hitting a golf ball with a hammer or a cricket paddle—I find idiotic. But once desensitized to *Super Swing Golf*'s cutesy Japanimation elements (which are nowhere near as clever as *Hot Shots Golf*'s), I had a great time throwing my back out using the Wii controller as a virtual golf club (you can use a more traditional button-controlled swing if you'd prefer—though what's the point in that?). But while the forward swing has a great feel and turns flaws in motion into virtual hooks and slices, the inconsistent backswing had me wiggling the controller above my shoulder trying to get the proper amount of power. The backswing issue is forgivable when compared to

the game's molasses pace, though. I was forced to watch every computer-controlled golfer shot, and the game criminally offers no way to fast-forward things once I, or my opponent, hit the ball. Considering I had to stand to play, the waiting wore me out.

➔ **GARNETT:** Golf boils down to grooving a swing, and *Super Swing Golf*'s mechanic approximates the real thing pretty well. I got swing power down easily enough by cocking my wrists at the top of the backswing. But a lack of feedback to help you understand what caused an errant shot makes it more frustrating than fun to perfect your motion. And as satisfying as striking a good shot can be, the puzzling system for reading the break

on greens makes it next to impossible to drain a putt of any length.

➔ **BROOKS:** Todd's right; the "true" swing mechanics work great—which incidentally caused childhood flashbacks of my golf instructor shouting, "Keep those arms straight, bend your knees, and keep your eye on the ball!" Once you look past the nearly fluid swing, however, you realize *Super Swing Golf* lacks any real depth beyond traditional game modes, including story, stroke, and match play. More minigames—aside from the mediocre balloon-popping mode that focuses not on a low score but on how many balloons you and up to three others can pop in a round—would have been a welcome addition.





■ We placed No. 2 on the leaderboard...by losing two races. That's how few people are playing online....

PlayStation 3

FULL AUTO 2: BATTLELINES

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Pseudo ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICT'S
(OUT OF 10)

SHOE
6.5
AVERAGE

DEMIAN
6.0
AVERAGE

SHARKEY
6.5
AVERAGE

The Good: Arcade fun in short spurts, new cars and tracks
The Bad: Floor level design + overly fast cars = @\$\$%&!?!
Online: A virtual ghost town

Crash, burn, and swear a whole lot

➔ **SHOE:** I never got why some readers thought we overrated the original *Full Auto* on the 360 (8.0 to 8.5 range). Fast cars and big guns—guys gotta like it on some primordial level, right?

This hybrid car-combat/racing sequel (if you even want to call it a sequel—most tracks here are recycled) introduces some ideas that work, like power-ups that really intensify the action. Do you take that risky shortcut in order to pick up the health icon that will bring your shot-out ride back to showroom condition? Other ideas would give an Allstate agent some serious heartburn, like the faster overall speed. These tracks don't work that well for balls-out racing with fun-ending obstacles (poorly placed pillars, walls, alcoves, et cetera) that'll

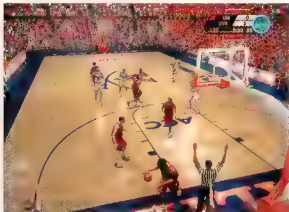
put your engine block on your lap and make you go from 130 to zero and first to worst in an instant. The arena battles can be frustrating, too, with smart A.I. that unfairly gangs up on you.

But still...fast cars, big guns. I'll keep playing....

➔ **DEMIAN:** I missed the first one, but this *Full Auto* is no 8.0 in my book. Shooting up a building/tanker/rival definitely looks good as you drive by at 135 mph, or maybe reverse time to get a second, closer glimpse, but both the combat racing and arena-style battles have been done to death and back by other games, and better. The weapons get cooler as you go (rear-facing flamethrower, I choose you!)

but never touch the distinctiveness of, say, any of *Twisted Metal*'s car-specific special ordnance. Do it again, Sega—I know you will, no matter what I say—but this time, with *feeling*.

➔ **SHARKEY:** If they'd just called a spade a damn shovel and sold this as a port instead of sticking that pesky "2" on there, I think I'd have felt a lot less jerked around by this one. Plenty of new cars, tracks, and multiplayer modes make for a stellar port—but I didn't find nearly enough new content here to justify calling it a sequel. If you're one of those too-much-money-having bastards with a 360 and a PS3, this is definitely the better version, but not really worth the trouble if you bought it the first time around. 🐊



Xbox 360

NCAA MARCH MADNESS 07

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

REVIEWS

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

TODD
6.5
AVERAGE

BRYAN
6.5
AVERAGE

GIANCARLO
6.0
AVERAGE

The Good: Crowd, defense

The Bad: Clunky free throws, rebounding, limited online features
Thankfully Nothing Like: EA's pro baller, NBA Live 07

Final Four crowd, Sweet 16 gameplay

➔ **TODD:** The next-gen debut of EA's *March Madness* series serves up some serious January delirium by delivering, hands down, the best crowd in any sports game (humbling *College Hoops 2K7*'s impressive show). I felt like a witness to a real college game as players pumped their fists after dunks and the crowd hollered "three!" when a home-teamer chucked a long-range bomb. But while the atmosphere rocks, the gameplay—like the UConn Huskies—is still a year away. The fast-paced action is fun, and, unlike in other hoops games, defense (a foreign word to cover athlete Adam Morrison) plays a role because of the still effective "lockdown stick." But the goofy flaws include the ball magically warping to

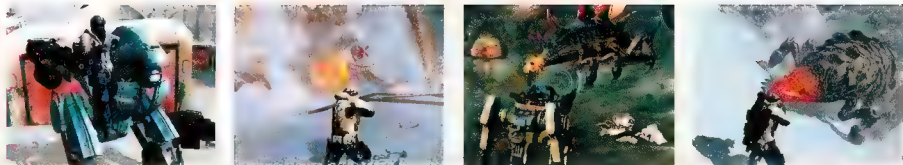
a player's hand on rebounds, overly plentiful fouls, and maddening free-throw shooting. It's a solid effort, but it just doesn't have the minute-by-minute gravity of *2K7*'s college game.

➔ **BRYAN:** *March Madness* has always done a superb job of reproducing the college b-ball atmosphere. But man, when I saw a UNC player—after his team's intensity meter got maxed out—walk over to the Blue Devil faithful and taunt his rivals' rabid fans, I knew *07* had taken it to the next level. But, like Todd says, it's too bad the gameplay doesn't quite match the ambience. Uncharacteristically, fouling is out of control here (even when you jack down the in-game slider), and you can't help but look like Shaq at

the free-throw line—in the words of Dicky V, "It's brick city, baby!"

➔ **GIANCARLO:** *March Madness* definitely has the framework for a great college basketball game. It does an excellent job of tying in the exuberant college atmosphere with player performance thanks to its composure feature, which also makes it really feel like you can control the flow of the on-court action. But, overall, the game is just too sloppy in other areas. The controls lack precision, forcing you to constantly fight the game to be a decent ball-handler, shooter, and defender. Also, someone get announcer Dick Vitale some glasses, because he's watching a different game than I am far too often.





■ *Lost Planet* at its otherworldly best: small man, big-ass creature, a change of pants.

Xbox 360

LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: Capcom ■ Players: 1-16 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

G. FORD
6.5
AVERAGE

MARK
8.0
GOOD

GARNETT
7.5
GOOD

The Good: Gorgeous visuals, killing bugs
The Bad: Unseen mech play, dumb enemy A.I.
The Ugly: A rocket launcher plus an alien launcher in the wrong place

Misdirection

➔ **G. FORD:** As one face among many, you work your way through darkened hallways, automatic gun at the ready. After blowing open a door, you and your crew rappel down to a larger hangar. Immediately, a bus-sized, buglike creature rolls toward you as you leap out of the way and open fire. The beast loses its fight—and life—and turns to ice: It shatters as you put one final bullet into it. The next room has far less imposing enemies—flying, sleek-looking creatures with flagella-like appendages lining their bodies. Though numerous, they go down easily. But the relative breather is short-lived. A gigantic, multilegged, horned grub of an alien—dwarfing that first pest—bursts through a wall and commences a devastating attack, wiping

out most of your compatriots with one gust of its breath, which freezes and shatters them. It's all you can do to run and pray.

