

GTA IV

8 pages of Liberty City
vs. New York City

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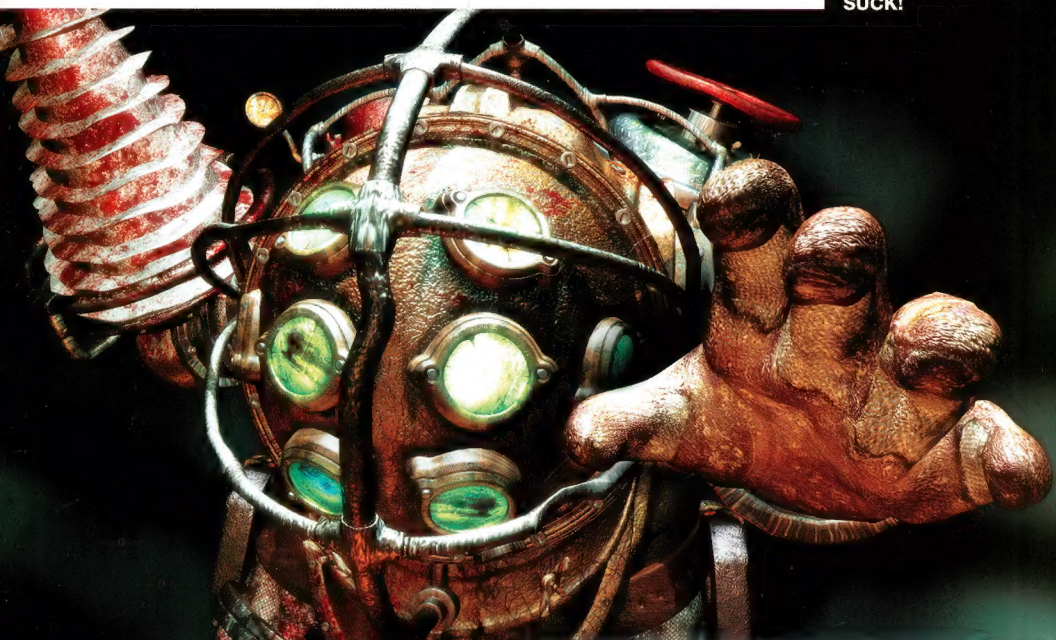
INSIDE:

**NEED FOR SPEED:
PRO STREET**

**NINJA GAIDEN
SIGMA REVIEWED**

**ALONE IN THE
DARK**

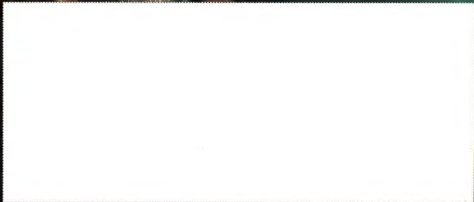
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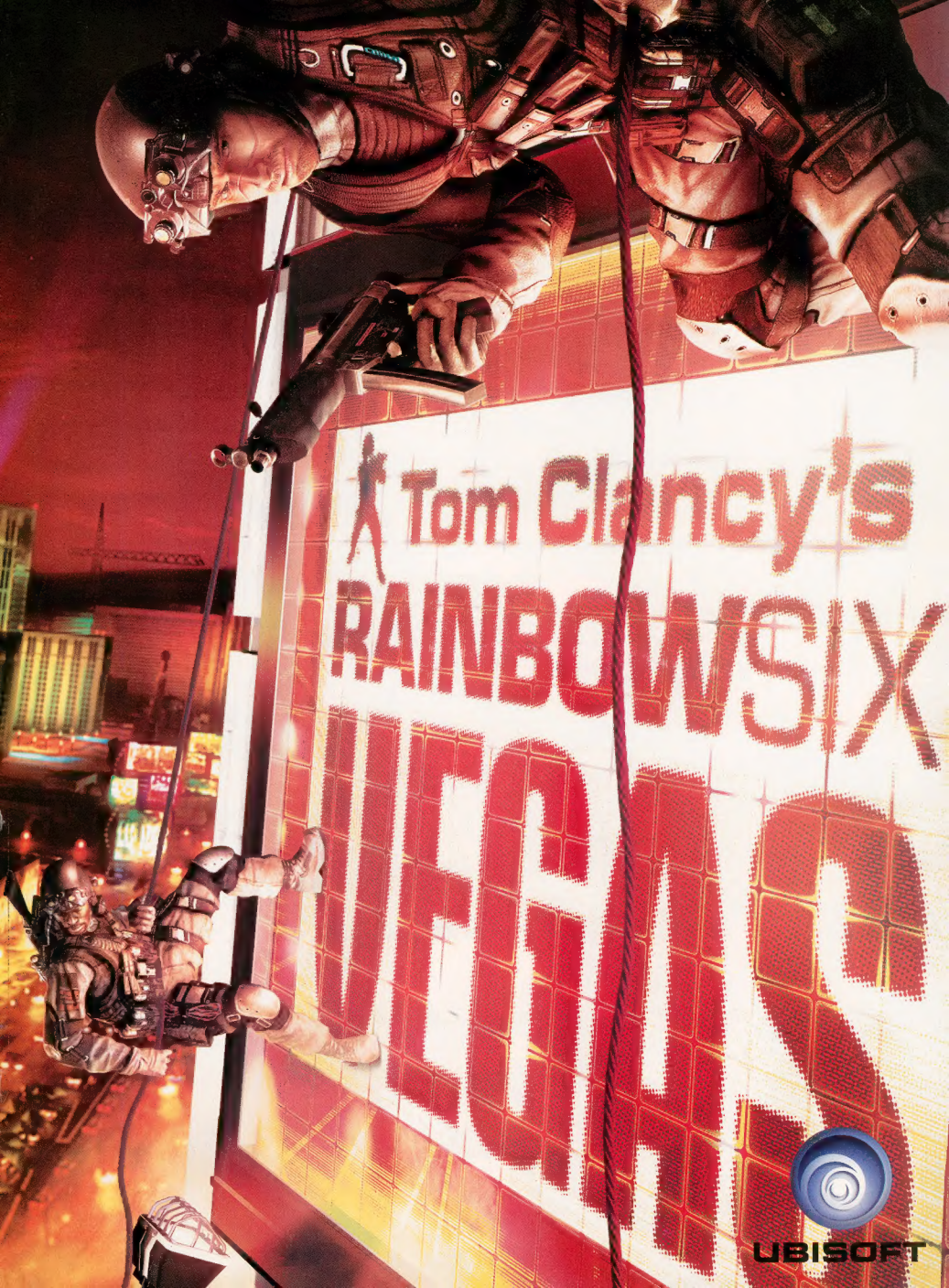
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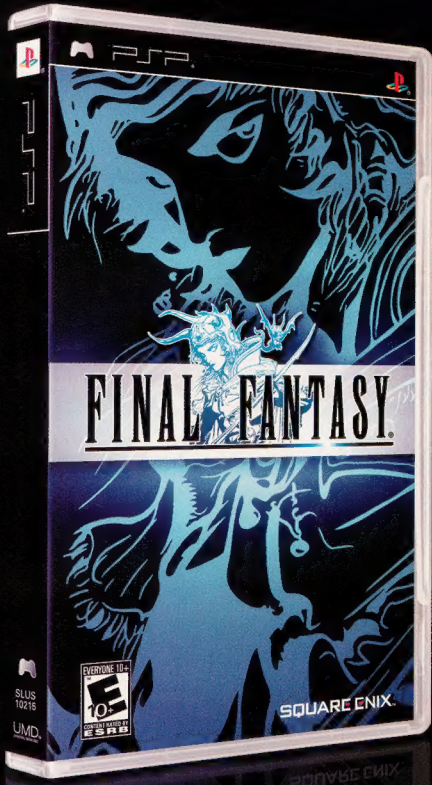
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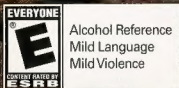
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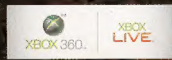


Alcohol Reference
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Mild Violence

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During Online Play



PLAYSTATION 3



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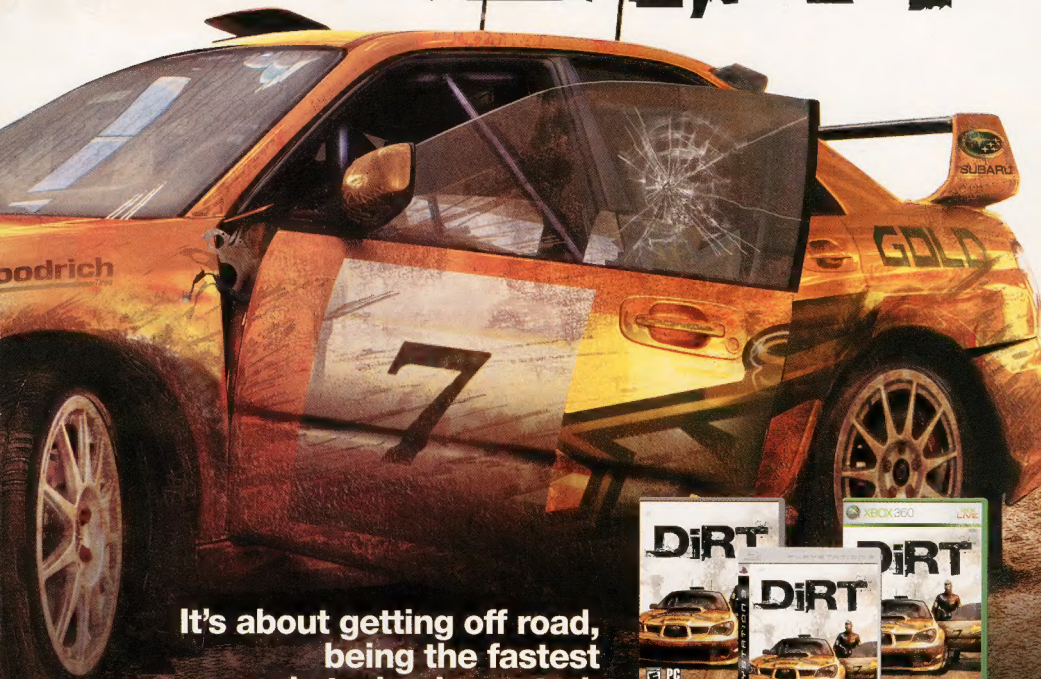


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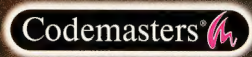
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 Robert Adney, Kevin Conventio, John Davison, Randy Dodson, Jon M. Gibson, Seth Kuehner, Evin Shannon, David Smith, Paulie Tizzard, Todd Zungus

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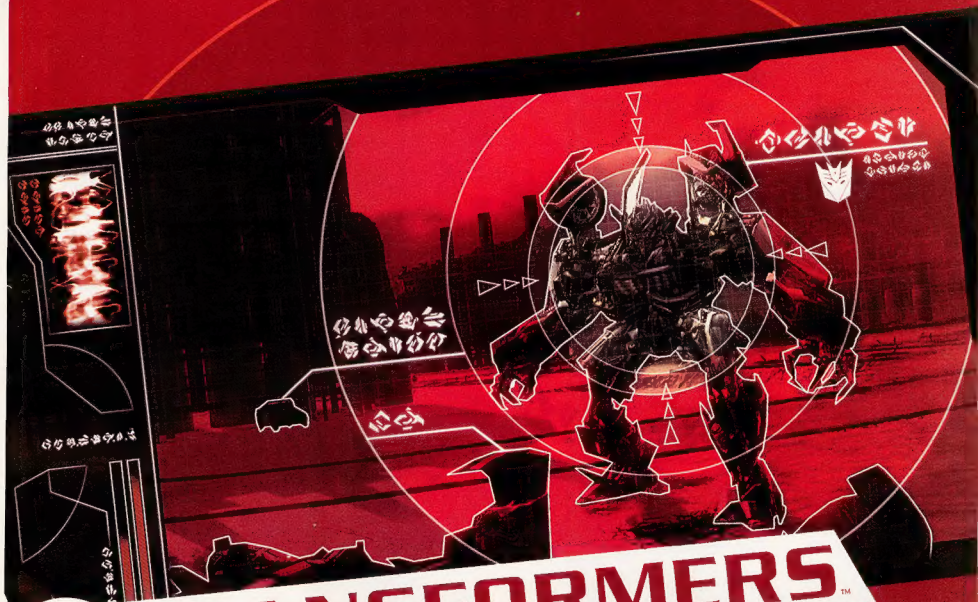
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(CONT.)

Full Disclosure



I RECENTLY HAD A CHAT WITH ONE of the editors over at gaming-journalism watchdog site Video Game Media Watch (www.vgmwatch.com). While outlining the ethical standards that we abide by here at the 1UP Network (which includes *EGM, Games for Windows: The Official Magazine*, 1UP.com, and more), I realized that I should just lay out everything for all our readers. It's only right....

Game companies are always trying to send us free stuff. What are we allowed to keep? We do not accept any gifts—such as video iPods, World Series tickets, cash (in the form of contest prizes)...all of which were actually offered to us at one point. But we are allowed to keep cheap, promotional items, so you'll see game posters or XXXXXXXL T-shirts around our offices. We also keep the games that the companies send us, but *EGM's* rule is to put one away for the office library copy, and the rest get evenly distributed to staffers who will actually play them (absolutely not trading them in or eBaying them for profit or gain of any sort).

We do not accept flights or hotel rooms from the publishers, either—we pay for those out of our own budgets. And even if we do fly out to see a game, we never promise any coverage. We will accept meals (say, for a business lunch or dinner), but we often pick up the tab too, to keep it fair. For example, during a recent *Grand Theft Auto IV* demo, we paid for dinner between Rockstar and us, since Rockstar paid for dinner the last time we met up.

All of this must seem pretty obnoxious to you, huh? After all, how can a magazine or website editor be totally objective if a company just flew him out to see their game? But you'd be surprised.

Help keep the industry honest. Read *VGM Watch* (we told them to keep an eye on us, too...because we have to be as accountable as everyone else), or better yet, ask your favorite magazine or website what their policies are. The more you know, the more you know whom to trust.

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief



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> THIS MONTH'S EGM EXTRAS

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BioShock
Video footage, user-submitted Q&A, and more!

Need for Speed: Pro Street
Check out exclusive footage of EA's new racer.

Spider-Man 3 and Pokémon SuperGuides
Summer games got you down? Check out these two guides to get a leg-up on the competition.



And check out our podcast on EGMLive.1UP.com and our message boards at EGMboards.1UP.com.

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FREE STYLE

STREET BASKETBALL

LETTERS

➤ violence, decapitated rhinos, and rock 'n' roll

➤ TRIVIAL ISSUE

This month's EGM question:
BioShock is the spiritual successor to what PC series?

E-mail the answer to EGM@ziffdavis.com (subject head:

Trivia: EGM #217) for a chance to win something potentially awesome.

Letter of the Month Jackassery

Staying true to form, immediately following the Virginia Tech shootings, dim-witted, hard-line gameophobe [attorney] Jack Thompson asserted that videogames in general, and *Counter-Strike* in particular, were the impetus behind Seung-Hui Cho's merciless attacks (a speculation that was soon proven dubious by testimony from Cho's former roommate).

Knee-jerk ideologues of all stripes swarm around tragedies like this one because it allows them to warp the event to further their agenda: The antigun lobby blames guns, gun nuts blame the victims' lack of guns, [antigay Kansas minister] Fred Phelps blames homosexuality, and Thompson blames Bill Gates.

What many of these simplistic, hair-trigger reactionaries forget is an ancient truism of the sciences: Correlation does not imply causation. Even if Cho played videogames constantly—violent ones, at that—to my knowledge, there is no hard evidence that doing so could or would stimulate him into acting out something in the real world that he'd experienced virtually. (I wonder—if *Cooking Mama* becomes very popular, will kids start whipping up soufflés and paella?)

Millions of people play videogames, yet the extreme majority never come close to behaving violently. That seems evidence enough to let videogames off the hook.

—Timothy R. Graham

Well put.

To each his own...but you're still wrong

I have recently bought *Castlevania Double Pack* for the GBA. I read all of the good reviews in your magazine, so I decided, "What the heck?" Overall, I was very disappointed. I was wondering if I am missing something, or is the game really a cheap *Metroid* rip-off?

—David Brubaker

Apparently, you are missing something: taste. Sure, *Metroid* served as a source of inspiration for recent *Castlevanias* (series producer Koji Igarashi even admitted as much himself), but a rip-off? You're crazy.



■ Cooking Mama says: "Remember, kids, don't try to cook in real life!"

One sad rocker

I recently purchased *Guitar Hero* and a wireless guitar. Having sold my PS2 because I got a PS3 for Christmas, I thought that after I bought an adaptor for PS2 controllers, *Guitar Hero* would work. So I plugged in the adaptor and the receiver and started the game, but it didn't work! I was confused, so I went online and saw that I had bought the wrong adaptor! I needed the Nyko Play Adapter. You said in *EGM* #213, on page 97, that you could find it in stores, but I looked on Nyko's website, and it wasn't scheduled to come out until Q2 2007! Please help!

—Name withheld

It gets worse: Nyko's Play Adapter has now been put on indefinite hold. In a statement to gaming site Kotaku, Nyko said, "Current tech-

nology makes it impossible to properly pass the special functions of the guitar controller to the PS3 with its existing protocol. We will not produce a product if it falls short of those expectations." Luckily, recent PS3 firmware updates are slowly edging toward full functionality with all PS2 controllers: As of the April update to version 1.7, the system at least recognizes the existence of the guitar when you plug it in. Hey, baby steps, right?

Believe!

I read about Zephyr in the "Moore's Law 2" article (*EGM* #214), so I researched it. The so-called "leak" about the future 360 is a five-sentence paragraph with no credibility and a Photoshopped picture of the back of a 360 with a black area where the new



For writing this month's winning letter, Timothy gets a copy of *Manhunt*. Unless we don't have one handy, in which case he gets something else.

➤ FAREWELL, FABIO

Ask an EGM cover model
After spending the last six months answering reader questions about love, life, and post-workout shakes, former EGM cover model Fabio, we figure, has done enough good. So we're sending him off with a final reader question that has long deserved an answer.

Dear Fabio: How's the hell did you wind up on the cover of *Ironword* and, consequently, *COM* 11 1/2 years ago? —Scott

Fabio responds: At that time, videogames featured mostly cartoon characters or primitive drawings. My agency was Ford Modeling Agency, and they sent me to this casting where they were choosing two people to be on the cover of a game. One was me. The other was wrestler Hulk Hogan.

Starting next month, we want to hear about your biggest gaming mistakes. Do you buy too expensive a racing chair that's now collecting dust? Did you go for a 1000-hour your priorities? Send your story and pics to EGM@ziffdavis.com. Subject: "My biggest mistake."



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■ The Xbox 360 Elite—not so mythical after all.

ports would be. It doesn't look real at all, and people are believing it to be true. I'm sorry, my poor 360 brethren, but please don't believe everything you hear. —*Khris Dickover*

Man, do we love printing letters like this. Where to begin the mocking? Should we just reply with a picture of the 360 Elite page at xbox.com? Go the sarcastic route by saying something like, "Apparently, there are folks out there with such mad Photoshop skills that they've managed to make us believe we actually have a 360 Elite in our office right now?" Or take the lowbrow approach and just make fun of this guy's name? So many options!

Don't let's start

Why do we always "press Start" at the title screen of games? Pretty much every game you play has you press Start or "press any button" to start the game. I've asked around, and nobody knows why this is. Is it a technical reason, so the game doesn't have to load more info than it has to before you start actually playing? Is it so gamers don't screw things up by accidentally hitting random buttons when they're doing who knows what? It's such a standard thing in gaming I just have to know! —*"Swinger913"*

Deep thoughts, Swinger. Deep thoughts indeed. But we actually have an answer for you: The tradition of pressing Start dates back to the dawn of arcade machines, which have what's called an "attract mode." This mode cycles segments of gameplay, the title screen, and

other information to get people interested in dropping some quarters into the machine. The tradition carried over to console games; you'll notice if you boot up pretty much any game and leave it sitting for a while, it will tend to move into a similar demo mode. Designers still include this function to avoid screen burn-in. So you press Start to interrupt the demo and get into the real game. Now someone cue the "The More You Know" music.

Sit! Roll over! Decapitate!

Why do some of the best games made have to be rated Mature? I have been looking forward to *Lair* since the second it was announced, under the hope that when it was released, it would be rated Teen. All of a sudden, my hopes were snuffed out in the form of a decapitated rhino in the latest trailer. I know the ESRB will give *Lair* a Mature rating now, but why? How is a teenager going to gain access to enough genetic technology to create a dragon, let alone teach it to rip off a rhino's head? —*John Keaney*

You may be surprised to learn that training a dragon really isn't as difficult as it sounds. All it requires is patience, some very large snack treats, a rolled-up newspaper, and asbestos underwear. And since dragons are natural-born decapitators, the whole rhino thing ends up being just the work of an afternoon. Now, teaching them to use the litter box? That's a challenge.

Scratching post

I recently received an Xbox 360 as a Christmas gift. After two weeks of owning *Oblivion*, the 360 managed to give it a deep scratch that ringed the entire disc, making it impossible to play. I had to keep playing *Oblivion*, so I bought another one. One day, the 360 told me there was an error reading the disc. To my horror, I found another ringed scratch. Please, for the love of 100-plus-hour gameplay, tell me what the heck I am doing wrong, and advise me on what to do with my scratched discs. —*Rob*

You're going to want to have that looked at, Rob. Microsoft hasn't confirmed any specific defects with the device, but widespread anecdotal evidence indicates that some 360s produced in December of 2006 were missing a part that prevents the disc from coming into contact with the lens. Check out www.xbox.com/support or call 1-800-4-MY-XBOX to see if your

system is covered. Until you get the problem fixed, make sure you keep the machine horizontal; it's slightly more stable that way and may not scratch your discs.

As for what to do with the damaged discs? You *might* be able to salvage them. *Maybe*. A company called Digital Innovations (www.digitalinnovations.com) makes a product called GameDR that actually does repair scratches to discs. We've had success in the past, but if your scratches are particularly deep, you may be out of luck; you've got a couple of lovely, shiny, \$60 coasters on your hands.

We demand convenience!

