

THE No.1 VIDEOGAME MAGAZINE



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INSIDE:

METROID
PRIME 3

SKATE

ZELDA:
PHANTOM
HOURGLASS

DECIPHERING
NONSENSE
GAMES

FIRST SCREENS & INFO

SAINTS ROW 2

Can THQ's gang take this series out of GTA's shadow?

 **Exclusive
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Wheelman:

Vin Diesel also takes a crack at GTA

**Uncharted:
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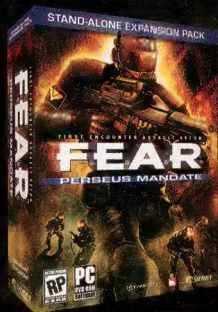
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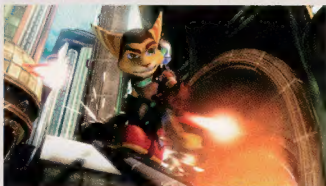
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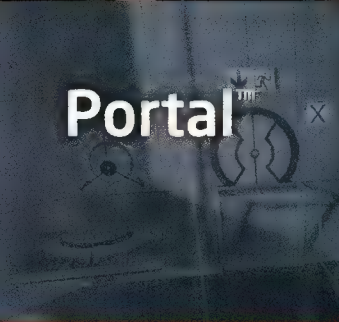
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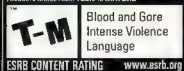
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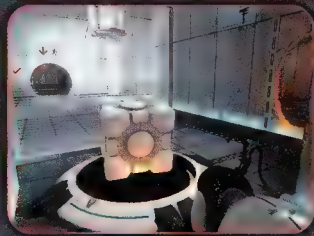
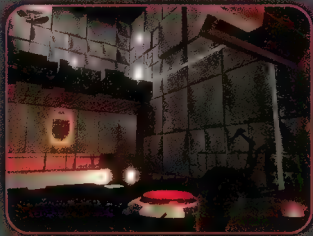
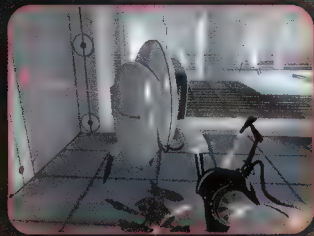
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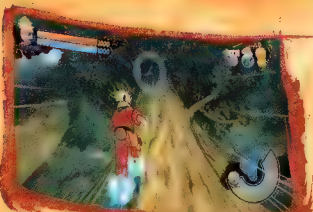


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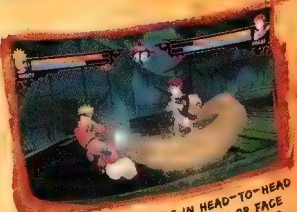
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Cover Story: Saints Row 2

THQ's gangbanging sequel returns to streets paved by *Grand Theft Auto*, but is another road-raging knock-off such a bad thing?



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> EDITORIAL

A New Era

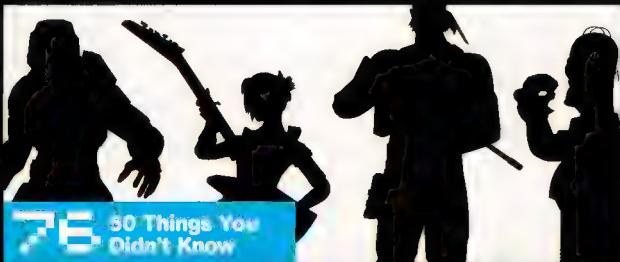


BOLLOCKS! John Davison is leaving us, yet we're still getting *Mr. Bean* movies? All things British seem to be going wrong for us right now. *Mr. Bean* is easy enough to ignore. But John Davison? We're really going to miss our second-favorite British import (sorry, John, the Beatles are still tops)—our former editorial director is leaving the company to form a new, family-focused media group.

John has been with us for so long now, it feels like he arrived with the other survivors of the *Titanic*. But in reality, John left England back in 1998 to join us as the editor-in-chief of *EGM*. He was also editor-in-chief of the now-defunct *Official PlayStation Magazine* and eventually made his way up to the director of the Ziff Davis Game Group (now also known as the 1UP Network). He's provided ideas, leadership, vision...as well as an extra syllable in the word "aluminum." It's hard to believe he won't be around our offices anymore—we'll miss that boisterous laughter down the hall—but luckily for all of us, he'll still be a regular on the Review Crew and on the 1UP Yours podcast (podcasts.1UP.com).

So who's replacing him? A guy who seems to get his kicks from knocking down *Mr. Bean* shows (even though he's never seen one: me. I've taken over the role of the 1UP Network's editorial director, which means I'll be watching over editorial coverage across a whole lot more than just the pages of *EGM*, from 1UP.com to *Games for Windows: The Official Magazine* to *GameVideos.com* to MyCheats.com and more (podcasts, blogs, etc.). That's a lot to manage! Good thing this is one cakewalk of a job: All our properties are run by some truly creative, ambitious folks. I know I don't have to worry much about the 1UP Network with such talented people (and great friends) taking care of the day-to-day content, so all I can really do is to continue John's great legacy and provide help, support, and direction where needed. Oh, and I'm still acting editor-in-chief of *EGM*, so sorry to say, you're still stuck with me for some time to come!

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief



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> THIS MONTH'S EGM EXTRAS

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See trailers and gameplay footage, plus interviews

Seek and Enjoy: Halloween edition
Suffering from brain strain? We've got the answers.

Abundance of SuperGuides
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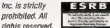
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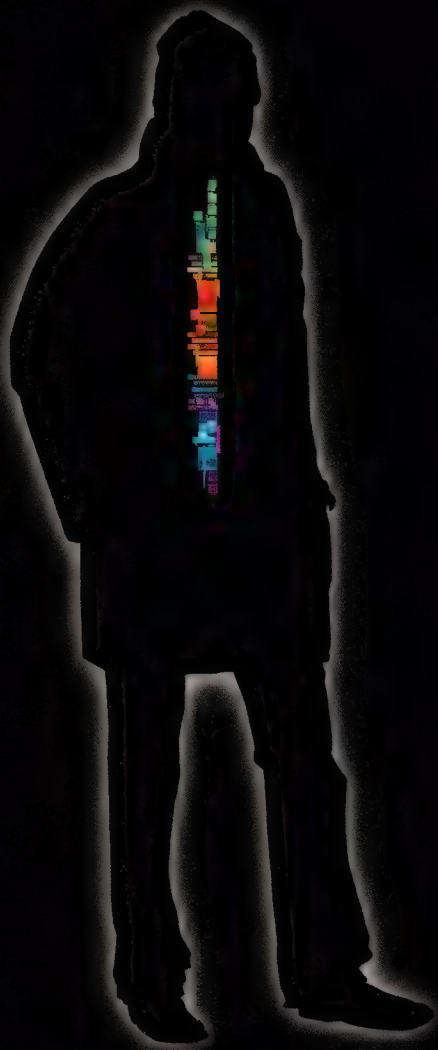
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Meet Vann.

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What's in your digital world?

LETTERS

> gaming with two x chromosomes, the role of previews, and something about gravity

> TRIVIAL ISSUE

This month's EGM question: Who's the patron saint of accountants?

E-mail the answer to EGM@ziffdavis.com

(subject head: Trivia: EGM #221) for a chance to win something potentially awesome.

.....

Letter of the Month Lady joins boys' Band

I just read both Chad Johnson's letter regarding *Rock Band* ("The day the music died," EGM #219) and your response. ["When your guitarist's wife starts trying to break up the band... you can drop 'em without a second thought...."] Guys, I have a shocker for you: I'm 30, and as of last Saturday, a wife (with two X chromosomes and everything). I'm very much looking forward to drumming, strumming, and singing my heart out in my very own *Rock Band*. I realize that perhaps my high estrogen level will cause a band breakup, especially when I have a massive PMS fit because my husband is playing games when he should be fawning over me and spending every night rubbing my feet while I watch *Steel Magnolias*. But I'm giving it a shot, and the consequences be gosh darned. Welcome to the Brave New World, guys. Some of us Yoko Onos are actually gamers in our own rights.

I do have one question for you, though: Should I buy lace doilies or a copy of *BioShock* with our wedding gift certificates?

—Stacy Wood

How do you have time to play games and still finish your womanly duties? Do you have one of those under-counter TVs in your kitchen?

That's why we call them previews, you know

I have an issue with your *Lair* review—and no, it is not because of the scores given [6.0, 5.5, 5.0]. I think that most of the people who were upset [with your review] would not be if EGM had not hyped *Lair* so much. Granted, EGM is not the only responsible party, as *Lair* has been featured on magazine covers, in preview features, on TV, and so forth. Why so much hype for a game that ended up blowing more than a prostitute grandmother? [What?—Ed.] Doesn't EGM bear some responsibility for featuring this game so much? I doubt that there would have been as many upset gamers otherwise. Didn't EGM know that this game sucked from the beginning? Why did you hype it so much?

I know that your score only reflects the opinions of the EGM editors, and



■ Lair, Lair, pants on...er, fair?

that is fine. If the game sucks then, well, it sucks. But why did you get gamers' hopes up for a game that you had played before and therefore had to have known was not gonna be all that great?

—Matt Lorenz

First off, our Lair scores hardly equate to suckage, as they fall squarely in the "average" range. But more importantly, your letter inspires us to wax philosophical about the preview process a little bit. See, when we look at a game before release, we're usually looking at a version that has a long way—sometimes a very long way—to go before it's ready for prime time. So we know there are always issues in the version we're playing that won't be in the final game...only

sometimes they do make it into the final shipped product (sometimes in spite of the developers' assurances to the contrary). That's one part of the equation.

Another part is the simple factor of time: Play a game for half an hour at a trade show or press event and you may not pick up on issues that may become painfully apparent when playing a game all the way through for review.

Plenty of other factors come into play as well: Sometimes the person writing the preview and the person writing the review may have honestly differing opinions on the game; sometimes something that feels new and fresh in a demo or preview may become tiresome when spread throughout an entire game; sometimes the designers even make



For writing this month's winning letter, Stacy gets a copy of *Barbie in the 12 Dancing Princesses*...or maybe something else we have lying around.

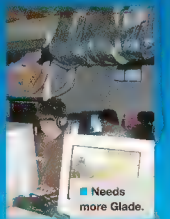
HOW HARDCORE ARE YOU?

Your proudest gaming moments

The first contestant in our monthly harder-core-than-thou competition is to use the #10P boards:

"Every year, I hold an ultimate LAN party. Last year we had two HDTVs, a 5.1 surround-sound speaker system, two minifridges (one for each team, because we didn't want to get off our lazy asses to get drinks), two Xbox 360s, two copies each of *Fallout*, *Halo 2*, and *Game of War*, and *Guitar Hero II* (with two controllers). It was pretty much the greatest thing ever. Maybe this year I'll even have a LukeBox!"

—DRPantsPnP



Want to see your own story in this space? All you have to do is tell us how harder-core you are. Describe the goods to what makes you more into games than anyone else in the house. If to EGM@ziffdavis.com, subject head: "I Am Hardcore." Remember, it doesn't count if you can't prove it to someone other than you!



■ A Slime appears!

changes that make the game worse between the preview version and the final version.

So yes, sometimes we can get excited about a game that turns out to be pretty mediocre. Truly, no one is more disappointed when this happens than we are. But with all the things that can change between a preview and review version, we're actually pretty damned proud of the fact that we get it right as consistently as we do.

On a more alarming note, what the hell was that bit about the prostitute grandmother? Seriously, what's wrong with you?

The great battle over random battles

Why is it that role-playing-game random battles are looked down upon? I don't see the appeal or the challenge of knowing exactly where a monster is when I am exploring a dark dungeon or world map. Why would I want to touch the graphic of an enemy so a battle screen appears that contains more than the one enemy that was on the map? Then again, why should I have to touch an enemy so a battle screen appears in the first place?

In real life, if I were to go on an adventure in a deep cave or in a rain forest, I would have no idea when a serious situation would come up. So, I would have to prepare for the unknown and stay on my toes at all times. That would be part of the excitement.

In a cave or forest in an RPG, I should prepare for the unknown. Did I take enough items into the cave? How many enemies will I run into? What combinations of enemies will be there? Will I survive knowing that foes can appear at any time?

I believe the level of accomplishment that you get from beating a random battle videogame far outdoes any

nonrandom battle game (excluding action-RPGs). Therefore, I had a hard time liking *Chrono Trigger*, *Lunar*, and many more. Random battle games are about preparing for the unknown and having the feelings of relief and accomplishment afterward.

—Alex Walenty

In real life, if we were walking down the street and were suddenly ambushed by a grinning, blue, ambulatory globule of slime, and transported to a tiny arena in which we had to wait for everyone else to do something before we could do anything—well, we would be alarmed. Confused, even.

So let's not take these "in real life" comparisons too far, hmm? "More realistic" does not always equal "better."

Oh, Halo...

I don't think I'm the only one ecstatic about *Halo 3*. I didn't realize until now that there are books that fill in the gaps between the games. In what order do the books and games go? I want to read/play the story of Master Chief from beginning to end.

—Onigiri Man

We'll answer your question, Mr. Man, only because we're so relieved that this wasn't another e-mail freaking out at us for covering *Halo 3* so much.

The chronological order of the plots of the books is as follows:

Halo: Contact Harvest (due in October), *Halo: The Fall of Reach*, *Halo: The Flood* (a retelling of the plot of the first game), *Halo: First Strike*, and *Halo: Ghosts of Onyx*.

A graphic novel, cunningly titled *The Halo Graphic Novel*, was also published. It includes four stories: "The Last Voyage of the Infinite Succor" and "Breaking Quarantine," both set alongside the events of the original game; "Armor Testing," which takes place between *Halo* and *Halo 2*; and "Second Sunrise over New Mombasa," which is set alongside the events of *Halo 2*.

As of this writing, two additional novels have been announced, and Marvel has just released the first issue of the new *Halo: Uprising* comic, set after *Halo 2*.

...is it me you're looking for?

Do you think *EGM* could cut one of the monthly 20-page *Halo* stories down a bit and use the space for a game that doesn't get covered on every website and videogame magazine ad nauseam? What would be nice

is using some of that space for games that probably won't do well because they get no coverage (*Persona 3* comes to mind). I don't expect you to not cover *Halo*—it sells mags and probably will be a Game of the Year contender in most circles—but I, and just maybe a few others, would enjoy a little freshness now and then from a multiplatform magazine.

—Ian Lyon

Dammit!

Back in the saddle again

I'd like to know if there are going to be sequels to *Gun*, *Crackdown*, and *Gears of War*. I have thrown away too many hours of my life playing these games and might kill myself if they don't get sequels.

—Nedward

Gears of War, definitely. *Crackdown*, almost definitely. *Gun*? That one's a toss-up. It did OK, and Activision has hinted at the possibility of a sequel, but we're guessing developer Neversoft will be too busy with *Guitar Hero* and *Tony Hawk* to take a trip down that only marginally rewarding trail again.

Hopefully that'll be enough to keep you from taking a long walk off a short ledge.

Now that's just mean

I have owned many consoles in the past. I have no patience, and for that reason I must get them at launch. I hear all of these stories about how the launch consoles break early, but I beg to differ. I have owned a launch Nintendo 64, PS2, Xbox, and, most recently, Xbox 360—none of which has broken or needed repair. The red ring of death is what I commonly hear about, but I have yet to discover that misfortune on my launch console. I am writing to rub that in the faces all the gamers who have paid \$400 for a 10-pound strobe light. My console is as healthy as the day I got it, and I am proud of that.

—Brian Ayers

Wow, Brian, you're a pretty big dick, aren't you?

Skate or die of boredom

I just finished reading your short article "Skate or Fly" in *EGM* #219. To be honest, I just don't think realism in the skateboarding videogame world will work very well. One of the things that makes *Tony Hawk* my favorite sports franchise is the fact that it's ridiculous—popping 900s over roller coasters and shooting fireballs out of

To end his thirst for blood,
you must develop one of your own.

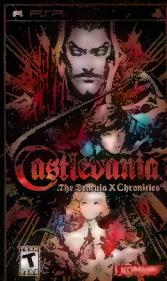


Castlevania

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Coming October 2007

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PlayStation Portable

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Falling: an all-too-common occurrence in the obnoxiously realistic *Thrasher*.

your skateboard is exactly what I love about it. Realistic skateboarding in a videogame sounds like it'll just make for some very trying gameplay. Gravity sucks. I'm open to being proven wrong, but in the meantime I'm sticking with *THPS4*. There's nothing better than shredding Alcatraz.

—Stephen K.

Hey, let's not forget that a realistic skating game has already been done. *Thrasher Presents: Skate and Destroy* (1999, from Rockstar) actually required you to tap the X button in order to push your board, remember? You don't? Exactly.

WRITE FOR EGM

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We're looking for the best writers around, so if your samples read like cookie-cutter clones of stuff you've seen everywhere else, don't bother. Thanks in advance.

Doesn't that have something to do with apples?

In *EGM* #219's Letters you responded to a concerned gamer about the A.I. in the upcoming *Splinter Cell* game. You then proceeded to try to explain a perfectly elastic collision (i.e., the bullet hitting the table) using simple Newtonian gravitation. While the attempt was admirable, a few ideas were overlooked: A key feature in Newtonian gravitation is that velocity is independent of mass, whereas acceleration is not. The perfectly elastic collision that gave the bullet its kinetic energy (the hammer hitting the firing pin) imparts an acceleration on the bullet such that the amount of force (a force, by definition, causes acceleration) that the rigid table would have to apply to stop the bullet's acceleration is equal to the amount of force generated by the explosion that put the bullet in motion (conservation of momentum and energy). So the table breaks. In other words, ladies and gentlemen: If I am to believe that the table is going to save my ass from a bullet, then I have to believe that the table can "push" on the bullet with as much force as the bullet "pushes" on the table. And that's a big no.

As far as the inverse square law is concerned: If you, for some unimaginable reason, wanted to measure the gravitational attraction (or electric charge) between the bullet and the table, then the inverse square (one divided by distance squared) approaches zero as the distance approaches infinity, and vice versa.

—Abdel Mohamed

You done? We stepped away for a minute to watch YouTube videos of fat people on trampolines.

Have you tried...ducking?

I consider myself a hardcore gamer. My main poison is first-person shooter (or third, like *Gears of War*). Now that I have several of these games under my belt, I have a severe concern: Many of these games have computer-controlled characters that work alongside you. But to my dismay all these characters end up being morons. I have no problem with the fact that they hardly help you through the game, but what I do hate is that they constantly get in the way. In *Gears* they block your line of sight and prevent you from advancing. In *Perfect Dark* I have been killed because I cannot see enemies and even shot up my own group when they jump in front of me while I'm shooting! The only game with smart computer characters is *Ghost Recon*.

To any developers who may be listening: You have billions of bytes to work with in these games. Please, could you invest more than one byte in these characters to at least get them out of my way?

—Matthew Hamel

You said it, Matthew. We understand that creating smart A.I. is one of the biggest challenges in creating a game. It's an enormously complex feat, involving behavior modeling, pathfinding, and simple common sense that's very difficult for a computer to replicate. But, damn. If we hear one more cry of "I'm taking fire!" from a teammate who doesn't have the basic wits to step out of the way of the freaking bullets, things could get ugly. Like, lead-pipe ugly.

Goddess of wardrobe

Heavenly Sword seems like a big-budget rip-off of *God of War*. My biggest complaint about it, though, is the main character, Nariko. She was probably the character designer's first wet dream. She is just demeaning to all women everywhere. And don't give me that "but she empowers women by being a hero!" crap. If she really is supposed to be an empowering, respectable woman, she would wear more than a Smurf's bedsheet over her body. You can say all that crap about allowing flexible movement by lack of clothes, but look at Ryu from *Ninja Gaiden*. He is a friggin' ninja, and he is fully clothed. Put him in a loincloth and I'll stop complaining about Nariko's appearance.

—Ben Jaberg

Funny thing about *Heavenly Sword*: One of the primary people behind the game is a woman. Ninja Theory co-founder and "Chief Development Ninja" Nina Kristensen has been the game's most visible spokesperson, and she's actually rather proud of Nariko. In fact, we sat down with her for an Afterthoughts chat on the game (pg. 64). Where is your righteous indignation now, Ben? 🐸

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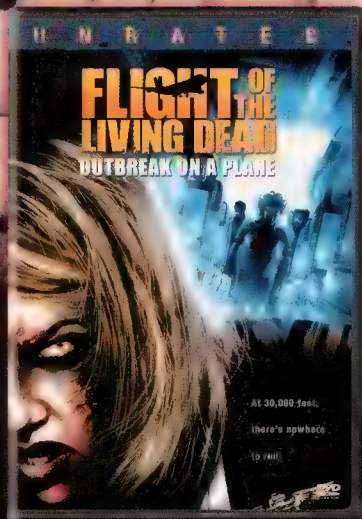
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Render by Chuck Ernst

EGM INVESTIGATES

Quality CRAP

Trash is piling up on Nintendo's systems, but why? We bulldoze through the junk to find out By Michael Donahoe



While Sega used to put quality seals on their games, neither Sony nor Microsoft currently has an "official stamp of approval."

NINTENDO ISN'T JUST SWIMMING IN CASH—they're practically drowning in it. Ever since the Wii and DS caught on with the "casual crowd," one thing's become quite apparent: Mommies and daddies now dig games as much as you. In fact, Nintendo's done playing with you, losers. Now they're focusing on the next stage: turning uneducated newbies into sudoku superstars. But Nintendo isn't the only one with this plan—third-party publishers are also looking to milk the mas and pops. And that's a problem for us hardcore gamers. You see, Nintendo is superlenient about what makes it onto their systems, meaning publishers and developers are now releasing more junk

than gems. Looks like this trend isn't going to end until Nintendo decides to stop releasing the schlock. But how exactly did the company get to this point? Nintendo won't say (they had no comment for us). So instead, we decided to find out for ourselves why the Wii and DS have become shovelware dumping grounds.

Seal of disapproval

Bad games aren't uncommon on any system. Hell, for every *Halo* on Xbox 360, you're going to get sucky software like *Vampire Rain*. But back in the NES days, Nintendo used to trick gamers into thinking every title was good. Sounds silly, but consumers really bought into Nintendo's Official

Seal of Quality—an insignia placed on the front of each retail box letting buyers know that Nintendo had "approved the quality of this product." In a way, they weren't kidding around—during the early days of the NES, publishers were limited in the amount of games they could release each year. Some companies, like Konami, actually had to create a subsidiary group under a different name (in their case, Ultra Games) to get around this strict rule. But shortly after the NES met its "game over" screen, Nintendo realized they could rake in a lot more money by allowing publishers to release more games per year.

Although Nintendo loosened their grip on publishers, they still kept the



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Diesel on
the wheel



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thoughts:
BioShock



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Feature:
Life meets
games

Official Seal of Quality intact...until the summer of 2003, that is. From this point on, Nintendo decided to ax the one word that made the seal worthwhile in the first place. Not sure what that word is? Well, here's what now appears on the box of every Nintendo DS and Wii title: "Official Nintendo Seal." As you can see, Nintendo opted to take out "quality," rendering the seal almost pointless. Just looking at all the recent poorly made DS and Wii titles proves this. Still, this doesn't fully explain why these games are in stores to begin with, but Nintendo's approval process does.

Easily approved

Wait, did we just say "approval process"? Our bad. "Nintendo does not have a formal concept-approval process," says Majesco Senior Product Manager Liz Buckley. "It's very structured for Sony and Microsoft." This means it takes a wee bit more effort to get a game approved with Nintendo's competitors. "If you want to get a game green-lit for Sony or Microsoft, you have to do a concept submission," explains Buckley. "You have to submit your game-design document, technical-design document, and pass a review committee." You see, unlike Nintendo, both Sony and Microsoft have dedicated review committees set up for one sole purpose: keeping crap games off the shelf. Does it always work? Of course not—it just means Sony and Microsoft are more conscientious about the kind of content that makes it onto their consoles.

Sony, in particular, is serious about the approval system. "I manage what is known at SCEA as the product-evaluation group," says Sony Computer Entertainment America Product Evaluation Manager Mark Vitello. "It's a small group of expert gamers and designers who evaluate all of the third-party game proposals and work-in-progress games for all the PlayStation platforms."

Along with evaluating titles early, the team also works closely with developers. Not so much to change ideas (these guys aren't developers, remember), but to help understand certain aspects of the proposed games. "On paper, rolling a ball of garbage around that other garbage

sticks to doesn't really sound like so much fun," says Vitello, referring to the seemingly unworkable concept of Namco Bandai's *Katamari Damacy*. "When you sit down and talk to the developer, it can suddenly all come together, and you see that vision and realize you're looking at a really awesome game. That's the fun part for us—sitting down with the developer to hear their ideas directly."

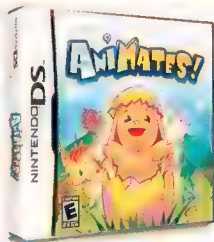
That doesn't mean Sony tries to sabotage the making of games, either. For years, Internet nerds have speculated Sony does not approve 2D games—that's obviously not the case. "The biggest [myth] is that we don't like 2D games and will just reject them outright," says Vitello. "If you look at all our games, that's clearly false. We don't restrict our approvals to a set number per year or by genre or art style or anything like that."

And just because Vitello works at Sony doesn't mean his team doesn't check out the competition. "We play everything, and I really mean everything, that comes out on 360, Wii, DS, and PC to stay on top of the competition," explains Vitello. "We all know what it feels like to buy a bad game and feel ripped off, so we work hard to get every PlayStation game to be worth a player's time and money."

A noble effort on Sony's part, but no amount of hard work could have possibly repaired the mess that was *Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire* (PS3). Still, at least Sony admits they try to keep consumers from wasting dough on dud, something Nintendo doesn't seem too concerned with. In fact, it seems Nintendo doesn't even mind when developers blatantly borrow—or, in some cases, steal—their ideas. For example, publisher DreamCatcher just

▶ Nintendo does not have a formal concept-approval process.