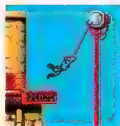
Lost Planet starts at a gallop, as any good action-shooter should, and it keeps the upbeat pace going for a few more levels. Trudging through knee-deep snow and swapping through a standard arsenal of weapons, you take out scores of the insectlike alien Akrid. And despite the main character's methodical pace, *Lost Planet* manages to nail a nimble feel—for the most part. With the default control setup, tapping the controller's left and right bumper buttons quick-spins you 90 degrees in the corresponding direction, which isn't intuitive but is useful when you get the hang of it.

Also, a handy grappling hook keeps things moving vertically (though support for midair grappling would've sated our tingling Spidey sense). Quick feet are necessary, since the action has a very arcadey slant to it: Smaller critters pour out of generators, and all the Akrid have glowing weak spots for optimal shooting, sometimes in multiple parts, allowing you to blow off some of a creature's far-too-numerous legs. And graphically, the game's a stunner (at least in high-def—standard-def has more whiteout conditions). The backdrops consist of crumbling ruins, dilapidated warehouses, twisting caverns, and crisp, snowy landscapes—you're truly navigating a hostile yet beautiful land. For a while, *Lost Planet* completely



Equation for an extermination

Creating *Lost Planet* in four easy steps



Bionic Commando's
grappling hook



Starship Troopers'
bug-killing insanity



Bing Crosby's
White Christmas



MechAssault's
assaulting mechs



Lost Planet

satisfies. Similar to smashing zombie heads in Capcom's *Dead Rising*, squishing alien bugs proves undeniably enjoyable. But partway through the adventure, the momentum wavers, taking some of the game's charm with it. In addition to fighting Akrid, you start tackling snow pirates and an evil corporation. While simple A.I. is understandable in the alien creatures, it's just embarrassing in the humans, who regularly don't react to soldiers being picked off next to them nor generally seem to care much for their well-being, given their mindless tactics. When you're stuck facing just these jokers, *Lost Planet* feels like a totally generic shooter at best.

But the big change comes with the vital suits scattered about the land. These suits, made specifically to eradicate Akrids (as explained in the over-

wrought story), are essentially mechs, with interchangeable guns (which you can wield on foot...a nice touch) and different abilities depending on the model. They cover the typical spectrum, from quick and long-jumping bipeds to tanklike mobile drillers. In limited quantities, taking control of these machines can be quite fun—kind of like the vehicle segments of PS3 first-person shooter *Resistance*. You feel a rush of power as you dominate smaller enemies and handily dispatch with midsized ones. But as the game shifts into mech-heavy stages, the luster fades into plodding labor, especially as the Akrids thin out and you're stuck fighting other mechs (for you non-mechheads out there who feel betrayed, be thankful you don't have to deal with *Armored Core*-level robo-tweaking). Particularly painful:

Whether on foot or in a mech, get hit by a powerful enough shot and you go into an uncontrollable stumble animation that lasts too long. Worse, some enemies prey on this, timing shots to hit as soon as you regain control. Forgettable multiplayer (four generic modes...really?) and impressive yet usually easy-to-exploit boss fights, which the other reviewers have plenty to say about, don't help the cause.

Sleek graphics and a fast start can't mask what's an entertaining but ultimately disposable diversion.

➔ MARK: Greg, I think you need to judge *Lost Planet* for what it really is: an overgrown arcade game. Bugs crawling out of monster generators, gigantic boss creatures with glowing weak points, weapons and power-ups scattered everywhere—on paper, >

LOST PLANET



it'd be easy to confuse *Lost Planet* with the old-school games that made Capcom famous two decades ago. But in person, it's undeniably state-of-the-art. Sit your ass in front of a nice television and sound system and *Lost Planet* will blow it right off with an audiovisual fireworks display only *Gears of War* can top. From its crumbling cities to dank, monster-packed caves to pulsing lava pools, this game looks and sounds *amazing*.

Of course, if you melt away all this gorgeous icy frosting, you're left with a simple game about one thing: blowing stuff up. Sure, sometimes you might need to think, "What should I blow up first?" or "What's the best way to blow that up?" but that's about as in-depth as it gets. *Lost Planet* is more about dodging and survival than any grand strategy, more about reflex-

es than thinking. Maybe that's why I can forgive the fact that sometimes the enemies aren't thinking either, like when they stand idly by as I snipe their neighbors or when they blow me off my feet as soon as I get up, over and over. Because, really, it's hard to dwell on these things when the next minute I'm boosting my hulking mech 50 yards in the air, raining giant rockets and endless machine gun fire down on 18-wheeler-sized mutant insects and puny human foot soldiers. Whenever my complaints threatened to build up, a wave of adrenaline and gunfire washed them away.

Likewise, competitive types may never get over the online game's unbalanced weapons and maps (the inevitable by-product of repurposing parts of single-player levels), limited modes (post grab and team elimina-

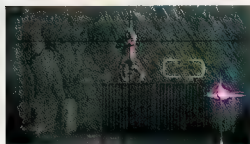
tion are the only two worth playing), and questionable spawning system.

But don't come in expecting *Halo*—or even *Gears of War*—with multiplayer and you'll find enough to enjoy for a few days: mech versus on-foot battles, an interesting take on the grappling hook, and a unique post-grabbing mechanic, where you trade off the risk of staying in one place without a weapon with the reward of capturing the spot for your team and/or extra health for yourself. The grenades alone—one of which sails like a Frisbee, another that's a decoy player and works as a booby trap—make it worth a try.

➔ **GARNETT:** I clamor a lot for more style in games. On that count, *Lost Planet* delivers in a very next-gen way. Not just high-res for the sake of high-

Multiplayer mayhem

During our online playtesting of *Lost Planet*, we encountered a number of annoying quirks, notably getting booted back to the multiplayer menu when a match ends. Capcom has told us that an automatic update on day one (featuring fixes based on user feedback from the multiplayer demo) will address most of the problems. Among the changes, the developers have added a postgame lobby where players can rematch (though game options can't be changed), given the host the ability to reserve private slots for friends, and given players the ability to switch teams in team matches.



We thought this was next gen, so how come...

...we can only use the grappling hook while grounded?



...invisible walls still box us in?



...all the aliens have "shoot me here" bull's-eyes?



...the enemy A.I. is as idiotic as ever?



When good graphics see you in the aes: That massive zit's about to burst.

res, it puts the 360's power to good use. With the wind howling all around through the surround sound, blowing snow obscuring my vision, and one of the best uses of the whiteout effect—simulating the experience as your eyes adjust to glare off the snow—I got completely drawn into this icy world. And while the star power of basing lead character Wayne on Korean actor Lee Byung-Hun may be lost on this side of the Pacific, its impact is not. This is a warrior you feel cool playing, which is critical in making the third-person style work.

If only the story kept up. As Greg mentions, the scripting predictably declines into overwrought anime territory, with humanity as caught up in fighting itself as it is in survival on the inhospitable planet. But the bigger problem comes from the crimp put in

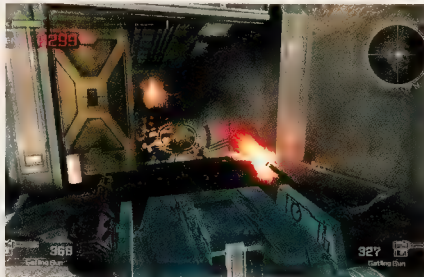
the pacing by the emphasis on boss fights. *Lost Planet* hits its groove when you're in the thick of the adventure, working through the varied levels. On foot you use your rocket-propelled grappling hook to zip all around, looking for points with a tactical advantage and taking out enemies in all directions. In the mechs (yeah, vital suits—whatever) you tromp around, grabbing different weapons and blasting the hell out of everything.

