

THE No.1 VIDEOGAME MAGAZINE

E G MTM



INSIDE:

BURNOUT: PARADISE

SHAWNIMALS'
NINJATOWN

NFL TOUR

SUPER MARIO
GALAXY

UNREAL
TOURNAMENT 3

ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY 11

SPECIAL
EDITION
COVER

#4 OF 12:
DONKEY
KONG

> MUSHROOM KINGDOM COME

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Postgame Report

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Rock Band, and more

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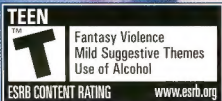
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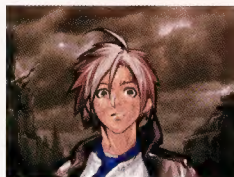
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Language
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HUNTING SEASON OPENS 2.05.08

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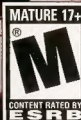
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EGM.1UP.COM

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Burnout: Paradise tips
Who needs Google maps? We've got you covered.

Halo WTFiction?
We make sense of *Halo*'s massive plot.



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

> EDITORIAL

Banned



IT USED TO BE GAME COMPANIES would pull advertising if they wanted to punish a magazine for unfavorable coverage. In more recent times, they're pulling the coverage as well. It's an interesting setup: Don't let us see the games, and we can't write anything bad about them. But don't let us see the games, and we can't write anything good about them, either.

Gamemakers have been taking issue with our reviews for as long as EGM's been around (almost 19 years now). It goes with the territory: Be honest and tough with your critiques, and you're going to piss just about everybody off at some point. But when I took over as editor-in-chief in 2001, I also wanted us to get more real with our previews. I was tired of the press-release rehashes our industry had become accustomed to, so I asked for more sincerity and opinions from our writers and editors. Naturally, you have to be fair—the products aren't finished yet, after all—but judging from reader feedback, our opinionated previews have been a hit.

Except with some game publishers, of course. Less-than-totally-positive previews don't sit well with those who are used to those press-release rehashes. Combine that with our candid reviews, and you can imagine the consequences that we have to face constantly.

For the time being, you'll get little, late, or no coverage of the following products: anything *Mortal Kombat* (they didn't like our reviews), anything from Sony's sports department (ditto), and now, anything from Ubisoft (it seems our coverage of *Assassin's Creed* was the last straw). So in case you're wondering why you're seeing so little of these games in our magazines and on our websites, now you know.

What do we do now? Nothing. We won't treat these products or companies any differently, and we'll just cover them to the best of our own abilities, with or without their support. Because, after all, we're writing for you, the reader—not them.

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editor-in-Chief

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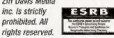
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LETTERS

➤ kindness on the internet, racism in rock band, and hot mass effect sex

▶ TRIVIAL ISSUE

This month's EGM question:

What are the names of the two Eskimos in *Ice Climber*?

E-mail the answer to EGM@ziffdavis.com

(subject head: Trivia: EGM #223) for a chance to win something potentially awesome.



Letter of the Month The kindness of strangers

Late one mid-October night, our apartment was robbed. The thief took, among other things, almost every last bit of my videogame collection. The empty shelves where my games used to reside hurt my heart.

After the police left, my wife and son went to bed. I stayed up, unable to sleep. I decided to hop on my old PC and go to my favorite place on the Internet: the EGM NGR [non-game related] board on 1UP's forums. I posted about our robbery situation and started to receive immediate replies of support. Soon, NGR regulars started to offer some of their old systems and games to help replace what I lost. I had not expected this at all and was amazed at the generosity.

The next morning, there was a thread stuck at the top of the page for the purpose of collecting items and money to donate to help replace my stolen stuff. I thanked the board members and told them that while appreciated, this was not necessary, that the thought alone was enough. But that didn't stop these guys. Stuff started to pour in. I started to get PayPal donations and games in the mail. I even received an Xbox 360, which I never even owned before the robbery! I was truly blown away by all of this.

The support and generosity of my fellow members of EGM NGR has greatly helped my family get through a tough situation. Thinking about what they have done for us still brings a tear to my eye. They could have reacted to my post like 98 percent of the rest of the Internet and been a bunch of jerks, made fun of my situation, and done absolutely nothing. Instead, they opened their hearts and made something completely amazing happen.

—Joel Capwill

That's a beautiful ending to a tragic tale. Well done, people.

Better late than awful

I just read the "Unfinished Business" article in EGM #223, and I wanted to throw my support behind those developers who are willing to forgo the holiday boost in sales in order to make sure that they're putting out a quality product. Sure, seeing that *Super*



Rock Band: the next generation.

Smash Bros. Brawl is delayed again is kind of a bummer, but if the game came out tomorrow and felt rough or unfinished, all the waiting we've already done would be in vain. I think Shigeru Miyamoto said it best: "A bad game is bad forever." A delay is only temporary, and I've never been disappointed by a game that was delayed for a significant amount of time. Hip, hip, delay!

—John Cogburn

While we agree with the sentiment, don't assume a game's going to be good just because it was sent back into the shop. Have we learned nothing from John Romero's famous PC flop *Daikatana*?

Coming 2009: Tejano Band

I don't agree with the target audience

of *Rock Band*. African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and any other people who don't like heavy metal and rock are purposely overlooked. Gamers come in all races and colors, and *Rock Band*'s songs should reflect that. They left out many of the greatest artists of all time. Disco, jazz, R&B, hip-hop, Latin, rap, and pop—where are they? My daughter asked me if the makers of this game were racist. Maybe you can answer her?

—Jon Harris

You're right—it must be a racist conspiracy. How else to explain the fact that a game called *Rock Band* is full of rock songs?

Reel change

I was reading your *BioShock* article in EGM #222 ["Not Like the Others"] >



For writing this month's LOMT, Joel gets a 360 game, like maybe *Dead Rising*.

HOW HARDCORE ARE YOU?

Your proudest gaming moments

The next contestant in our monthly Hardcore Gamer Photo Contest

I have been collecting NES games since I was about 10. I have been called everything from geek to fanatic to obsessed. But that doesn't stop my friends from coming over to play these games for hours at a time! My collection consists of 789 NES games, although some are different versions or labels of the same games. I also have an extensive role-playing game collection about 130 for every other system (love my RPGs). —David Hassemer

Guys have NES-ing instincts, too.

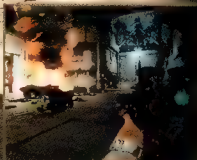
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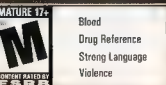
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■ Is it wrong for a man to love a pansexual, tentacle-headed blue humanoid?

Well, of course you would think that, because you're clearly not hardcore enough.

Enemy mine

Just wanted to point out an error in your recent holiday gift guide ["Present Dense," *EGM* #223]. In the section about *BioShock*, you said that my "enemy" could slip *Pipe Dream* into his DS. But sadly, the DS cannot play *Pipe Dream*, nor any other pre-GBA games.

—Jak Der

Er, yeah! That was the point! It would make your enemy extra-special sad! Because, uh, the game won't play! At all! You're not buying any of this, are you? All right—we'll admit that we screwed that one up.

Bait and switch

Remember the trailer for *Killzone 2* we all drooled over back when the E3 trade show was a huge deal and Pluto was still a planet? We began to expect incredibly fast, real-time, high-def visuals. But did developers deliver?

Take a look at *Halo 3* and *Call of Duty 4*. No one can deny the jaw-dropping effects and textures. Hell, they're both advertised to be 1080p! Says so right on the box!

So what's with all the fuzzy-looking crap everywhere? It turns out the "1080p" is simply upscaled from *Halo 3*'s native 620p and *COD4*'s 600p, 620 and 600! That's barely a notch up from the standard 480 lines of resolution for standard-definition TV. Granted, that's why we have the fluid animation and credible effects, but come on. 600?

Will we have to wait for the next generation to see sharp, true-to-life models and textures, and effects at a smooth 60 frames per second?

—Fei Li

Patience is a virtue...it always takes a few years for designers to really learn how to exploit the power of a new game console. We're pretty sure that *Killzone 2* will, in fact, sport some impressive 1080p graphics when it finally hits later this year, even though many recent PS3 titles have topped out at 720p. It's also important to consider the fact that 1080p is still a relatively recent addition to the Xbox 360. And it's still not for everyone: Only gamers who've hooked their consoles up via HDMI or VGA cables can take advantage of the snazzy new resolution. Plus, most 360 games don't output a "native" 1080p signal, but rather a lower

resolution that is then upscaled through by doubling each "line" of graphical data. Confused yet?

I/O error

Why doesn't BioWare allow homosexual relationships of the male kind in *Mass Effect* while lesbian sex is allowed? The setting of the game is in the far future, where human relationships have changed to allow more room for other species. I should have an option to play as a character very similar to Capt. Jack Harkness from *Doctor Who*, kicking ass while snogging anything with a pulse.

—Dan Cora

We asked BioWare for the straight story on this gay issue, but their PR people told us the developer was unavailable for comment.

One step ahead

Why do you send out issues saying they're for December when it's October or November? It makes no sense to me. Why can't you just label them the month you send them? Is it some conspiracy or something?

—Rylan Doyle

We wish we could tell you it was some cool conspiracy, but the reason's pretty simple: The cover month is the month in which the magazine stops being sold at newsstands. If you came to a newsstand at the beginning of January and saw an issue of *EGM* labeled "December," you'd think it was old. So we call it the January issue to make sure.

Casting shadows

Has Fumito Ueda [*ICO*, *Shadow of the Colossus*] started working on a project for the current generation yet?

—Stacie Gress

We've been hearing some juicy rumors about his upcoming PlayStation 3 projects (that's right, plural), but nothing solid has materialized yet. Odds are good that you'll see something soon, though....

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PRESS START

› features, previews, spartan commodes, and other stuff



AFTERTHOUGHTS

Postgame Show

We get answers for the rest of the holidays' hottest games

And we're back—last issue, we hunted down the developers of four of our favorite games from last year. Even though we squeezed out a ton of secrets, we still have questions for the other blockbusters we couldn't fit into our last feature. So we're finishing things up by wrangling together the makers of three other hits from yesteryear to yap about their creations (that means spoilers—read with caution).



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**'Chief's suit
secrets**



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**Taming the
Shawnimals**



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Feature:
**Everyday
developer**

> SUPER MARIO GALAXY

Behind the scenes with Nintendo's shining star

Nintendo's ubiquitous plumber may have shown up unfashionably late to the still-raging Wii party, but his innovative new platformer was well worth the wait. We recently sat down with Director Yoshiaki Koizumi to discuss the gravity of the situation....



Koizumi began his career at Nintendo by penning the manual for *Zelda: A Link to the Past* (SNES), but he went on to oversee games such as *Super Mario Sunshine* and *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* (both GC).

EGM: Many gamers have noted that *Super Mario Galaxy* reminds them of NES classic *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Was that game an inspiration?

Yoshiaki Koizumi: It's funny; I didn't begin to hear all the comparisons to *SMB3* until after *Galaxy* was out. I didn't feel a deliberate influence while making it, but the game was definitely a team effort; many of the younger members are big fans of *SMB3*. Revising the airships and music from that game must have been more prevalent in their minds. The different suits for Mario to wear weren't a deliberate nod to *SMB3*, either; that was more motivated by wanting to give Mario very specific abilities.

EGM: Aww, we were hoping you were the big *SMB3* fan. We'd love to see the Koopa Kids return....

YK: Well, as for the Koopa Kids...I didn't really see a place to put them into the story this time around. We did bring Bowser Jr. back, though—but that was in order to parallel his appearance in *New Super Mario Bros.*

EGM: Speaking about those power-up suits for Mario.... Sure, they're cute, but we feel like Mario's more fun to control without them.

YK: We deliberately made many of the power-ups so that they'd limit Mario's abilities, because we wanted the player to have to balance the loss of some powers while gaining others, to put a very real risk/reward decision in the hands of the player. For example, you see the spring power-up, and if you take it, you will not be able to perform all of your moves—but you may see a high platform that was previously unreachable.

EGM: The Red Star flying suit is totally fun, but why not allow users to play with it in a real level?

YK: I'm sad that you're not able to use that ability more, because I'm

personally a big fan of that style of flying in Mario games. I felt that I had to get that in the game no matter what, even if I had to shoehorn it in a bit. I was afraid of breaking the game balance by letting you use it all over, though, because many levels wouldn't work if you could fly straight to the end of them.

EGM: Mario's life bar is much smaller than it was in *Mario 64* or *Sunshine*, yet 1UP mushrooms seem far more plentiful. Why did you mess with this balance?

YK: I was trying to consider the different kinds of players we would have. If you think about the old *Mario* games, they were quite difficult, and you would die all the time. But the game would reset very quickly, so you were always back in the game with a good tempo. But by the time of *SM64* and *Sunshine*, it took quite a bit more time to restart a level when you died, so you needed more hit points because it would be redundant to have to constantly restart these large levels. I found that people would spend time just running around, getting lost, not doing the things that I intended for them to do! So, this was an opportunity to return to the tempo of the old *Mario* games. We're trying to bring hardcore and casual players back down to the same level so that they have the same feeling while playing the game. We have so many 1UP mushrooms so that casual gamers are not discouraged.

EGM: Players who snag all 120 stars get a sweet prize—playable Luigi. What can we expect from him?

YK: We included Luigi precisely because he possesses different abilities than his brother—we wanted

to give players a new feel for the controls. A lot of people have said that Luigi feels "dancy," since he has a slippery feel to his jump and he's very floaty. But this gives hardcore players a great challenge, because suddenly everything that they've gotten used to has been completely turned around. I like to think that Luigi handles like a very high-end Italian sports car.

EGM: In your opinion, what's the hardest star to get in *Galaxy*? Those Purple Coin stars are rough....

YK: Yeah, it probably is a Purple Coin star. [Laughs] If I had to guess, I'd say the Toy Time Purple Coin star, played as Luigi. It's incredibly hard!

EGM: We dug the two-player Co-Star mode, but did you ever consider actually having two players running around onscreen?

YK: So this idea of having two characters onscreen for cooperative simultaneous play has a really long history, dating all the way back to the original *Mario Bros.* But having two characters means that they have to stick close together, and that presents a lot of limitations. We know that it's something that people want to do, but we've spent 20 years researching without finding a solid implementation that we're happy with. It wasn't until we hit upon the idea of having one player control a pointer that it really worked. But I'm still giving thought to the idea of having both players on the same screen.... For example, network co-op could be a good way to accomplish this.

EGM: In a recent interview on Wii.com, *Galaxy* Producer Takao Shimizu revealed that he considered closing your development office in

> I like to think that Luigi handles like a very high-end Italian sports car.

—*Super Mario Galaxy* Director Yoshiaki Koizumi

Tokyo had the game been poorly received. Was he serious?

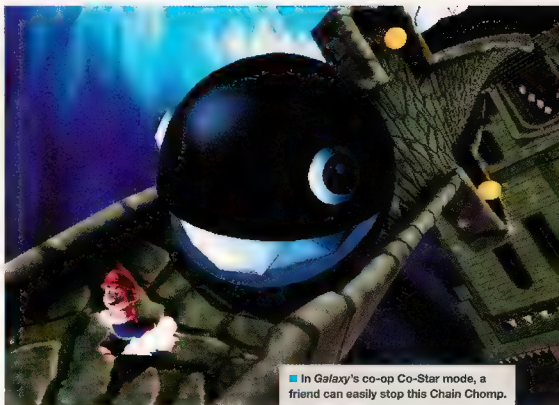
YK: I want people to know that I absolutely made *Galaxy* with that level of dedication—that there may not be any going back. As a result, the game contains so many of my own personal feelings. Nintendo has a commitment to keeping 3D action games going, and I'm focused on bringing more people into the world of gaming.

EGM: *Galaxy* is a huge success in Europe and America, but it's not selling as quickly in Japan. Why?

YK: I feel that it's really too early to start thinking about sales figures, and I'm not someone who follows game sales that closely. Plus, looking at a moment-to-moment sales snapshot doesn't feel very accurate to me. And in terms of action games, they tend to have a long sales life. But I'm much more interested in the impressions of players. After enough time has passed, I'd love to hear the opinions of players from all over the world.

EGM: Are there aspects of *Galaxy* that you designed specifically with the Western audience in mind?

YK: That's hard, because I'm not really sure what Western gamers would want. I wouldn't even know where to begin to try to cater to them



■ In *Galaxy's* co-op Co-Star mode, a friend can easily stop this Chain Chomp.

with a specific feature. I will admit that I did consider some specific issues facing Japanese gamers, though. Japanese gamers tend to be more sensitive to motion sickness caused by fast 3D motion, so we had to carefully adjust the camera to take that into consideration. The thing about action games in general is that they tend to have a very broad appeal across various markets because there's not much of a language barrier and everyone likes the feel of action games. I ultimately just wanted to make a game that would make everyone happy.

EGM: *Galaxy's* ending seems surprisingly apocalyptic and crazy; it's more in line with anime like *Evangelion* and *Akria* than the *Mario* fare we're used to. What's exactly going on during that nonsense?

YK: I feel that I shouldn't reveal my canonical version of what's happening in the ending, as I really want to leave it open to interpretation. But I will say that if you get all 120 stars, you'll get a better understanding of what's really happening by seeing that second ending. Even if you see both of them, you'll still have some details to sort out, though.

EGM: Looking back at your work on *Super Mario Sunshine*, can you point to elements that affected the development of *Galaxy*?

YK: Of course, we had tons of discoveries while making *Sunshine* that helped us while developing *Galaxy*, but that's not to say that

Sunshine was a bad game. They were just very different games, and *Galaxy* has a very unique feel and pace. Looking back, I wonder if the eight-piece life meter in *Sunshine* was a good idea, but for the type of nonlinear exploration you did in that game, it felt appropriate. With every new project, you always feel that there were things left undone in the last game, things that could have used more attention. I always carry those memories forward; it's valuable to keep the ever-evolving DNA of a game concept intact.

EGM: Nintendo is an incredibly secretive company. What's one thing about Nintendo that people don't realize?

YK: A lot of people don't understand what it's like to work at Nintendo on a regular day. We're actually very normal and funny! For example, back when we were making this game, it was late one night around 2 A.M. when [Mario creator Shigeru] Miyamoto and I were discussing how to implement a specific swimming motion. Discussing the animation simply wasn't working, so he decided that the best way for him to convey it to me would be to get up and "swim" on his chair. There are plenty of fun little moments like that when we don't have our serious outside "game faces" on.

As for the big secrets that have to remain secret, though...well, I can't say anything about any of those.

EGM Extras: Want to read more? Sure you do—hop on over to EGM.1UP.com for the full interview.



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.

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.

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.

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.
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▶ ROCK BAND

A special encore with Harmonix's rockin' game



Guitar Hero is great, sure, but developer Harmonix's multi-instrument rock simulator is keeping us jamming a helluva lot longer. We passed the mic to Greg LoPiccolo, VP of product development for Harmonix, to talk about the future of *Rock Band*.