—Majesco Senior Product Manager Liz Buckley



■ Nintendo may make good games, but it also lets a lot of crap appear on its systems. Here's a sample: (clockwise from top left): *Ninjabread Man* (Wii), *Escape from Bug Island* (Wii), *AniMates* (DS), and *Chicken Shoot* (Wii).

released a DS game entitled *AniMates* that—get this—centers around cutesy critters that you train to become stronger. Sound familiar? Well, if you've played that popular game known as *Pokémon*, you might think so. If not, the box art will probably catch your eye: Along with a bunch of pokémons on the cover, the title's font even rips off *Pokémon*. Gotta copy it all, indeed.

It's obvious Nintendo doesn't mind companies imitating their intellectual properties, but what about Sony? "I think because we do have our quality standards, you don't see many games like [*AniMates*] on a PlayStation platform," says Vitello. "They usually are of such low quality that they don't even come close to our standards."

Pay to publish

Standards? Bah, who needs 'em? Obviously not Nintendo. It doesn't take much to get a game published on the Wii or DS. Damien Sarrazin, product manager at publisher Game Factory, explains why making games for Nintendo is a simple process. "Nintendo is actually very easy to work with if you compare them to other first-party [hardware makers]," he says. "They have very defined rules and guidelines, but they can also be very flexible." How flexible? Let's just say Jean-Claude Van Damme would be jealous of Nintendo's ability to kick crap like *Chicken Shoot* onto the market. Not only is the title ridiculous, but so are its origins: It's a port of an Internet Flash game that then got ported to the Game Boy Advance that then got ported to the Wii—ouch. Yes, this is the kind of content Nintendo is letting publishers put out. Sure, that's only one example, but now that the Wii and DS are hot, we'll likely be seeing more bad games since everyone now knows Nintendo is the place to go to make easy scratch. Bet Nintendo doesn't mind, though. "If consumers are apt to buy a lot of Wii/DS games per console, Nintendo stands to benefit from royalties," says Martin Shkreli, a hedge-fund manager at Elea Capital. "So Nintendo might be betting that the casual gamer will buy more frequently than the hardcore gamer, who probably values replayability, detail, and game length."

This strategy may be working right now, but what if these casual newcomers get pissed after they play these terrible games? Well, Nintendo may change their tune in the future. "I think Nintendo has [no concept-approval process] in place because

they were fearful of a lukewarm reception to Wii prelaunch," says Shkreli. "Now that it's clear consumers love it, they'll probably tighten standards to protect the image of the console."

Diamonds in the dirt

Though it does seem rather depressing, it is possible to see some positives in Nintendo's questionable ways—if you look hard enough. "When you have cheap, crap games, that's a sign of a healthy system," says EE Fund Management President Ted Pollak. "There's so much interest in making games for [the DS

and Wii] that out of every five or six games, there's going to be a gem." Pollak does have a point—it may be extremely easy to get a title approved on a Nintendo system, but that also means publishers and developers can take a lot more risks when making something completely new. Still, that means wading through tons of terrible software in order to find one title (if you're lucky) that may not totally suck. Well, at least one thing will always stay the same: Nintendo's first-party-developed games will continue to be the best releases you'll find on the DS and Wii. ❦

➤ When you have cheap, crap games, that's a sign of a healthy system.

—EE Fund Management President Ted Pollak

CHEAP CHAMPIONS
Five low-budget games that don't suck

Nintendo is open, approval process that is giving us more of cheap games, but not everything on the company's systems is rubbish. In fact, Nintendo's allowing developers to release some cool games that benefit from the DS' and Wii's unique control schemes. Here's a list of the quality titles that aren't trash.

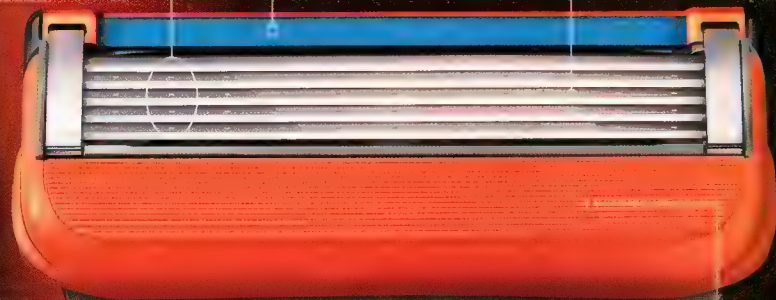
- Looney Tunes: Duck Amuck** • On paper—this, on the screen—the game looks silly. Poke the infamously terrible Duffy Duck until he gets pissed off? Well, who's the fun? Everywhere, actually—the wildly creative idea of finding hidden minigames by doing silly things (like drawing paint on Duffy's hoggin') makes this a fun little game that happens to take less than a DS game.
- Puzzle Quest** • This series—on a portable platform on the DS and PSP—has evolved into a addictive little time-washer. It's (almost) every gaming system's best-kept secret: a (almost) every gaming system's best-kept secret. Though it's merely a puzzle game (nothing you haven't watched your head over before), the main reason it works like 100 games is because...
- The New York Times Crosswords** • It's a DS game filled with over 1,000 crossword puzzles. OK, after you're going to find these for hundreds of dollars, it's a good idea to be the type of person who'd rather use the free version than play the game. (Regardless of what course you fall on, this always has been the rule for products...
- Cooking Mama series** • The only good way to get the best-selling platformer for the Nintendo DS is to buy the game. The game is pretty simple, and it's a little bit of a puzzle. It's a good idea to be the type of person who'd rather use the free version than play the game. (Regardless of what course you fall on, this always has been the rule for products...
- Trauma Center series** • The only good way to get the best-selling platformer for the Nintendo DS is to buy the game. The game is pretty simple, and it's a little bit of a puzzle. It's a good idea to be the type of person who'd rather use the free version than play the game. (Regardless of what course you fall on, this always has been the rule for products...

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> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

WHEELMAN

This ride runs on Diesel **BY JOE RYDICK**

Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
Midway

Developer:
Midway Newcastle

Release Date:
2008

VIN DIESEL KNOWS GAMES. The gravel-voiced actor (*Pitch Black*, *The Fast and the Furious*) has been actively involved in the biz since he founded production company Tigon Studios in 2002, which had a hand in creating surprise Xbox hit *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* (a remake is headed to PS3 and 360 next year).

And Midway's Newcastle studio knows driving games. The developer has pumped out ■ smattering of rac-

ers, from the 2002 PS2 incarnation of *Test Drive* to the more recent *L.A. Rush* (PS2/XB/PSP).

Put the two together and you get *Wheelman*, a story of "a good guy lured into a bad situation," in the words of Midway Executive Producer Shaun Himmerick. Based in a lovingly re-created Barcelona and starring the voice and likeness of Vin Diesel, *Wheelman* has serious ambitions. But big production values and a big-name headliner only go so far.

Going Hollywood

"It's all about the driving," says Himmerick. He says it repeatedly and fervently throughout our demo, attempting to underscore what he hopes will set this game apart from open-world epics like *The Getaway* or *True Crime* franchises. Sure, *Wheelman* is set in a real city. And yes, you do engage in some less-than-savory activities, from general traffic-destroying mayhem to very cool-looking midair carjacking (think



PSP's *Pursuit Force*, only better). But, Himmerick contends, where those games try to be jacks-of-all-trades, *Wheelman* is starting with a solid base of Hollywood-style chase scenes, then layering extras on top.

To demonstrate, Himmerick grabs the controller and speeds us through a mission. Diesel doppelgänger Milo must chase down and disable a car carrying a local tough guy, protected by a crew of lead-footed henchmen. As he tears down the streets of

Barcelona, lampposts go flying, café tables disintegrate, and oncoming traffic is shrugged off, tumbling away in explosions that bring *Burnout* to mind. Aside from buildings, Milo finds few obstacles between him and his prey that he can't plow through.

Road rage

As Milo approaches his target we come to the meat of the game: driving, at ridiculous speeds, through complex roadways while attempting

to take down enemies by way of wits, copious bullets, and Detroit steel. Milo grabs a handgun and starts firing out the window at a henchman's car. He closes the distance, and the game begins offering targets: rear tire, passenger, driver, gas tank. A tap of the targeting button switches between the different options; a quick squeeze, and the front tire goes...and so does henchman No. 1.

For his next trick, Milo tries something with a little less finesse: He



■ Vin runs into some trouble while driving to the set of his next film, *The Pacifier 2: Still Sucking*.



pulls up next to the enemy and gives him a nudge, and a shoving match ensues. As this enemy gets knocked into a building, Milo's own ride starts to show signs of damage. So he leaps to the next available car: Time appears to slow slightly as the virtual Vin floats toward the unlucky civilian's car. He lands on the trunk, leaps in through the passenger-side window, and kicks the driver to the curb.

This car won't be pristine for long, though, as Milo shows off his most spectacular move: the Cyclone. Pulling in front of his next target, he suddenly yanks up on the emergency brake. Things slow down dramatically as he spins the car 180 degrees, pulls out his gun, and fires a carefully

VIN IS IN

Diesel takes a hands-on approach



Sure, Hollywood action hero Vin Diesel lends his voice and likeness (as well as his stunt double for motion capture) to *Wheelman*. But how much is he involved, really? "Literally every line, every scene, every cut-scene, he's going over," says Midway Executive Producer Shaun Hinmcker. "He also has his people going over all the storyboards, all the cinemas—literally every one. He's a very big gamer, and he reviews the game and gives comments."

"This is something new, I think, to videogames. We're starting a franchise with Vin and Tigon, but we're making the game first and the movie second. Normally it's either the other way around or at the same time. So the benefit that this offers is that we don't have the time constraint of the movie launch date. And as we all know, [a hard launch date] has messed up a lot of games by being forced into that time frame."



THEY NICKED ME IN THE TEETH,
TORE MY GIRLFRIEND IN HALF
AND TOOK AWAY THE SUN.
I'M GOING TO LONDON.



Some "wheelman"—he can't even parallel park.

aimed shot through the windshield. The driver of the enemy car doesn't just slump in his seat—that would be far too mundane. No, the enemy car *explodes* in an unlikely fireball, flipping 10 or more feet in the air and doing who knows how much collateral damage. Spectacular, yes, and supremely satisfying, sure...but could it get old after the 10th or 20th time? Let's not rule that out.

Beyond the drive

Fortunately, the designers plan to have more than one trick up Milo's sleeve. Take the Missile, for example. "You can bail out of a car," says Himmerick, "and you'll have a time frame where you can shoot the gas tank of the car, and it'll explode, keep rolling, and take out [a huge group of enemies]." Then he hints at another move in the works. "We're not sure it's going to happen, but we love [the action game *John Woo Presents*] *Stranglehold*, and we love its Tequila Bomb," says Himmerick. "If we can find a way to make that [360-degree move] functional in a car, we're gonna do it. Maybe we'll put doves in. We'll see."

With all this over-the-top driving madness, the on-foot segments are almost a letdown. The gameplay is entirely adequate and we like Milo's ability to automatically take cover behind nearby scenery, but it doesn't quite match the scope and style of the driving. We're talking about a small segment of the game, though—perhaps 20 percent at most. So it's not much of a concern at this point.

VIVA BARCELONA

Fit for the road ahead

Barcelona may not be as iconic a city as *The Getaway*'s London or *True Crime*'s Los Angeles/New York City, but the developers of *Wheelman* found it perfectly suited to their needs. "Barcelona has a very diverse road system on its own. We didn't have to fake a lot," says Midway's Himmerick. "There are four-lane roads, a lot of narrow alleys, tunnels, a lot of winding roads—things you naturally want for your gameplay they have built in already." As a result, around 75 percent of the metropolis made it into *Wheelman*.



Much more intriguing is the prospect of taking this cinematic driving-combat experience online. Most of *Wheelman*'s Internet fare sounds pretty standard: races, time trials, capture the flag, and such. But add in the prospect of jacking competitors' cars and things get more interesting. "There are a lot of driving games where if *that guy has that car*, you're never going to beat him in that race," says Himmerick. "Here, every car will have its own advantage, so everyone will have their favorites. You may have the best-handling car, but I have the best top speed, so I can get up right behind you, carjack you, and you're out of the car."

On top of these combative modes, *Wheelman* will offer the ability to add human players into single-player scenarios. "We'll let the players online be the cops," says Himmerick. "You'll have seven guys who are cops, and you're the bad guy trying to pull off the mission.

We're really trying to bring some of that Hollywood cinematic style we have in the game online."

Narrowing the focus

This all sounds interesting enough, but it's hard to hear the words "carjack" and "free-roaming" and not think of *Grand Theft Auto*. Himmerick insists, however, that *Wheelman* is its own creature. "We're not trying to make a 'sandbox game,'" he says. "The games that are trying to do the sandbox, they don't have the time [to focus on driving], because they're focused on millions of things. We're trying to focus on over-the-top movie moments. We're not trying to do what they do."

Or as Himmerick put it earlier: "It's all about the driving." 🚗



EGM Extras: Now that you're done reading about the game, head to

EGM.1UP.com for exclusive *Wheelman* videos.

They impaled my dog
and drenched everything in blood.
It's time to return some pain.
I'm going to LONDON!



> AFTERTHOUGHTS

BioShock

Going deep with the game's creator *By Chris*



Ken Levine's resume is as elite as it gets— a fabled developer Looking Glass, he worked on *Thief* and *Ultima Underworld*. At Irrational, he's been behind *System Shock 2*, *Freedom Force*, and *SWAT 4*. And he kills at gin rummy.

KEN LEVINE MIGHT HAVE NITRO-GEN NARCOSIS, aka "rapture of the deep," a deep-sea sickness that causes your brain to go fuzzy. The creative director of critically acclaimed 360 shooter *BioShock* and president of developer 2K Boston (previously Irrational Games) actually—gasp—admitted to his game's problems during our recent interview. Rather unusual when most people would prefer to put a positive, sales-salvaging spin on any negativity. Bubbleheaded developer? Or a true industry luminary who really gets it? *****WARNING: REALLY, REALLY BIG SPOILERS AHEAD!*****

EGM: We have a theory we want to run by you. It wasn't the Adam that caused the downfall of Rapture—it's all the booze that's lying around.

Ken Levine: [Laughs] Whenever there's trouble, having enough

alcohol around always acts as a little bit of an accelerant. But hey, this is a very free society. It also probably got a little dull down there at the bottom of the ocean. People need something to occupy their time. But yeah, they had a fair amount of booze down there. And booze stays a long time.

EGM: Harvesting all the Little Sisters yields a very unfulfilling ending. Did you purposely punish the player for being a jerk with that ending?

KL: I would blame that on sucky writing, not on any intention. At the end of the day, there's a lot more interesting things to say about participating in a society

rather than destroying it. I think the endings, to some degree, reflect that. One ending is about a guy who's interested in exploiting and controlling, and the other one's more interested in building.

EGM: Do you think the good ending's too brief?

KL: I think it's a little brief. That was a function of production resources. We actually realized we wanted to have two endings really late in the [development process]. I'd never done multiple endings before—we used to have one twice-as-long ending, because you build those things based on the time you have. If it's twice as long, it generally costs

> I'd always rather piss off the gamer than the character.

—BioShock Creative Director Ken Levine

twice as much to build those pre-rendered sequences. The very end isn't my favorite thing.

But I like where [the good ending] ends up. I like that you end up becoming a family with [the Little Sisters]; there's a meaning to you saving them beyond just "you rescue the princess" and that's it. You actually are a part of their lives forever. I like the emotion. I just think we could have spent a little more time on it if we had the resources.

EGM: And the last boss was a little bit too easy....

KL: Honestly, I don't think the final boss battle was necessarily the best call on our part. It was our first console game; we felt like we had to have a big boss battle at the end, you know? Because that's just what you do. I don't think we even really needed it, necessarily. I think the escorting the Little Sister sequence is a lot more emotionally powerful. Going back to it, I'm not sure I would have done it the same way.

EGM: How did you research the music? We assume you don't have a bunch of 70-year-olds on staff to consult....

KL: I called my dad, who was a young man in the '40s and '50s. It's not Elvis Presley and stuff I became familiar with in the early stages of rock—this is really pre-rock: Johnnie Ray, Rosemary Clooney, Patti Page, Django Reinhardt, Billie Holiday.... We mixed some of the really classic stuff with the sort of crap pop of the time, what we consider pop music, like Patti Page, which holds up more for its nostalgic value than for being great music.

I did a bunch of my own research, and thank god for iTunes, that's all I'll say, because you can go listen to 30 seconds of pretty much any song ever made. Or I would research on Wikipedia or talk to my dad, and then I would go and listen to little snippets, and I'd ask myself, "Does this feel like it belongs in Rapture?"

[Dealing with this era of] licensed music...is a very complicated process, because generally you're dealing with people who are dead, and their lawyers are dead. The rights are often very complicated, and so a lot of times we'd want a song and we wouldn't get it. We'd have to find another person who performed it, or another version of

the recording or something like that. We had to be fairly flexible.

EGM: At the beginning of the game, you have no idea who your character is or what his motivations are, and as you get closer to the end you find out that you're really nothing more than a puppet. Was that a commentary on the current state of player/character interactions in games in general?

KL: You know, there is a notion of free will in games—but you don't really have a lot of free will in games. You get quests. Somebody tells you to go do this thing, and if you want to succeed in the game, we very naturally give you free will [to do so]. That's what a quest is.

I thought it would be really interesting to play on the very notion of what it is to be a gamer, to go through this experience, that when

you were going about these quests, your character, and by extension you, was actually being deprived of the free will to do those things.

In retrospect, you are a little puppet in videogames. I said, "Well, let's turn that into the narrative." Because I'd always rather piss off the gamer than the character, I'd always rather insult the gamer directly. If you have a villain, make it personal, make the gamer feel like the villain's bitch, not the character. When we came up with this notion, that you can sort of have the villain manipulating the player, to a degree that when the player finally realizes it, he's already been manipulated for quite a long time, and then sort of realizes that this is what happens in every game, but you don't even think about it... I thought it was a nice little way to comment, not just on *BioShock*, but to make gamers think about their experience of free will when they play games. ☹



Make sure to check out the November issue of *Games for Windows* magazine and 1UP.com for additional *BioShock* interviews.

CULTURE SHOCK

BioShock Creative Director Ken Levine's top 5 cultural references that helped him shape the world of Rapture...



The Shining

"No doubt, the most influential work of horror fiction on me in my lifetime. It's impossible to walk the halls of Rapture without getting a bit of the Overlook Hotel. Though he's become an icon, it's easy to forget that Stephen King completely redefined horror fiction in the modern age."



Miller's Crossing

"The Coen Brothers' best film and my favorite piece of moviemaking. You can watch it 20 times—and I have!—and still not pick up all of its nuances. The unique cast of their crime world inspired me when I was trying to construct the Rapturian dialogue of the game."



The Fountainhead

"Many of [in-game Rapture founder] Andrew Ryan's big ideas are inspired directly by Ayn Rand. It's easy to hate her, but it's impossible to deny that Rand's ideas about freedom and the power of humans have changed the nature of the dialogue about people and their governments."



New York City

"The visual direction in Rapture started with the day my wife and I spent at Rockefeller Center in New York City, disposable cameras in hand. We took photos of everything: floor tiles, lighting fixtures, door handles.... We ended the day at the Empire State Building. There's something about the look of art deco that always fascinated me."



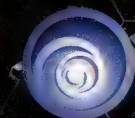
La Mer

"The music in the Lighthouse is Django Reinhardt's 'La Mer.' I first [learned of] Reinhardt in a Woody Allen film called *Sweet and Lowdown*, and I also grew an attachment to the style while listening to the car radio in Illusion Software's *Mafia*. That song became the audio touchstone of the world of Rapture for me."



HAZE

HAZEGAME.COM



UBISOFT

Robocopied

Ranking the roboclones *By Jason Kozlowski*

Downloadable *Robotron: 2084* rip-offs may all look different, but they all pretty much play the same. So we decided to rank the five best ones on Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Network.

5 Blast Factor

The hook: Motion controls
Highest score on PSN: zeus666
 (94,975,855, as of August 30)



The PlayStation Network's first shooter didn't exactly launch with a bang, but it did launch with some moves—the Sixaxis controls make this otherwise ho-hum game pretty fun.

1 Everyday Shooter

The hook: Combo variety
Highest score on PSN: N/A



Everyday Shooter may be a one-man development effort, but the game sure ain't simple—combo chains (and enemies) that change with each level make it our winner.

4 Mutant Storm: Reloaded

The hook: Adventure mode
Highest score on XBLA: nfrared2yaHead (214,133,740)

It's not as addictive as *Geometry Wars*, but *Mutant Storm* isn't that bad. Plus, the Adventure mode's 89 rooms gives this game some depth.



Originator: Robotron: 2084

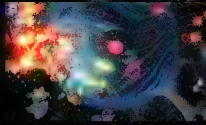
The hook: Saving humans
Highest score on XBLA: AlexTron
 (99,999,175)

The blast-em-up that started the simplistic control setup that's still copied today: move with one joystick, shoot with the other.

2 Super Stardust HD

The hook: *Robotron* meets *Asteroids*
Highest score on PSN: Rdin10
 (1,228,885,255)

Super Stardust HD is the first PSN game that made us combo crazy. But its homage to the arcade classic *Asteroids* shoots it to second.



3 Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved

The hook: Old-school simplicity
Highest score on XBLA: KILLerToKer420 (500,684,945)



Though recent games have zapped this twitchy king off its throne, it's still a classic. Too bad the new *Geometry Wars in Project Gotham Racing 4* isn't a true sequel. Lame.

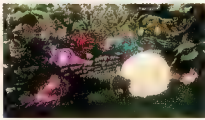
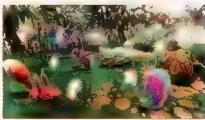
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Uncharted: Drake's FORTUNE

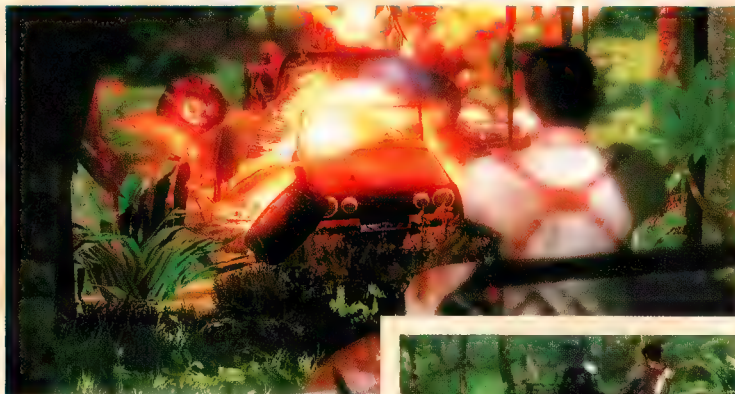
We discover the spectacular treasures buried in this PS3 adventure. By Bryan Intihar

Platform:
PS3

Publisher:
Sony Computer
Entertainment
America

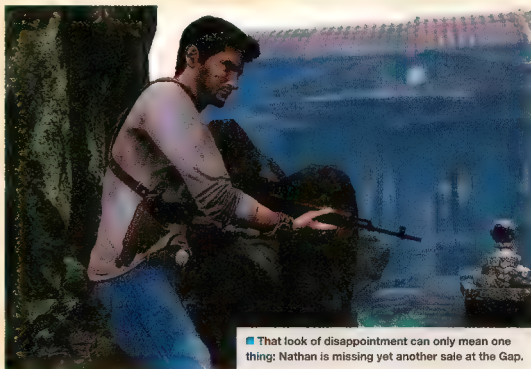
Developer:
Naughty Dog

Release Date:
November 2007



> THE STORY

Game Director Amy Hennig of developer Naughty Dog (*Crash Bandicoot*, *Jak* series) learned a very valuable lesson when researching the treasure-hunting genre: Everyone steals from everyone. "There are scenes in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* that are straight out of the Saturday-morning serial *Jungle Girl* and the movie *Gunga Din*," she says. "You realize that there's a very established tradition that you're working in. You have to know the conventions and then lovingly re-create them within your own context." As the game name implies, the questionable history of Sir Francis Drake provides the "context" here. While the early press on *Uncharted* has pegged it as a journey to see whether its leading man, Nathan Drake, is a descendant of the famous explorer, that's actually just a secondary goal. The legend of El Dorado is what really leads Nathan (as well as other—and much shadier—treasure hunters) to this mysterious island in the middle of the Pacific. "This treasure was brought to this island that remains uncharted 400 years later," says Naughty Dog Copresident Evan Wells, "and you'll learn that El Dorado causes weird things to happen to whoever comes across it." So are there mysterious forces hard at work in *Uncharted*? "One of the challenges in trying to tell a contemporary adventure story is that if you go without restraint in the direction of the supernatural, you lose people a little bit," says Hennig. "People want to understand how something can be grounded in truth, reality, and science, but at the same time still be amazing and mystical. You don't have to choose one or the other." We'll take that as a yes.



■ That look of disappointment can only mean one thing: Nathan is missing yet another sale at the Gap.

> THE HERO

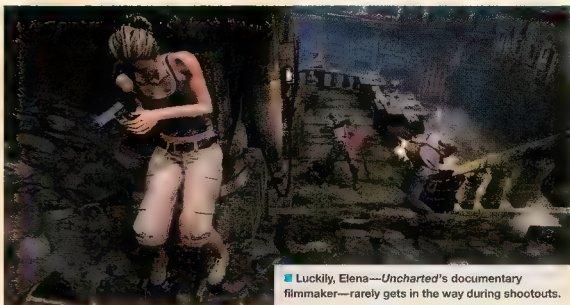
One look at *Uncharted's* protagonist (simple wardrobe, slender build, Supercuts 'do) and it's hard not to think of him as just another average Joe. But that's exactly how Naughty Dog wants you to think of Nathan Drake. "Our industry is still so much about that superheroic aspirational fantasy," says Hennig. "The characters are as burly or as clever as they can be. We're not making a James Bond here—that's a different genre. You need that vulnerability in this genre and the humor that comes along with it. While in the midst of peril and danger, you have to be able to make funny comments." Unlike several other games, *Uncharted's* realism extends well beyond its hero spouting smart-ass remarks during a cut-scene (been there, heard that). It shows up throughout gameplay: He'll barely grab the ledge during a big leap, wince and duck whenever he's running and under fire, and lose his footing for a second after slamming into cover. Also, thanks to the game's huge catalog of animations, Nathan looks awfully good when he's acting...well, average.