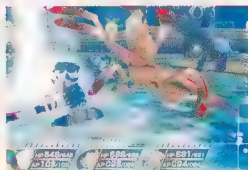
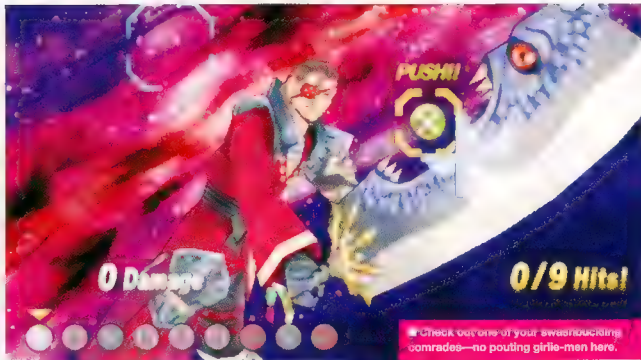
But this great adventuring gets treated as more of a prelude to the main events, and I had to keep reminding myself how much fun—and worth getting back to—it was every time I hit one of the boss fights. They come in two basic flavors. The human bosses offer mech-on-mech fights that amount to bouncing around and knocking down their health bar

before they get you—usually not too troublesome, but not too interesting, either. The real offenders are the Akrid. Being in an enclosed arena with a prehistoric-sized monster you shoot in a glowing red spot feels tired the first time, much less the fourth.

Greg dismisses multiplayer too quickly, though. True, you can find dozens of better games if you just want to play deathmatch, but in the team-based modes the strategic opportunities of mechs, foot soldiers, and foot soldiers wielding mech-sized weapons come into play. For anyone with Live, that should make up for the up-and-down ride of single player. ❄️

Go to EGM212.1UP.com to find our *Lost Planet* strategy guide. Among other tips, we show you how to nab all those hidden target marks in each level.





PlayStation 2

ROGUE GALAXY

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Level-5 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen



The Good: Cool spacing setting, user-friendly menus

The Bad: Mediocre story, never-ending clungens

Random Battles: Make them stop!

Japanese RPG fun...without the androgyny

➔ **FITCH:** It's refreshing to play a Japanese RPG where the men have facial hair, the women are the ones with the bare midriffs, and the robots are decidedly nonsexy. *Rogue Galaxy's* space-pirate setting—a little *Star Wars*, a bit *Skies of Arcadia*—is bound to attract role-playing fans who are sick of the standard primp-and-preen metrosexual JRPG heroes.

Unfortunately, the execution's more *Return of the Jedi* than *Empire Strikes Back*. You feel like you're in for a grand adventure as you set out to explore the galaxy...only to find a ho-hum story and underdeveloped characters. Also, combat-balance problems and excruciatingly long dungeons—both supposedly improved from the Japanese release—are still

noticeable issues. Thankfully, the game's streamlined ability system and menus help out greatly—they always let you know when you've found the right item to unlock new powers. And damn, the game looks gorgeous...but so did *The Phantom Menace*.

➔ **JEREMY:** Since Sega never got around to sequel-izing Dreamcast RPG *Skies of Arcadia*, I guess Level-5 decided to do it for them. Ah, if only *Rogue Galaxy* really were a true *Skies* follow-up...unfortunately, it doesn't reach those heights. They ripped the combat system straight from *Kingdom Hearts*, warts and all. The same too-close camera! The same brain-dead A.I. companions, more a liability than a help! Incessant button-mashing ran-

dom combat! Too bad, because the game looks lovely and can be fun. But it feels cobbled together from leftovers of other (better) games, which makes it merely pretty good rather than the classic it could have been.

➔ **MICHAEL:** These guys are right—*Rogue Galaxy* attempts to plunder content from other RPGs. But even so, it manages to cook up some cool content of its own—the useful item synthesis, coupled with the two-weapon combat, kept battles from getting too boring. Plus, I gotta give the visuals some props: The sexy cartoony look made my eyes blush. Sure, the game isn't a masterpiece, but until the PS3 raises its role-playing anchor, it'll at least help keep the PS2 afloat. 🐾



PlayStation 2

KARAOKE REVOLUTION PRESENTS: AMERICAN IDOL

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Blitz Games
 ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Same old song

➔ **JENNIFER:** Whichever goes stale sooner, *American Idol* or karaoke, this singing game will be there, ready to be looked back on as something that didn't represent either side exceptionally well. It's stronger on the karaoke front—*Karaoke Revolution* makes a pretty foolproof foundation for a game. Sing into a USB microphone and the game detects your pitch and timing, scoring you based on accuracy. With 40 songs and lots of fun unlockables, it's as entertaining as any previous *KR*.

In between those parts, however, things break down. The judging cut-scenes are entertaining and realistic—as on TV, opinions have little to do with quality (I'm not sure what game Karen's been playing)—but they need to be more integrated into the gameplay. It's unclear how your progress in the competition is gauged, and it's annoying to hand in platinum-album-winning performance after performance but still get eliminated in the final rounds. Wait, did I just glimpse how William Hung feels about himself?

THE VERDICTS
(out of 10)

JENNIFER
7.0
GOOD

MICHAEL
6.5
AVERAGE

KAREN
6.5
AVERAGE

The Good: Power ballads in full effect
The Bad: *American Idol* stuff is tacked on
Paula Abdul: Replaced here by some random named Laura

➔ **MICHAEL:** Unlike Jen's crowd-pleasing crooning, I'm a complete moron on the mic. But even though my lousy singing skills will likely induce suicidal tendencies in unfortunate onlookers, it's always fun to ham it up. Too bad the *American Idol* implementation is about as ridiculous as Paula Abdul's reject replacement, "Laura." It's silly you compete against the made-up contestants, too. Had Konami saved this for the PS3 so you could compete against real people online, it'd feel more like the show. But instead, we get an *OK Karaoke Revolution* game with a sloppy license.

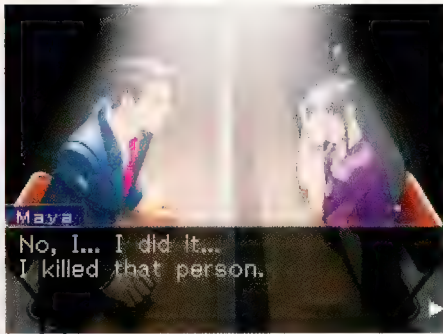
➔ **KAREN:** Sloppy, Michael? Sure, the fake Paula took a bit away from the *Idol* fanfare, but one can't deny how logical it is for *Karaoke Revolution* to implement *American Idol*'s contest structure. Though it's not entirely seamless, the contest mode really captures the show's excitement of advancing to the next round and the anticipation of final results. Even the judges' criticisms seem genuine and accurate to each performance rather than randomly generated. It may not be the best party version of *Revolution*, but this game fulfills a lot of individual *Idol* fantasies.



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◆ *Psyche-Locks*, one of the game's new features, extend the exploration segments.

DS

PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY— JUSTICE FOR ALL

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



The Good: Clever writing, challenging puzzles
The Bad: A tad short, repetitive
In Production: An all-new, DS-bred *Phoenix Wright* sequel

Objection? Sustained

◆ **SHANE:** Since the original *Phoenix Wright* first hit in 2005, Capcom's whimsical litigation simulation has grown into a bizarre cult phenomenon, amassing a surprisingly sizable fan base of wannabe defense lawyers. *Justice for All* picks up precisely where that first caseload ended: Expect to enjoy the same charming characters, snappy writing, and quirky sense of humor here. Sure, the whole thing skates dangerously close to the "edutainment" realm by building its gameplay around reading comprehension and deductive reasoning, but DS gamers weaned on *Brain Age* will likely welcome the cerebral stimulation.

