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STREET FIGHTER 4

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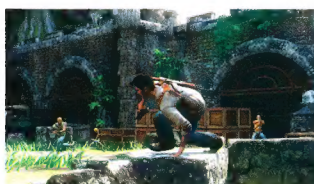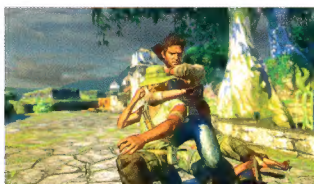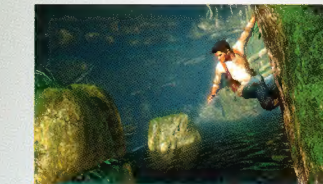
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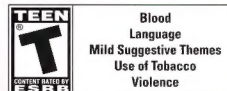
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NAUGHTY DOG

PlayStation 2

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CONTENTS

62
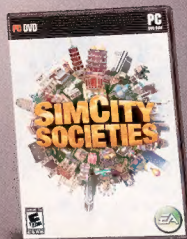
26 Lego Batman

40 Devil May Cry 4

Cover Story: Street Fighter IV
Capcom's revered fighting franchise finally returns and we've got the world-exclusive first look. Quarter up, anyone?

CONTENTS
(CONT.)

52 Top Secrets: Revisit the holiday's biggest blockbusters in our Afterthoughts special

42 DIY Gaming

84 Super Mario Galaxy reviewed

> THIS MONTH'S EGM EXTRAS

EGM.1UP.COM

Street Fighter IV: Everything but the kitchen sink
Check out exclusive videos, interviews with the crew, stories straight from the developers, and more!

Devil May Cry 4
We've got new videos of both lead guys in action

SuperGuides (get your walkthrough on)
Super Mario Galaxy, *Assassin's Creed*, and *Haze*

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

Round 4: Fight!

IT WAS MORE THAN 15 YEARS AGO— well before Facebook, text messaging, and *Hannah Montana*. I'm sitting in math class at college, listening to the teaching assistant drone on and on about something, presumably math-related. My mind wanders and starts tracing imaginary figures in the air. It's like a *Beautiful Mind* moment, except instead of formulas and triangles, I'm dreaming of fat sumo wrestlers and Brazilian man-animals.

Street Fighter II was a videogame phenomenon back then; it was a daily obsession for so many people. The series has been on *EGM*'s cover on 13 different occasions, for crying out loud.

Welcome to number 14: *Street Fighter IV*. I'm still rubbing my eyes over the fact that this sequel even exists, much less that we got the world exclusive on it (in case you hadn't noticed, we've been dropping hints about this scoop over the last three issues, on each "Next Month" page). The game's *extremely* early at this stage, but not early enough that we couldn't get some screenshots and playtime.

What's it like? Of course, it's exciting just to be able to say we're playing *SF4*, period. But the new art style threw me off, and I had trouble grasping the new "Saving" system (read the cover story for more on that), so I wasn't enamored... at first. But two hours later, I didn't want to relinquish my spot on the joystick. When I got used to the idea that this isn't the exact same *Street Fighter* I've been playing for years (I went through a similar early-adjustment period with *SF3*), I started really getting into it. It's way too early to say whether *SF4* will end up as legendary as the previous games, but it's safe to say we can see the potential.

Now that we're done with our cover story, our hands-on access to *Street Fighter IV* is temporarily on hold. But the game's got us excited again about seeing Ken, Ryu, and the rest of the gang. So until we can next do a preview, we'll be busy "quartering up" on the oldies-but-still-goodies (and not studying for math finals).
—*Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief*

Meet Vann.

eMusic

Vann digs the West Coast sound. But when
he wants something completely different,
he's all about eMusic. Because with over
2 million indie songs — and the ability
to download them over his phone —
he's always got the perfect track.

MySpace Mobile

Vann's got a lot of friends. So he's always getting
texts when one of his friends posts something
on MySpace. Or he's posting a pic from his
phone. It's nonstop.

Sports

If he's not texting, Vann is checking
his MEdia™ Net page for scores and
updates — he's a full-on fanatic
who's always up to date with
what's going down in
the league.

Video Share

Sometimes Vann shares a live rendition of
his *I Am So Great* dance with his boy
Jimmy while they catch up
over the phone.

This is Vann's digital world.
You've never met him but now you know what he's like.

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LETTERS

Letter of the Month
Striking distance

Now that movie- and TV-show writers are on strike, we're gonna be stuck watching *Heroes* reruns and crap-*Flava* reality shows until God only knows. But will games suffer the same fate? Are game writers also involved in this strike? It's not like games are known for having great writing, but I felt like we were seeing the start of a new trend with smartly penned games like *BioShock* and *Portal*. It'd hate to see that trend end because game writers won't cross the picket line.
—*Rob Robertson*

■ Game writers like Pandemic's Tom Abernathy here are still on the job.

Fear not, Rob. We got the story straight from a game-biz scribe, Pandemic's Tom Abernathy. He says game writers do not have their own union and are not currently covered by the Writer's Guild of America (WGA), the folks striking. "Gamers needn't worry that the 2008 holiday-buying season will find them agonizing over whether to buy *The Littlest Groom: The Game* for 360 or PS3," Abernathy says. "Their friendly neighborhood game scribes continue to toil on their behalf."

But all that might change in the future. Abernathy explains that the WGA's New Media Caucus has a long-term goal of persuading game publishers to use only WGA writers, just like the film studios and TV networks do. "This is a complicated issue," Abernathy adds, "fraught with anxiety for game writers, who make far less money than those in traditional media and whose legitimacy is not yet fully embraced by our industry."

Meanwhile, the writers' strike might actually benefit the game biz. All those crappy reality-TV shows and hack movie plots are going to send folks looking for fresher forms of entertainment. Why watch a season of reruns when you can play brand new games instead?

Land of the lost

Can you please let me know what the details are surrounding the release of *Landstalker* for the PSP? *Landstalker* is still my favorite game of all time, and I just wanted to see if it was canceled or what.

For writing this month's LOTM, Rob gets a copy of cult classic *Madden 06*.

Can I keep my hopes up, or should I stop dreaming?
—*Adam McDonald*

Keep hope alive, Adam. We've not heard anything about the game being canceled, and a recent redesign of developer Climax's website—featuring a very *Landstalker*-esque interactive menu—seems to indicate the project is still in progress. Check out www.climax.co.jp and see if you don't agree.

Meanwhile, don't forget the original game is available for the Wii's Virtual Console.

A/S/L?

I'm a girl gamer who enjoys shooting people up in *Halo 3* over Live. What sucks is that I can't play a single match without some smartass either

a) making sexual remarks (demanding sexual favors included), or b) making accusations that I'm actually a 10-year-old boy. I can't understand how guys can complain that there are no girl gamers, but when they actually meet a girl on Live they feel like they have to denigrate her. I certainly hope guys don't do this when they meet a girl in person. Then again, no wonder so many gamers are virgins.
—*Kimberly Mauchley*

Testosterone injections should help with that voice problem.

Vae Victis

Has the world seen the end of the *Legacy of Kain* series? They were all great titles, with a wonderful, epic storyline. Oh, the torture! I need to know: Is there anything new coming to

---

> **HOW HARDCORE ARE YOU?**

Your proudest gaming moments
The next contestant in our monthly harder-core-than-thou competition arrives!

In the manual for [*The Activision*] *Decathlon* on the Atari 2600, David Crane promised he would send free *Decathlon* patches and T-shirts to anyone who could beat his scores and send pics of the times. At the age of 5, I took up Mr. Crane's challenge, and in a few weeks I had beaten all of his scores. I even smoked his 100-meter dash time by *three seconds!* Did I ever receive anything from that lying jerkoff? No! —*David Tyler Harmon*

■ Better late than never, right?
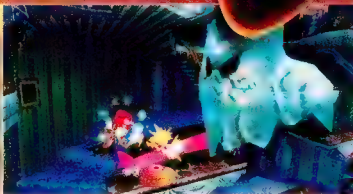
■ *Rex Ronan*: Spreading truth before truth became all hip and urban.

continue the storyline left open at the end of *Defiance*? Or should I just go lock myself in my closet and cry?
—"LordMicro"

Weep, goth dude. Weep. With the lackluster performance of the most recent *Kain* titles, and the 2003 departure from developer Crystal Dynamics of series mastermind Amy Hennig (now at Naughty Dog), we doubt we'll see more time-traveling vampires anytime soon.

Besides, Tony "Elder God" Jay passed away in 2006. The games just wouldn't be the same without his stentorian voice.

An imperfect world

I couldn't disagree more with the stance [Editor-in-Chief] Dan Hsu has taken to defend his *Halo 3* score. He says that *Halo 3* deserves a 10 because "it's incredibly fun" and has lots of replay value. Now, while that may be true, is that justification enough to award it the highest possible rating a game can get? Not really. There are plenty of games that meet [those] criteria but don't deserve a 10.

The reason why so many people have a problem with *Halo 3*'s score specifically is because *EGM* sends a mixed message. What are you telling your readers when a review rewards a game [with] a perfect score (even if it doesn't literally mean perfect) while simultaneously criticizing its "going-through-the-motions gameplay" and essentially admitting that the score is really just for sheer value?

And if *Halo 3* deserves a 10 just for value...why would *The Orange Box* get anything less than an 11?

Maybe the question, then, isn't why so many people want *Halo 3* to fail, but why so many people are willing to ignore its flaws.
—*Thomas Ella*

You breeze over this in your letter, Thomas, but you don't seem to understand it: A score of 10 *does not mean a game is perfect*. There is *no such thing* as a perfect game.

Of course *Halo 3* has flaws. The point is its strengths far, far outweigh them. That's how a game gets a 10 without being perfect.

Because there's no such thing as a perfect game. And a score of 10 does not mean a game is perfect. Because there's no such thing.

Would you like us to repeat that?

Hello, Clarice

On pg. 59 of *EGM* #222 ["World War True: See 'Em Coming"] you incorrectly identified a soldier as wearing a set of AN/PVS-14 night-vision devices. I have been in the military for 10 years and have had the opportunity to use both the PVS-7 and the PVS-14. The soldier is in fact wearing a set of AN/PVS-7s. The AN/PVS-14 is a true monocular device that only covers one eye, and can in addition be mounted on the M4 to give it night-fighting capability. The AN/PVS-7 covers both eyes, but is filtered through a single lens so depth perception is lost. This is the one the soldier is wearing in your photo. Just wanted to clear this up.
—*Wil Pagan*

We're a little creeped out by how much you know about night-vision goggles, Mr. Pagan. So let us pre-emptively say: We will happily put the lotion in the basket. We do not want the hose again.

You gotta get a gimmick

I have noticed that, over the last year or two, more and more media has been released with a cardboard sleeve over the case. I've noticed it more on DVD-based things like *BioShock* or *300*. I admit I think they are cool and usually try to get the media with the sleeve, but what is the significance of having a sleeve that looks just like the case beneath?
—*Devon Pieper*

It's just a matter of differentiation. Shelf space in retailers is always at a premium, so publishers will often try gimmicks like the cardboard sleeve to make a game or movie stand out from the other boxes it's wedged between on the shelf.

It also lets the graphic designers stretch a bit beyond the confines of the traditional plastic-sleeved case. In the case of *BioShock*, for example, it allows for that nifty embossing that makes us want to

stroke the game lovingly with our fingertips. What? Is that weird?

How edutaining

Way back in the day, around 1996, I borrowed a game from a friend. It was a silly SNES platformer. I remember a level where you went into a body, and you had to fight germs and viruses and so on, and the boss was some kind of germ. I've looked online and I couldn't find the name anywhere. What is the name of this game?
—*Trevor Jansen*

Sounds like you're talking about *Rex Ronan: Experimental Surgeon*. This 1993 game from publisher Health Hero Network (also known for such classics as *Bronkie the Bronchiasaurus* and *Captain Novolin*) puts you in the role of a scientist who has to enter the body of a tobacco salesman to fight off the effects of a life of smoking the evil cancer sticks.

Invalid page fault

You advertise high-end PC gaming systems and games for them, so why don't you review PC games? Do you think they're not worth your time? Yes, lots of people think consoles are better—just don't forget the people who like computer gaming better. This year, games like *Crysis*, *Far Cry 2*, and *Hellgate: London* will dominate, not to mention *StarCraft 2* coming out in August 2008. You would also appeal to a wider audience. I do like consoles, but PCs are just plain better.
—*Eric Ball*

We had a really great response prepared for this, but we got a driver error before we could save it and had to reboot.

Maybe someday

After browsing the Wii's Virtual Console lineup, I have one question: Where is *EarthBound*?!
—*Geonathan Sena*

On a whole lot of wish lists, that's where. 🖐

The family you want to spend time with this holiday season.

Coming
Spring '08
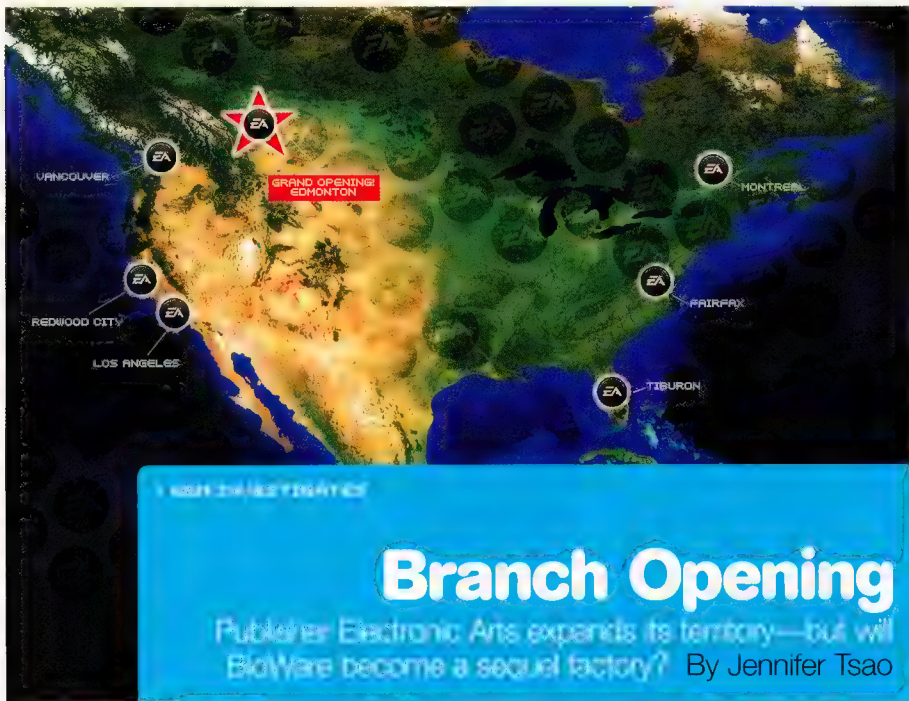
Branch Opening

Publisher Electronic Arts expands its territory—but will BioWare become a sequel factory? By Jennifer Tsao

EA's package deal: BioWare and Pandemic formed a partnership in 2005. Pandemic brings to EA its own original IPs: *Mercenaries* (EA was already going to publish the sequel), *Saboteur*, *Destroy All Humans!*, and *Full Spectrum Warrior*.

EA'S CORPORATE DOMINATION HAS TWO FACES. The first is the massive publisher that scoops up the charming independent developer, plucking a few glittering gems of intellectual properties (IPs) that EA can put its substantial resources behind to transform into commercially successful sequels and new franchises that encapsulate everything the little developer stood for. (This would be the story of Maxis—it brought *SimCity* to EA, developed superfranchise *The Sims* after joining, and now has creative juggernaut *Spore* in the making.)

The other face is much darker—that of a devil luring the unsuspecting indie developer into an unholy bargain. The studio believes this route is the best way it can support its IPs. But its role as branch office in a big videogame chain never quite jells, and eventually

the megaconglomerate absorbs and ruins its prey, destroying franchises by rushing sequels or by simply killing them altogether. (The buggy and unfinished *Ultima IX* from Origin Systems is an infamous example of an EA acquisition and franchise-milking gone terribly wrong.)

So, when EA swooped in recently to buy independent developers BioWare and Pandemic for an impressive $860 million, it was hard for gamers not to feel a slight sense of dread. Would BioWare, beloved developer of *Mass Effect*, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, and *Jade Empire*, thrive like Maxis or become another victim of EA's sequel-factory mentality?

Clearly, it's too early to know—the deal hasn't even closed yet. But look at the roster of titles the company has in the works, and one thing becomes

certain: A couple more sequels—done right, naturally—wouldn't be such a terrible thing. We check in on the developer's presale works in progress and past hits' chances for a sequel....

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic III
Who owns the IP? LucasArts
Does it deserve a sequel? The first *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* set a new standard for console role-playing games, and its way-before-the-movies *Star Wars* story was way better than anything spit out of George Lucas' word processor. Part two came out a year and a half later, made by another developer while BioWare focused on *Jade Empire* and other original IPs. Until recently, publisher LucasArts had been surprisingly quiet on the *KOTOR* front,

PAGE
26
Preview:
Toys for
batboys

PAGE
40
Preview:
Nero, our
new hero
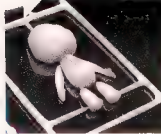
PAGE
42
Feature:
Just do it...
yourself

but the question's inevitable: Now with EA's money potentially behind it, will this fabled franchise ever fulfill its true destiny and become another classic *Star Wars* trilogy?

Is it gonna happen? Just weeks after announcing the acquisition deal with EA, BioWare and LucasArts announced that they were jointly developing and publishing an "interactive entertainment product" together. This wording, it turns out, is intentionally vague: A LucasArts representative says that the announcement's goal was to emphasize the collaboration between the two companies, and that "regardless of EA's acquisition, the LucasArts and BioWare project is moving full steam ahead." In fact, EA is not involved at all with this game, which LucasArts will publish.

Meanwhile, BioWare's Austin studio is known to be working on a massively multiplayer online role-playing game. It seems highly likely that the result of the collaboration could be the *Star Wars* game—*KOTOR3*, or *Star Wars Galaxies* done right—that everyone has been waiting for.

Mass Effect 2
Who owns the IP? BioWare
Does it deserve a sequel? *Mass Effect* was planned as a trilogy from the start, and there's little doubt we'll see parts two and three in a reasonable amount of time. The first game was published by Microsoft, and since the IP is wholly owned and created by BioWare, it's now an EA property and is likely to be developed and marketed as such, right?
Is it gonna happen? *Mass Effect*'s buzz and acclaim has ensured it will remain an important franchise for both BioWare and Microsoft. The question is whether EA will fight to get the game to go multiplatform like all the company's other published titles—and whether Microsoft has any say in preventing that from happening.

Microsoft Game Studios' Phil Spencer recently told UK-based *Develop* magazine that *Mass Effect* will continue to be an important franchise for the company. A source close to the game was more to the point, telling us that Microsoft will publish *Mass Effect 2* and *3*, while

BioWare and EA will be listed as sequels' developers.

Jade Empire 2
Who owns the IP? BioWare
Does it deserve a sequel? The commercial success of *KOTOR* proved that the previously PC-oriented BioWare was a contender in the console arena, and it allowed them to embark on projects that might not have seemed feasible before. The martial-arts epic *Jade Empire* was not only the company's first original intellectual property—it was, according to the founders, one of the games they created the company to make. But while *Jade* was critically acclaimed, its sales were anemic in comparison with the *Star Wars* games.
Is it gonna happen? BioWare obviously invested significant resources into creating the *Jade Empire* universe; the game was richly detailed and gorgeously executed. EA could benefit from tapping into

the non-cookie-cutter concepts that exemplify *Jade*. (It doesn't hurt that EA CEO John Riccitello is a self-proclaimed fan of the franchise.)

Sonic the Hedgehog
Who owns the IP? Sega
Does it deserve a sequel? If anyone can breathe life into the franchise that hasn't entirely aged gracefully, it's a company like BioWare. It's exciting see what they'll do with their first handheld effort, and to see how they'll turn this action game into a DS role-playing title. (Of course, neither of those statements would be true if the company didn't have a sterling reputation for shipping polished, high-quality games.)
Is it gonna happen? "BioWare and EA's partnership...in no way impacts or changes the development of the *Sonic* RPG," says Sega PR Director Charlie Scibetta. "[It's] on track to ship in 2008." In fact, we hear the game might arrive early this spring.

> :> **Microsoft will publish *Mass Effect 2* and *3*, while BioWare and EA will be listed as the sequels' developers.**
> —*An insider close to the* Mass Effect *franchise*
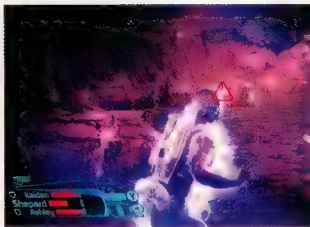
■ Clockwise from top left: *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, *Mass Effect*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, and *Jade Empire*.

Piñata proposer:

It's easy to fall in love with videogames, but it's difficult to find love *through* games—or in David Rosowski's case, win a wife with the push of a button. But that's just what the pro *Viva Piñata* player did—using developer Rare's cutesy piñata game, Rosowski proposed to his then-girlfriend. Since we didn't find this sexy strategy in the strategy guide, we tracked down Rosowski to find out how he won over his woman.

EGM: So why propose over a console game? Too cool for *World of WarCraft* (PC) weddings?

David Rosowski: I did a lot of research on online proposals—*World of WarCraft* has had weddings, *Second Life* (PC) has had weddings, but no one has done a proposal over a console game. And we've been getting crap for it. Like, "Oh, these guys must be losers." Well, [the haters] are the ones in their parents' basements at 35 and I'm the one who has a fiancée, so who's the loser?

EGM: Were you at all worried your fiancée would think the whole thing was a joke?

DR: Well, she did. I mailed the proposal to her [in the game] and she was like, "Why did you send me a rock?" And I responded, "It's a diamond—did you read the note?" She hadn't seen it at first.... Then I walked across the room and I got down on one knee and she started crying and said yes. But she really thought it was a joke at first.

EGM: So can we expect you to purchase *Viva Piñata: Party Animals* for her wedding present?

DR: Yeah, I actually bought it for her birthday.

EGM: Oh, snap.
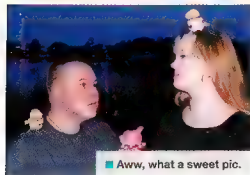
■ Aww, what a sweet pic.
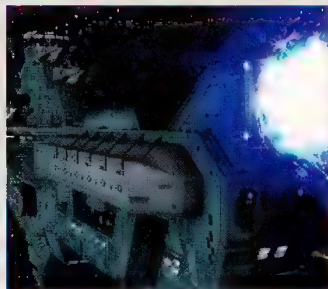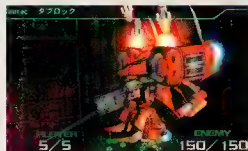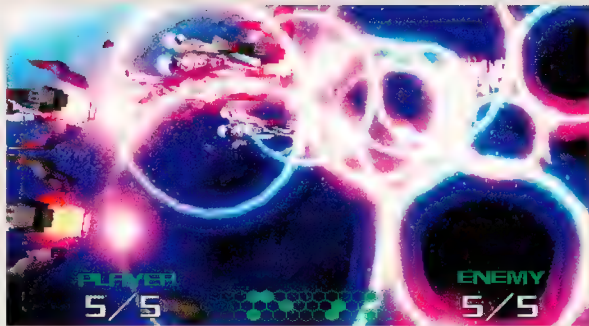
R-Type
TACTICS
For those with bad reflexes

Platform: PSP

Likelihood it'll come here: We don't get to say this very often, but we recently learned this one's actually coming to America.