> THE COMBAT

Up until now, even Naughty Dog would agree that *Uncharted's* shooting and hand-to-hand fighting haven't exactly been worth their weight in gold. But what a difference a month makes—since our last time playing the game, both aspects of combat have been dramatically improved. For starters, it no longer takes a ridiculous number of clips to kill enemies, and targeting specific body parts is now a breeze (racking up headshots with the new sniper rifle felt as good here as in any top-tier first-person shooter). As for the fisticuffs, the developers smartly ditched the rhythm-based mechanics (which basically led to everyone mashing buttons) and instituted a simpler control scheme in which light and heavy attacks are mapped to the Square and Triangle buttons, respectively. The new setup makes it much easier to pull off some of Nathan's more spectacular moves, such as neck-breakers and punches/kicks to the junk.

We were also surprised to discover that the combat actually has depth to it (something you don't always expect from a title that's more about exploration than explosions). The game encourages you to combine your trigger finger and knuckle sandwiches, as you can injure a foe with a few blasts and then cap it off with a running haymaker (it works in reverse, too). The environment affects how the battle plays out, as well. For example, if you clock a guy in the jaw and he falls back against the wall, your finishing blow will be different than if he were just standing toe-to-toe with you.

It's refreshing to see that, with a li'l tweaking (and developers willing to listen to complaints), *Uncharted's* biggest weakness has become one of its biggest strengths.



■ Luckily, Elena—*Uncharted's* documentary filmmaker—rarely gets in the way during shootouts.

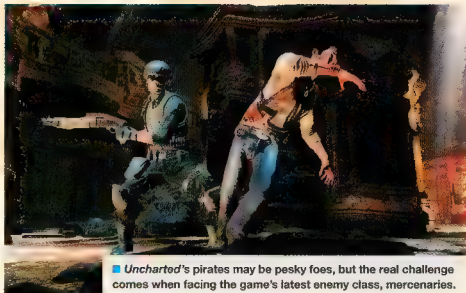


■ Nope, those aren't the jewels you're looking for.

> With a li'l tweaking, *Uncharted's* biggest weakness, combat, has become one of its biggest strengths.

> THE LOCALES

No treasure hunt would be complete without some stunning environments to traverse. *Uncharted* has plenty, even if its developer hasn't always been very willing to display them. "A lot of the early press for this game was focused on our jungle environment," says Wells. "And while the jungle is all over the island and even the monastery, with overgrown trees and hanging vines, there is a lot of variety in terms of the locales you'll visit. The jungle is only a small part of it." During our trip to Naughty Dog's office, we finally got to see some of the game's more exotic backdrops, including the flooded Spanish colony located in the center of the island, a dimly lit but wonderfully detailed monastery, and booby-trapped caves (think *The Goonies*). So, yes, the variety in scenery is definitely there. Also, from the realistic-looking foliage (no cardboard cutouts here) to the beauty of the architecture, *Uncharted*'s set pieces are definitely some of the best we've seen during this console generation so far.



■ *Uncharted*'s pirates may be pesky foes, but the real challenge comes when facing the game's latest enemy class, mercenaries.

> THE DIARY

Remember earlier when we mentioned that in this genre it's OK to rip off others? *Uncharted* continues that trend with Sir Francis Drake's diary, which bears a striking resemblance to another treasure hunter's personal memoir.

"It acts a lot like Indy's Grail diary [in *Last Crusade*]," says Hennig. "It exists as a story element—it ties you back to Sir Francis Drake, exists in the cut-scenes, and helps us learn things about the adventure." Most importantly, the diary (with its masterfully scribbled drawings and diagrams) is the key to solving puzzles, which Wells admits they made slightly more challenging because of the clues that its pages will provide. This approach (rather than going with the clichéd route of multiple camera pans as hints) also makes *Uncharted*'s brainteasers feel much more woven into the narrative.



EGM Extras: Head over to EGM.1UP.com for exclusive videos of *Uncharted*, which includes the first-ever footage of the game's Jeep chase through the jungle.

THE GOOD AND BAD OF PS3 DEVELOPMENT

The Good: Steady controls

"We're giving you subtle ways to help awareness the gameplay experience, rather than getting too gimmicky," says Naughty Dog Co-president Evan Wells, regarding *Uncharted*'s ill medication. This includes adjusting the trajectory of grenade

vision; keeping Nathan's balance on

tricky terrain; and

improving Drake's aim

in the more intense

combat situations.

Look, we're not saying

that the PS3 is the

best console for

developing games.

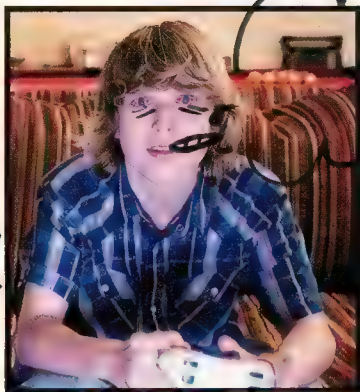


The Bad: Home console

Even though the game will sport a small amount of Xbox 360-esque achievements, it doesn't get another attempt at play. These achievements are your personal trophies, not the universal accolades of Sony's main store game.

And it's not that either. The game is a mess and you shouldn't play it. It's not that either. The game is a mess and you shouldn't play it. It's not that either. The game is a mess and you shouldn't play it.



**GAMER OF THE WEEK****Name:** Ted Krinshaw**Age:** 15**Hometown:** Tallahassee, Florida

PROS: InverteBOTS rocks! I recommend being the King scorpion. You got killer claws and one wicked stinger. Definitely the best attack combos.

CONS: The match-ups can get kinda unrealistic. I don't care who you are, an amped-up ant could never take a teched-out tarantula. Game over.

TOMMY VERTEBOTS

So I'm sitting on your couch, watching your favorite team on TV. You hear a thump, but you're too lazy to crack your head to the wind to see. Your dog begins barking. You hear a thump in the ground. Your dog stops barking. Actually where is your dog? Then a snake slings the sting of a telephone cord, comes crashing through your roof, directly into your mom's nest china. You look outside to see a 50-foot robotic scorpion landing with a heavy neighborhood. And all you can say is "Sweet."

Enter the InverteBOTS, the newest creation from POWERSOURCE 360. A reevaluation of Rapture page, InverteBOT's premise is simple. If you can grasp it, you can smash it. Set in the not-too-distant future, the world's machines have become modeled after the most resilient organisms on Earth: bugs. Techno-exoskeleton superbugs with the best of mechanical mandibles make us heroes on mankind. And you're behind the wheel. A

And from your pesky opponent sitting next to you, you'll have to fend off ranks of army ants, maniacal mayflies, and one bad mother sucker, the Mantisquito.

It has multi-function modes of play, from one- and two-player missions to a free-for-all bug-fest that ends in a head-to-head, tarso-twisting rough-house.

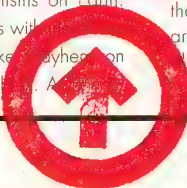
Lifelike graphics with just enough computer animation to let you level a city block without feeling too bad. And with independent controlling options that allow you to move each arm and leg individually, it's not all that hard to master.



King Scorpion



Super Fly



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THIRD PARTY EXCLUSIVES



> EGM INVESTIGATES

The Ex Games

Third-party exclusives have a past and a present, but do they have a future? *By H. Evan Van Zelfden*



Our guess for the next "exclusive" to go multiplatform: Xbox 360's *Ace Combat 5*. Microsoft paid for this Sony-loyal franchise to land on 360 first, but we expect it to hit PS3 next spring.



FORGET WOMEN—hell hath no fury like a *fanboy* scorned. Ask Capcom. When the company announced that its formerly PlayStation-exclusive *Devil May Cry* series was going multiplatform, Sony-loyalist gamer Derrick Hall took his disappointment to the people, starting an online petition that got more than 12,000 signatures. "We find it absolutely demoralizing for not only the gamers, but also Sony itself," he wrote.

Maybe Hall should pick a less depressing hobby, because the days of third-party exclusives—games you could count on to hit only one system—are numbered. To find out why, we delved into the business of game publishing. This isn't a topic you read about often—execs are usually reluctant to address the matter, what with confidentiality clauses, contract negotiations and the like. But we got several sources to talk to us about gaming's evolution from one game series for one game system to today's era of multiplatform *Grand Theft Auto* and *Devil May Cry*.

First strike

In the early '90s, PC-game developer Trilobyte created *The 7th Guest*, one of the first CD-ROM titles. After the developer started work on a sequel, *The 11th Hour*, Nintendo offered the game's publisher, Virgin Interactive, \$1 million to license the title. The contract specified that the game couldn't be licensed to competing platforms, specifically naming the just-launching Sega CD.

Trilobyte and Virgin agreed. But it became clear that Nintendo had no forthcoming platform that would be able to play the game. Nintendo had simply licensed *The 11th Hour* as a maneuver to stop Sega from releasing it for the Sega CD.

Today, such preemptive deals are nonexistent. Straight-up cash payers between a hardware maker

and a publisher or developer to lock down hot-commodity titles—popularly known as "moneyhats" on online forums—are unusual "but not a myth," says Jason Rubin, who cites the changing nature of platform exclusives as one of the reasons he left Naughty Dog, the PlayStation-friendly developer he cofounded. Recent examples include Microsoft's ludicrously high \$50 million advance to Take-Two Interactive to secure Xbox 360-exclusive downloadable content for *Grand Theft Auto IV*.

Instead, most modern exclusivity agreements involve lower royalty rates for the game (money the publishers pay the hardware maker for each game sold). Oftentimes, hardware makers will comarket an exclusive, helping cover the exorbitant costs of premium placement

➤ **There's no reason to do an exclusive. There's a big financial disadvantage.**

—Jason Rubin, cofounder of Sony-loyalist developer Naughty Dog

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Jump in.

 XBOX 360

within retailers, media events, and TV commercials, as well as ad placement within magazines—all of which add up to a larger bottom line for the game publisher. "It's kind of like selling your soul to get money to market the title," says Rubin, "and then when the title comes out, they don't make as much money because it's only on one platform, but it was the only way they could afford to promote the game in the first place."

Paying hard to get

From a hardware maker's standpoint, the stronger a game is, the more they're willing to cut a good deal with the publisher. A hot exclusive, after all, can move hardware. Look at *Final Fantasy VII*, a major contributor to the original PlayStation's success (and note it was originally a Nintendo 64 exclusive before developer Square allied with Sony). "Some deals we complete in weeks," says Michael Shorrock, Sony's director of third-party relations. "Some we have worked on for a number of months." It may take the lawyers a while to ink a handshake deal, and because it takes more than two years to bring a triple-A title to market, the discussions start early. "We're already looking out to 2009," adds Shorrock.

On the game publisher's side, exclusivity terms hinge on many factors. "As a publisher or developer," says Makoto Iwai, executive vice president and COO of Namco Bandai America, "we have to think of the installed base of the console." The more hardware units in gamers' homes, after all, the larger the potential audience for a third-party game. "In the early transition to next gen, no one platform has enough units out there [to justify exclusivity]," says Josh Resnick, president of *Mercenaries* developer Pandemic.

Relationships are important, too. Soon after he joined the company, Nintendo of America President and COO Reggie Fils-Aime had a one-on-one talk with Ubisoft exec Laurent Detoc; that chat led to new games, such as the Wii-exclusive *Red Steel*. "I do believe that conversation helped sow the seeds for a much better relationship that we have...with Ubisoft," Fils-Aime told *Newsweek* in April.

And last November, *Newsweek* reported that GTA publisher Take Two wanted to do a timed PS3 exclusive of six months to a year for *Grand Theft Auto IV*, while Ubisoft wanted a full PS3 exclusive



Not just for Sony's systems anymore (clockwise from top left): *Assassin's Creed*, *Devil May Cry 4*, *Grand Theft Auto IV*, and *Mercenaries 2: World in Flames* (a sequel that was originally announced only for the PlayStation 3).

for *Assassin's Creed*. But former PlayStation chief Ken Kutaragi had yet to finalize the business terms for independent publishers on the PS3. That delay allowed Microsoft to swoop in and persuade Take-Two and Ubisoft to back away from making *GTA4* and *Assassin's Creed* into PS3-exclusive games. Not only are the titles now for PS3 and Xbox 360, but versions for both systems will ship on the same day.

Dealing and schmoozing may buy a console a timed-exclusive-of-up-to a year (although never longer than that), but the rising costs of game development mean most third-party publishers and developers will eventually need to spread their big games to other platforms. One insider told us that doing an additional version of a game adds just 10 to 15 percent to the original development cost. That makes breaking even on a cross-platform title easier.

And today's publishers have to consider the M word: merchandising. Limiting a franchise to one system, after all, cuts down the audience for that series' comic books, movies, soundtracks, action figures, and other peripheral profit centers, not to mention its overall buzz factor. "If I have an opportunity to reach a couple million more users," says Rubin, "that's a couple million more users that might buy my T-shirts or my music and are going to make the overall notoriety around the franchise that much bigger. What's the 10-year cost of giving up 2 million users today on a growing franchise? It's hard to quantify."

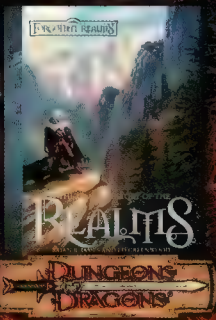
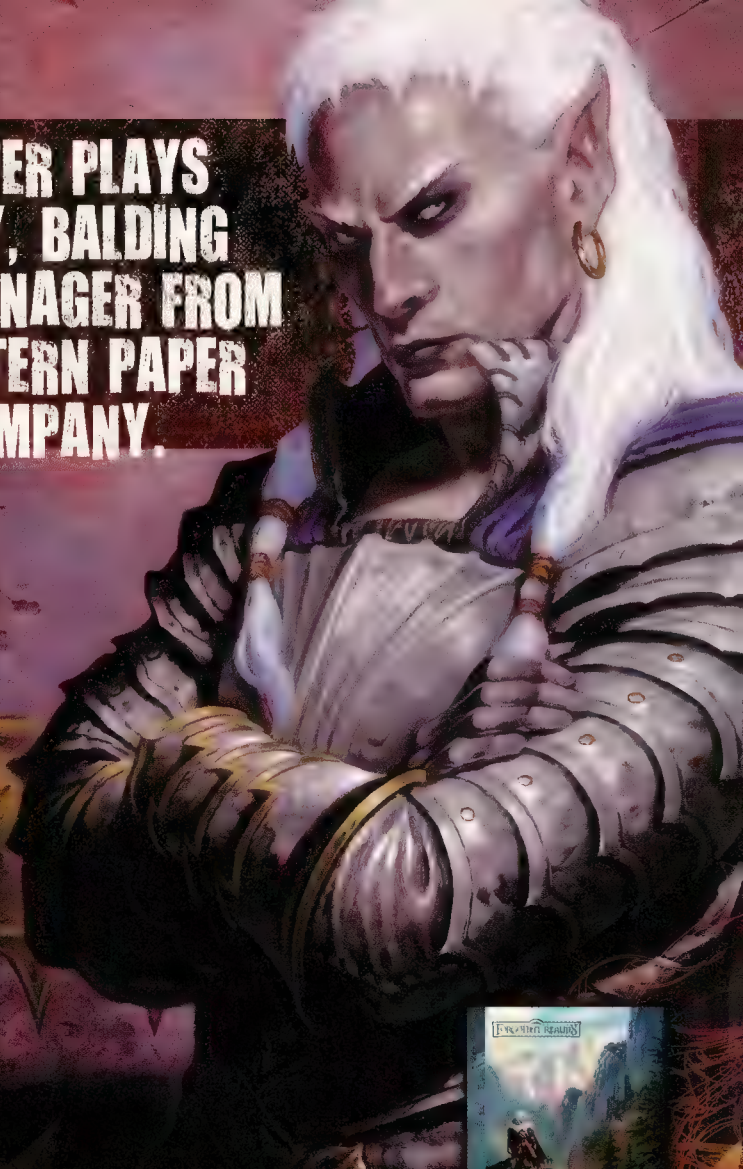
Endgame

That's not to say that exclusives will die out completely; Nintendo's Wii will get games only its motion-sensing interface can support (although the Wii's getting plenty of crap ports, too—see page 32). "The choice of a platform has a direct [effect] on our content and the production pipeline," says Ubisoft Montreal CEO Yannis Mallat. And some developers are so tied in with the hardware makers—receiving advanced tech support—that it's hard to imagine their games ever going multiplatform. "With *Resistance: Fall of Man*, we had a very good idea of what the PlayStation 3 would be able to do well before it was manufactured," says Insomniac head Ted Price.

Still, today's more evenly powered PS3 and Xbox 360 make simultaneous development easier than in the old days, when porting a game involved extensive reprogramming. "Dumbing a game down to get it across all systems does not hurt your game like it used to back when losing a few thousand polygons meant the difference between a 3D game and one that wasn't," Rubin says.

So where does that leave the demoralized Derrick Hall and his fellow 12,000 signatories? If they're serious about boycotting *Devil May Cry 4*, it looks like they'll be the only ones losing out. "We're not denying [*Devil May Cry 4*] to anyone who was already going to get it," says Christian Svensson, senior director of strategy and research at Capcom USA. "It really is the best decision for the company and for consumers." ❦

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PLAYSTATION 3



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> THAT'S COOL



FORMER EGM EDITOR Shawn Smith used to write about video-games, but now he's helping make one. The multitasking man is helping to create a DS title based on his cutesy toy line Shwanimals. The fall 2008 game, *Ninjatown*, puts us in the sneaky shoes of several ninjas who must band together to battle some bastard named Mr. Demon. Hop over to www.shwanimals.com to see the toys the game is based on.

MOVE OVER IPHONE—the next wave of cellular competitors promises to pump up the gaming quotient. First up, Nokia plans a third assault with its N-Gage brand this fall, but this time it's a GameTap-style subscription service for all Nokia phones. We're slightly more stoked for the official PlayStation-branded phone from Sony Ericsson, rumored to hit this holiday.

> THAT SUCKS



SEEMS EPIC GAMES is "too busy" to make console demos—Vice President Mark Rein recently said his company doesn't have enough time to make a PS3 demo of this fall's *Unreal Tournament 3*. Too busy our asses. Sounds more like "too lazy" to us, since the PC is getting one.

SONY IS BROADCASTING something sweet over in Europe—it recently announced PlayTV, a doo-hickey that connects to your PlayStation 3 and allows you to record television shows like TiVo. Too bad the service isn't ready for prime time here in the States, though...



> AFTERTHOUGHTS

Heavenly SWORD

What's after the afterlife?

By Shane Bettenhausen

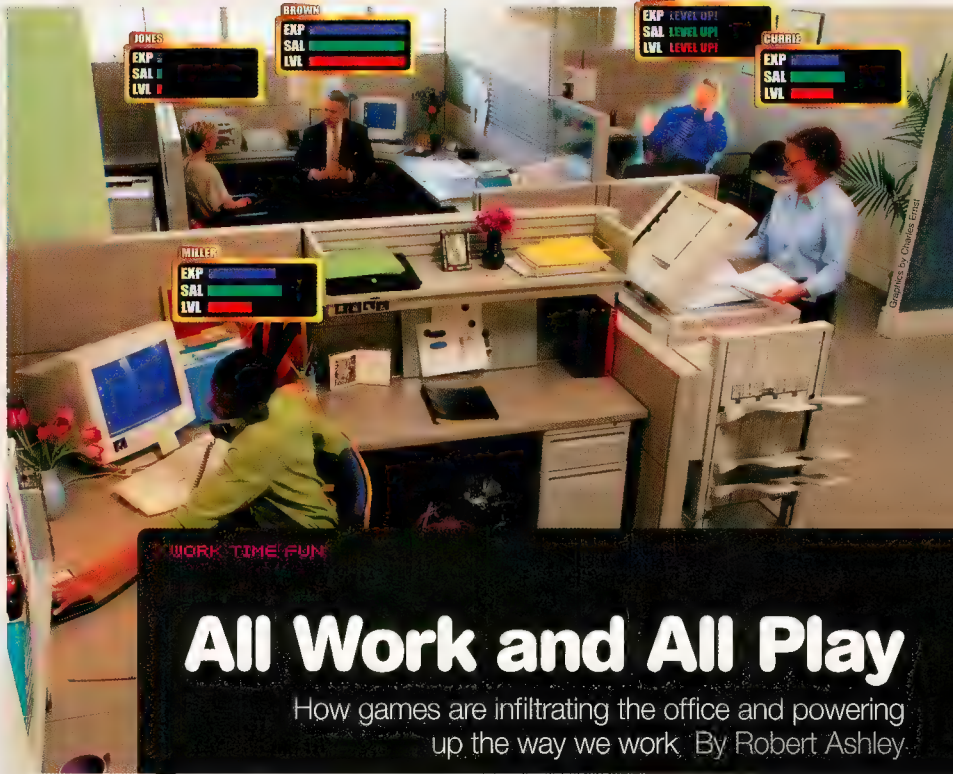


MARKS, SONY'S AFFIRMATIVE ACTION RESPONSE for going on vacation, *Heavenly Sword* by bringing the war with its "gung-ho" style. The PlayStation 3 game, *Heavenly Sword*, is about a warrior named Li Xia who goes on a quest to save the world. The game is a mix of action and strategy, and it's a great example of what a game can be.

EGM, Can you shed some light on those *Heavenly Sword* trailers that surfaced online?

Nina Kristensen has been working on it for over four years...

...and we've been playing them since the beginning. It was a very long process, but we're excited to see it finally published. We hope that when we first played it, though, publishers would say, "That's terrible... it's not sellable!"



WORK TIME FUN

All Work and All Play

How games are infiltrating the office and powering up the way we work. By Robert Ashley



Not to be confused with *Shenmue*, the *Grand Theft Auto* series, or any other games that put your character to work, this story is about real-life jobs that are turning into games.

WHERE TEACHERS AND PARENTS FAIL, VIDEOGAMES SUCCEED. They turn Ritalin-popping channel surfers into Zen masters of concentration, C-students into mindful accountants, and 20-something slackers into models of Protestant work ethic—albeit in the trades of gathering virtual wealth, fighting virtual wars, and solving virtual problems. How many human hours have been spent perfecting expert-level *Guitar Hero* solos? How many were invested in creating the ultimate *Oblivion* character? What if gamers spent as much energy and effort in their day jobs, taking on the challenges of the working world as they would *Halo 2* capture-the-flag?

The irony is that work and play are strangely similar. In games, we endure endlessly repetitive tasks (shoot the Covenant!), manage complex resources (mind the salary cap, coach), overcome seemingly impossible challenges (hard mode), and team up with (at least in online games) incredibly annoying people—and we

do all this with smiles on our faces. In fact, we even pay for the privilege. The makers of business software have begun to take notice. If games feel a lot like work, these companies reason, then work might be made to feel more like a game. If they succeed, you may someday get to play games for a living.

Try, fail, try again

"The whole thing started when we imagined trying to find a way for a fairy to get through a forest with the least amount of damage and come out the other end having discovered a new way to design a computer chip or load a UPS truck," says Byron Reeves, Stanford University psychol-

ogy professor and cofounder of the gaming-inspired business software developer Seriosity. From their offices in Palo Alto, CA, the company studied the inner workings of game design and found striking similarities between playing online multiplayer games and doing computercentric office work. "We spent a couple of years looking at complex, collaborative multiplayer games, realizing that a lot of the activity that was being done in those games, while for entertainment purposes, really resembled information work," says Reeves. "We're trying to take what's fun and engaging in those games and put it into actual business practice."

That's a pretty hefty challenge. What

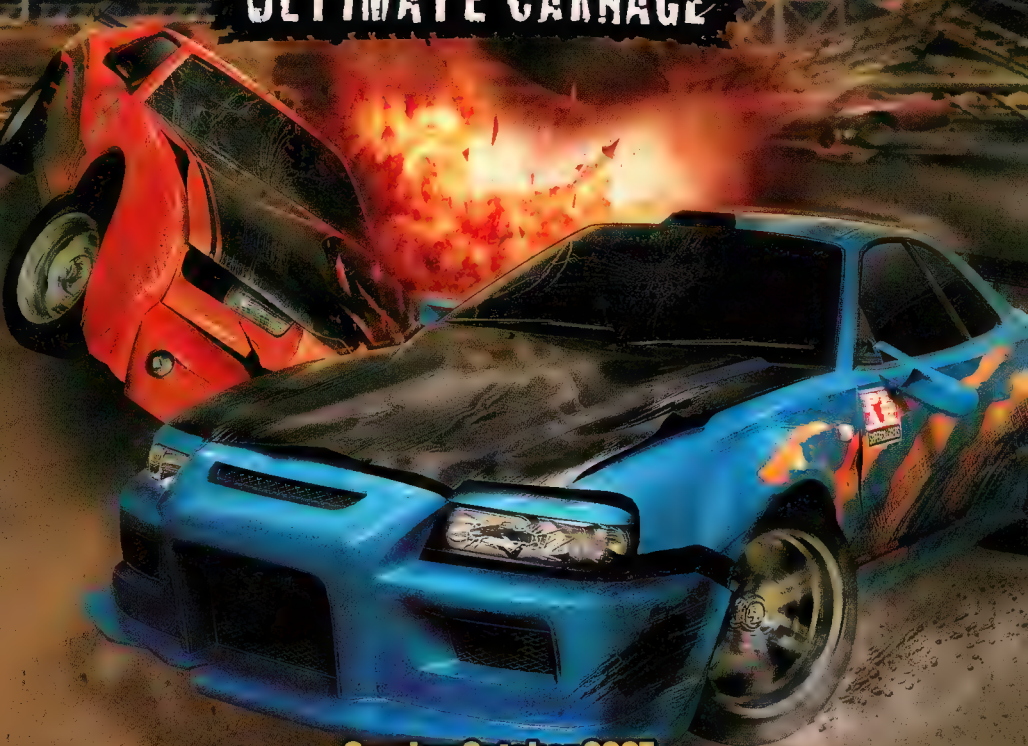
➤ **Let's build *World of Warcraft* for salesmen in the real world. That's kind of the Holy Grail.**

—Seriosity cofounder Byron Reeves

⚠ WARNING: Use Extreme Destruction

FLATOUT

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Coming October 2007



Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE

is it about games that makes us try, fail, and then try again? What makes them so engrossing in spite of frustration and repetition? Amy Hennig ought to know. A longtime game designer and member of the team at developer Naughty Dog, she's currently directing the upcoming action adventure *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*. "To be fun, repetition has to have some reward," says Hennig. "In a well-designed game, the reward is usually just the satisfaction you get from performing a task with increasing skill."