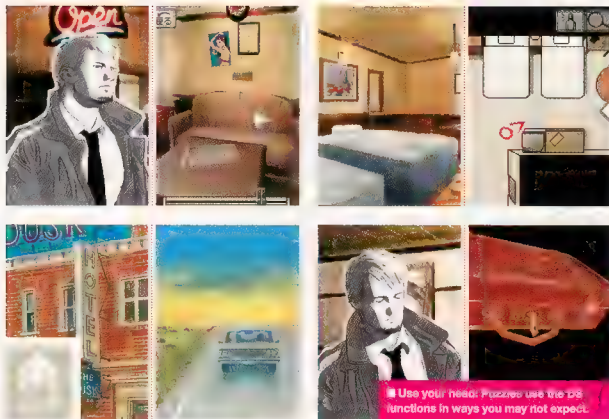
Unfortunately, even *Phoenix's* biggest supporters will raise a few objections about this slightly underwhelm-

ing sequel. While Capcom wisely added a new, DS-exclusive scenario (complete with cool touch-screen puzzles) to the first game, *Justice* (also a GBA port) gets no such upgrade. And although it's a shorter game, annoying new "Psyche-Lock" puzzles force you to backtrack and hunt for clues.

◆ **ANDREW P.:** If it weren't for the new *Psyche-Locks*, *Justice for All* would be pretty much the exact same game as the first one (which I consider a good thing). Personally, I like having more investigative options when not in trial because it feels like I'm actually working a case instead of reacting to everything around me. See, that's what I find annoying about *Phoenix Wright*: The trials always pit him as the

inexperienced underdog struggling to win against insurmountable odds. It's part of the character's charm, sure, but it also makes the cases repetitive and predictable. Toughen up, Nick.

◆ **JENN F.:** OK, guys. I'm split. I'm happy Capcom tried to make this sequel feel different with the *Psyche-Locks* (which make the exploration parts more difficult), but they don't really improve gameplay. Instead, they simply serve to distract gamers from how much of a re-read this truly is. Still, I loved the original, and I don't feel the rehash rings hollow. The first *Phoenix Wright* game was a little bit better, a little more fulfilling, but DS owners looking to tackle another caseload will get a kick out of this. ☛



DS

HOTEL DUSK: ROOM 215

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

A game to kill for

✦ **JEREMY:** The classic adventure genre has been woefully underrepresented on the DS. So old-time point-and-click fanatics should swoon over *Hotel Dusk*. Especially since it's more about character interaction than "insert widget A into slot B" puzzles. You'll come across your share of illogical and sometimes infuriating moments, sure—it is an adventure game—but the entire experience is rendered in a cool-looking film noir sketchbook style, and the real focus is on following clues and pursuing leads. While the plot feels contrived at times, it plays out like a great pulp detective novel: a mysterious woman, secret pasts, missing persons, questionable motives...the works. With a cast of well-written characters, branching conversations, and a cool interface, this is the adventure the DS has been dying for.



✦ **JENNIFER:** I completely agree—the style and character in this one make it a memorable adventure that uses the DS' charms well. I'd have liked it even more if it let

you advance the text more quickly. Gamers will have to slow. Down. And. Be. Patient. While. They. Wait. For. The. Text. To. Show. Up. I understand this pacing was intentional, but it makes the game drag in places. Still, the story is intriguing, and the puzzles nicely done. I actually didn't find this one required as many bothersome trial-and-error logic leaps as most adventure games. It's as linear as it can be without handing you the answers. And that pencil-sketch art style? Very cool.

✦ **MICHAEL:** For such an amazing detective drama, it's a damn shame hardly anyone is clued-in on its brilliance—blame Nintendo for keeping this gem hidden. Playing *Hotel Dusk* made me realize why I love the DS: The game executes everything with such craft and creativity—you hold the system like a book, the puzzles make terrific use of the touch screen—that it pushes home how fun games can be when DS developers dare to be different. And, unlike other point-and-click adventures, *Dusk* does a great job of making sure you don't get lost fishing for facts. Factor in the twist-heavy story (I want a sequel, damnit!) and you have one doozy of a DS game.

The Good: An intriguing story told with style
The Bad: The usual adventure game illogic
Hardboiled: Twice as gritty as *Touch Detective* (and twice as good)



[GEEKED AT BIRTH.]



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■ The PSP's limited button layout turns MPO into more of a run-and-gun affair.



PSP

METAL GEAR SOLID: PORTABLE OPS

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Kojima Productions ■ Players: 1-6 ■ ESRB: Mature



The Good: It's a real MGS action game with a deep strategic layer on top

The Bad: Complex controls hurt hands
Number of A-Team
Allusions: Two

Take a ride in Snake's mystery van

➔ **SCOOTER:** This new portable *Metal Gear* installment finally gives us the tactical espionage action we expect from an MGS title...and a whole lot more. Kojima Productions took the classic stealth-action formula and added soldier recruitment, which makes it absolutely vital to knock out baddies and throw them in your mystery van to build an army. You can then assign these soldiers to various squads that do stuff like make medicine, find guns, or provide helpful backup during the oh-so-quick missions (which you can now select from a map, making this a more free-form MGS). *Portable Ops* ends up being a bizarre Kojima chimera of MGS, *Metal Gear Acid*, and *Pokémon*, which is A-OK with me. Also, the game's varied

use of the PSP's online capabilities—snagging soldiers via Wi-Fi hot spots or the not-yet-released GPS attachment, and both local and online Wi-Fi multiplayer, which you can actually lose soldiers in—and fantastic graphics make this a stunning showcase for the system despite funky controls and occasional online latency hiccups.

➔ **SHANE:** Finally, a game that feels like it belongs here—*Portable Ops* brazenly shirks the established PSP norm of lazily porting PS2 games to Sony's handheld by instead offering an all-new adventure that actually plays to the system's strengths. Stealthily maneuvering Snake through urban missions delivers bite-sized MGS thrills, but players who want to

delve deeper can get seriously hooked on collecting, trading, and battling forces in the brilliant online modes.

➔ **BRYAN:** While I never felt the urge to trip on *Acid*, *Portable Ops* is just what I wanted—and what I never thought I wanted—from the series on the PSP. The classic sneaky gameplay from the console titles remains wonderfully intact, yet I got strangely addicted to recruiting soldiers and sending them out to collect intel, items, and new members also willing to follow my cause. As Scooter mentioned, the PSP's flawed design throws the occasional wrench into squad control, but it shouldn't stop you from picking up arguably the handheld's most imaginative title. 🐍



◆ **Enter the wookiee—be careful you don't cartwheel to your death.**

PSP

STAR WARS LETHAL ALLIANCE

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

Let the Wookiee play it

➔ **SHARKEY:** Bad guys in the *Star Wars* movies can't hit the broad side of a futuristic space-barn. While that's funny enough on the big screen, it makes for some brain-dead videogame gunplay in this third-person action-shooter. Sure, you've got fancy bullet-time acrobatics you can whip out (wasn't that your favorite part of the flicks?), but the risk of cartwheeling off of an instant-death ledge is greater than any threat posed by nearsighted morons who drop if you look at them funny. It's doubly a shame since the game forces a bunch of jumping puzzles on you—which would've been fun if not for these problems. In fact, all the control and death-ledge issues remind me of *Shadows of the Empire* (N64), only it's 10 years later and we get a more

attractive ass wiggling around in front of the spastic camera. Progress.