Unlike most of us, Greg LoPiccolo isn't frontin' his music chops. Before he joined the videogame industry, LoPiccolo was in the Boston band Tribe with fellow Harmonix peeps.

EGM: We love how the crowds sing along to songs. But we have to wonder: Do fans really know the words to all the songs? Seems a little bit unlikely.

Greg LoPiccolo: It's funny, because we had a whole internal debate about this as it was going down. So we actually asked Wave Group, the studio that's been doing covers for us, to do it for us. The instruction that they were given was to sing along to the songs, so they did it and we put it into the game. Then we realized, "Nobody knows the words to Blitzkrieg Bop. They know, 'Hey, ho! Let's go!,' but they don't know the [rest of the] words." Then we debated whether we should edit them or take them out, but we said, "Screw it, let's leave them in."

EGM: Playing the drums is definitely awesome. How come you didn't add a practice mode where you can just mess around for fun?

GL: The simple answer: We ran out of time. We had something planned, but there was not enough time to get it to a good enough polished level to include in the game. If we were hypothetically going to do a sequel, I think it'd be a safe bet to look for something like that in it.

EGM: Will you be able to play all the downloadable content you purchase now in the inevitable sequel?

GL: Our conception [of the DLC program] is as a platform. And the conception of a platform that makes sense is that you don't buy all your new CDs every year. We totally hear you on that.

EGM: We'd love to play a ton of songs from the first two *Guitar Heros*. Can we expect to see some of our favorites from those games appear as DLC?

GL: We don't have a real policy one way or the other on that, but I wouldn't rule it out.

EGM: How come we didn't see any full downloadable albums at launch?

GL: We're balancing a lot of different factors in how we roll that stuff out. All that stuff needs to be licensed and

authored pretty far in advance. So there is a secret plan that extends far into the future—the details of which I cannot divulge to you. But suffice to say, if you look at the six-month horizon, I think it all makes sense.

EGM: Why can't you switch the band leader during World Tour mode? No multitalented musicians?

GL: We've heard those complaints and we're looking at that hard. One of the most challenging design aspects of the game was trying to figure out how to connect characters to instruments to slots. It was just a really difficult problem, where if you did it one way, you'd have a bunch of problems in one area, and if you did it another way, you'd have a completely different set of problems. Certainly in the future we'll look hard at whether or not there's a different approach to that. But for this game, that's what we came up with.

EGM: Speaking of the World Tour Mode, one of our major complaints is that it doesn't work online. Can this be fixed with a future update?

GL: It is certainly something that is getting a lot of attention from us. We would have liked to include it, but it's incredibly technically difficult. It's not impossible. It certainly has our attention for an agenda we'd like to pursue in the future.

EGM: It seems *Guitar Hero 3* tried to increase its difficulty over the previous games, while you guys apparently opted to make the guitar parts in *Rock Band* easier. Was this intentional on your part?

GL: We thought a lot about difficulty. So that was absolutely a priority for *Rock Band* to make it accessible to nongamers. Specifically, with respect to the guitar parts, a lot of the song choices were really made to be balanced. We weren't going to do super guitarcentric songs because we wanted great drum parts and great singable vocal parts. So I think, in the case of the guitar parts, they trend a little easier just because a lot of guitar in a lot of rock songs is just holding the song together. But we think it's fine if you're playing as a part of a band—you don't expect to have the spotlight every moment. >



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CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE

We shot first. Now, we question the troops behind this super shooter

That thousand-yard stare can mean only one thing: You fulfilled your modern-day *Duty*. We interrogate Lead Designer Zied Rieke at developer Infinity Ward for a postbattle briefing. Tread carefully if you've yet to play the campaign—a spoiler minefield lies ahead.



Rieke is a four-star general of console war games, having worked on *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* at developer 2015 as a founding member, plus *Call of Duty 1, 2,* and 4 at Infinity Ward.

EGM: *Call of Duty 4's* campaign is very scripted, which works against the game on the harder difficulties. Why not give players more routes to get past the choke points?

Zied Rieke: When we brought players in during the development of *Call of Duty 2* and we watched them play the game, we were surprised to find that, although there would be two to three different ways to go, most players would choose one route and stick with it—no matter how many times they died. I don't know if this was because players didn't notice the other routes or because they felt like the route they chose was beatable, but it was something we saw again and again.

That said, we spent a lot of time on giving players more choices in this game than just different routes, such as new tools like claymores, flashbangs, and grenade launchers. Every game is a careful balance between the two pitfalls of so many choices that players are lost and confused and so few choices that players feel trapped and bored. I think we found the right balance for *Call of Duty 4*, but we'll have to evaluate the terrain and make some tough decisions again for the next game.

EGM: Was the mission after the credits always planned as a bonus?

ZR: We were excited about the idea of doing a mission in an airplane for a long time, but it was hard to figure out how to fit it in the story and what would come before and after. We had some ideas about an airport mission, but that didn't fit either. Eventually we decided that it would be cool to have it as a bonus mission. Storywise we are still keeping the significance of the mission and who exactly is being rescued a secret. This mission was the very last mission to be started. If things had not gone smoothly, it may not have made it into the game....

EGM: The last thing we expected was for one of our main characters to die an agonizing death after a nuclear explosion....

ZR: There are two big story twists in that sequence. First, in virtually every game you've played and every movie you've seen that involves the threat

of a nuke going off, it is defused at the last second.... That's what you are expecting to happen when Command warns you about the nuke.... So when it goes off like that it really blows you away, both visually and storywise.

Then your mind jumps to the next assumption: that you'll now have to make your way through a nuclear wasteland to survive. But when that expectation is also turned on its head and you die, it hits players in the emotional gut. From then on you now know that anything is possible in this story. As soon as someone suggested that the player should just crawl around for 30 seconds and then die, we knew it was the right thing to do.

EGM: We really dug sniping the bad guy in the Soviet mission from far, far away, having to adjust for wind, etc. Why not include more sniping like that?

ZR: *Call of Duty 4* thrives on variety. We are constantly introducing new gameplay mechanics right to the very end. When you work this way it's not obvious which mechanics will be fun and will work and which will fall flat on their face. That particular mission was one of the last ones we made, and by then the whole game was locked down in terms of story and gameplay.

EGM: The AC-130 gunship mission is almost disturbingly realistic to anyone who has YouTube'd real gun-camera footage. Any concerns about crossing a line there?

ZR: Absolutely. That's part of why people love that mission, because of that creepy contrast between what you're doing, which is basically taking out an enemy that can't fight back, and the deadpan—almost bored—way that the other guys in the aircraft talk about it. That deadpan tone is a huge part of why it feels so realistic, because these guys talk like people you know in regular life. You have to "cross the line" to make an emotional connection. "The line" is where people start reacting with their gut rather

than intellectually, and that's what entertainment is all about: having an emotional experience.

EGM: The multiplayer rank system and character-skill options are daunting for newbies. Any worries they'd give up and just play *Halo 3*?

ZR: The main issue for accessibility is letting the player make informed decisions. For example, when you first try *Call of Duty 4* multiplayer online, there are only two playlists unlocked.... But by the time you get to level 18, you've unlocked nine more playlists. This is different from other games where you may have as many as a dozen different options from the beginning and little information about what makes them different.

One of the hidden advantages of our leveling-up system is that it allows us to slowly reveal the game to players over the course of several hours—or days—rather than dumping the whole thing in their lap. Create-a-Class is key to our multiplayer experience, but you don't unlock it until level 4, by which time you'll understand enough about the game that you'll be making informed decisions when you make your first class. Also, the 360 and PS3 versions both do skill-based matchmaking.... This combined with only starting with two playlists means new players will generally play with each other at the beginning rather than with level 55 133t p14y3rs.

EGM: How long are we going to have to wait until we get new multiplayer game types?

ZR: [We can] add, remove, and modify playlists for 360 and PS3 anytime. If we wanted to we could update the game 500 times per day. Right now we are watching the forums and collecting data about what modes and maps are most popular. I don't really know how often we'll update the game types and playlists. It depends on what kind of feedback we get from the community. >

> **You have to "cross the line" to make an emotional connection.**

—Lead Designer Zied Rieke on *Call of Duty 4's* disturbingly realistic AC-130 mission

Cube Contestant:

Stephanie Liu



Computer programmers don't usually tip the "cool!" scale, but

Google geek Stephanie Liu managed to do just that by warping her workspace into World 1-1 of the original *Super Mario Bros.* The lavish Mario makeover was part of a game-themed cubicle contest Google hosted back in October. Sweet as it is, the design came in second to a theme based on the '90s flick *Jumanji*. We recently caught up with Liu to find out if this contest was rigged.

EGM: Why go with Mario? Don't appreciate the other Nintendo characters out there?

Stephanie Liu: No, Mario is just so iconic. I had to fight this, because [my coworkers] were like, "Mario? That's so cliché." And I told them, "No! No! No! Mario is *the* videogame character."

EGM: You think it was rigged to have the *Jumanji*-themed floor win? Or were the judges just big Robin Williams fans or something?

SL: No, no! To be fair, *Jumanji* had a smaller area, so [the team] could put more stuff in it to make it seem more decorated. They had a cutout tiger with a motion-sensor roar; they put a lot of effort into it.

EGM: You did get a prize for this, right? Or were you just a congratulated for being an artsy nerd?

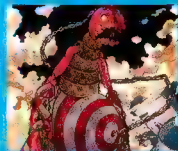
SL: We actually got a minifridge. Honestly, it's sitting there, and it has two bottles of water in it right now.

EGM: Do you have any plans for what you're going to do next year? Y'know, like maybe a *Flubber* or *Mrs. Doubtfire* theme? We hear the judges will totally love those.

SL: Well, it will probably be a different theme, so we'll have to see. But we've had conversations about how we're going to take it next year.



Welcome to World 9-5.



> FOREIGN OBJECT/JAPAN

Lord of VERMILION

Coin-based card combat

When you think of Japan, you think of anime, manga, and video games. But there's one game that's been making waves in the West: *Lord of Vermilion*. It's a coin-based card combat game that's been taking the Japanese market by storm. The game is a mix of strategy and luck, and it's been a huge success story for Square Enix. The game is a mix of strategy and luck, and it's been a huge success story for Square Enix. The game is a mix of strategy and luck, and it's been a huge success story for Square Enix.



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> THAT SUCKS

LOOKS LIKE IT'S LIGHTS-OUT

for an American release of the Nights into Dreams PS2 remake. Takashi Iizuka, director of the recently released Nights: Journey of Dreams, says Americans dreaming about playing the original Saturn game will be disappointed to know it's not expected to hit outside of Japan. Or at least until Sega realizes the U.S. is also a good place to make money.



OH, GREAT—NINTENDO IS NEGLECTING US AGAIN.

Lucky Japanese Wii owners are currently enjoying Wii and DS demos through the new Everyone's Nintendo Channel. Of course, we'll be getting it eventually (possibly by the time you read this), but it doesn't make us less jealous of our Japanese friends.



> OVERHEARD

"And when I went in as part of the car team, we were working on a kind of Twisted Metal game (it wasn't my idea). And the first thing [Miyamoto] said was, 'Why would you put guns on cars? Don't cars crash into each other? Isn't that what they do?'"

—Mark Pacini, game director of Metroid Prime developer Retro, recalls putting the brakes on a game after Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto shot it down. Guess gun-toting cars aren't as realistic as plumbers running across planets...



Photo Source: GameSaves

> CHIEF INSPECTOR

Spartan SPECS

Under the Chief's hood

We've all seen Master Chief's iconic armor countless times, but how much do we really know about it? Not a lot, so that's why we asked Bungie's writing lead Frank O'Connor to dissect his duds for us.

If you're really a Halo nut, you'd know Mjolnir Mark VI is the official name of Master Chief's armor.

SPARTAN ENVY

Any reason why his armor is colored green?

Although the green mimics the default color scheme of uniforms from his most recent detachment—with the [United Nations Space Command (UNSC)] Marines—the default color for Spartan armor is green. However, the color can also be altered for specific military or ceremonial purposes. Nanotech polymers can be instructed to realign to create different colors and effects.

SWEET SPOT

What's in the gaps between armor pieces—can he take a bullet there as well?

That is the Bilibik bodysuit that you hear so much about. It is armored as well, but to a lesser degree.

SUIT-ABLE

Is the armor part of the Chief's body now or can he take it off?

The armor is worn. The Chief does have some physical links with the suit, but those are temporary. He showers, just like you and I, but with some interesting interface surprises visible on his skin.

BURNING QUESTION

Why do his hands get "burned" when he overheats a plasma rifle? Is the armor there weaker than elsewhere?

The laws of physics: The heat has to travel somewhere. The suit's shielding dissipates much of the excess heat, but the localized overheating is a challenge even for Mjolnir armor tech.

STICKY SITUATION

Why do plasma grenades stick to the suit? They couldn't adjust the armor to prevent that?

They tried. Plasma grenades are an ongoing challenge for UNSC researchers.

LOCKED 'N LOADED

How do weapons stick on the Chief's back and legs when he isn't using them?

Fingerprinted magnetic catch. The armor recognizes intent and purpose using trace material from the Chief's gloves, as well as his motions within the suit. This prevents accidental adherence of other metallic objects.

MASTER PEE

How the hell does he go to the bathroom?

All fluids are recycled in the suit, a little like the stillsuits from [the book] Dune. The armor is powered, however, and filtration is optimal. Tastes like clean water.

LIGHT-HEADED

What's the deal with those little lights on either side of his helmet?

They are similar to LEDs: high output, low energy use, and are used primarily for the same purposes as a flashlight, but can be autocontrolled for signaling and discrete data transfer.

PLUG IT IN

What's the deal with the "Cortana slot" on the Chief's head? How does he get it in and out? Is it similar to pushing in a digital camera memory stick? Can other things go in that slot?

It's just like a memory card. However, it's also a very powerful computer in its own right. It's also very, very secure.

HAT TRICK

What's the purpose behind this little protrusion just above the visor?

It's part of the practical design of the helmet for inclement weather—strong sunlight and be on—, but it's no secret that the UNSC uses ergonomic and aesthetic advice from military psychologists to make the wearer's appearance more intimidating to potential enemies.

BOMBS AWAY

Where does he store grenades and equipment such as the Bubble Shield and Power Drainer?

The grenades are attached to sidearm panels on the Chief's hips. The giant equipment items that he picks up that appear to seemingly vanish? That is caused by magic. —EGM

> THE GAME OF LIVES



5 Lives: Ken Levine

Publisher 2K fished up quite a winner last year when it released *BioShock*. Much of the credit goes to the project's mastermind, 2K Boston Creative Director Ken Levine. We know he's a smart game designer, but is he intelligent enough for five questions? Let's find out...

1. Worse place to be: *BioShock's* Rapture or the Pauly Shore-inhabited *Bio-Dome*?

Ken Levine: [Sighs] Well, one's a death of the body, and one's a death of the soul, so I guess it depends on which is more important to you. I'd rather be stuck in Rapture, because at least it's beautiful.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining:

KL: [Laughs] How is the right answer determined?

EGM: Don't worry about it.

2. Who plays the role of the Big Daddy in the film *Big Daddy*?

KL: Adam Sandler?

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining:

3. Name the popular New York City band that shares its name with something found in *BioShock*.

KL: [Long pause] Van Halen? No. The Ramones? No. Blondie? No. You got me, brother.

EGM: Incorrect. It's The Rapture.

Lives remaining:

4. Pep Bars are the fake treats found in *BioShock*—what is the name of the real licensed energy drink found in *Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee*.

Levine: Oh, man...SoBe?

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining:

5. Match each of these three dystopian cities with the videogame it belongs to: Midgar, Haven City, and Pacific City.

KL: *Final Fantasy VII* is Midgar. *Beyond Good and Evil* is Haven City? Oh, man...[Pacific City] is a dystopian city? I'm gonna look like a loser here. You got me.

EGM: Midgar is correct. Haven City is *Jak and Daxter*. And Pacific City is *Crackdown*.

Lives remaining:

GAME OVER: What a shocker—another contestant failed to answer all five questions correctly. Who's your big daddy now, Kenny Boy?



> FEATURE

Way of the NINJA

An EGM alum turned gamemaker takes us down the curvy path that led to his DS debut, **Ninjatown**

All shots from the *Ninjatown* action-strategy game are from the DS' bottom screen—the developers aren't showing us what goes up top yet.

SHAWN SMITH HAD A DREAM JOB.

In 1994, at the age of 19, he began picking up part-time work at an office in suburban Chicago. That office was the headquarters of *EGM*. Two years later, he became an *EGM* editor full-time, reviewing truckloads of games and hardware while making a name

for himself in the industry. By 2000 he had been offered a promotion to previews editor, and a future in videogame media was his for the taking. Instead, he made a move that would shock any young gamer with dreams of breaking into the industry.

He left.