In *EGM* #215, someone in the Letters section griped about the loss of backward compatibility in the PS3. Look at the facts: Everyone and their brother/sister/mother/toaster/walrus has a PS2! If you just keep your PS2, you can play all the games without fuss! Oh, boo-hoo, you may have to change wires and AV inputs every once in a while. If people weren't so lazy, they'd realize that taking out backward compatibility will lower the price. If you're too lethargic to care, then you need to grow a brain and get off the couch. —*Chris Woodiel*

But getting up is hard.

Feel the burn

How much do you have to play to get carpal tunnel? I play about 20 to 30 hours a week. I've been playing games since I was 10, and I'm going to keep playing till I'm 80. Are my hands gonna become useless? —*Ricardo Cuellar*

This is kinda like "How manylicks does it take to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop?" We would may never know. But we assume there's a reason for all that info in the front of any game manual about taking frequent breaks and so on. Tell you what, why don't you keep playing and write back to us when you're 80? If you can still type, that is. ☹

> OOPS!

Since it might not have been obvious in last month's preview of *God of War: Chains of Olympus*, we wanted to clarify that Cory Barlog (below) is now the creative director of the *God of War* franchise as a whole. Ru Weerasuriya is the game director of *Chains of Olympus*.



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➤ FRONTIN' LINES

Lost in **BATTLE**

With shooters deploying players everywhere except Iraq and Afghanistan, we investigate why gamemakers are so afraid of real-world war By Robert Ashley

Marching orders: When you're done with this story, deploy to page 100 for Seanbaby's take on the one soldierin' series worse than real war.

MEXICO? BEEN THERE. VEGAS?

SAVED THAT. But with all the elements of realism—real firearms used by real soldiers, Humvees and tanks straight off the battlefield, official military seals of approval—trumpeted on the back of game boxes, why do most war games retreat from modern theaters of U.S. military involvement?

While much of the world is embroiled in conflict, games have largely avoided depicting this reality, setting their battles in the unlikelyst of locations. Take the Sin City setting of the latest in the Tom Clancy series *Rainbow Six*. "I think *Rainbow* is one of the most realistic games out there," says Maxime Béland, creative director of last year's *Rainbow Six*:

"Our guns are the real guns. We have their real sounds in 5.1 [surround sound]. They even reload properly." Why, then, do the game's counterterrorism squads fight not in Fallujah or Kabul, but in Las Vegas?

P-whipped

One reason, it seems, is that game developers and publishers fear the prickly and divisive politics of war.

"Politics," in the gaming industry, is a naughty word. Consider this: Last year's *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* broke with the series' usual affinity for implausible international intrigue and exotic locales by dropping famous sneak Sam Fisher into a live war zone in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, a region engulfed in a real-life civil war. You might assume this was an attempt to bring relevance

➤ **People are dying out there, and it's not fun. I don't want to make a game that reminds people of [that].**

—*Rainbow Six*: Vegas Creative Director Maxime Béland



PAGE
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Preview:
Sneaking
around



PAGE
38

Preview:
Requirement
for velocity



PAGE
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Preview:
Another
lonely night

and realism to the series. But *Double Agent* coproducer Julian Gerighty says Kinshasa was just an interesting playground for hide-and-seek. "We're creating entertainment, not a political statement," he says. "It's not meant to raise awareness of conflict in Africa. It's hard to have a political message within your game experience that people will not flat-out reject."

Nevertheless, it's also hard to make a game about war—whether all-out battlefield combat or behind-the-scenes espionage like in *Splinter Cell*—without at least accidentally commenting on the subject matter. "War is a political act by definition," says Ed Halter, professor in the department of Film and Electronic Arts at Bard College in New York and author of the book *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Video Games*. "So to say, 'We're making an apolitical view of war' is itself a political statement. It expresses the desire that you can take the politics out of war and just leave this fun experience." But that's exactly what many developers strive for. Games, more than movies or television, are dedicated to the virtues of pure, unadulterated fluff. "We're here to have fun, right?" "With *Splinter Cell*," says Gerighty, "what we've always wanted to do was create a parallel to big-budget Hollywood entertainment movies—movies that are thrilling, movies that are believable, but not necessarily out to change the world."

And like Hollywood, the gaming industry doesn't take unnecessary risks with its hard-earned money. Anything that might cause a fuss gets left on the cutting-room floor. "It takes so much money and manpower to create games now that they don't want to invest in something that might offend," says Halter. "They want that paradoxical goal that Hollywood wants: the totally original, [yet] completely predictable hit. It gravitates toward conformity because there's so much money at stake."

Bad taste

But the almighty dollar isn't the only arbiter here. Consider last year's *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* and its recent sequel, which cast an authentic war experience over a far-flung scenario: a military coup

in Mexico City. "We try to avoid situations where Americans have boots on the ground," says Christian Allen, creative director for both games and himself a former Marine and National Guardsman. "I've got [friends and] relatives in the military. There's always a concern that if you make a game portraying those situations, you might be making light of them. You don't want a kid whose dad is deployed somewhere to see this game portraying what their dad is doing and have a really negative experience."

Rainbow Six's Bédard agrees: "We don't want to be where there are actual issues right now because we don't want to have that bad-taste-in-your-mouth feeling. People are dying out there, and it's not fun. I don't want to make a game that reminds people of a friend or a brother who died. It would be a lot easier to just pick from the headlines and make a game out of it. But I think it would be tasteless."

Indeed, the few games that have tried to depict relevant conflicts have left a bad taste in the mouths of some. The *Ghost Recon* series, not always so removed from current events, once tackled a real hot spot. "In *Ghost Recon 2*, we set the game in North Korea," says Allen. "We had a lot of issues.... We pissed off the North Korean government and ended up getting banned in South Korea, which wasn't our intent." The experience helped push *GRAV* in its current, less-realistic direction. "It's partly playing it safe," he says. "But I've always seen

it as a sign of respect for our military. What they do is different. We try to present an authentic experience, but we also present the fun parts."

But in presenting only the heroic action (with infinite continues to boot), do games glamorize their subject to an audience of ripe potential recruits? "That's an old issue that goes back to way before videogames," says Ed Halter. "People were worried about this with toy soldiers and boys' literature. There's this old fear that, because children—especially boys—tend to think of war as a fun scenario to make games or play out of, that it's trivializing war. That assumption is kind of difficult with videogames, because anyone who plays games is obviously tapped into all sorts of other media. They're getting other information about war all the time. It assumes this dumb subject who plays games and does nothing else in life, so I don't really buy that."

An emotional deficit

Maybe games aren't yet equipped to deal with a subject as complex as war. It's telling that *World War II* is a hugely popular subject matter for both games and film, yet games have thus far managed only to capture the bombastic action of the genre (*Saving Private Ryan*) and none of the quiet nuance (*The Thin Red Line*).

Thomas Coles, creative director for the in-development stealth-action game *Cipher Complex*, doesn't think it's a fair comparison. "In a movie, ☐



☐ **Conflict:** *Desert Storm II* (top left) took players to the first Gulf War, and the hokey *Fugitive Hunter* (top right) had them bagging bin Laden. But most games stick with safer settings like *World War II* or even phony countries.

every split second has been carefully tailored to tweak emotions," he says. "They've done multiple takes with a professional actor. Their level of fidelity and refinement on the subtle level of storytelling is finely tuned. That's something on the game side that we're only now starting to address."

Cipher Complex is part a new crop of games that, at some level, attempts to connect to current events. "I look at the intrigue, the lies, and the stories that come out of [real war] and think, 'Holy crap! Why do we need to make up a story?'" says Coles. Beginning in northern Iraq, *Cipher Complex* centers on weapons of mass destruction stolen from the country before the U.S. invasion (so that's where they went). "We're trying to do something that's a little more socially relevant," he says. "If we're going to go through the exercise of creating a story, having it be a complete fabrication without any real relevance would be demoralizing."

Cipher also dives into the world of private military contractors—the likes of which the U.S. employs en masse in Iraq—with a critical eye. It's a hot topic, one that's worked its way into *Army of Two*, a buddy shooter due this fall. "We're not afraid to go into that subject in any way," says Reid Schneider, the game's senior producer. "We want to expose people to the idea that these companies are out there. [U.S. Vice President] Dick Cheney is a former CEO of Halliburton [and a current stockholder], and you know there's a reason the U.S. government is putting hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of contracts into Halliburton. If *Army of Two* causes people to do some digging about the world of private military corporations and how large a role mercenaries are playing in the global conflicts of today, then I think that's pretty cool." *Army of Two* has levels in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Schneider talks tough and outspoken about making a game relevant to world events—but like everyone else, he's quick with a political disclaimer: "Our goal with *Army of Two* isn't to make a strong political statement."

From arcade to Abu Ghraib

The best example of an upcoming game that deals with real life and real war also happens to feature...an alien invasion. Go figure. *BlackSite: Area 51* is a direct descendant of the garish old arcade shooter *Area 51*, now found lurking in dingy corners of disused bars and laundromats. But the sequel



■ Stronger than fiction: Despite their alien-invasion and stealthy-kill trappings, *BlackSite: Area 51* and *Cipher Complex* deal with Abu Ghraib-style prisons and Iraq's WMDs—topics that more realistic games retreat from.

is a radical departure. Named for secret overseas CIA prisons currently operated for the purposes of, let's say, "rough interrogation" in the War on Terror, *BlackSite* is set partially in Iraq and directed by a guy who says things like this: "[*BlackSite*] is kind of an allegory for jihad. You say that in a meeting, and all the marketing people get really uncomfortable." Meet Harvey Smith, creative director.

Dealt the unenviable task of breathing life into an old franchise, Smith searched for ways to make the game relevant. "It was always a struggle for me to get motivated," he says. "So I began asking, 'What are we afraid of today?' We're afraid someone might drag us into a secret facility with no oversight, strip us of our citizenship—even our basic human dignity—and do horrible things to us." Smith doesn't blink at the mention

of politics but says that *BlackSite* will strive to leave the experience open to interpretation. "I don't want to force [my personal politics] down anyone's throat. We won't come to any conclusions for you."

A 14-year game-industry vet, Smith has seen firsthand the reaction to ideas that venture outside the world of fluff. "I know a lot of people," he says, "and a lot of them have trouble. They just get shut down, or they're told: 'No, no, no.... You're going to be working on *Transformers* instead.'"

Until gamers demand more, *Transformers* is what we'll get. Or maybe not. Activision's just-announced *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* looks to have a few of its missions set in the Middle East. If players respond favorably, more war games could join it at the front lines, leaving Siegfried and Roy to fend for themselves. 🐼

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

David Jaffe's canned *Heartland* would have been the most politically charged game ever

It was to have America standing in as the occupied Iraq and commanding officers ordering players to slaughter innocents (you could pull the trigger if you wanted). So is really a surprise that *Heartland*—a PSP game from God of War creator David Jaffe—got nuked in development? But Jaffe, a liberal who wanted *Heartland* to haul on heartstrings and make a statement about America's involvement in the Middle East, insists that he gave his game the heave-ho because he didn't have the resources and time to do it justice. *Heartland*'s cancellation, he says, had nothing to do with its politically potent content. "There was certainly awareness that, if this thing kept going, we were going to have to convince a lot of people up the chain of command at Sony that this was a good idea," he tells us, "but Sony's always been great at believing in our products...as artistic endeavors."

Still, we've got to wonder if Sony would've believed in a game with scenes like this: "There were these sequences where you would find a room in the underground headquarters of the resistance," Jaffe says, "and there was this video camera and a blood spot on the wall. It wasn't until you chose during gameplay to go up and put your eye up to the viewfinder and watch what was on the videotape that you realized the Americans had captured a Chinese soldier and had beheaded him. It was very much like what [is] happening in Iraq."



The background of the text is a dark, atmospheric scene. In the upper half, a character is partially visible in deep shadow, holding a sword. The lower half of the image is dominated by a bright, ethereal mist or smoke that rises from the bottom, creating a sense of depth and mystery. The overall color palette is dark with high contrast between the shadows and the bright foreground.

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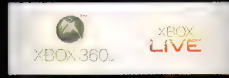
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> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS AND INFO

Splinter Cell: CONVICTION

Reinventing Sam Fisher (no, for real this time) *By Steve*

Platform:
XB360

Publisher:
Ubisoft

Developer:
Ubisoft Montreal

Release date:
December 2007

THE FAMILIAR SLEEK BLACK CATSUIT and all-purpose vision headgear (with the famous, iconic three glowing green circles) were nowhere to be seen, replaced by a Creamsicle-orange prison jumpsuit and 5 o'clock (plus overtime) shadow—Sam Fisher seemed to be in for a franchise reinvention. After all, you don't show our favorite government secret agent in a mug shot unless you're planning on flipping the script inside out. But *Splinter*

Cell: Double Agent didn't deliver on that unspoken promise. Sure, Fisher spent some time in jail in that fourth chapter of the stealthy series, but it was only for one half-baked level (as a "prisoner," he still had some of his high-tech gadgets, for chrissakes).

So *Double Agent*, despite still being a great game, ended up being more of the same: more hiding in the dark, more climbing up pipes, and more sneaking up on no-do-gooders from behind and putting them down for an extended naptime.

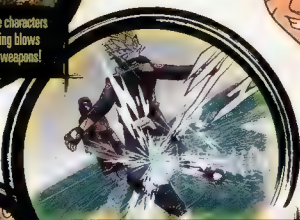
> **For the first time since the original, we're changing the core mechanics.**

—Conviction Senior Producer Mathieu Forland

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SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION (cont.)

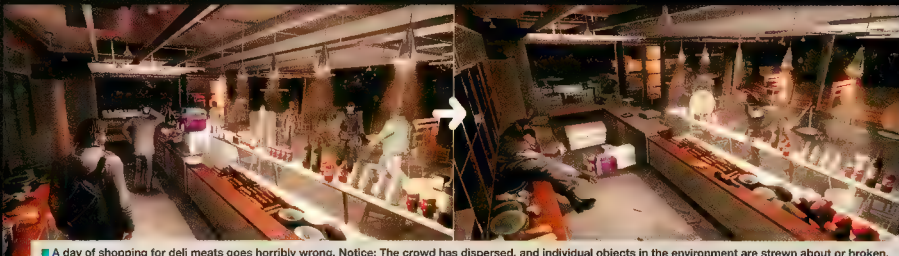
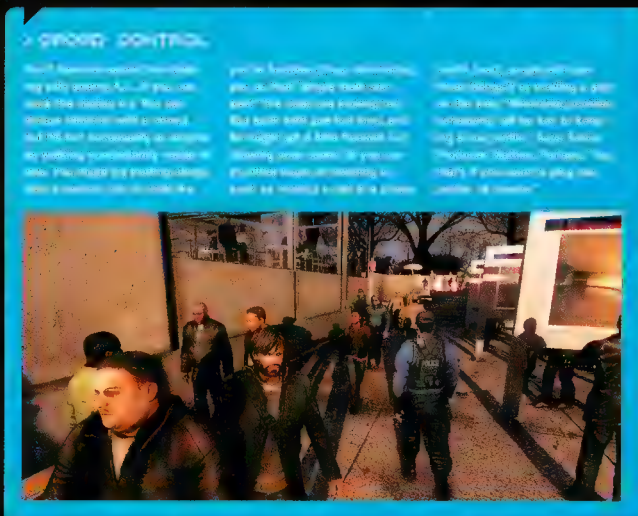
Conviction, however, is running with the idea of a “franchise reinvention” so fast that you may not even recognize it as a *Splinter Cell* game. Let’s look at this new game from the developer’s perspective and from a gameplay point of view...then we’ll let you know what we think.

The developers say:

“We realized that with the previous *Splinter Cells*...there was a lack of emotional attachment with the characters,” says Senior Producer Mathieu Ferland. “You were given orders, you were told what to do—it was a very cool experience, but this has created a lack of differentiation between each game. We thought that the gameplay was a bit repetitive over time. We decided to change, to renew the brand. For the first time since the original *Splinter Cell*, we’re changing the core mechanics, the core gameplay.”

But from a fiction point of view, you can’t just muck up the gameplay without good reason. Otherwise, it’ll seem forced—or, perhaps, feel like a whole new, different game. “The high-level story after *Double Agent*,” says Ferland, “is two years have passed, and there’s something that goes wrong with an old friend of Sam’s, and he decides to go back to Third Echelon [*Splinter Cell*’s top-secret arm of the National Security Agency]. He discovers that everything is dysfunctional—it’s not working as it used to—and at some point, Sam will have to do something that will be perceived as very bad, even if it’s not. So he’ll turn to a fugitive, and he’ll be hunted by those who have been betraying him for all these years. At some point, Sam will discover who’s chasing him and why—and at this point, he will reverse the situation and be the predator and not the prey.”

Well, maybe it is, for all intents



■ A day of shopping for deli meats goes horribly wrong. Notice: The crowd has dispersed, and individual objects in the environment are strewn about or broken.



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and purposes, a whole new game: "As a fugitive, Sam is losing all this 'comfort,'" says Ferland. "He has to find new ways of mastering this new situation by himself, to find new gadgets, find new contacts and such. He's always on his toes, watching his back. This is a major difference from previous *Splinter Cells*, where you could wait in the dark forever and be in a safe zone. Now, you need to move—you need to be more reactive to the environment."

To demonstrate what they're shooting for, the developers showed us a mashup video containing various clips they use as inspiration for *Conviction's* development: *The Bourne Identity*, *Die Hard*, *The Fugitive*, *24*...pretty good source material, if you ask us.

The gameplay says:

So how does all that translate into something you can play with a controller? (Right now, *Conviction* is an exclusive deal for the 360 and PC; no plans for a Wii or PS3 version.) The developers show us some demonstration target and tech-demo videos of how the gameplay will work:

We see Fisher in civilian clothing in a restaurant's restroom, with a police officer behind him yelling for him to put his hands on his head. As the cop tries to cuff Fisher's raised arms, Fisher pulls a Jason Bourne and deftly flips around and disarms his would-be captor. A short *Casino Royale*-style bathroom brawl ensues with stall doors, mirrors, and sinks meeting the policeman's head at some point, eventually knocking him out. Fisher takes the cuffs, pistol, and radio and leaves the bathroom.

Outside, he notices another cop walking toward him, so he quickly pushes another door open to draw attention to it; then hides underneath a table. Then, as the cop walks past the hiding spot to check out the open door (which leads to a descending stairwell), Fisher sneaks up behind him, cuffs his right wrist



■ Grab a chair and swing it, throw it, do-si-do with it, or toss it behind yourself to slow down pursuers.

THE MULTIPLAYER GROWD

The excellent spies vs. mercenaries multiplayer game from *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* got more hardcore in *Chaos Theory*, and now goes completely. We're awfully sad to see it go, but the game of guns vs. gadgets and force vs. stealth doesn't really fit in *Conviction's* world. "We are going to use as much as possible from what was developed for the single-player

experience," says Ferland. "We always felt that the discrepancy in terms of controls and gameplay between the single and multi in previous *Splinter Cells* was a strength for some and a problem for others."

"We're not sure we know," *Conviction's* multiplayer will work," but Ferland hints. "All we can say for now is that *Conviction* will have an online crowd, and players will be

stressed as crowd members." I am pretty sure you are left where this could lead us—gamers should prepare some paranoia pills.

Will we witness a return to the spies vs. mercenaries game play? "If we realize someday that there is still a lot of fun in creating classic light-and-shadow stealth and its multiplayer format," we said (revisited), says Ferland.



■ Messy tables apparently make for good cover...but watch out—enemies are smart enough to use furniture to their advantage, too.

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❖ [Sam] has to find new ways of mastering this new situation by himself, to find new gadgets, find new contacts and such.

—Conviction Senior Producer Mathieu Ferland

to the handrail, slams his hand down to make him let go of his gun, then pushes him down the stairs, knocking him out. Fisher charges through another door to tackle yet another officer to the floor, then gives him a lights-out with a right hook. Before more policemen can join the fray, Fisher pushes a heavy serving station in front of a doorway to block entry.

Fisher then exits the restaurant and is in the middle of a busy street market. Civilians and merchant tents keep him obscured from the half-dozen armed cops looking for him. He's surrounded, but he finds a quiet area where he pulls out the pistol he swiped earlier and fires a couple of harmless shots into some boxes, just to spook the shoppers—and more specifically, to get a hot dog vendor to run away from his stand. Fisher then shoots at the hot dog cart's propane tanks, causing an explosion that disperses the crowd. As people scream and run away, Fisher pulls his hoodie up over his head and blends in with the chaos, escaping capture.

Even though everything we just described came from a pre-rendered, scripted video, it's supposed to represent *Conviction's* gameplay, which is to be completely *unscripted*. The fights, the cops looking for clues (and checking out the opened doorway), the civilian reactions, blending in with the crowd...everything will happen on the fly, according to what the player's doing at the moment and how the artificial intelligence (both enemy and neutral) is evaluating the situation and

surroundings. It's a very different formula from past *Splinter Cells*—it's no longer about hiding in the dark and sneaking past (or up to and knocking out) guards. Now, you're in real-life civilian situations—and wits, not gadgets and guns, will get you out of trouble.

We say:

Let's face it: Most *Tom Clancy* games aren't known for their brainy A.I., so this leaves us a little skeptical about how well *Conviction* will come together. After all, the game's all about improvising in realistic situations, and that realism will only be there if all non-player characters (NPCs) are behaving...well, realistically. But if that A.I. performs like the developers promise, and the NPCs are more human than robotic, then damn, this could be one incredible game. The paranoia of being a fugitive with no one to back you up, having to think on your feet the whole time, a world that reacts to what you're doing—on paper, *Conviction* sounds amazing. Unless everything we've seen so far is only a small, insignificant part of the game as a whole (see again: the prison stuff from *Double Agent*), this really is a radically different style for the series. That's fine by us—we were kinda itching to get out of Fisher's supertight black suit and try something new anyway. ✎

For more gameplay info and video footage of *Splinter Cell: Conviction*, set your browser to EGM.1UP.com.

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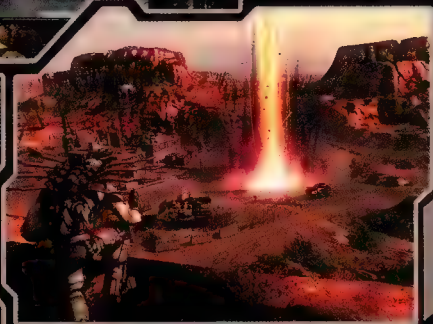


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New content cracking down

Crackdown is shallow, sure, but the game is still full of fun...especially now that Microsoft released new downloads for the game. The cool content is mighty meaty, too—half of it is free and the rest will set you back 800 points (\$10). While the peniless offerings are nice, obviously all the awesome stuff is packed into the premium content: new weapons, vehicles, achievements, and game types.