Whoa, *R-Type* is back for the attack? Indeed. After *R-Type Final* was released for the PlayStation 2 in 2004, it was widely assumed that the end of the galaxy had come for arguably the most hardcore (and certainly the weirdest) of side-scrolling space shooter games. But now it has actually been reborn...as, well, a PSP strategy game. Yeah, it sounds strange, but at least the developers at Irem stuck to their roots in converting the concept over to the strategy genre—the battles are laid out horizontally like any traditional *R-Type*, and your units and weapons are largely based on past games in the series.

So how's it work? Simple—imagine playing some old *R-Type* game, except instead of pressing a button to fire your R-9's cannon, you're directing a dozen R-9s to do the same thing at once. The charge beam and detachable option thingie (the twin hallmarks of the *R-Type* series) are both vital tactical accessories here, and the whole thing's really easy to get into. Hmm, wonder what other doddering Japanese series will get turned into a strategy game next? *Crazy Climber*, maybe? Or how about a *Dance Dance Revolution* sim where you must take over the entire arcade with your sick arrow-stepping moves?

Lego BATMAN

The Dark Knight is such a square   By Michael Donahoe

IF TRAVELLER'S TALES BUILDS IT, gamers will come...to connect the pieces. The developer has proven that constructing a crazily successful series is a cinch when you combine two things people love: *Star Wars* and Legos. But with George Lucas' faraway galaxy behind them, Traveller's Tales is looking to make the next big building-block moneymaker. And boy, are these men hard at work—not only is the developer whipping up *Lego Indiana Jones* (due out on multiple systems during '08) for LucasArts, but it's also working on a blueprint that doesn't involve a Harrison Ford trilogy. This particular design features one of DC Comics' most beloved costumed crime fighters: Batman.

Batter up

Bruce Wayne's alter ego couldn't be a better superhero for a videogame: He's got wonderful toys, love-to-hate-em villains, and enough fancy rides to rival Jay Leno's collection. Which is why it's ironic his gaming track record is worse than *Batman & Robin* director Joel Schumacher's love of nipples. Fortunately, this one is off to a strong start, capitalizing on the Caped Crusader's rich universe while adding the simplistic feel of Legos. Yeah, it's basically *Lego Star Wars* brushed up with a batty makeover, but we're not complaining. In fact, we're embracing it. We just love the idea of playing as a pint-sized Batman and Robin. Plus, the game looks like it belongs on

the PS3 and Xbox 360 (visually, it's a definite upgrade from the developer's previous *Lego* efforts). So if you're thinking, "been there, built that," don't—*Lego Batman* is offering up *just* enough new features to keep both tykes and adults happy.

Since this game isn't based on any specific *Batman* comics or movies, Traveller's Tales has a lot more freedom to fiddle around with the story. Don't expect a gripping narrative akin to a Frank Miller graphic novel, though. The premise is actually simple: A bunch of Batman's worst enemies escape from Arkham Asylum to...well, we think you know the rest. But here's the cool part: In addition to playing through the game's four chapters as a hero,

> **It immediately became apparent that bad guys such as the Penguin and the Joker deserved a greater share of the gameplay stage than mere opponents.**
>
> —*Development Director Jonathan Smith*

FAST...
PRONTO. RAPIDO. SCHNELL.
VITE. ANDALE!

AMMUNITION

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GHOST SQUAD

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you'll also have the option to assume the roles of the franchise's famous villains. "Batman and Robin are spectacular heroes, of course, but a great deal of the color and flavor of Gotham City comes from the energy and inventiveness of its great villains," says Development Director Jonathan Smith. "We set out to give players the full range of characters to play with, as we did in *Lego Star Wars*, and it immediately became apparent that bad guys such as the Penguin and the Joker deserved a greater share of the gameplay stage than mere opponents." So while *Lego Star Wars* teased the idea of letting us tour the dark side, *Lego Batman* gives us what we really want: the ability to play through the actual story as the bad guys. So far,

we know that Catwoman, Killer Croc, Scarecrow, Joker, Harley Quinn, and Penguin will appear in the game. And after playing all the *Lego Star Wars* titles and seeing its massive amount of characters, we imagine this is only a sampling of the foes that'll show up here. They may even be able to beat up Batman for good, too. "Will Batman and Robin lose in the end?" asks Smith. "Ah, you'll have to play the game to find out...."

We sure hope they lose. Not because we're dicks (we swear!), but rather, it's not often you get to play as bad guys and actually come out on top. Yet we bet Batman won't get thwarted so easily...at least when you're playing as him or his side-kick, Robin. During our demo, we only witnessed Batman enjoying the

■ Tired of being a tights-wearing goody two-shoes? *Lego Batman* features lots of missions where you'll play as a bad dude.

protection of the Boy Wonder, but we wouldn't be surprised if the likes of Batgirl and Nightwing joined the fight, too. Or even heroes outside of the *Batman* universe—when we asked if additional DC characters would drop in here, Warner Bros. Producer David Abrams seemed to suggest other "supermen" might lend a hand.

Biff! Pow! Zap!

Though *Lego Batman* may share the same blocky look as *Lego Star Wars*, the combat will sport some change-ups. For starters, you won't see Batman and Robin swinging around a silly laser sword—these guys are all about using their hands, feet, and toys. "Batarangs—which can target a variety of objects or enemies on a single sweep—are one of many new gameplay elements for *Lego Batman* players," explains Smith. Obviously,

this is just one of the fancy gadgets in your arsenal. And while the fighting we witnessed in our demo seemed pretty basic, Traveller's Tales plans to incorporate various combos, finishing moves, and even team attacks over the coming months. So even though things may look kinda shallow now, Batman and Robin's repertoire should be much more impressive by the time of the game's release next fall.

Oh, and if you're wondering how Batman and Robin will get through levels and solve puzzles without fancy Jedi powers, remember: These guys are pros—and, apparently, master tailors. Throughout each level, you'll be able to switch into different superpowered tights for both Batman and Robin. For instance, Robin can dress up in a magnet outfit that will let him walk on metal walls, and Batman gets a demolition

■ Not laughing at the Joker has some serious consequences.

getup that gives him the ability to toss little batbombs. Just in the one level we saw (which had Batman and Robin traversing through Gotham City's enemy-ridden rooftops and gritty alleyways), our two heroes switched into several different suits. So it seems the Dynamic Duo will do just fine without the Force.

Finders keepers

Hey, completists—prepare to freak, as you're going to find (or attempt to find, that is) a crapload of different collectibles in Lego Batman. All the coveted goodies from Lego Star Wars will be returning: bolts, gold bricks, and even some canister-like items. Factor in the free-play mode for each level and you'll be spend-

ing a whole lot of time searching for secrets. Yet unlike in the previous Lego outings, you'll be heading to more than one place to unlock extra content. Here, the good and bad guys have their own respective hub hideouts: Wayne Manor for the heroes and Arkham Asylum for the not-so-humble villains.

It's no secret the folks at Traveller's Tales have built themselves up as developers that can transform plastic into gold. Now let's just hope they stick to licenses that aren't totally lame—if we see Lego Aquaman or Lego Howard the Duck, we're gonna bust out the dump truck.

EGM Extras: See the teaser trailers for Lego Batman at **EGM.1UP.com**.

> TAKE IT...AND LEAVE IT

Lego Batman may not be based on any of the Dark Knight's movies, but that doesn't mean it can't borrow from 'em. Here are five things we'd like to see make it into the game...and five we hope stay on the cutting-room floor.

What we want:

Joker dance party (Batman): Visiting a museum is kinda boring...unless you're the Joker and you decide to deface the place while listening to Prince like he did in director Tim Burton's first Batman flick.

Bat-on-cat action (Batman Returns): Sure, Catwoman's technically a bad gal, but we can't help but get hot for the sexy scene in this movie when she pounces on Batman. Meow!

Rocket penguins (Batman Returns): Danny DeVito is a scary slob here, yet we dig his little killer penguins.

Bank heist (Batman Forever): The third battle starts out with a bang. On a bust, really—Two-Face's bank heist would make for a dastardly fun villain level.

Training bat (Batman Begins): Even batmen need to start somewhere—that's why it'd be cool to see the hardcore training sequences from this series' reboot end up as the tutorial.

What we don't want:

Mr. Pink (Batman Forever): Nobody wants to fight a version of Two-Face who looks like he's been dipped in Pepto-Bismol. We prefer a darker Harvey Dent—like in the comics.

Tankmobile (Batman Begins): Cars are cool, especially ones that Batman drives. Well, except for the hideous tank-looking ride he sports in this movie.

High octane (Batman Forever): Speaking of the Batmobile, it belongs on the ground, so none of Batman Forever's physics-defying wall-driving. Uh, isn't that what the Batwing is for?

Dame dames (Batman, Batman Begins): Batman's really at his best when he saves cities, not rescuing annoying broads (such as Vicki Vale in the first movie and whoever the hell Katie Holmes played in the last Batman flick.

The rest (Batman & Robin): We want nothing from this movie. That means no Bat-Cards, no hockey team from hell, and no subzero Arnold Schwarzenegger. Let us say it again: We want absolutely nothing from Batman & Robin!

GAME VIDEOS
play later

Quick! These videos will only be on the Internet for a limited time, until civilization as we know it ceases to exist, and then you'll have to watch them on space microfiche. See 'em now at **GameVideos.com/EGM**.

ZOMG: Mass Effect Lesbian Love Scene
It's *Mass Effect*'s special moment, in case you didn't see it from the comfort and privacy of your Naugahyde couch. Lady/lady alien edition.

ORLY?: Manhunt 2 Uncensored Comparo
See grisly kill scenes from *Manhunt's 1*, *2*, and the uncensored, unreleased version of *2*. Makes you think. About playing games other than *Manhunt*.

<3: The Hitoshi Sakimoto Interview
The famed game music composer invites us into his home (and studio) to chat about *Final Fantasy*, *Vagrant Story*, and the creative process.

1337: Portal "GLaDOS Sequence Break"
How to out-think *Portal*'s final boss in seconds, by Groobtube. Visit mycheats.com for more *Portal* strategies and videos.

> ONLINE SCENE

Alternate Shot
Find out why some aren't playing Halo 3
By Joe Rybicki

WHEN IT COMES TO ONLINE FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS, most fans hail to Master Chief. But, surprising as it may be, some actually play other games not named *Halo 3*. We took to the trenches of the Xbox Live forums to ask random players of other recently released 360 shooters why they aren't spending time with the year's biggest game.

Why *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* players aren't hot for *Halo 3*:
IceViper777: "*Halo 3* is unrealistic. I hate how you throw a grenade at someone's feet and they continue on like nothing happened."

HellBlazerUSA: "There's a greater sense of inclusiveness in *COD4*. Since there are so many different variations of playing style, almost anyone can find a role in the game — unlike *Halo 3*, where you can't really do anything other than run around, jump, and hope for the best."

Why *Team Fortress 2* players aren't hot for *Halo 3*:
Bukster: "You don't have over the-hill and immaturity around in nearly every *Halo 2* match, *Halo 2* caters to the lowest common denominator."

Hobbess253: "The big draw for me is the classes. Each class is very different, and it's fun to switch when you feel like a change. It essentially it is a class you know you can rely on your team."

Why *TimeShift* players aren't hot for *Halo 3*:
dead box #02: "I love the time grenades. With all the different weapons available, it seems there are no limits to how you can go on either attacking or defending."

V3gasBall3r: "You know what if you get sick of *Halo 3* it has new levels and weapons, and it's the same game being so and what not like *Madden*."

Why *Medal of Honor: Airborne* players aren't hot for *Halo 3*:
SSP Steved400: ...

SSP Trailer: ...

Why *F.E.A.R. Files* players aren't hot for *Halo 3*:
FireStarta316: ...

Zombie dogo: ...

Burnout: PARADISE

Paradise by the dashboard debris

Welcome to Paradise, the wide-open, free-roaming, all-*Burnout*-all-the-time city of races, chases, crashes, and other assorted varieties of vehicular mayhem. Join us as we tour the sprawling streets, highways, country roads, and not-quite-legal thoroughfares of this metropolis to check out the series' newest additions.

Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
EA Games

Developer:
Criterion

Release Date:
January 2008

1: STUNT RUN

On the hills and turns of Crystal Summit, you'll find plenty of opportunities for jumps, spins, barrel rolls, and other automotive acrobatics. Use your boost to link tricks together into combos and rack up the really big points. And check out the railroad tracks to the east for some truly amazing jumps.

2: BURNING ROUTE

It's just you, the road, and a timer ticking away. Burning Route requires concentration, skill, and the ability to maximize boost while minimizing any risks that could lead to a clock-eating crash. That's twice as hard out here in twisty Lone Peaks, but go ahead and let loose the horses—just watch those hairpin turns.

3: ROAD RULES

Here on the Eastern Shore you'll find lots of first-to-the-finish race events. But did you know that you can go for time records (and crash-focused Showtime records) on *any* street? You can even collect mug shots (these pics are taken using the console's camera peripheral) of players whose scores you beat.

PARADISE POST
TAKEN OUT!

4: MARKED MAN

Every stoplight in *Burnout Paradise* hosts another event—simply spin your wheels and the thrills begin. Here in Palm Bay Heights, you'll find yourself a Marked Man: Make a mad dash to the finish line (in this case, somewhere down south by Paradise Wharf) before your host of pursuers takes you down for good.

5: FREEBURN

If the vast expanses of Paradise City aren't enough to keep you busy, get online with a group of friends and go after one of 50 Freeburn challenges. (For example, you could try doing barrel rolls off the handy split ramps here at Big Surf Beach.) You don't even need to race—just roam, experiment, and have fun.

6: DISCOVERY

Scattered all over Paradise City are Super Jumps, special breakable billboards, and "private" areas behind flimsy chain-link fences—almost 600 in all, each one painstakingly tracked by the game. Hit this Super Jump in Harbor Town and you'll be treated to a slow-mo shot of your car majestically leaping the river.

7: SHOWTIME

The series' famous Crash mode is now dubbed Showtime, a free-form orgy of destruction you can trigger anytime. Downtown Paradise is the perfect place to bust it up, with its traffic-clogged streets and nice selection of mutliplier-adding buses. You *need* to see the ridiculously detailed damage modeling. It's absurd. 🐾

Back to Jack
By Hal Halpin

For the nine years that I ran the Interactive Entertainment Merchants Association, the retail trade body that represented game sellers, I subscribed to the same thinking as my counterparts at the other game-biz groups: Ignore Jack Thompson and he'll go away. It was the biggest mistake that the industry has ever made. By walking away from counter-point interview opportunities, we left Thompson—the Florida attorney who's built a career around his crusade against violent games—as the only person at the mic when the media came calling.

Doug Lowenstein, the former head of the Entertainment Software Association—and in many respects, my mentor—gave a historic farewell speech last year at an industry summit. In part, he blamed the enthusiast media who covered Thompson as the reason for his popularity and advised them to stop covering him. Many did. So while the gaming media was largely ignoring Thompson, the mass media wasn't. Turns out that the "ignore him and he'll go away" strategy backfired. He got even more exposure and became more influential and more powerful.

And so the games business built its own worst nightmare with Thompson. He is intelligent, articulate, passionate, and camera-ready. You may not subscribe to his philosophies or appreciate his liberal interpretation of the facts, but you should respect him, as should we all. And while you may know that his version of the facts isn't the same as yours, your parents, grandparents, teachers, or friends who are just casual gamers don't.

One of the major strategic changes we at the ECA undertook was to stop ignoring Thompson. We all just need to be smart about it to avoid enabling him. Don't avoid the discussion; engage it head-on. Don't jump on a forum thread and flame the man; doing so demeans your argument and empowers your detractors. Instead, voice your opinion, become involved, and speak out. It's time to fight back!

Hal Halpin is founder of the Electronic Consumers Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to watchdog gaming legislation. Join its cause at www.theeca.com.

Audio Designer
Our monthly look at the industry's most interesting gigs By Evan Shamoon

**Audio designer or L.L. Bean model?
Owen records the great outdoors in style.**

How'd he get the gig?

Owen actually graduated from college with a marketing/business degree and got a job at EA Sports, his first dream gig. "But I had other paths. I wanted to travel using my audio and music background," he says (he's been in various bands and has a degree in music production and jazz piano). Owen eventually started working closely with EA's sound-production departments and was asked to join a team as an audio producer, writing and recording dialogue and working with music licensing. Eventually, he moved to Vancouver-based Propaganda, where he often finds himself in Mother Nature recording animal sounds.

THE GEARS JUST AREN'T TURNING FAST
enough for Konami. The publisher recently confirmed its snazzy PS3 stealth title *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots*—originally slated to sneak into stores around January or February—is delayed yet again. Now it will arrive sometime this spring.

LOOKS LIKE THE CASE ISN'T CLOSED
for the Unreal Engine lawsuit. In case you forgot, *Too Human* developer Silicon Knights originally sued *Gears of War* developer Epic for apparently providing an incomplete version of its Unreal Engine. The latest: Epic was recently unsuccessful in dismissing its case, meaning the battle isn't ending any time soon. Nice try, Epic!

> **OVERHEARD**

"So although it was important to try and release [*Super Mario Galaxy*] simultaneously with Wii's launch, we also felt that it was much more important to make a game that the customers would feel was really worth buying. We were so determined that **we even thought of closing down the Tokyo office if *Super Mario Galaxy* received poor reviews.**"

—Can *Super Mario Galaxy* Director Takao Shimizu be any more modest? It's almost as if he makes *Sonic* games or something.

Quote source: http://uk.wii.com
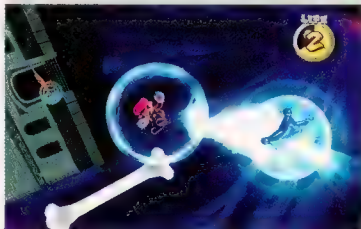
Devil May Cry 4

The tale of the tape on these two demonic superstars   By Bryan Intihar

As Capcom brings its slash-and-shoot-em-up action series to the new consoles, the publisher feels it's also time for a fresh face. Enter Nero, who joins *DMC* veteran Dante as a playable character. Find out why these guys ain't exactly BFF and much more....

Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
Capcom

Developer:
Capcom

Release Date:
February 2008

EGM Extras:
To see these two guys stylin' and profilin', head to EGM1UP.com *for some exclusive Devil May Cry 4 videos.*

❯ NERO

Previously seen in: Like we said, *Devil May Cry 4* marks the debut of this white-haired, leather-loving member of the Holy Knights (who protect the town of Fortuna). And from physical appearance to wardrobe selection, Nero strikes an uncanny resemblance to series mainstay Dante. Just a mere coincidence? "There definitely will be some hints to their connection," says Producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi.

Amount of screen time: You'll play roughly 60 percent of the game as this newcomer.

Why he hates Dante: Because he put Nero's boys down for the dirt nap. "While Nero is protecting Fortuna from demons that suddenly appear, Dante shows up and he kills some of Nero's comrades," says Kobayashi. "So he's given the task to track down Dante and make him pay for what he's done."

Personality: Even though Kobayashi describes Nero as "more of a straight shooter than Dante," the producer is quick to admit that he ain't exactly a model citizen, either. "[In one scene], Nero doesn't want to sit through all this religious stuff, so you see him sitting there listening to his headphones instead," he says. "Nero can be a bit of a wiseass."

Weapon collection: Nero will come packin' a revolver (dubbed Blue Rose) and a sword (Red Queen). The latter also sports a motorcycle-esque handle, which you can rev (via continuous presses on a shoulder button) to increase the potency of your blade attacks.

Fighting style: While his arsenal is extremely limited when compared to Dante's wide assortment, Nero—with the help of his demonically enhanced right arm, the Devil Bringer—still looks awfully good on *DMC4*'s battlefields. Nero's limb causes all sorts of destruction, from literally tearing enemies in half to grabbing foes and using them as shields. It even acts as a grappling hook for the game's limited platforming segments.

Demonic streak: In addition to the Devil Bringer, Nero can call upon his Devil Shadow, which temporarily beefs up attack power and adds some nasty moves to his repertoire.
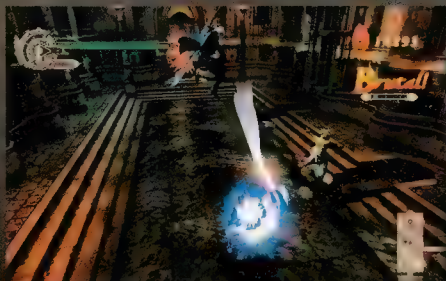
■ *Devil May Cry 3* too difficult for ya? Producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi promises that this installment will be a much more balanced offering. It'll even feature a tutorial, which takes place during Nero and Dante's first encounter.

❯ DANTE

Previously seen in: This guy became one of gaming's biggest action heroes while starring in three *DMC*s on the PS2.

Amount of screen time: Dante takes a slight backseat in this edition, but at least his journey isn't a carbon copy of Nero's. Expect a few exclusive missions and backdrops when assuming the role of this demon hunter.

Why he hates Nero: OK, maybe the word "hate" is too strong in Dante's case, as the source of his dislike for the game's other leading man and crew remains a mystery. "Dante is given a mission to head to Fortuna and do something that we're not ready to talk about just yet," says Kobayashi.

Personality: In the past, sarcastic and corny is probably how most people would've described Dante. Yet it seems he's finally starting to show signs of maturity. "In *DMC3* he was very young and a wiseass," says Kobayashi. "But in this one, he's more experienced as a demon hunter and [has] grown up a little bit. He's still as interesting as he used to be, but now he has a wider view of the world."

Weapon collection: Dante returns to the scene with his Rebellion sword and trusty pistols Ebony and Ivory (as you can tell by now, it's basically a requirement for every weapon to have some ridiculous moniker). *DMC4* also introduces two new toys for this character to play with. The Lucifer shoots exploding roses, while Pandora—depending on what fighting style you're using—transforms into a number of powerful firearms (bazooka, machine gun, crossbow, etc.).

Fighting style: How you deliver a beatdown is totally up to you, thanks to the return of the Trickster, Gunslinger, Swordmaster, and Royal Guard fighting styles. But unlike in *DMC3* (where you chose a style before missions and could only change it at save statues), you can now switch between them on the fly, which makes for some sweet-looking combos.