Soft wares

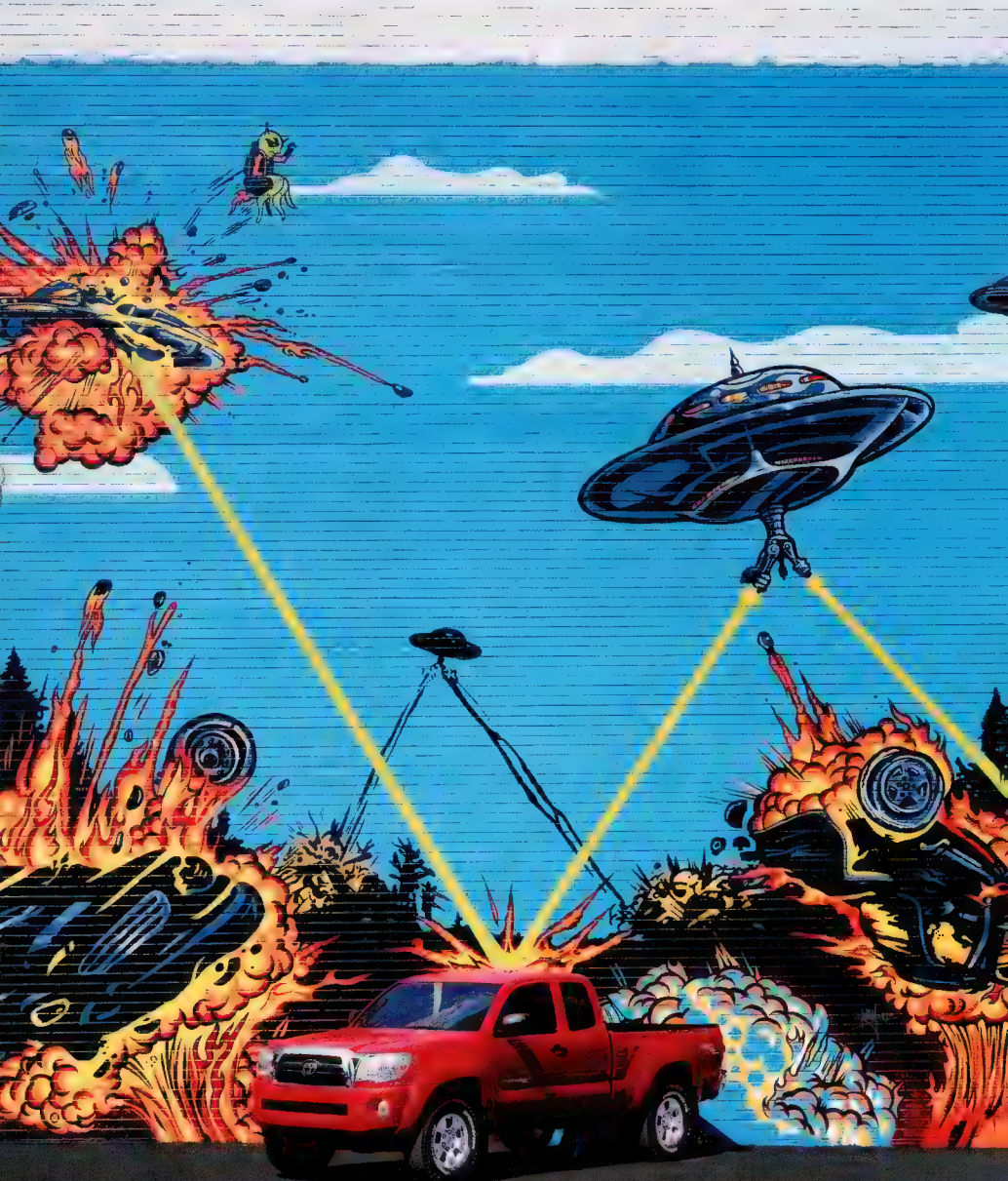
"I realized that I liked writing," Smith says, "but I didn't love it. I needed to do something visually creative, to figure out if this visual thing I had in my mind was actually something I would follow through on." Smith left *EGM* to study art at Illinois State University. It was there that Shawanimals—the name of his business as well as its product—was born. "I had all this time on my hands, and I was able to dabble in a lot of different things," Smith says. "I started compiling all of these sketches, all these characters I had. Then I saw some import toys at

EGM when I visited—that Domo-kun character, that monster guy. I thought, 'Here's this stuffed thing that's not a teddy bear and not a bunny.' I really liked the idea of doing something three-dimensional."

Smith began making his stuffed characters by hand in 2001, selling them to friends and then friends of friends. Word of his cottage industry continued to spread. Soon, he and his wife, Jen Brody, found themselves devoting more time to Shawanimals and its retail website—shawnimals.com—than they could handle on their own. Today, it has become a full-time job for both of them, even with the addition of two employees and an intern at their Chicago studio. Shawanimals are found in upscale toy stores worldwide (including tech-toy fave thinkgeek.com), in art galleries across the country, and in the homes of tens of thousands of fans.

And soon, they'll arrive on your DS. >





TACOMA

Artist: Kinsey

Location: Los Angeles, CA

Date: 4.07.07

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■ Reaping what he sows: Shawn Smith's not the only ex-EGMer to go into game development—he's just the only one who can also work a needle and thread.

Right place, right time

"It was just sort of a chance thing," says Jeremy Pope, producer of Smith's DS game at coderveloper Cashmere. "I ran into [fellow Rockstar alum] Corey Wade, and he said, 'Hey, a friend of mine has this [intellectual property], and he's always been interested in taking it into the videogame world.'" So Smith and Pope got together for a casual meeting filled with lots of "what if" talk and very general ideas. Smith had toyed with the idea of a Shawnimals game but had never gotten serious about it. But the more he and Pope talked, the more Smith realized the idea really could work.

Every Shawnimal comes with a backstory, based in the decidedly off-beat Shawnimaland. Within that world is a region that's become the source of some of Smith's most popular characters: Ninjatown. Set between the volcano of Mount Feroshi and the dangerous Dark Forest, Ninjatown is home to the Wee Ninjas, pint-sized masters of stealth, as adorable as they are deadly. Living in constant vigilance against invasions of Wee Devils from the Dark Forest, the ninjas of Ninjatown protect all of Shawnimaland from harm. This seemed the perfect setting for an unusual game. "We started talking about Ninjatown," Smith recalls, "and Jeremy totally got

it right off the bat. And he said, 'You know, we hear [publisher] SouthPeak is looking for new properties....' A million and one people want to make games, and here we are not really actively pursuing it, and it just sort of falls in our lap. It's crazy."

Real ultimate power

So what is *Ninjatown* about? With the game not coming out until late 2008, Smith and Pope are reluctant to divulge many details, but what they do reveal seems intriguing. Picture a hybrid of real-time strategy and action game, with battle separated into two phases: building and combat. In the building phase, players select and place structures that create or modify different Wee Ninja classes in preparation for the battle to come.

Smith and Pope are cagey about what happens next, though, since the game still has a long way to go. What we do know indicates battles may have a puzzle element, from boss-battle strategies to special skills like "Moment of Zen" (a supercharged health boost) or "Long-Winded Story" (a paralyzing attack).

What's certain is that *Ninjatown* will be pumped full of the quirky, cutesy character that has made Shawnimals such a success. But don't think the game will be all character and no substance. Smith did, after all, review



games for a living, an experience that's serving *Ninjatown* well. "He has that critical eye," Pope says. "It's already been a benefit. It's one more checkpoint, one more layer of tuning." And Smith is no less committed to the cause of good game design. "Really, all I care about at the end of the day," he says, "is that the game is fun." There's a sentiment we can happily endorse, and not just because it's from an old friend. 🍱

EGM Extras: Hear Shawnimal roar—or at least tell us more about his incredible journey—on our EGM Live! podcast at EGM.1UP.com.

RULE THE OCEANS.
SEIZE THE LAND.
FORGE A LEGEND.



PIRATES *of the Burning Sea*

SET SAIL FOR MASSIVELY
MULTIPLAYER ONLINE
ADVENTURES IN THE
PIRATE-INFESTED SEAS AND
CARIBBEAN PORTS OF 1720.



Swashbuckling Sword Fights



Intense Tactical Ship Combat

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RP
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
May contain content
inappropriate for children.
Visit www.esrb.org for
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Online Interactions
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piratesoftheburningsea.com





■ And to think Mak's mother never thought he'd get anywhere with his damn videogame tapes and loud rock music.

How'd he get the gig?

Mak started programming games on his PC back when he was a teen in 1987—and he just kept going from there. He entered his work into various game-design contests, which won a small prize. Some time one weekend he struck out on his own, displaying at five audio events. They showcased his early "Shadows" of the

1997 Independent Gaming Festival. To support himself along the way, he had part-time jobs programming, he says. "I found programming to be the sweet spot in terms of pay and work." At one point, he actually got into programming gigs while traveling for the first time, making one of the early PC games. That's when he hit networking. ■

TOOLS OF HIS TRADE

Guitar and FX pedal

Mak plays a Gibson Les Paul and a Marshall guitar, and he uses an MXR Phase 90 fuzz pedal.

Pencil and paper

Mak uses a pencil and paper to sketch out his game designs.

Software and hardware

Mak uses a 5-year-old PC with a Pentium 4 processor, 1GB of RAM, and a hard drive.

A 5-year-old PC

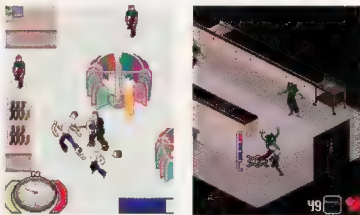
Mak uses a 5-year-old PC with a Pentium 4 processor, 1GB of RAM, and a hard drive.

Creative freedom

Mak says, "I love the fact that I can create anything I want to create. I don't have to worry about what the publisher or the market wants. I can just do what I want to do."

> THAT'S COOL

DEAD RISING STILL HAS SOME LIFE—publisher Capcom is reanimating the zombie-infested action game for mobile phones. Most of the apocalyptic action from the Xbox 360 release will be squeezed into the mobile port (though you may have to squint your eyes to see everything on the tiny screen). Along with *Dead Rising*, Capcom is also resurrecting yet another remake of the original *Resident Evil* for mobile phones. Both will run you 'round seven bucks and should be out by the time you read this.



YOU'D BETTER BELIEVE

PaRappa the Rapper creators Masaya Matsuura and Rodney Alan Greenblat are teaming up with publisher Majesco to compose an exclusive Wii music game due out later this year. Sounds sweet, but hopefully the dope duo will also find time to bust out *PaRappa the Rapper 3*.



X MARKS THE SEQUEL for *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*. The gorgeous PlayStation 3 exclusive looks like it might see another game in the series sometime in the future according to Evan Wells, copresident of *Uncharted* developer Naughty Dog. Not all that surprising, of course, but at least it's cool to hear that the treasure hunt is far from over.

> BY THE NUMBERS

Chilly consolidation

18.9

Billions of dollars that make up the newly formed Activision Blizzard



3.8

Billions of dollars in profit Activision Blizzard expects to have made in 2007



3.35

Billions of dollars former No. 1 publisher EA expects to have made in 2007

0 Percent chance of *World of Warcraft* coming to consoles, according to Blizzard





RUMOR MILL

Rockin' rumors By Quartermann

Professor Layton and the Curious Village

Resurrected Rumors:

Here's a small (but good) one I called a while back: Professor Layton, the innovative DS puzzle-adventure game from role-playing pros Level-5 (*White Knight Chronicles*), is coming to America in a few months.

2008 IS GOING TO BE GREAT. Or at least it better be. In case you're incapable of remembering how awesome I am (seriously, go see a doctor!), I broke a lot of big news last year. That means I have to work extra hard in '08 to make sure I can keep bragging about—err, I mean reporting—my rumors. No need to fret. In fact, The Q recommends you get your jaw checked, because he predicts it will drop quite a bit this year.

Rock on (and on and on)

Rock Band may have more instruments, but *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock* totally shreds it when it comes to sales. That's why publisher Activision is keen to kick out multiple sequels this year. We already know *GH4* is on its way (as well as a game based on the band Aerosmith), but **I'm hearing two more *Guitar Hero* titles are also in the works, bringing *GH3*'s sequel count to four.** And one may star a group that rocks in mysterious ways.

Golden gouge

I know you kids love your multiplayer *Halo*, but before Master Chief even started the fight, a suave spy started

the competitive shooter craze. Too young to remember, kiddos? Well, I'm referring to the Nintendo 64 classic *GoldenEye 007*. Many oldsters like me would love to play it again on Xbox Live Arcade. **Microsoft apparently wanted this to happen, too, but it sadly cancelled the 007 port even though it was cocked and ready to go.** Way to shake (and stir) up controversy, Microsoft.

Reborn relics




The PlayStation Network may not have as many games as Xbox Live Arcade, but it's slowly building a strong lineup. And it seems like it may get even stronger in the future—**my Sony spy says the company inked**

a deal with a major Japanese third-party publisher to develop exclusive remakes of its beloved oldies for the PlayStation Network. Too bad Data East isn't around anymore—I'd love to get a totally rad remake of *Bad Dudes*.

Movin' on up

It's about that time again—it's obvious all three hardware makers are thinking about what's next for their consoles. Nothing new there. But my Microsoft mole did tell me something rather juicy. **I'm hearing a secret unannounced first-party sequel, originally planned for the Xbox 360, is now going over to the next Xbox.** ☞

Q-TIPS

-  **Persona fans, listen up:** It appears the previously unreleased add-on *FES* is coming to the states. Also, the next *Shin Megami Tensei* will be on PS3 (duh).
-  **The Wii Fit Balance Board isn't just for fatties—**word is one or more skateboarding games will incorporate the new gizmo this year.
-  **I originally reported a *Sin City* game is in the works.** Well, it's still under construction, but now I'm hearing it won't be ready for real estate until 2009.

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PS3**



**Win With
Wii**



**VOTE
Xbox 360**

Decision



Final Fantasy or Fable? Gran Turismo or Mario Kart? Metal Gear or Splinter Cell? As you can see, picking a presidential candidate won't be your only tough choice in 2008.

So to help you with the decision process, we profile more than 60 games from the three major parties (Wii, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360) and those running as independents (multiplatform). Learn what they're preaching while on the campaign trail—and maybe more importantly, what they're trying to hide.



EGM Extras: Visit EGM.1UP.com for videos of several of the candidates.

Also, turn to pg. 90 for Crapmaster Seanbaby's thoughts on the year ahead.





Nintendo's wobble-friendly system ran away with the popular vote last year. And thanks to this fresh crop of games, the Wii aims for a repeat performance in 2008.

Wii Fit

Nintendo • Spring 2008

The Agenda: Since no politician in their right mind really wants to take on health-care reform, why not tackle something we can all agree on? Americans need to lose weight! The exercise game *Wii Fit* makes no bones about it—it's trying to get you moving and sweating. The game comes with the balance board controller, a flat panel that sits on the floor like a bathroom scale. You start off by stepping on it to measure your weight and height, and then the game calculates your Body Mass Index (BMI) to determine how fit you are. Next, you complete a variety of exercise routines (mostly stretching and balance moves), and the balance board measures how successfully you do. The game offers a daily

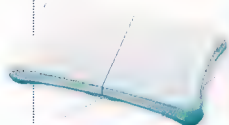
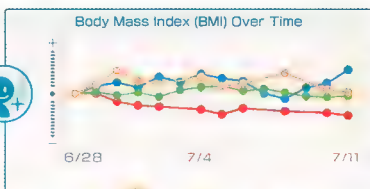
regimen (à la *Brain Age*) and keeps track of your progress as your weight and BMI fluctuate. Also, your Mii becomes fatter or thinner depending on your weight.

Wii Fit offers a bunch of minigames that, while potentially aerobic, aren't related to fitness. You can ski in a slalom race by bending your knees and leaning from side to side, or use your body as a controller to navigate balls through a maze, *Super Monkey Ball*-style. Another minigame has you bouncing balls (and other objects thrown at you) off your head. Some of these also use the Wii Remote for control.

Skeletons in the Closet? *Wii Fit* feels like other Nintendo titles of its nature (*Wii*

Sports, *Wii Play*): It may be fun in small bursts, but it just doesn't feel like a true videogame. Even those folks looking for a real workout may find themselves wondering why they didn't just buy one of those Billy Banks Tae Bo DVDs—which costs less and requires no fancy equipment. Plus, we all know gamers love to cheat, and it's possible in some of the exercises to trick the controls: You can shake the Wii Remote to simulate running in place or just press your foot down hard instead of doing a full-body lunge.

Then again, these problems didn't stop *Wii Sports* and *Wii Play* from becoming huge hits. Perhaps *Wii Fit* actually is just what the HMOs ordered.



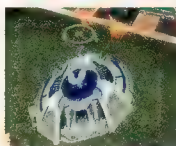
■ The proof is in the videogame: *Wii Fit* tracks on a weekly basis whether you're trimming pounds or totally slackin'.

Destroy All Humans! Big Willy Unleashed

THQ • Spring 2008

***** V
***** N

The Agenda: Looking for a way to spice up this open-world action series before it makes the jump to PS3 and 360, THQ took inspiration from something close to our divided country's heart: "We wanted to spoof the whole fast-food restaurant industry," says Senior Producer Ken Allen, "and blame it on the fact that Furons were using fast food to fatten up the human population to make them slow and dull-witted—and thus making it easier to harvest their DNA." And so Crypto, the alien Furon you control, will be able to take the helm of Big Willy, a Big Boy-style mech, giving you an alternative to the UFO for vehicular destruction.



Skeletons in the Closet? We can't help but worry about motion controls being added to franchises that seem better suited to a more traditional control style. It sure didn't work out well for *Soulcalibur* with *Legends*.

DECISION: YES

Samba de Amigo

Sega • Spring 2008

***** V
***** N

The Agenda: Yes, the sombrero-wearing monkey really is bumpin' to the beat of Ricky Martin's "Livin' la Vida Loca." Rhythm games are all about rocker cool these days, but *Samba de Amigo* is decidedly uncool, a Latin music-tinged psychedelic freak-out designed to humiliate rather than ego-inflate. Originally designed for special motion-sensing maraca controllers (which you shake in time to the music), this remake of the 2000 Dreamcast classic uses Wii-motes instead. Aside from new tunes, don't expect big changes. "If the maraca shaking, dancing, happy-monkey game ain't broke, don't fix it," says Marc Tardif, senior vice president of business development for developer Gearbox.



■ Don't expect this *Samba* to look or play much different from its Dreamcast days.

Skeletons in the Closet? The original controller detected both shaking and position (low, middle, high), which is a challenge to replicate with two Wii Remotes. "We have an elite group of ninja programmers on the problem," says Tardif.

Mario Kart Wii

Nintendo • Spring 2008

***** V
***** N

The Agenda: Think of the *Mario Kart* series as gaming's version of Ted Kennedy. Every few years it makes its requisite appearance, everyone gets all chummy and throws their votes behind it, and the legend grows. And so it goes again as *Mario Kart* revs up for its Wii mascot-racing run and delivers another slew of promises, including bikes, online play, new items, and a steering-wheel attachment for your Wii Remote.



Skeletons in the Closet? Until we get our hands on it, we're nervous about motion-controlled karting and its accompanying peripheral (didn't that already not work with launch game *Monster 4X4?*). The thought of charging a powerboost by shaking our hands already has us thinking repetitive stress. And what's with axing *Double Dash's* (GameCUBE) dual-character karts? Let's hope this isn't an indication of a dumbed-down game meant to appeal to a more casual audience.





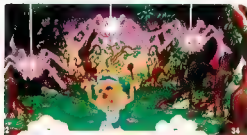
> ALSO ON THE BALLOT



No More Heroes

Ubisoft • Spring 2008

The twisted mind behind quirky cult-classic *Killer7* returns with this ultra-violent adventure that borrows equally from both *The Legend of Zelda* and *Grand Theft Auto*.



Wonderworld Amusement Park

Majesco • Summer 2008

In another blatant attempt to keep gamers from venturing outside, this party game brings the carnival home, with riders and 35 minigames for one to four players.

Okami

Capcom • Summer 2008

As our resident rumormonger Q-Mann discovered, this epic PS2 adventure and its artistically inclined wolf are finally heading to Nintendo's console. And obviously, the biggest change-up is wagging the Wii-mote to simulate brushstrokes.

Harvest Moon Wii

Natsume • Spring 2008

The basic grid-based farming in this agricultural sim hasn't changed a ton, but now you swing the Wii-mote like a hoe or "pour" it to water your crops.



The House of the Dead 2 & 3 Return

Sega • Spring 2008

Sega digs up a couple classic zombie zapathons for the Wii. Two games for the price of one is cool, but how many times can we play these deadfests?

de Blob

THQ • Spring 2008

The Agenda: No, it's not a typo—this action game is based on a school project by nine Dutch game-design students who clearly have never been told they're "da man!" You control a blob that trundles around different levels in a world that's been drained of color by an evil corporation. Your blob must return vibrant hues to the land by crushing enemies and painting obstacles with its mass in a variety of challenges. You might be rushing to paint a certain number of objects in a given time or racing against another blob in multiplayer.