➔ **MICHAEL:** Even if you're a Jedi-loving junkie, don't force yourself to play this cheapo *Star Wars* adventure. Sharkey is totally spot-on when it

comes to the slippery controls. In fact, I was my own worst enemy—I met my death more from stupidly falling off ledges than I did by the blaster of any baddie. But if you can actually keep your feet on the ground, the combat can be kinda cool. Using your robo-buddy to get through levels makes for some interesting situations, but the constant teamwork gets way too repetitive...and annoying—what idiotic architect designed every planet in the galaxy with a bunch of switches that can only be accessed by a stupid droid? And too bad the autotargeting is way more harmful than it is helpful—accidentally shooting exploding barrels sure is a dumb way to die.

➔ **SCOOTER:** Hey, I kinda like *Shadows of the Empire*, so that comparison isn't too troubling to me. I generally agree with Sharkey, but to a lesser degree. I like some of *Lethal Alliance*'s ideas, such as using your droid for both combat and platforming purposes, but they're pulled off in a very mediocre fashion (due to the aforementioned brain-dead A.I. and instant-death ledges). Even with my "I dig all things *Star Wars*" glasses on, I still realize this is an average-at-best game.

The Good: Hot chick doing slow-mo robot-straddling cartwheels...

The Bad: ...right off a damn ledge and into a load screen

Lightsaber Lovers: You're out of luck—only blasters in this one

THE VERDICT'S
OUT OF 101

SHARKEY
4.5
AVERAGE

MICHAEL
5.0
AVERAGE

SCOOTER
5.0
AVERAGE



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REVIEWS WRAP-UP

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

GC

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ ESRB: Teen

Twilight Princess may be all the reason you need to buy a Wii, but it actually started life on the Cube, and the "lesser" version is just as good as its waggle-licious counterpart. The controls are old-fashioned, sure, and the game world is flipped (what was east is west now) and stripped of widescreen. But the gameplay is spot-on, and that's what counts.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** We lavished all 10s on the Wii *Princess* last issue and, aside from some small technical details, this version is identical. If you haven't been able to snag a Wii, here's your chance to try this masterpiece.



PS3

BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ ESRB: Teen

Wait, what? Ubisoft is charging the full \$60 for this mostly unchanged port (you get one new multiplayer mode) of a 6-month-old Xbox 360 game that barely looked next gen to begin with? Who cleared that idea for takeoff? Patient players will find fun single-player missions about halfway into the game, and the online multiplayer modes here are pretty cool. But the business-class frills here aren't worth the first-class price.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Unless you're desperate for a PS3 game to play online—or one that uses the Sixaxis' motion-sensing stuff—wait for *Angels* to land in the discount bin.

On the DL

Some downloadable games worth your space bucks...or not

WORTHY WINNERS

ASSAULT HEROES (XB360)

■ Pub: Sierra

■ Price: \$10

This overhead in-tank and on-foot shooter has *Geometry Wars'* controls and offers nearly as much fun as that Xbox Live legend.



SMALL ARMS (XB360)

■ Pub: Microsoft

■ Price: \$10

Sure, *Small Arms* borrows (more like steals) the *Super Smash Bros.* formula, but the four-player mayhem is superfun...especially when you throw a bunch of friends into the fray.



PLUS:

➤ RISTAR (Wii)

■ Pub: Sega ■ Price: \$8

➤ LEMMINGS 2 (PS3)

■ Pub: Sony CEA ■ Price: \$2.99

➤ MILITARY MADNESS (Wii)

■ Pub: Hudson Soft ■ Price: \$6

LOUSY LOSERS

ROBOBLITZ (XB360)

■ Pub: Naked

Sky

■ Price: \$14.99

What, this isn't *NFL Blitz* with robots? Just a forgettable actioner with sweet graphics thanks to the Unreal Engine 3? Sorry, not interested.



TENNIS (Wii)

■ Pub: Nintendo

■ Price: \$5

With this terrible version of *Tennis*, the price of the game equates to the amount of seconds you'll spend playing it before you realize it totally blows balls.



PLUS:

➤ COLUMNS (Wii)

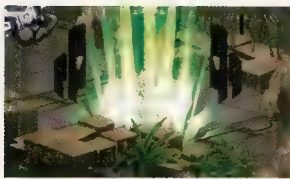
■ Pub: Sega ■ Price: \$3

➤ SPACE HARRIER II (Wii)

■ Pub: Sega ■ Price: \$8

➤ WARIO'S WOODS (Wii)

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Price: \$5



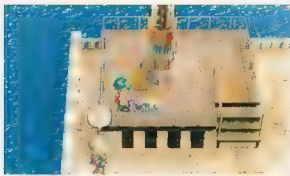
PS2

AR TONELICO

■ Publisher: NIS America ■ ESRB: Teen

Been rejected on Match.com one too many times lately? Get your dating game up to snuff with *Ar tonelico*. This 2D Japanese role-playing game looks and plays like a decade-old PS1 title but spices up the gameplay with dating-sim elements: If you treat your anime-babe companions well, you'll gain access to their most intimate secrets...oh, and some sexy unlockable outfits, too!

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** The game may have dated graphics and a botched localization, but the compelling "relationship" aspects make it worth a look...especially for dateless nerds. We hope to have a full review next month.



PSP

THE LEGEND OF HEROES III: SONG OF THE OCEAN


■ Publisher: Namco Bandai ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

This latest *Legend of Heroes* maintains the "cute, but generic and forgettable" standards set by the previous two games (and closes out the overall trilogy). The story focuses on some kid named Forte, who, with his musician friends, zips around the land looking for fragments of a song that could change the world. Per the previous games, you still have traditional turn-based combat, lovable pets to help you, and a not-so-great translation.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** It's a generic and harmless little RPG for the PSP, just like the other two games in the series. If you really need an RPG fix, you could do worse.

THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for Nov/Dec

Name	Platform	EGM Scores
1 New Super Mario Bros.  This 8-month-old game isn't, well, new, but it's the first traditional 2D <i>Mario</i> since <i>Super Mario Land 2</i> hit the original, impossible-to-see Game Boy.	DS	9.5 10 8.0
2 Gears of War  <i>Gears of War</i> isn't just chain-sawing the competition; it's also shootin' up the sales charts—it recently sold a megaton 2 million units worldwide.	XB360	10 9.5 9.0
3 Madden NFL 07	PS2	7.5 8.5 7.0
4 Final Fantasy XII	PS2	8.5 9.0 9.5
5 Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!	DS	8.5 9.0 7.5
6 Nintendogs: Dalmatian & Friends	DS	Not scored
7 Pokémon Ranger  In case you're counting, <i>Ranger</i> has a grand total of 213 critters to collect. Not counted: the amount of time it takes to catch 'em all. Answer: too long.	DS	Not scored
8 Yoshi's Island DS	DS	6.5 8.0 6.0
9 Call of Duty 3  <i>Call of Duty 3</i> can teach you a lot about World War II, especially if you beat the game—a completed campaign earns you three interviews with WWII vets.	XB360	6.5 7.0 7.0
10 Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy	PS2	6.5 7.5 8.0
11 Big Brain Academy	DS	9.0 8.5 7.5
12 Final Fantasy III	DS	8.0 8.0 7.5
13 Guitar Hero II (Bundle with Guitar)	PS2	9.0 9.0 8.5
14 Animal Crossing: Wild World	DS	7.5 7.0 9.0
15 Mario Kart DS	DS	9.0 8.5 8.5
16 Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team	DS	6.5 6.5 8.5
17 Madden NFL 07	XB360	7.5 8.5 7.0
18 Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Red Rescue Team	GBA	6.5 6.5 8.5
19 Nintendogs: Labrador Retriever & Friends	DS	7.5 8.0 9.0
20 Guitar Hero I (Bundle with Guitar)	PS2	9.0 9.0 9.0

GAME OVER

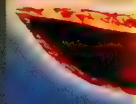
➤ Press continue for retro gaming, a classic crossword, and Kevin Bacon's Mil



➤ SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

Flame-Broiled Fear

Burger King declares war on videogames



Seanbaby might look happy in this photo, but that's just the trans fats talking.