> PLAYING FAVORITES

Boss battle: God of War 2

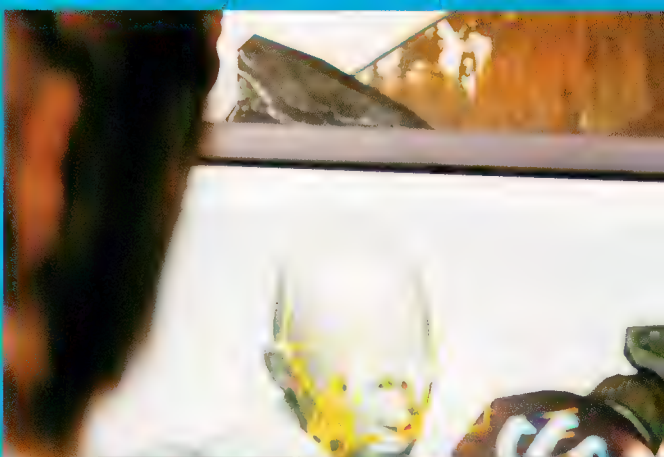
When it comes to bosses, *God of War II* is tough to beat. And since this epic sequel is packed with 'em, we asked *GOW2* director Cory Barlog and an *EGM* reader we solicited on our message boards to tell us which fantasy freak is the most fun to fight.

Cory Barlog: "God, this is a tough question. I want to go with the standard Colossus answer, 'cause that boss fight was such a pain in the ass to put together...but that is the expected answer. With that in mind, I would have to say Euryale, the sister of Medusa, because she is one seriously scary chick. A very tense and exciting fight that has a great payoff."



EGM Reader Cory Grad:

"The series of fights between the two Sisters of Fate. The pace was incredible, as you swing back and forth like a barbaric George of the Jungle—to only then go backward in time to make sure you don't lose the last boss fight of the first game. That's like a new scale of epicness."



> TAKE THIS JOB

Animation Director

Our monthly look at the jobs you want
By Evan Shamoon

Who wants this job?
Animators

Location:
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Education:
High school

What's an animation director?

He or she oversees all the animation created for a game and makes sure it fits the overall vision. This is a high-level position that involves a lot of communication with the creative team and the artists. The director is responsible for ensuring that the animation is of the highest quality and that it fits the overall vision of the game. They also work with the artists to ensure that the animation is of the highest quality and that it fits the overall vision of the game.

Job title

Animation director

Animators are responsible for creating the animation for a game. They work with the director to ensure that the animation is of the highest quality and that it fits the overall vision of the game. They also work with the artists to ensure that the animation is of the highest quality and that it fits the overall vision of the game.

Crusher: Typical day

Starts by reviewing the animation for the day. Then they work with the artists to ensure that the animation is of the highest quality and that it fits the overall vision of the game. They also work with the director to ensure that the animation is of the highest quality and that it fits the overall vision of the game.



5 Lives: David Jaffe

Chaining down *God of War* creator David Jaffe for a chat is a cinch this month; the loudmouthed industry vet recently put the finishing touches on his first PS3 downloadable title, *Calling All Cars*. So since the former *Twisted Metal* director is pimping his new ride, we took the time to grill him with our five random questions.


1. What current emo band has a song entitled "Calling All Cars"?

David Jaffe: I have no f***ing clue. I don't listen to emo bands....

EGM: The answer is Senses Fail.

DJ: OK, great. Should I care that I don't care?


EGM: Nope.

Lives remaining: 

2. Put these levels from your first game, *Mickey Mania* (SNES/Genesis), in the correct order: Mickey and the Beanstalk, Moose Hunters, and Steamboat Willie.

DJ: Well, Steamboat Willie was the first one. Moose Hunters was next, and then Mickey and the Beanstalk.

EGM: Correct.


Lives remaining: 

3. What's the name of the WWE car-combat game that ripped off *Twisted Metal*?

DJ: Right, I know this one...*Rush Hour*?

EGM: Incorrect. It's *Crush Hour*.

DJ: You know what? It's actually C for "crap," then *Rush Hour*.

Lives remaining: 

4. On your blog you've said you dig Kevin Smith's talks...so what did a producer force Smith to put in his axed *Superman* script?

DJ: A spider.


EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining: 

5. So Kratos is the god of war, but who is the god of love?

DJ: [Former *EGM* Editor-in-Chief] Ed Semrad. The magazine really hasn't been the same since Ed left, and I think he really brought the love to *EGM*, and [current *EGM* EIC] Shoe has just ripped the heart and the love out of the magazine [laughs]. That's a joke, I'm not really serious.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining: 

Game Over: Glad you did well, Jaffe. 'Cause we were afraid of what you'd say if we'd called you an idiot.

...telling said they're all in the same
age. "The biggest thing with the
AI programming is not," he says.
"Active animation and AI. It's not
"Coming Together..."

How'd he get the gig?

"I was interning," says "Graham,"
saying, "I was at [Red Bull] I had
...and [Red Bull] to it." And then

...solutions. And I always wanted
to get into games." He described an
...ment of Digital Illusions, which
...with [Red Bull] a founder, and
by the time he got hired had a job
offer waiting some time. "I got
...and [Red Bull] a [Red Bull]
...and [Red Bull] a [Red Bull]." He
...[Red Bull] "OK I had to [Red Bull] that I
...and [Red Bull] the game [Red Bull]." *

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Work
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THE BIG ONES

Updating you today on tomorrow's heavy hitters



Super Smash Bros. Brawl

Wii • Nintendo • Fall 2007

Rumors continue to circulate that Nintendo's four-way fighter won't make it out this year. But if you ask Hideo Kojima, *Brawl* is ready to go right now. The *Metal Gear* series creator recently had a chance to play it (remember, *Metal Gear*'s Solid Snake makes an appearance in this one), and according to Kojima Productions' podcast host Ryan Payton, Kojima said, "The game already feels very complete and very fun. [Nintendo could] probably put it out now and sell millions of copies."



Resident Evil 5

PS3/XB360 • Capcom • 2008

Looking at *Resident Evil 4* on the Wii (peep our review on pg. 82) reminds us how far the series' graphics have come. Better days are ahead, though, as our insiders tell us that the visual leap from *RE4* to *RE5* will just as big as what we saw from *RE0* to *RE4*. Now that's hot.

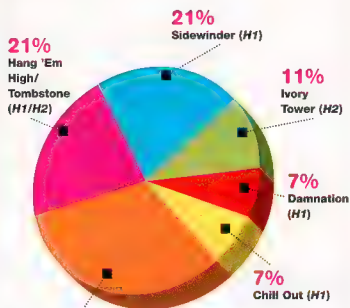
Halo 3

XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios • Fall 2007

Some leaked beta footage revealed that the multiplayer map Zanzibar (from *Halo 2*) will find its way into *Halo 3*. And since we're sure that won't be the only one, we asked *EGM* readers what other maps they want to see make the move.

> EGM MESSAGE-BOARD POLL

Which multiplayer maps from *Halo 1* and *2* would you like to see remade for *Halo 3*?



Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

PS3 • Konami • Fall 2007

The *MGS4* dev team may have their heads down cranking away on this game, but David Hayter—who provides the voice of Snake—already has a few ideas for the plot of No. 5. "You'd see the son, Solid Snake, dealing with things in the future," he explained on the Kojima Productions podcast, "while Naked Snake is dealing with things in the past. [The game would then] parallel the two." Hmm, doesn't sound half bad, Snake....

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> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

Need for Speed: PRO STREET

EA (finally) chooses a new racing line *By John Dawson*

Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
EA Games

Developer:
EA Black Box

Release Date:
Late 2007

THE NEED FOR SPEED SERIES is one of the most successful in EA's stable, behind unstoppable forces like *Madden* and *The Sims*. With four games released in four years, no one is more aware of the potential for franchise fatigue than the development team at EA Black Box in Vancouver. Rather than unleash yet another pink-lit street racing vari-

ant, Senior Producer Mike Mann and Producer John Doyle have set about redefining the game and sending it off in a new direction. The result? "It's all about authentic street racing," Mann declares. "*The Fast and the Furious* vibe is dated, and the culture has matured. *Pro Street* is a reflection of that."

The game is headed for release at

the end of this year, and EGM was lucky enough to get the first look at it in action. It's truly a next-gen racer, and the images you see here are "visual target" screens using the game's engine and are indicative of what the team is striving for on the PS3 and Xbox 360. A Wii version is also coming, but it'll obviously look and play quite differently.

Customization counts

Like *Need for Speed: Carbon*, *Pro Street* offers a lot of customization options, including the remarkably full-featured Autosculpt widget that lets you mold body panels pretty much any way you'd like. Whereas in *Carbon* this was purely a cosmetic function, in *Pro Street* every tweak you make affects the physics model (and consequently the performance) of the car, and an in-game wind-tunnel mechanic highlights this for you. Unlike in recent *Need for Speeds*, you don't have to make your car ugly just to score points; what's more important is tweaking its performance.



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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Intense Violence
Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Use of Drugs

* Wii to PlayStation: Nintendo is rated E. Content users: Nintendo uses the ESRB rating system.
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* For the PSP® system, Scarface: Money Power Respect.

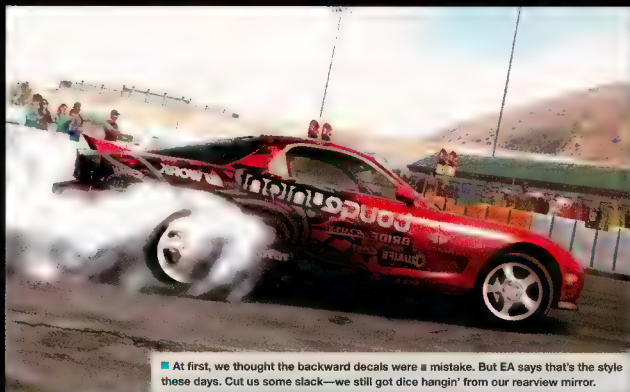


A change of venues

Street racing is no longer the illicit culture glamorized by *Most Wanted* and *Underground*, and *Pro Street* reflects this by focusing on "race weekends" at tracks and closed courses around the world. This screen shows the way that the Infineon circuit in Sonoma County, California should look in the final game, where it will host speed, grip, drift, and drag racing challenges.

Burning rubber

Senior Producer Mike Mann is keen to stress that the dirt and grime of racing is an important part of the vibe that hasn't been adequately conveyed in any games before. "Something you don't realize from just playing games is how much smoke there is," he tells us. *Pro Street* will go a long way to rectify this by rendering (via some clever tricks hardly anyone outside of game development understands) life-like clouds of noxious tire and exhaust fumes. The result is something that looks remarkably realistic, and not like the painted-on effects we've seen in games like *Project Gotham Racing* or *Gran Turismo*. This stuff dissipates just like the real thing.



At first, we thought the backward decals were a mistake. But EA says that's the style these days. Cut us some slack—we still got dice hangin' from our rearview mirror.



What a wreck

We're starting to see damage handled in more and more realistic ways in today's racing games, but *Pro Street* is the most convincing we've seen yet. Rather than make graphics simply change when you crunch into something, the Black Box team has built a physics-based procedural damage system, which means that cars scrape and crumple based on what they were hit by and with what force. Clip another car on a corner and see a body panel dent or become detached. Whack something really hard and the body will deform just like it should.

In the middle of June, head to www.1UP.com for more exclusive info and the first gameplay footage of *Need for Speed: Pro Street*.

IN ANY OTHER GAME, THIS MIGHT ACTUALLY HELP YOU.

When death can come from anywhere, it can make even the most unflappable near-future warrior a little jumpy. In *Shadowrun*, good brains matter as much as good aim as you ditch the usual run-and-gun to outwit and outgun your enemies. You're a deadly combination of firepower and mystic powers as you teleport, see through walls, and even turn to smoke to out the bad guys in a state of permanent relaxation. The bad news? Your enemies can, too. Better keep your eyes open.



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shadowrun.com

Games for Windows LIVE

XBOX 360 LIVE



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Suggestive Themes



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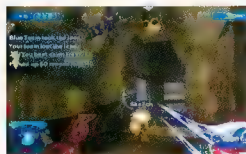
LOL: WWE Superstar Challenge 2007

EGM's own Michael Donahoe interviews WWE superstars, with hilarious results (that even non-wrestling fans can appreciate).



ZOMG: Left 4 Dead on The 1UP Show

First hands-on with *Left 4 Dead*, the 28 *Days Later*-esque zombie game that's about to top your most-anticipated list.



PWN: Bungie/1UP Halo 2 Grudge Match 3

Epic Oddball battle decides Bungie vs. 1UP/EGM *Halo* Humpday Challenge rematch. Bungie claims it was "practice." Wrong.



LTPP: Late To The Party Episode 1

First installment of 1UP's new show revisits gems you may have missed like *Final Fantasy XII*, *Kororimpa*, and *The Lord of the Rings: BFME2*.



> ONLINE SCENE

Tapping the classics

Free play is now, well, free

By Michael Donahoe



Lara is all about the remakes—here is a pic of Croft's new animated look.


NEW GAMES ARE NICE...if you've got the dough to throw down on 'em. But if you're broke (and don't mind oldies), a better deal is currently playing on a PC near you—online game service GameTap (www.gametap.com) now offers a selection of titles for the low, low price of nada (expect around 30 games ranging from *Metal Slug* to *Joust*). Hold up! Not everything's free, but at least it's opening up some of its massive library to penny-pinchers who don't want to go the monthly subscription route. But it's not just games shedding the green—GameTap TV original programming will also be available for free.

This is especially nice considering the cool new content the service is cooking up. Along with typical hohum interviews with popular celebrities, GameTap is also spearheading a sweet new series entitled *ReVisioned* that takes classic characters and has comic book artists/writers "reenvision" them into animated shorts. Lara Croft is

the first icon to get the makeover treatment—the cave-raiding cutie is set to debut in her first episode July 3. Along with the new cartoon, GameTap TV is also running a documentary on the *Tomb Raider* series that will feature all the former Lara Croft models (pictured above).

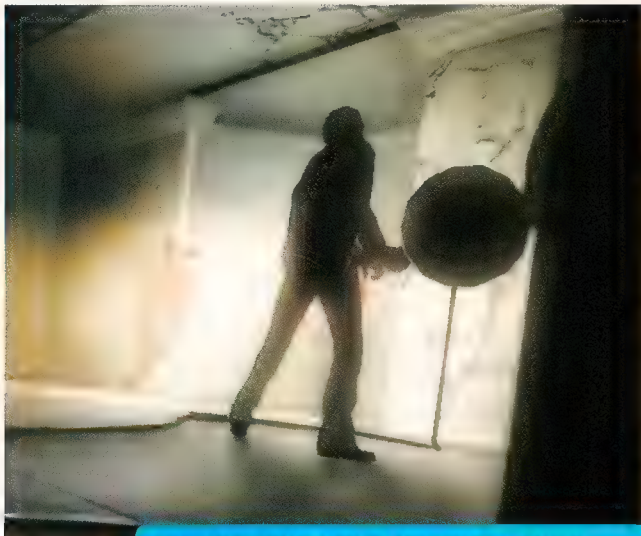
GameTap hopes that offering this free content will entice gamers into getting a subscription. Doing so ain't that bad of a deal—you'll not only get access to over 850 games, but you'll also get some exclusive content from Cartoon Network/Adult Swim. OK, this programming isn't that exciting, but \$83.40 for a year (which comes out to a meager \$6.95 a month) or \$9.95 month-to-month isn't that bad when you factor in all the games and content you're getting. Plus, now that the Sega Saturn has been added to the already staggering pile of systems, nearly every modern console is represented. And hey, it's a better deal than blowing \$5 on a simple port of Soccer (NES) on the Virtual Console.

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Last year, a former Russian spy was allegedly murdered using Polonium-210. This radioactive chemical is also found in cigarette smoke, a fact at least one tobacco company was aware of in 1964.

truth



A REVOLUTIONARY EXPERIMENTAL GAME

ALONE IN THE DARK

Not just another walk in the park By Bryan Intihar



Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
Atari

Developer:
Eden Games

Release Date:
Winter 2007

DUSTY OLD MANSIONS, fog-filled towns, insane asylums—been there, not so scared of that anymore. The repetitive nature of survival-horror settings is killing the fright factor in videogames, which is why we're looking forward to *Alone in the Dark's* unexpected backdrop: New York City's Central Park. Even the Big Apple's craziest kooks are afraid of the spots that lie within its 843 acres, especially when night falls. And after recently learning more about the game (which is a series reboot), we can say the locale isn't the only surprise in store.

It's episodic: While so many games look to the silver screen for inspiration (and pale in comparison), *AITD's* structure takes a page from hit TV series like *Lost* and *24*. Each level will essentially act as an episode (the disc will contain around 11, each consisting of 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes of gameplay), complete with plot twists and cliff-hangers. Oh, and you know those times where you put a game down for a while, only to come back and totally blank on what

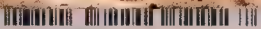
happened previously or what you're supposed to do next? That won't be a problem here. "A 'coming next' trailer plays when you leave the game at the end of the episode to tease you into wanting more," says Producer Nour Polloni of developer Eden Games. "Then, the previous trailer plays when you come back to help you get back into the story." Also, Eden isn't ruling out offering additional episodes (via download) after the game ships.

It's hot: As you guide Edward Carnby (yes, the same paranormal investigator from the 1992 original) through Central Park, it'll be important to bring out his inner pyromaniac. And whether you're torching stacked-up furniture, wooden roofs, or the game's evil forces, "fire will behave as it does in real life," says Polloni. "It'll propagate in real time across flammable surfaces and objects, moving at different speeds depending on the material."

It's got an olfactory bulb: "Enemies can detect you with a full range of senses—including, of course, sight

and sound, but also smell," says Polloni. This unique characteristic (at least for game A.I.) does give *AITD's* fuglies a leg up when hunting you down, but you'll find instances where you can actually turn it against them. "This lets you actually bait enemies," says Polloni, "with blood trails or a cadaver, which can prove to be very useful."

It's got air-conditioning: Even though most of your time will be spent on foot, you can also hop into vehicles to get around NYC's sprawling recreation area. These aren't the typical videogame rides, though—*AITD's* cars come fully loaded with working radios, heat, and AC. More importantly, these features will factor into gameplay. "You won't be turning on the radio for hits of yesteryear," says Polloni. "You'll be picking up distress calls, for example, which can give you useful information like meeting points for survivors. And if it's a cool night in New York City, the heater could come in handy getting that frost off the vehicle's windshield." 🚗



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Post-it Pro: Ian Rickard

Sure, anyone can piece together some pixel art, but in order for it to stick out, you gotta have some talent. Well, UC Santa Cruz game-design major Ian Rickard and a group of fellow students definitely made an inviting portrait—the talented team recreated the first level of the NES classic *Donkey Kong* on the windows of a campus building using only Post-it notes. We recently had a chance to speak with Rickard to see what's next on his pixel plate.

EGM: So why'd you go ape for *Donkey Kong*?

Ian Rickard: Two years ago, some other students organized a Mario-themed portrait. One of the big elements of the selection of Mario was [Mario creator] Shigeru Miyamoto and his influence on games and his inspiration to many of today's engineering students.

EGM: OK, so now that *Donkey Kong's* done, what's next?

IR: We're probably going to be doing *Duck Hunt* (NES) in the fall. And *Zelda* (NES) next spring.

EGM: What? Nothing ambitious like Master Chief saving the world from an onslaught of Covenant?

IR: No, no. We pretty much have to stay with games from the '80s. A single sprite from anything newer would fill up all four floors.

EGM: Guess we gotta wait for the next-gen Post-its, eh?

IR: Something like that, yeah! The 16-bit Post-its.



> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS AND INFO

No More HEROES

Heroically defying expectations

By Shane Bettenhausen

Platform: Wii

Publisher: TBA

Developer: Grasshopper Manufacture

Release Date: Fall 2007

GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE'S upcoming adventure *No More Heroes* clearly stands apart from the rest of its third-party Wii brethren, and not just because it's neither a spazzy minigame collection nor a last-gen port with tacked-on motion control. Rather, *No More Heroes* differentiates itself by being phenomenally weird...let's just hope it's a good weird. This surreal offering blends open-ended, *Grand Theft Auto*-style missions, frantic Wii-mote swordplay, and bizarre, postmodern

humor in distinctive visual trappings that bear a strong resemblance to Grasshopper's divisive cult classic, *Killer 7* (PS2/GC).

We're still a bit foggy on precisely how all these disparate elements will come together in the final product, so we're going straight to the source—enigmatic *No More Heroes* Director Goichi Suda—for assistance. While he doesn't exactly reveal the true nature of the gameplay, Suda adamantly explains precisely what his new game *isn't*.

> IT'S NOT JUST ANOTHER WII MINIGAME COLLECTION

No More Heroes stands out among Wii releases by being...well, a real game. In a sea of insubstantial minigame collections, a meaty single-player adventure seems positively ambitious. It's no accident, and Suda has no shortage of opinions on the state of Wii software. "Let me tell you one thing," he insists. "I'm not looking to other developers' Wii titles as reference points during the creation of *No More Heroes*...I think a lot of developers are preparing original software on Wii presently, but at least in Japan, you can't deny the fact that developers are planting the soil on this new platform with unoriginal and entirely boring game concepts."

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IT'S NOT KILLER 7 ALL OVER AGAIN

Although we had plenty of respect for *Killer 7*'s wildly creative storyline, its complex web of politics, religion, and insanity left most players thoroughly lost without a clue. "The story of *No More Heroes* proudly represents the antithesis of *Killer 7*'s," Suda explains. "It's a story of the maturation of a young man, so the narrative should be more understandable for players." So, rather than juggling seven characters, each representing aspects of the protagonist's fractured psyche, here you only have to wrap your head around one hero, the amusingly named Travis Touchdown.



Travis begins the game as an affable everyman who lucks into a killer find via an Internet auction site—his very own beam katana (think lightsaber). Armed with this new weapon, he accepts a gig as a hit man...and later finds himself caught up in an international assassination competition against the world's finest killers. Sound preposterous? Maybe not—perhaps this is a primal fantasy that Suda knows gamers will relate to. "He's actually a huge manga, anime, and hardcore fighting otaku [fanboy]," says Suda of his new hero. "Travis figures that if he's going to turn his hobbies into something practical, he's going to become a hired killer."