Skeletons in the Closet? The action looks a little simplistic. Games like these can either be smash hits (*Katamari Damacy*) or just make you wanna hit something (*Elebits*).



■ With a flick of the Wii Remote, you can squish enemies and change your blob's color palette.



> DEBATE '08

Is the Wii's momentum going to last?

"Yes, and it's possible that the Wii will be one of the hottest holiday gifts of 2008 as well as 2007, which is a fairly unique situation historically and partly the result of the current supply/demand imbalance. By then, there will be a plethora of new games and peripherals such as *Wii Fit*. It's also possible that there will be a pricing adjustment by then and even new hardware SKUs."

—Entertainment Fund Management President Ted Pollak

"I think the Wii's momentum lasts until the PlayStation 3 is under \$300, so another year."

—Wedbush Morgan Securities Financial Analyst Michael Pachter

"Yes, I still think the Wii offers the most appealing console to the widest audience in terms of price, innovation, and accessibility. With more third-party software becoming available, increased production, and [the release of] *Mario Kart*, [it] should mean the momentum will last throughout 2008."

—KBC Financial Analyst Hiroshi Kamide

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Suggestive Themes
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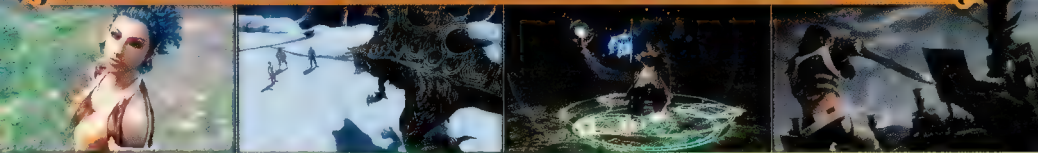
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The PlayStation 3 finished in third place during the 2007 race. But the console looks primed to win back your support with this year's exclusive lineup.

Gran Turismo 5: Prologue

Sony Computer Entertainment of America • Spring 2008

The Agenda: Even for the talented gear-heads at developer Polyphony Digital, making yet another compelling racing sim poses a really tough challenge. The solution will start with finally taking their first steps online—and Polyphony will be anything but tentative. Sure, *Prologue* will support online races, but as Associate Producer Chris Hinojosa-Miranda explains, “our vision has always been beyond gaming. We’re looking forward to creating more ‘live’ experiences through new features such as GT-TV, an in-game channel where

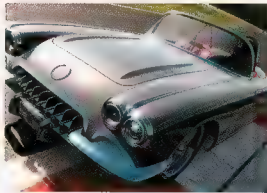
you’ll be able to download video content from around the world.”

Plans also include intriguing crossover ideas such as using their strong relationships with car manufacturers to offer virtual test drives at the in-game dealerships. In a similar fashion, during the Tokyo Motor Show they virtually unveiled new models in the game simultaneously with the actual reveal. “It’s not just the console anymore,” says Hinojosa-Miranda. “It’s all these things that surround it. We take that into scope and we have some wild ideas.”

Skeletons in the Closet? While we like the extras, online comes down to racing first, and on that front Polyphony is still a novice. “The trouble starts when you’re involving all that data for up to 16 players to race online,” says Hinojosa-Miranda. “Needless to say, we’ve had to run numerous public/internal beta tests that have taught us a lot about online gaming, the limitations of the average DSL/cable line, and optimizing the code.” Even the most experienced online developers face a tough test going smoothly from beta to full-scale gaming.



■ Since this isn't the full GT5 product (hence the "Prologue" subtitle), expect some features missing like car customization.



Final Fantasy XIII

Square Enix • Fall 2008

The Agenda: Now here's an agenda—Square Enix's "Fabula Nova Crystallis" project has an enormously ambitious goal: to deliver several thematically linked *Final Fantasy XIII* games across multiple platforms. *FFXIII* proper will hit first, introducing players to an ancient realm torn apart by magic and technology. Precise gameplay details remain scarce, but we know that you'll control lead hottie Lightning as your quest to bring about peace has you engaging in plenty of turn-based battles, over-the-top summon spells, and appropriately emo cut-scenes. Assuming everything goes as planned, expect *FFXIII* to create the new high-water mark for Japanese role-playing games.

Skeletons in the Closet? After staring at absolutely gorgeous trailers for two years, we're all starting to wonder when we might actually get our hands on *FFXIII*. The seemingly glacial pace of development troubles us...



LittleBigPlanet

Sony Computer Entertainment of America • Summer 2008

The Agenda: Everything about this quirky side-scrolling platformer screams group activity: It's best played with four friends, in levels created by what Sony hopes will become a vibrant online community that'll also serve as a YouTube-style peanut gallery, commenting on and rating all the user-made stages. The game's easy-to-wrangle interface and Isaac Newton-approved physics system make for so many creative possibilities that even Reggie Fils-Aime, the president of rival Nintendo, said he wishes *LittleBigPlanet* had landed on the Wii instead.

Skeletons in the Closet? Developer Media Molecule hasn't shown us some big pieces of the *LittleBigPlanet* puzzle yet (we were at least hoping to see a demo by now). For instance, what will the promised enemies—and even big, bad bosses to place at the end of stages—add to the mix?



The Agency

Sony Online • Fall 2008

The Agenda: Now picture this: You're bored at work when—bzzz!—your cell phone vibrates. It's the Agency and they've sent you a text message. Yes, a videogame just texted you. One of your operatives has been taken hostage, which means it's now decision time: Do you text "1" to wire a million dollars and be a hero, or text "2" and let your operative die? This is just one of the tough choices you'll make when entering *The Agency*, Sony Online's next massively multiplayer online game that lets you join up with a covert spy network, design your own agent, earn upgrades, do battle, and rise through the ranks—all while working toward the goal of creating your own agency.

Skeletons in the Closet? Everything we've seen so far has impressed, but that doesn't change the fact that there has yet to be an MMO success story on consoles. Can *The Agency* be the first?





> ALSO ON THE BALLOT

**SOCOM: Confrontation**

Sony Computer Entertainment of America • Fall 2008

This online-only shooter will attempt to resurrect the tense, close-quarters combat that characterized the first two SOCOMs. The fight will also expand considerably with downloadable content.

Infamous

Sony Computer Entertainment of America • Fall 2008

We would've been just fine with another *Sly Cooper*, yet Sucker Punch made good on its name when the developer revealed this urban open-world-meets-superpowers surprise à la *Crackdown*.

**Afrika**

Sony Computer Entertainment of America • Fall 2008

We're still not quite sure what to make of this nonviolent African shutterbug safari, but the promise of tracking down photo-realistic fauna has a certain allure....

**Killzone 2**

Sony Computer Entertainment of America • Fall 2008

We've seen great gameplay footage of *Killzone 2*'s single-player mode, but we expect to hear about multiplayer (the best part of the first game) any day now.

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

Konami • Spring 2008

★★★★★

★★★★★

The Agenda: *MGS4*'s campaign slogan would read something like this: an older but wiser Snake in 2008. Yep, Konami's stealthy one doesn't want another sales drubbing like the series experienced four years ago against the likes of *Halo 2* and *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, so developer Kojima Productions has made some much-needed upgrades here, including an over-the-shoulder camera, customizable weapons, and a sneaking suit that mimics the look of any surface Snake's touching. But it's the freedom on the battlefield that has us excited to support this geriatric. At any point in the game, you can choose to either team up with the local militia and cause a big ol' shootout or take them out and sneak around undetected while these freedom fighters and Liquid's crew slaughter each other.

Skeletons in the Closet? It's more like a diaper-wearing monkey in the closet, as this series newcomer is just the beginning of *MGS4*'s head-scratching oddities.



In addition to a new over-the-shoulder camera, you can play *MGS4* totally from a first-person perspective.

Hot Shots Golf 5

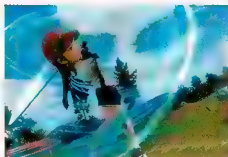
Sony Computer Entertainment of America • March 2008

★★★★★

★★★★★

The Agenda: Even icons like the Golden Bear and Tiger have to make continual adjustments to their swing. The *Hot Shots* series will follow the lead of these legends, as No. 5 ditches the meter-based play and offers a more realistic mechanic in which you'll time button presses with the stroke of your golfer. Also, with the Japanese version done since last July, Sony's had a lot of time to produce extra goodies for the Stateside release. "We'll be including some cool new characters, new courses, and a couple of very special guest appearances by some PlayStation first-party protagonists," says Associate Producer Chris Hinojosa-Miranda. We can only imagine what *God of War*'s Kratos would look like on the links sportin' some plus-fours....

Skeletons in the Closet? Sony hasn't revealed whether they are fixing the unpopular online mode where you have to "apply" for tee times and return later to play.





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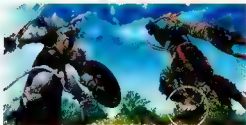
> ALSO ON THE BALLOT



Yakuza Kenzan

Sega • Fall 2008

Sega's third *Yakuza* title rewinds the gritty mob saga way back to Japan's historic 17th-century Edo period, opening the door for swordplay, horseback travel, and geishas galore.



White Knight Chronicles

Sony Computer Entertainment of America • Fall 2008

Customizable characters, a combo-heavy battle system, and fancy visuals make *White Knight Chronicles* the PS3 role-playing game to whet your appetite before *Final Fantasy XIII* hits.

Valkyrie of the Battlefield: Galian Chronicles

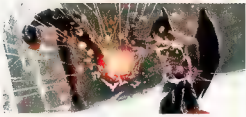
Sega • Fall 2008

This tactical role-playing game breaks the mold with both its unorthodox "living sketch" art style and its action-infused turn-based combat (you actually aim your weapons).

Wipeout HD

Sony Computer Entertainment of America • Spring 2008

Rather than a full-fledged sequel, this downloadable, pedal-to-the-metal futuristic racer recycles old *Wipeout* tracks while giving them a complete 1080p high-definition makeover.



Tekken 6

Namco Bandai • Spring 2008

Tons-of-fun Bob and tomboy Leo lead another crop of first-timers into a King of Iron Fight Tournament, which graphically is finally looking more like a contender than pretender.

SingStar *****

Sony Computer Entertainment of America • Spring 2008

The Agenda: This sing-along game sets itself apart with My SingStar Online, a video upload feature that combines two popular (and somewhat embarrassing) current trends: *American Idol* and homemade Internet videos. You just need to have a camera (the PlayStation Eye or another compatible USB device) hooked up while you play. As you belt it out, the game automatically takes videos of your performance and records your vocals. When you've got a good clip, you can upload it to the game's community site, where other users can rate it. SingStar has already launched in the U.K. and Australia, and the video feature is gaining momentum. "The [development] team in London is addicted to watching other people's videos and rating them," says Associate Producer Ryan Hamlyn.

Skeletons in the Closet? The default setting is for videos to be viewable by the entire community, so if you're not ready for the spotlight, be sure to change permissions to friends only.



> DEBATE '08

With a lineup that includes the likes of *Killzone 2*, *Final Fantasy XIII*, and *Metal Gear Solid 4*, will 2008 finally be Sony's year?

"I think Sony will make great strides in 2008. *Killzone 2*, *Metal Gear Solid 4*, *LittleBigPlanet*, *Final Fantasy XIII*, and a number of other titles will help stimulate sales. Additionally, a number of peripherals such as the PlayStation Eye and its associated titles will give the console a boost. I am also running into people who have purchased the PS3 for its Blu-ray player—with gaming as a secondary motivation—and that's another element to consider." —Ted Pollak

"2008 is definitely Sony's year. And I'd throw *Grand Theft Auto IV* into the mix, given that it's considered a PS2 owner's [franchise]. Also, *Gran Turismo 5: Prologue* should sell some consoles...." —Michael Pachter

"No—Sony will do better in 2008, but with exclusive software becoming more of an exception than the rule, things will still remain difficult. I think, however, that the industry will begin to see the 'potential' of the system after the release of *MGS4*. But it'll remain a distant third in the current cycle." —Hiroshi Kamide



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Can any of these games fill the massive shoes of Master Chief and lead Microsoft's console into this year's race?



Fable 2

Microsoft Game Studios • Fall 2008

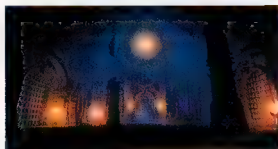
The Agenda: *Fable 2* may have a slight image problem when it comes to family values—the action-role-playing game just happens to allow polygamy, unprotected sex, and a deep, meaningful relationship with one's dog. This sequel, like the first *Fable*, places you in control of a hero who grows from young child through old age. You'll visit the usual cities and towns, castles and dungeons. But unlike one-dimensional hack-n-slash adventures, in *Fable*, your actions have noticeable consequences in the game world. Polygamists, for instance, had better keep their various families separate from—and oblivious of—each other, or divorce (and a ruined reputation) is inevitable.

You can also now choose to play as

either a male or female. Heroines will find that the people they encounter may treat them differently because of their fairer persuasion. They can also get knocked up if they're not careful. Series creator Peter Molyneux of developer Lionhead won't say exactly how pregnancy affects gameplay. But he was clear that your children, romantic partners, and even pet dog could be part of your adventure, if you choose. In this way, the game seeks to evoke emotions in its players through challenging them with interesting relationships. "You can choose to spoil one family and buy them a big comfortable house while keeping another family in a hovel," says Molyneux. "If your spouse dies, your children could end up in an orphanage."

The context-sensitive fighting system—which assigns each combat style to its own single button—aims to appeal to a broad range of gamers. "Inexperienced players will still be able to do damage by randomly pressing the buttons or mashing," says Molyneux. But he promises that more experienced gamers will find that timing, interacting with environmental components, and mixing combat styles make *Fable 2* as "exciting and satisfying as any other combat system out there."

Skeletons in the Closet? Molyneux's speeches and interviews are usually full of big promises—promises that sometimes end up being more exciting than the actual finished product.



■ The tempo of *Fable 2*'s music will actually fluctuate based on how the fight is proceeding. We imagine it's pretty rockin' during this 1-versus-17 skirmish.



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Lost Odyssey

Microsoft Game Studios • February 2008

The Agenda: Microsoft's latest bid for role-playing dominance (a key platform for Japanese voters), *Lost Odyssey* sees *Final Fantasy* creator Hironobu Sakaguchi returning to very familiar territory. The game plays out much like a hybrid of *FFX* and *FFIV*, with a huge cast, turn-based combat, and an epic score by *FF* mainstay Nobuo Uematsu. Where it stands apart, though, is in its emphasis on story. Developer Mistwalker brought in an honest-to-god novelist to flesh out main character Kaim's backstory through several dozen text-only vignettes.

Skeletons in the Closet? Visually, *Lost Odyssey* is a bit rough around the edges. And its conservative gameplay (especially the by-the-books combat system) may alienate progressive gamers, as it essentially ignores all the advances the past five years have brought to the role-playing genre.



Ninja Gaiden II

Microsoft Game Studios • Spring 2008

The Agenda: Action games rarely come as feral as the *Ninja Gaiden* series, and fans of the jumping, rolling, stabbing, and wall-climbing Ryu Hayabusa will be glad to know that the much-anticipated sequel's bite is much worse than its bark. Wrapped in tight black leather and armed with the deadliest weapons an assassin could want, Hayabusa will wage war against the Black Spider Clan in locales across the globe. This time around, the violence moves up a few notches with the addition of beheadings, dismemberments, and "obliteration techniques" to the ninja's assorted talents. The series' legendary difficulty remains intact, too, ensuring that this game—even with a new regeneration-based health system—is still strictly for the hardcore.

Skeletons in the Closet? Despite the developer's claim, *NG2*'s visuals simply don't have the same impact as when the series debuted on the original Xbox.



Ryu Hayabusa does his part for *Ninja Gaiden II*'s blood drive.

Too Human

Microsoft Game Studios • Spring 2008

The Agenda: Back in January 2006, *Too Human* creator Denis Dyack told us, "Hopefully, our game will take the player places that they've never been before." Two years later, we're still waiting to depart for his epic trilogy that blends Norse mythology with cutting-edge sci-fi to deliver an experience that's equal parts action/adventure and co-op online role-player. A planned playable demo on Xbox Live will hopefully help to spread the word about this hack-n-slash hybrid.

Skeletons in the Closet? *Too Human* practically needs to rent off-site storage to conceal its scandalous past. Previous iterations of the game for PS1 and GC were scrapped, a playable 360 version was deemed "terrible" by *EGM* in 2006, and developer Silicon Knights is currently suing *Gears of War* maker Epic Games after being forced to abandon using the allegedly unfinished Unreal 3.0 middleware tools. What a mess!





> ALSO ON THE BALLOT



Alan Wake

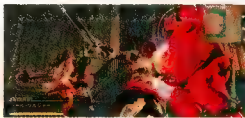
Microsoft Game Studios • Fall 2008

While developer Remedy continues to hold back new details regarding their psychological-action thriller, we know two things for sure: It's absolutely gorgeous and seems vastly more interesting than their *Max Payne* franchise.

Splinter Cell: Conviction

Ubisoft • Spring 2008

Rogue agent Sam Fisher's gone quiet on us since *Conviction's* new-direction debut (think *The Bourne Identity*). But the wait should be worth it if the A.I. and on-the-run theme come together.



Infinite Undiscovery

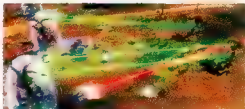
Square Enix • Fall 2008

Star Ocean developer tri-Ace brings their fantasy expertise to the Xbox 360 with this colorful action-role-playing romp, but unfortunately, multiplayer co-op isn't in the plans.

Universe at War: Earth Assault

Sega • Spring 2008

In this outlandish *StarCraft*-styled real-time strategy game, ancient gods, *War of the Worlds*-y walkers, and anime robots wage a three-sided war—though cross-platform, PC-vs.-360 battles might prove one-sided.



Command & Conquer:

Kane's Wrath

EA Games • March 2008

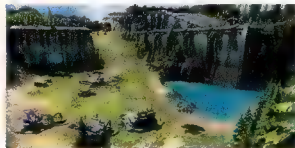
C&C3 did quite well by console real-time-strategy standards, and this expansion builds on that base with a new story and additional depth in terms of units and powers. Some more Billy Dee wouldn't hurt, either!

Halo Wars

Microsoft Game Studios • Fall 2008

The Agenda: This real-time strategy game has vote-snagging star power (*Halo* name, great pedigree in developer Ensemble Studios—but no Master Chief, since this takes place 20 years prior to *Halo 1*), but we still know very little about what could make it stand out from the other candidates. How does the economy work? ("There's no dirt digging in the game," is about all that Lead Designer Graeme Devine would tell us right now.) New vehicles? (So far, we know of the antiarmor Sparrowhawk aircraft and the antiair Wolverine tank.) Other races? (The developers are still deciding whether the Covenant can be playable.)