WHEN YOU FIRST SAW THE ADS FOR THE BURGER KING GAMES,

the corporation's chilling embrace of terror and insanity (out now for Xbox and Xbox 360), you thought, "I'm glad it's not my job to play terrible games like that." If you were elderly, you might have simply been terrified to death. Well, either way, aren't you lucky. I've been dreading this day, since I first accused my TV of making up fake commercials for impossibly lame Burger King stealth games. But I assure you they're real, and they're worse than you think.

Pocketbike Racer

Game Concept: It's a simple idea—take the horrible monster Burger King, calls its corporate mascot along

with all its other popular characters, and put them on tiny bikes. You know what? Let's take a look at these beloved characters!

Brooke Burke: Yes, they really got her! Brooke Burke Tip: While racing with Brooke Burke, press the yellow button to make her shout, "Don't you have any idea who I am?" Secret Tip: Press the red button on controller number two to make that biker reply, "Yeah...weren't you judge number two on episode 309 of *Pet Star*? Holy crap—you gave the somersaulting parrot an 8! I knew I knew you!"

Whopper #1: A human head with a cheeseburger costume. At least now we know what happened to the parts

left over after they Frankensteined Mayor McCheese together.

Subservient Chicken: Ha ha. Subservient Chicken. I bet the merchandisers over at McDonald's are still pissed that Burger King thought this guy up before they could.

Biker: I have a question: When it's your job to create bikers, and your idea is Biker—a biker named "Biker"—do you get fired?

The King: His unblinking gaze sees every color of fear.

Game Execution: I know a lot of readers will be insulted that I even bothered to type this, but *Pocketbike*



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Retro: Final Fantasy III Afterthoughts



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Grudge Match: It's electric!



PAGE
110

Hsu & Chan: Comic antics in 1080p

Racer isn't very good. It's not even \$3.99 good. I sort of wish I'd spent my \$3.99 on a dollar bill.

Sneak King

Game Concept: The object of *Sneak King* is to creep up on hungry people, then surprise them with a dance and a burger. Get to them on time or they collapse! Let's face it—that idea's insane, even in this industry where Shaquille O'Neal can have kung-fu adventures and royal-space fairies roll our belongings up into giant katamari balls. How could this have happened?

Here's my theory: *Sneak King* was originally software developed by the FBI to reconstruct murder scenes and get inside the minds of predators. For years it was kept internal until Burger King corporate hamburglers hacked their database looking for the technology to turn teen runaways into soda cups. They came across this FBI ambush simulator and, through a comical mix-up, accidentally e-mailed the program to their marketing department. They came nothing but tears and confusion until the marketers did what they were trained to do: push those feelings deep inside and crudely smash cheeseburgers into the concept they were given. *Sneak King* was born.

Take a moment now and look at that theoretical table of cards I had to build to explain why this game exists. It's possible I'm wrong, but one thing is for sure: If the makers of *Sneak King* are not lunatic murderers, then they have a lot of explaining to do.

Game Execution: Whatever part of me stupid enough to worry this would be good was quickly reassured. It sucks. Burger King figured that as a purchaser of *Sneak King* I would be 4 years old (and rightfully so), so they adjusted the difficulty accordingly. I'm sneaking around people who can see about two feet forward and zero feet in either direction, so it's up to me to stay several inches to their left or right. This really took me out of the story. A world of legally blind hypoglycemics who die whenever madmen don't bring them

unexpected food requires a suspension of disbelief I can't manage, and I once saw a movie about ragtag oil drillers landing the space shuttle on an asteroid.

The eerily realistic graphics of the game make it seem like it takes place in our world, which means instead of enjoying my burger-predatoring, I'm constantly wondering why police aren't doing anything about me. Here's what would happen in the real world if cops drove past this mess:
Fizketti: "Look, a 7-foot man's giggling Halloween mask is protruding from that garbage can."
Vasquez: "Roger that. When I finish this clip, hand me the shotgun."

Now, if we apply *Sneak King* logic to our policemen, here's how their conversation would be different:
Fizketti: "Do you smell Burger King?"
Vasquez: "AAAH!!! Who said that?"

Fizketti: "AiiEEE! Where is that voice coming from!"
Vasquez: "There it was again!"
Together: "It sounds like it's coming from inside the car!"
Vasquez: "AAAH!!!"
Fizketti: "AiiEEE!"

To make the *Sneak King* world more confusing, each of your victims cheers wildly when you appear. This isn't a normal reaction for someone realizing that the hot breath on his or

her neck is coming from the king of nightmares holding a sandwich. And no grown adults pump their fists in celebration at the world's cheapest, most ordinary food item. No, this can only be the excitement of finding out that the masked intruder who got the drop on you ISN'T going to rape you.

Big Bumpin'

Game Concept: Take the characters you loved from *Pocketbike Racer* and put them in wildly uncontrollable bumper cars! *Big Bumpin'* features several modes including Klutzy What Happened and That Game Was Shorter Than Its Load Screen.

Game Execution: Of all the Burger King games, this is the least boring. And since that came off a little nicer than I meant it, let me add that it's still boring enough that doctors prescribe it to patients experiencing erections lasting longer than four hours. Only in extreme cases, though. Most times they still suggest an ice pack and pictures of old people vomiting. My point is, I can't think about this game long enough to form sentences about it, which is why the next part of this sentence is: Playing this game will make you disgusted with yourself no matter what pills your dong has taken. I'm starting to get the feeling that staring into the face of Burger King for a week straight has melted the part of my brain that makes sense. Murglefluff banana ping! 🍌



Pictured above—bah, does it really matter which Burger King games these are?

➤ SNEAK CLOWN



Before Burger King's creepy murderer frightened children everywhere, McDonald's mascot

Ronald McDonald tried to break into videogames. With titles that were almost certainly created by pointing at someone and saying, "Think-of-a-McDonald's-game-name-right-now-GO," they were *Ronald McDonald in Magical World* (Game Gear) and *McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure* (Genesis). Someday I hope they get around to releasing *Ronald's Magic Game Quests Through Land* *Peace*.

Just like in *Sneak King*, I played these games with the idea that something horrible was about to happen. Not from actual evidence...Ronald never came right out and did something criminal...it was just a feeling. Also, one thing I'd like to never have to say to authorities is, "Yes, I saw those missing children earlier, unsupervised and playing with a clown that surprised them in the park. Everything seemed OK, though—he was only luring them into magical circumstances with prizes... You say you found their faces stapled to a screaming hostage on a pagan altar? Yeah, no, that makes sense."

10 Years Ago...

SPINE COVER



On the cover: Tekken 3

Before fighting freaks got their kicks out of Namco's champion 3D fighter, we gave readers the scoop about the upcoming PS1 port. And perhaps jumping the gun too early, we also speculated the Nintendo 64 might end up getting a version, too. But in reality, the N64 ended up with *Clay Fighter 63 1/3*—ouch!



Game of the Month: Command & Conquer (Saturn)

We dug *Command & Conquer*, despite the terribly tiny sprites. The strategy port averaged a score of 8.9, triumphing over tough competition from *Dark Savior* (Saturn) and *DK Country 3* (SNES). Kiddie b-baller *Space Jam* (PS1) didn't fare too well with Editor-In-Chief Dan "Shoe" Hsu—he slammed it with a 3.5.



Domestic violence

Our fighting-game guru, Sushi-X, named four must-have fighters of 1996, including *Virtua Fighter 2*, *Tekken*, *Night Warriors*, and *Battle Arena Toshinden 2*. Sadly, cutesy VF *Kids* did not make the cut.