Demonic streak: As in every other *DMC*, transforming into a demon brings out Dante's uglier (not to mention much more powerful) side. ✖

■ Aside from some yet-to-be revealed Sixaxis motion controls, the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions of *Devil May Cry 4* will be identical.
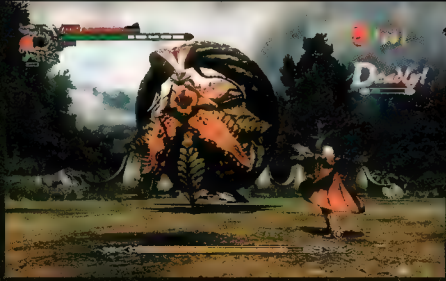
D.I.WHY?

Do-it-yourself games like LittleBigPlanet and Halo 3's Forge are turning players into designers, but what's in it for them?

Get personal advice for kicking off your own basement-brewed-gaming gig next month when we feature *Everyday Shooter* creator Jon Mak in our Take This Job series.

JAMES "JAMEZILLA" SILVA THOUGHT PLAYING GAMES WAS COOL ENOUGH. But the one thing that could top it: creating his own. "That's the thrill of game development for me," he says. "I want to make something I'm really proud of." While he'd made some games for computers, what he really burned to do was code for consoles. "It was like the holy grail," he says.

Using Microsoft's XNA Game Studio Express, a set of game-development tools that anyone can download for free, Silva created a gleefully violent side-scrolling shooter called *The Dishwasher: Dead Samurai*. And he got the ultimate score—a contract from Microsoft to distribute the game on Xbox Live. This marked not only the start of his life as a professional game developer but a new chapter for the console industry: homebrewed gaming for profit as well as fun. "What we really want to do is unlock the creativity not only in the indie market, but in the homebrew crowd as well," says Chris Satchell, manager of the Game

Development Group at Microsoft. "People who aren't professional game developers have great ideas that stay locked up in the head."

While industrious geeks have been creating and modifying computer games for decades, the walls around consoles are finally coming down. Start-up developers can make their own titles on PCs and distribute them via Xbox Live Arcade or the PlayStation Network's store, while average thumb jockeys can express themselves in more and more games that offer in-depth content editors (we'll get to them in a bit). Such DIY gaming will transform the industry, bringing in fresh blood and talent just as, say, garage bands and underground moviemakers have

transformed music and film. "Games are uniquely personal, and now it's starting to get a little more outside the box where you can give a portion of that personal experience to someone else," says Will Wright, creator of *The Sims* and the upcoming *Spore*, a PC life-creation game built around community sharing of user-created content. "You're performing in a game not just as a player but as a designer." The YouTubing of videogames is now.

Home work

The game industry already owes much to DIY development. Some of the biggest franchises and developers around—Epic, Valve, id Software—hatched from the computer-game underworld. Today, two innovations >

> **One obvious concern is that someone is going to...paint a picture of a penis.**

—NinjaBee President Steve Taylor on the level editor in one of his games
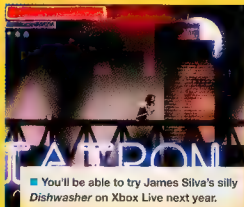
■ You'll be able to try James Silva's silly *Dishwasher* on Xbox Live next year.

are bringing the creative rush to console players: digital distribution, which makes it easier to upload and distribute content online at broadband speeds, and toolsets that make development way easier.

Microsoft isn't the only console maker courting start-up programmers. Nintendo's WiiWare program encourages developers of every size to create small, innovative games that players will buy and download from the Wii Shop Channel later in 2008. Sony, meanwhile, has been pushing the ability to run the Linux programming language on the PlayStation 3 as a means for game development. Eric Lempel, director of PlayStation Network operations, says the company's stoked about the creativity that gamers can bring. "We know this is something users want to do," he says, "and it's important we offer the ability to do it here."

Jon Mak, ■ 25-year-old coder from Toronto, Canada, got his dreamy action game, *Everyday Shooter*, picked up by Sony after an executive spotted it at a videogame conference. The title was released for download in the PlayStation Store for $10 in October. Unlike Microsoft, which lets XNA developers maintain ownership of their titles, Sony purchased *Everyday Shooter* outright. "Unfortunately, they own it," says

Mak. "At first, I didn't want to sell it, but here's a company willing to invest time and energy. I'll reach more people if I go through that channel. That makes sense to me."

Players don't even require computer-science skills anymore to get in this development game. Already, they can handcraft ultracreative play modes—from combat racing to plasma-grenade baseball—in *Halo 3*'s impressive Forge editor. February's *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* for Wii comes with a level editor and the ability to share custom battlefields online. And next year's *LittleBigPlanet* for PlayStation 3 is all about players taking their rag-doll characters and loads of objects and unleashing custom playlands in a world of realistic physics. The payoff: Gamers' creations can be rated and swapped by everyone else in the community. Creative designers will see their creations rise to the top of the download pile and achieve the same flavor-of-the-moment fame as would-be filmmakers do on YouTube.

Unreal Tournament 3, the latest installment of the multiplayer shooter, is treading similar territory. Its level editor lets players create maps on their PCs, then important the content, using a memory stick, right into their PS3s. "*UT3* PS3 owners will have as much new content to play as they ever wanted," says Jeff Morris, producer of *UT3* for Epic. "Additionally, they can start getting their feet wet on their own console ideas without an expensive development kit. All the things that make user-created content exciting for PC users apply to their console brethren."

Let freedom sting

Giving power to the people comes at a price, however. How can game companies empower players with the tools to create while still maintaining their standards? It won't be easy. Just ask NinjaBee, an indie game developer in Orem, Utah. After making two titles for Xbox Live Arcade, *Cloning Clyde* and *Outpost Kaloki X*, the company set about making *Band of Bugs*, a quirky strategy game. For fun, they wanted to include a level-editing program to let gamers make their own maps. But Microsoft wasn't exactly thrilled. "They wanted it, but they knew it would be problematic," says NinjaBee President Steve Taylor. "It's about user-generated content. You're opening a can of worms.... One of obvious concern is that someone is going to take the editor and paint a picture of a penis."

What to do? Microsoft includes an opt-out feature so that players—or parents—can choose to lock out user-created content online. With that solution, *Band of Bugs* got the green light to put its level editor in the game after all. But NinjaBee felt enough of ■ sting from the experience to not want to go back down that road anytime soon. All the back-and-forth cost time and money. "It was painful," says Taylor. "We do plan to do it again—in the end, it's a cool feature—but you have to be careful about it."

Microsoft's more cautious stance on user-created content isn't slowing down the more hardcore homebrewers. Coders like Silva, who will see his game *Dishwasher* on Xbox Live Arcade sometime next year, hope there's plenty more DIY content to come. "This taps a new market for creativity and innovation," he says. "Who knows what will happen if you open up the platform to hundreds of potential developers? Good things can happen, and terrible things can happen—but hopefully, the good ones win out." ■

⠿ MEET YOUR MAKERS

We rate the current and near-future tools that give power to the players

XNA Game Studio Express
PC • Out now

Accessibility: 1/10
Development power: 10/10

Halo 3's Forge
XB360 • Out now

Accessibility: 8/10
Development power: 4/10
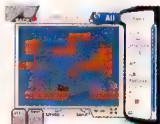
Super Smash Bros. Brawl
Wii • February 2008

Accessibility: 8/10
Development power: 3/10

Unreal Tournament 3
PS3 • February 2008

Accessibility: 6/10
Development power: 4/10

LittleBigPlanet
PS3 • Fall 2008

Accessibility: 9/10
Development power: 6/10

ORCHESTRATE THE PERFECT OP.

22:01 Eliminate soldiers near ambassador.
22:02 Suppress fire on left building.
22:03 Cover northwest corner for extraction.

22:01 Eliminate enemy on balcony.
22:02 Provide covering fire.
22:03 Move in to extract ambassador.

COMING SOON
January's prime-time players

NFL Tour
PS3/XB360 • EA Sports Big

EA steps back onto the arcadey gridiron, ditching the *Street* moniker and that series' thuggish aesthetic for a backdrop that would definitely please the uptight NFL execs. While we're enjoying the new exhibition-style setup and fighting game–esque reversal system for making and breaking tackles, *Tour* desperately needs an adrenaline shot (the gameplay is way too slow). Plus, how about making the game look as pretty as EA's other arcade sports offering, *NBA Street: Homecourt*?

Samurai Warriors: Katana
Wii • Koei

Koei is giving gamers yet *another* history lesson, but at least the publisher is reworking its hack-n-slash ways with this first *Samurai Warriors* installment on the Wii. This one takes place completely from a first-person perspective, and the developers have done a good job of balancing how much of the action will get your heart pumping (normal attacks are done with simple button presses, while special moves require some Wii Remote and Nunchuk wigglin').

Turning Point: Fall of Liberty
PS3/XB360 • Codemasters

This twist on World War II (in *Turning Point* the Nazis actually invade U.S. soil) got pushed into 2008 because Codemasters felt its first-person shooter could benefit from a few more months of development to spruce up the locales and tighten the controls. That all sounds great to us, but we have one more request: Can you give the enemy A.I. some brains? From what we've seen so far, the game's German soldiers aren't the smartest fellas.

Endless Ocean
Wii • Nintendo

From marine biologists to those simply pretending to be one like George Costanza, *Endless Ocean* hopes to attract all sea lovers. You'll mingle with lots of marine life, which includes the likes of penguins, manta rays, and humpback whales. But aside from searching for hidden treasure along the ocean floor, this one resembles more of an educational tool than an actual game. Too much time is spent reading log books that contain "fun" facts about the creatures here. And by fun we mean absolutely boring.

More January Releases

Bomberman Land
Wii/PSP/DS • Hudson

Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30
Wii • Ubisoft

Bully: Scholarship Edition
Wii/XB360 • Rockstar

Burnout: Paradise
PS3/XB360 • EA Games

Harvey Birdman: Attorney at Law
Wii/PS2/PSP • Capcom

Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom
XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios

Nitrobike
Wii • Ubisoft

Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice
PSP • Sony CEA

Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity
Wii/PS2 • Sega

RUMOR MILL

Shaken (not stirred) scuttlebutt By Quartermann

BOY, I CAN'T WAIT FOR 2008. Hey, that's not to say 2007 wasn't a swell year for your favorite rumormonger. In fact, The Q is currently enjoying one of his best years ever (you don't have to thank him, er, me). But even though I've broken a lot of big stories this year, I'm always striving to find even juicer scuttlebutt. In fact, I smell an even better year ahead for me. Wait, I think that's actually my—uh, let's just get to the rumors, shall we....

Bizarre spy
The once-mighty Microsoft Game Studios lineup is starting to look a little skimpier nowadays. Not only did *Mass Effect* developer BioWare get bought by EA, but MGS also lost *Geometry Wars* developer Bizarre Creations to Activision. I don't have any dirt on BioWare, but I do have a heap on Bizarre: My spy tells me the **Project Gotham Racing 4 creators are working on the next James Bond game.** "But they make racing games," you say? Well, duh—that's why it's going focus *a lot* on driving.

Rocked out
Poor EA Chicago—the development studio behind the jaw-dropping *Fight Night* series recently closed down. But that's not the only thing I hear got knocked out—my EA mole tells me **the studio was also working on a now-canned *Guitar Hero*–inspired action game.**

Exclusive mission
Console sales don't seem to sway publisher Square Enix. Even though the PlayStation 3 still isn't selling all that great, the role-playing game powerhouse still insists on keeping its *Final Fantasy* titles exclusive to Sony. Still, my RPG rogue informs me that Square Enix is at least throwing the Xbox 360 a bone—it appears **a new entry in its mech-based strategy game *Front Mission* will find an exclusive home on the 360.** And to even things out, another unannounced Square Enix sequel will apparently set up shop permanently on the PS3.

Mama Mii-a
Nintendo creates some cool things, yes, but it doesn't necessarily want *other* companies one-upping it...even its own first-party developers. A gossipy Goomba let slip that **Nintendo canceled a first-party Wii game because the developers insisted on allowing players to customize their cutesy Mii characters.** Come on, Nintendo—we're not asking you to let us add simple things like clothes to our Miis. Wait, actually we are. Stop being so stiff, guys! ✦

> Q-TIPS

- EA likes the *Need for Speed* franchise; that's not new. This is: The series looks like it will flip each year between being a realistic and an arcadey racer.

- Here's one for you supernerds out there: Publisher THQ looks to be making an action game based on the *Warhammer* toy line.

- A *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles* game is coming to Nintendo's WiiWare service, but what about the real *CC* Wii game? It appears to be in trouble.

Postgame Show

We get answers on all of the hottest games this holiday

Hope you're happy—with the all the amazing holiday releases this year, it's going to be a *long* time before you can complain about the lack of good games. We're sure not complaining, but we are asking questions. So we hunted down the developers of a handful of the fall's biggest titles to squeeze all the juicy info out of 'em (that means spoilers—proceed with caution). But even though we're only able to fit in four winners here, we'll be back next month with another answer-filled special—brace yourself.

⫸ HALO 3

Battling it out with Bungie's master chiefs

Obvious statement of the year: *Halo 3* is big—3 million units sold in one month big. So we talked to Brian Jarrard, community and franchise lead, and Tyson Green, multiplayer design lead, from developer Bungie to find out what makes this game so, uh, big.

Brian Jarrard has endured endless comparisons to Shaggy from *Scooby-Doo* and mocking of his initials while handling community duties on *Halo 2* and *Halo 3*, including co-hosting the Bungie Podcast.

Tyson Green was known as "the guy who made that crappy *Halo 1* Library level" or "the guy always wearing that fishing hat" until he redeemed himself working on single-player *Halo 2* and Multiplayer Design Lead on *Halo 3*. He was recently spotted without the hat.

EGM: Why no levels where you play as the alien Arbiter in single-player *Halo 3*? Were you guys surprised at how much hate he received after *Halo 2*?

Tyson Green: I wouldn't say surprised. We knew some people weren't going to like it. I feel like if [*Halo 2*] had actually closed off in a better fashion, fewer people would have minded. It's like the Arbiter became the scapegoat for the story not ending. "Bungie bit off more than they could chew because of this Arbiter character and then they couldn't finish the game." But it was clear from the very onset that the last game in the trilogy was going to be the Master Chief's story. There were various discussions early on about whether or not you would play as the Arbiter for one or two missions and then...there was even talk of, "We should kill the Arbiter! Yeah! Get rid of 'im!" In my opinion, cooler heads prevailed and we said, "No, let's make him a cool character in the story, but still keep the focus on the Chief." I think it worked out well.

EGM: Speaking of killing characters, some of the ads and part of the ending made it seem like you might kill off the Chief. Was that ever part of the plan?

TG: There were certainly storylines proposed that said stuff like, "Yeah, let's kill the Chief at the end!" That's just like someone wanted to try that to see if we can do it, if we can actually pull it off and make it feel cool. But other people knew we could achieve what we wanted, to close the story out without doing that.

Brian Jarrard: One funny story about that: The first time Bungie sat down with Microsoft [executive honchos Shane Kim and Peter Moore] to walk them through the final story, we had a PowerPoint presentation with a bunch of concept art [and a musical score], so it was pretty evocative and emotional. And the very last image we left them with was a memorial, the [UNSC soldiers] paying tribute to a fallen Master Chief, and then we turned the lights on and shut off the projector. And I think it was actually a couple of days that we let them sweat before we finally let them know that that wasn't the true ending of the game. [*Laughs*]

EGM: A lot of people bitch about one campaign level in particular: "Cortana." Some have gone so far as to compare it to "The Library," the infamously unpopular *Halo 1* level that you worked on, Tyson....

TG: ["Cortana"] is a claustrophobic level, it's all against the Flood—it has many of the same problems that "The Library" did. I think it's a gorgeous level, myself, in a kind of horrible way. The art is probably some of the best in the game as far as realizing that particular space. But it's such a harsh environment for having a good, richly rewarding game experience. I think it's criticism well taken, and it's stuff that the single-player guys are fully aware of.

EGM: It also has backtracking. Many people were surprised to see any backtracking in *Halo 3* given the flak you guys took for it in the original *Halo*.

TG: I think we were sensitive to that, because it was a perfectly valid criticism of *Halo 1*. But, [the second level in *Halo 3*] "Crow's Nest," for example—you spend a lot of time backtracking and running back through rooms, but I don't think it's the same thing. That particular level was more of an experiment to have people feel like they were actually in a real space, developing some knowledge of the terrain. So I don't really feel like that was a failure on the part of the single-player guys—I thought it was a really good mission—but I can see where that complaint comes from.

EGM: Opinions also vary on some pieces of equipment. What equipment do you think works well, and any you'd like to change?

TG: I think the Bubble Shield is a positive example, where it totally worked—we're really happy with that one. [On the other hand], the Trip Mine...it was [potentially] a really powerful griefing tool for betraying your teammates, so we had to water it down...it never worked right. We're not really happy with that piece of equipment.

EGM: Any rejected ideas for equipment you can share?

BJ: [Sandbox Design Lead] Jaime Griesemer just reminded me of an example: the Vortex. It was deployed similarly to the Energy Drainer, thrown in front of the player, creating a mini-black-hole or magnetic field. It would "suck" in any object or projectile within range: grenades from midair, tracers from rifles would alter course into the Vortex rather than your face, etc. It would even affect nearby objects like Fusion Coils and [even other] players. As cool as it sounds, it was ultimately cut because it was too "expensive" from a networking and performance standpoint.

EGM: On to weapons—you think the Needler is finally vindicated in *Halo 3* after sucking so hard in *Halo 1* and 2?

TG: You know, sometimes I feel like the Needler is overpowered, and other times I'm cursing at the Needler. I think it's actually working out pretty well. Every now and then it works brilliantly—then you catch a person on the open field, and you start strafing, and you think, "This is the most useless weapon ever." But I think that's good, in a way; I think the Needler really did find its way this time.

EGM: We've been hearing lots of people complain about the Mauler being too powerful....

TG: The Mauler melee combo [where you shoot and then quickly do the melee attack for a kill—*Ed.*] is really powerful, and it's something we're paying attention to. I could certainly see us looking at [multiplayer] and saying, "Y'know, we should dial back the Maulers." It's something we're playing by ear.

EGM: Some are bummed it's tough to find any ranked games with friends, even if they are just a few skill levels apart. Is that a concern?

TG: We do feel like that [the matching system] is a problem; it's more ⫸

⫸ **There was even talk of, "We should kill the Arbiter! Yeah! Get rid of 'im!"**
—*Multiplayer Design Lead Tyson Green*

aggressive than we intended for it to be. We're actively investigating that one right now to figure out what the best solution is. That's certainly one of the things on our list.

EGM: What about the different pieces of armor you can unlock to customize your character in multiplayer—do any of these shiny new additions make you ▪ bigger or smaller target for enemy bullets?

TG: The only ones that do are a couple of the nonstandard Elite helmets that are slightly differently shaped. We're still pretty confident that those things are evenly balanced. Certainly they're not unbalanced in the way they were in *Halo 2*. We always knew that the Elites were going to be a little bit different than the Spartans, but it's still playing pretty fairly, I think.

EGM: We heard a rumor that the hittable area of the special Bungie-employee-only flaming helmet is half the size of a normal helmet. What is up with that?

TG: Half the size? What are you talking about, it doesn't exist! [*Laughs*] There actually isn't a Bungie helmet. I'll let you in on a secret here: It's actually a Bungie chest piece, and the chest piece has the fire on the collar, so we're free to use any helmet that we like.

EGM: But even when you're invisible, the flames show up, right?

TG: It's a bit of a penalty for us; we knew that going in. You can turn it off if you want, but it's something there to just have fun with people.

EGM: What can you tell us about other secrets hidden in the game? We've seen a pic of ▪ monkey tribe in the first level....

TG: [*Laughs*] That's actually the face of our art lead, Marcus Lehto.

BJ: I heard Jason's in the game somewhere as well....

TG: Yeah, [Bungie co-founder] Jason Jones, he's the shirtless guy [hidden] in the last level.

EGM: What about the skulls you can find in the campaign maps? Is there a particular skull combination you personally recommend activating for a tough, but not impossible, experience?

BJ: I'll have to give credit to [Content Editor] Luke Smith for helping establish my de facto skull [playlist]: I like to enable Tough Luck, Thunderstorm, Mythic, and Tilt for a challenging

experience that is still reasonably attainable without endless frustration (e.g., Iron Skull).

EGM: Are there any secrets or funny inside jokes in the multiplayer levels we might have missed out on?

TG: There are some places on the levels where you might see environment artist names listed as "Architect." The firm of Buelterman, Carney, and Cotton [all Bungie multiplayer guys], that's in one of the levels. The "Traxus" name on the crates you see all over the place [is] from [the old Bungie shooter] *Marathon*, a background story character named Traxus. Funny story with that is, one of the testers almost immediately filed a bug saying that word was a slur, because if you read it [flipped around], it says "art sux." It was totally unintentional, but our art lead commented [on the bug] in a big font, "WHAT IS THIS CRAP?" [*Laughs*]

EGM: It seems like the announcement that Bungie was separating from Microsoft was downplayed quite a bit, like not much was actually going to change at all. So tell us: What exactly is different now that Bungie is an independent development studio?

BJ: Right now, things are not that different at all. We're working hard on *Halo*-related projects that we had [already] been working on with Microsoft. The attitude is different though—we are excited about a future where Bungie calls the shots and the entire team is in charge of our own destiny. For now we remain very much in close partnership with Microsoft, and we both enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship.

In the future, should we desire to branch out to a new [property] that perhaps Microsoft wasn't interested in funding, we'd have the flexibility to investigate other partners or even a different platform. We have no plans to do that, but we *could*, and that's definitely not something we could say prior to the split. ⟩

> ⟩ **We have no plans [to develop for a different system], but we *could*.**
> —*Bungie Community and Franchise Lead Brian Jarrard*

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✕ MASS EFFECT

Going beyond the galaxy with BioWare's epic role-playing game

Casey Hudson is BioWare's project director for *Mass Effect*. Before that, he was the project lead on *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*.

It's still there in a sense; when you press the X button, it worked out so you could skip lines of dialogue. As things wrapped up toward the end of the project, there were some aspects of [the dialogue system] that weren't working the way we had intended. But that's definitely something that we want to be the focus with the next *Mass Effect*. We want to add not only the ability to interrupt characters, but also other active things to the conversations.

It's definitely a skill, something we never had to do before *Mass Effect*. I would say our writing team spent a couple of months ramping up on learning how to do that well. I think they definitely had fun with it. The paraphrases were opportunities to replace a well-written, well-crafted sentence with something that makes the player chuckle—but also tells them exactly what will make that choice.

Well, the item comparison is probably a lot better than *KOTOR*'s because we now show you a graph that compares [the stats] of one weapon to another. As you can imagine, the inventory-management system for a role-playing game is probably one of the biggest and most complicated systems. It's actually one of the drawbacks to giving people so much to do and so many things. We didn't get much negative feedback during development with the inventory screen, although [if stuff doesn't work right], that's definitely something we want to fix in the future.