Skeletons in the Closet? *Halo Wars* looks like a straightforward RTS—nothing revolutionary so far—but the *Halo* universe is rich with unit, weapon, and vehicle types (perfect for this genre) and the developers still have a lot yet to reveal.



> DEBATE '08

Does the departure of developer Bungie and EA buying BioWare (which primarily made Xbox and 360 titles) mean that Microsoft's first-party business is collapsing?

"I wouldn't say it's collapsing. I think with Bungie's departure, Microsoft is now free to spend money on new intellectual properties and riskier projects, which is both challenging and potentially rewarding from a profit-margin standpoint. This is also good for gamers, because we like fresh experiences." —Ted Pollak

"I think Microsoft's first-party lineup is weakening, but I think that exclusives like *Splinter Cell: Conviction* will keep them going for another year. They also have the resources to sign third-party exclusives." —Michael Pachter

"This is a setback, but Microsoft has enough resources and an attractive business to entice other studios to come onboard." —Hiroshi Kamide

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Games for Windows

XBOX 360 LIVE



Meet this year's crop of independents—the games that don't have loyalties to just one particular console party.

Tomb Raider: Underworld
PS3/XB360 • Eidos • Fall 2008



The Agenda: It's a credo worthy of an embossed bracelet, complete with a snappy acronym. "W.C.L.D.: What could Lara do?" says Eric Lindstrom, creative director at *Tomb Raider: Underworld* developer Crystal Dynamics. "We're always asking ourselves that." The Lara in question, natch, is Her Royal Hotness Lara Croft, back for more relic-hunting and cave-spe-lunking in Crystal D's third *Tomb Raider* title since the studio inherited the sagging series from original developer, Core Design.

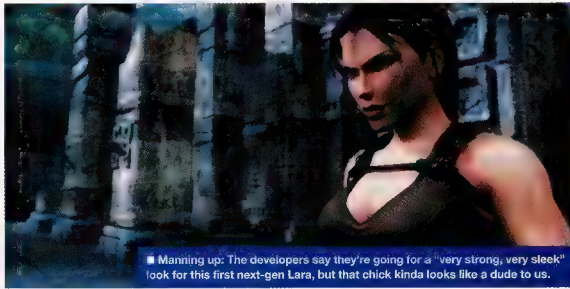
Lady Croft brings along her still-fresh-from-the-shrinkwrap grappling hook, now more functional in a game world where the physics play an even larger part in the puzzles. In one Mayan temple in a stormy Yucatan rain forest, for instance, we saw her use a far wall as leverage to heave-

ho her cable against a column and send it crashing through the floor. It's just one example of Lara doing what you logically think she can do when true physics rule. "It's a way of having the players apply their own intuition," says Lindstrom. "They don't have to memorize a bunch of arbitrary game rules."

The W.C.L.D. credo applies to her new move set, too. She can now perch atop poles rather than just swing from them, free-climb walls, chimney climb crevices, and chuck anything she picks up. Her motorcycle isn't relegated to bonus stages this time; she can ride it anywhere in the levels. And when it comes to her dual guns, she can aim at two targets simultaneously—a good thing, since the game's animal enemies will go where she goes.

"It's not just like the old games where you can climb out of harm's way and shoot fish in a barrel," says Lindstrom.

Skeletons in the Closet? Lara's nearly ruinous legacy of all-too-similar annual sequels is still fresh in many gamers' minds—and developer Crystal Dynamics, who are making their first go at a true *Raider* sequel here. "A lot of what happened in the cranked-out sequels was there was this level-editor and new-art aspect to it that people wearied of," says Lindstrom, "whereas for us...it's not just about laying out mechanical challenges in a pretty world. It's about spending a lot of time and energy and detail on the experience of it that's emotional, that's exciting, that's relevant."



■ Manning up: The developers say they're going for a "very strong, very steek" look for this first next-gen Lara, but that chick kinda looks like a dude to us.

Fallout 3 ★★★★★ V N

PS3/XB360 • Bethesda • Summer 2008

The Agenda: The future is going to get a lot uglier when developer Bethesda resurrects this classic action-role-playing-game franchise. Using the *Oblivion* engine as a base, *Fallout 3* puts players in a postapocalyptic Washington, D.C., where you'll battle horribly mutated creatures, meet with characters scurrying for survival in the nuclear wasteland, and try your damndest not to get radiation poisoning. Expect deep character development, black humor, and a stat-heavy battle system that aims for more deliberate strategy than *Oblivion's* hack-n-slash combat.

Skeletons in the Closet? Some have criticized *Fallout 3's* reliance on *Oblivion* technology, as well as the fact that the developer is aiming for a smaller, more focused experience. But Producer Todd Howard says: "Smaller than *Oblivion* does not mean small, believe me. It's still huge—we can't help ourselves."



■ Gears of War's Berserker may finally have some competition...or a lover.

Grand Theft Auto IV ★★★★★ V N

PS3/XB360 • Rockstar • Spring 2008

The Agenda: While some upstart challengers have surfaced (including *Saints Row* and *Crackdown*), the seemingly invincible incumbent in the open-world action-adventure genre still commands the floor...and the votes. With *GTA4*, Rockstar is running an airtight campaign, releasing information at a trickle that the masses happily consume. Everything we've seen falls in the *GTA* template of previous games: a mix of vehicle and on-foot missions held together by strong characters and a dose of humor.

Skeletons in the Closet? The more we see of the game, the more we see a focus on the gunplay's cover system and hand-to-hand—or foot-to-face—melee throwdowns. But looking slick and actually controlling just as smoothly are different things, and this on-foot action has always been the series' soft spot. Until hands-on play proves otherwise, we remain wary.

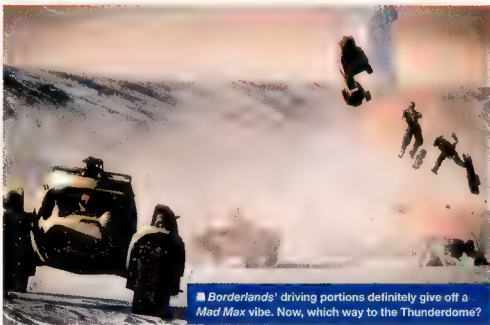


Borderlands ★★★★★ V N

PS3/XB360 • 2K Games • Fall 2008

The Agenda: For those growing tired of the middle-school locker room that is competitive online gaming, *Borderlands'* focus on meaty co-op play could be just the cure. A first-person shooter set against the backdrop of a hostile alien world, this game balances its firefights with open-world exploration, which you can share with up to three friends. They'll be helpful in sorting out *Borderlands'* half a million different guns, all generated by a nifty system that builds bizarre weapons from combinations of spare parts.

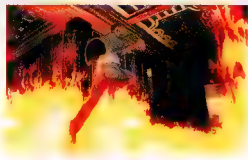
Skeletons in the Closet? A ton of guns sounds nice, but can they really all be fun to use? "The player will never come across a weapon that dips below a certain level of usefulness," says Randy Pitchford, president of developer Gearbox. "We want every gun to be cool in one way or another."



■ Borderlands' driving portions definitely give off a Mad Max vibe. Now, which way to the Thunderdome?



▶ ALSO ON THE BALLOT



Alone in the Dark

Wii/PS3/XB360 • Atari • Summer 2008

Paranormal investigator Edward Carby returns to the series, and this time he's exploring the spooks that lie within Central Park. But here's the real mystery: Will we ever play it? (Atari has pushed back the game's release yet again.)



Turok

PS3/XB360 • Touchstone • February 2008

We're hoping the execution of the dinosaurs-and-humans combat of this first-person shooter is as cool as it sounds. A shame you can't play as the dinos, though.

Left 4 Dead

PS3/XB360 • EA Games/Valve • Summer 2008

Meet *Left 4 Dead*, the first-person-4-player-online-co-op-and-versus-zombie-survival-gorefest from *Orange Box* maker Valve. Break out the cake—we'll vote for that.



Silent Hill V

PS3/XB360 • Konami • Summer 2008

Konami's U.S.-developed *Silent Hill* sequel stays true to the series' eerie, fog-soaked mood but isn't afraid to mix up the formula by evolving the combat system and adding a player-controlled camera.

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

Wii/PS3/XB360 • LucasArts • Summer 2008

The Agenda: Sure, playing as Vader's secret apprentice is headline-worthy, but he isn't the real star here. That honor belongs to the mythical *Star Wars* power you know as the Force. The developers have really cranked up the mid-chlorian count in this one; you'll be able to find a TIE fighter as easily as a Frisbee and tear apart metal blast-shield doors like they were made out of straw. While the PS3 and 360 versions earn "best-looking" honors here, the Wii edition has its own unique qualities, including two exclusive levels and a *Power Stone*-esque Duel mode.



Skeletons in the Closet? As much as we're looking forward to testing out these steroid-fueled Force powers, the game's levels don't seem to offer much other than countless stormtrooper and Jedi fodder.

Project Origin

PS3/XB360 • Warner Bros. Interactive • Fall 2008



The Agenda: Despite losing the *F.E.A.R.* moniker, developer Monolith isn't scared to promise that its second term in Alma's world will deliver the fantastically gee-whiz combat that constituents expect from this shooter franchise. The original game was knocked for stopping just shy of actually scary, but Producer Troy Skinner assures that "this time around, the horror stuff will hurt you." Oh, and the A.I. has all kinds of behaviors built in for when they're "burning alive," so that's fun. Throw in the claim that *Project Origin* offers greater visual variety than its predecessor, and Monolith has one hell of a campaign platform.

Skeletons in the Closet? No hard facts yet, but Monolith vows to deliver a multiplayer experience capitalizing on *Project Origin*'s strengths. Here's hoping that's not just lip service...

TNA Impact!

Wii/PS3/XB360 • Midway • Fall 2008

The Agenda: Tame your hormones, sleazeballs—this ain't a game about boobs and butts. Well, unless you care about the mens' variety, that is. *TNA* actually stands for Total Nonstop Action, and *Impact!* is the first game based on the small but growing wrestling fad. While the *SmackDown* series is steadily making improvements, some longtime fans are fed up with its ho-hum grappling engine. That's where *Impact!* hopes to shine—the developers are basing the gameplay on the Nintendo 64 classic *WWF No Mercy*. "We're all big fans [of *No Mercy*]," says Midway LA Studio Head Scot Lane. "It's definitely influenced us."



Skeletons in the Closet? So far, we're really stoked for *Impact!*, but one thing is pinning down our hopes: The development team behind the game previously made the terrible *Backyard Wrestling* series. Please don't subject us to that again!

Dead Space

***** V N
 ***** N

PS3/XB360 • EA Games • Fall 2008



The Agenda: If anyone deserves hazard pay, it's *Dead Space's* main man Isaac. Not only is this engineer assigned to some disgustingly creepy mining ship way off in the Milky Way, but he's also gotta deal with its very persistent inhabitants. "Headshots are not the answer here," says Executive Producer Glen Schofield. "The enemies just keep coming at you. Dismemberment is your key to surviving." And when you aren't firing Isaac's weapons of gross destruction, this horror game will literally turn you upside down. "Gravity and the lack of it play huge roles," says Schofield. "There aren't any jetpacks or certain areas to walk on—if you're in a place without gravity, real physics and common sense on where to land are the keys."

Skeletons in the Closet? Whenever a developer tosses around the phrase "scariest game ever," it's like they're setting themselves up for failure.

Dark Sector

***** V N
 ***** N

PS3/XB360 • D3Publisher • Spring 2008

The Agenda: Talking about running and actually entering the race are two entirely different things, and *Dark Sector* knows that better than anyone. Developer Digital Extreme's action game was one of the first titles shown for this console generation (early '04), but only now are they ready to release agent Hayden Tenno and his *Krull*-esque glaive into a creature-filled Eastern Europe. The long gestation period looks to have paid off, though, as the recent additions of dual-wielding and wonderfully gruesome finishing moves with the blade disc have given *Dark Sector* a much-needed adrenaline shot. Even the PS3-exclusive motion controls for guiding the glaive through enemies work surprisingly well.



Skeletons in the Closet? The online multiplayer (which pits one Hayden versus a group of mercenaries) seems a bit tacked on here.

Saboteur

***** V N
 ***** N

PS3/XB360 • EA Games • Fall 2008



The Agenda: *Saboteur's* rendition of France during the 1940s displays all the classic signs of a war-torn country: enemy soldiers patrolling the streets, Nazi flags blowing in the wind, locals fearing for their lives. If that weren't enough, developer Pandemic is also covering Paris and the French countryside with a black-and-white blanket. As British race-car-driver-turned-rebel Sean Devlin, you'll inject some color into this open-world affair with every successful mission (which range from climbing buildings and stealthily killing guards to blowing German strongholds to bits). It's a lot like that movie *Pleasantville*, except you're dealing with Nazis instead of a whiny Tobey Maguire.

Skeletons in the Closet? The developer's ambition often leads to game delays (see *Mercenaries 2*), so we wouldn't be surprised if it's 2009 before we're whipping out a paintbrush.

▶ ALSO ON THE BALLOT



Golden Axe: Beast Rider

PS3/XB360 • Sega • Fall 2008

This reimagining of the ancient arcade game mixes co-op multiplayer and two of ye olde heroes (you only play as witchy warrior Tyriss Flare) in favor of concentrated combat and a larger coral of rideable critters.

Army of Two

PS3/XB360 • EA Games • Spring 2008

This smartly delayed (and now tampon-free) shooter makes co-op priority one, packing lots of novel buddy-system gameplay—like controlling a tandem parachute while the other guy snipes—into its heavily political story.

Sega Superstars Tennis

Wii/PS3/XB360 • Sega •

March 2008

Like a cruel high school gym teacher, Sega's forcing its roster of famous mascots (ranging from Sonic to Amigo) to hit the tennis courts.



Wheelman

PS3/XB360 • Midway • Fall 2008

Ever wanted to spin a speeding car 180 degrees to snipe the driver of a pursuing vehicle? Now you can, in this driving game starring Vin Diesel.



Mercenaries 2: World in Flames

PS3/XB360 • EA Games • Spring 2008

You'll be able to destroy nearly everything in this open-world shooter, control dozens of different vehicles, and set lots of stuff on fire.



> ALSO ON THE BALLOT



Tom Clancy's EndWar PS3/XB360 • Ubisoft • Fall 2008

You can see this war to the end ending just your voice—real-time strategizing (moving troops, launching attacks, changing cameras) via only a headset works surprisingly well.



NBA Ballers: Chosen One PS3/XB360 • Midway • March 2008

Travel like a true NBA star as you participate in a global tournament, all on the way to becoming "the chosen one." It's like a Van Damme movie, but with more dribbling.

Ghostbusters Wii/PS3/XB360 • Sierra • Fall 2008

Your knee-jerk reaction may be to dismiss this beloved-license game, but the little gameplay footage we've seen, including a stunning, building-scaling fight with resident puffball Stay Puff, makes busting ghosts seem like a spirited affair.



Midnight Club: Los Angeles PS3/XB360 • Rockstar • Spring 2008

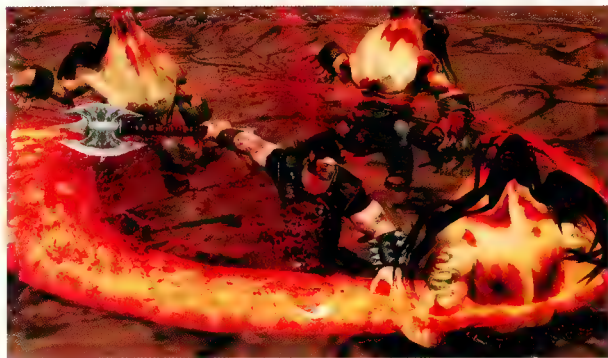
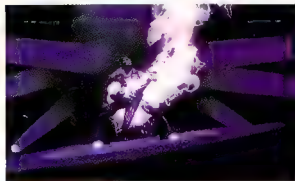
Time to channel your inner Lindsay Lohan: Rockstar's fourth *Club* boasts only one city to recklessly careen through, but this fanciful version of Los Angeles dwarfs all three *MC3* locales combined.

Brütal Legend *****

PS3/XB360 • Sierra • Fall 2008

The Agenda: A heavy-metal fantasy from the twisted mind of *Psychonauts* creator Tim Schafer, *Brütal Legend* stars Jack Black (alongside a cast of heavy-metal heroes like Lemmy Kilmister and Ronnie James Dio) as Eddie Riggs, a roadie transported to the Age of Metal. Gameplay details are still pretty skimpy, but we expect a combination of free-roaming brawler, vehicular combat, and tactical strategy, with Eddie controlling an army of headbangers. Look for ridiculously over-the-top bloodshed, brought on by special attacks such as a literally face-melting guitar solo, a deadly pyrotechnic display, and a storm of ear-piercing feedback. Oh, and Eddie apparently has demon wings. Because it's f***ing *metal*, that's why.

Skeletons in the Closet? Skeletons are *everywhere*, like on belt buckles, hot rods, T-shirts, and towering thrones from which Eddie can survey his conquests.



> DEBATE '08

Will the currently PS3-exclusive *Metal Gear Solid 4* end up going multiplatform?

"I would be surprised to see Konami alter a prearranged agreement. It's possible that they will be able to negotiate a sweeter margin on other PS3 games due to the fact that they have essentially invested one of their star franchises in a platform that does not yet have nearly the numbers of previous generations."

—Ted Pollak

"This game should go multiplatform after the exclusive term [with Sony] ends. My guess is that's for all of 2008."

—Michael Pachter

"No, because Konami is an old-fashioned Japanese company where historic ties remain very important. But the *Metal Gear* franchise is likely to start making appearances on other non-Sony platforms in the future."

—Hiroshi Kamide

Prototype PS3/XB360 • Sierra • Fall 2008

The Agenda: *Prototype* isn't the first open-ended game set in New York (that'd be the *True Crime* sequel), the first sprawling building-hopper (*Crackdown* gets that credit), or the first Radical-developed adventure starring a character who destroys crap (*The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction* crushed it first). OK, so *Prototype* is not the first of its kind, but it sure ain't faulty—the shape-shifting protagonist, Alex Mercer, has enough originality to make him stand out. When he's not sucking up schmos into his body and stealing their abilities, Mercer will be scaling the skyscrapers of NYC. It's like *Assassin's Creed's* wall climbing, only cranked up. “You wouldn't want *Assassin's Creed's* movement in our game,” says Executive Producer Tim Bennison. “It'd be like driving a Ferrari while being stuck in first gear.”



Skeletons in the Closet? Radical's track record is spotty (their last project: the awful *Crash of the Titans*).