She might as well be describing a good job. Through the course of performing a job, after all, you naturally become more skilled in its execution and feel a certain satisfaction in being good at what you do. Unfortunately, that satisfaction only goes so far. "Ultimately, repetition without variation is a killer," says Hennig. "As players advance through a game, they've got to feel like their skills are being challenged in new and complex ways, otherwise it quickly becomes boring."

Finding the flow

This is game design's motivational secret. Great games are built around steadily increasing challenges that throw just enough new stuff at you to keep you interested. Most jobs, unfortunately, don't follow that flow: A graphic designer's workday may be hectic Tuesday (when a project's deadline approaches) and slow to the point of boredom on Wednesday, while a new level in a game will predictably be a degree more difficult than the one before it.

Psychology has something to say about that difference. In his 1990 book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Hungarian-born psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (say it like "chick-SENT-me-high") describes a state of mind that should be familiar to any gamer. Flow, or what an athlete calls being "in the zone," is what happens when other concerns melt away and you find yourself able to concentrate easily on the task at hand, be it saving the world, winning a deathmatch, or clearing as many *Tetris* lines as possible. Csikszentmihalyi attributes this higher gear of mind power to a perfect meeting of skill and challenge. In other words, it's all about doing something that is neither too easy nor too hard.

The designers at Seriosity are well aware of this idea. "There are two kinds of jobs that game sensibilities might address," says Seriosity product designer David Abecassis. "The first

is that some jobs are too difficult and too complex. The second is that some jobs are too easy." Seriosity, having studied the way gamers manage complicated goals and inventories in massively multiplayer online games, focused their attention on adding fun to complex real-life busywork. Taking a look under the hood of corporate America, they saw a possible fix for the overwhelming tide of e-mail flooding the inboxes of office workers. "What you're seeing in the workplace is that we're getting inundated with massive amounts of e-mail," says Ilan Frank, director of product management at Seriosity. "That information is sometimes relevant and important to what you're doing, and sometimes it's just a distraction."

And so Frank and company took a page directly from online role-playing games, designing an e-mail client called *Attent* that adds virtual money to the mix. But instead of being used to buy magical armor, Serios—as the currency is called—are used to buy attention. It works like this: Every week, *Attent* users receive a certain amount of Serios. Workers are free to attach Serios (in whatever denomination) to their e-mail as an indication of their communication's importance. Nagging messages about cleaning out the ancient takeout containers in the office refrigerator, for example, would receive few or no Serios. If you wanted to tell your boss about an earth-shattering new idea, however, you would want to get his or her attention by attaching a sizeable amount of the currency. On the receiving end, you're able to quickly determine which messages in the e-flood are important by simply checking their value, indicated in the subject line.

And as you open your mail, the attached Serios accumulate in your account, just like real money. Eventually, such a system might be related to a worker's real pay, rewarding efficiency with cold hard cash. "That's absolutely the goal," says Professor Reeves. "We're not there yet, in terms of your salary being pegged to your Serio count. We have a slight inflation problem right now."

Attent also copies another gamer favorite, Xbox Live Achievements, in the form of badges. "You earn badges for playing the game—for using *Attent* well," says Frank. Users earn badges for things like trading Serios with a large number of coworkers or for achieving a favorable ratio of Serio-attached e-mail to normal mail. "Each badge has been designed to award

your use of *Attent*," says Frank, "but in the future, the thought is that companies could actually set up their own custom badges."

It's not exactly something you'd play at home, but Seriosity intentionally started with a small, attainable





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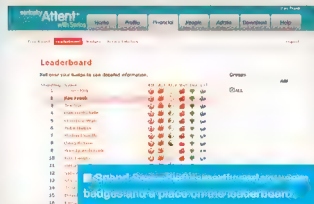
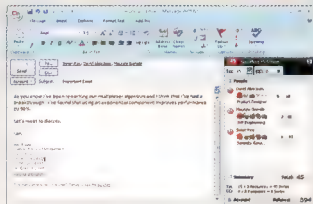
- Games
- Movies
- Web
- 2D and 3D

goal. "Our first thought was, let's build *World of Warcraft* for salesmen in the real world," says Reeves. "That's kind of the Holy Grail, where we expect all this to go to, but it's an incredibly difficult place to start out with."

Level 20 used-car salesman

New York-based software developer Entellium is attempting to start with just that. The company's Rave software is best described as a no-frills role-playing game for sales departments. Competing in an office software category known as "customer-relationship management," Rave tracks a salesperson's efforts (for the boss to monitor) and keeps tabs on potential customers. "If I'm a salesperson, right now I'm basically being forced to use software by my manager so that he can determine whether or not I'm doing my job efficiently," says Dave Scott, Entellium's senior VP of sales and marketing. "The manager wants to know how many customers you called today, and if you didn't make enough phone calls, he's going to reprimand you. When it comes to the carrot versus the stick, it's all stick. Compare that to *Zelda* on the Wii. That's all carrot-based. I know that if I go through tasks A, B, and C, I'm going to get the sword or the shield or the boomerang. I'm incentivized to work harder, faster, more efficiently."

To make the road to reward more apparent, Entellium is building in a level-up system along the lines of a role-playing game. "So when you first start out, you're a level-one user," says Scott. "You're only going to be able to see the basic activities and the basic reports. But when you master that level, new reports appear. Rather than overwhelm you when you first begin to use the software, we're going to allow you to receive new functional-



➤ **[Companies] are really into using the sensibilities of games in creating and designing work for this new generation.**

—Seriosity's Byron Reeves

ity as you master certain aspects of the software." Rave incorporates a system of experience points that dictates how fast you level up, affording competitive salesmen bragging rights that extend outside the office break room. "It's an objective analysis of how good that salesperson is," says Scott, "and they can take it to their next job. It's like you walk into your next campaign already a ninth-level Paladin." If that's not nerdy enough for you, Rave and Attent also maintain Xbox Live-style leaderboards to track the top employees in the company.

Neither Rave nor Attent looks like a videogame; you probably couldn't pick them out from any other office program. They feature no characters or 3D environments, no office-chair races or first-person stapler shoot-outs. It's unlikely that this kind of work will ever happen within an immersive game world. "I don't think that in [the office] environment we're going to see a lot of graphical complexity," says Seriosity's Abecassis. "Those jobs are already very difficult to do. We want to reduce the headaches as much as possible." It's the jobs that are too

easy or slow—things like security guard work, data entry, and over-the-phone customer service—that might benefit from an all-out videogame makeover. "That's where the extra spice of adding complexity—adding graphics or team play, things beyond what are required—would work," says Abecassis. "That's where you may start seeing things that look more like games for entertainment."

If it seems unlikely that your boss would ever look to videogames as a model for your job, consider the multiple generations of young workers raised on a diet of interactive entertainment. "There are a lot of big companies that are [catching] on to the success of these games and looking at them to figure out what they can use," says Seriosity's Reeves. "Companies are hiring people that come from a gaming environment. They're really into using the sensibilities of games in creating and designing work for this new generation."

And if your "work" hard enough in this new game-inspired office space, maybe someday you'll become your company's final boss. 🎮

ON-THE-JOB GAMING WE HELP THREE LAME CAREERS LEVEL UP

Cargo inspector

Thanks to a newly passed law, inspectors will soon have to sift through 100 percent of the shipping containers arriving at U.S. ports. That grueling task could be made more efficient and fun with an old-school role-playing-game trick: the random bonus. In these games, careful dungeon explorers are rewarded for their effort with treasure chests full of loot. By attaching a \$100 bonus to one in every 1,000 shipping containers, inspectors might be motivated to be just as thorough.

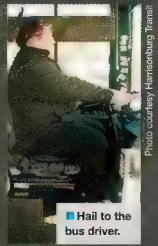
Night watchman

Patrolling the halls of an empty building at night is the kind of job that can bore the clock to a stop. Museums and businesses that require maximum security could increase the

awareness of (and job intensity for) their guards by installing a system of speakers and motion detectors. The speakers would, once in a while, emit a suspicious noise, while the motion detectors would record whether the guards inspected the area, scoring them on their response times.

Bus driver

The bus is always late. Sure, traffic has a lot to do with it, but bringing out a bus driver's competitive instincts might go a long way. Buses equipped with GPS devices could be tracked in real time as they hit their stops, while—back at headquarters—that data is compiled onto a leaderboard of the most prompt drivers. Each bus could display the rank of its driver in the electronic destination sign, giving good drivers public bragging rights.



➤ Hail to the bus driver.

THE END IS NEAR.
AND IT IS ANGRY.



GEARS OF WAR

Introducing Gears of War to Windows.

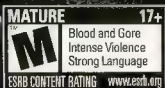
The Locust Horde has emerged on the Windows platform. And they bring forward a new enemy to help them ravage whatever is left of mankind: The Bromak—a relentless, soulless tower of terror.

All is not lost. Three new multiplayer maps have also been unearthed, along with five new single-player chapters—which means more battles, more story, and for Marcus Fenix and his squad, more chaos.

More than 30 Game of the Year awards on Xbox 360.

5/5
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10/10
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Games for Windows LIVE



RUMOR MILL

Sweet and tangy scuttlebutt By Quatermann

PROTOTYPES

It's a common sight in the game development world: a prototype of a game, often a simple one, is shown to a group of people. The prototype is usually a rough sketch of the game, showing the basic mechanics and the look of the characters and environments. It's a way to get feedback from the people who will be playing the game, and to make sure that the game is fun and interesting before investing a lot of money in it.

WE SCROUNGED TOGETHER 541 MANY RUMORS by Jason Matlock and Nightshade, as the members of *Wacko Games* (writing and design) *Wolfenstein 3D*. At this point, our videogame plan is being fully developed for the time I'm spending with around 1,000. There's a lot of work to do, and we're not sure how much of it we'll be able to do. I'm not sure if I'll be able to do it, but I'm not sure if I'll be able to do it. I'm not sure if I'll be able to do it, but I'm not sure if I'll be able to do it.

WILD BITES

Some things are just too good to be true. Like the fact that the members of *Wacko Games* (writing and design) *Wolfenstein 3D* are now working on a sequel to the game. It's a really cool idea, and we're really excited about it. We're not sure if we'll be able to do it, but we're really excited about it. We're not sure if we'll be able to do it, but we're really excited about it.

SPY GAMES

It's not just the members of *Wacko Games* (writing and design) *Wolfenstein 3D* who are working on a sequel to the game. It's also the members of *Wacko Games* (writing and design) *Wolfenstein 3D* who are working on a sequel to the game.

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WIT GAMES

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Final Fantasy Tactics (PS) director Yasumi Matsuno is wrangling together some of his old pals who worked on past SRPG titles like *Ogre Battle* (SNES) to piece together an exclusive Wii game very similar to *Final Fantasy Tactics*.

Spy games

Thief: The Dark Project (PC) director Yasumi Matsuno is wrangling together some of his old pals who worked on past SRPG titles like *Ogre Battle* (SNES) to piece together an exclusive Wii game very similar to *Final Fantasy Tactics*.

Q-TIPS

- Most of the rumors in this issue are based on information from the game development world. Some are true, some are not. We're not sure if we'll be able to do it, but we're really excited about it.
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COMING SOON

A November to remember?



Mercenaries 2: World in Flames

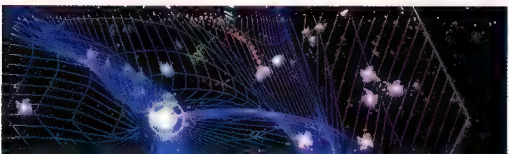
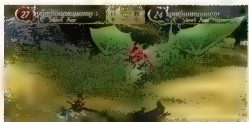
PS3/XB360/PS2 • EA Games

This long-awaited follow-up to 2005's open-world blockbuster finds the same three soldiers-for-hire fighting for private military companies in war-torn Venezuela. And those titular flames actually play a big role—brandishing your handy Zippo can lead to strategic immolation of enemy structures. Plus, the addition of online co-op lets you and a pal tackle oil-greedy tyrants together.

Fire Emblem

Wii • Nintendo

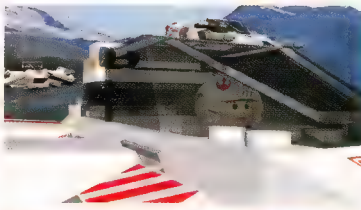
This installment of Nintendo's popular tactical role-playing series has much in common with its Cube cousin *Path of Radiance*—familiar grid-based combat, an epic storyline, and, well... GC-quality graphics. You can even transfer your old saves from *POR* to import your beefed-up heroes. Speaking of characters, as in previous games, don't get too attached to anyone in your party. Why? Once they die, they're gone for good.



Geometry Wars: Galaxies

Wii/DS • Sierra

Sure you could pop down a few Xbox Live Marketplace spacebucks and get your fix with *Tetro Evolved*, but for the rest of us this new *Geometry Wars* iteration breathes fresh air into an already overly addictive top-down shooter. Grids now span multiple galaxies, and all-new enemies await your untimely arrival. You can also customize your battle drone with weapons and abilities, or challenge friends in the multiplayer mode. The price tag remains our only concern: \$50 seems a bit steep.



Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga

Wii/PS3/XB360/DS • LucasArts

Nobody expected these family-friendly, blockified takes on the *Star Wars* saga to be its best videogame adaptations in years, but pick-up-and-go gameplay, a ton of playable characters, and cuddly Lego visuals made 'em smash hits. This new collection combines both games to span the whole six-flick series, sprinkling additional characters and levels throughout.

More November Releases

Army of Two

PS3/XB360 • EA Games

Mass Effect

XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios

BlackSite: Area 51

PS3/XB360 • Midway

NiGHTS: Journey of Dreams

Wii • Sega

Brothers in Arms:

Hell's Highway

PS3/XB360 • Ubisoft

Rock Band

PS3/XB360/PS2 • EA Games/MTV Games

Call of Duty 4:

Modern Warfare

PS3/XB360 • Activision

Soulcalibur Legends

Wii • Namco Bandai

Haze

PS3 • Ubisoft

Super Mario Galaxy

Wii • Nintendo

Kane & Lynch:

Dead Men

PS3/XB360 • Eidos

Uncharted:

Drake's Fortune

PS3 • Sony CEA

Mario & Sonic at the

Olympic Games

Wii/DS • Sega

Unreal Tournament 3

PS3 • Midway

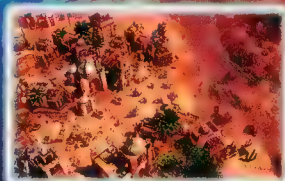
CONQUER THE EARTH



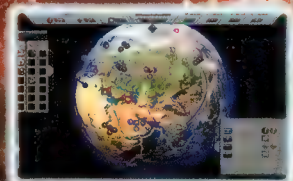
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Coming November 2007



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50

THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW

THE NEW TUROK FEATURES DINOSAURS?!

The next *Call of Duty* takes place in the present day?! *Rock Band* is about putting together...a rock band?! We can probably guess what you're thinking right now: "Well, duh." So instead of wasting your time with another stack of by-the-books previews like the other guys, we've dug up 50 juicy (and sometimes quite unusual) bits of info on several of the most anticipated games.



→ ROCK BAND

PS3/XB360/PS2 • EA Games/MTV Games • November 2007

1. ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

Rock Band's sturdy drum kit (which should cost around \$80) comes in five pieces but assembles in less than five minutes. You'll need to provide your own throne, though.

2. THE MISSING INK

The game will have a tattoo shop where you can spend money earned from road gigs to decorate your custom rock star. Even sweeter: The shop will showcase tattoos from real-life parlors and artists.

3. HAND SOLO

You can play entire songs on the tiny made-for-solos buttons at the base of the Fender-licensed Stratocaster peripheral...as long as you don't mind looking ridiculous.

4. MORE COWBELL

Not only can your singer tap the microphone for tambourine sounds—it also doubles as a cowbell in Blue Öyster Cult's "(Don't Fear) The Reaper." Singer/guitarists who have their hands full with the ax can just shout "pow" into the mic to trigger tambourine and cowbell.

→ METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

PS3 • Konami • Spring 2008



5. SWAN SONG

Need further proof that this installment in the stealth-action series is really the end of Solid Snake's story? According to the folks at Kojima Productions, "Full Circle" acted as the development code name for *Guns of the Patriots*.

→ DEVIL MAY CRY 4

PS3/XB360 • Capcom • Winter 2007



6. THE NAME GAME

If you thought Devil Bringer was a strange moniker for protagonist Nero's reach-out-and-kill-someone right arm, the name isn't nearly as bad (or generic) as what was originally being tossed around. "My first inclination was to call it Devil Right," says Director Hideaki Itsuno. "But for so many reasons...Devil Bringer was the perfect name."



MASS EFFECT

XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios • November 2007

7. OH, THE POSSIBILITIES...

In this action-role-playing game, you have as many as 640 different attack combos available at any given moment. Your character has up to 10 special attacks, and each of the two squadmates has eight. Since these can all be combined, the possibilities are astonishing: $8 \times 8 \times 10 = 640$.

8. TRY, TRY AGAIN

The combat interface took a lot of fine-tuning—developer BioWare did seven completely different iterations before they got it right. "It's like a puzzle—you can't just change one thing," says Project Director Casey Hudson.

9. RING-OUTS

Testers have shown designers things they didn't even know were possible. "We saw somebody have one character lift an enemy up, and the other character punched him back with a throw—and it literally launched him back 60 feet and over the building that was behind him," says Hudson.

10. FACE FACTS

The character-creation system is so realistic, it has the lead designer seeing the world differently. "When I go for coffee," says Hudson, "I'll find myself looking at the barista, thinking, 'Yeah I can almost imagine where the sliders would be on the face-creation system to make that person.'"



SUPER MARIO GALAXY

Wii • Nintendo • November 2007

11. HAPPY HAUNTING

Go ahead and add another getup to Mario's wardrobe: the Boo suit. This outfit transforms him into an incorporeal ghost capable of passing through walls. Plus, other Boos will leave him alone...but just be sure to avoid sunbeams.

12. CLASSIC CONSUMABLES

Despite its wacky outer-space theme and wild new costumes, *Galaxy* retains many of the power-ups that fans have come to expect. The Super Mushroom, Fire Flower, and Stamman return here, although the 'shroom no longer grants Mario megasize—now, it simply refills his health meter.

13. MULTIPLAYER MARIO

Although it's hardly the two-player experience that series creator Shigeru Miyamoto has been hinting at since completing *Super Mario 64*, *Galaxy* does offer an intriguing co-op option in which a second player brandishes a Wii Remote to help Mario stun enemies and collect goodies.

14. BIZARRE LOVE TRIANGLE

Mario's well-documented fling with temptress Princess Daisy may be ancient history (see: *Super Mario Land* for Game Boy), but how will Peach handle his new relationship with celestial beauty Princess Rosetta? Scandalous!



→ HALO 3

XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios • September 2007

15. MOMMY COMPLEX

Dr. Catherine Halsey lent her likeness to hyperintelligent A.I. Cortana and invented the Spartan-II program, making her Master Chief's "mom." But is she a more literal mom, too? She and Capt. Jacob Keyes worked together about 35 years prior to the games—and Keyes' daughter Miranda looks to be in her mid-30s. Hmm....

16. CAN OF WORMS

The mighty Covenant Hunters aren't actually giants but instead consist of a colony of worms wearing armor. Pretty weak worms, too, considering how a Hunter goes down like a chump with a single, well-placed shot to the lower back.

17. SE7EN

Seven Halo installations. The Master Chief is Spartan-117. Forerunner Monitors are named in powers of seven (e.g., 343 Guilty Spark). Gravemind speaks in seven-syllable couplets. See a pattern? Sadly, though, this first-person shooter is merely a trilogy—not a heptology.

18. O IRONY

In real life, an arbiter is someone who peacefully mediates a solution between opposing parties. For the Covenant, an Arbiter is a warrior who mediates peace by killing everything in sight (and usually dying in the process). This is known as a "cultural difference."

→ ARMY OF TWO

PS3/XB360 • EA Games • November 2007

19. DUAL DYNAMIC DUOS

This ain't just a buddy game with homoerotic undertones—we've learned *Army of Two* also has a versus multiplayer mode. "You're playing against two other live people," says Senior Producer Reid Schneider, "but still competing for contracts, dollars, and objectives."

ASSASSIN'S CREED

PS3/XB360 • Ubisoft • November 2007



20. INSPIRATIONAL BATHROOM BREAK

This stealth-action game's complex crowd system was born from a trip to the crapper. "I was trying to get there as fast as possible before the beginning of the second period [of a hockey game]," says Creative Director Patrice Désilets. "I asked, 'What would happen if I started running through [all the people], pushing them to the side?' I didn't try it that night.... I made a game instead where you play my fantasy."

21. GRUMPY OLD MEN

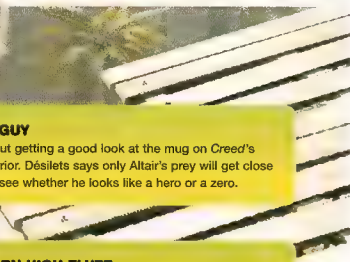
Listen carefully and you'll hear lots of funny one-liners from Creed's crowds. Désilets' favorite? When an elderly citizen spouts, "You should have seen me in my younger days!"

22. SHY GUY

Forget about getting a good look at the mug on Creed's deadly warrior. Désilets says only Altair's prey will get close enough to see whether he looks like a hero or a zero.

23. A BORN HIGH FLYER

No wonder Altair doesn't get scared whenever the "job" requires him to swan-dive off a tall building—his name means "the flying eagle" in Arabic.



GUITAR HERO III: LEGENDS OF ROCK

Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2 • Activision • October 2007



24. ROCKIN' REMAKE

Vibrant hard-rock band Living Colour is the master of its own track "Cult of Personality." Unfortunately, the group was unable to locate the original master recordings to use for the game. Instead of panicking, Living Colour geared up to rerecord the hit—complete with a new guitar solo.

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PS3/XB360 • Rockstar • Spring 2008



25. FREE ROAMING

Everyone's made a big deal about Niko's prolific cell phone and texting use in GTA4, but mobile phones and pagers have been a series staple (though now you can initiate those interactions) since its inception in the late '90s.

→ THE SIMPSONS GAME

Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2/DS • EA Games • November 2007



26. EASIEST. ACHIEVEMENT. EVER

Sure, the 360 version has standard achievements for completing levels, but we like the five-point, minimum-effort touch right off the bat just for hitting the Start button.



27. HUTZ APPEAL

Not only does EA chairman Larry Probst appear here, but so do knockoffs of Mario, Donkey Kong, *Street Fighter*'s Ryu, and *Madden* jocks. Lawyers, unite!

→ RESIDENT EVIL 5

PS3/XB360 • Capcom • 2009



28. THE WAITING GAME

Remember all that time between *RE4*'s debut and finally playing it? Well, history could be repeating itself with Capcom's latest survival-horror entry. Recent word coming out of Japan has *RE5* with a 2009 release date, which is about four years after it was initially shown.

→ KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN

PS3/XB360 • Eidos • November 2007



29. AS SNEAKY AS A FOX

While shooting through the Tokyo level with these two psychopaths, keep an eye out for the rotating fox atop one of the buildings. This symbol is a clue to developer IO Interactive's next project (which we hear is geared toward the kiddies).

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

Wii • Nintendo • December 2007



30. FRIENDS OPTIONAL

In addition to the four-player bouts, *Brawl* has a fleshed-out solo mode featuring side-scrolling action levels, boss fights, and individual storylines for each character.

31. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

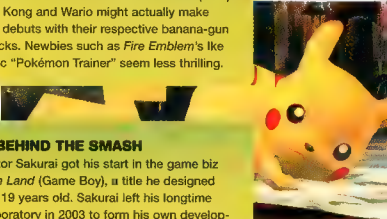
If you haven't checked out *Smashbros.com* yet, prepare for an overabundance of info—*Brawl* Director Masahiro Sakurai updates this official website almost daily with new screenshots and exclusive intel.

32. NEWCOMERS GALORE

Brawl adds several Nintendo characters to the roster. Fanboys are most excited for the return of *Kid Icarus* (NES) star Pit, but Diddy Kong and Wario might actually make more ostentatious debuts with their respective banana-gun and toxic-fart attacks. Newbies such as *Fire Emblem*'s Ike and weirdly generic "Pokémon Trainer" seem less thrilling.

33. THE MAN BEHIND THE SMASH

Smash Bros. creator Sakurai got his start in the game biz with *Kirby's Dream Land* (Game Boy), a title he designed when he was only 19 years old. Sakurai left his longtime employer HAL Laboratory in 2003 to form his own development studio, but Nintendo President (and ex-HAL honcho) Satoru Iwata eventually lured him back to helm *Brawl*.



HAZE

PS3/XB360 • Ubisoft • November 2007/Spring 2008

34. MONKEY BUSINESS

Soldiers hooked on Nectar (*Haze*'s performance-enhancing drug) won't be the only fodder here. Also be on the lookout for primates, which are an obvious nod to developer Free Radical's other first-person-shooter series, *TimeSplitters*.

35. BUY OR SELL?

Need the current stock price of *Haze*'s fictional mega-corporation? Free Radical has gone and created a freakishly legit-looking website for this mass producer of Nectar (it's even got employee testimonials and job listings). Check it out at mantelglobalindustries.com.