Actually, no. We try to make sure we're giving you lots of places to go and not designing it with a bias for a certain path. We tried to create a feeling around the middle of the game that you can go wherever you want and in the order you choose, and it'll work out as well as anything else.

I really like Liara. She's an alien but turned out to be the most "human" character in the game. She's very sensitive; I like the little conversations you have with her aboard the *Normandy* where she tells you her hopes and fears. It's a very tender little story about her character.

One of the neat things is going back to our solar system and helping the Human Alliance on the moon. You'll drive around, and as you're cresting a mountain, you'll see the Earth come up over the horizon—it's actually pretty cool. Then there's Eletania, the planet with a quest that involves space monkeys, which always gets a laugh around here. We also made six-legged space cows for the planet Nodacrux, but one of our designers didn't like them because he thought they looked too creepy. But he let us put the cows in the game on the condition that one of them would follow you around and eventually pickpocket you.

Unfortunately, we haven't announced any specifics about downloadable content, but we're working on some really cool stuff.

Yes, it will definitely be much, much bigger and better than *KOTOR*'s. From the beginning, we were able to plan for DLC because we knew even before the 360 came out how important the Xbox Live stuff would be. So it was built into the design of *Mass Effect* and built to work really well. That's part of the reason why we created this big galaxy—it's a good place for us to place downloadable content.

Yeah, that was always my hope. Obviously, the first took the longest because we had to build so much new technology. But now we can get done a lot faster with parts two and three. It'll also come down to the lifespan of the system—it seems like they keep getting shorter and shorter. But if the 360 is around a few more years, we'll be able to put them all out, and you'll get to play with the same character you created in the first game.

In general, *Mass Effect* is a game that streams all the way through. We could've had more load screens, but instead we let you physically get into an elevator—still be in the game, hearing news reports or your characters talking—while you transitioned to another area. But, yeah, they weren't the most epic part of the experience. [*Laughs*] ✕
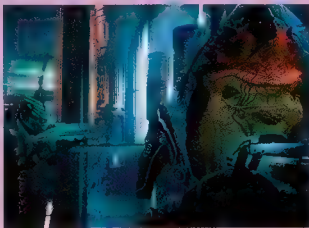
> HALF-LIFE 2: THE ORANGE BOX

Tearing apart Valve's overstuffed box

The Orange Box makes most games seem shallow. Could it have something to do with it containing five frickin' games? Hmm—maybe that's it. So with a ton of things to talk about, we contacted Seattle-based developer Valve for a nice long chat.

VALVE

Seeing as how this *Box* has so many games, it'd be pretty hard to interview just one person at Valve. So we made this a team effort and talked to Marketing Director Doug Lombardi, *Episode Two* Lead David Speyrer, *Portal* Level Designer Kim Swift and *Team Fortress 2* Programmer/Designer Robin Walker. Whew!

EGM: Why not include the first *Half-Life*? Most console players aren't up to speed and *Half-Life 2*'s story and depth will be lost on them.

Doug Lombardi: We thought about it, and as great as the idea is, we just had to let it go in order to get all five of the games that are included in *Orange* done, tested, and—in the case of the consoles—processed through certification.

EGM: *Episode Two*'s Little Rocket Man Achievement [carry the garden gnome from the first shack to the rocket hatch at the end] is hardcore. What do you do when you're in the car?

David Speyrer: Some people find different places where they can wedge it in the car. One person wedged it though the back windshield—there's a hole back there where you can kinda stick it. It works for a while, but eventually it'll roll out if you go around a sharp corner or something.

EGM: *Episode One* stuck closely to the *Half-Life 2* formula, to the point of being too similar. *Episode Two* mixes things up. So what can we expect from *Episode Three*?

DS: We haven't announced any details on *Episode Three*, but the direction for the series can be charted against the direction from *One* to *Two*.

EGM: Where will *Episode Three* fall in the *Half-Life* saga?

DS: *Episode Three* will close this chapter of the game, but not the franchise. Once *Episode Three* is complete, we will basically have made what should have been called *Half-Life 3*.

EGM: How will you deliver *Episode Three*? After *Orange Box*, gamers will feel ripped off if the third episode ships by itself.

DS: We're giving a lot of thought to that right now. History shows that almost every time we release a new product for the PC, we change the rules and try something new.... Look back at *Half-Life: Game of the Year Edition* including *Team Fortress*

Classic, *Half-Life 2* including *Counter-Strike: Source*, *Orange Box*.... We also aim to give customers choices about how they want to buy the products. So, I'm sure we'll follow tradition and break tradition on the next [package]. What that looks like, exactly, is still being defined.

EGM: Since you can't exactly run Steam [Valve's online multiplayer and distribution service] for PCs] on the consoles, any thought of working with Microsoft or Sony to sell your games individually on Xbox Live Arcade or the PlayStation Network Store?

DL: We'd like that very much, please. As soon as they're ready, we'll do it.

EGM: *Portal* is the funniest game we've ever played. *Psychonauts* cowriter Erik Wolpaw wrote it. How'd you go about enabling him?

Kim Swift: We would always make jokes about stuff, and if we laughed... we put it in the game. Erik would say something; that would spark one of us to reflect what he was saying in the [game's] environment. Like with the Weighted Companion Cube—it was this constant back-and-forth between gameplay and writing and environment....

EGM: We've heard you've gotten e-mails from people saying they had a harder time incinerating the Companion Cube than harvesting Little Sisters in *BioShock*.

KS: It's actually pretty crazy for us here to see everyone so in love with

the Weighted Companion Cube. We deliberately designed the map you get the Cube in to revolve around carrying it everywhere and using it in a bunch of different ways. I think that, coupled with Erik's hilarious dialogue and the [Cube] being unique from all of the other cubes you've encountered, seems to make a lasting impression.

EGM: Will *Portal*'s gun and heroine, Chell, wind up in *Episode Three*? Or will *Portal* become its own series?

KS: We're still in the midst of figuring out our plans. We've gotten plenty of input from forums and people e-mailing in, and we're definitely taking their thoughts into consideration.

EGM: What are people demanding?

KS: A variety of things: map packs, multiplayer/co-op, *Portal 2*, Portal gun in *Episode Three*, and beyond. Right now, we're prototyping a few of these ideas and more. Getting Portals to work at all is a fairly significant challenge, but now that we're able to capture feedback from what worked in the first version, we have a lot to build upon for future versions.

EGM: We hear you can track how long it takes players to complete *Portal*. What's the average finish time, and what's the maximum time *Portal* should take players before you consider them morons?

KS: Everyone is different: Some people prefer to go through games as fast as they can, and others enjoy taking their time. I personally fall

Elf quest: *Episode Two*'s carry-the-gnome Achievement was inspired by player-invented goodie-hauling challenges from *Half-Life 2* on PC.

toward the latter end of the spectrum, but I certainly wouldn't call myself a moron. Our average playtime during playtests was three to six hours.

I don't know. I mean, we just sort of put it out there as a "what if"? What if games can be this short, but still be enjoyable and fun? We're still not sure what we want to do next, but when we stepped into *Portal*, we wanted to take a risk on many different dimensions.... There's the risk of, it's too short—what are people going to say about that?

And also, it's an experiment in creating easily consumable chunks of game. I know everyone can commit maybe a couple of hours a week to go watch a movie, but not a whole lot of people will commit 20 hours a week to play a game....

We expected this, because it's the most straightforward Medic pairing. It's great for killing bad guys but is going to have trouble attacking a well-placed sentrygun. If you can run to the sentrygun, a Pyro-Medic pairing is probably best. If you can't reach it and need to take it out at range, your best bet is a pairing with a Demoman or Soldier. A Heavy-Medic pair is always more easily countered, with both Snipers and Spies able to easily take out the Heavy. The faster-moving combat classes, like the Pyro and Demoman, aren't as easily countered.

As soon as we get them done. We're playtesting several now.

> UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE

On the scent of Naughty Dog's gorgeous treasure hunter

If it seems difficult to find a PlayStation 3 gem, you obviously haven't uncovered *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*. We have— that's why we rounded up Naughty Dog Copresident Evan Wells and *Uncharted* Director Amy Hennig to spill the jewels on their game.

Evan Wells, copresident of *Uncharted* developer Naughty Dog, has worked on some expected (the *Jak* and *Crash* series) and unexpected projects. *Panic on Funkotron*, anyone?

The career of game director Amy Hennig also covers a lot of ground. Before moving over to Naughty Dog, she was at Crystal Dynamics working on the *Legacy of Kain* series.

EGM: So, how much did *Gears of War* influence *Uncharted*'s development?

Evan Wells: Certainly we all played *Gears of War* and liked it. It set a bar visually that we knew we wanted to compete with.... As far as gameplay, I think I've heard them cite the same game that put us on this path: *kill.switch*. *Gears of War* obviously took that to another level, and again, that level of polish helped push us.

EGM: Drake hardly seems like an everyman hero, given his perfect aim and all these great leaps he does... why was he billed as such?

Amy Hennig: It's funny; everybody uses that term differently. For instance, people call Bruce Willis in *Die Hard* an everyman hero.

EW: The reason we bring it up so often is to point out that we're trying to distinguish ourselves from characters like Master Chief, Marcus Fenix, and Lara Croft, who are these superheroes, these acrobats, and who stick every landing. Nathan Drake is not that, and yet he still manages to be a hero.

EGM: Elena, on the other hand, is more of a refreshing character—not all boobs and leather. Was this a conscious attempt to avoid that kind of femme fatale character?

AH: Well, she has boobs and she's wearing a leather belt....

EGM: [*Laughs*] You got us there.

AH: It was definitely a conscious choice. If Nate's going to be an everyman, we want her to be an everywoman...like a 21st-century version of the classic '30s foil for the hero—the spunky, cute girl next door. She has her own humor, her own strengths and weaknesses in her personality. So that meant, in her character design, that she has a real person's proportions.

EGM: About the puzzles, they wouldn't make much sense without Drake's diary in terms of figuring out what you have to do, but that diary pretty much spells out *exactly* what you need to do. Were the puzzles intentionally made this straightforward?

AH: We focus-tested this game... and it came back that people either marked the puzzling just right or a little too hard.

EW: Some of those puzzles were ratcheted up a notch or two [earlier in the game's development], and we had to back them off because they became brick walls and players would become stuck.

AH: I'm almost wondering as an older gamer that maybe the current crop of gamers [have different tastes]? We were concerned going into the focus tests that we needed to make more difficult puzzles. And the opposite information came back consistently.

EGM: The final boss battle at the end of the game is a little bit lame. Did you ever have plans for a different finale?

EW: Nothing dramatically different. We created this island and this world, so we had to come up with a boss battle that fit within those confines. If we had a few more weeks, we probably would have made the setup a little more elaborate, but it was still pretty much the direction we were headed.

AH: [With] a lot of games, you get this jumping-the-shark problem at the end because you've got to be ramping up to something. Because movies are more about the narrative and the emotional experience, they get away with less. Whereas with games, it's almost like we have to shift our thinking away from boss battles to peaks of the experience.

EGM: In the end, do you feel you captured what you were going for?

AH: It's doing what we wanted it to do. So many games are cynical and dark and gritty; we wanted this to feel colorful, optimistic, humorous, and romantic. Those are funny words to use for a videogame, particularly one where you're popping hundreds of guys in the head with bullets, but it's that sense of the romance of adventure that we felt was lacking in so many games these days. 🕹

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

The Big Comeback

An all-access look at Capcom's long-overdue fighting opus **Street Fighter IV**
By Shane Bettenhausen

SAY IT ALONG WITH US: Street Fighter...IV. Seems almost hard to believe, right? Fighting-game fans know that Capcom doesn't drop out larger Roman numerals on us very often. We've endured 10 years of spin-offs, updates, rereleases, and remakes since Street Fighter III. And as it turns out, SF4's very existence is something of a miracle—this long-awaited follow-up wasn't always a sure thing. In fact, in the beginning, the prevailing attitude at Capcom had been that there would never be a Street Fighter IV," explains SF4 Producer Yoshinori Ono. "Everyone had given up on the idea because too much time had passed since SF3, and everyone at Capcom seemed perfectly OK with letting it end."

Why would the publisher choose to retire the genre-defining franchise? It's partly a matter of internal politics, but mostly due to a dip in the popularity of fighters. The reign of the 2D fighting game ended well over a decade ago, and no series was immune from the fallout. Despite garnering critical acclaim and a hard-core fan following, the Street Fighter Alpha and Street Fighter III games

never attained the popularity of SF2. "For a lot of people, Super Nintendo [Street Fighter II] was the last one they really played," says Ono. "SF3, unfortunately, just lost in the shuffle."

Also, consider the fact that creating a new installment in an influential franchise presents a daunting task for developers. Liberally tinkering with the classic formula could easily alienate longtime fans. Regardless, Ono decided the series shouldn't be laid to rest. "Let's get this straight: Getting this game made hasn't been an easy process within Capcom," says Ono. "There was certainly resistance at first, but the more interaction I had with fans at conventions, the more I realized that gamers desperately expected this eventual port, and that Capcom had to do it." And the success of a certain fighting game on Xbox Live Arcade convinced him to pursue this dream project. "If you look at Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting on XBLA, it might not be the highest-quality product, but the fact that it sold so well despite that proves that a lot of people are still really into this series," Ono says. "I don't feel that the brand is dead in the U.S.—if anything, it's

Street Fighter II, is that you?

Street Fighter II remains the single most important and influential fighting game of all time. But that doesn't mean that every conversion of Capcom's classic title is a winner. Check out what happens when SF2 gets squeezed onto platforms it has absolutely no business appearing on.

■ Commodore 64

■ ZX Spectrum

■ MS-DOS

■ 8-bit NES (unlicensed port)

■ To answer the burning question that's on everyone's lips: *Street Fighter IV* features fully 3D graphics but strictly 2D gameplay.

like a sleeping giant, but we want to kick him in the ribs and wake him up." Determined to restore the *SF* dynasty to its rightful place atop the fighting-game pantheon, Ono was finally able to persuade his boss, *Mega Man* creator Keiji Inafune, to green-light the project in 2005. Now, after years of rumor and speculation, the curtain finally rises on *Street Fighter IV*.

Unfortunately, due to the veil of secrecy surrounding the game, we're afraid that some crucial details—including concrete info about when it's coming or what platforms it will appear on—remain strictly off-limits (though if you keep reading, you'll catch a few hints). But we didn't let that stop us from delving deep into the drama behind *SF4*'s creation and getting our hands on the decade's most important fighting game.

The man behind SF4

So, just who is this headstrong champion leading the charge for *SF4*?

Tokyo-based Ono wasn't around back in the days of *Street Fighter II* (the main men behind that landmark title, Akira Nishitani and Akira Yasuda, have long since left Capcom to pursue other endeavors), but he did work on the well-received *Street Fighter Alpha* and *Street Fighter III* titles. Unfortunately, the most recent fighter on his résumé isn't quite so impressive: He oversaw 2004's sloppy *Capcom Fighting Evolution* (PS2/XB). But perhaps that's a forgivable sin: When we first met Ono in 2005, he candidly admitted to *CFE*'s failings, and acknowledged that the game was actually a salvaged version of a scrapped 3D arcade fighter known as *Capcom Fighting All-Stars*. A couple of years later, he's still apologizing for *CFE*. "That game was basically thrown into my lap after another producer left the company halfway through development," Ono says. "Where the game broke down was the idea of having all the different gameplay systems intact,

so it wasn't really balanced."

Humble honesty such as that rarely surfaces in this industry, and Ono isn't your typical fighting-game maestro. From our experience, the creators behind your favorite fighters tend to be cooler-than-thou egomaniacs or buttoned-up salarymen. Ono is neither, instead exuding an easygoing affability and playful creativity reminiscent of *Mario* mastermind Shigeru Miyamoto. Ono's even a bit of a Renaissance man, having penned the genuinely slammin' hip-hop tune that plays during *SF3: 3rd Strike*'s intro. During our meeting, he was all smiles, constantly cracking jokes, and brimming with excitement to finally show off the game he fought so hard to produce. Yet this project clearly comes saddled with a tremendous amount of pressure, and Ono's kind demeanor doesn't mean that he's a pushover. "We still have a lot of people in Capcom R&D who worked on the original *SF2*, and many who joined the

A CLASSIC IN THE REMAKING

Last spring, Capcom announced that U.S. developer Backbone Entertainment would helm a high-definition remake of *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* for Xbox Live Arcade and PlayStation Network featuring completely redrawn art by the comic-book artists at Udon. It's an ambitious project: In addition to giving the graphics a modern-day makeover, the developers also plan to create an entirely original game mode that rebalances the characters, simplifies special move inputs, and adds a host of new maneuvers to the World Warriors' arsenals.

Since its announcement, *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* has remained largely under wraps, leaving fans to pore over unfinished character art, blurry screenshots, and shaky camera-phone footage that leaked onto the Net. When Capcom finally unveiled an early playable version at a recent London press event, few were surprised to hear that the game's release had been pushed back to a highly nebulous "2008." Based on our hands-on time with every limited demo, we feel that the final product should meet fans' expectations. The new art style looks incredibly clean and crisp, and the gameplay feels perfectly fine—assuming you have a joystick.
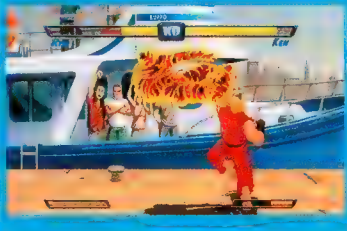
> ## It's important to look back at *Street Fighter II* and see what players enjoyed about that game.
>
> —SF4 Producer Yoshinori Ono

company because of that game," he says, "so, as you can imagine, people have their own ideas on how *SF4* should be made. We've been butting heads a bit trying to figure it all out, and it won't be easy from here on in, but the title is important enough that I'm willing to sacrifice for it."

A return to form

Ono's goal with *Street Fighter IV* is simple: He wants it to be the second coming of *Street Fighter II*. Younger gamers probably can't fathom just how huge that game was 15 years ago. Although it wasn't the first fighting game (that accolade belongs to *Karate Champ*...or maybe Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots), it was the one that became a phenomenon, bringing 1-on-1 hand-to-hand combat to the masses and inspiring a galaxy of clones. At its peak, *SF2* machines were so ubiquitous in arcades across America that it wasn't peculiar to see multiple rows of identical cabinets

packed with quartered-up opponents. Back then, *SF2* mania reached such an absurd level that it even became an internal mandate that *EGM* would feature the game prominently on our magazine's cover every month.

So how does Ono hope to recapture that bygone *Street Fighter* zeitgeist? "With *SF4*, I think it's important to look back at *SF2* and see what players enjoyed about that game," he says. "We want it to feel like a homecoming, for it to be natural and instinctive for users to return to." He believes that *SF2* players opted out of successive *SF* iterations because of convoluted gameplay systems and unfamiliar characters. Having worked on *Capcom Fighting Evolution*, he's experienced both of those missteps firsthand: The *SF2* players-gone cartoony half-octopus/half-nautilus monstrosity was basically *Street Fighter* jumping the shark.

Ono wants serious *Street Fighter* fans to love *SF4*, but he's equally

concerned with attracting casual *SF2* players to the game. "Those of us who played it back in the day—either in arcades or on the Super Nintendo or Sega Genesis—now we're out of college, out in the world with real jobs.... We want to bring those guys back into the fray," Ono explains. He intends to do that by giving this new chapter instantly recognizable characters, gameplay, and visuals. "We realize that people still love *SF2* and see it as the pinnacle of fighters," he says. "We want to respect that legacy."

Such a tease

At a recent press event in London, Capcom revealed a teaser video for *Street Fighter IV* amid a chorus of cheers and gasps. In the brief CG clip, *SF* poster boys Ryu and Ken trade blows in a stormy forest. The fight's impressive, but the fresh new art style steals the show: Expressive brushstrokes and *Okami*-style "sumi-e" ink splatters create the look of a living

SF4 TAKES THE FIGHT ONLINE

With the newest renditions of *Virtua Fighter*, *Tekken*, and *Soulcalibur* all promising online fighting action, *Street Fighter IV* wisely plans to follow suit. "Online play is an absolute necessity for *SF4*," Producer Yoshinori Ono says. "The project is still early, so I can't go into much detail, but we want this mode to tie into the central *SF* concept of going out into the world to fight different people and become stronger." Surprisingly, Capcom doesn't seem concerned with the pitfalls of Internet latency. "We're building our game around the existing online technology," Ono says. "There's no reason you can't make an enjoyable online fighter as long as you're aware of the technological limitations—you just find a way to work around them."

Don't expect to see the same wacky item-collection and customization options offered by *VF* and *Tekken*'s online games in *SF4*, though. "The characters in this series are quite iconic, and everyone has a lot of love and respect for them," says Ono. "The idea of Ryu wearing a girl's sailor suit and a funny hat would kind of crush the *SF* memory that we all know and love."

An online-enabled *SF4* also allows for the possibility of future content updates, including new characters, stages, and gameplay modes. "Microtransactions are a cool idea from a gamer's perspective," says Ono. "I'd really like to go that route, but it's up to the company as a whole to decide whether or not we can do that. It's difficult to adjust to the new landscape of digital distribution."

■ Hopefully *SF4* will be able to overcome the lag problems players witnessed in *Hyper Fighting*.

painting. While this assuredly seems like a cool manner of reintroducing the world to the franchise, the trailer reveals precious little about the game itself...including what it looks like or how it plays.

Millions of trailer downloads and inflammatory message-board posts later, Capcom's finally ready to stop teasing and start showing. Now that *EGM* has seen—and played—*Street Fighter IV*, we have to wonder if that teaser may have looked a little *too* stylish and impressive. The actual game incorporates subtle elements of that stylish ink-splatter aesthetic (mostly in menus and between-round displays), but it renders its characters and environments in a slightly cartoon-shaded style that manages to evoke *Street Fighter II* reimagined in 3D. The game has a clean look, with visible black lines outlining vividly colored characters. "We're aiming for an art style that looks like moving paintings rather than a hyperrealistic look,"

Ono says. "But I'm not terribly worried about users being disappointed that the final game doesn't look like the teaser trailer.... We do feel that if we made a fighting game entirely in the style of the teaser, it might be too impractical and too hard to play."

We'll be honest: When we first gazed upon *SF4*, we weren't exactly blown away by the graphics, at least in a conventional sense. Its fluid animation and speedy action (even at this early point in development, the game runs at a rock-solid 60 frames per second) impress, yet the game doesn't look much like that astonishing teaser trailer, nor does it have the detailed sheen of upcoming genre competitors *Soulcalibur IV* and *Tekken 6*. Nor was it supposed to. "When I look at other upcoming games, I see a predictable pattern: Everything is going toward a very photo-realistic look," Ono says. "That's only given the team more confidence, as we're definitely going in a fresh direction

with our art style." *Street Fighter IV*'s distinctive look draws its inspiration from the talented artists who have worked on the series during the last two decades. "You've seen a lot of *Street Fighter* art from our illustrators over the years that looks like oil paintings or watercolors," Ono explains. "So when we first started this project, we thought, 'What would that look like if it were moving in 3D?'"