Soulcalibur IV PS3/XB360 • Namco Bandai • Fall 2008



The Agenda: Several big-name fighters will vie for fisticuff supremacy in 2008, but Namco Bandai's fourth *Calibur* may have an edge with its lush visuals, deep character customization, and copious corseted females. Of these ladies, Director Katsutoshi Sasaki openly admits to finding newcomer Hilde the “most alluring,” explaining her as “a brave and noble warrior who fights with cunning grace, using a short sword for quick attacks and a spear to do some serious damage from afar.” Considering the fact that all of SC4's lasses look as if they've had some top-quality nip/tuck, expect to see some furiously sexy fights in the franchise-first online mode.

Skeletons in the Closet? In the wake of the unbalanced SC3 and the underwhelming *Legends* spin-off for the Wii, this franchise's stature has seriously diminished in recent years.

Mirror's Edge PS3/XB360 • EA Games • Fall 2008

The Agenda: Scaling the sides of buildings and running across rooftops—any prince or assassin can do that. But could these guys be as graceful if they tried it from a first-person perspective? Developer EA DICE hopes to accomplish just that with heroine Faith in *Mirror's Edge*. “Imagine being in the chase scene from *Casino Royale*,” says Senior Producer Owen O'Brien. “That's how our game feels.” So while gunplay will factor into mission success, Faith will rely more on her parkour-esque moves to survive in this metropolis. Just listen to how she got into the top screenshot: “High above the streets, [Faith] has just completed a wall-run along the outside of a building,” explains O'Brien, “and is now sliding down its slanted glass roof under fire from police—and this is just the first level.”



Skeletons in the Closet? If EA DICE doesn't nail the controls, so much hoppin' and boppin' from this viewpoint could make for some frustrating (not to mention queasy) gameplay.

THE “AL GORE” CANDIDATES



Al Gore, like the former vice president of the United States, we totally expect to see these currently unannounced games to hit in 2008. Check out what our mole has dug up on their respective campaigns.

Red Steel 2 (Wii) — Actually, we're around town had this first-person shooter/leasher set to run in '07 (with new features like online co-op). Yet with the project lookin' rough (so much so that it's apparently been handed off to a new developer), Ubisoft is now targeting 2008 for *Red Steel 2's* release.

Resistance 2 (PS3) — Remembers the original's shooter of an opening level? Well, developer Insomniac is aiming for this first-person shooter (which may not star *Half of Man's Face*, Nathan Hale) to also come with a real bang. On the multiplayer front, patches will most likely find their way onto the battlefield.



Call of Duty 5 (PS3/XB360) — Unfortunately, COD-maker Infinity Ward won't be heading up the next installment of Activision's military shooter. Instead, developer Raven Software (which created the pastiche COD5) will take the reigns of the new effort, which supposedly is set back in World War II. We'll have more on this one soon.



Animal Crossing: Wild World (Wii) — Unlike the DS installment, *Wild World* expects the same cute-but-fishable-yet-addictive event-driven life to be a full-fledged season. Also, we hear this Nintendo Crossing will be the first console game to have a downloadable update.

Gears of War 2 (XB360) — The follow-up to the smash-hit Xbox 360 shooter, *Gears of War 2* will be the most ambitious yet. It's expected to feature a new campaign, a new character, and a new setting. The game is expected to be released in late 2008.



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.

www.socomtacticalstrike.com
www.us.playstation.com/ps3
www.redmaw.com



Drug Reference
Violence

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SOCOM

TACTICAL STRIKE
evaluate. plan. execute.

Control four of the world's greatest fighting men as they infiltrate the dangerous war zones of Panama.



Play as a team. Experience the action from each SEAL's perspective.



True combat simulation, where tactics determine the outcome of each encounter.



Evaluate the situation, plan your approach and execute on your command.

- 22:01 Engage enemy soldiers.
- 22:02 Eliminate all enemy threats.
- 22:03 Cover team's extraction.

- 22:01 Fire grenade at machine gunner.
- 22:02 Move to secure ambassador.
- 22:03 Escort ambassador to rendezvous point.

PLAYSTATION
PSP
PlayStation Portable





MUSHROOM KINGDOM COME

Nintendo's finest get a royal beating—and fans get the royal treatment—in **Super Smash Bros. Brawl** By Robert Ashley



IT'S THE KIND OF IDEA A COUPLE OF KIDS MIGHT COME UP WITH, daydreaming about videogames over peanut-butter sandwiches in the school cafeteria: What if there were a game that had every Nintendo character in it? Mario and Link together in the same game? Samus from *Metroid*? Donkey Kong and Bowser and maybe even outsiders like Sonic the Hedgehog and Solid Snake? What if they could fight each other? Man, that would be awesome!

Super Smash Bros. is that daydream materialized, the ultimate fan fantasy, a videogame version of the

comic-book crossover: Superman battles Batman for the love of Lois Lane! And it brings the fans out in droves. *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, the series' last appearance, clung to the charts like a Beatles tune, eventually becoming the best-selling GameCUBE game of all time. *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, scheduled for release on the Wii on February 10, has been picked apart and studied like a sacred text by hardcore fans, thanks to daily doses of info dished out through the Smash Bros. Dojo, *Brawl*'s microscopically detailed promotional website (see it out at Smashbros.com for the nuts-

and-bolts info you won't find here).

If you've never set thumbs on a *Smash Bros.* game, it goes like this: Up to four famous and not-so-famous videogame characters gather together to throw punches, kicks, fireballs, Pokémons, Bob-ombs, baseball-bat swings, sword slashes, and a zillion game-nerd references at each other on a moving, transforming, or otherwise booby-trapped stage (Nintendo-themed, of course). The goal? To chuck your opponent off the airborne island, sending them to the ultimate videogame death: a bottomless pit. The overall effect is near-total chaos, something between a riot and a bar fight, only rainbow-colored and family friendly. Spaceships fly, bombs explode, Pokémon swoop, lava rises, characters get big, characters get small, characters knock each other around like baseballs in a batting cage. It's nuts.

History re-bating itself

For a game that tries hard to push the limits of frantic, *Brawl*'s creators spend a bizarre amount of effort in getting as many tiny game-trivia nuggets onto the disc as possible. Characters, items, collectibles—everything you see in *Brawl* is virtual memorabilia. Nate Bihldorf, the game's U.S. producer, is one of the people in charge of making sure this memorabilia gets the facts straight, and he's spent a ton of time playing through decades-old Nintendo games to verify quotes, character names, and art that appears in *Smash Bros.* "I'm a huge Nintendo nerd myself," says Bihldorf. "So I know that there are going to be people reading a lot of this stuff, and I want them to be able to rely on it as gospel."

Behind the scenes, the game's eccentric, tireless creator, Masahiro Sakurai, is the driving force behind Nintendo History 101. "There can be no question that, from the very beginning, [Sakurai] saw this as the encyclopedia of Nintendo," says Bihldorf. "You can tell the guy just loves Nintendo games, wants everybody to appreciate where videogames came from, and to make these old things new again. He wants to make sure [younger players are] educated about what came before." Know the

A WHOLE NEW BRAWL GAME?

Ten new things in the *Smash Bros.* ring

Characters

At least 11 new fighters (try to ID them in our character quiz starting at the bottom of the page).

Modes

Including a training tool, new minigames, and highly customizable matches.

Online Play

Battle with friends or random strangers (see sidebar later in the story).

Voyeurism

Watch other people play online—and bet on the results—in a special Spectator mode.

Collectibles

The trophies are back, but now you can nab stickers and put 'em in an album.

Items

Lots of new power-ups, but nothing tops the Final Smash—a coup de grâce unique to each character.

Assist Trophies

Bust these open and stunner Nintendo characters (Excitebike bikes? *Sin & Punishment*'s Saki?) come to your rescue.

Stages

Wuhu Island's four corners are covered, along with oddball stages like a draw-it-yourself PictoChat arena.

Stage Builder

Make your own levels and share them with the world (see sidebar later on).

Single-player mode

Called "The Subspace Emissary," it's a full-fledged side-scrolling platform game you can even play with a friend!

> KNOWING IS HALF THE BATTLE

Mario, Link, Donkey Kong, Samus Aran—you've known these folks since they were four-color sprites. So of course these series vets (and all the other famous faces below, plus more that haven't been announced) will return in *Brawl*. As for the new-to-the-fight characters, we're going to make you work to figure them out. Eye the silhouettes and cryptic hints to the right, then turn the page to see if you guessed *Brawl*'s new playable combatants. Repeat over the next six pages until you've guessed all the newcomers announced so far.



character Devil from the old Japanese Famicom game *Devil World*? Of course you don't. But you will.

'Shroom with a view

This compulsion to educate the masses on the finer points of Nintendo trivia fits in nicely with another Sakurai goal: to stuff as much content into *Smash Bros. Brawl* as his (already delayed) shipping date will allow. Beyond the expected fighting-game options and modes, *Brawl* features a story-driven adventure called "The Subspace Emissary" that, according to Bihldorff, goes well beyond any single-player effort the series has seen before. "It's a great plot, strung together by some really awesome movies starring all the characters that you know and love," he says.

Bihldorff, stinky with the details, describes what sounds like a variety show for Nintendoophiles. "You're basically playing with everybody, and they're all joining up on your team as you go along," he explains. "You're going to be forced to play with a bunch of characters that you don't know, or maybe don't like. A lot of people are going to find characters they love that they otherwise wouldn't have touched. So you're too big a man to like *Pokémon*, but you're going to have to go through this section with Pikachu. And you may find out that he's a killing machine."

Aside from the "Emissary" adventure, *Brawl* also packs in two big-name non-Nintendo characters (Sonic the Hedgehog and *Metal Gear*'s Solid Snake), an elaborate level creator (which allows you to share your creations with your friends), and what is easily Nintendo's most ambitious online multiplayer effort. "You can trace it all back to Sakurai-san, this sort of Energizer bunny over there [in Japan]," says Bihldorff. "The amount of content he's crammed into this thing is unbelievable."

It all adds up to a love letter from Nintendo to their most ardent fans, the very people who may be feeling neglected by Nintendo's recent focus on soccer moms and retirees. Hopped up on months of teaser details from the *Smash Bros. Dojo*, these superfans are done daydreaming. They're ready for the real thing.

FOUR WAYS TO PLAY

Which *Brawl* control scheme is for you?

When it comes to Wii games, multiple control options can signal bad things. But after testing each of *Brawl*'s four setups, we can verify that all play surprisingly well, though some are more appropriate for serious players than others.



The Old Pro

GameCube Controller: A sure thing. Veteran *Smash Bros.* players will want to stick to their old wares and plug in their well-worn GameCube pads.

The Young Pro

Classic Controller: With plenty of buttons and an analog stick that feels more responsive than the GameCube's, this setup is perfect for those who don't fear a little change. And the pad's wireless connection (through a Wii remote) isn't subject to the random interference that plagues old-school wireless GameCube controllers.



The Good Friend

Wii Remote + Nunchuk: Something about gripping the remote in this setup feels pleasantly visceral, like playing a fighting game with an axe handle. But *Smash Bros.* will find the D-pad-mapped jump button hard to get used to.

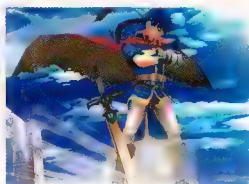
The Casual Acquaintance

Wii Remote: Surprisingly, this pared-down configuration works well. Blocking with the underside trigger makes defense a bit of a chore, but the *Wii Sports* crowd thinks this was designed for will-be-too-busy-missing-buttons-to-worry-about-blocking.



➤ So you're too big a man to like *Pokémon*, but you're going to have to go through this section with Pikachu. And you may find out that he's a killing machine.

—U.S. Producer Nate Bihldorff on *Brawl*'s new single-player game



➤ GUESS THE NEW CHARACTERS



Eggplant wizard



Hates garlic



Wearing nothing

Burning sensation



Balls fighter



Loyal Subjects

The Mushroom Kingdom's characters have attracted videogaming's most rabid fans, both young and old. Are you one of them? We go inside the cult of Nintendo...

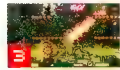
Sometimes imitation isn't quite so flattering....



Jump Super Stars DS • Nintendo
In Japan, Nintendo made its own middling *Smash Bros.* clone starring manga characters.



Onimusha: Blade Warriors PS2 • Capcom
Not even a Mega Man cameo could save this uninspired four-player fighter.



Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble GC/PSP • Capcom
By the time this rip-off landed, Joe's 15 minutes of fame were over.



Small Arms Xbox Live Arcade • Microsoft
Ugly fighters and iffy controls sealed the fate of this online wannabe.



Dream Mix TV World Fighters PS2/GC • Hudson
Solid Snake and Optimus Prime couldn't save this import-only mess.

You've seen the YouTube videos: A grown man in a Mario costume corners *Mario* and *Zelda* mastermind Shigeru Miyamoto in a narrow hallway and sings him a song about... Shigeru Miyamoto. You've seen the pictures: Google employees decorate their office cubicles to look like *Super Mario Bros.* levels, with question blocks hanging from the ceiling and coins suspended atop the dividers. You've read the newspaper stories: Armies of DS-toting superfans camp out all night at Rockefeller Center just to get autographs from their game-designer heroes. What makes Nintendo fans do the things they do? Are they insane?

Kevin Cassidy is in a position to know. As the owner and operator of GoNintendo.com, he's rubbed elbows (both real and virtual) with many specimens of the Nintendo fanatic species. "Nintendo is known for having the most rabid fan base in the videogame world," says Cassidy. "Coming in contact with some of these people can be a downright scary experience if you aren't ready. I've been sipping from Nintendo's Kool-Aid vat for years

now, and while our presence may be frightening, I think our motivation is pretty innocuous." Cassidy believes that Nintendo fans connect to the company's stable of well-known characters and the expectations of quality gaming associated with them. "We are fed a constant diet of Mario, Link, Samus, and plenty of other Big N staples," he says. "When an entry into one of these series comes out, you know you can expect quality."

Nintendo's power

Nintendo's characters are a brand that seems to never go out of style, cutting across generations of gamers. Everyone grows up with Mario. "In the entire games industry, Nintendo has done the best job of managing their franchises in the long-term," says Chris Kohler, author of the book *Power-Up: How Japanese Video Games Gave the World an Extra Life*. "They've kept their brand consistent for decades. This continually brings complaints that they rely too heavily on their existing brands, but I guarantee you there isn't a videogame publisher in the world who would not

kill to be able to do that."

Conversely, it's the lack of continuity that keeps game fans of other persuasions from reaching Nintendo-fanatic levels of insanity. "The reason you don't see a lot of crazy Sony fans is because Sony doesn't have the enduring decades of history that Nintendo does," says Kohler. "The Sony stable of today is far from the Sony of 10 or even five years ago. Who's going to decorate their rec room with *Blasto* merchandise? Does it even exist?"

For gamers of a certain age, of course, Nintendo can be an object of nostalgia. Kyle Orland owns and operates *Super Mario Bros. Headquarters* (www.smbhq.com), a site that hosts reams of Nintendo-themed fan art (Mario and Luigi as mobsters!) and fan fiction (*Mario's Murder Mystery on the Excess Express!*). To Orland, one gamer's freaky obsession is another gamer's nostalgia trip. "For the generation that was just too young for Atari, Nintendo was videogames," says Orland. "These fan projects serve as totems to those youthful good times...."



■ Cult of personalities (clockwise from left): Folk music man Jonathan Mann, aka GameJew; Gabe Swarr's art; students *Donkey Kong-ly* U.C. Santa Cruz; a cosplayer gives us the Tingle.

> NEW-CHARACTER ANSWER KEY



Pit from *Kid Icarus* (NES)

Wario from the *WarioWare* series



Zero Suit Samus from the *Metroid* series

Ike from the *Fire Emblem* series



Pokémon Trainer from the *Pokémon* series



Mario the muse

Nintendo even inspires work by professional artists. Gabe Swarr's stylized Mario paintings earned him a spot in L.A.'s "I Am 8-bit" art show. Though his work is head-and-shoulders above the crude drawings of art-inclined Nintendo obsessives, he's not ashamed to call himself a fan. "I grew up with a Nintendo, loving all the games and characters," he tells us. "I think that Nintendo, especially the difficult games, helped me to stay focused, driven, and disciplined."

We all have to grow up at some point, but the real appeal of Nintendo games, developers say, is that they never ask us to act like grown-ups. In fact, quite the opposite. "I hate to start alluding to an 'inner child,' but there's really no other way to spell it out," says *Gears of War* creator Cliff Bleszinski, a self-professed Nintendo fanatic (he got a high score listed in *Nintendo Power* magazine as a kid). "When we're little and experiencing so much of what life has to offer for the first time, everything seems fresher and brighter. Over time, this shininess becomes a bit dull. Nintendo has managed to tap into that sensation of newness, into something deeper that makes even the most jaded of us feel like a kid again."



> THE OUTSIDERS

It may have started as an April fool's joke: In 2002 *EGM* cruelly claimed that dedicated *Super Smash Bros. Melee* fans could unlock long-time Mario rival Sonic the Hedgehog as a playable character. This time around, it's actually true (can't you hear the fanboys cheer?). The far stranger non-Nintendo pick is *Metal Gear Solid*'s scruffy, cigarette-smoking Solid Snake. No word yet on whether his nudie mag distraction attack will make it into the game.

> GUESS THE NEW CHARACTERS

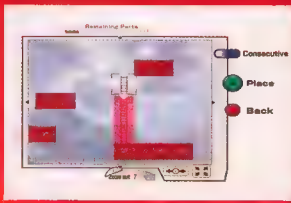


CUSTOM CHAOS

Brawl's level editor lets you share your Created creativity with the world

For the woefully pale players who manage to run out of new content to play with in *Brawl*, the game features a new editor that will allow them to make their own stages. That means countless of Nintendoophiles are now plotting to re-create their favorite moments in 8-bit gaming. But while level editors in Nintendo games date all the way back to *ExciteBike* for the NES, *Brawl's* does one better: Thanks to a submission option, these folks will be able to upload their creations for a chance to share them with the masses.

Nintendo will broadcast one level per day, selected from the throng, to *Brawl* players who have connected their systems to the Internet. It begs the question: Will there be a human sorting through all the Bullet Bill puzzles and brick-spelled four-letter words? "I think there's a human in the process somewhere," says U.S. Producer Nate Bihldorf. "Naughty children being what they are, we're sure to see our fair share of...inappropriate shapes." Still, if any of the phallic-faced Miis on the Check Mill Out Channel are anything to go by, we figure some subtle dirty work will slip past the censors.



> The Sony stable of today is far from the Sony of 10 or even five years ago. Who's going to decorate their rec room with *Blasto* merchandise? Does it even exist?