→ TUROK

PS3/XB360 • Touchstone • February 2008



36. STAMPEDE!

You can wield some wicked weaponry in this shooter, but sometimes a strategically startled herd of duck-billed hadrosaurs will take out enemies for you. "Just don't startle them in the wrong direction," warns Game Director Joel Manners. "They might turn around and trample you."

37. TUROK: TERRIER HUNTER?

Listen to *Turok*'s dino screams, and you'll detect walrus grunts, squirrel scampering, and dog yipping sampled by the audio team. "I recorded my friend's Boston terrier," says Lead Audio Designer Ted Conley. "Dogs have the most aggressive sounds."



38. SOUTHCLAW

When raptors pounce on your character, you'll enter timed button presses and joystick waggles to break free. The sequences vary by attack, but one has you flicking the left analog stick horizontally. It's a tough, seemingly unnatural maneuver for most of the play testers—who end up moving their right thumbs to the left stick to do it—so Manners asked Designer Rob Davidson why he had chosen this scheme. "Seems natural to me," Davidson replied. Then Manners noticed Davidson was left-handed.

→ MIDNIGHT CLUB: LOS ANGELES

PS3/XB360 • Rocketcar • Spring 2008



39. OUT OF THIS WORLD

MC's massive re-creation of L.A. beautifully captures the look and feel of the ultimate car-culture mecca. But that's mere child's play compared to Rockstar San Diego's previous work. Over the years, the developer has completed some projects for NASA.

→ FINAL FANTASY XIII

PS3 • Square Enix • Fall 2009



40. YES, IT'S REAL

Sady, it seems that no amount of snooping can penetrate the veil of secrecy surrounding the next major entry in Square Enix's flagship role-playing franchise. But we've recently heard some promising news—at long last, the game is running on actual PS3 hardware.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3

PS3/XB360 • Midway • November 2007/Spring 2008



41. TRUMP CARD

UT3 meets *Magic: The Gathering*? Yep—you'll earn "cards" during this shooter's solo campaign, which you can spend on stuff like firearms and abilities for your A.I. teammate.

42. MOD SQUAD

"User-created content equals porn—or intellectual property—infringing material," says Epic Games Producer Jeff Morris. So while you can build what you want (weapons, vehicles...whatever) on a PC and share it with PS3 players, the developer has safeguards that log mod contents and their creators.

43. PIMPING YOUR RIDE

What's taking so long to make the game? It's the details, people. One team worked on *UT3*'s Dark Walker vehicle alone for more than two months: Nine days conceiving it, 39 days modeling the damn thing, 15 days texturing, and another 15 for visual effects.



→ NIGHTS: JOURNEY OF DREAMS

Wii • Sega • November 2007



44. THE JESTER'S NEW TRICKS

The violet-hued dreamclown gets some nifty new powers in this long-awaited sequel. By donning a variety of masks, he/she can withstand powerful winds, rocket high into the stratosphere, and transform into a dolphin in order to explore aquatic areas.

→ GRAN TURISMO 5: PROLOGUE

PS3 • Sony CEA • Fall 2007



45. A SHOCKING DEVELOPMENT

According to a recent advertisement in a Japanese gaming magazine, *Prologue* will support the much-wanted rumble feature in Sony's new DualShock 3 controller (which supposedly hits our shores by the end of the year).

CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

PS3/XB360 • Activision • November 2007

50 THINGS

46. A TRUE CALL OF DUTY

The shooter's military adviser (and this issue's "Take this Job" profile—see pg. 56), Hank Keirse, temporarily left the project to train U.S. troops in Iraq. Keirse even did some patrols with his son, who's stationed over there.

47. MAN HANDS

The mitts holding *COD4*'s weaponry in-game are modeled after one of developer Infinity Ward's artists. "They told me mine were too girly," says Studio Head Vince Zampella.

48. HANGIN' OUT

In order to motion-capture free-rope for the game, Infinity Ward had military folk perform the maneuver off their building's balcony, which faces L.A.'s bustling Ventura Boulevard.

49. TWO DEGREES OF BACON

To thank the Marines at Twentynine Palms Base, CA in helping with the game's development, Infinity Ward named a *COD4* tank after one found at the training center: War Pig.

HALO WARS

XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios • 2008

50. IN GOOD HANDS

Worried that PC developer Ensemble Studios (*Age of Empires* series) is working on this console real-time strategy game? Don't be. Collectively, the team has worked on games for the Atari 2600, ColecoVision, NES, Genesis, Philips CD-i, Dreamcast, PlayStation, PS2, Xbox, and GameCube. ♣



COPYCAT KILLER

Saints Row 2 struts the line between inspiration and grand-theft game idea, but it's hardly the first attack of a clone...

By Robert Ashley



A STRAPPED-UP THUG HITS THE STREETS

in camos and boots, searching for a suitable ride. He finds it—a red convertible cruiser—at a busy intersection, rips open the driver's-side door, smashes the driver's head against the steering wheel, and throws him onto the pavement. Pedal to the metal, our thug fidgets with the car stereo before settling on a blowhard conservative talk show. He plows through pedestrians without remorse, sometimes on purpose. When he reaches his destination, a rival gang's stronghold, he lets loose a shower of Uzi bullets, piling his enemies into slumped-over heaps.

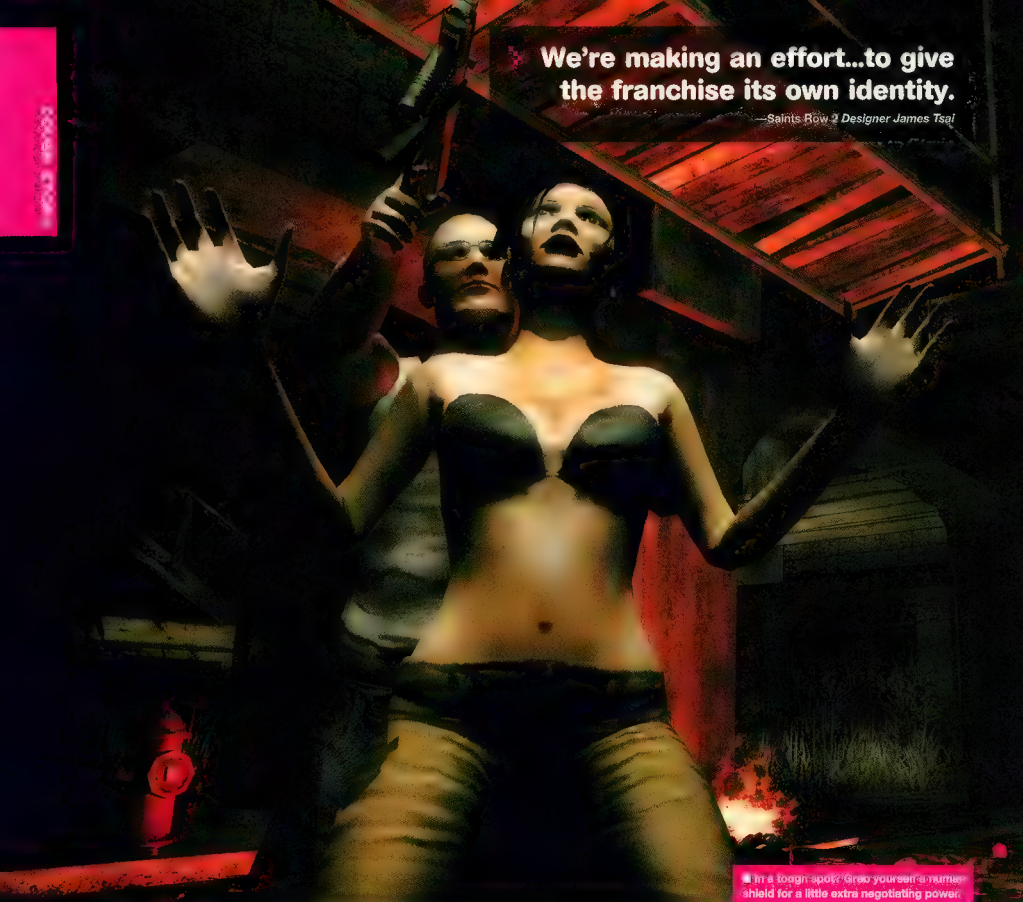
If asked to identify the game this scene describes, most players

would answer *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, the ubiquitous go-anywhere, do-anything, pop-culture landmark. But these events could've just as easily gone down in last year's Xbox 360 game *Saints Row*—or, for that matter, its PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 sequel, *Saints Row 2*, due next year. The upstart series is unshakably attached to *San Andreas*, having borrowed not just that game's infamous urban-chaos gameplay, but also its subject matter (a marginalized street gang on the rise), sense of humor (adolescent-male booby fetishes, jabs at corrupted-by-power politicians and businessmen), and taste for a sprawling game world filled with distractions, moonlighting

jobs, and minigames.

It's a similarity that the game's creators, Illinois-based Volition, don't dispute. "The *GTA* franchise has obviously had a very big impact on open-world games," says *Saints Row 2* Designer James Tsai. "We have lots of respect for them. I've owned the games, and I've learned a lot from them. We know they're a beloved franchise, but we think we have a lot to offer, too."

Saints is not alone. As in the past when new genres changed the gaming landscape (see: fighting games in the 1990s), many developers stepped into the post-*Grand Theft Auto* fray hoping to catch a piece of the action. Just look at *Scarface: The* >



We're making an effort...to give the franchise its own identity.

—*Saints Row 2* Designer James Tsai

■ In a tough spot? Give yourself a name shield for a little extra negotiating power.

World Is Yours, the *True Crime* and *Getaway* series, and *The Godfather*. Of these games, *Saints Row* stayed closest to the source. It was also one of the best.

All artists and craftsmen build their works on the foundations of their creative forebears. Game designers have, since the dawn of interactive entertainment, openly borrowed ideas from their colleagues and competitors. But where is the thin line between imitation and innovation, and on which side of that line does *Saints Row 2* play?

Knock it off

Game developers are all too familiar with charges of imitation. In the years that followed the release of id Software's genre-defining first-

person shooter, *Doom*, the gaming press labeled every game that followed in its corridor-treading footsteps a "Doom clone." *Saints Row* and its ilk have received similar treatment with the "GTA clone" label. Harvey Smith, creative director of Midway's upcoming sci-fi first-person shooter *BlackSite: Area 51*, detests this mindset. "I hate the term 'clone,'" he says. "Usually, the people using that term are just envious." Obviously, when game players (as opposed to creators) lambast a game for borrowing excessively from others, the motivation is different. "People often do cry foul when a game comes out that's too similar to an older game," says Smith. "I believe it offends their sense of justice." But is it really unfair? Does

GTA lose something when other games plunder its ideas? Smith believes quite the opposite, that these exchanges are crucial. "I think the gamer benefits from competition and creative evolution. It's better if everyone loosens up a bit."

That competition and evolution stretches back centuries before the beginnings of videogames, back to games played in boring old reality. Mark Nau, creative director at Edge of Reality—a studio whose current project, *Cipher Complex*, borrows from stealth-genre touchstones *Metal Gear Solid* and *Splinter Cell*—points to an archaic board game called *chaturanga*. "It's an ancient Indian game that's a precursor to chess," Nau says. "It's extremely similar: eight-by-eight board, king

KING OF THE CLONES

Four other knockoffs that rocked

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell (ripped off *Metal Gear Solid*)
A perfect example of how designers can borrow without stealing, *Splinter Cell* took the core idea of *Metal Gear*—the silent, violent agent—and created a new experience. *Splinter Cell*'s behind-the-spy view worked so well that the *Metal Gear* series later borrowed it.



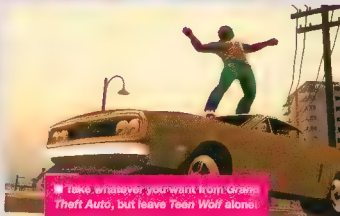
Castlevania: Symphony of the Night (ripped off *Super Metroid*)
Underneath the obvious story and style differences between *Castlevania*'s gothic horror and *Metroid*'s alien sci-fi lies the same compelling idea: a 2D world where weapons and special powers open new areas to explore. It's a formula that still works today.



Okami (ripped off *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*)
Okami earned critical acclaim for its ink-and-paper art style and innovative paintbrush mechanics, but anyone who'd set foot in a *Zelda* game could spot the similar structure: a wide-open world of epic scale, punctuated by dungeons, puzzles, and boss fights.



Super Stardust HD (ripped off *Asteroids* and *Geometry Wars*)
Stardust looks pretty, but obsessive-compulsive types were spending their afternoons cleaning up meteor showers way back in 1979. *Asteroids* loses out to *Stardust*'s rock-paper-scissors weapon swapping and use of color. As in, it's in color. Fancy!



that moves one square, pawns that march forward, knight that jumps over pieces. But that form of the game is almost completely unknown today." Through the organic evolution of game rules and player strategies, *chaturanga* later became *shatranj*, which then evolved into the chess we know and play today. "Chess is a much better game than *shatranj*, even though the differences are slight," Nau explains. "That gradual design process, building on lessons gleaned from previous designs, did us a great service by creating a great game."

Saints Row borrowed heavily from its predecessors, but it contributed new ideas to the creative conversation. In particular, the game's well-executed free-aiming controls made

Grand Theft Auto's clunky lock-on system feel outmoded. "I have a low bar for how much you have to change before I call your work 'innovation' instead of 'plagiarism,'" says Nau, "because changing a few elements in minor ways can have great effects. Those few changes can make all the difference in the world."

Reloading the clip

If it only takes a few changes to make a game different, then perhaps *Saints Row 2* will be an entirely new experience. Using the usual sequel metrics, however, it looks to be the very definition of an update—a fresh clip reloaded into the still-smoking barrel of the original. In fact, the production of *Saints Row 2* began months before the original was fin-

ished. It was a gutsy move for an untested game (which later went on to sell 1.5 million copies), but one that reveals the kind of raw commercialism that drives *Saints*. "Due to marketing studies about what consumers liked at the time, we'd actually written [*Saints Row*] as a trilogy," says Producer Greg Donovan. "It was planned to be a franchise from the very beginning."

When Donovan talks about *Saints*, it's usually in the language of business jargon and meeting-speak. He's "advantageously leveraging" the experience of his team by "cross-sharing studio knowledge." He speaks of his audience as "consumers," his game as "a refined, polished product." Nobody is confusing *Saints Row* with art, but in treating their



games as simple consumer goods, Volition passes up the opportunity to create something with heart and soul. In place of that kind of progress, they're plugging away at the task of beefing up features and expanding their game world. "We're definitely making an effort in *Saints Row 2* to give the franchise its own identity, to really take a step forward," says Tsai. "We've got a lot of unique features. Our combat system was widely praised in the first game, and we're trying to give the player more fighting options, more weapon choices, and things like that."

"More" is definitely the operative word. Where *Saints* expanded on the genre's stupid-simple combat by encouraging players to take cover and giving them the freedom to aim for themselves, *Saints 2* is bulking up on options. You can now take an enemy gang member hostage as a human shield, forcing his or her friends to cease fire. You'll lose that

sense of safety, though, when you (inevitably) decide to throw your hostage off a roof or into oncoming traffic or through a plate-glass window. For extra protection in such a case, be on the lookout for a spare pistol or submachine gun; you can now fire two single-handed weapons at the same time, *Halo*-style.

Other notable additions to the *Saints* offense include satchel charges, remote-detonated explosives that stick to whatever surface you want: vehicles, people, or structures. And a new rocket launcher lets you unleash impromptu airstrikes. You can aim it after firing, allowing you to shoot the rocket straight into the air, then laser-guide it down toward some innocent bystander. Such ruthless activity will bring out the fuzz, of course, with retooled A.I. for more aggressive law enforcement. Luckily, *Saints 2* introduces a number of new getaway options, from nimble motorcycles to car-crushing monster

trucks. More significantly, planes and helicopters will open up the airspace, while boats will expand the domain of street gangs into the water.

When you tire of the stresses of criminal life, the game provides what the developers call "diversions," which are basically the crazy things you already do in an open-world game when you get bored: causing major traffic accidents, destroying private property, and practicing random acts of violence. This time, however, you'll be rewarded for your efforts with cash and respect points, the game's version of experience. New diversions include car surfing (riding the hood of a car like a skateboard) and testicular marksmanship, wherein your relentless below-the-belt machine-gun fire triggers a painful-looking animation. "Shooting guys in the groin is always a good time," says Tsai, offering a universal truth confirmed long ago by America's *Funniest Home Videos*. >

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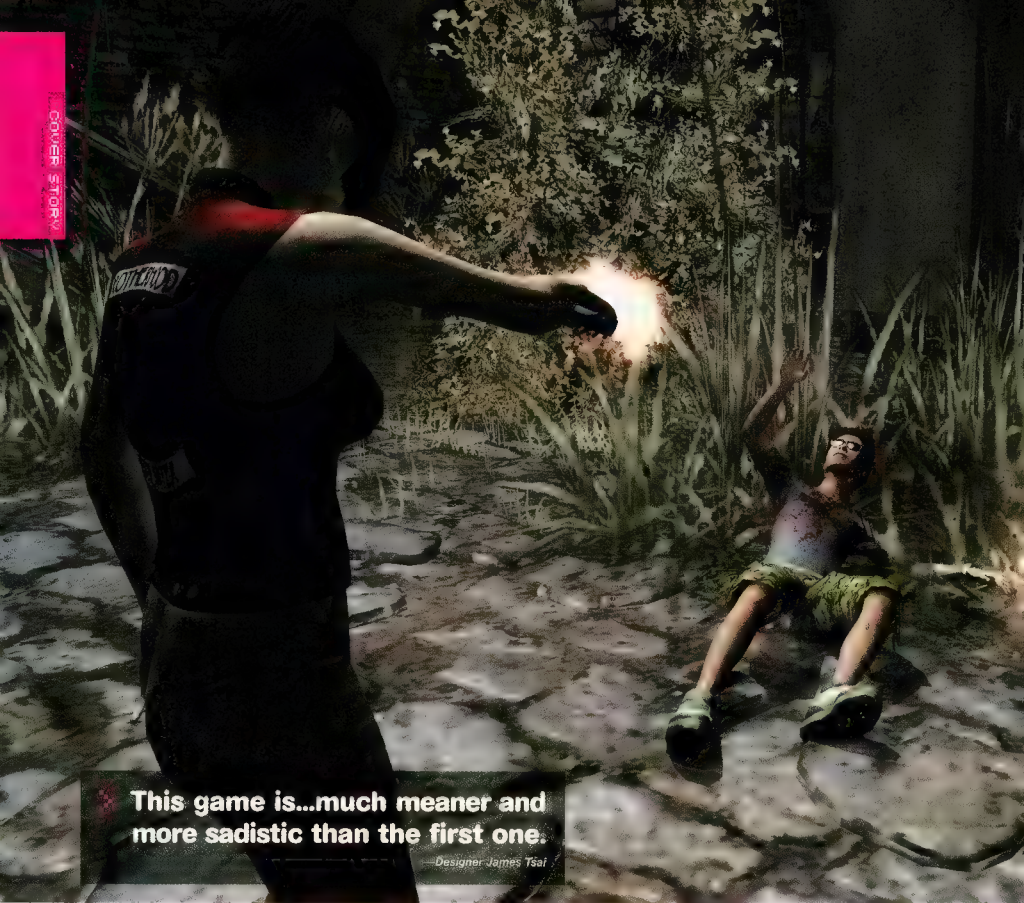
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This game is...much meaner and more sadistic than the first one.

—Designer James Tsai

“Brand new every time”

Many of these features and ideas have appeared in other games (*Scarface*, for example, once had the market cornered on nutshots). But gamers are accustomed to retreading previously explored ground. That wasn't always the case, according to Mark Cerny, an industry vet who now works as a game designer/consultant. “When I joined Atari Games in 1982, the philosophy there was pretty simple,” says Cerny, who created the arcade classic *Marble Madness* at the age of 19 and has worked on recent titles such as *Resistance: Fall of Man*. “A game had to be a brand-new experience. And by that, I mean, if some other company had previously released a fighting game, you couldn't make a fighting game, as

that would be overly derivative.”

Before you give in to rose-tinted nostalgia for the old days, consider the financial havoc that this strict “originality first” approach reaped. “Our success rate with these games was one in three, roughly,” says Cerny, “meaning that only one in three games could earn enough quarters to justify manufacturing it. Unfortunately, you had to finish creating the game to find this out. As a consequence, Atari Games had severe financial issues during my three years there.”

Even the grumpiest, most jaded of gamers will agree that profit-driven familiar games are better than no games at all. “An ‘Ivory tower’ perspective only gets you so far,” advises Cerny. “In order to be able

to continue making games, you must make games that are commercially successful. So the ‘brand new every time’ attitude has to be tempered a bit. If someone has made a fighting game, it really is acceptable to make one yourself. Just try to add something new....”

By this measuring stick, Volition is on track. They don't pretend that they're making an earth-shattering game—just something that people want to play. “Gamers enjoy innovation,” says Tsai, “but they also enjoy familiar experiences as well. And if they have a great time playing one type of game, and another game comes out and improves upon that, then I think they're going to enjoy that game just as much. It's going back to what they know.



DIY DILEMMA

Be whomever you want, but can a freak tell a decent story?



As in the original, *Saints Row 2* forgoes a defined hero for whatever you make in the game's character editor. The creator now allows for nearly endless possibilities, from tweaking cheekbone structure to effecting full-body changes like age and gender. But can a game tell an effective story when so many details of its leading lady/man/manlady are up for grabs? "It's totally difficult," says Head Writer Steve Jaros. "You can't have a character say 'Hey, man,' 'cause it might not be a man." Also troublesome: The editor lends itself to the creation of monstrosities (such as this cover story's author, seen in the screen above), potentially turning the plot into a joke. "If a player wants to let their artistic side out and make a freak, then more power to them," says Designer James Tsai. "If seeing that character in cut-scenes enhances the experience for them, then I think that's great."



COVER STORY



Remote-detonating saucers charges range reverse invader. And they stick to anything.

Still in Stilwater

Saints Row 2 is going back to what it knows: Specifically, the fictional city of Stilwater, inspired by such varied metropolises as Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco. Instead of packing up and leaving for a new locale, the team chose to modify and expand on what they'd already created. Tsai insists that it has nothing to do with laziness and everything to do with the Saints, the game's improbably multiethnic street gang. "It was definitely not a time-saving decision for us," he says. "The decision to go back was that the game is about the Saints. We just couldn't put the Saints in Dallas or San Francisco. This is their home, and we really want to show what it has become."

What it has become is noticeably

larger. With the help of boats and bridges, new water-locked areas—including an elaborate Alcatraz-like prison island—help fill out the edges of Stilwater. Meanwhile, the passing of a few years has transformed the appearance of much of the city. "We're doing 'comic book' time," says Tsai. "In terms of the story, it's just been a handful of years, but we're packing 20 years of development into that timeframe. The entire Saints Row district itself is no longer a dilapidated old neighborhood. It's this gleaming metropolitan area with massive towers and rich people drinking lattes all day long."

It won't be completely unrecognizable, however. Players of the original *Saints* will be able to pick out the game's old headquarters. "At the

very center," says Tsai, "there's this really familiar-looking church that's been cleaned up and preserved as a historical monument." These changes to the Saints' home turf are representative not only of what Volition is doing with the rest of the city but with the series itself: grafting a layer of new material onto something comfy and familiar. "We're striving for a sense of familiarity," Tsai explains, "but not for *déjà vu*." Elsewhere in Stilwater, what once was an empty waterfront is now a gentrified marina complex with upscale restaurants and a boardwalk. A section of old piers is now decrepit, serving as a handy stunt park for watercraft. A newly uncovered sub-city cavern attracts tourists with its rock formations, while elsewhere, >



■ **Deconstruction:** It's not overthrowing a thing, especially a person, out of a window. Off a pier or into oncoming traffic works, too.

NETWORK NEWS

Online *Saints* offerings pick up the slack

Co-op

Crackdown, a futuristic open-world game on the Xbox 360, turned heads with its no-frills online co-op play. *Saints Row 2* aims to go a step

further, allowing you to drop in on a buddy's game at any point and join the story. Missions requiring both a driver and a gunner will split the duties, encouraging close teamwork—or arguments over whose turn it is to drive.



Versus multiplayer

Saints Row 2's most interesting feature is also its most mysterious: a competitive online mode vastly different from any of the original's multiplayer versus games.

"All of the elements of single-player are going to be a part of this online game," says Producer Greg Donovan. "There will be missions. There will be activities. There will be diversions. We're not talking about deathmatch." What they are talking about, it seems, is a mission-based, online gang war. And, according to Donovan, it will take place in a designed-for-multiplayer version of Stilwater. Sounds like a fun place to visit, but you wouldn't want to die there.



■ **Stilwater's taste:** Fashion-forward enough to wear bras, sports bras, and assless chaps after Labor Day.

an underground ruin provides a home for vagrants and a little-known street gang, the Saints, now on the rebound.

Saints Row finds its balls

How the up-and-coming gang from the first game managed to lose their status and end up on the bottom again is a potential spoiler for anyone still making their way through *Saints Row* (so skip to the next paragraph until you catch up): At the end of that game, your character—a player-created custom gangster—is blown to bits by a boat bomb planted by one of your own. "At the start of *Saints Row 2*, you wake up in a prison hospital bed and remember that not only did your boys try to kill you and leave you for dead, but that your balls are floating somewhere in

the water," says Tsai. "You're going to have to choose if you want to be a man or a woman. Needless to say, you're f***ing pissed."