→ RETRO AFTERTHOUGHTS

Final Fantasy III

Retelling a long-lost fantasy
By Jeremy Parish

Only those who possess
may break the curse of
the one of them. Will you



It took a while, but we now have every frickin' Final Fantasy. Of course, picky fanboys will probably bitch about wanting an original NES translation of Final Fantasy III now.

FINAL FANTASY FANBOYS CAN NOW SHUT UP: The DS release of *Final Fantasy III* officially gives America every game in the long-winded series. Thankfully, we didn't get a shrunken-down console copy, either—the DS version is actually a spruced-up remake. But before pretty polygons replaced the pint-sized pixels, *Final Fantasy III* innovated on the Famicom—the Japanese version of the NES. We recently spoke with Hiromichi Tanaka, the director of the game (not just the remake, but the original as well) to find how this fantasy was born.

EGM: *Final Fantasy III's* gameplay was drastically different than its predecessor's. Why the change?

Hiromichi Tanaka: The *Final Fantasy* series employs an entirely different game system with each release. If you examine *Final Fantasy I* through *XII*, you will discover that no two titles share the same exact elements. Although concepts such as swords, magic, and of course, the crystals reappear throughout numerous games, we always aspire to implement features that are highly attuned to each specific title.

The job system in the original *Final Fantasy III* allowed players to customize their four-character party

in strategic ways to face whatever challenge they encountered—be it a dungeon or certain enemies. Figuring out which job combinations to utilize in overcoming different obstacles was one of the most enjoyable parts of the game.

EGM: The storytelling also ditched clearly defined characters, especially compared to *FFIII*.

HT: When the original *Final Fantasy III* was released, we decided not to add any individuality to the four main characters, to leave that up to each player as they saw fit.

With the rerelease, we used well-rounded, defined characters to increase enjoyment of the plot and to help newer gamers empathize with the story's leading roles more easily. However, we also made sure to not define the characters as much as they were in *Final Fantasy II*, whose story was largely character-based. We believed this was the best course of action to preserve the feeling of freedom from the original and to keep longtime fans happy.

EGM: Every *FF* manages to bring something innovative to the table. What aspect of *FFIII* are you most proud of?



Luneth
Not You can't ask us to...

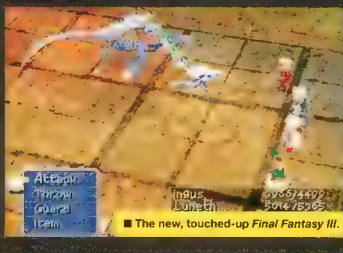


A FAIR COMPARISON

Even though the DS remake sports a glibzy makeover, the game remains true to the 8-bit original.



Final Fantasy III as it looked 16 years ago.



The new, touched-up Final Fantasy III.

HT: That would most definitely be the job system. Additionally, *Final Fantasy III* was the first title to feature summoning spells, which would become a trademark of the series. On the technical side of things, it also sported high-speed scrolling, when aboard a certain airship, as well as a tremendous amount of data on the game cartridge. Both of these traits were deemed high impossible on the Famicom at the time.

EGM: What was the inspiration behind introducing the adventurous vocations?

HT: The original idea for the job system came from the power-up system present in contemporary scrolling shooters of the time, such as *Gradius* (NES) and *Zanac* (NES). Powering up with various types of weapons such as lasers or bombs allowed the player to deal with a variety of different situations. We thought it would be interesting to implement this into a role-playing game, to allow characters to change jobs anywhere.

EGM: With so many job combinations, do you think it was tough to fine-tune the difficulty?

HT: The original version, unlike the DS remake, was designed so that

many objectives would be difficult to face without using a predetermined combination of jobs. In the original, we mainly needed to focus on balancing the game around those specific job combinations, so the DS version was more difficult to balance.

EGM: OK, so how exactly was the job system rebalanced for the DS?

HT: In the original version, it was almost impossible to clear the final area of the game without using a party of Ninjas and Sages. When we developed the DS port, our ultimate goal was to allow players to complete the game using any job they wished. To allow players to fully utilize and enjoy the job system, changes were made to the difficulty level throughout the entire game.

EGM: What made you decide to give the remake a fresh coat of visual cuteness?

HT: When we decided to port *FFIII* to the Nintendo DS, the first thing we did was find the visual style most appropriate for using the full hardware capabilities of the system. Then we found a style that reached fans of both the original title and newer players—a style that retained the

flavor of the Famicom version and skillfully integrated 2D graphics with 3D models.

EGM: The remake is pretty darn faithful to the original. Why no crazy changes?

HT: Due to the fact that *FFIII* had not been ported once in 16 years, the opinion of fans toward drastic changes was decidedly negative. We pursued a style for the DS version that would not betray the original's fans and would also appeal to new users.

EGM: Can we expect another remake now that you've tackled this one?

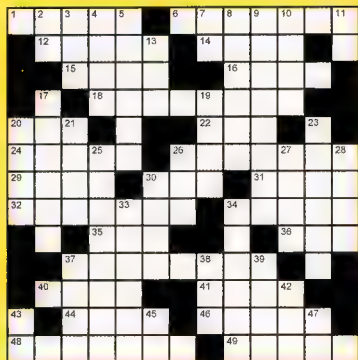
HT: I prefer working on creating new games and new content, so I don't have much interest in re-creating past titles. Because the announcement of *FFIII* for the DS was made before development started, I joined the project out of a sense of responsibility as the creator of the original. Although I probably won't have much direct involvement with the DS for a while, the development team from *FFIII* is starting to work with a different producer on an entirely new project. I hope you'll look forward to finding out what it is. **FF**



As you can see, the cutesy character art infused some much-needed personality into the DS remake.

+ CROSSWORD

Oldies-n-newbies



ACROSS

1. Bell offered food in exchange for PS3s
6. *Guitar Hero* unlockables
12. PS2 *Bond*: *Under Fire*
14. ... Bell offered food in exchange for PS3s
15. Birdo spits them in *Super Mario 2*
16. *Super Mario RPG* secret weapon and armor ... Shell
18. 2007's *Medal of Honor*: ...
20. Like an NES *Racer*
22. *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*'s Flamenco
24. *Battle of Olympus* (NES) unit of currency
26. *Time Crisis 2* minigame clay targets
29. In *Super Mario Bros.*, Bowser's castle feature
30. Vampire hunter Helsing
31. Konami 2D fighter ... *Master*
32. Pen & paper role-playing game with future videogame potential
34. *Test Drive* featured sports car ... *Martin*
35. Wii *Dragon Ball Z* character Supreme ...
36. ... *Mead's Terraforming* (TG-16 CD)
37. *God of War* one-eyed wonders
40. *Crash Bandicoot's* PS2 racecar
41. Invincibility in *Super Mario Bros.*
44. Plural of Nintendo's new system
46. *Halo 2* music track
48. Enemies in Saturn's *Bug!*
49. NES military-action title

DOWN

2. 2007's *Army of Two* publisher
3. Determines eligibility to buy M-rated games
4. *Street Fighter* miniboss
5. PS2 CPU nickname Emotion ...
7. *Addams Family* cousin
8. 4 DOWN, in Japan
9. *Metal Gear Acid 2*'s sonar and motion devices
10. SNES *Power Rangers* boss Ivan ...
11. Game Boy Advance type
13. Early *Dungeons & Dragons* publishing company
17. 2007's *Super Mario* ...
19. 2007's *Sphere* (PS2)
20. Part of RPG
21. *WWE* gal
23. *Dynasty Tactics* emissary units
25. ... *Profile 2* (PS2)
26. Controller
27. *Vice City* soundtrack artist Hall & ...
28. Xbox Live messaging option
30. *Klonoa 2: Luncheon's* ...
33. Strategy
34. *Armored Core* publisher
37. *Resident Evil* crow calls
38. Sony handheld
39. PS2 *Wizardry* priestess
42. *Simon's Quest* body part collectible
43. A *katamari*'s circumference divided by its diameter
45. Atari PC model from the '90s
47. Like *True Crime* streets

(Solution on page 109)

+ GRUDGE MATCH

It's Electrifying

Power to the people

With diminishing fossil fuels and electricity rates on the rise, maybe it's time to look at some alternative forms of energy...like mischievous power sprites in tiny jumpsuits.