—Chris Kohler, author of the book *Power-Up: How Japanese Video Games Gave the World an Extra Life*

SMASHING WITH STRANGERS

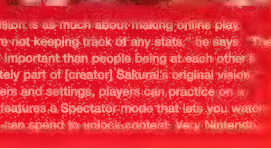
Brawl's multiplayer modes finally push Nintendo deeper into online territory

Really Nintendo's maddest online game, *Brawl* packs lots of new-to-the-Wii features along with a very familiar—and very annoying—one: the friend code. If you want to *Smash* your friends online, you'll need to input codes for each buddy, even if you've previously entered his or her Wii console code. The system, according to outgoing Nintendo VP Ferrin Kaplan, is designed to protect young players from contact with strangers. "Our goal is to ensure safety for everyone who plays online," she says.

And though you can play with your friends (and exchange whatever obscenities the filter will allow through customizable text-based taunts), *Brawl's* online matchmaking service makes players totally anonymous to one another.

Producer Nate Bihldorf says that this decision is as much about making online play accessible as it is about safety. "With Anyone Mode, you're not keeping track of any stats," he says. "The idea of people coming together to play for fun being more important than people being at each other's throats is the top spot on the leaderboards—that's definitely part of [creator] Sakurai's original vision."

While waiting for online opponents to pick their characters and settings, players can practice on a dummy, an attempt to keep the adrenaline up. *Brawl* also features a Spectator mode that lets you watch online matches and bet coins on the outcome—coins you can spend to unlock content. Very Nintendo.



> FIVE NINTENDO CHARACTERS WE DON'T WANT TO SEE IN BRAVUL

COVER STORY

The Secret Sauce

What makes *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* so special? Designers from across the industry try to unravel the magic that makes Nintendo games Nintendo games...



CD-i Link
Link: The Faces of Evil (CD-i)



Candy Kong
Donkey Kong Country (SNES)



Dog Food Bowl Geist
Geist (GC)



Mike Tyson
Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!! (NES)



Math
Donkey Kong Jr. Math (NES)

It's on the tip of your tongue when you rocket from planet to planet in *Super Mario Galaxy*. You feel it lurking in your subconscious when you scramble up a steep corridor in *Metroid Prime 3* or push a puzzle piece into place in *Ocarina of Time*. It's a quality possessed by Nintendo's best-in-house games that resists description. Critics call it "polish." Gamers call it "feel." Kids just assume it's magic, and they're probably closer to the truth. What's the secret ingredient that gives Nintendo's greatest games their peculiar mojo? Admiring game designers have studied the subject closely.

When *God of War* creator David Jaffe plays a Nintendo game, he's often struck by the lack of obstacles between the joystick and a good time. "It's like they've thought of everything," says Jaffe. "All you need to do is pay for your ticket, then sit back and go on a great ride. From fundamental aspects like great controls

and smart difficulty curves to more obscure—but just as important—elements like giving rewards when players try kooky and creative things, Nintendo takes care of the player."

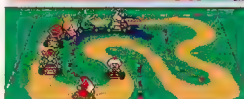
Motion sickness

Most strikingly, Nintendo takes care of the connection between player and character. Zen controls, tuned with a watchmaker's precision, are a Nintendo hallmark. "I feel well-versed to speak about this because I spent a significant amount of time trying to break the formula as a game designer," says Jason Rubin, cofounder of developer Naughty Dog. Back when Rubin and company were still hard at work at the *Crash Bandicoot* series, games that often succeeded in tapping into "Nintendo-ness," he came across a study linking the commercial success of games to how close their character's jumps mimicked Mario's. "The results were incredible," says Rubin. "Games with characters that

stayed in the air about the same amount of time as Mario were more successful than games with characters that stayed in the air a longer or shorter time. Nintendo just has the best innate ability to judge control. They have mastered the art."

The pleasures of great game control can be difficult to put into words, but indie game developer Steve Swink is in the process of writing an entire book on the subject: *Game Feel: A Game Designer's Guide to Virtual Sensation*. "Nintendo's unique focus is on making the thing being controlled in the game feel like an extension of the player," says Swink, "and making that sensation powerful, tactile, and subconscious."

This isn't a recent development. More than 20 years ago, *Super Mario Bros.* featured nuanced controls unlike any other game. "Before *Super Mario Bros.*, there were plenty of side-scrolling games featuring running, jumping, collecting things, and fighting

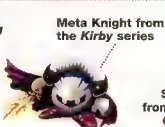


■ That loving feeling: No matter the genre—from fighting to racing to gravity-defying action—Nintendo games just have that certain something.

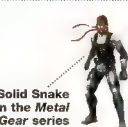
> NEW-CHARACTER ANSWER KEY



Diddy Kong from the Donkey Kong Country series



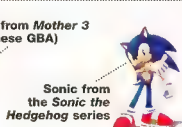
Meta Knight from the Kirby series



Solid Snake from the Metal Gear series



Lucas from Mother 3 (Japanese GBA)



Sonic the Hedgehog from the Sonic the Hedgehog series



King Dedede from the Kirby series

enemies," says Swink. "*Super Mario Bros.* found just the right tuning of elements." With just two buttons and a D-pad, the game's creator, Shigeru Miyamoto, was able to squeeze out a surprising array of moves, each with its own delicately tuned feel. "Mario speeds up gradually and slows down gradually," says Swink. "He can steer left and right in the air, but with less speed than when he's on the ground. Hold down the button longer, and Mario jumps higher. These relationships made Mario feel like a beautiful instrument, one which millions of people responded to."

Delaying actions

While some of Nintendo's success in crafting good feel can be attributed to talented designers, the company is also famous for spending more time, effort, and money in pursuit of perfection than most other game developers. Denis Dyack, founder of *Too Human* (XB360) developer Silicon Knights—a studio that worked under the Nintendo umbrella for several years—witnessed this obsession firsthand. According to Dyack, it's the process of iteration (building and

rebuilding a game again and again before it's released, regardless of the effect on the game's release date) that sets Nintendo games apart. "Most developers, particularly those in North America, will get something to a first pass, do a single pass of iteration, and then finalize," says Dyack. "Nintendo starts with a first pass and then iterates like no other group we have ever seen. They are prepared to iterate on something for years until it feels right to the creators."

Nintendo may be detail-oriented, but the company's ability to pull those details together in complex games like *Super Mario Galaxy* or *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* is the ultimate secret ingredient. "What I think is so surprising to gamers, critics, and other game developers, is just how different the

experience of a Nintendo game can be from other games that seem to be constructed with the same elements," says Swink. "The reason is that video games, more than any other medium, rely on harmony. Nintendo games, while composed of familiar elements, combine them in ways that give rise to the most delightful dynamics."

Dyack believes that this harmony is what we find so hard to describe, yet take such pleasure in. "Miyamoto-san once compared the creation of his games to the creation of music," Dyack says. "They look for melody and rhythm in the game mechanics they create. In this sense, Nintendo creates classical music that may move and uplift its audience, but the audience may not always understand why or how they do it." **DA**

➤ Nintendo creates classical music that may move and uplift its audience, but the audience may not always understand why or how they do it.

—Silicon Knights Founder Dennis Dyack



BRRAWLING FOR A LIVING

Think *Smash Bros.* can't hang with serious fighting games? Just ask a pro player.

With the amount of anger and stress that takes place in any given *Smash Bros.* match—the ever-changing levels, the randomly dispensed weapons, the zooming and panning visual chaos—you wouldn't expect there to be such a thing as competitive *Smash* tournaments. But they do exist. In the community of gamers, players of *Smash Bros.* not as a party game, but as a fighting game. And they're extremely serious about it.



"The tournament players are way beyond anything that I could ever do in that game," says *Brawl* producer Nate Bihldorf. "And I played pretty relentlessly for a while." Bihldorf may have a lot of hours under his belt, but that's nothing compared to the time Major League Gaming pro Chris "KillaOR" McKenzie has logged. "I've played, probably, a year and a half straight, total time," he says. McKenzie and his competitive ilk, however, play under very specific conditions. They only use a handful of stages (the simplest, least interfering types), and they loathe items. "We definitely take out the items," says McKenzie. "It makes it too much of a random, lucky type of environment instead of a skilled environment." The pros also tend to use just a few of the game's huge roster of characters, due to some character imbalances—something McKenzie is hoping *Brawl* will fix.

But he shouldn't get too optimistic about the prospect of an overexposed *Smash Bros.* "In a game like this," says Bihldorf, "you're never going to get to this utopian where everything's balanced perfectly. You strive for it, but the chances of it ever happening are pretty much nil. The character roster is just way too big. There are too many moves, too many factors."

Meanwhile, for anyone looking to up their *Smash Bros.* game, McKenzie has one piece of advice: Use your head. "There are a lot of really technical players, but they're not smart with their technique," he says. "The best way to get better is to watch your mistakes, not so much be as fast as possible. Be the smartest Fox, not the fastest Fox."

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DRAKE'S FORTUNE



NAUGHTY DOG

Prepare yourself for the adventure of a lifetime as modern-day fortune hunter Nathan Drake sets out to find the legendary treasure of El Dorado. Swarmed by pirates and mercenaries, Nate must rely on his wits to survive, while trying to unlock the secrets of this fabled prize. He's just an ordinary guy, hell-bent on an adventure that will be anything but.

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GRAPHICS

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REVIEWS

> pigskin flop, hijacking cop, samurai chop, and skid marks

74
BURNOUT:
PARADISE
(GAME
OF THE
MONTH)



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> THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS

Two Tickets to Paradise

Seat belts encouraged



WE ALMOST HAD A LEGENDARY REVIEWS SECTION THIS MONTH. A

half-point was all that separated this issue's pack of bottom-dwellers and prevented an unheard-of triple Shame of the Month tie. As it turns out, *NFL Tour* secured that dubious honor for itself, but *Samurai Warriors: Katana* and *Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom* gave it their best. Maybe next time, guys.

While it may be tempting to say that this makes for an ominous start to 2008, *Burnout: Paradise*, easily our Game of the Month, made many an editor here happy and turned out to be a perfect palate cleanser for 2007's year-end glut of shooters and sugary-sweet Wii games. Even better, while some third-party multiplatform releases vary in quality depending on the system (such as *Madden NFL 08*), *Burnout* plays beautifully on both PS3 and XB360. See, we can play nice.

—Greg Ford, Reviews Editor

> HOW WE RATE

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

> SCORES AND AWARDS

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

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





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NFL Tour:
Sacked for
a huge loss



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Harvey: A
case of fall-
ing short?



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Katana: A
very dull
blade



THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

Back by popular demand...or just back



Dan "Shoe" Hsu

Editor-in-Chief/Editorial Dir. Shoe closed out 2007 shooting way too many things (Covenant soldiers, Middle Eastern troops, interdimensional portals...), so he's looking forward to calmer games in 2008. Where's *Animal Crossing* for Wii?

Now Playing: *The Orange Box*, *Advance Wars: Days of Ruin*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



Jennifer Tsao

Managing Editor Jen's early start on New Year's resolutions (she promised last month to lose weight through gaming) only meant she got to slacking earlier than everyone else—does shouting in *Burnout* burn calories?

Now Playing: *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Burnout: Paradise*
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



Bryan Intihar

Reviews Editor As Bryan worked on this issue's "Decision '08" feature, he couldn't help but ponder how many of these games would eventually get delayed till next year. Here's to the PS3 safari *Afrika* not being one of them.

Now Playing: *Devil May Cry 4*, *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com



Michael Donahoe

News/Features Editor What an easy month for Michael—normally he reviews at least two or three games, but this issue he only had to play one (short) offering. Not that he objects to that—his backlog will keep him busy. Too busy.

Now Playing: *Final Fantasy Tactics*, *Super Mario Galaxy*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



Brooks Huber

Editorial Intern After 13 long months serving as EGM's editorial intern, it's finally time to bid farewell to young Brooksie. If only he went out with a little more class. This kicking and screaming bit is embarrassing. Security!

Now Playing: *Call of Duty 4*, *Burnout: Paradise*, *Portal*
Blog: egmbrooks.1UP.com



Shane Bottenhausen

Executive Editor Shane dedicates his *Culdcept* review to Galton, his 12th-level chaotic-neutral bard eaten by a Tungsten Dragon in a decade-long *D&D* campaign. He'd toast this fallen half-elf, but the Royal Crown bag is still full of dice.

Now Playing: *Culdcept Saga*, *Burnout: Paradise*, *Wii Fit*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



Crispin Boyer

Senior Editor Crispin's mom told him it was a beautiful day outside; why waste it cooped up with those damn game tapes? So he took advantage of the postholiday gaming lull to beat the s*** out of nature, *Smash Bros.*-style.

Now Playing: *Wii Fit*, *Super Mario Galaxy*, *Mass Effect*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



Greg Ford

Reviews Editor After reviewing *Burnout: Paradise*, Ford was optimistic that this would be the year when every game would be pure gold. Then he played *Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice*. Hmm, what's on tap for 2009?

Now Playing: *Halo 3*, *Burnout: Paradise*, *Call of Duty 4*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



Darren Gladstone

Senior Editor, Games for Windows: The Official Mag. After playing through countless hours of *Samurai Warriors: Katana*, Darren's finally ready to fight ninja hordes. Now he just needs to figure out which end of the sword to use....

Now Playing: *Rock Band*, *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*
Blog: glwdarren.1UP.com



Andrew Fitch

Staff Reviewer Evidence of Fitchy's dedication to his craft: He almost passed up a hot date in favor of a *Kingdom Under Fire* multiplayer session. Almost. And once you read his review, this factoid will become all the more frightening.

Now Playing: *Silent Hill Origins*, *Contra 4*, *Persone 3*
Blog: codydesk-fitch.1UP.com

Also on deck...

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Managing Editor
1UP.com

Andrew Pfister
Reviews Editor
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Matt Leone
Reviews Editor
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Patrick Klepek
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Tyler Barber
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Joe Rybicki
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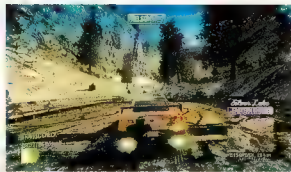
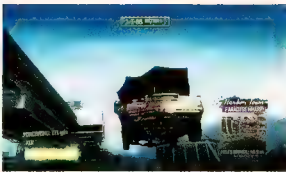
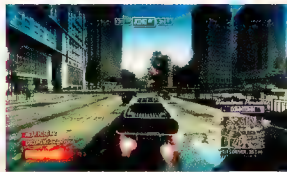
Greg Sewart
Staff Reviewer

Todd Zuniga
Sports Guy
Staff Reviewer



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

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



You can initiate a unique event in all of Burnout's 120 intersections by just hitting two buttons.

PS3/XB360

BURNOUT: PARADISE

■ Publisher: EA ■ Developer: Criterion ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+



Oh won't you please take me home

➔ **SHANE:** As someone who's closely followed Criterion's racing series for the last seven years, it warms my heart to see it evolve into something as innovative, satisfying, and polished as *Paradise*. The series' core driving gameplay remains mercifully unadulterated here—you'll find the same overly forgiving steering, wild stunts, and cringeworthy collisions that have always set *Burnout* apart from its peers in the genre. But while the most recent franchise offerings (*Revenge* and *Dominator*) felt like playin'-it-safe rehashes, *Paradise* brilliantly reimagines *Burnout* as a go-anywhere, do-anything open-world adventure in the vein of *Grand Theft Auto*.

From the game's outset, you're given free rein over a massive chunk

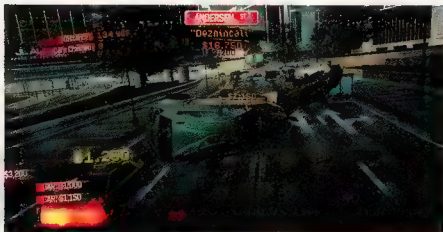
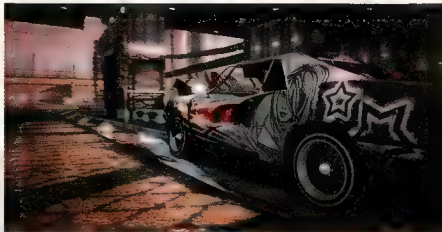
of land encompassing fictional Paradise City and its outlying countryside. And oh what a world it is: Whether you're careening through desolate urban alleys or rocketing across a rickety railroad trestle, the game looks nearly flawless and runs at a buttery-smooth clip. Plus, Paradise City offers so many cleverly hidden secrets to discover (Super Jumps, shortcuts, gas stations, targets to smash, etc.) that you needn't even tackle the 120 instantly accessible events. This was a genius move: Casual players can have a blast while merely exploring the world, unfettered by the consequences of crashing or losing a race.

Of course, you'll eventually want to enter those events in order to amass

a junkyard full of unique rides. Some familiar mission types reappear sporting slight tweaks: Devilishly aggressive enemy A.I. transforms point-to-point races into epic high-speed battles, while Stunt Runs demand familiarity with Paradise City's craziest trick playgrounds. Yet it's a shame that the game's best events—the takedown-centric Road Rage and everyone's-out-to-total-you Marked Man—aren't available in the otherwise sensational online mode. And although it's goofy fun, the new Showtime mode (see sidebar) is no Crash mode.

➔ **G. FORD:** Once I got the hang of *Paradise*'s open-endedness—which didn't take long—I marveled at the way its freedom melded into the

The Good: Fast, fun, and addictive open-world gameplay
The Bad: Showtime isn't a worthy substitute for Crash Mode
DJ Atomic: Oddly, he's not that annoying



Show's Over



Burnout's cataclysmic Crash mode has been a fan favorite ever since its debut in *Burnout 2*, yet in *Paradise*, developer Criterion replaces it with Showtime, a new minigame that can be triggered after any crash. Here, you control your wrecked auto as it bounces through traffic in an attempt to create as much vehicular damage as possible. Sure, it's still a fun, visceral exercise in destruction (that, weirdly enough, plays a bit like *Katamari Damacy*), but the results often feel too random. Busy intersections yield huge pileups, but many parts of Paradise City are just too desolate to create any satisfying wreckage. We're hoping a traditional Crash mode might appear via downloadable content....

structured events. Like how when your busted-up jolopy is on its last legs in Road Rage, you can simply drive through an auto-repair shop and come out new-car-smell fixed. Or how every race has a start and a finish but no set route connecting them (although you may have to stick with the pack or double-check the map to ensure you aren't horribly off target). Or how you choose which events you even want to tackle while graduating through the licenses.