Out for revenge, you take to the streets of Stilwater with, perhaps, a greater sense of purpose. The game's designers are aiming for a darker tone, a concession to the lack of gritty authenticity in the original. "This game is about anger and revenge and is much meaner and more sadistic than the first one," says Tsai. Not that Volition is shooting for Ol' Dirty Bastard-level credibility. "Our game doesn't try to take itself too seriously," says Tsai. "*Saints Row 2* is not striving in any way to be an authentic gang experience. We're going for a tongue-in-cheek, yet still intense, kind of story." Thus far, *Saints Row 2* looks like

the work of a developer unwilling to take big chances and break the mold. Like the original, it has no ambitions beyond being a good time. But sometimes, a good time's all we want. As it's been throughout gaming history—all the way back to chess (what a *chaturanga* rip-off)—some games are about making other people's ideas work better. "You can see similar things in consumer products," says Edge of Reality's Nau. "It's great to have some brand-new gizmo that nobody has seen before, but it's also awesome to get a familiar tool that's been elegantly refined over several iterations. The iPhone doesn't have anything that hasn't been seen before, but it's all put together in a great overall design. Sometimes, all you really need is a better mousetrap." 🐭

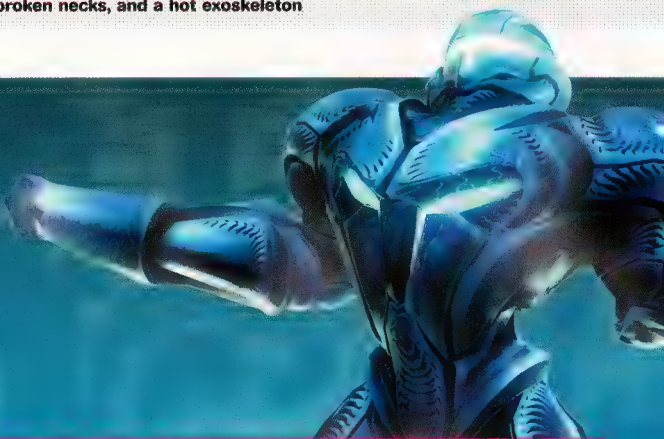
EGM Extras: Our *Saints* coverage marches on at EGM.1UP.COM. See videos of the game in action, along with interviews with the development team at Volition.

REVIEWS

> body checks, massive wrecks, broken necks, and a hot exoskeleton

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METROID PRIME 3: CORRUPTION (GAME OF THE MONTH, TIE)



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THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS

Trifecta of Awesomeness

A Game of the Month logjam

WHEN I TOOK THIS JOB ALMOST TWO YEARS AGO, exiting Reviews Editor Damian Linn (as surly and lovable as ever at GameVideos.com) gave me a warning I never forgot: Testing multiplayer sucks. And he's right. Setting up sessions with the developer to play a game to its max number of players can be a pain. You know, because people have busy schedules. But we do it because it's a big part of many games. What's discouraging is when we try to set something up and are told other magazines are "fine" not participating (which happened this month). Not only does this make it harder for us to fill a session, it also makes us wonder how much faith we can put in reviews that ignore that part of the equation. Rest assured we check all features or let you know if we can't. But enough bitching. Instead, enjoy this month's three Game of the Month winners!

—Greg Ford, Reviews Editor

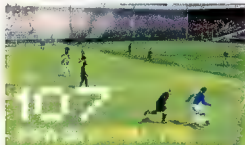
> HOW WE RATE

- 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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**Strangle-
hold: Chow
down**



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**Skate: Or
die over the
realism**



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**Castlevania:
Dead and
loving it**

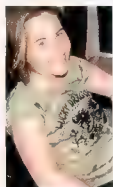


THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

So easy even nine cavemen (and one cavewoman) could do it



Dan "Shoe" Hsu
Ed.-in-Chief/Ed. Director
PSP's *Final Fantasy Tactics* has revitalized Shoe's love for strategy-role-playing games. He wants to review *Disgaea 2*, *Phantom Brave*, and others, but who has time with *Halo 3* coming out?
Now Playing: *BioShock*, *Call of Duty 4*, *FF Tactics*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



Jennifer Tsao
Managing Editor
This time of year is deadly for game-magazine editors. With all the good titles coming out, you really can't afford to get behind. So why is Jennifer spending her weekends on an almost-10-year-old PC title? Two words: *BioShock* obsession.
Now Playing: *System Shock 2*
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



Bryan Intihar
Previews Editor
Sorry, ladies—by the time you read this, our Bryan will be a married man. Hopefully for him, that doesn't mean less game-playing and more Saturday-afternoon outings to Bed Bath & Beyond.
Now Playing: *BioShock*, *Madden NFL 08*
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com



Michael Donahoe
News/Features Editor
Dressing up like a doofus is one of Michael's daily duties in the office. So to celebrate reviewing *Star Wars: Battlefront—Renegade Squadron*, he transformed into Darth Lamer. Now pray he's not your father.
Now Playing: *Halo 3*, *Rock Band*, *Metrod Prime 3*
Blog: egmhoe.1UP.com



Andrew Fitch
Staff Reviewer
After playing through the superbly stealthy *Logan's Shadow*, Fitchy now fancies himself a suave superspy. Either that or he's hiding from the frighteningly frustrating *Mercury Meltdown Revolution*.
Now Playing: *Persona 3*, *Brave Story*, *Jeanne d'Arc*
Blog: copydesk-fitch.1UP.com



Shane Bettenhausen
Executive Editor
With a *Zelda*, a *Metrod*, and a *Castlevania* all on his review docket, Shane wondered if he'd somehow ripped a hole in the space-time continuum leading back to 1987. If so, he's totally gonna mack on Ally Sheedy.
Now Playing: *Virtua Fighter 5*, *Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



Crispin Boyer
Senior Editor
Cris cared diddly about college football until his backwoods alma mater Appalachian State upset Shoe's vaunted Michigan Wolverines. Now he's digging up any artifacts of school pride he can find. Hot, hot, hot!
Now Playing: *Skate*, *BioShock*, *Zelda: Phantom Hourglass*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



Greg Ford
Reviews Editor
Greg recently took it upon himself to completely master *BioShock's* fathomable labyrinths. Sure, netting a perfect gamescore impresses those around him, but it also raises ethical questions like, "Dude, do you have a life?"
Now Playing: *Halo 3*, *BioShock*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



Mark MacDonald
Director, GameVideos.com
Unconsciously dumped from this page over a year ago, Mark knew that, sooner or later, EGM would come crawling back like a pathetic ex-girlfriend, who really needs a *Metrod* review. You know the type.
Now Playing: *Metrod Prime 3*
Blog: mark.1UP.com



John Davison
Outgoing Editorial Director
When we got word that the head cheese was leaving us for some family-friendly start-up, we freaked...until we realized he'd still be writing for us. Now we have our go-to guy for every *Hannah Montana* review.
Now Playing: *BioShock*, *Glory Days 2*, *Warhawk*
Blog: jvhdavison.1UP.com

Also on deck...

James "Milkman" Mielke
Executive Editor
1UP.com

Garnett Lee
Managing Editor
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Andrew Pfister
Reviews Editor
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Matt Leone
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Nick Suttner
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Todd Zuniga
Sports Guy
Staff Reviewer



The Review Crew is the 1UP Network's ensemble cast of writers from all of our publications, both online and in print. We believe that games are more than the sum of their parts, so we tackle them subjectively, as experiences.

Head over to ReviewCrew.1UP.com to meet all of the 1UP Network's expert reviewers. And check out 1UP.com for reviews of games we didn't have enough time or room for.



► Default control feels familiar, but many female galactic bounty hunters choose the more engaging "advanced."

Wii

METROID PRIME 3: CORRUPTION

► Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Retro Studios ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen



The Good: Revamped controls, breathtaking art
The Bad: Power cell fetch quest, dull A.I.
What's Next: Scan for hint at upcoming *Metroid Dread* (DS)

Back to the future

► **MARK:** In my review of the original *Metroid Prime* in the fall of 2002, I said "it's [as if] the best title from six years in the future fell through a time warp." The funny thing is, playing *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption* almost six years later, it often does feel like the same game. Fortunately, that's a compliment: This first-person adventure franchise may have lost its spot on the bleeding edge of modern gaming, but what changes *Corruption* makes to the series' rock-solid core still add up to something special.

As with many Wii games, the biggest adjustment is the control; *Corruption* shakes up (or waggles side-to-side) *Prime*'s previously dumbed-down scheme, using the Wii-mote both to aim and turn your view; the

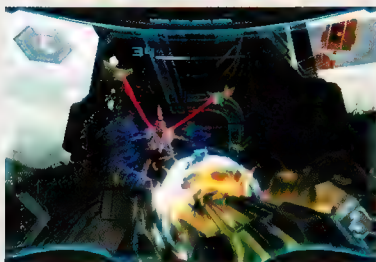
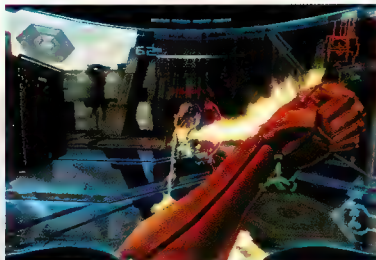
Nunchuk's analog stick moves your hero, bounty-hunting space hottie Samus Aran.

After a few hours of adjusting (and tweaking menu options—"advanced" sensitivity helps a lot), frustration melts into appreciation for what this new setup makes possible: kick-ass combat. As always, enemies and the excellent bosses require all of Samus' different abilities (props for creative use of the grapple beam this time), but now you also need steady nerves and quick reflexes to aim your shots.

And that's nothing next to the game's greatest accomplishment: the graphics. Or should I say the artwork. After a few relatively simple early areas, *Corruption* blooms, exploding into colorful, elaborate designs, thick

with atmosphere. The game can't always mask the hardware's technical limitations (pixelation every time you're up close waiting for a door to open, for example), but in most cases the lighting, attention to detail, and wonderfully cohesive and imaginative art direction more than make up for the Wii's lack of raw horsepower. Put it this way: I found myself wandering through rooms two or three times just to look at them. How many games on any system can you say that about?

► **SHANE:** While neither *Corruption* nor its Cube predecessor *Echoes* impresses quite like the original *Metroid Prime*—a daring, beautiful game that pulled off a flawless *Super Mario 64*-style 2D-to-3D gameplay



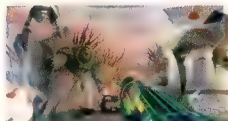
Battle of the Planets

SPOILER WARNING: In a *Metroid* series first, Samus' quest spans several different worlds in *Corruption*. How do they stack up?



Norion

More like "Snorion." Besides one brief morph-ball battle with Ridley, this world is as dull as its name. Worth a return visit late in the game for those last few missile containers, though.



Bryyo

Now we're talking. Excellent variety—from blazing lava pools to desolate frozen canyons—makes it easy to remember the map layout, plus it has awesome gigantic golems and a fascinating backstory. Bryyo bry-ings it.



Rylasia

Mixed feelings on this one. We love the intricate designs and clockwork mechanics, but the interchangeable connecting trams are confusing as hell. Also, "Skytown"? People get paid to name this crap, right?



Pirate Homeworld

Corruption saves the best for (almost) last: the best designs, lighting, and overall graphics; the best plot nuggets as the few remaining gaps are filled in; and the best boss battle, topping the actual (pushover) final encounter.



Phaazee

Its unique look and interesting game-play twist make it a worthy final level, despite being too short and way too easy. When did Dark Samus become such a wuss?

metamorphosis—it's encouraging to see the series benefit from landing on the Wii. Sure, it takes an hour or so to fully acclimate to the new Wii-mote 'n' Nunchuk configuration (mapping missiles to the D-pad and visor-switching to the minus button doesn't help), but the addition of independent shooting and aiming transforms combat into a far more engaging, visceral experience. Problem is the A.I. simply isn't up to snuff—enemy reactions (or lack thereof) quickly become predictable, and the game often falls back onto the crutch of infinitely respawning enemies that require little strategy (but a helluva lot of shots) to dispatch. Thankfully, the game's plentiful boss encounters pick up the slack, thrusting the player into expertly crafted, multipart *Zelda*-inspired duels that force players to think creatively.

Although the new controls are ultimately a boon, the other tweaks to the established *Prime* formula—more cut-scenes, voiceovers, and the ability to planet-hop in Samus' ship—have surprisingly little impact. The Wii's last-gen graphics put a damper on the otherwise aesthetically lovely visuals, the plot's awfully predictable, and spreading the adventure across smaller planetoids serves only to subtly remix the game's flow...you'll still find plenty of traditional *Metroid* re-traversal here.

➔ **JEREMY:** After *Echoes* failed to hit its predecessor's high standard, I felt a bit of *Metroid* dread about *Corruption*—but Retro redeems itself with a great adventure whose graphics make all other Wii developers look like incompetent amateurs. (Yeah,

even Nintendo.) *Metroid Fusion*'s concepts—Samus as a walking bio-hazard, bossy computers telling you what to do every step of the way—work wonderfully here. Yes, when it's being *Metroid*, *Corruption* is great; unfortunately, it also wants to be a fast-paced, scripted shooter. Between its pathetic A.I., limited weapon selection, and lopsided difficulty—well, it's no *Halo*. Worse, the brilliant control scheme brings to light the fact that the Wii-mote *sucks* for hardcore games. Its awkwardly placed buttons and unergonomic shape left me with hand cramps that'll last longer than my memories of the game. Still, it's a solid end to the *Prime* trilogy. 🚫

EGM Extras: Trying to find all those pesky power cells? Head to EGM.1UP.com for our SuperGuide and boss strategies.

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Mild Language
Violence

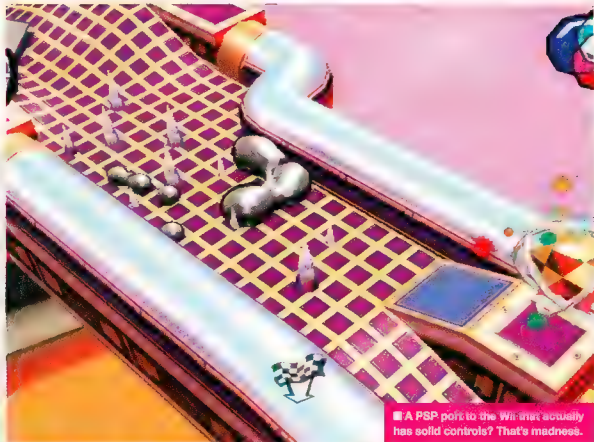


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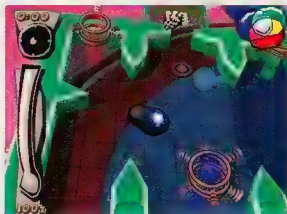
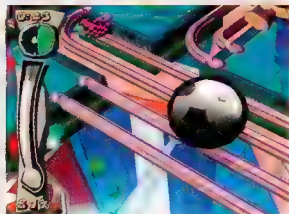
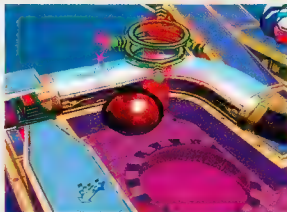
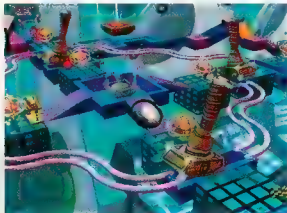
XBOX 360



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■ A PSP port to the Wii that actually has solid controls? That's madness.



Wii

MERCURY MELTDOWN REVOLUTION

■ Publisher: Ignition ■ Developer: Ignition Banbury ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone



The Good: Use of Wii-mote, cheap!
The Bad: Crazy-hard later stages, lack of multiplayer
Does Anyone Really Need:
 Savable ghost runs?

Great balls of mercury

→ **NICK:** The *Mercury* series has been trying to incorporate motion control since the PSP original (the enabling peripheral was canceled), and it's finally clear why: It's simply the most enjoyable and intuitive way to navigate your shiny blob around the game's many mazes and obstacles. *Revolution's* level design is surprisingly clever—many stages have you simultaneously controlling disparate bits of goo—so it's as much about puzzle-solving as it is about raw skill. And unlike in *Monkey Ball* and *Kororinpa*, you're controlling your mercury directly—not the stage itself. The camera has an unfortunate habit of zooming out to give equal attention to bits of mercury that are too far gone to rescue, and the game could certainly

have used some midlevel checkpoints on the more challenging stages. Still, \$20 for a meaty (minigames, 150-plus levels), exclusive Wii game with motion controls that complement the experience seems like a solid buy.

→ **A. FITCH:** Yeah, Nick, the \$20 price is a plus—but I think the need to stock up on Excedrin cancels that out, dude: *Revolution* holds the ignominy of being one of the few games to literally give me headaches! The level design, puzzles, controls, and objectives all get way too complex far too quickly, and the game never really builds a foundation to help improve your play—many of my successes stemmed from sheer luck. A shame, since some cool minigames and

clever brainteasers hide within this otherwise too-frustrating package.

→ **JENN F:** Unlike Nick, I didn't mind the camera. In fact, my usual beef with "marble puzzlers" is that you can't see around corners (I'm looking at you, *Kororinpa*), but in *Revolution*, you can niftily rotate the playing field and zoom in and out. The teeter-totter controls seem a bit too loose, and I am no fan of *Revolution's* visual style—the original PSP *Mercury* had a harder sci-fi edge, but this sequel has kid-friendly primary colors and sparkles galore. Aesthetics aside, this is no ordinary marble game: It's deeper, tougher, and generally pretty great. Pop some popcorn and pass around the controller. ☛



PS3/XB360

NBA LIVE 08

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

Still in the rebuilding process

➔ **BRYAN:** If you thought the Dallas Mavericks' playoff meltdown was the low point of the 2006-2007 NBA season, you obviously didn't play EA's basketball sim—what a mess. Luckily, *NBA Live 08* goes a long way in righting several of those wrongs. This one is...well, actually playable, thanks to a vastly improved default camera perspective, legit low-post moves (big men finally play a role on the offensive end), and the added ability to pressure ball handlers.

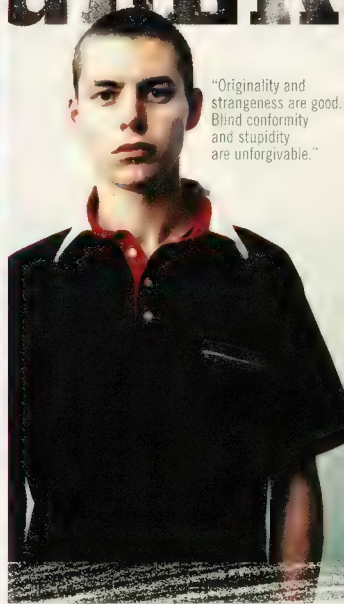
Still, the more time I spent with *08*, the more I felt like the developers played it too safe—you really won't find anything on this hardware that you haven't seen before. Also, this series continues to have some nagging problems, including little off-the-ball movement, the occasional wonkiness when shooting right near the rim, and the inability to explode to the basket after getting your defender in the air. So even though *Live* is lookin' better, the series could use more time in the gym.

The Good: Low-post play
The Bad: Takes no chances with the gameplay
Don't Bother: Trying the slam-dunk contest—it's terrible

➔ **TODD:** In what's a no-doubt good move, *08* has gone the franchise-restart route. That means we have beefed-up graphics, on-the-fly subs, and FIBA inclusion! Of course, that also means we get a few hang-ups, like some phantom foul calls (did someone pay off these virtual refs?). What irked me most, though, was tossing up crazy, Iverson-style shots when I just wanted to stop and pop, and how getting to the hoop for a dunk or layup is way, way too easy. Still, *08* looks fantastic, is way more realistic than previous *Lives*, and puts the series back on the road to Wellville.

➔ **GARNETT:** While I agree with Todd and Bryan on *08*'s technical problems, I have no problem paying for the show it delivers on the court. The new implementation of the right stick makes breaking down defenders off the dribble flow smoothly. The defensive assist makes a big difference in that you can stay manned up on the guy you're covering without worrying about making a slip. Also, turn-arounds have a more natural rhythm to them. Yeah, the franchise mode feels like work, but with the melting-wax men from last year gone, this *Live* looks and flows like a pro game.

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XB360 (also on PS3)

JOHN WOO PRESENTS STRANGLEHOLD

■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: Midway Studios Chicago ■ Players: 1-6 ■ ESRB: Mature

THE VERDICT'S (OUT OF 10)

JOE
7.5
GOOD

MATT
8.0
GOOD

G. FORD
7.5
GOOD

The Good: Deliciously destructible environments
The Bad: Uninspired level design, camera
The Woo: John Woo has a cameo in the unlock shop

Prepare to be Wooed

→ **JOE:** Sometimes the best you can hope for with a game this ambitious (note director John Woo's and actor Chow Yun-Fat's involvement) is that it be entertaining in spite of its pretensions. And this *Stranglehold* delivers, largely due to its tech: Being able to destroy nearly everything in this action-shooter's world never gets old. The debris-splashed graphics and clever writing don't hurt, either.

But *Stranglehold* is choked by some mediocre level design, unreliable controls, and a point of view so tight on the creepy virtual Chow Yun-Fat that it feels almost claustrophobic. His special moves add some variety, as do the opportunities for stylish railslides and environmental attacks, but I couldn't help but wish for more than

a series of cookie-cutter levels, waves of faceless enemies, and only the rarest deviations from either of these. It's mindless, destructive fun—with a bit of strategy if you're willing to look for it—but little beyond that.

→ **MATT:** For me, the disappointment isn't that you face enemy waves, but how those waves show up—often from out of nowhere, right behind you, and in clown car-style closets. Beyond that, it's easy to nitpick (see: the sometimes amazing/sometimes awful visuals, the awkward platforming) but the destruction and gunplay are so good (just try not to get excited when special-move time comes around) that the game succeeds without a ton of polish.

→ **G. FORD:** Rarely do I consider it a good thing for a game to take a mere seven hours to complete, but with *Stranglehold*, it hits the sweet spot. Any longer and its cocktail of enemy waves, Mexican standoffs, and special moves wouldn't go down so smoothly. Like a good action movie, this game entertains greatly while it lasts, but the thrills run shallow.

That said, I had higher hopes for the online play, which offers standard six-player deathmatches. It boils down to whittling away too-long life bars and jumping incessantly until the others give up from damn annoyance. ☹️

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XB360 (also on PS3)

NHL 2K8

■ Publisher: 2K Sports ■ Developer: Visual Concepts/Kush Games
 ■ Players: 1-6 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Out of control

➔ **BRYAN:** For the past two years, I've ripped this series for being the frozen pond's ugly duckling. *2K8* is definitely much prettier (the player models are on par with EA's skaters), but beauty only runs skin deep. The new control scheme is, quite frankly, an utter disaster. From the game's ineffective puck mechanics on the right analog stick to the awkward button-mapping for shooting/passing, I feel as uncomfortable on this ice as I do in real life. Even taking a simple slap shot requires multiple button presses—it's not ■ fighting game, people! Now I could switch back to *2K7*'s setup and have more fun. But I could also just play last year's edition, update the rosters, and save \$60.

And the problems don't stop there. The checking is excessive, plus players skate from goal to goal at ridiculous speeds. *NHL 08* is the winner of this hockey season, no contest.

➔ **DEMIAN:** Eh. Someone please hit reset on this once great franchise. My

first game (default settings) against the computer: a 7-1 rout with 48 checks.

The checking button may be easy to find, but otherwise, I'm with Bryan—*NHL 08*'s elegantly simple control setup really exposes *2K8* for the mess it is. Stuff like ■ shoulder button for turbo and a face button for sprint and arcane "superstar move" combos where you hold the left trigger and then hit multiple face buttons to pull off a canned deke...ugh.

It has some decent ideas (faceoffs are more interesting this year, and the simulation settings option is way better than the arcade default), but *2K8*'s fundamentals are flawed.

➔ **SEWART:** I would actually recommend *NHL 2K8* to those who want a more arcade hockey experience, where the sheer speed and intensity is gained by giving up the ability to really create a play. This is end-to-end, crash-the-net hockey. A game where just getting in front of the net (or even *in* it) and repeatedly jabbing the shot button is more effective than trying to score realistically. I'm not as hardcore about my hockey as these guys (ironic as I'm the Canadian here), but *2K8* just feels too sloppy to be a real contender.

The Good: Finally looks like a next-gen hockey game
The Bad: Impossible control scheme
Good Luck: Pulling off any of the superstar moves

THE VERDICTS
 (OUT OF 10)

BRYAN
4.0
 BAD

DEMIAN
5.0
 AVERAGE

SEWART
6.0
 AVERAGE

DESIGNERS IN: COMPUTER ANIMATION > DIGITAL ARTS & DESIGN > ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS > FILM > GAME DEVELOPMENT > RECORDING ARTS > SNOW PRODUCTION & TOURING



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PS3/XB360

FIFA 08

■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Developer: EA Canada
 ■ Players: 1-10 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Goal! Goal! Goal!

➔ **TODD:** I'm in shock. *FIFA*, which I've found to be a glossy disappointment for years, has completely impressed me, a tall order seeing as *Winning Eleven* has been my favorite game for five straight years. Not only has *FIFA 08* corrected everything I complained about last year (and even some things I didn't), it's outdone my high expectations. It now has never-ending league licenses, a tournament creator, online leagues, loads of goalkeeper animations, fluidly moving players, and natural-feeling collisions. And that's just what they brought up to the gold standard. It also has the inventive Trick Stick addition that lets you go über-Ronaldinho on defenders. The subtle workings of the game are fantastic: Exerting your authority against a lesser team, wearing them down, and creating scoring chances is absolutely rewarding. I'm not sold on the aerial game, though, as corners don't feel threatening. Still, I'm thrilled for soccer fans who don't have to watch the clock waiting for the next *Winning Eleven*.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

TODD
9.0
 EXCELLENT

JOHN
9.0
 EXCELLENT

ANDREW P.
8.0
 GOOD

The Good: New superstar moves
 The Bad: Corner kicks are still goofy
 No Need to Wait For: *Winning Eleven 2008*

➔ **JOHN:** As Todd and I played more and more games together, we started to describe the strategies we were employing as though we were discussing a game of chess. That's not something that *FIFA* has ever provoked before, and it's a testament to the huge raft of improvements developer EA Canada has made to this year's version. More than ever, you feel like you have the time to make decisions and really control the ball. While the on-field action feels sluggish and unresponsive at first, you soon learn to work with the pace of the game and play it like you would the sport, rather than just the videogame.