Elebits

VS.

The electric company



Capabilities

Flush a toilet, lift a house

Advantage: Tie



Keeping critical signage lit all night long

Advantage: Tie



Human Interaction

Will shock you with their feats of power

Advantage: Elebits



Can shock you with 20 amps of alternating current



Your Cost

Nothing but time, patience, and virtual points

Advantage: Elebits



One assload of cash per kilowatt-hour



Power Outages

Start to work as soon as you can find or wake them

Advantage: Elebits



Managed to black out most of New England



Side Effects

General spikes of cuteness and love

Advantage: Elebits



Nuclear runoff

Winner: Elebits

If they can recharge a hybrid car battery and respond to the Clapper, these little buggers just might be the future of American energy.

Sixteen Degrees of Mii

Tracing Kevin Bacon back to Uwe Boll

UNLIKE THE PS3, the Wii can turn you into a celebrity—sans the money, fame, and good looks, of course. So try to guess our Mii-made celebrities as we play Sixteen Degrees of Mii.

For videos on how to make these and other celebrity Mii's, go to EGM212.1UP.com

 <p>START: 1. Kevin Bacon</p>	 <p>2</p>	 <p>3</p>	 <p>4</p>	
 <p>5</p>	 <p>6</p>	 <p>7</p>	 <p>8</p>	 <p>9</p>
 <p>10</p>	 <p>11</p>	 <p>12</p>	 <p>13</p>	 <p>14</p>
 <p>15</p>	 <p>16</p>	 <p>FINISH: 17. Uwe Boll</p>		

1. Kevin Bacon starred in *A Few Good Men* with 2. Jack Nicholson, who starred in *Prizzi's Honor* with 3. Anjelica Huston, who starred in *The Royal Tenenbaums* with 4. Bill Murray, who starred in *Charlie's Angels* with 5. Drew Barrymore, who starred in *No Place to Hide* with 6. O.J. Simpson, who starred in *The Naked Gun* with 7. Leslie Nielsen, who starred in *Spy Hard* with 8. Hulk Hogan, who starred in *Rocky III* with 9. Sylvester Stallone, who starred in *Demolition Man* with 10. Jesse Ventura, who starred in *Predator* with 11. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who starred in *Twins* with 12. Danny DeVito, who starred in *Anything Else* with 13. Woody Allen, who starred in *Annie Hall* with 14. Christopher Walken, who starred in *Sleepy Hollow* with 15. Johnny Depp, who starred in *Donnie Brasco* with Michael Madsen, who starred in *BloodRayne*, directed by 17. Uwe Boll. 🎮

Nothing But Net

Who rules the online-gaming world?

All the new consoles are ready to take you online, but who's the best at it? Is Xbox Live the king or the dinosaur? Can PlayStation Network compete? How's WiiConnect24 going to fare against the big boys? Two *EGM* editors discuss....



■ Shane Bettenhausen, Executive Editor



■ Dan Hsu, Editor-in-Chief

Best online service: Xbox Live or PlayStation Network?

PlayStation Network: Microsoft's four-year head start can't be denied—they've had plenty of time to work out all the kinks and develop Xbox Live into a tremendously feature-rich, easy-to-use service. But then again, they charge \$50 a year for the privilege of playing online...and I think that sucks. Sony's fledgling network offers all the same basic services—online matchmaking, messaging, leaderboards, shopping—completely free of charge. Plus, you can browse the Web on the PS3—having the ability to watch YouTube or update your MySpace page will appeal to a lot of users. So far, the service still feels rough around the edges, but it does function properly, and the promise of continual updates (look how far the PSP's functionality has come in two years) fills me with hope for constant improvement.

Xbox Live: Here's the reason behind your insane (and very wrong) answer, Shane: You don't play enough online games to be able to appreciate how much better Xbox Live does everything—yes, enough to justify the price tag. Have you even tried going online with the PS3 to play games with your friends? It sucks. You usually have to coordinate outside the system by calling them on the phone to let them know where to meet. Xbox Live is worth it alone just for in-game messaging across the entire platform, no matter what you're doing or playing.

And if you don't have friends, Live is set up better for you to make some. Just look at the recent players list, and you can befriend that stranger you just fragged with. PS Network has a lot of work ahead of it to catch up to Xbox Live.

Best service for downloading classic games: Xbox Live, PlayStation Network, or Wii's Virtual Console?

Wii: Xbox Live Arcade admirably blazed the trail here, but it's losing ground fast. Sony's service serves up moderately priced PS1 games and meatier PS3 fare (*Tekken 5: DR*, *Calling All Cars!*) that outclass XBLA's shareware-style offerings, but there just aren't enough games yet. Wii's Virtual Console simply offers the best (and fastest-growing) list of exclusive console classics.

Wii: Maybe you're not as crazy as I thought. You're right...no one can beat Nintendo's classic library, so the Wii easily wins here. I'll have to donate some bodily fluids and maybe an organ to afford all those games, but to have them all on one machine is great. I have to admit, though, I do really like earning Achievement points on Xbox Live Arcade titles...even with the so-so games...

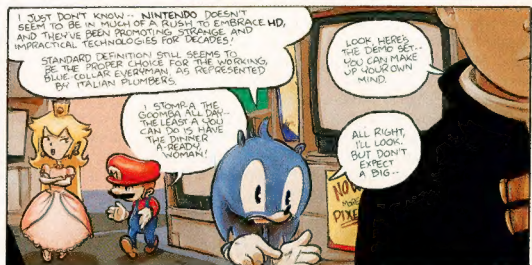
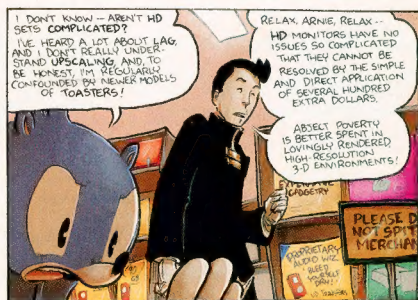
WiiConnect24: game is awesome or already doomed?

Doomed: The Wii's "unified" Friend Code system initially seemed like an upgrade the DS' draft-online plan, but it's actually just more of the same nonsense. Once again, each game requires its own separate friend list...so get ready to input lots of 14-digit codes. Seriously, designing your entire online strategy around preventing child predators simply isn't a good idea.

Doomed: Plus, even if we can play games like *Mario Kart* and *Smash Bros.* online, I can't imagine them being perfect experiences. Will we be able to voice chat? I doubt it. Will we have a ton of multiplayer games from Nintendo to play online with and against our friends? Yeah, right. I just can't see Nintendo doing it right this time around. It doesn't seem to be a priority for them. ☹

Hai, Def

By Jeremy "Norm" Scott



END



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LOST PLANET™

EXTREME CONDITION



"...it simply rocks."

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"...plays like a dream..."

-Games Radar

"...has been making us jump in all the right places..."

-GameSpot

"...action packed..."

-IGN

"Capcom has another winner on its hands."

-Hardcore Gamer

"...an action game on full throttle..."

-Play

"Gorgeous graphics..."

-GamePro

"...one lean, mean, addictive futuristic shootin' machine."

-Official Xbox Magazine



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SCREENS

XBOX
LIVE

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XBOX 360

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