No More Heroes also diverges from *Killer 7* in terms of structure and gameplay: That game's simple, linear stages and ill-advised "on-rails" controls have wisely been bulldozed, replaced by a wide-open world where you can travel and fight with no restrictions. The fictional city of Santa Destroy, CA provides a suitably quirky backdrop to the action and, thankfully, you're not limited to hoofing it around this sprawling metropolis. "Players will need to use Travis' bike, the Schpal Tiger, to ride from location to location within Santa Destroy," says Suda. "While he's in transit, I don't expect Travis to encounter enemies, but there might be set instances where there will be on-bike battles."



Travis heads to Mexico for some gray market Cialis and the donkey show.

IT'S NOT RED STEEL ALL OVER AGAIN

Since most of *No More Heroes*'s combat involves slicing up fools with Travis' beam katana, prepare to wield your Wii Remote for some serious swordplay. But, as Ubisoft's *Red Steel* taught us, virtual sword fighting can feel awfully haphazard and imprecise. Luckily, Suda appears to be fully aware of this potential pitfall. "If you're going to make a katana-based game, you're going to run into a lot of problems unless you adopt an advanced camera system," he says. The game's dynamic camera makes it easy to determine how to best strike your opponent—the precise motion you make with the Wii Remote isn't actually that crucial, but the height and angle of your attack are. Expect to encounter a bit of a learning curve, but skilled players will soon be able to dismember and decapitate foes, and even mix in a few wrestling-inspired finishing moves (like a skull-crushing suplex) using the Nunchuk. Overall, it's a far more brutal, visceral approach to sword combat than we've seen in the past. "The Wii is an entirely new device and requires a completely new approach to game design," says Suda. "You can't take your past experiences into a Wii game and pray they work just as well as before."





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RUMOR MILL

This is scuttlebuttttt!!! By Quartermann

The PS3 is pretty similar to the Xbox 360 except for its (boring) Achievements. Not for long, though—the PS3 will soon incorporate the gametrophies with its online service, back to our emerald-based base game when they were still the “achievements.”

It's not a rumor, it's a fact.

USUALLY AROUND THIS TIME OF YEAR, I'm digging through mountains of dirt thanks to all the fantasizing idiots I uncover at the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3). Not this year, though! No, no. Because the formerly massive gaming convention is a little later this summer, I'm sadly forced to delay my anticipated rumor feast. So my stomach may be starved for scuttlebutt right now, but don't worry 'bout it! Q-Man—next month, I'll digest all the juicy details for you! Until then, let these rumors fill ya up.

360 minute abs

It doesn't take an eaglehead to realize epic Spartan flick *300* is the perfect thing to crack on consoles. Hell, movie critics said the film looks like a videogame. So, uh, now come nothing ever came out besides the shoddy PSP game? Stupidly likely, but at least someone out there isn't completely brain-dead—I hear a new publisher is preppin' a 360 game for the PS3 and Xbox 360.

PS3 getting a good rap

Before wannabe rockers banged their brains out to *Guitar Hero*, music

titles like *PaRappa the Rapper* got gamers groovin' in a more simplistic fashion, pushing buttons to the beat of the music. Simple? Yeah. Addictive? Oh yeah. Sony lets their rapping pup out again this July when they release the original *PaRappa the Rapper* for the PSP, but it looks like the PS3 is getting thrown a bone, too. My Sony spies tell me I gotta believe *PaRappa the Rapper 3* for the PS3 is real.

Haunted hill

Publisher Konami wants to keep the sequel talk for their spooky survival horror series. *Silent Hill*, quiet, but the Q is hearing all sorts of scary details. Like, get this: *Silent Hill 5* is

coming to the PS3 and 360 next year! OK, that's not too frightening...but this is! The Japanese team responsible for the series is handing the reins over to a new Yankee development team.

Rockin' sequels

Right now, *Grand Theft Auto 4* is (rightfully) stealing all of publisher Rockstar's attention, but I caught wind of other sequels coming from the controversial gaming superstars. How many games? Three—expect to hear official announcements about a new *Midnight Club* (duh!), *Bully* (yay!), and *Red Dead Revolver* (uh?) sometime very soon...maybe even sooner than you think. ☹

Q-TIPS

- 1 Monster publisher EA is sure as greedy—I hear it's looking to snatch up the MLB and NBA licenses for complementary current NFL exclusivity.
- 2 Nintendo's looking to level up its role-playing fare—the company recently acquired developer Monolith Soft (Xenosaga) to make a *Final Fantasy* killer.
- 3 Grisy first-person shooter *Condemned* is a guilty pleasure on a lot of gamers, enough so that I hear publisher Sega is making *Condemned 2*.

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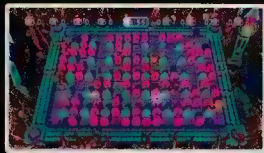
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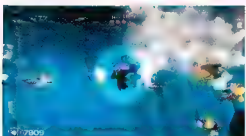
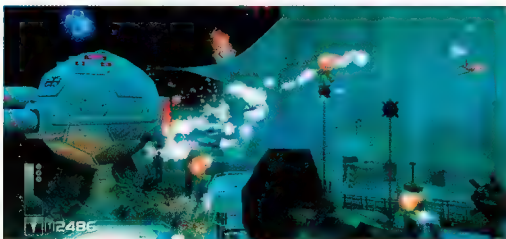
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COMING SOON

Another slim July



Undertow

Xbox Live Arcade • Chair Entertainment

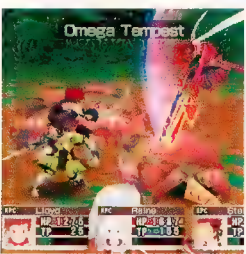
If *Battlefield*'s "pick different units, capture command points" setup held hands with *Geometry War's* 2D, 360-degree arcade shooting and jumped into the ocean together, you'd have *Undertow*. Although this underwater shooter clearly rips off ideas from other games, it's quite ambitious for a Live Arcade title, with 16-player online support, cut-scenes, and pretty amazing graphics.



Hot Shots Tennis

PS2 • Sony Computer Entertainment America

A cute cast. Extremely accessible play. Fun challenges. Sounds like another *Mario Tennis*, right? Yes, but this time it's the *Hot Shots* crew who'll be trading their golf clubs for a racket. It's a nice changeup, but it's even nicer to see a company continuing to support its aging console with new software (near that, Nintendo and Microsoft?).



Tales of the World: Radiant Mythology

PSP • Namco Bandai

If you're having trouble making sense of the seven *Tales* installments, you're not alone. Luckily, this lighthearted role-playing romp will shed some light on the overarching story, bringing characters from the entire series together for a fast-paced, open-ended dungeon hack.



NCAA Football 08

PS3/XB360/PS2/XB • EA Sports

You've once again led your Michigan Wolverines to a victory over Ohio State, but your buddy (who's a Bucknut) isn't around to witness the massacre. Don't worry: Thanks to *NCAA Football 08*'s new replay system, you can now create a vault of highlight clips and send them to your online pals. Nothing like rubbing a lil' extra salt in the wounds of your college rivals....

More July Releases

- | | |
|--|---|
| AniMates
DS • DreamCatcher | Panzer Tactics DS
DS • CDV Software |
| Final Fantasy II
PSP • Square Enix | Persona 3
PS2 • Atlus |
| Guitar Hits
PSP • Ubisoft | Project Sylpheed
XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios |
| Lair
PS3 • Sony Computer Entertainment America | Vampire Rain
XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios |
| NASCAR 08
PS3/XB360/PS2 • EA Sports | Worms: Open Warfare
PSP/DS • THQ |

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- TORQUE: CORRUPTS ABSOLUTELY
- MISTAKE ON HAIRPIN TURN: PRESS RESTART
- AVERAGE TIME TO REPLACE INTAKE MANIFOLD: 20 SECONDS
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- FEELING TO DRIVE: AWESOME (WITH EXTRA WASHINGS)



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Jump in.



XBOX 360 LIVE



Welcome back to
**LIBERTY
CITY**

With a camera in hand, we take a trip to New York to compare one Big Apple to another: **Grand Theft Auto IV's** Liberty City

By Greg Ford

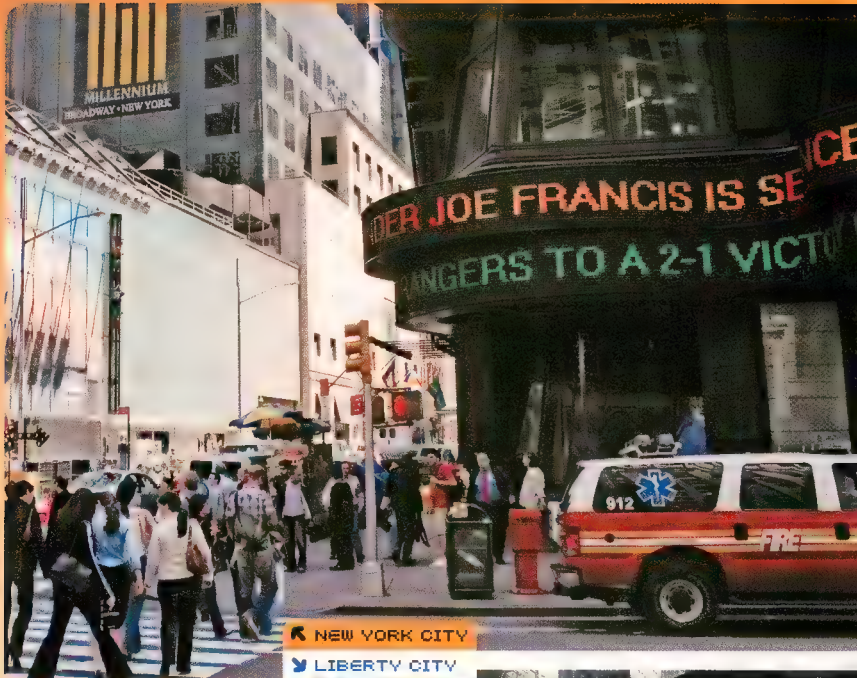
Photography by Sam Kushner



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV IS STILL A MYSTERY to many. Sure, everyone's seen the trailer, and a few of us have seen a demo of the game running. But hard info? Not so much. You still jack cars, pilot choppers, swim, and pack heat, but is that a surprise to anyone? All we know about multiplayer is that *GTA4* (coming to the PS3 and Xbox 360 this October) won't be a massively multiplayer online game, nor a death-match showdown, but "will match single player," according to a Rockstar rep. OK...good. We know a little about the story: Protagonist Niko Bellic heads to Liberty City from Eastern Europe to turn his life around, only to find that the wonders his cousin promised were unfounded.

What we know the most about is the setting. As in previous GTAs, LC is Rockstar's version of the Big Apple. And while those earlier games made you feel like you were in a city, none of them made you feel like you were *in* the city. One of Rockstar's biggest goals is to change that and really nail the NYC feel.

Fact is, we've been impressed by what we've seen. Graphically, it's a beaut. And since this is Rockstar's most ambitious re-creation of the metropolis yet, we wanted to see how far the developers have come to mimicking NYC. So we sent a photographer to try to match screens shot for shot. Let's see how close he came...and in turn how close Rockstar did.

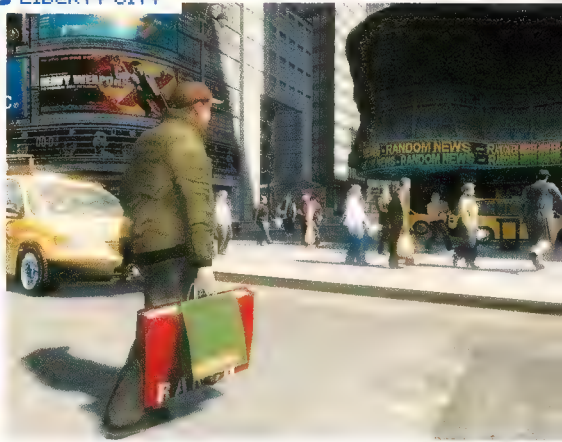


NEW YORK CITY

LIBERTY CITY

THE SQUARE

Make no mistake; *GTA4* has impressed many doubters with its graphical splendor, delivering the series' first bona fide gawker. But ■ pretty world can only serve to draw you in. It's the people who fill that world that make you want to stay, and that's where *GTA4* has us most intrigued. More specifically, we focus our attention on Times Square, the most recognizable intersection on the planet and a bustling slice of human idiosyncy, both in the real and virtual world. In the NYC pic, the corner and crosswalk teem with activity, with some people walking at a determined gait, others casually crossing the street. Most of all, their minds are on their own immediate destination. And you know what? While LC's square ain't as dense (we really didn't expect it to mimic Manhattan's nearly 1.6 million inhabitants), those peds give off the same "I couldn't give a s****" vibe. They're going about their own thing and, amazingly, aren't all copies of each other. And don't forget the signage and stock-market ticker: The *GTA*-style satire makes its mark again.



THE BROWNSTONES

OK, we couldn't find an exact match for these NYC staples, but we have a good reason why (besides LC's fuller trees—wrong season!). See those elevated tracks in the background? We know of no such tracks that have brownstones next to them. Now, part of this may be due to the game only copying four of NYC's five boroughs, but what about this: Transportation between the boroughs and Jersey is easiest via the subway, but Rockstar hasn't put as much emphasis on the underground, instead focusing on aboveground tracks that go above the already modeled city? Could be. We do know that the developers have put a lot of emphasis on the interiors. One of our favorite parts of the demo was seeing Niko slip into one of these apartments—a detailed flat with lots of furniture—gun drawn, before escaping through the back door. The thought of a more compact but deep city, complete with details like people sitting on the stoops and birds chirping and Niko looking their way, only further gives Liberty City life.





← NYC

↓ LC

THE SKYLINE

This NYC/LC showdown features the biggest aesthetic differences simply because of the game's more streamlined city. The real city is much more developed (especially apparent to the right of the Empire State Building). But take note of all of LC's skyscrapers (as well as that beautiful sky). Rockstar is stressing vertical density, meaning when you're touring the financial district, the buildings towering above you will block out the sun and really give you a sense of being encapsulated in this city, just like in the real thing.



← NYC

LC →



■ The Brooklyn Bridge, one of the oldest suspension bridges in the world, serves as the connection between Manhattan and Brooklyn (Algonquin and Broker in LC). Now, how many of you will have Niko (shown here) plungin' off it the minute you get the game? Thought so...sickos.

UNDER THE TRACKS

If you've been following our *GTA4* coverage (both in *EGM* and on 1UP.com), you know we love the little touches. Like when Niko breaks a car window with his elbow in order to unlock it. Or the way he takes a big step up and shifts his weight when he approaches a curb while walking. Or pedestrians taking a drag, chatting on a pay phone, or just leaning against a wall. In these particular shots, *LC* doesn't feature as many storefronts as this packed NYC strip, yet it has just as much going on: folks minding their own business, faded bills on the foreground pillar, trash on the sidewalk. You'd better believe we'd love to see more shops along the street...all the better to rob and escape out the back, something Rockstar tells us is indeed possible.

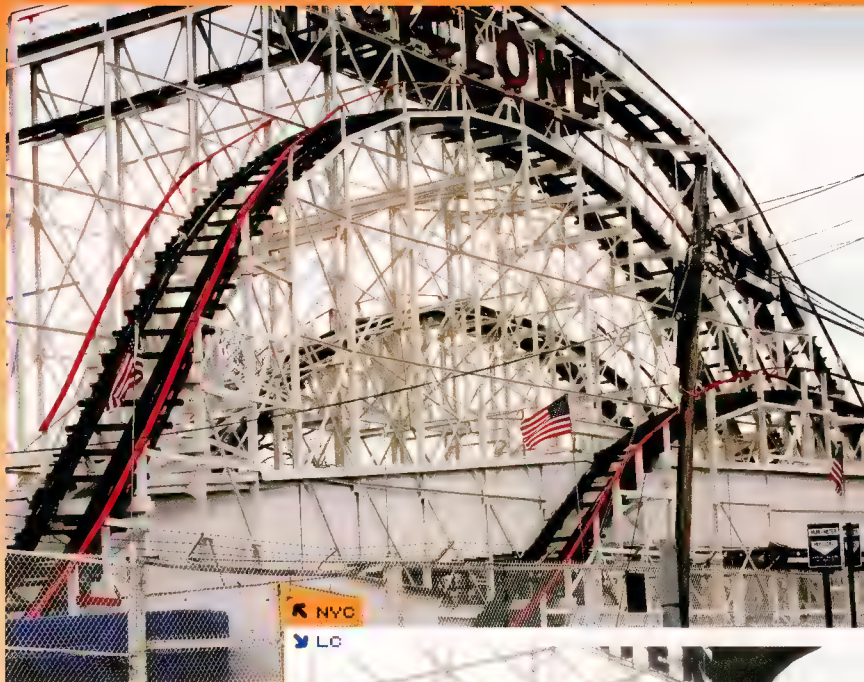


LC

NVC



Whether in the real world or in the game, Times Square is inundated with ads. But rather than trying to sell you on something (like in the real world), *GTA4* just looks to entertain—hey, we'd gladly clog our arteries with a Heart Stopper Burger from Burger Shot. Better yet, we can wash it down with the one crossover: ice-cold beer.



THE COASTER

We've put a lot of focus on the hearts of the cities so far, and rightly so, but it's worth pointing out that GTA4 isn't all high-rises and wild cabbies. Places like Broker and Alderney (GTA4's versions of Brooklyn and New Jersey, respectively) offer some diversity in the environment (though nothing like *San Andreas*' boonies). The Coney Island riff here has the same run-down, dilapidated look of the real thing. And again, you'll notice a misplaced elevated-track pillar in LC, which in the real city is a block away.



■ Admit it, these two shots look amazing. No, it's not a landmark or anything iconic, but still.... The way the hill crests. The crisscrossing fire escape. Even the streetlamps. The fact that the developers modeled a seemingly random street so well has us itching to explore Liberty City.



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GRAND THEFT APPLE

A list of NYC locales that we want to appear in GTA4

New York City has way more sin than Sin City—you only need to know where to find it. We chatted with the metropolis' most in-the-know people to uncover a handful of spots that simply must show up in GTA4. Our criteria: We wanted seedy, salacious, or underground. But ideally, all three. —*Todd Zuniga*



Happy Ending
302 Broome St., Manhattan

Formerly an exotic massage parlor, Happy Ending is the Lower East Side's most heavenly spot...if your idea of heaven is wild chicks, ridiculous dancing, and brain-bending martinis. The bar/club hybrid inspires decadence from its attendees, and its sauna rooms turned party coves would make a perfect spot for down and dirty deal-making in GTA4.



City Sub
450 Bergen St., Brooklyn

The building and its name are both nondescript. But if you can fatten up the main character in GTA4, this is the place to do it. Inarguably, Brooklyn's City Sub serves up the most delicious sandwiches on the planet. Each one is painstakingly prepared, so the lines are murder. But when the cops aren't on your tail, this would be a great place to cool down.



Bohemian Hall & Beer Garden
29-19 24th Ave., Astoria, Queens

A slice of Munich nestled in the middle of Astoria, this legendary summer outpost is far from the horn honks and general mania of Manhattan. A perfect fit for GTA4, it plays host to some serious goofballs, who drunkenly stumble around, happy as beer-filled clams.



Hotel Chelsea
222 W. 23rd St., Manhattan

The body count from past visits to Liberty City has piled up, but all those deaths don't equal the amount of ghosts that spook the hallways of this legendary hotel. This creativity-sleeping locale has hosted quite an eclectic mix of hyper-talents, from Jimi Hendrix to William S. Burroughs to Edith Piaf. Shazam!



French Roast
78 W. 11th St., Manhattan

There's no sleeping in a *Grand Theft Auto* game, so French Roast, the premier eat-late spot, makes perfect sense. Open around the clock, this low-lit West Village gem looks indiscriminate, but the food is delicious. You'll also always find some local drunk—Johnny Darko, specifically—ready to tell tales at the bar, no matter what the hour. **rbk**

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DEPTH CHARGED

We grab a joypad and go beneath the surface of **BioShock**, the unfathomably deep, wet-and-wild Xbox 360 shooter that's smarter than you By Crispin Boyer

"TODAY WE'RE GOING TO SET UP A DEFENSIVE PERIMETER,"

says Ken Levine, and we're instantly grateful for two things. One, that he's the president and creative director of a game company and not, say, prepping us for a frazzling day in mall security. And, two, that Levine and his studio, Boston-based Irrational Games, are famous for PC titles (such as *System Shock II* and *Freedom Force*) that give players the freedom to be who they wanna be.

So we're going to assume that setting up a perimeter in *BioShock*, Irrational's first made-for-console game, will be fathoms more interesting than doing it in many other first-person shooters. Due on Xbox 360 August 21—and, we expect, the PS3 eventually—*BioShock* is an under-the-sea adventure bulging at the

bulkheads with customizable powers and weapons, smart and motivated enemies, and torturous moral choices that involve killing what appear to be 8 year olds. Other sunken pleasures: the occasional flaming teddy bear and a camera to capture all the high-minded carnage and research new killing skills.

Trip wires? Check. Telekinetic tornado-generating doodad? Got it. Helpful hovering machine-gun drone? Got two of those. And with that we're braced to build our security perimeter, seconds away from an onslaught of genetically jacked-up enemies known as Splicers blaw-torching through the steel hatch in front of us. However this encounter plays out—and we'll get to that later—we know we can replay it daily and never see the same scenario.

"I've always loved games where it's never the same experience for you, and for your friends," says Levine, "where the game empowers the player to drive the process and make epic decisions. We try to make it so there are five different ways to do everything. There are so many stimuli in *BioShock*'s world, so many things that do cool s****."

Submergence day

All this "cool s****" has lured a formidable following to *BioShock*, especially for a new franchise. Few games, after all, have a fan base as frothed up as the one at www.cultofrapture.com, where the most common message-board worry is—yikes!—what if *BioShock* is too short? (Levine predicts a 25-hour playthrough for aquahauts who take



■ Your guns evolve visually as you mod them with steam-powered gadgets and other moving parts. "By the end of the game, [they] look insane," says Lead Designer Bill Gardner.

a holiday pace.) Today we're going leagues deeper than anyone has yet ventured into the game's world, playing levels for the first time and experimenting with never-before-revealed weapons, powers, and strategies.