While the game doesn't look like a moving painting in its early state, we see tremendous potential for the style. The 3D character models look completely unlike anything you've seen in other fighting games, with visible veins and musculature moving in real time under their skin to give them an uncanny living-anime vibe. "We've never been able to convey realistic facial expressions that make you feel like you're in a real street fight," Ono explains. "Maybe you'd see someone puke after a strong hit in *SF2*, but now you'll finally see guys wincing in pain

Look for Capcom to incorporate more of the teaser trailer's ink-splatter style into *SF4*'s menus and cinematics.

> ## If they really want to make a game with 3D gameplay so badly, perhaps we can revisit the idea for *Street Fighter VI* or *VII*.
>
> —*Yoshinori Ono*

MORE CAPCOM COMEBACKS AHEAD?

We asked Ono if he'd like to try reinventing any of the other fighting franchises languishing in Capcom's stable. As it turns out, he sure does: "Personally, I'd love to make a new *Marvel vs. Capcom*, and I'd also like to see the triumphant return of *Darkstalkers* to a new generation of technology. It would be an interesting challenge with *Darkstalkers*, because in the old games you'd see a lot of really interesting animations as characters would morph into different forms. That would be tricky to do with this 3D engine, but not impossible. In two or three years, if I got the chance to resurrect that series, I'd like to shock Hollywood with how good the graphics would look."

and cheeks being deformed by fists in real time."

He's definitely onto something—we watched with sadistic glee as Ryu's eyes bugged out and his face contorted with each Dragon Punch our Ken dished out. And Ono claims that he's only just begun to dabble with this form of grisly visual payoff. "I hope that we can include some sort of visible reactions from the characters based on how much damage they receive and where they're hit," Ono says. "We'd like to add details such as if a character gets hit in the shoulder multiple times, perhaps his shoulder hangs a little lower, or perhaps his animations are affected."

2D or not 2D... that is the question

Ono is prepared to shock fans with *SF4*'s daring new graphical style, but he's thankfully not looking to rock their worlds by needlessly thrusting the gameplay into three dimensions,

even though the backgrounds and characters have made the transition. "Gameplaywise, we're sticking with 2D, and that's ▪ very deliberate choice," Ono says. "We want to preserve the strategic nature of *SF2* and *SF3*, where matches unfold almost like a chess game." He's right: The strict two-dimensional limitations of the old games foster the fundamental balance between offense and defense that makes *Street Fighter* so incredibly fun and addictive. You won't find any eight-way run or sidesteps here. "I feel the need to vehemently protect what's at the title's absolute core: a side-view 2D game with one character on the left and another on the right, fighting each other in an arena in a very serious manner," says Ono. "We don't want 3D movement or dynamic camera sweeps, as we really must maintain the atmosphere of the confined battle." The camera doesn't budge during fights; you'll only spy dramatic spinning camera angles dur-

ing flashy Ultra Combos and end-of-round replays.

Settling on this 2D-gameplay-in-a-3D-world model wasn't an easy decision. "Within the company, there were plenty of people who felt that we should go fully 3D with *SF4*'s gameplay," Ono admits. "But I have too much respect for *Street Fighter* as it's always been, and 3D fighters can be very intimidating.... I know that people want to play something that they already understand." Attempting to reinvent the franchise with gameplay that mimics that of *Tekken* or *Virtua Fighter* would likely serve to alienate all the lapsed *SF2* fans that Capcom aims so desperately to please. "I told those who wanted a 3D *SF4* to keep their hands off my *SF4*," Ono says. "If they really want to make a game with 3D gameplay so badly, we can revisit the idea for *SF6* or 7."

Ono's adamant belief in the glory of 2D fighters begs the question: Why not make the entire game using

In its current state, SF4 plays almost too fast...but it's intentional. If Capcom can balance the gameplay at a brisk clip, they know it will still work when slowed down.

STREET FIGHTER, FINAL FIGHT, AND THE TRUTH ABOUT POISON'S GENITALIA

Capcom's classic brawler Final Fight was originally titled Street Fighter '89, and we've seen plenty of FF-to-SF crossovers over the years. Ono claims that you won't find any direct FF references in SF4, but that didn't stop us from asking about a rumor that's haunted gamers for years: Is Final Fight's pink-haired cutie (and SF3: 2nd Impact costar) Poison actually a dude? Let's set the record straight: In North America, Poison is officially a post-op transsexual," Ono reveals. "But in Japan, she simply tucks her business away in order to look like a girl." Apparently, a cross-dressing character with a penis was deemed "good" for sensitive Western audiences. Fun fact: Capcom replaced her with a butch male thug, pictured here, in the SNES version.

gorgeous high-res, hand-drawn art? "The thought of making SF4 fully 2D did cross my mind, as it would preserve the traditional gameplay," Ono says. "Guilty Gear does a good job of holding the torch for traditional 2D fighters, and Capcom's upcoming high-def remake of Super Street Fighter II Turbo has it covered for us." So rather than retread that safe route, Ono and his team have opted to bravely venture into the realm of three dimensions. "I don't want to brag, but if you look at Street Fighter III, we've pretty much done all that's possible with animated sprites," Ono says. "There's simply not much for us to learn from doing another 2D game."

The gang's all back, and they're thicker than ever

If Capcom hopes to capitalize on gamers' fond memories of Street Fighter II, stuffing SF4's roster with new characters and obscure weirdos simply won't do. Even if a

Skullomania-versus-Twelve melee might pique the interest of hardcore fans, most gamers might not even recognize such a freak show as being Street Fighter. "As a nod to the fans, we're trying to get as many of the original SF2 characters into the game as possible," Ono says. "SF3 was a very great game, but we have our regrets about having a whole new roster of characters.... We feel that we may have betrayed the audience we built up with SF2."

Although it seems somewhat like revisionist history, SF4 officially takes place after the events of Super Street Fighter II Turbo, but before the time of Street Fighter III. While that doesn't necessarily prevent the inclusion of a few popular faces from the SF3 and SF Alpha games, we definitely caught the drift that the traditional "World Warriors" from SF2 will constitute most of the starting roster. "We want to do everything we can in order to bring everyone back," Ono says. "The

last thing we want to do is to cut the character that [fans] loved."

Officially, the only four fighters guaranteed a return ticket for SF4 are Ryu, Ken, Chun-Li, and Dhalsim, all of whom were playable in the early version we saw. And although their punches, kicks, and special moves look instantly recognizable to Super SF2 Turbo fans, the characters sport a new look. To put it bluntly, these street fighters have been bulking up in the off-season. "We really want to preserve the look from Super SF2 Turbo, but to also bring them up to date with modern times," Ono explains. "You'll notice that just about everyone has been beefed up for SF4."

If anything, the new art style seems like a concession to appeal to Japan's perception of Western tastes: The newly thick Ken and Ryu can now hang tough next to popular meatheads such as Gears of War's Marcus and Dom. They've also seemingly had a decent chunk of their anime

COVER STORY

Street Fighter IV's badly named Saving system isn't about recording your progress (in fact, Capcom hopes to come up with a better name for it in America). Instead, it offers an unexpected new twist on the traditional *SF* gameplay. The new "Revenge" gauge, a four-segment meter that builds up as you receive damage, lies at the heart of this system: At any time during the battle, you can cash in one of these four chunks by simultaneously pressing strong kick and strong punch. Simply pressing those buttons initiates a special attack that dishes out decent damage while rendering your character momentarily invincible. If you hold the buttons down, you can charge up for a devastating, invincible attack that's also completely unblockable (that move requires three-fourths of your Revenge gauge). "This makes it possible for someone who's getting beaten down to stage a stunning comeback," Ono explains. "A symbol graces the character getting angry from losing, and then channeling that rage into a last-ditch effort.... We went for keep the matches exciting until the final moments of the fight."

You can also cash in those chunks of the Revenge gauge to free your powerful EX special moves (normal special moves beefed up by pressing two punch or kick buttons instead of one), including bigger fireballs and more damaging, longer-range Dragon Punches. And if you're looking to get really deep, you can explore the world of cancels and feints: When performing a Saving move or EX special, you can cancel out by dashing forward or back midway through the move's animation. The attack with half kick and half punch, allowing you to bust "cancel and cancel" into

...executing another Revenge move, juggling your foe, and extending your combo. "If you're both good at this canceling game and a complete jerk," says Ono, "you can get your foe up against the wall and trap them in a nasty trap of fireballs and Dragon Punches."

While this might sound fairly simple on paper, the pinpoint timing required to execute these moves won't be easy for most players. "We don't want to scare anybody off with all the hardcore talk about cancels and feints," says Ono. "You certainly don't need to bother to learn it in order to play the game." It's an added layer of depth for players who really know what they're doing." Ono has seen the obscene skills that tournament-level players demonstrated with *SF3*'s dazzling parry system, and he expected to see the dynamic gameplay possibilities Saving will offer. "The contest is truly a cruel part of *SF4*," Ono adds, "and my sure it will continue to please even the cruelest of the game's newcomers."

For more details, discussion of our new Saving system, potentially coming with a name, check *Street Fighter IV* online.

flavor surgically removed. Even the formerly svelte Dhalsim's been hitting the gym. "We were originally going to go with the superskinny *SF2* version of Dhalsim, but it just didn't look right: He was like a stick figure compared to the bigger guys," Ono explains. "We widened his shoulders but kept his ribs and collarbone visible in order to keep his general shape intact." Luckily, Chun-Li hasn't been hitting the 'roids to fit in, but her controversially wide thighs will continue to be a point of contention for leg-obsessed fans (scope the sidebar on pg. 71 for the full scoop on her anatomy).

Relying so heavily on the original *SF2* cast would seem to put a serious damper on *SF4*'s chances for gender equality, seeing as how Chun-Li was that game's solitary female representative. Thankfully, Ono has plans to avoid such a sausagefest: "If you're worried about how we'll balance the gender war in our character roster, don't necessarily focus on

what female fighters from past games will reappear.... We'll have some new characters as well."

But how does it play?

"The game is only about 1 percent complete," warns Ono before letting us loose on an arcade cabinet housing *Street Fighter IV*. Later, he corrects that to 2 percent, but even in its unfinished state, two-player *Street Fighter IV* delivers fun, addictive gameplay. We could clearly sense the potential, despite the severe limitations of this demo. We could play as any of the four aforementioned characters, but only Ken and Ryu both felt and looked somewhat complete (the others were obviously unfinished: Dhalsim lacked moves and Chun-Li sported 1993-era flat polygons). We didn't require any instruction—all the *SF* fundamentals carry over flawlessly. "For *SF4*, I knew that we had to keep the traditional eight-way joystick and six attack buttons," Ono says. "We have to protect

that no matter what." Even if you haven't touched an *SF* since 1992, you'll instantly feel at home. Up still jumps, Back still blocks, throws are still cheap, and all of the moves you learned in 1991 still work here. "We need to keep the game approachable for everyone," Ono says. "The first time you grab an *SF4* joystick, you'll be able to pull off the Dragon Punches and Hadoken fireballs you remember without thinking too deeply."

In its current early state, the game feels remarkably close to *Super SF2 Turbo*: wickedly fast and somewhat straightforward compared to the deeper defensive strategies offered by the *Alpha* and *SF3* titles. "The big, overarching theme for *SF4* is that the game is more aggressive," Ono states. "It's more about attacking and less about defending." Even though recent *SF* titles offered greater customization (*SF Alpha 3* gave users three different play styles to select from, while *SF3* introduced a tricky

SF4's gameplay at a glance

What's In:
Supers
Ultras
Taunts
medium punch + medium kick
Throws
(weak punch + weak kick)
Quick get-up
(down + kick as you hit the ground)
Saving
EX specials

HARDCORE SF4 102 ULTRAS

Ever since *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* introduced the concept of Super moves, the world of fighting games has never been the same. These powerful attacks created a brilliant risk/reward trade-off that had players patiently building up their Super meter (by performing special moves) and waiting for just the right second to input the complex motion required to dish out an over-the-top assault. For *SF4*, Capcom hasn't yet decided precisely how to handle the distribution of Supers. Ono reveals that he's eyeing three possible scenarios: it could be like *Super SF2 Turbo*, in which each character has only one set Super (the current version of *SF4* is like this); *Street Fighter Alpha*, where every character has multiple Supers at their disposal at all times; or *SF3*, where players were forced to choose one Super before starting the match.

The Supers we performed during our demo were instantly familiar— Ryu's Shinkuu Hadoken fireball, Ken's Shoryu-Reppa Dragon Punch, Chun-Li's Kikoushu close-range fireball, and Dhalsim's Yoga [illegible]. *SF4* will also offer an all-new Ubardamashii Super [illegible]

■ Although all the screenshots in this story show *SF4* from zany angles, the camera remains strictly side-view during play.

SF4's gameplay at a glance

What's Out:
Parries
Alpha counters
Tech rolls
Custom combos
Air blocking
Air fireballs

parry system for expert players), these advancements left casual players confused. "Even though you and I may have enjoyed the parries in *SF3*, we're fighting-game maniacs," Ono says. "*SF3* wasn't that popular, so a lot of players aren't really familiar with that system, and that might present an unnecessary hurdle for players who haven't been into fighters for a while."

But that's not to say that Capcom is paring *SF4*'s gameplay down to some archaic level. Even though many of the *SF3* and *Alpha* gameplay systems have been scrapped, Super combos—originated in *Super SF2 Turbo*—remain intact, joined by a souped-up new Ultra version (check the sidebar above for the full lowdown on these maneuvers). And hardcore *Street Fighter III* fans needn't be bummed out by the removal of that game's parry system—Capcom has a suitable replacement in the works. In fact, this new Saving system might actually offer untold tactical possibili-

ties. "The hardcore players are terribly important to us, so we have to give them a deep system to keep them interested," Ono explains. "*SF3*'s parries were in early versions of *SF4*, but we've pulled them out and replaced them with the new Saving system that broadens your possible options instead of limiting them." Saving uses a simple button combination to unlock a branching network of offensive and defensive possibilities depending on the player's skill level. Unfortunately, the system hadn't been implemented in the version we played, but we did get to watch Ono demonstrate its various uses. (Serious *SF* players should check out the sidebar on pg. 69 for an in-depth look at this pivotal new gameplay evolution.) Honestly, it's kind of ingenious and could fundamentally alter the concept of high-level *Street Fighter* play. But you don't have to master those intricacies to get use out of the move, either. "The great thing about the Saving system is

that it can be used by newcomers and expert players alike," Ono explains.

Balance remains the only missing piece in *SF4*'s gameplay puzzle. In the past, the series has had its difficulties equalizing its various fighters' strengths and weaknesses (remember Dhalsim's inescapable Yoga Fire trap in the original *SF2*?), but recent *SF* titles have offered surprisingly well-matched rosters. "We absolutely want our players to have a well-balanced experience," Ono says. "We're obviously thinking very hard about balance the entire time we're developing this title, but an online patch could also be a possibility if we run into balance problems down the road."

Fighting in the streets

As stoked as we were to play *Street Fighter IV*, we longed for a change of scenery after 45 minutes of beatdowns. Since the game's in such an early state, our myriad matches all took place in one stage—the same
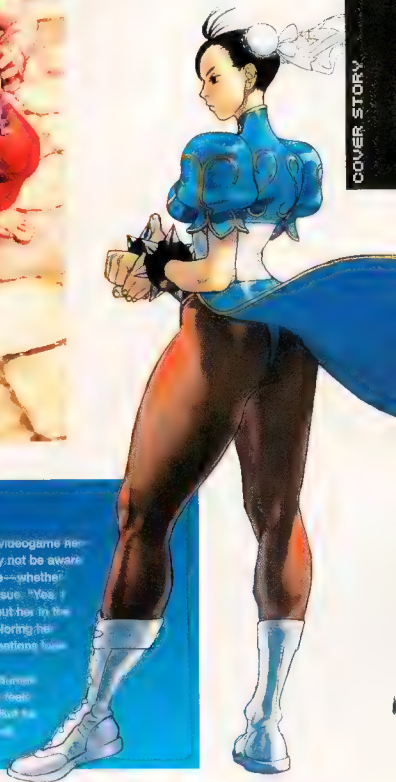
THIGH-DEEP IN CONTROVERSY

As the lone female character in the original *Street Fighter II*, Chun-Li has truly become an iconic videogame heroine, inspiring a staggering amount of fan art, cosplay, and spiked-bracelet fetishes. But you may not be aware of the shocking controversy that has ripped the Chun-Li fan community apart for nearly a decade—whether or not her thighs have simply gotten too damned big. Ono carefully weighs in on the thigh-size issue. "Yes, I witnessed as her thighs made a sudden jump into gigantism in *SF2*," he admits. "When we first put her in the game, her sprite was just an outline and her thighs weren't that big, but as the artists starting coloring her in, her legs got thicker and thicker. Surprisingly everyone on the [team] said [that] made her sometimes even more expressive and impressive, so they stuck...

[remaining text obscured]

3D throwback to Chun-Li's memorable Chinese *SF2* stage that frames all of our screenshots. While it's certainly colorful and nostalgic, the backdrop isn't quite there. "That stage you fought in is only about 50 percent done right now," says Ono. "We want this place to feel as if people actually live there, to impart a better sense of atmosphere with subtle details and plenty of motion."

One way of making the stages feel more alive will be to allow players to interact with them. "We're doing experiments with having elements in the stages react to being hit by fireballs, or when your character lands from a jump having the objects near his feet move in real time," says Ono. "One of the experiments we did was with actual chickens walking by the action, and if a fireball went past them they'd actually roast. We'll add little details like that, but we do need to make sure that the player's attention remains squarely on the two char-

acters fighting." Does this mean that we can hope for real-time elephant dung in Dhalsim's stage? Considering Capcom's effort to revisit the glory days of *SF2*, seeing additional 3D variations on familiar stage concepts seems like a safe bet. "We're going to make stages that remind you of past ones without being exact replicas."

Unsolved mysteries

Sure, the game looks early, but its heart is in the right place, and it has all the basic ingredients for success. So, when can you get it, and what will you play it on? Good questions, but not ones that Capcom's prepared to answer. "I mean this in all sincerity: We haven't decided for sure what platforms *SF4* will end up on, and if there will even be an arcade version, for instance," Ono says. "We're not looking to release it on a certain platform first and use that to collect info as a beta test and tune the game—we're instead taking the opposite

approach, by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each platform and making a version to suit each platform as needed." The version we played was running on a PC that had been tucked away in an arcade cabinet (and we also heard rumors of a test version hitting Japanese arcades in early 2008). While it might appear obvious that *SF4* is headed to Xbox 360 and PS3 based on its visuals, Ono suggests that Capcom could produce a PS2 or DS version if they deem the market suitable.

In this era of console-specific third-party games (and "timed exclusives" like *Lost Planet*), one has to wonder if *SF4* could end up allied with a single platform if the proper incentives were offered. But Ono doesn't seem interested in these so-called moneyhats. "Speaking personally as the producer, I'd like to get it out on as many platforms as possible and in as many hands as humanly possible," he says. "I don't think that I'd like to go the

■ SF4's colorful, stylized visuals purposefully hearken back to the
SF2 days, as does the soundtrack: Expect to hear plenty of remixes.

exclusive route...and I've made this known to the company as a whole, so we'll see how that turns out."

Not only is SF4's eventual home still in question, but its release window also remains shrouded in secrecy. 2008 would seem like an ideal time frame, given that it's Street Fighter's 20th anniversary and all, but Capcom isn't prepared to commit. "Of course, they've already announced the new feature film to mark the 20th anniversary, but there are no guarantees that SF4 will necessarily make it out in time for that," admits Ono. "It could be a year or two after that!"

Living up to the legacy

Videogame sequels don't get much bigger than Street Fighter IV, and attempting to recapture the magic of a history-making, genre-defining classic surely isn't an easy task. The gravity of the situation isn't lost on Ono. "What happens when you revisit something that people remember

from their youth?" he asks. "People will be very nostalgic about the game, and everyone will envision precisely how they want it to be.... At this early stage, I'm emotionally preparing myself for the inevitable backlash."

Based on our time with the game, Ono shouldn't be that worried: He's doing right by the franchise. Although he initially comes off as a naive dreamer, his passion for the project is palpable. "All of the titles that I've worked on in the past were interest-ing, but they were nothing like this," Ono admits. "I truly have a lot of love for Street Fighter, and I think about this as less of a game and more of a tool that allows people to enjoy the pure action of combat."

Perhaps the best advice we could give Ono would be to not place too much weight on the countless forum posts his game is sure to inspire. He admits to regularly checking many of Japan's most notorious mes-sage boards, and he was thrilled by

the positive reactions he saw to the teaser. "I think a lot of the internal pressure has been taken off now that the trailer is up and people seem gen-uinely excited about it," Ono says. "I can tell my superiors that, yes, people do want this...but now the question becomes can you make something to live up to the legacy?"

If SF4 somehow fails to do that legacy proud, Ono may go into hid-ing. He was alarmed to see enraged Monster Hunter fans posting his pic-ture on message boards after Capcom made some unpopular tweaks (he's also a producer on the PC version of that online RPG), and he worried that angry players might recognize him on the train to work and confront him. Irate SF fans could be worse. "I better be careful with SF4, because I really like going shopping in the States," Ono says. "But we're going to get it right, even if we have to keep tweak-ing and balancing until the moment the discs go to manufacturing." 🎮

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Déjà New

Street Fighter IV isn't the only new old game in town. From **Golden Axe** to **Bionic Commando**, the classics are making a comeback. By Erik Henriksen

"IF SOMEONE FORCED ME TO MAKE A SIDE-SCROLLING ACTION GAME in this day and age, I'd say I would have to quit my job!" says Tomonobu Itagaki. Fortunately, the man charged with modernizing the hit *Ninja Gaiden* franchise—which dates back to a 1989 side-scroller on the Nintendo Entertainment System—got to do things his way. "The only constraints that the NES version of *Ninja Gaiden* put on me were this," he says:

"One, the main character must be a superninja, and two, his name must be Ryu Hayabusa."

Of course, 2004's *Ninja Gaiden* for Xbox was not a side-scroller. Itagaki created a gorgeous, fiendishly difficult action game that spawned Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 installments, plus a bona fide sequel for the 360 next year. But making a killer remake isn't as easy as a certain ninja makes it look. It's just as easy to disappoint old-school fans (see sidebar for remakes that worked and didn't). Now more than ever, however, game publishers are digging through their back catalogs, finding classic titles they can "reimagine" into new games that'll inspire warm and fuzzy feelings. Why go through the bother of creating a new franchise, after all, when nostalgia sells?

Great expectations
Ben Judd was 14 when he first played 1987's *Bionic Commando*. "I

was staying over at my best friend Michael Yu's house," he remembers. "Back in the day when gaming was much smaller and when you pretty much only got four or so games a year, if one of us would get a game then the other person would crash at that person's house and we would play the new game all night." Impressed by the innovative swing mechanic that *Bionic Commando*'s main character, Radd, used to navigate the levels, Judd became an instant fan. Now he's producing Capcom's new *Bionic Commando* for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3.