➔ **ANDREW P.:** And if you've ever played the sport yourself, you'll likely enjoy *FIFA* the most by hitting the "Be A Pro" mode, where you play only one position for the entire game. It brought back varsity-team memories, mostly involving me being way out of position. Along with its involving Manager (i.e., "franchise") mode, this year's *FIFA* did a lot to impress me. I had issues with the defensive A.I.—players would frequently miss their marks and rarely challenge for possession—but as Todd says, the soccer field is competitive again.

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PS3/XB360

SKATE

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: EA Black Box ■ Players: 1-4 (PS3), 1-6 (XB360) ■ ESRB: Teen



The Good: Supremely realistic
The Bad: ...which isn't always such a good thing
Not Worth Using: Sixaxis motion control in the PS3 version

This is skateboarding, for better or worse

➔ **NICK:** *Skate* succeeds as an unapologetic simulation, offering a fundamentally different take on a subgenre that's been monopolized for ages by that Tony Hawk dude. Built around utterly convincing physics—with character movement on the left analog stick and board control on the right (whereby tricks are performed through flicking motions)—*Skate* feels completely different from anything else out there, not just the competition.

The learning curve is steep but rarely unfair; some challenges take dozens of retries, but the satisfaction of truly learning a complex move and then executing it flawlessly is something gamers rarely experience. Dress it in a beautifully realized city to shred and online modes that are actually worth

playing (accompanied by a robust video-editing tool), and you've got an impressive foundation for a new franchise. The difficulty will undoubtedly polarize, but as something unique, *Skate* is more than welcome.

➔ **JENNIFER:** Once I adjusted to the controls (which initially frustrated me, a *Tony Hawk* faithful), I liked *Skate*'s linear pace: It really feels like you're learning to skate, move by painstaking move. It sets a high bar for realistic skateboarding (except for those annoying pedestrians. I have it on good authority that in real life, bystanders stay far away from gromets). But c'mon, this is a game—don't make me share the half-pipe (bumping into dudes at every turn

gets awkward). And while the photo and video replay options rock, aren't skaters supposed to be hot? The ones you make here aren't.

➔ **TODD:** Maybe I'm too Tony-tuned, but I found that *Skate*'s paltry rewards never quite lived up to the hard work they require. I do like the clever cutscene art style and the races. But not being able to get off my board to hop a curb or run up stairs frustrated me—much of my time was spent circling back, trying to find an incline. The low camera didn't help, either. I understand this hardcore direction was the path to take to compete with *Tony Hawk*, and *Skate*'s technically very strong. I just wish I didn't feel so bored playing it. 🙄

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Xbox 360

FLATOUT: ULTIMATE CARNAGE

■ Publisher: Empire ■ Developer: Bugbear
■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Teen

High-speed twisted metal

↑ GREG S: Anyone who's ever enjoyed *Burnout* needs to play *Ultimate Carnage*. Developer Bugbear did an excellent job with this alternate take on wrecking and racing. Striking down backwoods and urban tracks covered with more debris than a blasting site, doorhandle to doorhandle with ferocious competitors that would rather wreck you than race you...yeah, it does my soul good. I got completely lost in the game's world—not so much in the car-upgrade department, but more in mastering every single track to the best of my abilities. Learning how to finesse my way around supersharp turns and how to use my opponents as bumpers was just as much—if not more—fun than winning every race.

And considering you can take the whole thing online (races, minigames, and all) and it still runs smoothly, well, that just adds extra mileage. Oh, anyone looking for an easy win online should look up ol' Gord.

↑ JOHN: I dismissed the previous *FlatOuts* as der-

neck-style *Burnout* knockoffs best suited for late-night, beer-fueled social-gaming situations where you could overlook the games' sloppy controls and gimmicky gameplay. Not so with this latest version, though. The cars still have a too-floaty feel, and *Carnage* still has the ridiculous fling-the-driver-through-the-windshield minigames, but it's so much tighter in every other regard. It's fun as hell, looks great, and might have the most visceral destruction-derby gameplay since those old *Destruction Derby* PS1 games from Reflections.

↑ GORD: Greg may be giddy that he somehow coaxed his fetid heap to the finish line before me, but his review is gratuitously glowing. I longed for just a few sections of open road, free of *Carnage's* perpetual clutter and...well, carnage. I looked for a rearview mirror or an inset cam to witness my devastation, but found only a disruptive "look back" button. *FlatOut* is a gorgeous smash-up derby that'll temporarily thrill everyone. But naturally, it'll satiate only "arcade" racers for the long haul, and it's best when played online where treacherous human unpredictability and abundant multiplayer modes add necessary octane.

The Good: Pure vehicular mayhem
The Bad: Too-strong rubber-band A.I.
Most Insane Minigame: Skipping your driver across a pool



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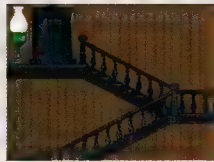
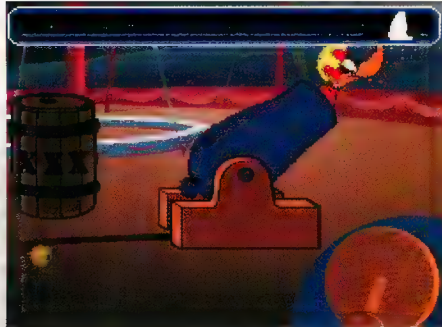
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Some of the minigames (like this piano game) are deceptively dumb.

DS

LOONEY TUNES: DUCK AMUCK

■ Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive ■ Developer: WayForward ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

8.0
GOOD

NICK
6.0
AVERAGE

JOHN
8.0
GOOD

The Good: Clever use of the DS, awesome animation, genuinely funny
The Bad: Vague minigame directions
Close the DS: For a surprise

Poking duck

➔ **MICHAEL:** Don't dismiss *Duck Amuck* because of its loony license—this is a DS title done right. Most kiddie-approved fare fails to cook up creative ideas, but *Duck Amuck* simmers with imagination. Hell, from the start, the slobber-mouthed main character, Daffy, lets you know you're playing a videogame. But this isn't a normal title per se—the concept revolves around the classic cartoon *Duck Amuck*, where an anonymous animator screws with Daffy. But instead of an animator, the player (i.e., you) is tasked with pissing him off. The more you mess with him, the closer you get to "finishing" the game. You rile up Daffy by hunting for different minigames. This is done in several different ways: "tearing" the

background with your stylus, closing the DS, or merely letting Daffy stand idle. The actual minigames are simple, too: In one, you light a match and trace a gasoline trail back to Daffy. In another, you chop veggies to cook him. Yeah, some of these time-wasters can be a little vague, but the ones that do work are both fun and funny.

➔ **NICK:** Don't get me wrong—I love the creativity at work here, and having to poke, prod, and piss off Daffy in different ways to initiate minigames is a great way to approach the concept. The games themselves can be hilariously self-referential (pulling out bad bits of game code, closing the DS to hunt a monster in the dark), but they can also be ridiculously unclear in

their objectives; pressing pause tells you *what* you're supposed to do, but not always how. It's a great concept, but all the innovation and humor can't save something that you can see the vast majority of in half an hour.

➔ **JOHN:** Like Michael, I think *Duck Amuck*'s great. It's like a postmodern, humor-filled subversion of *Nintendogs*, with lots of blowing into the DS mic hole. Unlike so many games that try to crack jokes, *Duck Amuck* is imaginative and genuinely funny. "This game is full of Bugs," Daffy declares, as a giant image of a certain bunny appears behind him. It's not really a title to play for extended periods, but instead something to dip into for five minutes at a time. ❦

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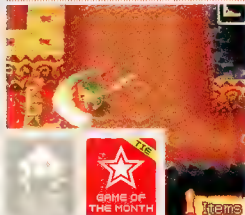
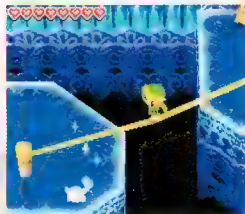
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DS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

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

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

8.0
GOOD

JEREMY
9.0
EXCELLENT

SHANE
9.0
EXCELLENT

The Good: Cuddly visuals, easy controls
The Bad: Formulaic design, low difficulty
Piracy: Link's sailor buddy, Linebeck, is a blatant Capt. Jack Sparrow rip-off

A touching reunion with old friends

➔ **MILKMAN:** Known for consistently high quality and innovation, the long-running *Legend of Zelda* series is hard not to love. For some, *Wind Waker* on GameCube was a misstep because of its whimsical graphics and lack of an adult, ass-kicking Link. But that bitching notwithstanding, it was still a good game that garnered plenty of fans. And now baby Link returns in *Hourglass*, an all-new adventure that deftly borrows its console cousin's distinctive cartoon look, even though the game plays primarily from the traditional overhead view of *A Link to the Past*.

As expected, *Hourglass* serves up the usual slate of *Zelda* staples—traveling, exploration, puzzles, and combat—in generous quantities, but this

time everything is handled via the touch screen and stylus. Personally, being forced to adapt to this new play style irritated me at first, especially since your hand often obscures the action. But as the game progresses, moves become available that wouldn't be possible without the stylus—like drawing the boomerang's exact path on the screen—so this method eventually proves its worth.

But another *Zelda* basically means another carefully choreographed series of fetch quests and contrived boss battles that, if you're less romantic about the series than others, eventually start to feel like work. Also worth noting, the dialogue is solid as always, even if the story itself ends up being surprisingly insubstantial, even

by *Zelda*'s standards. Is *Hourglass* a solid piece of DS software? Absolutely. But we've all been there and done that before.

➔ **JEREMY:** By all rights, a *Zelda* game controlled entirely by stylus should be a disaster, but somehow Nintendo has performed a miracle. Everything from sailing—a huge improvement on *Wind Waker*'s sea-faring tedium—to swordplay feels perfect, and Link's usual arsenal of special weapons works in newer, more precise ways.

No doubt most of the development team's time and effort went into making the control scheme work perfectly, and job well done—but the great interface comes at the expense of

A Link to the Wi-Fi

Phantom Hourglass offers a true *Zelda* first—online multiplayer via Nintendo's Wi-Fi Connection service. Don't get overly psyched, though: This isn't like the madcap four-player co-op action from the underrated *Zelda: Four Swords Adventures* (GC), but rather a tense 1-on-1 game of high-stakes hide-and-seek. The contests here take place on small, mazelike maps: One player controls Link as he attempts to carry heavy Force Gems to a goal, while his opponent directs enemy troops via stylus strokes. This mode isn't terribly ambitious, but it's a simple, engaging diversion that holds up remarkably well to repeated play.

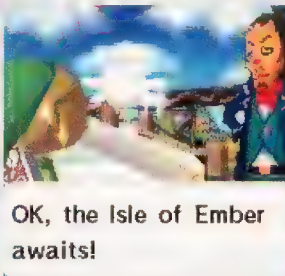
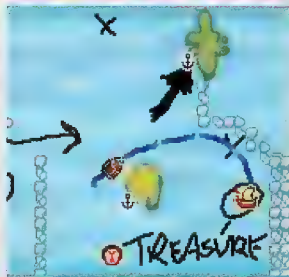
EZ You're a little faster!
...For a little while.



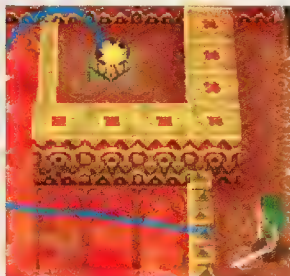
Enemy sighted!



The seafaring in *Hourglass* easily outclasses the sailing in *Wind Waker*.



OK, the Isle of Ember awaits!

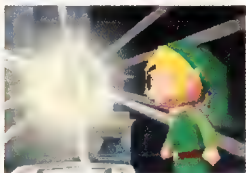


creativity. *Hourglass* barely scratches the surface of the possibilities the stylus offers, largely sticking to safe, simple mark the map "puzzles," if you can even call them that. The formulaic bosses and repetitive Temple of the Ocean King disappoint, too. But *Hourglass* is a welcome reinvention, a fulfillment of *Wind Waker's* promise of a new series direction. As a game, it's great; as the groundwork for even better things, it's absolutely inspiring.

➔ **SHANE:** All the *Wind Waker* fans who felt betrayed by Link's more serious turn in last year's *Twilight Princess* will delight to see him back in cutesy, cartoon-shaded form in *Hourglass*, an effervescent, low-impact romp that directly continues *Wind Waker's* memorable plot and nautical themes. First-timers wary of the series' notorious complexity and depth should also take note: *Hourglass* brazenly dumps much of the franchise's established

tenets (no collecting Heart Pieces, no item-delivery minigames, and no Ganon!) in favor of pick-up-and-play touch-screen simplicity.

Hourglass's new stylus-controlled gameplay performs admirably most of the time—in the heat of a boss battle, you may feel as if it's imprecise and unwieldy, but actually, the combat remains shockingly easy until very late in the game. In fact, the same goes for the adventure as a whole: This is by far the least-taxing *Zelda* ever created. But its adorable graphics, snappy writing, clever puzzles, and addictive multiplayer mode manage to make one of gaming's perpetually recycled products feel fresh again. 🎮



EGM Extras: Those temple puzzles giving you fits? Head to EGM.1UP.com for our solution-filled SuperGuide. Thank us later.



These onocrocs may look cute, but they'll gobble you up early on.

PSP

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS: THE WAR OF THE LIONS

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ Developer: Square Enix ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen



The Good: Addictive gameplay, great new translation

The Bad: Learning curve, dated visuals

Hard Lesson: Multiple save files save lives!

Still king of the tactical jungle

➔ **JEREMY:** How good is *Final Fantasy Tactics* on PSP? So good that I put in 70-plus hours...with the Japanese version. That's a testament to the strength of the original's tactical-role-playing-game design. This PS1 classic may not be perfect, but its class-based progression system is superaddictive, offering both tons of character customization and a rewarding sense of accomplishment as you unlock your party's skills. Portability makes it better, as do this version's fresh features: new cinemas, characters, and classes. Also added: two multiplayer modes. One lets you compete against a friend, while the other has you team up for special co-op missions. They're good, but not as good as if they were online. Last, the localization has been

updated, so the intricate story finally makes sense. The original game's other flaws are still present, though: the early chapters are way too hard and the end is way too easy. Plus, once you jump in, you may never want to put another game in your PSP.

➔ **MILKMAN:** The dialogue from the original *Tactics* wasn't so much bad as it was blunt. The redone script feels like Joss Whedon (*Buffy*, *Firefly*) got a hold of it, and that's a good thing. The plot is still ultralayered and overly dense—and will lose a lot of people along the way—but since the tactical combat is so good (if slow), most won't mind. Unless you have the two versions side by side, though, you'll likely miss the PSP-exclusive charac-

ters (*FFXII*'s Balthier, etc.) and jobs, and the "different" camera angles are still all but useless (the game needs an overhead view...badly). But *Tactics* is still engrossing, time-consuming fun.

➔ **SHOE:** In about the same time it took me to get lost (again) in *Tactics*' still-impenetrable fiction (Jeremy must be smarter than I), I got readdicted to its classic job system. How strange is this game design where I enjoy playing around in menus—growing and customizing my squad, noseless warriors—as much as I do on the colorful battlefields? The new, gorgeous, living-art cut-scenes are too rare, though. Why bother bringing this world to vivid life only once every couple of hours or so? **46**

FRAG AND CONQUER.

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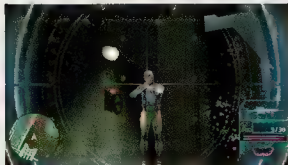
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Logan's so badass, he doesn't need to know where he's firing.



PSP

SYPHON FILTER: LOGAN'S SHADOW

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Sony Bend ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Teen



The Good: Diverse missions, engrossing story

The Bad: A.I. sometimes goes haywire
Gruff Gabe Actor: Also voiced FFX's whiny Tidus

Finally out of Snake's shadow

➔ **A. FITCH:** With *Metal Gear*'s Solid Snake and *Splinter Cell*'s Sam Fisher both AWOL this fall, it falls on *Syphon Filter*'s Gabe Logan—forever the third wheel in the holy stealth-action-hero triumvirate—to pick up the slack. Last year's surprise PSP hit *Dark Mirror* proved that Gabe's more than up to that task, and *Logan's Shadow* cements it: This is the handheld stealth-action series to beat.

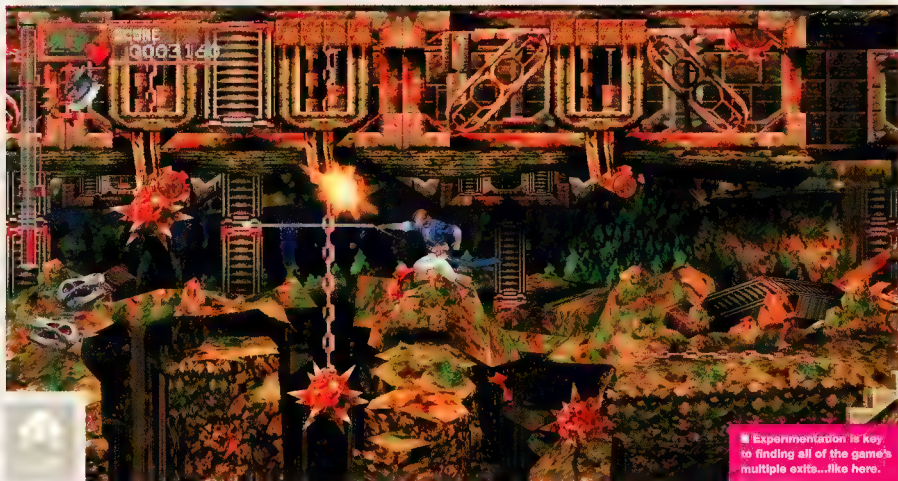
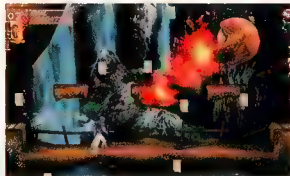
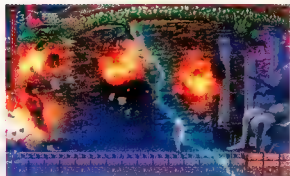
Logan's Shadow augments *Dark Mirror*'s already excellent control scheme by adding water-oriented quests and physics-based cover. While the action's a perfect mix of sly sneaking and guns-blazing shootouts, the gripping storytelling is what really sets *Logan's Shadow* apart: Each mission serves an actual purpose in mov-

ing the politically charged tale forward, and the game isn't afraid to make allusions to real-world conflicts, which further ramps up the intensity. If you're a stealth-action fan who's still ignoring the *Syphon Filter* franchise, you're doing yourself a disservice.

➔ **BROOKS:** Logan certainly holds his own against the likes of Fisher and Snake. His arsenal of gadgets, such as heat-sensing goggles and a Batman-like propel system, adds an abundance of variety to the gameplay. Most rewarding though, is peering around corners for that quick one-shot kill between the eyes—it's too bad enemies don't react accordingly to leg shots and chest hits; the stiff "ugh" doesn't cut it. Multiplayer's unique

maps sweeten the deal, though, filled with turrets, zip lines, and multiterred stages that give the game legs.

➔ **NICK:** "Excellent" controls? An "abundance" of variety? My copy didn't seem to contain those luxuries. The mechanics are workable once you adjust to the awkwardness of manually aiming with the face buttons (NS4's *Turok* says hello), but it's never intuitive. And while the production values are sky-high (cinemas, pretty water, the works), the constant stop-and-pop gameplay makes it feel more like *Time Crisis* lite. The online multiplayer impresses, and the spy stuff is novel but packs all the political intrigue of a board meeting (sorry, Fitch). It's simply too bland to bother with. ❌



■ Experimentation is key to finding all of the game's multiple extras...like here.

PSP

CASTLEVANIA: THE DRACULA X CHRONICLES

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

THE VERDICT'S
(OUT OF 10)

JEREMY
8.0
GOOD

SHANE
9.0
EXCELLENT

MARK
8.0
GOOD

The Good: Coveted classic, solid remake
The Bad: Some control jankiness
Upgrade? *Symphony's* new voices still suck

Better late than never

➔ **JEREMY:** *Dracula X: Rondo of Blood* has always been the *Castlevania* fan's holy grail. Released only in Japan for an obscure system (PC Engine), gamers have long lusted for a way to play the game without dropping a few hundred bucks on eBay. This opportunity alone would make *The Dracula X Chronicles* worth a look, but this title sports a few more surprises. It's also a comprehensive remake that updates the tight 2D, monster-slaying action with crisp 3D visuals (plus a few twists for those who know the original inside-out). The gameplay is slightly tweaked to make the characters easier to control, and purists can unlock both the original, 16-bit *Rondo* and its sequel, *Symphony of the Night*. Good thing,

too, because the remake does suffer from imprecisions—like mushy hit detection—that plague 2D games with 3D graphics. Don't let that discourage you from finally getting your hands on this game, though; it's the pinnacle of the classic *Castlevania* formula.

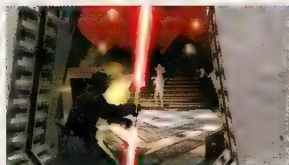
➔ **SHANE:** Konami finally exhumes this legendarily elusive chapter in *Dracula's* history, gussies it up with lovely 3D trappings, and then grafts on its revered sequel...yet Jeremy dares to nitpick the controls and graphics? Absolute heresy. While *Rondo's* gameplay might feel a tinge clunky and unforgiving by modern standards, its clever level designs, wildly different playable characters, and killer boss fights hold up remark-

ably well after 14 years. And you'll find so much content here—those unlockables Jeremy mentions offer plenty of reasons to replay.

➔ **MARK:** I have to agree with Jeremy that the *Rondo* remake could be better; certain stages—especially the later levels—really come to life in 3D, but others seem somewhat empty (blame the lack of detail). And the control, while improved, still isn't up to modern *Castlevania* standards. But I also agree with Shane—these are minor problems in the face of an amazing overall value. Classic *Rondo* alone would be a great budget title for virgin Western audiences; adding a remake and *Symphony* turns this into a no-brainer. 🍌



Even if Old Man Obi is your only hope, you may as well strike yourself down now.



PSP

STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT—RENEGADE SQUADRON

■ Publisher: LucasArts ■ Developer: Rebellion ■ Players: 1-16 ■ ESRB: Teen

New soldiers, old problems

➔ **SHOE:** You can add stuff to a *Star Wars* shooter—like the ability to fly in Boba Fett's *Slave I*—that would make a fan's C-3PO Underoos feel a bit tight, but the hardware can still kill the mood. Like in the last PSP *Battlefront*, the limited controls mean the designers have to let you "cheat" to make stormtroopers and TIE fighters easier to shoot down (like lock-on targeting, autopilot, and way, way dumb A.I.). It cuts down on the frustration but also any sense of challenge.

Renegade Squadron does step it up in other areas, though. Instead of picking a preset class, you can spend a limited amount of points to customize your character to create anything from a jetpack-sporting sniper to a chaingun-wielding medic. The cam-

paign also lets the game take a break from being a straight-up *Battlefield* rip-off by offering more story-driven and objective-based missions. Too bad this mode is over with so quickly.

➔ **ANDREW P:** The enemies you encounter in the *Battlefront* series have never been too bright, but like Shoe says, they're even less challenging on the PSP—in the Galactic Conquest mode, I managed to shred through the mighty Empire in under an hour. It's much more enjoyable (and challenging) when played over the Internet against real people, and that new customization system revitalizes a formula that quickly turned stale. If you missed *Battlefront II* in 2005, this is an improvement. Everyone else

should probably wait until the entire franchise gets an upgrade.

➔ **MICHAEL:** Just like you know how every *Star Wars* movie starts with the iconic text crawl, you'll know right away that *Renegade Squadron* offers merely a modest update of the previous two *Battlefront* games. Hey, but that doesn't mean this game reeks of rancor poo. In fact, the online play is definitely worth picking up a blaster for. Not only because of the frantic fun and new maps, but also because the human-played enemies will likely attempt to dodge your bullets. But while multiplayer rocks, the appeal of the campaign and character customization lasts about as long as Darth Maul's screen time. 🐾

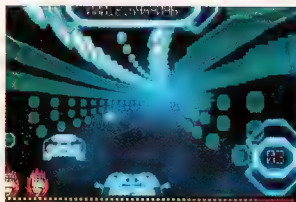
THE VERDICT'S (OUT OF 10)

SHOE
6.0
AVERAGE

ANDREW P.
7.0
GOOD

MICHAEL
6.0
AVERAGE

The Good: Mission-based campaign, customizable classes
The Bad: Choppy action
Does Han Shoot First? Answered in an in-joke cut-scene



PSP

HOT PXL

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

Wario's pixels are still hotter

➔ **NICK:** If you've ever played a *WarioWare* game, you'll have a very good idea of what to expect from *Hot PXL*: dozens of frenetic "microgames" strung end to end, taking no more than a few seconds to figure out and even less to complete through button presses and simple movements. *Hot PXL* pilfers the formula unapologetically, and it's still fun.

Unfortunately, where *WarioWare*'s bizarre aesthetic and creative bite-sized game concepts are half the appeal, *Hot PXL*'s wackiness comes off as bit forced, owing more to bizarre PSP ad campaigns than anything particularly creative. The main game is best in short sessions as it takes under an hour to finish, but additional downloadable games and local multiplayer extend the experience. It was only

a matter of time until the PSP caught microgame madness, and while *Hot PXL* can be fun, it's also derivative and insincere.

➔ **SHANE:** Four years back, Nintendo's hyperkinetic GBA smash, *WarioWare, Inc.: Mega*

Microgame\$!, famously reinvented the minigame-collection genre, and various sequels have further evolved its pioneering, postmodern approach to game design. Too bad you won't spy any of those innovations here. As Nick says, *Hot PXL* feels like a blatant rip-off. That's not to say it's devoid of charm—the goofy DIY presentation (complete with creator Jonathan Choquel hamming it up in copious video cut-scenes) frames 200 meager diversions with appropriately quirky visuals and sounds. If you can get past how limited it all feels, you'll have a modicum of fun.