If you're not yet in the cult, we've got your Kool-Aid. *BioShock* begins in 1960 with your character adrift in the North Atlantic after a plane crash. "Keep that [airplane] tail in mind—you might see it again," Levine says as we watch the mangled fuselage sink to Davy Jones. We have only one way to swim toward the flaming plane fuel: toward a lighthouse towering above the whitecaps. Inside we find a bathysphere that carries us down to "a city where the artist would not be censored, where the scientist would not be bound by petty morality, where the great would not be constrained by the small," claims the narrator of the bathysphere's propaganda film that plays as the fathoms tick away.

Buildings loom up from the abyssal gloom, connected by Habitrails of pressure-proof glass that span neon-lit boulevards patrolled by sonorous blue whales and other life aquatic. This is the city of Rapture. It's a name with significance for the religious as well as for scuba divers, who worry that dallying too long at depth will bring on a drunken mental

fog known as "rapture of the deep."

We know the feeling when we exit the bathysphere and begin our first tentative explorations. Something, very bad has gone down in this dimly lit underwater town. The Art Deco décor—all streamlined industrial design and terrazzo floors and rich woods tinged with the functional contraptions of a Jules Verne submarine—has degenerated into moldering opulence. Tables are overturned. Libraries have been ransacked. Blood stains walls. Bing Crosby and Billie Holiday croon from tinny speakers and gramophones. "I love the feeling of a place trapped in time," says Levine, who composed one of the game's tunes and consulted his pop for oldie music worth licensing. ("That's *BioShock*'s target audience," he jokes, "people in their 70s and 80s.") Mingled with the music: a constant drip, drip, drip. The sea is reclaiming this city, leaking through buckled bulkheads

and pooling on cracked floors. If *BioShock* supported Smell-O-Vision, think grandma's attic crossed with a tropical-fish store's Dumpster.

"We didn't want a modern-day city because we'd have to use artificial barriers to limit where players can go," says Levine, walking us through the design process that led to *BioShock*'s sea-based setting. "Rapture is more natural. You can't, say, take a plane to fly somewhere else. And we're nerdy enough to care how the city works. You'll find [out] how the city's powered, how they get their oxygen—and all factors into the gameplay."

New city areas—from a hospital to a forest greenhouse—open as you gain powers and complete objectives. Eventually you can explore all the buildings and regions you saw on the bathysphere ride down. "The levels are pretty sprawling—lots of nooks and crannies," says Levine. "It's not one long corridor like in



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■ Look for little plot touches everywhere. "The story should work on several different levels," says Irrational's Levine.

most first-person shooters." You can revisit any areas you've already seen, with very little load time between them, but the game never forces you to retrace your steps with backtracking missions. "Generally, the game-play flow is on the level you're on," says Levine, although he adds that previous levels house caches and other goodies worth hunting for. "Our attitude is let the gamer tell us how much they want to backtrack rather than us dictating it."

Not far into Rapture's first area, however, we reach a point of no return. Walking through one of the glass tunnels that connect the city's structures, we look up to see the airplane tail section tumbling through the cobalt murk. It collides with the tunnel. Millions of gallons of seawater pour through the shattered glass. Wading through frigid H₂O that looks too real (Irrational has an artist working solely on water effects), we barely make it through the exit hatch at the end of the tunnel. We're cut off. We can't go back. Our only choice is to head deeper into Rapture.

Red tide

"Look, this is an M-rated game," says Levine. "We wouldn't be having this conversation if we were making a movie." The conversation in question follows our first encounter with a Big Daddy about two hours later in the game. These eyes-on-high-beam, pressure-suited monstrosities have become iconic of *BioShock* and are a linchpin of its labyrinthine plot—and not just because you're supposed

PRIVATE LIVES

BioShock's enemies think before they shoot

"Our enemies don't just sit around waiting for the player to show up with a pistol," says Irrational's Ken Levine. Indeed, *BioShock*'s adversaries, called Splicers, have lives of their own. They wander Rapture, nosing around dead bodies, vending machines, and locked doors, looking for life-giving Adam (more on that later). They'll also react to the sounds you make—you'll need to be stealthy if you're not ready for a fight. And they start in different places each time you play, making it hard to get the jump on them if you retry an area. "Our levels are so nonlinear, you never know where they're coming from," says Lead Designer Bill Gardner.

Competing for limited resources in what Levine calls *BioShock*'s "A.I. ecology," Splicers often get into scraps with each other—and sometimes even take on the lumbering Big Daddies. But their smarts extend to combat. They can see what kind of weapon you have and will egg you into a melee if you're not packing heat. "They learned this lesson from Indiana Jones: Don't taunt the guy with the pistol," says Levine.

Splicers understand their environment and will seek cover when the shooting starts. But the scariest part of all: They'll make a dash for the nearest medical station when their health runs low. It makes for bittersweet relief if you're on the losing end of a fight. On the one hand, it's nice get a breather while the enemy runs off to lick his wounds. On the other, you know the Splicer is just going to return—and with full health, no less—unless you managed to hack into and booby-trap the medical station. "There's nothing more fun than watching the A.I. try to use that thing," Levine says, "then seeing all the green smoke come out of and the Splicer choking to death on that stuff."



■ "The A.I.s have head-tracking technology," says Levine. "You'll see them looking at points of interest and even commenting on what they see."

SEE THE MOVIE IN THEATERS JUNE 15TH

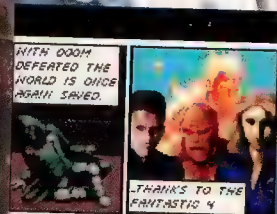


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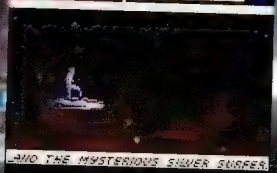
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■ Red means go: Don't be on the warpath of a Big Daddy when his eyes go crimson. His terrifying bellows of rage blur the screen and stun you, leaving you open to one mega melee pounding.

to seek out and take down three in each section of Rapture. Each Big Daddy protects one of the Little Sisters, gaunt 8-year-old girls who pop out of hatches to scour areas for corpses. The girls aren't what they seem. They've been genetically engineered by one of Rapture's residents to drink the blood of the dead and convert it to Adam, stem-cell goo that fuels all superpowers (in Rapture,

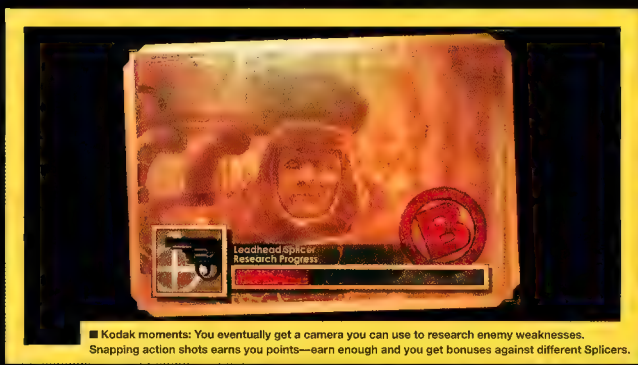
You want Adam; acquiring it is at the heart of your character-customization options. But here's the tricky part: Once you take down a Big Daddy (no small feat, which we detail on page 75), you can opt to either "save" the Little Sister and get a wee bit of Adam or "harvest" her and get the maximum amount. What happens when you harvest her? Well, you figure it out. Your hand pulls the whimpering girl offscreen, you hear some squishy noises, and when your fist reappears it's holding organic material and the Little Sister is gone.

Seeing this, it's easy to imagine backlash from the mainstream media, maybe a Fox News story about a new game that lets you kill little girls—never mind that the Little Sisters aren't exactly human. Levine says it's a risk he's willing to take to create a compelling experience. "We're making a game where the theme is the exploitation of people,"

he says. "You have to show that exploitation or there's no choice to make here." The team's big challenge, he explains, was to go only so far with the graphical presentation of harvesting. There's a reason you don't see it actually happening onscreen. "We did it basically so you crossed the threshold of information so the player understood what was happening, but no more," says Levine. "You don't need to show anything else and you shouldn't show anything else, because we're not going for a prurient thrill here.

You can't shoot the little girls. You can't hurt them in any way, except in that moment when you're given the choice [to harvest them]."

Don't assume that choosing to harvest the Little Sisters rather than save them sends you down some irreversible path. In *BioShock*, Much of the game's rich story (which we've left vague to avoid spoiling) has you torn between two characters, Atlas and Tenenbaum, who harass you regularly on your radio. Atlas' family is trapped in Rapture, and he wants you to harvest all the



■ Kodak moments: You eventually get a camera you can use to research enemy weaknesses. Snapping action shots earns you points—earn enough and you get bonuses against different Splicers.

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Adam you can find so you can soup up your powers and rescue them. Tenenbaum, on the other hand, is a former Nazi scientist who created the Little Sisters and wants you to save them. "So all of a sudden you're like, 'Wait a minute...who do I listen to here?'" says Levine. "Atlas is telling me these aren't little girls anymore, and that his wife and child will die unless you power up your character. Tenenbaum, meanwhile, begs you to not hurt her children. What we're trying to do is not have a white hat and a black hat, not have an angel and a devil, but have it be ambiguous, which is that much truer to life."

Power struggle

Depending on what kind of hero you want to create, you can focus on saving all the Little Sisters or harvesting them, or mixing and matching. If all you care about is building the maximum roster of superpowers, harvest all the Little Sisters you find to get all their Adam. (Levine didn't want to spoil how saving Little Sisters instead of harvesting them affects your character, although we know you run into the girls later in the game.) In *BioShock's* capitalistic character-development market, you spend Adam at special machines called Gatherers' Gardens to buy different plasmids, body modifications

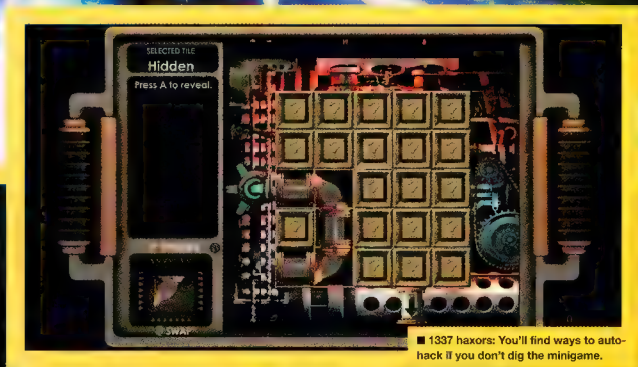
that grant powers. You'll find plasmids that let you unleash telekinesis, fireballs, freeze rays, Splicer-stunning electrical jolts, and swarms of insects. Some plasmids turn enemies against each other (really the safest way to take down Big Daddies). Others make them appear hostile to automated turrets and security cameras, which will send out flying robot drones armed with machine guns.

In addition to the plasmids, you'll find passive character-tweaking substances called gene tonics. These do everything from boosting health to granting semi-invisibility to causing more damage when you melee-attack Splicers from behind. Some increase your hacking skills—yet another subset of *BioShock's* seemingly limitless character abilities. Via a block-shifting minigame that feels straight from PopCap.com, you can hack any contraption in Rapture, including vending machines (for lower prices on health and plasmid fuel), security bots (which hover near

you and blast enemies), and medical stations (which will poison Splicers who try to use them for health).

BioShock even has its own invention mechanic that lets you build custom plasmids and pimp out your guns. Each of the six weapon types has two customization slots, as well as a magazine for homebrew ammo. You can increase the rate of fire of your shotgun, for instance, or alter the grenade launcher so that its rounds, don't damage you when you blast point-blank enemies.

If all this talk of Adam and plasmids and gene tonics and hacking makes the prospect of character building in *BioShock* sound dizzying—especially since you must find specialized machines to tinker with every aspect of your hero—Levine is unapologetic. "I do not deny that this is a game with a lot of cool stuff in it," he says. "Think about a game like *Zelda*: If you were to pick it up at the end and try to figure out what's going on, you'd be totally lost. But



■ 1337 haxors: You'll find ways to auto-hack if you don't dig the minigame.

PLAY IT YOUR WAY

We ponder three paths through one of BioShock's rooms...

"Let's pretend we didn't just do that," says Irrational's Ken Levine after a particularly ungraceful attempt at tackling three enemies. And that's the beauty of *BioShock*: Do-overs are often even more fun than exploring new territory. Because enemies always spawn in new locations and, as Levine frequently reminds us, "everything in the environment is a weapon," we found ourselves restarting areas just to come up with more elegant solutions to dealing with bad-guy Splicers and Big Daddies. Here to back up our words are three ways to play in just one room...



Start here

Port Neptune, a Rapture fishery that provides food for the city. We haven't been to this area yet, but we can assume it's crawling with Splicers, monitored by security cameras and turrets, and might even be home to a wandering Big Daddy and Little Sister. But this game ain't gonna play itself. Pick your plan of attack and let's clear this room....

1. The run-and-gun approach

Not the thinking type? Not a problem—grab your biggest gun and go gung ho if you want. *BioShock* is a first-person shooter, after all. But players who take the direct approach, be warned: Despite *BioShock*'s adaptive difficulty, you'll die a lot unless you play it on Very Easy mode. "That [mode's] for the people who just want to be tourists, just play the game and get through it," Levine says. "Very Easy is for the dumb jocks. On Normal mode, if you're not taking advantage of the environment, you're not going to do as well."

Sure enough, we blunder into the firing arc of an automated turret while almost simultaneously triggering a security camera. Hovering drones buzz into the room and pepper us with machine-gun fire. Splicers on a mezzanine hurl grenades at us while others flank us on the ground. We go down pretty fast. Too bad we weren't playing on Very Easy.

2. The environmentalist approach

If nothing else, our brief blazing-guns approach above gave us valuable intel on this room's innards. We found out the hard way about the security camera and turret, but we also noticed pools of water on the ground and electrified trip wires—known as trapbolts—spanning the room. Hmmm.

So this time we take it slow, staying out of range of the security camera and creeping behind the turret. We zap it with our Electrovolt power, which disables electronics and stuns enemies. With the turret momentarily short-circuited, we hack it to turn it against enemies. It begins firing on the Splicers wandering deeper in the room. They scatter, but not before we use telekinesis to reposition trapbolts across exits. Enemies dash into the trip wires and—bzzzt!—they're toast. Others Splicers run toward us, but we light 'em up with our Incinerate power. They freak, dashing for the nearest pool of water to douse the flames. We're waiting for them. As soon as they dive into the pool, we hit it with our Electrovolt, which conducts a lethal charge through water (in contrast, it only stuns enemies if you zap them directly).

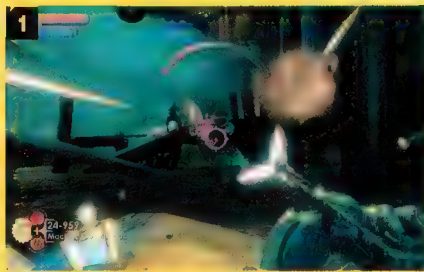
We've turned the environment to our advantage. But amidst the chaos, we hear a Godzilla roar. Uh-oh—a Big Daddy has wandered into the fight and got tagged by a stray bullet. His red viewports are focused on us. He's coming our way. Taking him down on our own will be next to impossible. Hmmm.

3. The enemy-mine approach

One lesson learned early in Rapture: Ammo is scarce in this town. So why waste it all taking down a Big Daddy when you can turn your own enemies against him? Typically, Splicers will avoid Big Daddies and vice versa. Targeting the behemoth with your Enrage power, however, changes that. His Little Sister scrambling for cover, the Big Daddy instantly goes aggro and turns his grenade launcher on the room's Splicers, who return fire.

Meanwhile, we get on with our old tricks, hacking turrets and rearranging trapbolts so they cross the Big Daddy's path. While we're at it, we nail a few Splicers with our Security power. Now the camera sees them as enemies and sends in the drones. Everyone is shooting everywhere but at us, giving us time to improvise some explosive devices. We telekinetically bond three grenades to a TNT barrel, then hurl the whole megaton mess at the Big Daddy. Boom!

He's just finished mopping up the last Splicer and now, half weakened, he's turned his red eyes on you. He blunders through trapbolts that ding his health meter. He approaches a pool of water. We think you know what to do next....





■ Stop, drop, and ROFL: Splicers understand their environment, so they'll hunt for health stations when hurt and take a dip on hot days like the one above. Teach them a lesson in conductivity!

they give you things steadily, and we follow that model."

Under pressure

That brings us back to where we started, taking stock of our powers, guns, and ammo to build a defensive perimeter against the encroaching Splicers. The only factor left to consider: the environment. Rapture's world works just like your own. Water conducts electricity. Objects and substances that logically seem flammable—oil slicks, books, stuffed animals, enemies—will burn. It makes for anything-goes gameplay that has the *BioShock*-quality-assurance-testers-inventing-impromptu-attack-strategies-daily.

This is a shooter you play on your terms: "It's like a game of roving boss battles," says Levine. "You decide where to fight Splicers and Big Daddies in a level. You set up the ambush. You hack the security. You manipulate the A.I.s. The theme again is that everything is a weapon."

Far be it from us to tell you how to use these weapons. The Splicers are nearly done blowtorching through the door. This fight is all you. ☞

Check EGM.1UP.com for a full month of extra *BioShock* coverage, including gameplay videos, extended hands-on impressions, and much more.

HEY, HOW'S IT PLAY?

We go hands-on with *BioShock*

With atmospheric visuals on par with *Gears of War* (*BioShock* uses a modified version of that game's graphics engine) and a sea of character-customization options and gameplay strategies, Irrational's underwater adventure certainly astounds on paper. But all the nifty powers and Einstein A.I. in the world won't save a shooter if its fundamentals are fled.

Fortunately, the developers designed this game to be a first-person shooter, er, first. "It's just one where you can do all this other cool stuff," says Irrational's Ken Levine. Consequently, *BioShock* is on target with the things you'd expect. Head shots do significantly more damage. The garaged-together guns have a satisfyingly heavy feel when you fire them. You can lean around corners to survey an area for enemies before rushing in. You get a map, a journal of important story points, and an onscreen mission arrow to keep from getting lost in Rapture's dark and twisted structures. Aiming control did feel twitchy—not as finely tuned as in triple-A shooters such as the *Halo* series—but Levine assures us we can tweak sensitivity settings until the game feels just right.

We had other nits to pick. Why not let players unleash all of *BioShock*'s powers, weapons, and environmental-based killing strategies in a multiplayer mode? Why don't enemies you freeze and shatter with your Cryoshard power melt into pools of water (instead, the bits of ice just disappear)? To these gripes, Levine gives the same terse response: "*BioShock 2*."



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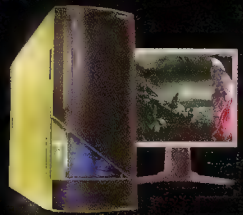


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REVIEWS

> giant bug spray, archaic roleplay, harvesting hay, and rowdy seamen

92 ODIN'S SPHERE



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> THIS MONTH ON REVIEWS

2D OR NOT 2D?

PS2 has the answer

WHOA...MAJOR CASE OF DÉJÀ VU THIS MONTH. Just look at that lineup. Are we going backward or something? It's a remake special! And besides the recast *Resident Evils*, *Ninja Gaidens*, and *Tomb Raiders*, even *Innocent Life* is a *Harvest Moon* reimagining, just with a robo-boy looking for love (and the proper harvesting schedule) instead of a real one. Hmm...really? While it's fun to relive some of our favorite gaming moments, even more fun would be experiencing new ones...like with out-of-nowhere Game of the Month winner *Odin Sphere*. This 2D side-scroller RPG brawler (whew) impressively stole the thunder from even the *Pokémon* juggernaut, showing that the PS2 still has some juice. Also impressive: Half the games this month won awards—if you count Shame of the Month as an award...which I absolutely do. Kudos, *Escape From Bug Island!* Kudos.

—Greg Ford, Reviews Editor

> HOW WE RATE

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

> SCORES AND AWARDS

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

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





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Bug Island:
Stomp this
stinker



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Spider-Man:
Third time's
no charm



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**Raider: Too
young for a
face-lift?**



THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

Living proof that God has a goofy sense of humor



Dan "Shoe" Hsu

Editor-in-Chief

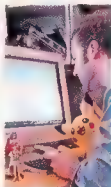
EGM's old grudge match with *Halo* developer Bungie recently got it Needler shot in the arm. Now *Halo 2* maps, the *Halo 3* beta...EGM-Dan relations are currently at an all-time low. See Shoe's April 25 blog post for all the details (and video!).
Now Playing: *Halo 2*, *Halo 3*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



Jennifer Tsao

Managing Editor

She didn't find sunken treasure or Atlantis or even Nemo when she helped Crispin research this month's cover story, but Jennifer did learn one important fact: Dressing up like a Big Daddy scares the sea otters.
Now Playing: *Crackdown*, *Pokémon Diamond*, *PQ2*
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



Bryan Intihar

Previews Editor

Bryan surfs the Web in search of any info that'll give him the edge over fellow Pokémon trainer Shane. Listen to these grown men battle it out on the EGM "Live" podcast, and then feel free to laugh at them (we do).
Now Playing: *Dead Rising*, *Ninja Gaiden Sigma*
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com



Michael Donahoe

News/Features Editor

After seeing Spider-Man strut his sexy stuff on the silver screen, Michael decided to follow his lead out in the real world. The result? Uh, not so good. Our advice: Just stick to the game, kid.
Now Playing: *Odin Sphere*, *Gears of War*, *Halo 3*
Blog: egmhoe.1UP.com



Jeremy Parish

Features Editor, 1UP.com

Having almost caught 'em all, Jeremy needs only one more capture to complete his Pokédex: the elusive INTIHART! It's a shy creature, but fierce when cornered. Shhh, be vewwy vewwy quiet....
Now Playing: *Pokémon Pearl*, *Odin Sphere*
Blog: jparish.1UP.com



Shane Bettenhausen

Executive Editor

Just when he thought he was out, they pull Shane back in. Who? Those damned cuddly pocket monsters. Now, he can't rest until he catches 'em all (and makes rival trainer Bryan cry).
Now Playing: *Pokémon Pearl*, *Ninja Gaiden Sigma*, *Planet Puzzle League*, *Uncharted*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



Crispin Boyer

Senior Editor

Never let it be said that EGM editors are afraid to go deep for a cover story. Crispin got the bends, nitrogen narcosis, and one wicked case of Jacques Cousteau beanie rash researching *BioShock* at 20 fathoms. Must...get...ointments.
Now Playing: *Puzzle Quest*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



Greg Ford

Reviews Editor

Getting intimate with New York City's tiniest details is never easy for a die-hard Red Sox fan, especially during baseball season. But that's the sacrifice Greg made for the *GT44* preview. At least Yankee Stadium isn't in the game...yet.
Now Playing: *Pokémon Pearl*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



Brooks Huber

Editorial Intern

Hoping to compete with this summer's epic lineup of blockbuster films, EGM decided to beef up its advertising. Brooks drew the shortest straw, hence his predicament. But what he doesn't know is that they were all short straws. Sucker.
Now Playing: *Punch-Out!! (Wii)*
Blog: egmbrooks.1UP.com



Joe Rybicki

Staff Reviewer

Now that Sony's figured out the whole playing PS1 games on PSP and PS3 thing, Joe's turned back to his trusty PSP to catch up on some older games. Unfortunately, there appear to be a few kinks left to work out.
Now Playing: *PQ2*, *Cooking Mama: Cook Off*, *Carcassonne*
Blog: opmjoe.1UP.com

Also on deck...