Some things have changed—Radd now sports a less-goofy name, and the game is set 10 years after the original—but according to Judd, the core appeal remains. "There are new weapons, new enemies, and lots of new gameplay," he says. "If you had to compare the game to anything, I would say we are shooting for what *Ninja Gaiden* did. They also stuck with the same name but added in new enemies, powers, and gameplay. Yet they still try to keep key elements and features from the original game so that fans would appreciate the new title."

Fan support will only get you so far, though. "We care very much about the hardcore fans, but we also need to make sure that there is

The worst thing that could happen is if we called something *Commando* and then it was like *Commando*...in the year 3000 battling robotic aliens.

—Capcom Director of U.S. and U.K. Design Kraig Kujawa

enough appeal to propel the game beyond the 'nu retro' niche," says Nigel Cook, producer of *Golden Axe: Beast Rider*, the PS3 and 360 update of 1989's *Golden Axe* arcade game. "We need to find the correct balance to attract a wider audience without alienating fans of the original." The development team's solution, after consulting with fans as well as the creator of the original *Golden Axe*, was to pick a part of the 1989 arcade experience that really worked. "We created a new template that focused in on the main experience we wanted to create—namely, savaging your enemies with beast, blade, and magic in a fantasy world that has a gritty, stylish, and realistic quality to it," Cook explains.

As you'd expect, that world is filled with fan service. "We carefully sprinkle content that is familiar to fans of the old-school game yet is entirely new to an audience who may not have played the original arcade game or subsequent versions," says Cook. For example, in the original multiplayer *Golden Axe*, players teamed up to ride on creatures, fend off magic-stealing gnomes, and defeat the nefarious leather daddy Death Adder. In the single-player-only *Beast Rider*, the same ideas are there—just a bit different. "Our gnomes are darker, twisted versions of the original giggling arcade critters," Cook gives as an example. "But the mechanic is still there. Death Adder is back as the game's villain—he was simply too cool to leave out. And of course the beasts had to be there. One

of the elements of the original that everybody remembered was riding the creatures."

Don't you forget it

There are a lot of Xbox Live Arcade games where I boot it up, I play it for a level, and I either say, 'Hmm, that was kinda cool,' or 'That was cooler games to play,' or 'That was kind of *not* cool, and it's not the way I remember it,'" says Kraig Kujawa, director of design at Capcom's U.S. and U.K. branches—and a former *EGM* editor. Kujawa is working on *Commando 3*, a new PlayStation Network/Xbox Live Arcade title that takes its inspiration from 1985's *Commando* and its 1990 sequel, *Mercs*. "So what we really want to do is bring back these old [intellectual properties] and then update them, modernize them. There'll be enough there to kinda tap into that kid who remembers the arcade games, but then [we'll] modernize it enough so you don't walk away after the first level." Kujawa, too, is aware of the delicate balance in updating a beloved property. "I think the worst thing that could happen is if we called something *Commando* and then it was like *Commando* in the future, in the year 3000 battling robotic aliens," Kujawa jokes. "It's really dangerous to get in there and feel like you can fix something that's not broken." (Don't fear, *Commando* fans: *Commando 3* aims to capture that 1980s *Rambo* vibe, kicking you into three-person co-op as you once again rescue POWs and fire on several billion rounds of ammo.)

Ultimately, the process of making a good retro remake isn't much different from making any kind of game. "I think that in order to be successful you need to have a deep understanding and analysis of the original, plus the courage to cut out what you don't need," says Itagaki. "And more than anything, you need to have a clear vision of what it is you are trying to create and the determination to see that vision through. Franchise titles made by designers that don't possess these qualities—whether their game is a remake or a numbered sequel—are 100 percent bound to fail."

Also certain: As long as both old-school and new-school gamers continue to buy them, games based on retro titles will continue to multiply—and maybe even outgrow their '80s roots. "When all is said and done, I believe that the majority of the fans who played the 3D action version of *Ninja Gaiden* understood what I was trying to convey, and I believe they enjoyed it," says Itagaki, who was inundated with *Gaiden*-fan gripes back when he revealed his new direction for the series. "In that sense, it was a major milestone for me. It is because of this that I am now able to focus solely on the future and create completely new-game experiences with *Ninja Gaiden II* and *Ninja Gaiden DS*." ✦

EGM Extras: Outspoken Ninja Gaiden sensei *Tomonobu Itagaki* goes old-school on us in an exclusive interview at [████████], and feed your nostalgia with our podcasts at [████████].
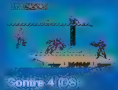
> REMAKES IN THE MAKING

Golden Axe: Beast Rider
PS3/XB360 • Summer 2008

What's the same? The original power trio of barbarian, dwarf, and Amazon warrioress return—along with their creatuery transportation—to topple the evildoing Death Adder.

What's changed? It's now a single-player-only (ugh!), combat-heavy 3D adventure with Amazonian Tyris Flare as the main character and featuring many more rideable creatures.
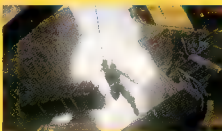
Bionic Commando
PS3/XB360 • 2008

What's the same? Proving that any amputee can be handi-capable with the right prosthetic, the game's hero wields a mechanical arm to swing from platforms and sock it to baddies.

What's changed? That arm can do more than grapple—you can yank buildings onto enemies or chuck debris. The swing-anywhere ability will set your Spidey-game sense tingling.

Commando 3
XBL Arcade/PSN Store • January 2008

What's the same? The mid-'80s coin-op original took its shoot-everything gameplay lessons from Schwarzenegger and Stallone flicks, and so does this over-the-top sequel.

What's changed? *Commando* was single-player. Its sequel, *Mercs*: two-player. Now three gung-ho guys can team up for online blasting/vehicular manslaughter in this 10-buck title.

Tecmo Bowl
XB360/PS3
Summer 2008

What's the same? The Nintendo Entertainment System gridiron great finally returns in '08, and from what we've heard, it will retain the series' instantly accessible controls (such as those ridiculously simplified defensive mechanics).

What's changed? Since EA Sports now owns the exclusive rights to the NFL license, expect this new *Bowl* to feature a bunch of fictional squads and players.

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REVIEWS

84
SUPER MARIO GALAXY
(GAME OF THE MONTH)

> CONTENTS

SOULCALIBUR LEGENDS 82

ROCK BAND 92

THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS

An Intergalactic Fantastic Voyage
Return of the king

ASSASSIN'S CREED AND SUPER MARIO GALAXY. Two very different games share the spotlight this month. With Mario, we have a superstar returning to glorious form. Seriously, this guy is in a class with the likes of Vinny Testaverde and Julio Franco in terms of longevity, and the mustachioed one is still undoubtedly in his prime. He again shows the world how platformers should be done—well, minus that spring power-up. In doing so, he also nabbed Game of the Month honors and is on the inside track for Game of the Year.

Creed didn't fare as well. If you've been following this game, you've likely noticed mixed reviews, and this holds true with EGM. Yet I still have to play this game. Partially to see where on the scale it rests for me, but also simply because it's hard not to play a game surrounded by so much drama. Plus, Mario can't last forever, right?
—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.

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

ACE MARIO **9.0** EXCELLENT

SO-SO MARIO **6.5** AVERAGE

SPRING MARIO **1.5** TERRIBLE

PAGE
80
Nights: As dreamy as ever?

PAGE
88
Assassin's: Hanging on by ▪ thread

PAGE
94
Crisis 4: Lost in transition

THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

Take a good, long look—you never know when they'll pop up in your hood

Dan "Shoe" Hsu
Editor-in-Chief/Editorial Dir.
Three *Mario* reviews (*Party DS*, *Galaxy*, and *Olympic Games*) in two months? That smile isn't joy; Shoe's in some sort of cuteness-induced sugar shock/coma. Maybe *Smash Bros.* (Feb.) can beat it out of him.
Now Playing: *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Halo 3*, *Street Fighter IV*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com

Jennifer Tsao
Managing Editor
Jennifer has lots of New Year's resolutions for '08. Lose weight playing *Rock Band*! Lose weight playing *Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games*! Lose weight playing *Wii Fit*! She's gonna be way active in '08.
Now Playing: *Rock Band*, *Ratchet & Clank Future*, *Portal*
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com

Bryan Intihar
Previews Editor
Bryan rented out his bio space to *Team Fortress 2*, the best multiplayer experience on a console that people *aren't* playing. Go buy *Orange Box* so you can enjoy this gem along with him. Like, now!
Now Playing: *Call of Duty 4*, *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Uncharted*
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com

Michael Donahoe
News/Features Editor
Playing *Assassin's Creed* made Michael realize he doesn't fancy killing folks in games...or in real life, for that matter (phew!). But he does enjoy giving nice back massages—heal the pain, don't kill it. That's what he says.
Now Playing: *Orange Box*, *Call of Duty 4*, *Super Mario Galaxy*
Blog: egmhoe.1UP.com

Nick Suttner
Reviews Intern, 1UP.com
After a ridiculously close *Rock Band* loss in the finals of the media outlet Battle of the Bands, Nick figured there might be ▪ worthwhile use for the GunCon 3 after all. To be continued....
Now Playing: *Skate*, *Team Fortress 2*, *Scrabble*
Blog: rocksolidaudio.1UP.com

Shane Bettenhausen
Executive Editor
Working on this month's cover story inspired Shane to sharpen up his fisticuffs by sparring with the interns...who have obviously yet to master that complex new "Saving" system.
Now Playing: *Street Fighter IV*, *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Burnout: Paradise*, *Crisis Core: FFVII*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com

Crispin Boyer
Senior Editor
Some folks thought Crispin's 4.5 review score for *Assassin's Creed* was a little harsh, but try telling that to the family of the innocent controller he smashed against the floor after one particularly frustrating mission.
Now Playing: *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Orange Box*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com
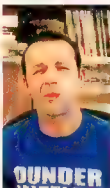
Greg Ford
Reviews Editor
Reading this month's cover story got Ford all nostalgic for the days of donnybrooks on the docks, Vegas Strip showdowns, heated rumbles in the jungle... oh, and *Street Fighter II*. Man, he loved that game.
Now Playing: *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Halo 3*, *Call of Duty 4*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com

Jeremy Parish
Features Editor, 1UP.com
Parish despairs at the prospect of ever catching up with all the great games he missed this fall because he was reviewing, uh, *other* great games. Too bad he can't be at multiple places at once, otherwise the holiday game rush would be far easier.
Now Playing: Everything!
Blog: jparish.1UP.com

Joe Rybicki
Staff Reviewer
With the arrival of *Guitar Hero III* and *Rock Band*, Joe's been spending some time reliving his sordid past as ▪ punk-rock star. Here he is onstage at some basement club in New York City. Oh, such angst!
Now Playing: *Halo 3*, *Guitar Hero III*, *Rock Band*, *Portal*
Blog: opmjoer.1UP.com

Also on deck...

Sam Kennedy
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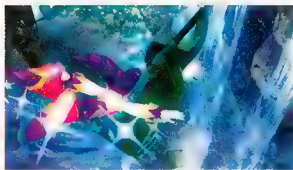
■ A strict time limit is often your most deadly adversary in *Nights'* boss battles.

Wii

NIGHTS: JOURNEY OF DREAMS

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

Sega rewrites its Harlequin romance

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

SHANE
7.0
GOOD

MILKMAN
7.5
GOOD

SAM
7.0
GOOD

The Good: Lovely aesthetics, lush music
The Bad: Lean on content, some confusing bosses
Unplayable: The new Wii Remote controls

✦ **SHANE:** If you harbor fond memories of the original *Nights Into Dreams* for Sega Saturn, you'll surely welcome this decade-late sequel with open arms...well, at least once you eschew the abhorrent new Wii-mote control scheme for a Classic Controller or GameCube pad.

Journey feels slavishly faithful to its predecessor in every respect, from the parallel mission structure for its two preteen protagonists to its imminently hummable Enya-meets-Disney soundtrack. Despite a few meager tweaks, the core gameplay remains intact: As the weirdly asexual Nights, you soar past surreal landscapes on a set, on-rails path, balancing speed, precision, and acrobatic tricks in order to finish with a high score. This old-school approach may not click for newbies (or the young tykes who will appreciate its for-babies-only narrative), but few Wii titles offer such addictive, finesse-driven mechanics and rewarding challenge. If only the same could be said for the amateurish 3D platforming levels, confusing boss encounters, and undercooked A-Life virtual-pet minigame....

✦ **MILKMAN:** I'm a little disappointed that the new *Nights* didn't blow me away like I was hoping it would. But the original Saturn game was so innovative, so complete, that nothing short of a next-gen reinvention was going to satisfy me 11 years later. That said, I did enjoy playing this conservative sequel, thanks to the re-created sym-phonic score, the top-notch voice acting, and the solid controls (provided you ditch the Wii-mote). It'd be easy to write this one off as child's play, but it has a hidden depth that reveals itself over time.

✦ **SAM:** As someone who didn't have that affinity toward the original as many others, I found *Journey* bizarre at first but quickly became captivated thanks to its fantastical atmosphere. While the game suffers from some basic issues, like uneven graphics, unskippable story sequences, and a lack of checkpoints, it offers a welcome challenge and a gameplay experience unlike any on the market. Just be sure to at least plug in a Nunchuk and you'll be flying fine. 🕹

Wii

RESIDENT EVIL: THE UMBRELLA CHRONICLES

■ **Publisher:** Capcom ■ **Developer:** Cavia
■ **Players:** 1-2 ■ **ESRB:** Mature

Don't shoot till you see the dead in their eyes

The Good: *Resident Evil* works as a *House of the Dead* rip-off
The Bad: Terrible voice acting and cheesy cut-scenes
Wii Zapper: Makes headshots easier

✛ NICK: Shooting clouds of zombie vomit out of the air probably isn't the first use you'd think of for the Wii Remote, but here we are. *Umbrella Chronicles* isn't quite a light-gun game, nor is it a first-person shooter; think of it as an on-rails whirlwind tour of the series (sans *RE4*), retold and experienced from the perspectives of most everyone involved. The point-and-pull shooting is straightforward and mostly satisfying despite a lack of pinpoint precision and zombies that always seem to take slightly too long to kill, though the "horror" aspect gets lost since there's precious little time to build tension.

It's also a surprisingly meaty game, and having a second player gunning alongside allows you even more time

to shoot up the environment for hidden goodies. Series fans will devour it as an excuse to flesh out the *Resident Evil* canon, but it features enough casual slaughter of the undead for anyone to enjoy.

✛ ANDREW P: Not being the biggest fan of the traditional *RE* games, I appreciated the capsule look at the series' story arc, as it was far more interesting than the other gun-based spin-offs in years past. To me, *Resident Evil* was always about intimidating foes, limited resources, and the wonderfully cheesy/kinda serious approach—*Umbrella Chronicles* gets that part right. The gun cursor lags a bit behind my actual aiming with the Wii Remote, and some of the boss

battles are tough, but I was pleasantly surprised by the varied environments and plethora of firepower.

✛ MICHAEL: I find it just a little funny that Sega's classic light-gun series *House of the Dead* has way more life than *Umbrella Chronicles*. Sure, it's great to take a gun-toting trip through the *Resident Evil* saga, but the actual creature-killing lacks the ghastly whimsy of the *HOD* games; unloading oodles (and oodles) of bullets into the undead just wasn't as gratifying as I thought it would be. Play with a buddy, though, and it's way more fun. And easier—some bosses in the game are unnecessarily difficult without a companion at your side to help shoot down the frustration.

Wii

SOULCALIBUR LEGENDS

■ **Publisher:** Namco Bandai ■ **Developer:** Namco Bandai ■ **Players:** 1-2 ■ **ESRB:** Teen

Merely a disappointing sideshow on the stage of history

The Good: Nice character visuals
The Bad: Repetitive gameplay, enemies, and environments
Special Guest: Lloyd from *Tales of Symphonia* (GC)

✛ MATT: Controls aside, almost every aspect of *Legends* feels dated. It's a basic action game in which you run down a corridor into an empty room, fight enemies until the progress-blocking transparent blue walls disappear, fight a boss by performing the same couple attacks over and over, read a bunch of text while looking at character art, then repeat, mostly with the same environments, enemies, and art. Because what the *Soul Calibur* series always needed was more story.

But the controls are what you should care about, and if you can get past the game's whole button-masher-with-forearm-swinging mentality, the setup actually works. You can pull the Remote back to launch enemies into the air, mix in Nunchuk movements

to perform special moves, and parry enemy attacks. It ends up feeling like a lot of work without enough payoff since the scenarios are so bland, but the mechanics could have been far worse, and the seven-character roster adds a nice bit of depth.

✛ MILKMAN: Put simply, *Legends* feels like a bonus mode from a bigger game (think Tekken Force in *Tekken 4*) thanks to its sheer repetitive simplicity. You basically swing both sticks to jump and create various attacks, for hours, with little variation. I appreciate it, however, when a company takes a well-known franchise and successfully tries something new with it. And since *Legends* controls well and gives you seven beloved characters to play with,

I found this seemingly simple diversion worth the time.

✛ SHANE: Wow, you guys are being far too kind to this sloppy spin-off. *Legends* succeeds solely as fan service, delivering a hefty chunk of backstory for its characters. As a stand-alone action-adventure game, it's an absolute mess. These *Calibur* stars deserve better than wandering through countless crudely designed levels dispatching throngs of mindless foes. Like Milky says, imagine *Tekken*'s Force mode, but expanded to an undeservedly epic scale, rife with dullness and repetition. As for the haphazard motion controls "actually working," I had just as much success randomly flailing my arms around.

Wii

SUPER MARIO GALAXY

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

In space, no one can hear you scream (with delight)

✦**JEREMY:** *Super Mario Galaxy* begins with a fleet of airships bombing the Mushroom Kingdom back into the Stone Age—yes, the same airships that patrolled Bowser's turf in NES classic *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Coincidence? Not likely. *Galaxy* is probably the closest thing we'll ever see to a 3D version of *Mario 3*, and those iconic flying boats set the tone quite nicely. Like that 8-bit classic, *Galaxy* sees Mario tackling a huge array of wildly varied worlds one bite-sized chunk at a time, collecting wacky power-ups, and eagerly rewriting the rules of platform gaming; it's rooted in and expands upon its genre-defining predecessor. (By which I mean *Super Mario 64*; sorry, *Super Mario Sunshine* fans, but this is back-

to-basics gameplay, and squirt guns have no place here.)

That fact alone should be enough to send anyone who ever owned an NES rushing for the nearest store to pick up a copy of the game, but wait! It gets better. *Galaxy* also makes a good case for Nintendo's grand business scheme, bridging the divide between its hardcore fans and nontraditional newcomers with challenges that range from mild to insane. The controls are generally spot-on (although your brain may balk at the prospect of dodging enemies while running up a wall) and the game makes effective but tastefully restrained use of the Wii Remote. *Galaxy*'s overall structure is open enough that even a casual player can beat Bowser with a bit of practice...

but earning all 120 Stars throughout the game demands mad skills and maddening determination. He looks cute—*too* cute, really (see sidebar)—but Mario isn't afraid to hand you your ass every now and then.

Most impressive is the way that *Galaxy* happily defies your expectations about what platform games can do, flipping gravity on a whim and constantly asking you to perform stunts that would be suicidal (or impossible!) in any other game. Yet it never breaks the rules of good design; once you understand how Mario's new worlds work, you'll find that the game subtly defines the limits of every situation with tiny visual cues. Which isn't to say you shouldn't push those limits—in fact, you're often rewarded

Sure. Spring Mario can keep right back on perpetual motion leads to accidental deaths.
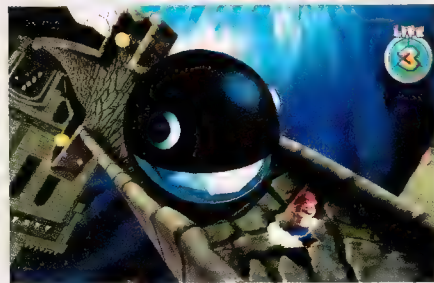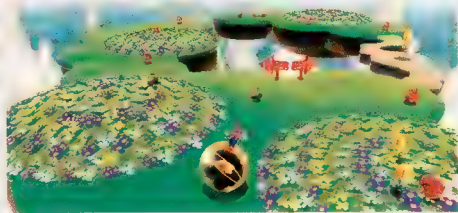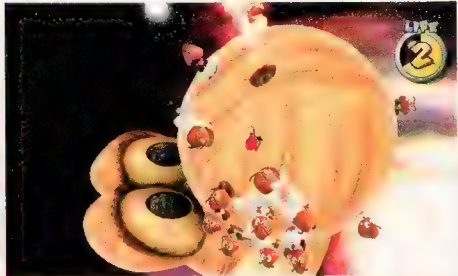
The Emasculation of Mario

When did Mario become a hypersaccharine exercise in cuteness? The older games teetered between surreal and psychedelic, whereas *Galaxy* comes off like a sugar-dipped Care Bear. Let's compare:

CLASSIC MARIO

- Sounded like a gruff pro wrestler
  - World was eerily alive yet appreciably silent
- Turned into a take-no-names, badass hammer-flinging turtle
- Stomped enemies in a giant wind-up shoe

MODERN MARIO

- Sounds like a shrieking castrato
- World is obnoxiously alive and squeaky
  - Turns into a fuzzy-wuzzy, adorable bumblebee
    - Feeds candy-like star bits to cuddly baby stars

for indulging your whims and doing things that you suspect you maybe shouldn't try.

Galaxy isn't without its shortcomings—I was particularly annoyed to find that the reward for beating the game is the ability to play through a dozen of the much-hated coin-collecting stages. (Gosh, thanks.) And the camera, in true *Mario* fashion, works just well enough that its occasional lapses are doubly frustrating. It wouldn't hurt if the Wii were just a tiny bit more powerful, too; the graphics are almost, but not quite, totally great. These are ultimately tiny flaws in a game that's otherwise breathtaking in its scope and originality, though. The platformer is a creaky dinosaur of a genre these days, so it's only right that the man to make it feel fresh again is the one who's defined (and redefined)

it these past 25 years. Welcome back, Mr. Mario...we've missed you.

→ SHOE: Let's put Jeremy's list of "tiny flaws" in perspective: Those postgame coin-collecting stages are just bonus hours on top of an already long, fulfilling experience. The camera almost never gets in the way (although I do wish I had more control over it). And the graphics are just fine, giving *Galaxy*'s fantastical, surreal characters and environments just enough detail to look new-gen without making everything unrealistically "realistic."