➔ **JENNIFER:** If I repeated everything these guys said, and did it with a certain pseudo-street, yo-yo-check-it "flava," that'd be a perfect embodiment of *Hot PXL*. But shouldn't you offer something new? And where *Hot PXL* comes up short, I'll bring it. Like so many PSP games, this one suffers from too much loading. It's disguised in hilarious cut-scenes, but it slows down the pace just enough to be annoying. And the controls seem to limit the games' variety. Halfway through, they start to feel very repetitive. If you're a PSP loyalist who missed *WarioWare*, though, check it out, yo.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

NICK
5.5
AVERAGE

SHANE
5.5
AVERAGE

JENNIFER
6.0
AVERAGE

The Good: Some clever minigames, plentiful unlockables
The Bad: Forced humor and wackiness, short and repetitive
Added Value: Don't forget to download extra games from HotPXL.com

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REVIEWS WRAP-UP

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

PS3

RATCHET & CLANK
FUTURE: TOOLS OF
DESTRUCTION

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

For their PS3 debut, Sony's lovable lombax and his tin-can sidekick are going back to their roots (meaning more platforming and less shooting). It's a smart move, as this series has gotten a lil' too trigger-happy over the years. *Tools of Destruction* is also quite the looker, thanks to its Pixar-inspired visuals and massive environments. Even the Sixaxis-specific mechanics (such as moving the controller left-to-right while Ratchet free-falls and avoids space traffic) work great here.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** In taking a step back, *Ratchet* is taking a huge step forward.



XB360

HALF-LIFE 2:
THE ORANGE BOX

■ Publisher: EA Games ■ ESRB: Mature

Like after-hours TV, *Half-Life 2: The Orange Box* is one "And that's not all!" after another (although Valve's PC prestige should sell itself, no motor-mouthed huckster necessary). Already wrinkle-proof on the art-direction and design ends, *HL2* looks sharper than ever after the jump to the 360. Also part of the package, *Episodes One and Two* scoot the sci-fi saga forward with terrific plot twists, as well as new landscapes and bogeymen.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** While the pitchman shouts "But wait—there's more!" we add that *Team Fortress 2*'s whimsical take on überviolence isn't *Halo 3* online by another name.



Wii

VICTORIOUS
BOXERS:
REVOLUTION

■ Publisher: XSEED ■ ESRB: Teen

Wii Sports may have gone a long way in getting Nintendo's console into the spotlight, but its boxing portion sure didn't help. XSEED's anime-based fighter attempts to fill that void, but ultimately, *Revolution* looks more like a pretender than a contender. While you have more punches at your disposal here (plus a story mode), matchups usually end up with people swinging the Wii-mote and Nunchuk like untrained buffoons. Another major problem: Too often, the game doesn't register when you throw blows.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** The Wii remains in need of a ring king.



Wii

DEWY'S ADVENTURE

■ Publisher: Konami ■ ESRB: Everyone

The producers behind *Elebits* wanted to do more than just point and click this time around. Here, you're required to tilt the world around Dewy, a cheerful droplet. But he's not helpless—changing the air temperature allows Dewy to freeze solid and attack foes or evaporate into a lightning-zapping cloud.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Once you peel away the so-cute-it-hurts epidermal layer, you're left with a surprisingly rich platformer, complete with boss battles. But with wonky fixed camera angles and narrow, rail-less level design, controlling the hero-drop feels more like guiding butter on a hot skillet. Curse you edges!



PS3/XB360

TONY HAWK'S PROVING GROUND

■ Publisher: Activision ■ ESRB: Teen

After a few rounds with EA's realistic *Skate*, we were starved for the big-air antics of *Tony Hawk's Proving Ground*. The additions of Nail the Manual and Nail the Grab led to wicked strings of slow-mo maneuvers, and the gritty, winding storyline lets you choose your own path—and unlock gobbs of create-a-skater goodies along the way. Plus, the video editor is just plain fun. After nine tries, we consider it a significant achievement that Neversoft has kept this series so fresh.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Fun factor alone easily keeps this an ollie above EA's supposedly harder-core competition.



XB360

BEAUTIFUL KATAMARI

■ Publisher: Namco Bandai ■ ESRB: Everyone

We can almost get away with copying-and-pasting our review for the original *Katamari Damacy* here. Because the quirky series that started off so endearingly different on PS2 has unrolled another installment that barely breaks with the collect-the-crap formula. We suppose the "beautiful" in the title refers to the graphics, but aside from being crisper and a bit more dense, they're indistinguishable from the first game's. New online competitive modes seem promising, but otherwise this "beauty" feels just about beat.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Not worth \$40. This should have been a cheap Xbox Live Arcade game.



PS3

FOLKLORE

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ ESRB: Teen

We haven't had a chance to play the full game yet, but limited time with *Folklore* reveals a quirky action-role-playing game with pretty visuals and some really neat ideas (stealing a defeated enemy's powers for your own being the best part). Stealing souls isn't easy: You have to yank up and twist the Sixaxis controller with pinpoint timing.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *Folklore* hails from the same team as PS3 launch title *Genji*, but don't hold that against it. While the game's not exactly triple-A fare, its cool *Devil May Cry*-meets-*Psychonauts* vibe seems fresh and hip. Check for a review next ish.



PS3/XB360

NBA 2K8

■ Publisher: 2K Sports ■ ESRB: Everyone

Last year, 2K's roundballer officially took over as the premier NBA sim. And the way *2K8* is shaping up it doesn't appear the series is about to give up that crown. Aside from drastically improved visuals (especially when you get up close and personal with these guys), the game comes to the court with brainer A.I. (lots of off-the-ball movement, they double-team big men, and so on) and simple play-call mechanics. This also marks the franchise's first stab at a slam dunk contest, which is way more intuitive than *Live's*.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *2K8* belongs on the court with the likes of LeBron and Kobe.



PS3/XB360

JUICED 2: HOT IMPORT NIGHTS

■ Publisher: THQ ■ ESRB: Teen

Emphasizing online multiplayer racing and a headset concept wherein cheers and jeers can impact outcomes, *Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights* sports a ton of racing formats, oodles of ridiculously tweakable cars, and the added intrigue of prerace wagering. Learning how to expertly drift through turns is mandatory, and whatever you do on the track influences your character's "DNA," which is then displayed for potential challengers.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Without its offbeat perks and deep multiplayer component, *Juiced 2* would be another tired arcade racer. Fortunately, that periphery is pretty strong.



PS2

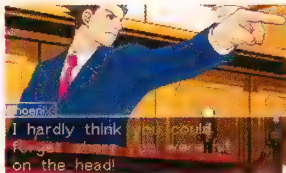
SOUL NOMAD & THE WORLD EATERS

■ Publisher: NIS America ■ ESRB: Teen

Soul Nomad is your typical save-the-world strategy-roleplayer, but with a twist: The unnamed, mute protagonist just happens to be possessed by a rude, crude centuries-old demon (the titular "soul nomad"). Parental advisory: Keep the kiddies away from this dude with a "tude—he swears up a storm like he's at the Flavor Flav celebrity roast!

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** An edgy, adult script filled with dark comedy sets *Soul Nomad* apart, but ugly, dated sprites (*Odin Sphere* this ain't) and complex rules of engagement make the game tough to recommend for anyone but hardcore strategy nuts.

REVIEWS



DS

PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY—TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ ESRB: Teen

Like its predecessors, *Trials* is a courtroom adventure game that's been ported over to DS from its Japanese GBA roots. Here, the titular defense attorney handles a third series of offbeat murder cases, matching wits against shady prosecutor Godot in order to get always-innocent clients off the hook.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Adventure geeks should enjoy the trail of exploration- and conversation-based puzzles, though don't expect any enhanced DS-only cases like in the first *Wright*. Also, do yourself the favor of playing the first two games beforehand—or risk *Star Wars* syndrome when familiar faces pop up.



DS

FRONT MISSION 1ST

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Turn-based strategy games work well on the DS, as *Front Mission* ably demonstrates. On the battlefield, the action moves along smoothly. Constantly upgrading and outfitting your wanzor mechs to develop a well-rounded squad with long, short, and melee combat capabilities gives the game ample depth. Also, its two-sided single-player campaign provides plenty of opportunity to try out all the potential combinations.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *Front Mission* brings back a classic (from the Japan-only Super Famicom) that gives first-timers an ideal place to discover the series.

THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for August

#	Name	Platform	EGM Scores
1	BioShock 	XB360	10 10 10
2	Madden NFL 08 	XB360	9.0 9.0 8.5
3	Wii Play (with Wii Remote)	Wii	4.5 6.0 5.0
4	Madden NFL 08	PS2	Not Reviewed
5	Madden NFL 08	PS3	Not Reviewed
6	Mario Strikers Charged	Wii	7.5 7.5 7.5
7	Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day! 	DS	8.0 7.0 6.0
8	Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3 	PS2	8.5 9.5 9.5
9	Guitar Hero Encore: Rocks the 80s	PS2	7.5 6.0 6.0
10	New Super Mario Bros.	DS	9.5 10 8.0
11	Pokémon Diamond	DS	8.5 9.0 8.5
12	Guitar Hero II (Bundle with Guitar)	PS2	9.0 9.0 8.5
13	Pokémon Pearl	DS	8.5 9.0 8.5
14	Madden NFL 08	Wii	Not Reviewed
15	Mario Party 8	Wii	5.5 7.5 6.0
16	Resident Evil 4	Wii	8.0 9.0 9.0
17	Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!	DS	8.5 9.0 9.5
18	Big Brain Academy: Wii Degree	Wii	Not Reviewed
19	Rune Factory: A Fantasy Harvest Moon	DS	Not Reviewed
20	High School Musical: Makin' the Cut	DS	Not Reviewed

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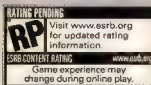
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GAME OVER

➤ press continue for overwrought plots and a nightmare on game street



➤ SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

Official Nintendo Seal of Quantity

These games are officially but just barely sort of approved



See video of Seanbaby and his amazing friends as they suffer through countless no-quality games at BrokenPixels.1UP.com

THE OFFICIAL NINTENDO SEAL

OF QUALITY is now just the Official Nintendo Seal. And if you've played *Escape from Bug Island* or *Boogie* on your Wii, you know why. Or *Red Steel*. Or *Spider-Man 5*. Or 80 percent of every game ever made for the DS. The Official Nintendo Seal is so easy to get that 137 different research foundations are working on a cure.

I believe it goes back to the case of *People v. Total Recall* for the NES, when Nintendo was stripped of its right to describe the quality of anything. As part of the settlement, if Nintendo were to call something good, it would require four additional pages of documentation stipulating that their standards of good include the atrocities of *Total Recall* for the NES. This is similar to the regulations on prescription-drug commercials, in which, if they list which ailments their products cure, pharmaceutical

companies must also disclose possible side effects. Which is why erection commercials rely less on actual description and more on visual metaphors like a grinning man or a hot dog being jammed into a moaning woman's lap. If they told the viewer flat out what their pills did, they'd be required to mention such unsexy side effects as loosened stool, exploding talking dong, and werewolf.

So it's understandable why Nintendo removed the word "Quality" from its seal. They could be sued by language itself. But to not replace it with anything else? That's weak. Putting a seal on something without an adjective is like saying, "This

product was noticed by us, its parent company, but please don't make us describe it." Even mayonnaise has the balls to say "freshness" on its seal, and if I'm not mistaken, mayonnaise is fermented chicken sperm.

As a service to my loyal readers, I will be rating four awful games that made it through Nintendo's nonexistent quality filter using Nintendo's own Seal of Sealing system. It's on a scale of one to five Seals, and to help you understand it, five Official Nintendo Seals means that Nintendo Sealed it, and then Sealed it four more times. A score of only one Seal is one fifth as Sealed but exactly the same amount of Official.

The Official Nintendo Seal is so easy to get that 137 different research foundations are working on a cure.



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Retros: A no-nonsense approach



PAGE
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Seek and enjoy: A tricky treat



PAGE
136

Grudge: Chief gets schooled

DRAKE & JOSH: TALENT SHOWDOWN

Description Rating:

Take control of two young boys as they train for a talent show and try to deny filthy, secret cravings misunderstood by their classmates and forbidden by God.

Whatever a Drake and a Josh Are,

They Have a Game Rating:

This is a real game. Someone made this!

Realism Rating:

The back of the game's box shows everything you can do in your adventures through Belleville High. And right after the first game feature "Perform dazzling magic tricks!" it showcases that you can "Battle



your way through bullies!" This sequence of events could have only been imagined by someone who has firsthand experience performing dazzling magic tricks in his high school.

What Nintendo Could Have Done to Catch This In Time:

It's hard to put protocols in place to prevent the making of a game like this that will never be played by anyone for any reason, including the game's quality-assurance staff. Luckily, I've invented a system that Nintendo's quality control can use: Step one: Put the game in its box next to any two other games. Say out loud, "Look at that thing. What kind of—look at that f---ing thing!" If nearby people know which game you're talking about, place it in the reject pile, Nintendo. There is no step two. By the way, *Drake & Josh: Talent Showdown* does not hold up to this level of scrutiny.

PONY FRIENDS

Description Rating:

My favorite pony is every pony!

Chore Rating:

The manual lists three events under the heading of "Chores." They are trail-riding, accessorizing, and, I quote, "Feeding your pony (its favorite treat)." I don't know where these game developers grew up, but when I'm from, accessorizing your pony is not a chore: It's the primal connection between a rider, his or her pony, horse makeup, and a tattoo needle. Making your pony beautiful is not a chore. Are you trying to break Majestica Skytasm's heart? Majestica Skytasm is the name of my pony.



Boring Rating:

Pick stones from your pony's hoof. Shampoo your pony's entire body. Condition your pony's entire body. Apply my treatment to your pony's entire body. Apply medicine to your pony's entire diseased body. If this game is realistic in any way, every pony owner in the world is clinically depressed and riddled with horse

disease. My whole life I wondered why, with all our technology, we still use horses to make glue. Now I realize it's because pony owners want it that way.

What Nintendo Could Have Done to Catch This In Time:

Someone in quality control should have noticed that this concept only works as a fruit snack or a sparkly sticker. This game promotes the punching of ponies even more so than their stupid, punchable faces.

NACHO LIBRE

Description Rating:

Following in the tradition of Bruce Willis in *Hudson Hawk*, Jack Black made a movie solely to test the understanding and patience of Jack Black fans. This is a game-like spin-off based on that project.

Gameplay Rating:

Wrestling gameplay is marred only by unresponsive controls, frustrating slowness, terrible graphics, scratchy audio, wildly bipolar AI, and an overall presentation that makes even the very act of choosing options suck. Luckily, the game features much of the film's humor, such as saying things with a Mexican accent. For example, "Use your eagle power!" I guess it doesn't work when you type it.

Descriptiveness Rating:

The back of the box follows Nintendo's example by describing the action in its entirety with, "Use the touch screen to play eight themed minigames." It may not want to go out on a limb by calling anything fun or exciting, but it will say that the games might remind a consumer of the film *Nacho Libre*. And when you think about it, that is pretty brave.

What Nintendo Could Have Done to Catch This In Time:

As American consumers, many of us understand that every product comes with a small percentage of impurities. The government allows for a small percentage of cockroach eggs in our chocolate, and a trace amount of mouse droppings make it into our powdered rat feces. *Nacho Libre* was Mexican enough to be exempt from America's strict contamination regulations, and as such was able to be made entirely out of cockroach eggs and mouse droppings.



BUILD-A-BEAR WORKSHOP

Description Rating:

Assemble, stuff, and dress your very own teddy bear. Picking up the pieces of your shattered, hopeless life not included.

Concept Rating:

To many of us, a game about making toy bears is ridiculous. Possibly insane. In fact, take out the possibly. What was my point?

America! What a Country Rating:

Do you think that somewhere in Taiwan, a 10-year-old child smashing teddy bear parts through a sewing machine with arthritis-curling hands knows that someone made a DS game based on his life story? And would knowing this let him finally go to bed happy, assuming of course that he were allowed to sleep? Or would he curse the imperialist pigs who mocked his pain with giggle-fun tummy rubbing using your DS Stylus?!?!?

What Nintendo Could Have Done to Catch This In Time:

Take a look at the product you're licensing. Nintendo. Do you want to explain to me how a game about making teddy bears is realistic if I don't have the option of carving a hole into it and "stuffing" it myself? **NO.**



10 Years Ago...

GAME OVER



On the cover: Issue 100

In honor of getting old, we bestowed upon the world our list—chosen by us—of the 100 best games of all time. Coming in at 100? *Qix* (NES)—a game about drawing boxes using a sparkling "Stix." Uh, OK. And our top pick? *Super Mario Bros.* (NES)? *The Legend of Zelda* (NES)? Nope—*Tetris* (Everything).



Game of the month (tie): Saturn Bomberman and Castlevania: Symphony of the Night

Two great titles earned an average score of 9.25, giving us two games of the month. Though *SOTN* is 10 years old, the game just won't die....



Behind the screens

More like behind the *screams*. In a feature much like show-and-tell, we detailed the crazy accounts of the making of an issue of *EGM*. All you folks who think we just play games all day? Ha—if you only knew! Oh, wait—you do know because of this article. Oops! So in addition to proving we actually do work, we also showcased all the silly shenanigans that go on in the office. Example: The deadly game of Decapitato—a made-up game where you throw Frisbees... at people's heads. Ouch.

WTFiction!?

No. 5: Xenogears

Deciphering silly stories By Jeremy Parish

Most videogame stories are simple, but some are just nutty. So over the next few months we'll be counting down (and explaining) the wackiest game plotlines ever. We begin with *Xenogears* (PS1).

START HERE

1: THE ELDRIDGE



Our tale begins with the Eldridge, a starship that suddenly finds itself under attack from within by Deus, an insidious force that fills the forward screens with scripture. The crew takes the only possible course of action to such a threat and destroys the ship. The Eldridge crash-lands on a conveniently located planet, and the only survivors are a naked lady named Miang and a kid named Abel.

2: DEUS

The Eldridge's crew decides to nuke its own ship because Deus is a diabolical interplanetary superweapon that should never, ever be set loose upon the universe. After the crash, Deus creates Miang as a sort of Eve to populate the new world. Not out of kindness, though, but rather because it needs lots and lots of people to power its return to space.

CARRIES

3: KRELIAN

Krelian has issues. These lead him to team up with Miang to revive Deus, knowing full well it means the end of mankind. To that end, he even creates a clone of Abel named Ramsus. Once Fei destroys Deus, Krelian realizes that he's been a bit of a bastard and repents, moseying along the path to divinity with the newly freed Wave Existence.



3: NONSENSE & NONSENSIBILITY



All of this is actually a fairly straightforward story, but it seems a lot more confusing because the game constantly sidetracks players with silly nonsense about giant rats on crucifixes, pedophilic priests, sandships, and Fei's dad, Darth Va—er, Graih. Ignore these red herrings (and pink fuz balls) and it all makes sense!

CONFUSES

3: WAVE EXISTENCE

Fortunately for mankind, Deus' plans are undermined from within as well. The superweapon is powered by a device called the Zohar, which works its magic by tapping into a higher dimension, trapping a divine being called the Wave Existence in the process. Nonplussed, the Wave Existence makes contact with Abel, which initiates a ten-millennia-long battle with Deus.

4: ABEL



Abel is an Eldridge passenger who comes in contact with the Wave Existence. Doing so sparks a war with Deus, who uses Miang and others to prepare mankind to serve as sacrifices for Deus' revival. Meanwhile, Abel finds herself reincarnated throughout history, taking a stand against Deus to help the Wave Existence break free.

GAME OVER

CONTACTS

DESTROYS

7: MIANG

A sort of evil version of Eve, Miang is created by Deus to populate the world with delicious humans—biomass to fuel its galactic rampages. Miang is kinda like an Agent in the Matrix; upon death, she can possess any woman with her genetic code (which is all of them, since the entire planet is descended from her). She usually manipulates history from behind the scenes, although, this being a role-playing game, she also pilots a big-ass robot into battle from time to time.



CREATES

5: FEI FONG WONG



The main character of the game is also the final incarnation of Abel. Although he mostly sulks and mopes about not wanting to fight (when he's not rain-scaping as the "super-powered being M, anyway), Fei eventually pulls it together and pilots a god-killing mech to put a stop to Deus' ambitions and set the Wave Existence free.

REINCARNATES

STERNALLY LOVES

TEAMS UP WITH

LOVES

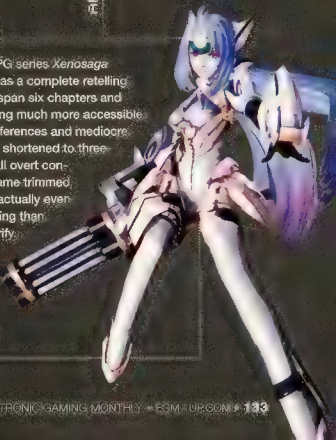
8: ELHAYM VAN HOUTEN

Fei's love interest Elly is also the latest Antitype, a persona who (like Abel and Miang) is perpetually reincarnated as part of the struggle between Deus and the Wave Existence. Elly's various forms always seem to die tragically, to the perpetual dismay of her Abel-descended lovers. In this life, she transforms into Miang and is absorbed into Deus. Man, love sucks.



10: XENOSAGA

Namco's PlayStation 2 RPG series *Xenosaga* was originally envisioned as a complete retelling of *Xenogears* that would span six chapters and finally make the whole thing much more accessible. Unfortunately, creative differences and mediocre sales saw the entire thing shortened to three entries and pretty much all overt connections to the original game trimmed. The resulting trilogy was actually even messier and more confusing than the game it set out to clarify. But at least they mean well! A better (and nonsense-free) explanation of the entire tale can be found at <http://xenosaga.wikia.com>.



APOCYPHYCAL

APPROXIMATE

> SEEK AND ENJOY

Streets of Screams

More tricks than treats

By Michael Donahoe and *GameSpot* by Bill Koster

The picture below may look scary, but we promise that behind the ghastly frights lies a brain-bending puzzle. The rules are simple: Scour the scene for 20 references to spooky videogames. Don't be tricked by the obvious, either—if you want to find 'em all, you're going need to bust your brain.

66

HELLO?

How it works: Peruse the picture for discover hints that represent specific videogame titles. For example, the picture above of a dude alone in the dark is, well, *Alone in the Dark*. (Duht) Now go find the rest.



EGM Extras
Think you
found all the
games? Head over
to EGM.1UP.COM
to get the solution.



> COMMUNITY REACTION

A recent NPD poll revealed only 40 percent of PS3 owners know the console plays Blu-ray discs and only half of 360 owners know it plays DVD movies. What do you think?

**Bill, Castle Guard:**

"Sony should've mentioned it on the box. Oh, it's on there? Well, maybe if they included a Blu-ray movie...they do? Well, someone still should have called me."

**Zeb, Brinstar Local:**

"You know, I bet fewer than half the people who bought that counterfeit South African toothpaste knew it had antifreeze in it, but they still bought it."

**Steve, Karate Champ:**

"Ah, so that's what that giant, bold-faced 'DVD MENU' button on my Xbox 360 remote is for."

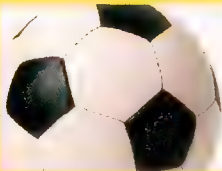
**Mortimer, Zombie:**

"Yeah, nothing sets the mood for a romantic first date like navigating the *Love Story* DVD menu with your Xbox controller."

**Exploding Barrel:**

Kabooooom!

> GUESS WHO



- 1 It might not look like my goal in life, but I can totally kick your ass in soccer.
- 2 I love doctors; they always seem to shed light on my troubles.
- 3 People think that I'm a poseur, but that's not true. I just like to borrow the style of others.
- 4 Cats are pussies—I like a tough dog who knows a ton of fancy tricks.
- 5 I don't know why people don't like lots of sequels. More is more, I say!

Who am I?

Meagan Math

> GRUDGE MATCH

Geometry War

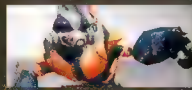
Boost your GPA or online ranking?

Since *Halo 3* comes out right when classes start, you'll have to make a decision: Go to real school or take punks to school online. Let's see which one is a better teacher.

Halo 3

VS.

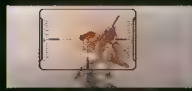
School



Brings years of Covenant conflict to an apparent close.
Advantage: Halo 3



General Custer ate it at Little Bighorn.

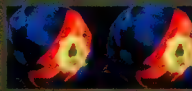


A shot in the head is worth two in the gut.

Biology

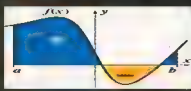


Those feelings in your pants are totally normal.
Advantage: School



Two plasma grenades minus two equals double kill.
Advantage: Halo 3

Math

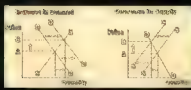


Calculus can integrate your ass for all you care.

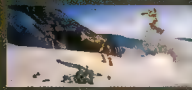


Xbox Live subscription is a student loan well spent.
Advantage: Halo 3

Economics



Supply and demand are inversely proportional.



Grenades can give you a painful superjump.
Advantage: Halo 3

Phys Ed



The teacher's got his eye on you in the shower.

Winner: Halo 3

There's you have it. But hey, if anyone asks, we never told you to ditch class for Team Slayer.

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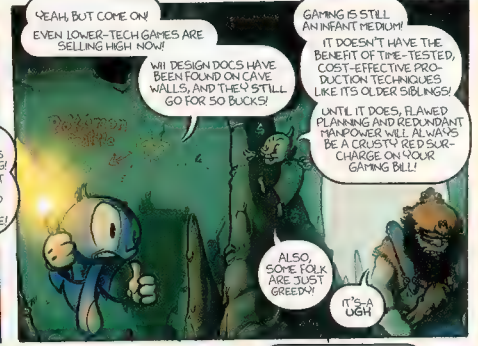


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Cash Out

By Jeremy "Norm" Scott



END

AMERICA THE



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Language
Violence
Game Experience May
Change During Online Play

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Game experience may change during online play.	

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