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Want more?

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



■ God, looks like somebody has a case of the Sundays.

Wii

RESIDENT EVIL 4

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



The Good: The best *Resident Evil* on Wii? Sounds good!
The Bad: Fussy controls = No joy.
The Shakes: Intense waggling replaces button mashing.

What are you buying...for a third time?

➔ **MILKMAN:** By now, you must know that *RE4* completely rocks—it was *EGM*'s 2005 Game of the Year, after all—so I won't waste your time by extolling its many virtues here. And even if you're a vet of the GC and PS2 outings, this Wii-make offers something new: *RE4* action mapped to near-first-person-shooter-style controls. But moving your character with the Nunchuk's analog stick doesn't aim, it only moves your field of view, with enemies often out of view unless you wave the Remote around, holding B while pressing A to shoot. Essentially, it's more complicated than it sounds, which saps some of the fun out of it. The "Separate Ways" missions that first appeared in the PS2 version are intact and practically

constitute a whole new game, which means fans aren't getting cheated, especially considering the \$30 price point. But it's amazing how a game that once looked so good can look so dated after a couple years of seeing games in high-def.

➔ **MARK:** Milky's right on the visuals—*RE4* may have lost that "holy f***ing s****" wow factor, but the sharp graphics still ably support its other awesome features: an engaging story, a deeply rewarding character and weapon upgrade system, and a truly creepy atmosphere no other game can match. Though they suffer a bit when things get hectic, the Wii-mote-enabled controls generally serve *RE4* well: Aiming weapons, swiping your

knife, and shaking off face-sucking nasties with real-world moves add urgency to an already incredibly intense experience.

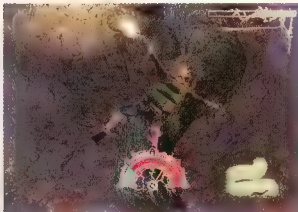
➔ **MICHAEL:** Unlike Milky, I never complained about the newfangled gameplay. In fact, I actually found the Wii's point-and-shoot controls made gunning down Ganados a helluva lot easier than before...maybe too easy—I breezed through tough parts that originally pissed me off in the previous versions. But I will find time to chew out Capcom for not including anything new in this old (but still amazing) game. Is it that hard to throw in some extra costumes or weapons? Hell no! Well, at the cheapest price tag takes away some of that pain. 🍷

Wii

ESCAPE FROM BUG ISLAND

■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: Spike
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Mature

REVIEWERS



THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

IG. SCORE
2.0
TERRIBLE

MARK
1.5
TERRIBLE

SCORE
4.5
BAD

The Good: Fun, schlocky concept
The Bad: Ugly graphics, frustrating controls, and more!
The Ugly: The canine men...get 'em a mask!

Bring on the exterminator

➔ **G. FORD:** Well, I suppose our luck was bound to run out. After two very good tongue-in-cheek campy experiences—*Grindhouse* in theaters, *Earth Defense Force 2017* on XB360—*Escape From Bug Island* squashes the good will with steel-heeled authority.

This survival-horror adventure game follows the path of one Ray, who's trying to figure out what the deal is on an island of overgrown insects. Sound premise for some kitschy B-movie-style fun, sure, but what *EDF* does so right (simple, responsive controls that make killing hundreds of mindless enemies fun), *Bug Island* mutilates. Antiquated tank controls (you turn your body before moving forward rather than pressing a direction to run) often make the simple act of moving a chore, and sluggish attack motions (hold a button then swing the Remote, or hold two buttons then swing for thrown weapons) mean deadly critters will be all over you as you flail the wrong way.

And the game's twist will excite only fans of backtracking, who, as far as I know, don't actually exist. *Bug Island* has plenty more wrong with it, as you can see by the screens on this page, but that just leaves these other two reviewers something to chew on.

➔ **MARK:** Greg, Greg, Greg... complaining about the horrendous controls and frustrating combat? It's called *Escape From Bug Island*, Greg—"Escape," not "Fight." The game never gives you a reason to attack monsters (save a handful of bosses), so I think you're supposed to just run from everything instead. Fun! And the crappy cut-scenes and laughable dialogue? That's the developers telling you to skip the horrible story as well. Yippee! No, what *Bug Island* does well is the balancing minigame that appears whenever you cross a log bridge...come in expecting anything more (like a half-decent survival-horror game for the Wii), and you will be sorely disappointed.

➔ **A. FITCH:** I'm the kind of guy who's endlessly amused by the Japanization

of cheesy American action flicks and horror movies (see *Resident Evil*). But even I can't recommend *Bug Island* as anything more than a kitsch party game in between *Wii Sports* and *WarioWare* sessions (take a swig of your beverage of choice every time *Road House* reject Mike disturbingly points his shotgun at your in-game love interest).

Still, the game's not quite as playable as these other two suggest. Yes, the controls are "old school" (to be kind), but they're not much worse than most pre-*RE4* survival-horror games. My main problem's with the lack of variety: Ray's got an astounding total of four offensive attacks: high, medium, and low—plus the long-range "hurl rocks at a bug's face" option. *Bug Island*'s not exactly horrible...it's just horribly repetitive.



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Animation by Aaron Frie



Want to see the visual difference between the Xbox and PS3 versions? Go to GameVideos.com to see a comparison video.



PlayStation 3

NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA

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



The Good: Most polished, value-added version to date.

The Bad: Feels a tad antiquated and glitchy.
Ridiculously Sexy: Rachel's idle animation.

Wait...ninjas do Botox now?

➔ **SHANE:** When I originally reviewed Tecmo's genre-redefining action-adventure for Xbox (way back in EGM #178), I honestly gushed, "I've never played a prettier game." Well, times change...and modern games such as *Gears of War* and *Lair* clearly push the graphical envelope far beyond Team Ninja's stunning last-gen achievement. It's impressive, though, that the visuals in this remake can still hang tough on PlayStation 3—thanks to some expert nip/tuck artistry, Ryu Hayabusa's adventure looks sexier than ever. It's a shame, then, that weird glitches (sync problems that make the screen "tear" when the camera moves, odd bouts of loading, even in combat) make it feel a bit like a slapdash port.

Luckily, the fantastically deep gameplay overshadows any visual hiccups. Returning vets will adore Ryu's new toys (eviscerating enemies with dual katanas feels particularly brutal), and busty Rachel's all-new levels deliver an obscenely violent change of pace. Genuinely new content doesn't abound, but *Sigma* remains such an expansive, challenging, and well-paced thrill ride that you won't care.

➔ **BRYAN:** Ditto on the graphics. Even with those strange visual miscues, *Sigma* looks significantly better than both Xbox installments. But it's the brilliant gameplay that keeps Ryu at the top of the action crowd. The combat is extremely fast and fluid, and the formidable enemies force you to fight

smarter. As far as the new stuff goes, though, I'm not impressed. The Rachel sections feel like an afterthought, and the pointless tilt controls (shaking the joystick to boost magic attacks) make me wonder why they bothered.

➔ **G. FORD:** This being my first tour through this order, I had high expectations...and came away mostly impressed. Like these guys say, the fighting engine is divine. The graceful combat (minus some occasional iffy targeting) makes you appreciate the art of the counterattack. What you won't appreciate, though, is the god-awful camera, which bogs down every big battle with bouts of babysitting. Given the game's age, though, the rest holds up remarkably well. 🎮



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XB360/PS3

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: AT WORLD'S END

■ Publisher: Disney Interactive ■ Developer: Eurocom
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

Yo ho ho and a bottle of ho-hum

THE VERDICTS

(OUT OF 10)

BROOKS
 AVERAGE
6.0

JOE
 BAD
4.0

GREG S
 AVERAGE
5.5

The Good: Detailed environments, a spot-on Jack Sparrow
The Bad: Pirates can't swim
Dirtiest Power-up Name in a Disney Game: Jackanism

➔ **BROOKS:** When it comes to summertime pirating fun, *At World's End* gets a little too close to walking the plank for our liking, though it has its good points. The attention to detail—such as the rowdy pirates in Port Royal or Jack Sparrow's inebriated mannerisms—is spot-on with the films. It's painful, then, that the swashbuckling combat (if you can call it that) consists of only a few simple sword swipes that don't always feel responsive when you try to pull them off. And why does every enemy soldier/barran/sea crony turn his back after only two sword clinks? Such antics cause some serious déjà vu: attack, attack [*enemy turns his back*], attack, and he drops. Simple? Yes. Fun? Well, if repetition is your thing.

Boss battles manage to shake things up with some 1-on-1 duels. These battles are a more close-up, concentrated form of combat, but again, the long pauses between attacks and dodges kill the flow. Exploration-based puzzles break up the sword-swinging, but they're more of a burden than pleasure, forcing you to scrounge far and wide for a few hidden rum bottles.

➔ **JOE:** *At World's End* poses so many burning questions. Why, for example, am I allowed to use my sword in some parts of town but not others? Why does the game insist on telling me in the most ridiculously explicit detail where to go next? And why, in the name of all the gods of the deep, is

legendary pirate Jack Sparrow allergic (yeah, even unto death) to *water*? The developers got so many of the visual details dead-on...didn't they think that maybe the gameplay should be at least marginally decent too?

➔ **GREG S:** Outside of my esteemed colleagues' complaints—which I agree with wholeheartedly—the thing that keeps sticking with me in *At World's End* is how incredibly quiet Capt. Jack has become. While nothing's going to make this dreadfully straightforward, mediocre action game great, more quips from our hero and his companions would have at least given the game more personality and thus made it a wee more compelling. But as it is, all it's got going for it are the graphics.

Heatstroke

With several movie-based videogames falling short for yet another summer (see *Spider-Man 3*, *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*), here are four flicks coming out over the next few months that we think would've had a better chance for virtual success...



THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM
 A highly trained operative on the run uses everything and anything in the environment to avoid his pursuers. No, we're not recapping the new *Splitter Cell* game (check out our preview on pg. 24). That just happens to be the basic premise of the *Bourne* trilogy, which concludes this August with the release of *Ultimatum*. Now, if such a scenario is good enough for Sam Fisher's developers, don't you think Universal Pictures should've capitalized on bringing Jason Bourne (played by Matt "Do you like apples?" Damon) to a console in addition to theaters? We'd even settle for Ben Affleck.



28 WEEKS LATER
 Uh, hello? Packs of rage-filled zombies (and we're not talking *Night of the Living Dead*-style shambling wrecks here—28 Weeks' infected undead haul ass like Olympic sprinters) chasing the first flick's survivors through the dreary streets of London? Making a game based on this follow-up to 2002's surprise hit *28 Days Later* sure sounds like a no-brainer of a videogame to us. And just imagine the online multiplayer possibilities—we're thinking along the lines of those *Resident Evil Outbreak* (PS1) games, only fun. Quick, someone fill these T-Virus canisters with Monkey Virus.



STARDUST
 While Harry Potter and friends receive the videogame treatment again in *Order of the Phoenix*, may we suggest the same for another epic fantasy: *Stardust*. This tale (based on *Sandman* author Neil Gaiman's novel) has it all: dashing heroes, teeth-gnashing witches, elves...and a gay pirate? Robert De Niro, arguably the greatest living actor, assumes the supporting role of the swashbuckling fancy-pants Captain Shakespeare. Ah, we can see it now: Tingle (of *Zelda* fame) versus De Niro in a battle for the biggest fruit in gaming. Our money's still on Tingle.



HAIRSPRAY
 Now, when you start getting cast as an overweight momma (when in real life you're a dude), does that mean your acting career is on the rise or heading into the crater? Either way, we think John Travolta's role as the jovial Edna Tumbblad would make for one helluva boss fight in a videogame. Just look at him...er, we mean her...him...her...whatever. And call us crazy, but we see this fitting in perfectly on Wii: all the non-traditional games who swooned over *Cooking Mama's* thrilling sno-cone level would surely enjoy a waggie-based beehive hairdo styling session.

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PS3/XB360

SPIDER-MAN 3

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



The Good: Looks all right for a PS2 game, webslinging still fun

The Bad: It's not ■ goddamn PS2 game, the voice acting

Whipped: Slinging MJ across town

With great graphical power comes great graphical responsibility

➔ **SHARKEY:** I can only imagine what Uncle Ben would say if he had picked up *Spider-Man 3*: "You're on next-gen platforms now, Spidey, and you sure as hell don't look it." You know that "PS2 game with shiny characters" look that plagues PS3 and 360 ports? It's dripping all over this webslinging-filled action game. That, and vicious slowdown when you break objects.

The rest of the game is a pretty straight-up combination of the better bits of *Spider-Man 2* and *Ultimate Spider-Man* (which isn't a bad thing, but we expect more), quick with absolutely punishing quick-time button-pressing events. A, B...ugh! A, B, Up...damn! A, B, Up, X...f***! And with each failure we get an unskippable cut-scene during which Tobey

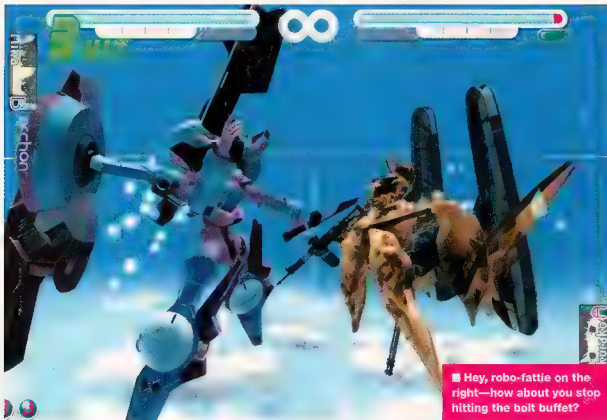
Maguire sleep-talks through the same stupid line for the dozenth time.

➔ **BROOKS:** Sharkey seems to have woken up on the wrong side of the web. PS2 graphics? Really? Despite some objects popping in, this PS3/XB360 version of Manhattan looks great. The story may be more comic book than movie (think rampant lizards, mad bombers, and a gang of Gothic Lolitas), but the action is all here, and mission variety abounds. Webslingin' remains the selling point, but the combat—although built from the ground up for this game—still consists of random button mashing. Also, those quick-time events aren't that horrible, but they certainly falter next to those of *God of War*.

➔ **BRYAN:** As these two debate the game's graphics (for the record, I'm more in Sharkey's camp), allow me to tell you about the unbalanced boss fights. Even with the improved combat system, you'll actually dish out little damage, which drags out these encounters (those infuriating button-press sequences don't help here, either...sorry, Brooks). And while I enjoy the mission diversity, I was hoping for a livelier metropolis. I know if I saw my friendlier neighborhood Spider-Man swingin' by, battlin' some foes, I wouldn't just stand there nonchalantly. I'd point, scream...do something!



Even wannabe heroes need ■ hand. If you need help keeping MJ happy, hit up our SuperGuide at EGM.1UP.com.



■ Hey, robo-fattie on the right—how about you stop hitting the bolt buffet?

Xbox 360

WARTECH: SENKO NO RONDE

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

Would be at home on Dreamcast

➔ **MATT:** Remember back when it was acceptable for a console game to be 20 minutes long because it was an arcade port? You know, before things like cheap, simple Live Arcade games and \$60 retail 360 games made the concept look silly. *WarTech: Senko no Ronde* is dated in this respect, offering a content-light 2D shooter as a "full priced" game.

But calling it a 2D shooter is oversimplifying things. In fact, it's arguably not even 2D. Basically, it's a 1-on-1 competitive shooter, with 2D gameplay and 3D graphics, set up like a typical fighting game. Neat concept, and it executes it decently, with a good variety of characters, distinct attacks, and fun special moves/boss attacks that add some strategy to the action. But the controls aren't as twitch-friendly and built for quick movements as you might imagine, so matches often boil down to each player throwing up as many bullet walls as possible until one player happens to absorb enough damage to lose.

➔ **SAM:** As a fan of both shooters and fighters, I dig the shooter-fighter mashup concept—it's just a shame that it really doesn't work as well as you'd imagine. The game's a bit too chaotic and inexact, and I kept thinking I'd much rather be playing a dedicated shooter or fighter. That, and like Matt says, the price is nuts. For \$60 bucks you can find a lot better games—shooter, fighter, or otherwise—to spend your dough on. The novelty's fun for a while, but that's about it.

➔ **DEMIAN:** Yeah, I'm going to have to go ahead and be the echo on this one: interesting concept, less interesting execution, and definitely far too expensive. As a fighting game, *WarTech* is light on the moves and strategic depth; likewise, as a shooter, it's way too short, and when your opponent launches a hail of bullets in your direction, your best bet is to simply hit the shield button rather than try to dance through a seam in it. I can't stand that art style, either—sure, the paint-by-numbers (big-eyed/busty/Hot Topic outfits) anime characters are one thing, but a robot with bunny ears and a purse? Not on my futuristic interstellar battleground!

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

MATT
4.0
 BAD

SAM
5.0
 AVERAGE

DEMIAN
4.0
 BAD

The Good: Little else like this out there

The Bad: It moves slower than you'd expect

Online: We didn't get to try it yet, but we'll let you know next month if it has any problems

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EGM's Top 5: Unorthodox health power-ups



5 Mushrooms: *Mario* series

What kind of message was Nintendo sending when it rewarded snackage on 'shrooms?



4 Floor poultry: *Final Fight*

Dining off the ground may sound rank, but remember: Eat it within five seconds, and it's all good!



3 The neck needle: *The Chronicles of Riddick* (XB)

OK, seriously, would you stick your neck there? Anyone?



2 Doing nothing: *Halo 2* (XB)

They say the best offense is a good defense, so sit back, enjoy the view, and charge that suit.



1 Gettin' busy: *Grand Theft Auto III* (PS2/XB)

When the cars started rockin', the politicians came a-knockin'.



PlayStation 2

TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

■ Publisher: Eidos ■ Developer: Crystal Dynamics
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

A worthy celebration

➔ **JOE:** Wow. Crystal Dynamics isn't messing around with this whole *Tomb Raider* thing. *Anniversary* is an excellent reimagining of the original game, with some gorgeous settings, clever level design, and even a fair share of reasonably challenging puzzles. Like *Legend* before it, it feels almost as much like an homage to *Prince of Persia* as to the original *Tomb Raider*, but that's a good thing; Lara was always meant to be as acrobatic as we see her here. In fact, *Anniversary* feels like the game *Tomb Raider* was supposed to be all along. An occasionally squirrely camera and infrequent control issues mar the overall package...but the problem is, by the end of the game, when things start getting really ridiculously difficult, the camera and unreliable controls become fairly significant. Overall, though, *Anniversary*'s a fine showing, an excellent service to fans, and proof that the series is back on the right track for real.

➔ **GARNETT:** I'll go Joe one further: *Anniversary*

sets the standard for remaking classic games. Reliving the signature moments here delivers the same thrills as a decade ago, not because the developers exactly re-created the original, but because they used the new engine to create a vision that lives up to my fond memories. The PS2 manages the requisite natural lighting and lush details—if only the broader vistas didn't cause the game to sputter. I'll accept the technological limitations and handle the camera, though, to get to the game's feeling of isolation, exploration, and wonder.

➔ **CRISPIN:** Checking out Lara Croft in the original *Tomb Raider* today is like looking at the yearbook photo of your acid-washed, feathered-haired high school sweetheart and thinking, "I thought *she* was hot?" But playing the bargain-priced *Anniversary* is like finding out that ex-girlfriend is now a runaway model. This game is beautiful—and it respects your nostalgia with clever reimaginings of famous encounters (like the T-Rex) and puzzles (such as the Sword of Damocles). Control feels loose—off-kilter leaps killed me more than anything—but I'll take it over the original's rigid grid-based system any day.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

JOE
8.5
GOOD

GARNETT
8.5
GOOD

CRISPIN
8.0
GOOD

The Good: Gorgeous levels, interesting puzzles

The Bad: Squirrely camera and controls

You'll Die Often: Good thing load times are fairly minimal

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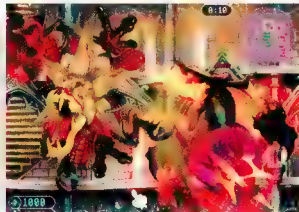
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HANDS-ON
MOBILE



PlayStation 2

GRIM-GRIMOIRE

■ Publisher: NIS America ■ Developer: Vanillaware ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

GREG S.
6.0
AVERAGE

RAY
6.0
AVERAGE

A. FITCH
7.0
GOOD

The Good: Beautiful visuals

The Bad: Superrepetitive gameplay

J.K. Rowling

Called: She wants her story back

Harry Potter Gone Wild

➔ **GREG S:** This 2D side-scrolling real-time-strategy game (as opposed to the typical overhead view you see in these resource-managing games) is a real departure for publisher NIS, which is better known for so-deep-you'll-drown Japanese RPGs. And it's also a tad disappointing. Not because it's pretty shallow, but because it lacks any multiplayer options (a no-no in this genre) and is superrepetitive. Even as you progress and unlock new skills, the game is never really compelling.

Unless, of course, you're a *Harry Potter* fan. Lillet Blan's adventures at magic school and the characters she meets parallel the story of the "boy who lived" so completely that it's almost creepy—right down to an object called the "Philosopher's

Stone." This is what *Harry Potter* would have been had it been written as a daytime soap.

GrimGrimoire is fun at first, but not in the same league as developer Vanillaware's *Odin Sphere* (see below).