But Jeremy's comparison of *Galaxy* to *Super Mario Bros. 3* is apt. Besides the specific similarities (see sidebar), both offer such amazing, diverse worlds to explore—I feel like it's Christmas morning every time I unlock a new galaxy. One minute I'm swim-

ming inside an enormous ocean planet, the next I'm dismantling a giant toy robot, who *is* the entire stage. Even traditional level designs get fresh-thinking makeovers. In ice worlds, for example, Ice Mario freezes water as he skims over it, creating instant walking surfaces that temporarily stick around, even after he thaws out of his power-up. Seemingly old-school side-scrolling stages require some creative navigating with alternating gravitational pulls that literally turn everything upside down. And just when it seems the galaxies are starting to repeat their themes, antimatter creeps in, phasing parts of the levels in and out of reality, making for some of the trickiest (and coolest) *Mario* gameplay ever.

That's not to say everything's changed in Mario's universe. The controls are still pinpoint-perfect and

REVIEWS

■ If a landmass in *Galaxy* has round edges, its gravitational field prevents Mario from falling off.
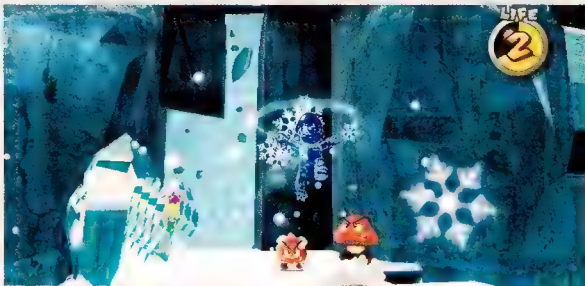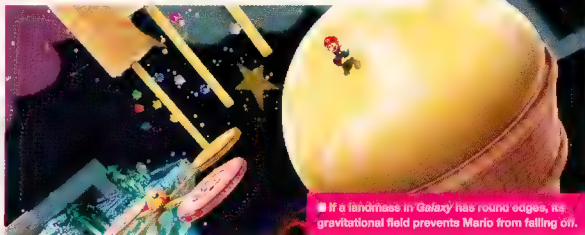
Mario 3 Reborn

Not convinced that *Super Mario Galaxy* channels the awesomeness of *Super Mario Bros. 3*? Try these on for size:

Bite-sized levels
SMB3's tiny levels were strung together like *Galaxy*'s individual planetoids
Wild power-ups
Galaxy has seven power-ups total—more than any *Mario* game since *SMB3*
Airships
Bowser's airship fleet is everywhere! (Alas, the Koopa Kids are still MIA)
Bolt platforms
Those screw-and-bolt platforms are even trickier in 3D

instantly accessible (although the 360-degree upside-down-ness may disorient some players). The pacing is also classic *Mario*: The mix of short versus long levels and leisurely paced romps versus high-stress platforming keeps *Galaxy* on a roller-coaster ride of fun that lasts for hours.

Where series like *Zelda* are starting to stagnate, *Mario* continues to innovate and impress. So if you're worried about the Wii becoming too casual a gaming machine, spend a few hours in this *Galaxy*—it's a grand, grand adventure that's impossible not to love.

✦SHANE: The cynic in me agrees wholeheartedly with Jeremy's complaints about *Galaxy*'s occasionally unreliable camera and less-than-stellar graphics. Hell, I'll even lodge some

additional grievances: Compared to classic *Mario* power-ups such as *SMB3*'s Raccoon Tail or *Super Mario World*'s Cape Feather, nearly all the transformations Mario performs in *Galaxy* seem limited and gimmicky, and a few (Spring, Bee, and Fire Flower) actually manage to make hopping and bopping on these planetoids *less* fun. And the coolest power you'll discover—an exhilarating Remotedriven flight suit—can only be used in the game's hub world. Bummer.

But what truly shocks me is that not one of those crabby nitpicks keeps this game from being an instant classic. Sure, we all expect *Mario* games to offer flawless control, but you really learn to appreciate just how instinctive, responsive, and versatile Mario's running and jumping can be when you're vaulting through bizarre

gravitational fields and running across ceilings. Plus, unlike the one-note *Super Mario Sunshine*, *Galaxy* throws such a startling variety of environments, challenges, and puzzles in your path that you honestly never know what to expect next. And that's not simply praise for how vastly varied the game's worlds feel or how open-ended the progression has become, but also for the innovative, creative pacing that you'll find within each individual stage. And although it initially seems like an afterthought, the rewarding new two-player mode offers a groundbreaking way to bring a buddy along for the year's wildest and most enjoyable ride. ᗰ

EGM Extras: *Can't find all 120 elusive Stars? Head to* **EGM.1UP.com** *for our invaluable* Galaxy *SuperGuide.*

A wood splinter has pierced the bicep... We need to carefully extract it.

New Blood's controls are as unforgiving as a bill from your HMO.

So far, so good... We're almost done.

The coolant seems to be working. Now, use the scalpel to excise the dead tissue...

Now drain the tissue from the pericardium.
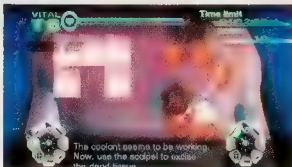
Wii

TRAUMA CENTER: NEW BLOOD

■ **Publisher:** Atlus ■ **Developer:** Atlus ■ **Players:** 1-2 ■ **ESRB:** Teen

The Good: Co-op mode is kinda fun
The Bad: Single-player gets frustrating
The Pacemaker Operation: Almost gave Jeremy an aneurysm

Sicko

➔ **A. FITCH:** A few operations into Atlus' second Wii surgery sim, I had to perform multiple skin grafts on a burn victim. But no matter how fast I worked, the grafts would constantly burst. Frustrated, I attempted the level again with Jeremy as my co-op assistant. We saved the patient, and the diagnosis became clear: New Blood is designed for two players...*even in the single-player game.*

And that's hardly the only malpractice worthy of a Michael Moore–style investigation. The brain-dead nurses from the first game are back and as vague as ever, and the controls require way too much precision from your Wii-mote and Nunchuk, even on easy—I'm no brain surgeon for a reason! Too bad, because much of the

sci-fi nonsense from the first *Trauma Center* has been excised in favor of realistic maladies like appendicitis and brain aneurysms. After three games, the developers *should* be full-fledged M.D.s...so why do they keep making the same med-school mishaps?

➔ **JENNIFER:** Fitch has it right—this is the ER you hope the meat wagon doesn't cart you to. The ridiculously unbalanced gameplay—simple in some parts, hellishly difficult in others—is unfortunate, because I really, really, really wanted to play the game this should have been. Suturing wounds, draining fluids, conducting ultrasounds under pressure...these are wonderfully creative applications for the Wii's unique mechanics. The story,

told in cheesy text-based cut-scenes, could have been interesting, too. But the game's simply impossible to play at times, which is disappointing for someone new to this unique franchise.

➔ **JEREMY:** Yep. I love the concept of *New Blood*—saving lives is a welcome change from killing everything in sight—yet the pleasure flatlines when you realize that it's easier to complete a real medical residency than to finish some of these operations solo. It's not challenging, merely hard—and all because of arbitrary difficulty spikes and fussy controls. Unless you like hours of trial-and-error memorization, the two-player mode is the only way to keep your blood pressure down in this operating room. 🔬

counter ⓧ 🔴 grab break
Ⓐ dodge

■ Patience is a virtue—these flashy counter-attacks are the coolest (and quickest) way to kill.

PS3/XB360

ASSASSIN'S CREED

■ **Publisher:** Ubisoft ■ **Developer:** Ubisoft Montreal ■ **Players:** 1 ■ **ESRB:** Mature

Not quite a killing

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

MICHAEL
7.0
GOOD

ANDREW P.
6.0
AVERAGE

CRISPIN
4.5
BAD

The Good: Awesome animation, climbing walls, cool story
The Bad: Repetition, repetition, and repetition
Worst Ending: Since *Halo 2's*

✚ **MICHAEL:** It kills me that *Assassin's Creed* is so close to being a complete gaming experience. From the second I started Ubisoft's stealthy assassination simulator, I was sucked into—or more like jacked into—a creative story that begged for a kick-ass conclusion. And I kept intently playing thinking I would get it—boy am I an idiot. See, *Creed* wasn't built with a beginning, a middle, and an end. No, it was built with a beginning, a middle, and an advertisement...for its inevitable sequel. Because of this, the actual game feels stretched out to saltwater-taffy proportions.

This doesn't just affect the story, either—the core gameplay also suffers from the insistence on saving things for a follow-up. While, yes, exploring

each city is amazing—especially scaling walls—the main objective (assassinating nine Third Crusaders) is overly repetitive. You perform each hit in the same way: Conduct an investigation (eavesdrop, pick pockets, etc.), find the target, and murder them. At first, it was a thrill to kill, but once I realized I had to do the same thing over and over, I began to lose interest. This isn't to say I didn't enjoy playing *Creed*—it attempts a lot of ambitious things (a simple but ironically complex control scheme, a realistic combat system, and a living world that reacts to your every move) and it almost succeeds at every one. But it's apparent that these grandiose ideas may have been a bit too much to master the first go-round. If *Creed* had been given a little more

time, I'm confident it would have been a more successful hit.

✚ **ANDREW P:** The premise intrigues, but *Assassin's Creed* is an incomplete template based on multiple other games. Much like *The Legend of Zelda*, it has a beautiful environment with controls that eventually feel natural—but you're never given a satisfying reason to explore. It has an open city design much like *Crackdown's* that's authentically detailed, but the districts within lack distinction. The satisfying centerpiece assassinations recall *Hitman*, yet the investigations leading up to each kill are copied-and-pasted throughout—you're climbing up the same lookout tower, saving the same falsely accused

Horsing Around

When collecting the optional hidden flags loses its luster, try...

Body bowling
Chuck commoners into each other to send 'em flying. Then pick up the spare!

Beggar beatdowns
Lure the annoying panhandlers into alleys and pound on those poor souls.

Back rubs
Killing people is cruel, so repent by giving your pals massages. Tap the Blend button to work those magic fingers.
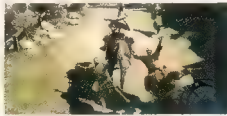
Trot tackles
See how many people you can run down with your galloping horse. Bonus points for plowing through a pilgrimage!

souls, and hearing the exact same anti-Crusader speeches every hour, on the hour. When it breaks from this, *Creed*'s squandered potential is briefly revealed: a trickier ascent up that viewpoint, a challenging parkour path of escape...this is where the game could have been great. Instead, your fellow assassin has *very important information*, but can't tell you what it is until you collect a number of flags in under three minutes. This city feels new, but we've been here before.

→**CRISPIN:** I'll agree that *Creed* comes with amazing components. The greatest-of-ease rooftop-roaming acrobatics are exhilarating; put the team who came up with that mechanic in charge of a parkour simulator. Sword combat—which grows in offensive and defensive finesse throughout the game—is as much fun to watch as it is to play. Drinks all around for the gang who handled that one, as well as for the guys behind the sand-swept Middle Ages decor and

M. Night Shyamalanian plotjinks.

If only all that good stuff had a happy home here, but the rest of *Creed* is no good. These guys already described the déjà vu–inducing mission structure. What makes it all worse is the way the game piles on annoyances the longer you play. A clone army of in-your-face beggars and street-brawling lunatics hound you, for instance, throwing off your stealthy style and forcing you to retry failed missions (and rewatch unskippable mission briefings) until you finally get them right. It all pseudo-ends with a badly handled sequel tease, but count me out if the next *Creed* is more of this repetitive crap. 🐎
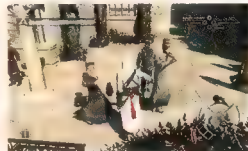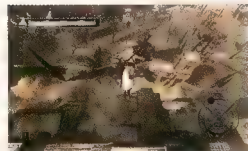
EGM Extras: *Finding all those flags proving to be a pain in the ass? Check our SuperGuide at* **EGM.1UP.com.**

XB360 (also on PS3)

PS3/XB360
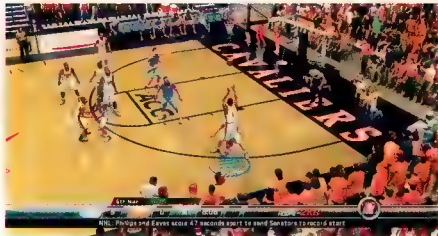
NCAA COLLEGE HOOPS 2K8

■ **Publisher:** 2K Sports ■ **Developer:** Visual Concepts
■ **Players:** 1-8 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

A next-gen threepeat

✦ **TODD:** A No. 1 seed in every gameplay aspect, *College Hoops 2K8*'s victory over *March Madness 08* is decisive. To counter EA's superb pressure-D mechanics, 2K implemented *NBA 2K8*'s Defensive Lock, so with the pull of a trigger, I have a fighting chance against Tyus Edney–quick guards. And since I'm an atmosphere whore like Intihar, I love the 6th Man meter (which measures how pumped up the fans are and can give you a performance boost) and the way the crowd roars to life after a home-team dunk, a key missed free throw, or a big steal. My main issue is with the bitter-sweet Dynasty mode: I love the drills that let me key on one aspect of one player's game during off-days, but recruiting is an unpleasant mess unless you take serious notes, and scouting ends up being too time consuming. But since gameplay is what matters most, go ahead and cut down the nets for the NCAA basketball champion.

✦ **BRYAN:** It's a good thing Todd isn't on the NCAA Tournament selection committee—he's a bit too generous when it comes to seeding. The A.I. here still needs work, as you'll find little off-the-ball movement on offense and bouts of lackadaisical play on defense (even the most talented squads are suckers for back-door cuts). But at least *2K8* finally feels like a college basketball game. From the crazy crowds to the way the camera shakes while shooting free throws, this edition even outshines longtime atmosphere king *March Madness*. Still, those A.I. hiccups need to be addressed before I'll award it the top slot in the Big Dance.

✦ **GARNETT:** On the court, this game doesn't decisively win any-

thing. At first, it feels like *2K8* nails the college b-ball tempo, but as I played more, I found this tempo to feel artificial. For instance, too much of the ball handling relies on moves that lock you into an animation. Meanwhile, big men refused to take it to the hole all too often, no matter what combos I pulled off. Sill, I love how the game delivers the college hoops spirit (the crowd is great) and the fact that the 6th Man meter actually changes with the game's flow.

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

TODD
7.5
GOOD

BRYAN
7.0
GOOD

GARNETT
7.0
GOOD

The Good: The roar of the 6th man
The Bad: Recruiting is a snoozefest
Now Featuring: South Carolina Upstate!

NCAA MARCH MADNESS 08

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

More gloss than game

✦ **TODD:** What a letdown! I had high hopes for *March Madness* this year, but this one's all sizzle and very little steak. I was starstruck by the great menus, sharp players, thrilling atmosphere, and the Dynasty mode stacked with smart options (the recruiting challenges are my favorite). But once I stepped on the court, this game felt *off*. The ball moves too quickly, the players move too slowly, passing is too deliberate, and rebounding is laughable—instead of reaching for the ball, players jump straight up, arms held high. Plus, when I tried to reach for a loose ball, players from both teams were so measured that it looked like they were helping each other lift a large rock! I like the low-post improvements, but it still has a ways to go. Outside of a little more pregame gloss than its rival, *March Madness*' gameplay doesn't come close to outshining *2K8*'s.

✦ **BRYAN:** Todd, in the words of basketball's big men, "Get that s*** outta here!" You couldn't be more wrong about *08*. First off, the game moves at a decent clip as long as you increase the speed at the settings menu. And too-deliberate passing? Oh, so I guess you'd rather have players blindly tossin' the rock up and down the court. Anyway, as you said, it's the series' new low-post mechanics that make this one a contender; in addition to the reworked moves set on the offensive end, you have more control of defenders on the block. Too bad, though, that the arenas aren't as electric as they used to be—2K's offering definitely has the edge there.

✦ **GARNETT:** I'll give you that the right-stick controls on offense and defense make for some epic battles down on the blocks, but they'd

better, since the game all but forces post play down your throat. Other than the odd kick-out for a three, the art of a good jumper gets completely marginalized. Going all high-flying causes problems, too. Get stopped on a drive and suddenly your baller becomes a bumbling jester who almost always loses the rock. *March Madness* is still a decent hoops sim, but I have to wonder: Why does it think that school spirit amounts to taunting and Dickie V ranting?

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

TODD
6.0
AVERAGE

BRYAN
7.5
GOOD

GARNETT
6.5
AVERAGE

The Good: Low-post game works
The Bad: Rebounding animations are atrocious
Gotta Love: 70 classic teams (like '83 NC State)

"Til the Sand- man he comes

4x

132,585

■ If *Guitar Hero* were to mate with other instruments, it would look like this.

PS3/XB360

ROCK BAND

■ **Publisher:** MTV Games ■ **Developer:** Harmonix ■ **Players:** 1-4 ■ **ESRB:** Teen

The Good: Amazing multiplayer, excellent accessories
The Bad: Not nearly as fun by yourself
The Crowd Loves You: Singalongs get everyone pumped

We could rock all night with this one

+NICK: *Rock Band* is one of those concepts that's so inherently dynamite that if it simply delivers on its promise it's more than enough. And it certainly does deliver: Built squarely in the *Guitar Hero* mold (by the ex–*Guitar Hero* team), the game lets you rock out to scrolling notes and chords by matching the colored buttons on the (surprisingly substantial) new Stratocaster guitar, whaling on the four pads and foot pedal of the drum set (with real sticks), or if you're not too shy, busting a lung on the mic (*Karaoke Revolution*–style). If you can get three friends over (and another guitar for bass), the experience shines and provides about as much fun as you can have with a videogame.

The (multiplayer-only) World Tour mode is the best way to play, a massive nonlinear progression of special set lists and cities to unlock, with fans, managers, and roadies to garner (though considering the game has 58 songs, they repeat far too often along the way). The Solo tour isn't nearly as interesting, though, and simply consists of unlocking new tiers of songs to play that obviously weren't built for a single instrument. It's still great fun, but the song selection—while mostly excellent—was chosen with the entire band in mind, so expect more than a few awkward silences if you're by yourself. *Guitar Hero* is still the way to go for lone wolves, but if you have the space, the manpower, and the means ($170), *Rock Band* unquestionably, unequivocally rocks.

+MICHAEL: While *Guitar Hero* is trying to save its popularity by catering to its loyal group of hardcore headbangers, *Rock Band* is playing to a more casual crowd. Both master the feeling of playing real music, but *Rock Band* is less about racking up high scores and more about celebrating the euphoric nature of playing fake instruments to real music. In that sense, it makes it the ultimate party game. Sure, it's not nearly as much fun to go it solo, but neither is playing an actual instrument by your lonesome. Wrangle four wannabe rockers, though, and it's amazingly awesome.

As good as the experience is, I have to admit I wasn't stoked to play a few of the songs ("Celebrity Skin" from Hole? Uh, no thanks!). But it's really

What We Wanna Rock

We've heard some seriously big promises when it comes to *Rock Band*'s supposed flood of downloadable content lined up for the future. We love the game, and our wallets are ready for a bruising, but what one album do each of our reviewers want above all others?

NICK
Album: *Relationship of Command*
Artist: At the Drive-In

"*Rock Band* has its share of classic rock and current metal, but very little of anything resembling '90s postpunk/indie rock/hardcore, which is a shame, because it's damn fun to play. From the thunderous drum intro of 'Arcarsenal' to the spastically driving guitar hooks of 'One Armed Scissor,' *Relationship of Command* has plenty of rock to go around for every instrument. Singers would also have a particularly interesting challenge on their hands, with lyrics like 'mechanical panaceas absolved by history, phonetic paralysis inflicted through morality.' You know you want it."

MICHAEL
Album: *Dookie*
Artist: Green Day

"It's criminal that Green Day isn't *already* in *Rock Band*. Seriously, the pop punk kings' third album is positively perfect for the game. Unlike some bands, all the members of Green Day are mighty talented musicians (meaning you won't find any boring filler here, no matter which instrument you pick). No lies—every single song on this CD is a classic. And they all manage to offer everything you could possibly want in a copycat music simulator: sweet lyrics, great guitar and bass licks, and enough Animal-approved drumbeats to keep your arms sore for days. Make it happen, Harmonix!"

JENNIFER
Album: *More Fun in the New World*
Artist: X

"This game demands a crazy but delicate balance of amazing vocals, ripping guitar licks, and wild-man drums. So what other band to pick than Los Angeles punk royalty X? I'm dreaming of howling as Exene Cervenka on 'Breathless,' living out my Billy Zoom guitar fantasies in 'True Love,' or doing my best DJ Bonebrake drums on 'I See Red.' Plus, since this one's somewhat forgotten in the annals of great rock 'n' roll, a full *Rock Band* download would have the added benefit of exposing a whole new generation of musicians to the album's punk rock virtuosity."

hard to complain when it does have such a well-rounded lineup—everything from "Maps" by the Yeah Yeah Yeahs to Metallica's "Enter Sandman" is here, and that's before you factor in upcoming downloadable content. So even if *Rock Band* has to open for *Guitar Hero III* for now, it's only a matter of time before this series becomes the new headliner.

✚JENNIFER: Casual crowd? Michael, you've got to be kidding. I didn't realize what a hardcore lone wolf I was until I tried to assemble a band of four musically-minded friends, one skilled enough to not totally suck on drums, two others OK on guitar and bass, and one drunk enough to not mind sounding like a complete fool rapping to "Sabotage" (I have newfound respect for the Beastie Boys' mic skills). Yes, the full band package is revolutionary and impressive, and those willing to put in the time (or play online, which doesn't happen to be

my thing) will love it. But, perhaps as in real life, being in a band takes commitment—it's not as simple as getting together as many people as you can and hitting the stage with whatever instrument strikes your fancy that night. The band roles are largely determined at the outset (in multiplayer, the band leader must always be present, and in solo, you can't switch instruments midcareer), so it's not quite as pick-up-and-play as I'd like.

Yet even with the oddly repetitive World Tour and the less than perfect song selection (downloadable content should solve that), the bottom line is this game takes the essence of *Guitar Hero*, galvanizes it with drums, and *then* tops it off with a karaoke game. Sure, *Rock Band*'s not for the faint of heart, but I guess that's what rock 'n' roll is all about. 🎸

MX VS. ATV: UNTAMED

■ **Publisher:** THQ ■ **Developer:** Rainbow
■ **Players:** 1-12 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

The higher they jump, the harder they crash

The Good: Waypoint races still awesome, 16-vehicle races
The Bad: Realistic in all the wrong places, dated graphics
Best Online Minigame: "Snake"

✚ JOE: Developer Rainbow has put out some really spectacular arcade racing games. So it's disappointing to discover that with *Untamed* it appears to be edging away from that arcade style and in the direction of a more realistic racing experience.

"Realistic" may sound good to you. But the trouble is that it's inconsistent: You can still get unrealistic air—you just can't land it. You can still ride at a near-90-degree angle along the side of a hill—but if you make the slightest contact with other racers, you're toast.

Untamed does have a good bit going for it, especially its fantastic cross-country waypoint races and its frantic 16-vehicle supercross competitions. It's positively bristling with different vehicles and competition types,

with even more game types available through its (competent, though occasionally laggy) 12-way online multiplayer. But ultimately, the game's not realistic enough to satisfy sim fans... and it's too realistic to be as much fun as Rainbow's previous games.