➔ **RAY:** I'm not a huge RTS connoisseur, but I have a good idea of what works. And I know that viewing *GrimGrimoire*'s action from the side (rather than overhead) isn't very helpful. To the developers' credit, the control scheme cleverly handles selecting crowds of units, but it still ends up cumbersome and never as fast as a traditional RTS. Sure, it's gorgeous, but this game deserves a high-def presentation, or at least a system that can handle all of those 2D sprites.



PlayStation 2

ODIN SPHERE

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

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

A. FITCH
8.5
GOOD

MICHAEL
9.5
EXCELLENT

JEREMY
9.0
EXCELLENT

The Good: Old-school Super NES-style action

The Bad: Old-school slowdown
Good Lord: Odin's a demon here, not a god

Valkyrie in profile

➔ **A. FITCH:** Gorgeous hand-drawn art straight out of a medieval storybook. A soaring musical score by the famed composer of *Final Fantasy Tactics*. Charming storytelling elements clearly inspired by Norse mythology and the Brothers Grimm's classic fairy tales. Yes, it's safe to say that *Odin Sphere*, a 2D side-scrolling action-RPG that feels like a "lost" Super NES title, might cause a fair bit of excitement for the more Japonophilic among us.

True to its fairy-tale inspiration, the game unfolds as five separate "books" read by a little girl, the first of which centers on a Valkyrie princess—I'd actually have preferred a choice of the five protagonists, as her tale is the least interesting by far. The four brilliant subsequent stories more than

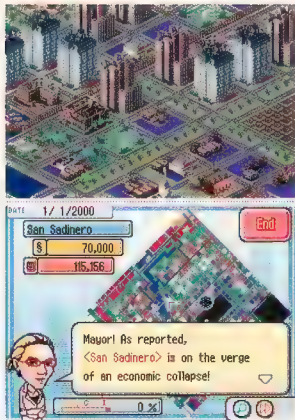
make up for this tepid start, though, and all of the characters control differently enough that the game never devolves into tedium. Take the time to savor *Odin Sphere*—they don't make too many like it anymore.

➔ **MICHAEL:** Whoever said 2D is dead neglected to kill off this beauty. What *Odin Sphere* gives up in geometry it makes up for with its insane amount of detail—the characters, enemies, and backgrounds are crafted with such intricate care that it's a miracle it even runs on the PS2 (some bosses absolutely slaughter the game with slowdown). Apart from this nagging issue (what do you expect—it is a 2D game), the experience is consistently exciting. Cutting up the story into five

bite-sized bits is a brilliant idea, too—just when you get bored, you're given a new character to chow down on.

➔ **JEREMY:** If *Odin Sphere* had to get by on its good looks, it would still be one of the most compelling games of the year—its hand-drawn artwork is so beautiful that you have to wonder why people ever made such a fuss about polygons.

And happily, the game has far more to recommend it than simple visual panache; *Odin Sphere*'s an inventive fusion of RPG and brawler. Once you get the hang of brewing potions and growing sheep trees in the thick of battle, you'll find a surprisingly deep adventure and a gripping story. Simply amazing.



DS

SIMCITY DS

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: EA Japan
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Red-tagged by the building inspector

➔ **GARNETT:** Impressively, this miniaturized version of *SimCity* packs nearly every classic aspect of raising a bustling metropolis from the bare ground. After tracing out roadways and zoning a few parcels, I watched with anticipation as the buildings sprung up. And then the reality of actually playing *SimCity* on a DS set in. Because neither of the two zoom levels work well, construction planning really built up my frustration. I was ready to throw up my hands trying to play anywhere other than sitting still; even the slightest bump made it impossible to be accurate with the stylus.

Still, that unique *SimCity* urban-planning pride kicked in when my burg started growing, but the high faded awfully fast. Never have the DS screens felt so small; even the

largest buildings lack the details key to their charming appeal. Take this as a reminder that just because you can put *SimCity* on the DS doesn't mean you should.

➔ **SHOE:** I completely agree. Part of the series'

charm is watching your town come to life. Everything's so tiny and blurry on the DS, however—so never mind that for this particular *SimCity*. But for an on-the-go city-management simulator, this version is really robust: It's got budget sheets, graphs, too-talkative advisers with different personalities, and lots of special buildings to research and discover (including some sci-fi-themed ones). *SimCity DS* is deeper than I would've expected, but those annoying citizens that are constantly asking me to build random things (that aren't really helping the city) have got to go away.

➔ **NICK:** It's indeed impressive that EA has shrunk down such a complex game without dumbing it down, but having to regularly hit the "Undo" button due to imprecise touches and a janky camera sucks out some of the fun. I didn't have as much of a problem with the visuals as my compadres, but I can definitely relate to the headache of having to sit through the whiny requests of my tiny denizens just in case they offer something important. *SimCity's* still a uniquely addictive experience when everything's clicking, but the DS just isn't the best medium for burgeoning city planners.

The Good: Big-city sim in a pint-sized package

The Bad: Never has the DS felt so small

Overloaded: Only enough room for one saved city at a time

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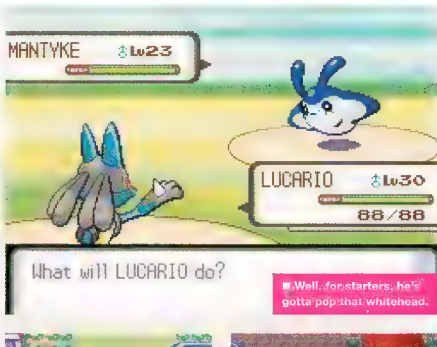


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DS

POKÉMON DIAMOND/PEARL

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

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

JEREMY
8.5
GOOD

SHANE
9.0
EXCELLENT

BRYAN
8.5
GOOD

The Good: Tons of small refinements, online battles

The Bad: Let's ditch the friend codes, OK?

Familiarity: Ultimately more of the same

A diamond and pearl are everyone's best friend

➔ JEREMY: I've never been much for *Pokémon*, being older than the target audience and having little patience for compulsive level grinding. But *Diamond/Pearl* has me hooked—which is strange, because it's not terribly different from its predecessors. But the latest generation of Nintendo's monster-collecting-and-battling RPG finally demonstrates enough polish and depth to feel rewarding. And really, this is probably the best time to get hooked; *Diamond/Pearl* carries over all the refinements of the earlier games, upgrades the graphics, and features online battling. Head-to-head wireless fights aren't new to the series, but being able to wipe the floor with someone's Pikachu from across the country (or across the globe) is sweet

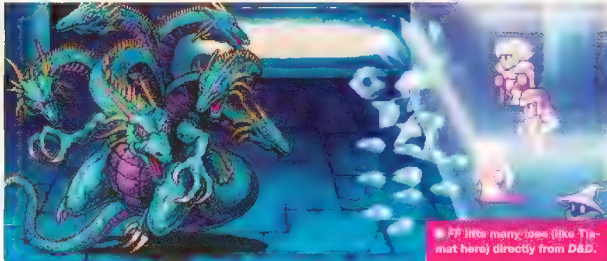
satisfaction. Pokéfanatics would be snapping this up regardless of its quality, so it sure was nice of Nintendo to make it the best *Pokémon* yet.

➔ SHANE: If you've been enjoying Nintendo's whimsical take on cock-fighting for the last 10 years, you won't have any trouble snuggling up to *Diamond/Pearl*—like Jeremy says, this DS installment introduces plenty of subtle refinements to create the ultimate *Pokémon* RPG. While only true Pokémaniacs will appreciate the effect that differentiating normal-attack and special-attack stats has on gameplay, even casual trainers can marvel at the unexpectedly robust online options (although friend codes *still* suck, of course). Ultimately, it's another addic-

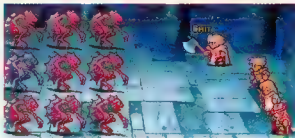
tive treadmill of a game that offers nearly limitless replayability and depth.

➔ BRYAN: I'm right there with ya, guys. The game's still-solid turn-based battles, new online features (anyone out there willing to trade a Squirtle?), and graphical face-lift make this the best *Pokémon* adventure in a long while. But I gotta say, I'm bummed the DS touch screen didn't come more into play (think *Pokémon Ranger*... except fun) during skirmishes. Still, it's another pocket-monster blockbuster—now when will Nintendo bring this exact formula to a console? 🐾

Still having trouble catching them all, Poindexer? Then head to an over to EGM.1UP.com to see our SuperGuide.



FF likes merry: uses (like Tiamat here) directly from D&D.



PSP

FINAL FANTASY

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

How to regift an anniversary present

† **SHANE:** Fresh-faced *Final Fantasy* devotees will surely enjoy this umpteenth remake of the game that launched a million cosplay and fan-fiction atrocities, yet for oldsters like me who foggy recall questing through the original NES version, this latest rerelease feels a tad inessential. Distressingly little effort went into crafting this anniversary package: Square Enix merely cobbled together aspects from the PS1 and GBA remakes, touched up the graphics with high-resolution art, and added one new, ultra-difficult dungeon at game's end.

But it's hard to stay mad at this RPG rerun—at least it's an enjoyable romp that remains surprisingly engaging 20 years later. Although purists will decry the seriously rebalanced difficulty (like the GBA version, this is a cakewalk

compared to the original), the modernization makes for a far smoother, low-impact turn-based RPG experience that actually invites replay thanks to its party customization. The \$30 asking price feels a tad steep, but most *FF* fans will get their money's

worth...the same can't be said of the imminently avoidable *FFII* PSP refresh due in July.

† **JEREMY:** Shane must be an easy date. I've been with *Final Fantasy* since the start, and there's no way I'm putting up with this lame excuse for an anniversary gift. The too-easy GBA *Dawn of Souls* game gets clumsily animated new graphics and a borrowed soundtrack? That's not a celebration; it's an amateur *RPG Maker* project. Sure, the underlying game is still pretty decent, but seeing this junky face-lift on PSP screams "waste of potential." I'd rather pretend the upcoming *Tactics* remake is the *real* 20-year tribute.

† **MICHAEL:** Jeez, Jeremy...way to ruin our nice anniversary party. Yeah, this is obviously an easy cash-in for Square Enix, but the not-so-epic adventure is one of the best role-playing games currently out for the PSP (which is pretty sad considering how crusty this game is). And since I finally got around to playing this for the first time, I didn't mind the minor gripes these guys are yapping about. But the ridiculous number of random battles did annoy me—this *really* needed an autoattack button.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

SHANE
7.0
GOOD

JEREMY
5.0
AVERAGE

MICHAEL
8.0
GOOD

The Good: Best-looking version of *FF* ever
The Bad: Not a particularly value-added package
Mysteriously Massive Font: Is this *Final Fantasy: Large Print Edition*?

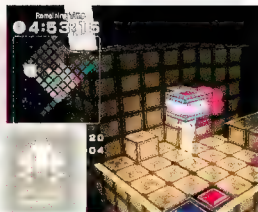


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PSP

PQ2: PRACTICAL INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT

■ Publisher: D3Publisher ■ Developer: Nowproduction
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

JOE
9.5
 EXCELLENT

GREG S
7.5
 GOOD

TODD
9.0
 EXCELLENT

The Good: Almost limitless replay value

The Bad: The hard puzzles are really hard

Favorite New Feature: Glass blocks

Your turn, Mr. Smarty-pants

→ JOE: If you ask me, *PQ2* is simply one of the best puzzle games on PSP, and possibly beyond. But it's not for the faint of heart; while scrambling to complete 100 puzzles in the five-hour time limit, you may end up feeling like a complete idiot. Do not be alarmed; this is normal. *PQ2*'s nefarious puzzles of logic and spatial reasoning are like visual riddles, designed specifically to make you feel stupid until you finally "get it," at which point you'll feel stupid for not getting it sooner. It is, after all, just moving blocks around (some with special abilities) to find a path to the exit. How hard can it be? Plenty hard. What's more, a constant stream of user-created levels traded online guarantees the inferiority complex should persist indefinitely. If you like

a cerebral challenge, you won't find anything much better. But if you look to games to turn off your brain, you'll hate this one with a passion.

→ GREG S: I guess I must be turning off my brain when I play games, because I'm not nearly as enamored with *PQ2* as Joe up there. The game is a decent puzzler, but not Earth-shattering. I do really dig the puzzle-creation aspect, though. The interface is a tiny bit confusing at first—what with having to pop up a whole new menu before switching out different pieces and all—but once you get past the initial stumbling blocks, it's quite easy and rewarding. And being able to share your creations with the rest... well, creation? That's just the icing on

the cake. It gives *PQ2* unlimited replay value, assuming a decent community springs up around the game.

→ TODD: Greg "The Brainiac" Stewart has never been mistaken for someone with his neocortex turned on, so it's no surprise this one didn't wake his synapses. I'm 2,000 percent with Joe here. *PQ2* kicked my ass—and brain—in a million different directions, but I loved how it made me feel idiotic one second, then Einsteinian the next. The puzzles are inventive, brain-bending, and unique (and about 87 out of 100 are very challenging). *Brain Age* is the type of game that makes you react; this is a game that makes you think—and even punishes trial and error (which I found out the hard way).

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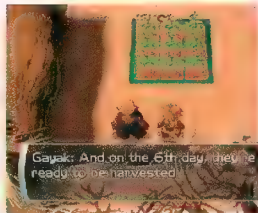
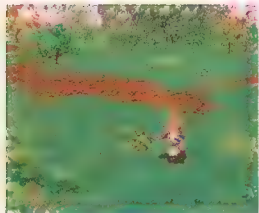
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PSP

INNOCENT LIFE: A FUTURISTIC HARVEST MOON

■ Publisher: Natsume ■ Developer: ArtePiazza
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone

REVIEWS

THE VERDICTS
(BY JENNIFER)

JENNIFER
6.5
AVERAGE

JENNIFER
6.0
AVERAGE

MICHAEL
5.0
AVERAGE

The Good: High production values, peaceful gameplay
The Bad: Slow, ponderous, can be boring
Smart TV: Watching increases your skills

Sowing the seeds of mediocrity

➔ **JENN F:** *Innocent Life* is different from the average agrarian simulation, ostensibly because it's set in the future. As a neo-Pinocchio robo-boy, you are tasked with renovating ancient ruins into a giant farm.

As you cultivate your farm and make friends with the townsfolk, your "human" abilities (like cooking and loving!) slowly improve. But farming can be tedious, and in some ways, this is a game of order and protocol. Worse, I could never seem to "aim" my actions (hammering, watering, hoeing!) where I wanted.

The game itself is lovely, very persuasive and philosophical—and really slow. At the outset I was just bored, but as I unlocked more areas and possibilities, I appreciated being able

to spend more time doing the sorts of things that appealed to me, being able to plan and spend my days as I wanted. I'm glad I kept at it, because *Innocent Life* gradually blossoms into a deep, contemplative experience.

➔ **JENNIFER:** *Harvest Moon* isn't for everyone, with its inscrutable game-play and glacial pacing; a farming game only works if it doesn't feel like, y'know, farming. I hoped by now this franchise would have figured out a way to make watering and harvesting crops more fun and less labor-intensive. And while I appreciate that the manual actually offers great tips and strategy, I have to wonder why they didn't put that useful info into the game itself. Too much of the good

stuff (unlocking new areas, upgrading equipment, and raising livestock) happens either by accidental discovery or hours into the game—after most people will have lost interest.

➔ **MICHAEL:** Jenn isn't the only one who can't water crops correctly—my idiot bot must not have installed his eyes, because he couldn't aim in a straight line, either. I also agree with these gals on the pacing—the game starts off way too slow (though I'll admit it does get better), with tons of monotonous tasks that don't make farming seem fun in any way. But the "future" theme annoys me the most. Seriously, making the main character a robot doesn't change the fact that we've harvested this moon before.

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REVIEWS WRAP-UP

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

XB360/PS3

THE DARKNESS

■ Publisher: 2K Games ■ ESRB: Mature

Chronicles of Riddick maker Starbreeze puts Vin Diesel on the sidelines to bring another bad boy to your console, the possessed mobster Jackie Estacado. The first-person-shooting portions are merely standard fare, but it's Jackie's demonic side that'll grab ya. His powerful tentacles can toss vehicles as easily as foes, and if you're really in a jam, you can always call out some creepy helper darklings to saw off an enemy's head.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** If Starbreeze can tighten up the controls, make this hit No. 2 for the developer. Expect a full review next issue.



XB360



XB360



DS

SHADOWRUN

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ ESRB: Mature

While FASA Studio might not have delivered a true RPG sequel to the *Shadowrun* games of yore, it's crafted a uniquely compelling team-based first-person shooter, laden with life-giving trees, teleporting, and all sorts of other genre firsts. The learning curve is more of a learning sheer wall due to the complexity of choices and the rock-paper-scissors relationship between them, but if you put in the time and find the right group of people to play with, you'll have some fun.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** If you can learn its intricacies (easier said than done), you'll love it. We'll let you know if we do next month.

TENCHU Z

■ Publisher: Microsoft ■ ESRB: Mature

The series that helped jump-start the stealth-action genre but then did nothing to advance it over the ensuing 10ish years is now on the 360, and...yeeeah. Pretty much the usual *Tenchu*. Slinking around as a ninja, one-button stealth kills, guards that forget about you moments after you're out of sight—oh, but now if you jump in a cesspool, the rank, green cloud around you will tip off the sniff-sensitive sentries. Progress!

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** This series needs a ground-up remake, and if you think the 360 debut would be a good time for it, you probably don't call the shots over at *Tenchu* HQ.

COOKIE & CREAM

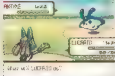



■ Publisher: Agetec ■ ESRB: Everyone

The DS version of the hopping dynamic duo's adventures has been watered down for a more single-user-friendly experience. Translation: less brain strain here. The splitscreen is now horizontal, thus removing the PS2 version's notorious simultaneous play mechanic. Instead, you trigger Cream only during key moments of a stage—which prompts *WarioWare*-style minigames.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Some puzzles demand simultaneous use of the touch screen and shoulder buttons, but it's not as complex as the PS2 game's split-screen stuff. Wireless co-op and battle modes are fun for a bit.

THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for April

Name	Platform	EGM Scores
1 Pokémon Diamond  <p>Would you believe the two new Pokémons garnered half a million preorder and have sold over 3 million units worldwide? Pokéforever indeed.</p>	DS	8.5 9.0 8.5
2 Pokémon Pearl	DS	8.5 9.0 8.5
3 Super Paper Mario	Wii	8.0 9.0 9.0
4 Guitar Hero II	XB360	Not Reviewed
5 God of War II	PS2	9.5 9.0 9.0
6 Guitar Hero II  <p>The PS2 version may not be able to rock the extra downloadable content like the 360 version, but it is getting an exclusive '80s edition later this summer.</p>	PS2	9.0 9.0 8.5
7 God of War	PS2	10 9.5 10
8 WarioWare: Smooth Moves	Wii	8.0 8.5 7.5
9 The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Wii	10 10 10
10 Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords	DS	Not Reviewed
11 New Super Mario Bros.	DS	9.5 10 8.0
12 Gears of War  <p>Gears' multiplayer is still bloody awesome...especially now that four new maps are out. The pack costs 800 points (or is free if you wait until Sept. 3).</p>	XB360	10 9.5 9.0
13 Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!	DS	8.5 9.0 9.5
14 Mario Kart DS	DS	9.0 8.5 8.5
15 Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter 2	XB360	8.5 8.0 7.5
16 Marvel: Ultimate Alliance  <p>Activision released a new download pack that lets you fight as four evil villains. Or some new do-gooders...if you're into that saving-the-world crap.</p>	XB360	7.0 8.0 7.0
17 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	Wii	7.5 8.0 6.5
18 Katamari Damacy	PS2	8.5 8.5 8.5
19 The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	PS3	9.5 8.5 9.0
20 Cake Mania	DS	Not Reviewed

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GAME OVER

> press continue for pointless plastic marines, flea-market tips, and man funk



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> SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

Lost on Purpose

You win, boredom!



Seanbaby is sick of surge telling him how to be soldier. One: He is not made of plastic. And two: Plastic is not made of men.

WHILE THE UNITED STATES

FINDS ITSELF STUCK in year one zillion of Operation: Pointless, we often overlook another inept military operation that's been going on inside our own borders since the late '90s: the *Army Men* occupation of our consoles. It seems that no matter how much we hate them, or how much we refuse to buy them, they send surge after surge of troops and refuse to withdraw. This month, I'm going to take a look at the numerous attacks they've waged on each of our consoles and hold the worst *Army Men* offender accountable for

its heinous war crimes.

First, though, let's examine how this invasion happened right under our noses. It's simple—after two or three of these crap bombs, gamer brains adapted to ignore the signals sent by any eyeballs looking at the words "Army Men." If they named the next one *Army Men: I Planted a Bomb In This Videogame Store*, it

would go unreported. If you made a suit out of *Army Men* boxes, no consumer could detect you. So there is no way that you could possibly know that over 400 of these games have made it to shelves. It's time to wake up, America. Six out of every seven anythings in this country are *Army Men* titles, and your children may be next to enlist in the war of monotony.

It's time to wake up, America. Six out of every seven anythings in this country are *Army Men* titles.



PAGE 102

Retro: Let's go antiquing with nerds.



PAGE 104

Web-slinger vs. rum-drinker



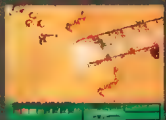
PAGE 106

We find the best graphical sizzle.

Game Boy Color

Tours of Duty: 4 (*Army Men: Army Men 2, Army Men: Air Combat, Army Men: Sarge's Heroes 1*)

Featured War Criminal: *Army Men*



Of the four *Army Men* games on the GBC, the original truly set the standard by redefining bad graphics as we knew them. As hard as your brain fought to discern shapes amid sandy clumps of dots, it was a losing battle. For a time, I was sure that the game's enemies were cookies wearing my mother's face, but my Game Boy therapist assured me that I was simply hungry and carrying unresolved teen angst, adding that the enemies are clearly pickle cowboys riding on cameles.

Real War Story: In Taiwan, a young boy spends 22 hours a day working in an army's toy factory. His job is to eat a trail through the cockroaches so the workers with hands can reach the injection mold. One day, the little boy sees this GBC adaptation of his hard work, and he cries for the last time.

Game Boy Advance

Tours of Duty: 3 (*Army Men: Advance, Army Men: Operation Green, Army Men: Turt Wars*)

Featured War Criminal: *Army Men: Operation Green*



In *Operation Green*, the already way-too-manky installment of the series, the graphics have improved enough that a player can now identify the shapes shooting at him or her. This sets the game's focus on just how much the gameplay sucks. Due to design flaws in God's plans for the chromosomal development of the game's creators, this is an action game where you can't aim your gun while you move. Shooting anyone who doesn't walk directly into your line of fire requires a slow repetition of rotating and jerking forward. Imagine an Etch A Sketch you can't shake that occasionally kills you.

Real War Story: In 2002, a Theta Chi fraternity pledge class was given a task during initiation week: to each bring home the ugliest girl he could find. This activity is commonly known as "hogging" and is, by air means, what ugly people have had coming. While each pledge scoured the campus for barnyard monsters, the clever initiate who had sex with *Army Men: Operation Green* received a posthumous commendation from the national fraternity's Hogging Council.

Nintendo 64

Tours of Duty: 3 (*Army Men: Air Combat, Army Men: Sarge's Heroes, Army Men: Sarge's Heroes 2*)

Featured War Criminal: *Army Men: Air Combat*



Army Men: Air Combat tarnishes the series' spotless reputation by actually being kind of good. If there's such a thing as an *Army Men* fan, this game's fun pace and enjoyable gameplay must have been a sad disappointment.

Real War Story: The 87th game in the series, *Army Men: Teer Abduction Van Molester Chronicles*, was cancelled during preproduction because child predators felt that being associated with the *Army Men* franchise would hurt their image.

PlayStation

Tours of Duty: 10 (Holy crap, they made 10 *Army Men* games for the PS1!)

Featured War Criminal: *Army Men: Sarge's Heroes*



Sarge's Heroes is awful in every way you could possibly imagine, and the developer especially stepped it up in the graphical-glitches department. Sarge will get stuck on invisible floor glue, fall through walls, levitate for no reason, and even manage to completely elude the game's spazzy camera. *Sarge's Heroes* was instrumental in inspiring psychologists to change the clinical definition of insanity to "An individual or individuals who saw the first 19 *Army Men* games, then decided to make the 20th. See also: dumbass."

Real War Story: Despite shoveling out an incredible 10 installments on the system, the *Army Men* guys did not receive the You Did It! Participation Medal of PlayStation, the lowest honor our nation can bestow in a time of peace. Better luck next 10 games, guys!

PlayStation 2

Tours of Duty: 7 (*Army Men: Air Attack 2, Army Men: Green Rogue, Army Men: Major Malfunction, Army Men: RTS, Army Men: Sarge's Heroes 2, Army Men: Sarge's War, Portal Runner*)

Featured War Criminal: *Army Men: Sarge's Heroes 2*



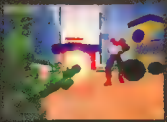
After this many crappy games, Sarge has lost his will to fight. He still can't aim while moving, so you have to rely on his autotargeting system. If you're one of those players who likes to hit things, the problem is, even when Sarge is locked onto an enemy at point-blank range, approximately no bullets will hit their target. And since it couldn't possibly be that the people making these games are horrible failures, we can assume this is Sarge's sad suicide attempt. It works, by the way.

Real War Story: For weeks, the lead designer of *Sarge's Heroes 2* was actually a stack of cartoon dogs in a trenchcoat disguised as a human. The staff first became suspicious when their project manager broke into several parts and scattered whenever someone whistled.

Xbox

Tours of Duty: 2 (*Army Men: Major Malfunction, Army Men: Sarge's War*)

Featured War Criminal: *Army Men: Major Malfunction*



After over 30 games on PC and across every console, we come to *Army Men: Major Malfunction*. This game is so amateurish and awful that it looks like it was only meant to be used as background action for a game-design commercial. I kept expecting Sarge to turn to the camera and say, "Are you tired of playing videogames like this when you could be MAKING them?" Then I'd either say "GOSH, YEAH!" or "OBEY THE TENETS OF REALITY, TV MONSTER!"—but most likely "GOSH, YEAH!"

Real War Story: During a black-ops mission in an Ewok Village play set, Sarge had to open fire on eight hostile Ewoks. There were 120 survivors. That's right—he missed so badly, he actually created 112 enemy combatants.

10 Years Ago...

GAME OVER



On the cover:

Gex 2: Enter the Gecko

Before the snarky Gecko Insurance gecko graced the boob tube, Gex (the first smart-ass lizard) mucked it up in a bunch of parody platformers on the PS1. The first Gex sequel tried to tackle the popularity of *Mario 64* by riffing on popular TV shows and movies. And apparently, he's trying to goof on *Star Wars* on our cover—but, seriously now, everyone knows stormtroopers don't use lightsabers. Duh!



Game of the month:

Wild Arms

Only 10 games fell onto the laps of the Review Crew this month. And, role-playing underdog *Wild Arms* (PS1) stole the show. Its best feature? The "items." Uh, OK....



Exclusive: Star Wars: Masters of Teräs Käsi

Well, a *Star Wars* fighter *seemed* cool at the time—random stormtroopers battling Boba Fett? Talk about an overdose of awesome! Or not—this schlocky fighter just sucked.



> RETRONAUTS PRESENTS

Retro resources

Clues for wannabe collectors

By Jeremy Parish



Want to see IUP's visit to the famous Japanese retro shop Super Potato? Well, mosey on over to bonusstage.iup.com

BETWEEN WII'S VIRTUAL CONSOLE, XBOX 360'S LIVE ARCADE, AND PS3'S PLAYSTATION NETWORK (not to mention GameTap over on the PC side—read up about it on page 44), retro-gaming fans have never had it so good...if they're willing to settle for downloading games. But imaginary ownership can't compare to the real, physical goods: The heft of a cartridge, the ritual of dust blowing, fussing with aging hardware, jiggling rotted cables, suffering through the lag of standard-definition content on your shiny new HDTV. OK, it actu-

ally kind of sucks, but possession is nine-tenths of awesome. So where does a retro-geek go for a fix of pure undistilled nostalgia?

The local scene

Like the saying (kinda) goes, think globally, shop locally. Major-retailers like EB Games and GameStop have conglomerated into a retro-hating monolith, cutting life support for anything older than PlayStation 2. Better to support the little guy anyway. And what could be more "little guy" than the humble garage sale? Sure, 49 out of every 50 garage sales are going



Tracking down ancient games may take a little work here in the States, but in Japan, it's a cinch—retro stores (like Super Potato, shown above) carry an abundance of oldies.

to be crammed with junk—Genesis sports games, broken *Duck Hunt* carts, that sort of thing—but it's that 90th-stop that makes it all pay off. Some legendary bargains have been unearthed in people's backyards, including some amazing unreleased prototype games. And when you're done browsing garages, don't turn your nose up at pawn shops. They're kind of horrible, it's true, and owners have become savvy to the actual value of rare games. But it never hurts to look.

The global market

Still, sometimes you gotta suck it up and accept the fact that your local market is full of people with no appreciation for the classics. When all else fails, the Internet usually succeeds. Surfing the Net is a fantastic source for hard-to-find games. In fact, it's so convenient to be able to find rarities on eBay in a couple of mouse clicks that the thrill of the chase has all but died. Don't fall into

the rut of thinking eBay is the only source for retro collectibles, though. It's just the tip of the iceberg, as countless independently run game stores peddle all manner of classics—all you have to do is find them. And even major online retailers like Amazon.com make room for retro games these days.

Peer-to-peer shopping

Still, nothing beats human contact and the comfort of knowing that your new acquisition is coming from a loving home, where it's been stored with care by a dedicated gamer. For that, you'll want to deal directly with other gamers. The great thing about the P2P approach is that gamers are everywhere. You can find

> HALL OF THE INTERWEB

finding games in person is fun, yeah, but sometimes it's easier to just comb the Web for the classics. Here's a list of retro-friendly sites to sift through.

eBay

www.ebay.com

Yeah, yeah, you know about eBay—and so does everyone else. That's good in that it makes finding rarities far more likely, but it's also kind of bad because it means the days of accidental bargains are pretty much over. Still, if you don't mind fighting off the snipers and paying a potentially inflated price, eBay should still be your first stop for classic game hunting.

Digital Press

www.digitalpress.com

That is, unless you prefer to barter with fellow gamers rather than pawnshop pros. In that case, stop by Digital Press, the online companion to America's longest-running classic-gaming fanzine, where an entire forum has been established specifically for the purpose of game swaps.

Japan Game Stock

www.japangamestock.com

But what if you prefer your classics in a Japanese flavor? We recommend the English-proficient online shop at JapanGameStock, its selection of 8- and 16-bit import software is truly awesome. Best of all, JGS is based in Osaka, so you're paying Japanese market value rather than inflated U.S.-oriented prices. Overseas shipping can cost a pretty penny, though, so buy in bulk to make it worth your while.

Shopping Mall Japan

www.shoppingmalljapan.com

For the truly rare, you'll want to learn to use Yahoo! Japan's game auctions—tricky, since it's all in Japanese and no one there seems to do overseas shipping. Fortunately, Shopping Mall Japan acts as a willing proxy service to get your auction winnings to you. Its fees are pretty crazy, though, so this works best as a last resort for those impossible finds.

them all over the internet, where countless trading forums have been established to uphold the cause of fair trade. The long-running Digital Press is probably the biggest, but it's certainly not unique. Hey, we hear there's a pretty great trading post at boards.tup.com, too! And you tech nophobes need to go online to find a good deal. Local gaming clubs, small shops, and even the classified ads are great resources for tracking down goodies. And if you can swing the cash, major gatherings like the Classic Gaming Expo are unbeatable for finding true obscurities—and you get to complete your transactions face to face. So if you end up getting cheated, you'll at least you'll know who to hunt down. ☛

➤ **Some legendary bargains have been unearthed in people's backyards...**

Point-Counterpoint



What? I like rings, OK?

By Sonic the Hedgehog

I don't see the problem here. So I have a few dozen rings when I get up in the morning—who doesn't? But now Amy thinks I ought to go on a 12-step program to get off 'em. Quit the rings? Uh, I'm Sonic The F***in' Hedgehog, bitch. Sorry, but I kind of need rings to live. What if I misjudge a trampoline over in Green Hill Zone and end up in a pit of spikes? Is that whatcha want? 'Cause I'll make it happen for you, toots. You can be little Ms. Perfect Widow while your ring-junkie boyfriend gets skewered.

You need to get some professional help

By Amy Rose

I don't mind a guy having outside interests, but when your boyfriend gets up five times every night to count his rings like a cracked out Ebenezer Scrooge, it's time for an intervention. He used to tell me it was all to get ahead—the occasional bonus stage here, an extra life there. But lately, it's become like a sickness. I mean, the neighborhood kids look up to him. What kind of a role model passes out facedown on the front lawn after an all-night ring binge? He better get this ring habit under control or I'll just take my chances with Knuckles—even the occasional backhand from a raging echidna with fist spikes beats the hell out of this.



> GUESS WHO



- When it comes to movies, I dig comedies. Nothing is more divine than a fine laugh.
- I know it's not nice to brag, but hey, I'm not shy about talking about how stylish I am.
- I like lots of colors, I swear! I, uh, just choose to wear one color...a lot.
- Some people name their pets. Perverts name their privates. I name my little friends.
- My brother is a bastard. Not only is he annoying, but he also copies me.

Who am I?

Dante from Devil May Cry

> GRUDGE MATCH

Trilogy Tussle

Sparrow and Spidey duke it out

Two blockbuster movies (and their game counterparts) are competing for your scratch this summer, but who's got the dough to see (and play) both? Well, let's see....

Spider-Man

VS.

Pirates of the Caribbean



Thug-thumpin' glider brawls
Advantage: Spider-Man

Combat



Like sword fight? You'd better



Shiny black suit works like Spidey 'roids
Advantage: Spider-Man

Alter Egos



Elizabeth Swann isn't as hot in giant boots



Tigra mendacior

Dress Code



Sparrow still sporting fragments of the Technicolor Dreamcoat
Advantage: Pirates



Web-based navigation all over New York City
Advantage: Spider-Man

Acrobatics



Walk the rigging, not the plank



Crazy crooks in goofy suits
Advantage: The

Opposition



Spicy creature-men in goofy suits
Advantage: The

Winner: Spider-Man

But we'll give props to Pirates for bringing the wash-bubbling genre back into the limelight. Arrrrr



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BEST



FACES


FIGHT NIGHT: ROUND 3 (PS3/XB360)

Capturing intricate facial details requires developers to really dig into a console: We want to see the subtle expressions, bloody gashes, and the all-too-real pores on the face of the fighter we're beating to a pulp. *Fight Night* does that right. Hell, it's probably the closest thing you'll get to real fist fighting—without having to deal with that stupid thing called "pain." **Runner up:** *Gears of War* (XB360).

BEST



EXPLOSIONS

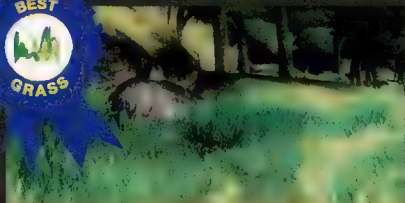

GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2 (XB360)

Much like the first time you saw your sister naked, awesome explosions are hard to get out of your head. Try as you might, the combination of flame and gas is completely satisfying. Wait, sorry—it's the explosions in *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter 2* that are thrilling, not your sister naked. **Runner up:** *Crackdown* (XB360).

BEST



GRASS


THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION (PS3/XB360)

Have you ever heard someone recite the numerical value of pi to the millionth decimal place? Well, the dude who rendered all the grass in *Oblivion* is probably crazier. He probably has nightmares about grass, but by "nightmare," we mean something else not appropriate for print. **Runner up:** *Viva Piñata* (XB360).

BEST



STUFF BREAKING


RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN (PS3)

Try this: Take an Uzi, a sledgehammer, and a sock loaded with quarters, and break every single window in your house. Really shatter them—every last one. Then stick a copy of *Resistance* into your PS3. We think you'll notice that developer Insomniac did a pretty good job simulating a bunch of crap getting busted up. After all, now you're an expert. **Runner up:** *MotorStorm* (PS3).

BEST



MUD/DIRT


MOTORSTORM (PS3)

Even if you're a no-nonsense, work-time-funless adult, it's hard not to resist the urge to pounce into a massive puddle of mud. Going piggy really takes you back to the days of carefree fun...and *MotorStorm* excels at recapturing this feeling in digital form. The goopy brown filth even affects game play—plowing through mud alters the track as you go. **Runner up:** None.

BEST



SWEAT


FIGHT NIGHT: ROUND 3 (PS3/XB360)

With the snazzy graphical sophistication of the Xbox 360 and PS3, games are finally showcasing what really stinks about sports: sweat. Every punch in *Fight Night: Round 3* is met with a cloud of perspiration...just like in real life. Well, sort of—mashin' mugs may cause the funk to fly, yes, but is every fight in a sauna? Seriously, cool down, guys! **Runner up:** *NBA 2K7* (PS3/XB360).

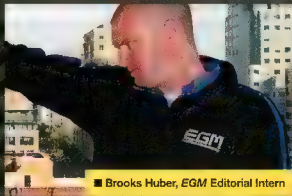
Fresh Meat

Our whippersnapping interns debate age-old issues

Kids these days with their hip-hop and Hannah Montana got no respect for gaming's glory days...or do they? *EGM's* oldie editors (average age: 32) quiz their two young interns (average age: 24) to map videogames' generation gap...



■ Alice Liang, 1UP.com Previews Intern



■ Brooks Huber, EGM Editorial Intern

What's your favorite old-school system? (If you say PlayStation, we're going to throw our games at you!)

Super NES: Is that "old-school" enough? The Super NES is my favorite console of all time simply because it plays host to so many magically awesome games—why play crappy 8-bit NES duds when you could venture through sophisticated fare like *Chrono Trigger* and *Zelda: A Link to the Past*? Super NES had the balance between visual tech and gameplay creativity down to perfection.

NES: Sure, the Super NES had prettier sprite-based graphics and more than two face buttons, but the NES supplied the foundation you speak of, Alice. Blowing on cartridges to get them to work, staying up late to beat-down Soda Popinski in *Punch-Out!*, or even shooting quacking ducks two inches away from the television screen made for an unforgettable experience. Oh, and *Mario 3*...

What classic franchise would you like to see revived?

Chrono Trigger: I know *Chrono Cross* (PS1) came out only seven years ago, but seriously—whatever happened to rumored sequel *Chrono Break*? After all these years, I wouldn't mind seeing another entry into the pages of *Chrono*—preferably one with Magus (or Gil, if you played Japan-only pseudosequel *Radical Dreamers*). The fans know what I'm talking about.

Out of This World: Intriguing puzzles, a hulking ally, and a redheaded science geek wielding a gat all came together to produce one of the finest action games ever. But then it seemingly disappeared, as if into the Disney vault, only to be idolized but never resuscitated. The creator said he wanted the ending to be open to interpretation...how about re-interpreting it on the PS3/XB360?

Historically speaking, which game was more significant: *Spacewar!* or *Pong*? (No looking on Wikipedia; you cheaters!)

Pong: All right, I'm a cheater. But even after reading *Spacewar!*'s Wikipedia entry, I still have to go with *Pong*. *Spacewar!* may have been 10 years earlier in the making—and way more expensive—but *Pong* was pretty dang popular. Besides, I'd never even heard of *Spacewar!*. History has a way of forgetting losers, and when it comes to pop-culture credibility, *Spacewar!* is the definite loser.

Pong: You violated explicit instructions; therefore your answer shouldn't count. I must admit that I can't pick *Spacewar!* out of a lineup either, but I'm choosing *Pong*, because it still has a soft spot in today's high-tech gaming culture. It's been spoofed on YouTube, brought back to life with the PainStation device (Google It), and it spurred *Breakout*, another ball-whacking classic.

What's the first game tape you ever remember solving?

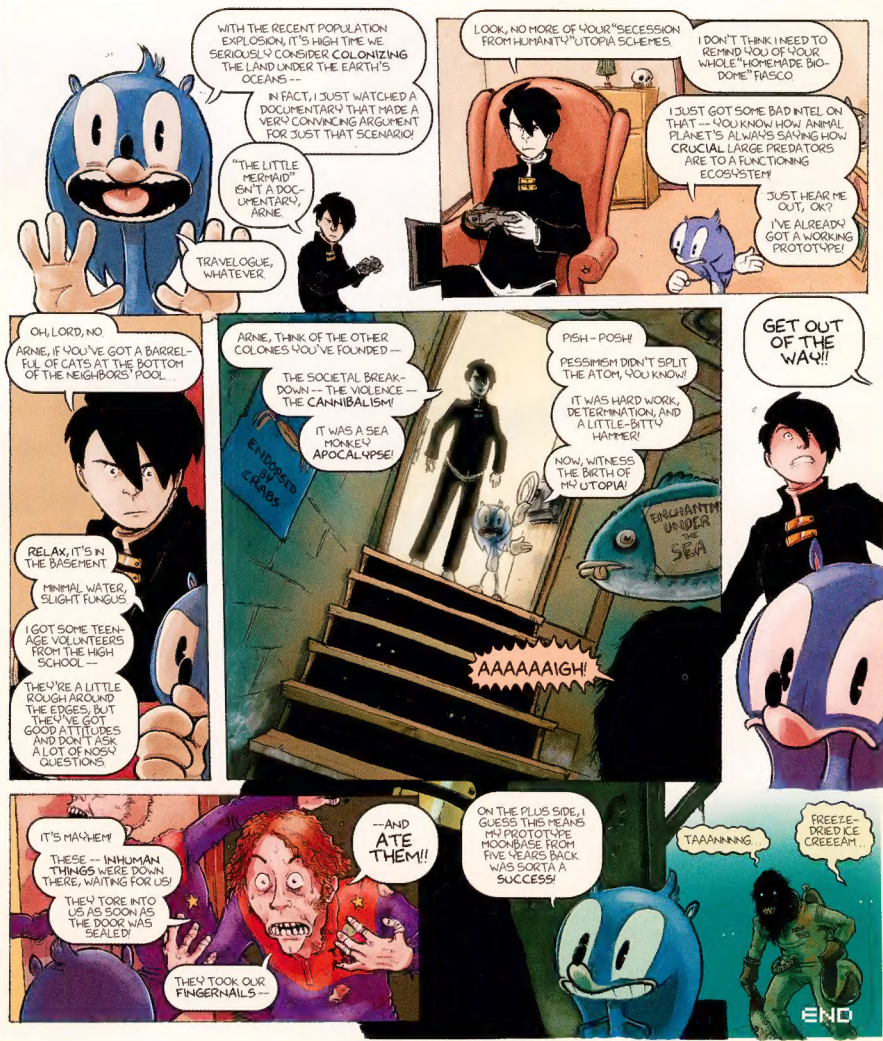
Super Mario Bros.: Tape? I'll go ahead and assume you're referring to cartridges. I guess I'm not cool enough to remember back when videogames were on tapes, and I certainly won't call them tapes in the here and present. The first tape I solved, however, was *Super Mario Bros.* (In the *Duck Hunt* combo cart). There, I added "tape" to my vernacular. Can I join the cool kids' club?

Insert game here: My brain must have wiped this precious memory from its data banks, because I can't recall the first tape I ever solved. My childhood ADD is to blame. My attention span always dwindled before I reached the end of anything. Or maybe it was all those Pixy Stix I snorted. Let that be a lesson for today's kids who want to remember solving *Hannah Montana*. ☹

> HSU & CHAN IN:

Down Where It's Wetter

By Jeremy "Norm" Scott





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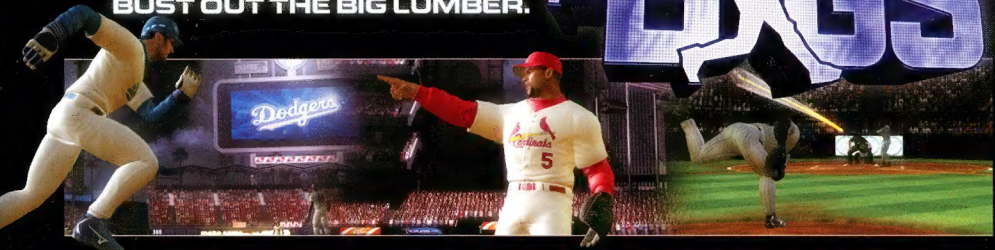
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PLAYSTATION 3



Wii

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