✚ GORD: If it's designed to travel off-road, you'll find it in *Untamed*. But it's not the vehicles or their crazily fanciful physics that make this game. It's the seemingly infinite variety of competitions, all of which are available online: indoor, outdoor, circuit, checkpoint, stunts, freestyle. Indeed, breezy yet riveting online minigames such as "Snake," "Graffiti," and "Tag" are high points. That said, the racing inevitably devolves into a confusing hubbub of

spilled bikes (that often and annoyingly will suddenly jump from one spot to another) whenever all 12 human riders are displayed simultaneously.

✚ GREG S.: One of my gripes with *Untamed* has to do with the weird concessions made to facilitate loads of different vehicles competing in the same game. Why is it that when my ATV plows into a motorbike the biker keeps on going while my rider flies through the air? Why does my monster truck feel like it weighs about 50 pounds? The interaction of various vehicles in this game is just as bad as the arcadey-but-trying-to-be-realistic physics. *Motorstorm* does off-road racing better than this. So do *Dirt* and *Sega Rally Revo*.

TIME CRISIS 4

■ **Publisher:** Namco Bandai ■ **Developer:** Namco Bandai ■ **Players:** 1-2 ■ **ESRB:** Teen

Now this is a Crisis Zone

The Good: Shooting mostly works
The Bad: Wasting $90, first-person shooter levels
Best Played...and Cheaper: In an arcade

✚ NICK: When paying *90 dollars* for a light-gun shooter you're used to playing in movie theater lobbies, you would expect to be able to feed it virtual quarters when you die, right? *Time Crisis 4* disagrees. With the sometimes seemingly unavoidable hits you'll take while popping in and out of cover, it's a frustrating struggle to simply make it to the end of each level intact enough to tackle the laughable bosses. That's OK, though; whether you're playing the mundane arcade levels or the incredibly slow and equally hideous new first-person shooter levels—where you control your movement and the camera with the physically painful new analog sticks on the included GunCon 3—you likely won't stick around long

enough to run into these problems.

Multiplayer is passable (though cramped with two windows squeezed onto one screen) and the story provides buckets of unintentional comedy, but the real joke is on PS3 owners expecting anything resembling a "new-gen" shooter.

✚ BROOKS: No arguments here; the graphically challenged first-person stages—with their barren locales and cookie-cutter henchmen—scream disaster. And man, those horrendous plastic analog nubs. My advice: Have some Advil handy for when the arthritic pain builds up in your cramped hands early in the game. If it weren't for teaming up with a bud in Arcade mode's co-op, which embraces what

makes this game OK, *Time Crisis 4* would be a complete abomination.

✚ G. FORD: A complete abomination sounds right. Single player and some of the minigames can be enjoyable in bursts, but a fundamental flaw hangs over everything. I could never calibrate the GunCon 3 perfectly with either setup routine. Surprisingly, this isn't a huge problem through most of the game since you're constantly shooting and can always see where your shots are hitting onscreen, but good luck trying to snipe the tires of a moving semi with an always-off-target gun. An onscreen reticule option would have helped—but that's only possible in those FPS stages you should be avoiding. And yeah, again: $90.

MARIO PARTY DS

■ **Publisher:** Nintendo ■ **Developer:** Hudson Soft
■ **Players:** 1-4 ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

Is that a plumber in your pocket?

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

A. FITCH
6.5
AVERAGE

BROOKS
6.5
AVERAGE

SHOE
6.5
AVERAGE

The Good: Most minigames are fun
The Bad: The luck-based events, some games repeat too often
Story Mode: Can be tough!

+A. FITCH: While it may be the 10th game (in just eight years!) in Nintendo's long-running board game–based party series, *Mario Party DS* is more innovative than you'd think: It's the first truly portable version of the game, as 2005's *Mario Party Advance* (GBA) didn't include the franchise's conventional four-way multiplayer.

For the most part, the transition to the DS is reasonably successful, albeit predictable: You'll roll dice, travel around the game board, collect stars, and play minigames, which take advantage of the portable format and offer some decent stylus- and mic-based gameplay. With over 60 minigames in all, you'd expect a lot of variety...except that some games repeated two or three times per ses-

sion and quickly grew tiresome, while others triggered only once...during our entire playthrough!

Like any *Mario Party*, this one's harmless fun, but the repetitiveness just drives home why the wacky, dynamic *WarioWare* has been crowned Nintendo's real party king.

+BROOKS: I like my music loud, my steak medium rare, and now, my *Mario Party* on the DS. Why? Tiny splitscreen events don't burden the player, since everyone has their own screen. Also appreciated: four-player support on a single cartridge—complete with minimal load times. While *Mario Party DS* triumphs in these areas, Fitch makes a good point about the repeating minigames, especially

during short games (10 dice rolls each). Oh, and for a game of luck, Shoe must have made a deal with the devil, because he never loses!

+SHOE: The second screen is great for maps and expanded stages, and the minigames are quicker and easier to get into now (since each player can read the rules and tips on his own DS at his own pace, and the game is better at demonstrating the action before each match starts). But like with *Mario Party 8* on the Wii, I must ask: Why? Why only take partial advantage of your innovative hardware? Half the events don't even bother with the touch screen or microphone, leaving us with too many uninspired, Nintendo 64–era minigames.

SOCOM: U.S. NAVY SEALS TACTICAL STRIKE

■ **Publisher:** Sony CEA ■ **Developer:** Slant Six
■ **Players:** 1-4 ■ **ESRB:** Teen

Conduct worthy of a court martial

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

JOE
6.0
AVERAGE

DARREN
6.5
AVERAGE

CRISPIN
6.5
AVERAGE

The Good: Execution of a complex strategy
The Bad: Having your complex strategy ignored
The Infuriating: "I'm sorry sir, I can't do that."

+JOE: Oh man. The fundamental idea of *Tactical Strike* is *so* good: Planning out intricate strategies for my SEAL team and executing them simultaneously at the touch of a button gives the feeling of a hyperstrategic *SOCOM*, with vastly more deliberate pacing and the need for even greater care than what fans of this shooter series are used to. When it works, it works really, *really* well.

If only my SEALs weren't such complete *idiots*. They ignore commands, wander into enemies' field of view, and happily take fire from attackers they claim they can't see well enough to shoot back at. What's worse, the game commits the almost unforgivable sin of spawning enemies in areas you've just cleared out.

On top of all that, *Tactical Strike* is absurdly stingy with checkpoints—and absurdly generous with load times, which is an awful combination. If you have the patience for it, the game can be really rewarding...but I don't have that kind of patience.

+DARREN: Hey Joe, where's camera control on that unforgivable gaming sins list? It'd sure be sweet to clearly see what the hell's going on. Oh, and ask me how much fun it is watching trigger-happy A.I. squadmates spoil a surprise attack. What kills me, though: *Tactical Strike* has moments of greatness. The *Full Spectrum Warrior* vibe makes for some smart portable play. That strategic team planning and stealthy single-player

combat is fun. It just needs to be more consistent...and controllable.

+CRISPIN: My SEAL team certainly wasn't the smartest squad (they'd occasionally let the bad guys mosey up and fire point-blank), but I didn't experience the level of idiocy that the other reviewers report. I also didn't find as many opportunities to get tactical. Each mission spans a huge map dotted with more objectives than you can accomplish during your commute, but I found my team forced through many kill-corridor choke points, and I rarely bothered to split them up. Instead, my strategy was to load my sniper with ammo and take out evil-doers from afar. It was satisfying—just not in an armchair-general sort of way.

PS3

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3
■ **Publisher:** Midway ■ **ESRB:** Mature

With *Haze* delayed into 2008, this multiplayer fragfest deserves the attention of every first-person-shooter fan. Technically, *UT3* has a single-player campaign, but pretty cinematics aside, it's little more than a training ground for the game's true calling: online multiplayer. With smooth-running, gorgeous visuals, the ability to download user-generated content, and a pick-up-and-play style that ensures even novice players will get a few kills, *UT3* doesn't screw around.

✦ **BOTTOM LINE:** An impressive shooter, but don't expect to remember the storyline.

Wii

PS3

DS

LINK'S CROSSBOW TRAINING
■ **Publisher:** Nintendo ■ **ESRB:** Teen

As a showpiece and introduction to the Wii Zapper it's bundled with, *Link's Crossbow Training* doesn't inspire faith in the peripheral—we found no comfy way to hold it, and it lacks the ergonomic prowess of even its 22-year-old NES father. Stick with the normal Wii Remote/Nunchuk combo, though, and you'll find *Crossbow Training* to be a surprisingly fun, albeit limited, shooter that's more interesting than most Wii party games out there.

✦ **BOTTOM LINE:** It won't last forever, but *Crossbow Training* provides a surprisingly satisfying—and cheap ($20)—slice of *Zelda*.
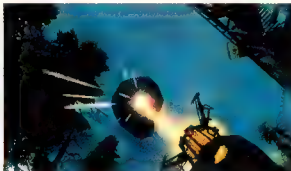
HALF-LIFE 2: THE ORANGE BOX
■ **Publisher:** Electronic Arts ■ **ESRB:** Mature

PS3 players had to wait an extra month to find out if the cake really is a lie, but now their *Orange* unboxing day has arrived. In the *Box: Half-Life 2* with two minisequel episodes, plus the hilariously clever puzzle game *Portal* (wherein lies the cake conundrum) and the online shooter *Team Fortress 2*. It's a solid-gold compilation—although this is the only version not handled in-house by developer Valve. That must explain the second episode's distinctly choppy visuals.

✦ **BOTTOM LINE:** Despite *Episode Two's* case of the jitters, such a vast quantity of quality gaming is a no-brainer buy.
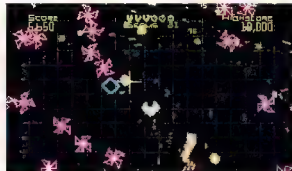
GEOMETRY WARS: GALAXIES
■ **Publisher:** Sierra ■ **ESRB:** Everyone

Surprisingly, the DS version of *Geometry Wars: Galaxies* matches the Wii version (reviewed last issue) almost exactly, with the only notable difference being the superior control system. Just poke the stylus where you want to shoot. Easy. The game lends itself very well to handheld play, thanks to the short, sharp level objectives and that trademark *Geo Wars* presentation. Of note is the multiplayer mode unique to the DS version that passes enemies back and forth like *Tetris* blocks when you zap them.

✦ **BOTTOM LINE:** Simple, effective, and beautiful. One of the best shooters on DS.

THE SALES CHART
Amazon.com's Top 20 for Oct/Nov

#	Name	Platform	EGM Scores		
1	**Super Mario Galaxy**	Wii	9.5	10	10
	Collecting all the stars in *Mario Galaxy* ain't easy, but those who actually take the time to seek 'em all out will be rewarded with a special character.				
2	**Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare**	XB360	9.5	8.5	9.5
	Call of Duty 4 doesn't just deal with military dudes battling a bunch of evil terrorists. It also deals with hardcore rhyming—watch the credits for a wack rap.				
3	**Wii Play (with Wii Remote)**	Wii	4.5	6.0	5.0
4	**Halo 3**	XB360	10	10	9.0
5	**Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day!**	DS	8.0	7.0	6.0
6	**Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock**	PS2	Not Reviewed		
7	**The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass**	DS	8.0	9.0	9.0
	Zelda series director Eiji Aonuma recently stated in an interview that he'd be down to do a remake of the SNES classic *Link to the Past* in 3D. OK, do it!				
8	**Assassin's Creed**	XB360	7.0	6.0	4.5
9	**Half-Life 2: The Orange Box**	XB360	10	10	9.5
10	**High School Musical: Sing It!**	Wii	Not Reviewed		
11	**Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!**	DS	8.5	9.0	9.5
12	**Dance Dance Revolution: Hottest Party Bundle**	Wii	Not Reviewed		
13	**Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock**	Wii	Not Reviewed		
	The Wii version of *Guitar Hero III* rocks, well, softly, actually—right now the sound only plays in mono. Might wanna fix that problem, Activision. Just sayin'.				
14	**Carnival Games**	Wii	Not Reviewed		
15	**Final Fantasy Tactics: The War of the Lions**	PSP	8.5	8.5	8.0
16	**Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare**	PS3	9.5	8.5	9.5
17	**Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga**	Wii	Not Reviewed		
18	**Flash Focus: Vision Training in Minutes a Day**	DS	Not Reviewed		
19	**Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction**	PS3	8.5	9.5	9.0
20	**Assassin's Creed**	PS3	7.0	6.0	4.5

> SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

Get the Most Suck for Your Buck, Part II

Trading in on $19.75 worth of tragedy

Seanbaby earned his suckonomics degree from the prestigious International Correspondence Schools, where he's now pursuing a PhD in TV-VCR repair. Also, heating and air conditioning.

TWO ISSUES AGO, I TOOK $100 to the game store and bought as much sadness as that could get me. Exhaustive testing revealed that my purchases totaled over nine Phil Collinses' worth of despair (9.3 Su-Su-Sudio Crystals). But how sad can a pile of garbage really make you when you know that it's worth *100 dollars*? I could even tolerate singer/songwriter Phil Collins himself if I knew in the back of my mind that he could be sold or traded. The only way I could keep Phil Collins from winning was to take this pile of garbage worth $100 and somehow prove that it wasn't.

So I took the pile back to the store. GameStop has a very simple game-return policy—so simple, in fact, that last time I was there I was given a 27-page Trade Guide, 10 pages of

which were used to explain the trade-in process. Let's see if I can do it in fewer words: Trade games for money, idiot. What'd that take...five words? And I wasted one of them calling the consumer an idiot. I realized that this must be the same thought all advertising copy writers have: "My job would go so much faster if you weren't an idiot, every person ever!!"

Now to further explain my new challenge as set down by the International Sadness Commission: With

the previous games' trade-in value, I must purchase as many terrible games as possible. I don't want to show off how I made it all the way to 9th grade, but I liken this to an earthworm letting soil pass from one end of its body to the other. The dirt coming out is still just dirt, but in a way, it's kind of poop now. After I'm done trading in my old bad games for new old bad games, I will reevaluate the pain my original $100 has caused.

After trading in my original batch,

> **The only way I could keep Phil Collins from winning was to take this pile of garbage worth $100 and somehow prove that it wasn't.**

PAGE
100
Retro: We cure the T-Virus

PAGE
104
Hsu & Chan: Takin' it to the streets

which included such hits as *The Guy Game* for Xbox and *Soul Plane* on DVD, I somehow turned my $100 into $19.75. And according to my 79-foot-long receipt, this included every Ultra Edge Member and Presidents' Day Sale trade-in bonus possible. If, for some reason, I didn't know what numbers were, I'd be certain I was the craftiest customer they'd ever had. I wasn't, though. In fact, I just gave the nation's largest game-store chain $80.25 for the privilege of having two used, boxless copies of *James Cameron's Dark Angel* in my apartment for 60 days.

You might notice in the final tally (see sidebar) that three items no longer had any value. They wouldn't take back *Mary-Kate and Ashley: Winners Circle* because they no longer carry Game Boy Color games. In addition, they wouldn't rebuy the *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer Strategy Guide*, presumably because it shouldn't exist in the first place. Now that I think about it, no reason was given. It was silently handed back to me as if I were the only one who could see it. Unless I can solve this mystery, I may be the only person who knows that in order to beat *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer*, you walk away from the starting point while pressing the attack button near enemies.

The final unreturnable item was my least-favorite game, possibly ever: *Orphen: Scion of Sorcery*. After I left the store, I wrote down the clerk's reasons for not accepting the game: "Too damaged. Too scratched. Too old. You'll get more without it." That's right: They'd actually give me *more* money if I didn't return *Orphen: Scion of Sorcery*. This was funny to me until I checked the disc, saw it was immaculate, and heard the other clerk tell the customer next to him that his 2006 game *Call of Duty 3* was "too old." GameStop talks to its customers exactly how I talk to my girlfriend when I don't want to take her shopping—I give a stack of excuses so grand, varied, and irrational that trying to debunk them each individually makes *you* the crazy one. Now that I think about it, f*** you, GameStop.

With my $19.75 of trade-in value I could only afford three games

despite all the discounts I get from being an exclusive Edge customer. Fun fact: I think all customers are in this club.

VeggieTales: LarryBoy and the Bad Apple (PS2)
Cost: $7.19

As a student of the obvious, I've noticed that Christian music isn't as good as Unqualified music. So imagine how quickly I formed an opinion of this game's theme song, a Christian rock song about a cucumber who fights crime by launching toilet plungers from the side of his head. So awesome! Listen to the premise: You're a religious vegetable Batman spoof, LarryBoy, battling against Temptation, an apple who wants you to eat chocolate.

Chasing this theme, literally every cut-scene features a cliché or an old line with one of the words changed to "chocolate." For example, "With great chocolate comes great responsibility." That doesn't mean anything! That's not a joke! That's not even a pun! Even if the word "chocolate" were inherently funny in any kind of context, that's laziness beyond any god's capacity for forgiveness.

If the Rapture came right now, here's what the VeggieTales writer would scream: "Lord, I've been tirelessly doing your work! For instance, on level two when the asparagus says that an apple a day keeps the doctor away, I thought to change a couple words to chocolate! Argh!! Why are you chocolating me with lightning bolts!?"

Death by Degrees (PS2)
Cost: $7.19

For the simple cost of sponsoring an overseas child in need and 25 of his friends, I bought *Death by Degrees*, a collection of loading screens starring *Tekken*'s Nina Williams. It's perfect if you like 3D fighting games but hate controlling them properly. The controls' analog-stick pressing and wiggling seemed so unsuited for gamer brains and human hands that I thought the game might have been designed for an octopus. Another clue is that before each stage it prompts, "Squirt the screen with your ink sac to continue."

Mad Maestro! (PS2)
Cost: $3.59

This is a rhythm-action game about a fairy helping a small-town orchestra conduct—you know what? If anyone had any interest in this game whatsoever, it wouldn't be retailing for $3.59. It was the only game in the entire store I could afford with the remains of my trade-in, and it's only out of sheer dumb luck that it sucks.

Two months ago, I had turned $100 into 11 games, a book, and *Soul Plane*. I'm now down to a critically panned *Tekken* spin-off, evangelical food monsters, and a fairy-music thing. I read somewhere that there was a law against destroying U.S. currency. After seeing what I've done, I hope that's not true.

Above: Death by Degrees and Mad Maestro!

> RETRONAUTS PRESENTS

WTFiction!?
No. 2: Resident Evil

Deciphering silly stories By Jeremy Parish

Resident Evil isn't just a charming zombie game filled with hilariously bad voice acting. If you've played more than one, you also know it's a confusing morass of tangled conspiracies and backstabs. And that's exactly why it's No. 2 on our list of wacky videogame stories.

START
HERE

1: UMBRELLA CORP.

Umbrella

The Umbrella Corporation is responsible for just about everything bad in *Resident Evil*. It began as a helpful pharmaceuticals business, but later switched to creating mutagenic Ebola-based bioweapons. In the wake of Raccoon City's destruction, Umbrella went bankrupt—although certain ex-Umbrella employees are still maintaining the nastiness quota.

FOUNDED

2: OZWELL SPENCER, EDWARD ASHFORD, JAMES MARCUS

Between plotting, backstabbing, and killing their employees, it's a wonder that Umbrella's founders had time to develop zombie viruses. But they did—and their infighting began at Umbrella's Spencer Mansion, ultimately revealing the corporation's ambitions and leading to its downfall. And the destruction of Raccoon City, too. What swell guys.

RESEARCHED

3: VIRUSES

The weapons of mass consumption—from Progenitor to the T-Virus to its substrain the G-Virus, *RE*'s viruses share in common an alarming ability to turn normal people into violent, bloodthirsty monsters. The heroes battle these gruesome diseases with firearms, presumably because vaccinations wouldn't be nearly as exciting.

LOCATED IN DEVELOPED

4: RACCOON CITY

It all began in Raccoon City. Just your average American town...well, except for its population of 100,000 ravening zombies. Alas, the American government nuked the city off the map at the end of *RE3*, so we'll only ever be able to revisit its postapocalyptic comforts through prequels and flashbacks.

SHUTS DOWN DON'T PROTECT

CAUSES DOWNFALL OF

DOUBLE-CROSSES OPERATIVE

BATTLES AGAINST

ENEMIES

5: ALBERT WESKER

"Why won't you die?!" Wesker seems to get killed a lot, but he always seems to pop up again, just looking slightly less human. An Umbrella employee masquerading as a STARS member, Wesker tried betraying his comrades only to be killed by his own creation, the Tyrant. He later switched allegiance, hoping to steal Umbrella's secrets for a rival corporation—and even later hoped to cultivate Las Plagas.

DOUBLE-CROSSES

6: RPD/STARS

The Raccoon City Police Department and its Special Tactics and Rescue Service are charged with maintaining order in the city—which is a wee bit tough, considering they're up against undead freaks.

7: ADA WONG

A mysterious woman who helped Leon Kennedy for a while... then turned coats and helped Wesker instead. But actually, she was double-crossing Wesker and his mysterious shadow organization in the service of a totally different shadow organization. Uh, OK.

8: LOS ILLUMINADOS

A sort of newfangled Umbrella from Spain, Los Illuminados is a secret organization that achieves its nefarious ends by kidnapping presidential daughters and using brain parasites to mutate and control its underlings.

SPIES ON

DOUBLE-CROSSES

PURLOINS SECRETS FROM

OPERATIVE

9: LEON KENNEDY

After surviving a zombie-infested Raccoon City and putting a stop to a sex-starved mutated version of Umbrella's top viral researcher, former STARS agent Leon Kennedy went to work for the American government. There he did STARS-like duties with the added benefit of having the president's daughter totally crush on him as he put an end to Los Illuminados.

10: JILL VALENTINE

11: CLAIRE REDFIELD

12: CHRIS REDFIELD

Smash Bros. Brawl

February Issue (#225) • On sale January 15

GAME OVER

BRAWLING IT UP

Nintendo Wii's soon-to-be megahit **Super Smash Bros. Brawl**—sequel to GameCube's best-selling game of all time, *Super Smash Bros. Melee*—is nearly upon us. Check back next month as we blow the lid off everything this stuffed-to-the-brim fantasy fighter has to offer, including its star-studded character roster (Sonic! Solid Snake! Ike! Wait...who's Ike?), customizable environments, creative online features, and the completely revamped single-player adventure mode. You won't want to miss it.

2008's bound to be a crucial decision year for voters...and gamers, too. We're prepping a massive preview feature covering titles such as **Grand Theft Auto IV, Alan Wake, Killzone 2, Final Fantasy XIII**, and **Wii Fit**. Which ones deserve your support? Which ones won't live up to their campaign promises?

And for all you overachievers out there, you won't want to miss our investigation on players' obsession with unlocking achievements and getting high gamerscores. It's an addiction, man.

Last, but not least, our notorious Review Crew returns with **Devil May Cry 4, Burnout: Paradise**, Wii's underwater scuba sim **Endless Ocean**, and more. See you in 30....

(All planned editorial content is subject to change.)

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