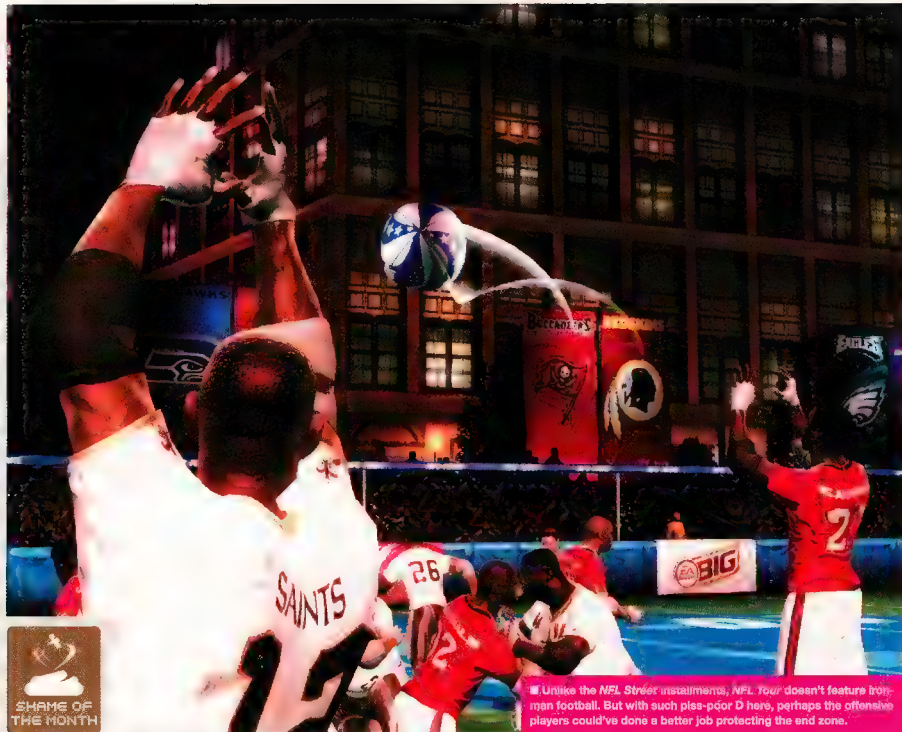
And then you have online, a playground where you and a virtual round of friends can compete to drift the farthest or stay airborne the longest or just ram the hell out of each other. When that gets old, the leader can host a challenge (such as completing a certain Super Jump) or lay down a race using any two endpoints on

the map. Plug in the PlayStation Eye or Live Vision camera (depending on your system), and the winner even gets to share a drive-time victory photo. The obscene possibilities are as wide-open as the city itself.

➔ **ANDREW P:** There'll be an adjustment period, for sure, thanks to this newfound sense of freedom. The expanse of Paradise City encourages exploration, but also memorization of shortcuts and optimal routes—and thanks to the unique stretches of road, complex intersections, and phantom off-ramps, it's easy to find yourself disoriented. It's like the city planners intentionally made their roads as dangerous as possible, stocking them with blind corners, oncoming traffic, and cement barriers. But that's still part of the fun, because even if

you bust out of a race, you'll always find something else nearby that you can do. It's sad to see the traditional Crash mode disappear because its replacement (see sidebar) does seem a bit too random, but Showtime could still be lots of fun in an online session with players trying to outdo each other's carnage.

And that's the real essence of *Paradise*: Sure, the city is great, but it's simply the necessary means to the online end. The seamless jumping in and out of online sessions tears down the wall between single- and multi-player, and though the absence of Road Rage and Marked Man events is disappointing, a competitive (or even cooperative) spirit as you and your buddies drive around the city is always there. Like Shane said, this is the natural evolution of *Burnout*. 🚗

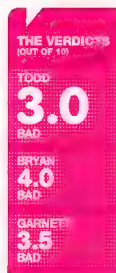


■ Unlike the *NFL Street* escalations, *NFL Tour* doesn't feature iron-man football. But with such piss-poor D here, perhaps the offensive players could've done a better job protecting the end zone.

PS3/XB360

NFL TOUR

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



The Good: The reversal system
The Bad: Where's the D?
The PS3 Version: Runs considerably slower than the Xbox 360 edition

Get us the hell off this tour

➔ **TODD:** This half-assed rebranding and rethinking of the *NFL Street* series is one of the limpest sports experience I've played in years. *NFL Tour* is shockingly inorganic, severely underdeveloped, and thoroughly limited.

The 7-on-7 game is semifun on offense, with a simplified reversal system that will have you tearing through tackles if your button timing's right. But the game completely falls apart on defense. I couldn't stop any team over the course of four downs (except one stop against the dismal Dolphins). In part, that's because running backs won't go down. I counted nine broken tackles once, and I simply couldn't find a way to counter the endless string of dekes and dodges. To win games, I had to try to score more

extra points than the other team (you can go for either one or two points here). And on defense, I'd just pick a play and then check my e-mail while the game ran. It's that bad.

Any arcade-rich sports game worth its salt is all about balancing the yin/yang, risk/reward, back/forth dynamics (think *NBA Street Homecourt* and *The Bigs*), but you won't find any of that in this rush job. With no degree of difficulty here, it simply has no degree of fun.

Likewise, Tour mode is a colossal, unimaginative waste, and it just further showcases the rush. You play through the NFL divisions with different scoring systems (like play to 24, or play two two-minute halves) for each group. Yawn. The create-a-player

development is farcical, too. In *The Bigs*, my avatar was integral; here, it's an after-after-afterthought. Also, why is my QB doing a bodybuilder flex after I got sacked to make it 3rd and 29? And please don't get me started on the announcing!

➔ **BRYAN:** "Announcing?! Don't talk to me about announcing!" Now, if you think my riff on Jim Mora's famous postgame press conference is bad, it's nothing compared to this game's butchering of it. And sadly, that's not even close to the worst line ESPN's Trey Wingo utters while calling *NFL Tour*'s action.

Things don't get much better once you step onto the field, either, as the total lack of defense really handicaps



how you play the game (the clock ends up being more of your opponent than the other team). I do enjoy the fighting-game-esque reversal system for making and breaking tackles, but that's really all I'd like to see carried over into the next edition (if it ever happens). Also, when the developers stripped away *NFL Street*'s thuggish aesthetic, why did they have



to take with it some of those games' entertaining modes, like picking your squad from a random pool of players? At least that involved some kind of strategy...

+ GARNETT: When I fired up my copy of *NFL Tour*, I had to double-check that I was playing the right game, because I figured something had to be off. But nope, I hadn't accidentally booted up my Dreamcast...it only looked like a holdover from those days.

That offers no excuse for the utter lack of creativity on display here, such as the generic beach-volleyball stadiums for each city. Nor does it explain only giving me 20-some-odd premade faces to choose from for my "custom" character. And even back in the days of *Blitz*'s heyday, the developers knew you needed a little balance between offense and defense. *NFL Tour*'s last-team-with-the-ball-wins emphasis on offense deflates whatever air this pigskin had left in it. **✎**

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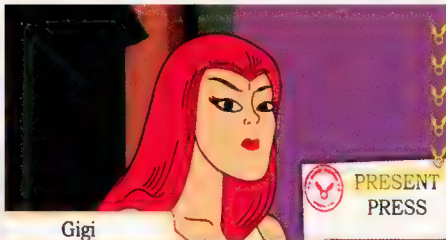
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Gigi

Harry Birdman and I recently got back together, we are married.



Wii/PS2

HARVEY BIRDMAN: ATTORNEY AT LAW

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



The Good: Feels like a *Harvey Birdman* episode...

The Bad: ...a somewhat unfunny episode
Find Hidden Street Fighter Cameos: To unlock bonus videos

Think twice before taking this case

▲ A. FITCH: It seems like a can't-miss formula: Take the hilarious courtroom drama of *Phoenix Wright*, extract the somewhat morbid undertones, and inject the irreverent, hysterical antics of *Harvey Birdman's* whacked-out cast of classic Hanna-Barbera toons. But in a lighthearted point-and-click adventure like this, the biggest crime is not being consistently funny...an offense of which *Harvey Birdman* is regrettably guilty. The script, penned by two of the show's creators, feels like slapped-together B material, and the rare laugh-out-loud moments—such as trench-coat-clad spy Secret Squirrel's penchant for flashing—are recycled from funnier capers on the original series. Also, *Harvey's* investigations outside the courtroom unfold

via text only, so lines that could elicit snickers with the right delivery fall flat. To top it all off, fan favorite Stephen Colbert's missing from the voice cast! *Harvey Birdman's* good for a few yuks, but one of the funniest shows on Adult Swim—recently canceled, sadly—deserves a better send-off than this.

♦ MICHAEL: Hell, *Harvey Birdman* doesn't so much copy as steal the courtroom gameplay introduced in the *Phoenix Wright* series. Not that I have a problem with that—being a big fan of Capcom's lovable lawyer games made playing *Birdman* a breeze. Or at least when the contradictions—the crux of the cases—weren't so damn ambiguous. Even with my confusion, it

didn't take me long to fly through the five supershort cases. So yeah, the length is definitely a concern, but the wacky antics were enough to keep me interested throughout the game.

♦ DARRIN: Objection! Donahoe, stop smoking the evidence. No way would I recommend this game to legal eagles with the superior *Phoenix Wright* titles already out there. My beef with the Adult Swim-ification of Capcom's lawyer RPG: The half-assed humor isn't up to the show's standards. Even as a fan, I almost found it in contempt of my save-game slot. Is it worth it? The gameplay works fine—but provided you follow *Harvey Birdman's* loopy logic, you'll breeze through each case. I'd suggest buying the DVDs. 🐦



Wii

SAMURAI WARRIORS: KATANA

■ Publisher: Koei ■ Developer: Omega Force
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

This blade could use some sharpening

➔ **BROOKS:** Given its appearance, you could be forgiven for calling *Katana* a "light-gun game" or a "first-person shooter" at first, but you'd be a little off. "On-rails hack-n-slash" would be more appropriate, as nearly every stage adheres to the same dull theme: Defeat wave after wave of brain-dead, cookie-cutter henchmen by jostling the Wii Remote about.

My complaints don't end there. The controls for the titular katana lack polish, as the slow response time will have you flailing your arm to little avail. In fact, I found the spear—a late-game acquisition—to be the most effective weapon, simply because it relies on old-fashioned button presses. Thankfully, standard projectile weapons also offer a break from the frustrating motion controls. Flooring foes with a gun feels satisfyingly sadistic, and the best stages focus entirely on the shooting mechanic—too bad they're so few in number. I appreciate Koei attempting something new for this series; if only the dullness hadn't made the cut....

THE VERDICTS
(OUT OF 10)

BROOKS
4.5
BAD

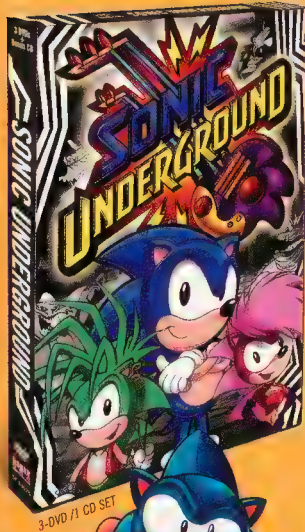
SHARKEY
3.5
BAD

DARREN
3.0
BAD

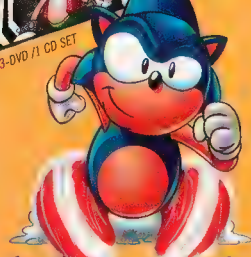
The Good: Once you get a gun and spear equipped
The Bad: Motion control for some weapons, unskippable cut-scenes
Who Cares? The convoluted story ■ ■ ■ snoozefest

➔ **SHARKEY:** Not only is the katana the worst weapon in the game, but I get the sense you could play through the first half-dozen levels of this thing by duct taping your Wii Remote to an oscillating fan without sacrificing any effectiveness. To make matters worse, the shooting mechanic is awe-inspiringly bad (Brooks is being too kind...or maybe he just has low expectations given the recent glut of middling Wii light-gun shooters). Throw in boring unskippable intros and interstitials in every stage, and congratulations: *Katana* completely lost my attention.

➔ **DARREN:** Brooks? Sharkey? Who else here is ready to commit seppuku? Yes, I know *Katana* isn't a light-gun sword-slinger, but that doesn't stop me from thinking this melds all the gravitas of the laughable *Mad Dog McCree* (Sega CD) with the tension you feel from a ninja that throws kittens at you. I felt like an idiot swinging my arms while playing *Katana*—almost as dopey as the countless waves of nameless, faceless enemies that kept stepping right in front of my blade. God help me—playing this I actually missed the button mashing from other *Warriors* games.



3-DVD / 1 CD SET



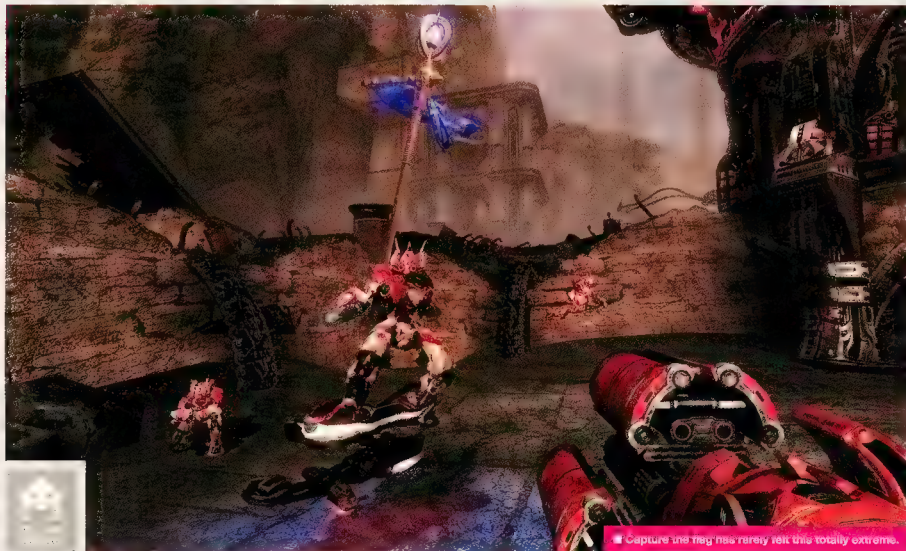
Juice and Jam Time... All the Time

When he's not battling the evil Dr. Robotnik, Sonic the Hedgehog is pursuing his real passion: bringing the *ROCK*. And when he's got a moment to spare, the SEGA legend's loading up our libraries with all the festivities of his third animated series, *Sonic Underground* — a 3-DVD box set boasting bonuses like the 8-song *Sonic Underground* greatest-hits CD, retrospective interviews, original concept art, and plenty more. Folks, "way past cool" never got this cool. It's juice and jam time...



Available at:





■ Capture the flag has rarely felt this totally extreme.

PlayStation 3

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3

■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: Epic ■ Players: 1-16 ■ ESRB: Mature



The Good: Frantic multiplayer, user mods, visual
The Bad: Lame offline story mode
The Thrilling: Flying tactical nuke into your enemy's base

Just an old-fashioned fragfest

✦ **GARNETT:** *Unreal Tournament*—a popular PC online multiplayer first-person-shooter series renowned for its cutting-edge visuals and lightning-fast action—has never been embraced by console players...but it should be now. Packing the series' trademark reliable weapons (including the flak cannon and rocket launcher), *UT3* hits the PS3 primed for frag-filled action.

Whether on or offline, when the fighting starts, you face the shooter essentials of deathmatch and capture the flag, as well as a grand battle mode called Warfare. Every one runs smoothly on even the biggest maps (which feature lots of avenues and are well thought-out tactically), and reliable controls erased my concerns about how the game would handle

with the Sixaxis. What *UT3* does, it does exceedingly well. While the appeal may not sustain much in solo play, this stands as one of the high-lights for Net-connected PS3 owners.

✦ **PATRICK:** About that solo play: Not only is its campaign little more than boring training for multiplayer, but the computer-teammate A.I. is completely worthless—players are forced to complete every objective themselves. That said, the online play is spectacularly fun. The fast pacing and overpowered weapons may turn off some, but for everyone else, you won't find anything else like it on PS3. Plus, user mods—new weapons, levels, and game types you can create on PC and transfer to PS3—ensure limitless replayability.

✦ **JOE:** Yeah, I was just as disappointed as Patrick to find the single-player so lackluster; the story just feels tacked on. And while I understand why the player has to take care of all the crucial objectives, without a decent story, it feels like you're getting all of the drawbacks to solo play with none of the benefits.

But online? Hot damn. It's as fast as they come, with loads of customizability and variety. The beautiful levels show some clever design, too. *UT3* may be a bit light on strategy, but it's heavy on fast, frantic mayhem. **A-**

EGM Extras: If you find yourself getting your ass handed to you far too often online, head to EGM.1UP.com for our multiplayer-focused *UT3* SuperGuide.



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Xbox 360

KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: CIRCLE OF DOOM

■ Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios ■ Developer: Blueside
■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Mature

Dynasty Warriors...now with Sominex!

➔ **A. FITCH:** What's the perfect way to sabotage the *Kingdom Under Fire* series, a real-time-strategy franchise with elements of *Dynasty Warriors*? How about ditching the strategy elements entirely and making it just like Koel's long-since played-out hack-n-slashfest?

OK, that's a little unfair...to *Dynasty Warriors*. At least it doesn't have *Circle of Doom*'s half-assed role-playing elements, like a confusing, unrewarding alchemy system and fetch quest-triggered abilities. Shaky camera angles and massive slowdown plague combat itself, and the "story"—such as it is—is delivered via a dream world so subtly woven into gameplay that it might as well not be there at all. *Circle of Doom*'s online multiplayer does make things slightly more bearable, but not because it injects any fun into the experience—more that you're not burdened with the mundane task of slaying every single generi-demon yourself. It's never a good sign when I nearly fall asleep while playing a game...multiple times.

➔ **GREG S:** Dungeon hacks can be fun—just ask anyone who's lost countless hours with classic "head into a dungeon and collect loot" games like *Diablo*. So *KUF*'s switch to this genre actually piqued my interest at first. But only a few levels into my play experience, I was bored beyond belief. The game's basic mechanics are crap. The fighting system is awkward and clunky, made even worse by graphical slowdown. And the linear levels wouldn't be so bad if they were semi-interesting to look at. Very disappointing.

➔ **TYLER:** *Circle of Doom* may not be great, but I still enjoyed it. Well, to be clear, my enjoyment was at the game's expense. Playing from the peanut gallery, the horrible dialogue, questionable characters, and trite level design are at best tolerable—mocking the game with your friends online helps. Play alone, and the unintentional hilarity is just embarrassing. Mowing your way through to the end unlocks the "hard difficulty." Rather than being smarter, enemies inflict status-effect damage with every attack, leaving you frozen, poisoned, and on fire. Circle of doom indeed.

THE VERDICTS

(OUT OF 10)

A. FITCH

3.0

BAD

GREG S

4.0

BAD

TYLER

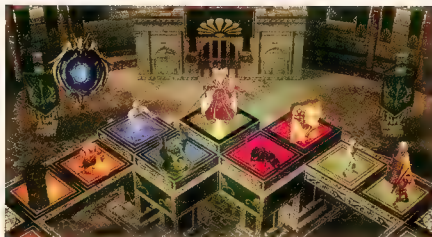
4.0

BAD

The Good: Mildly engaging online co-op

The Bad: It's an absolute bore to play

Does a Game This Dull: Need eight language options?



Xbox 360

CULDCCEPT SAGA

■ Publisher: Namco Bandai ■ Developer: OmiyaSoft
■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen

Plays its cards right

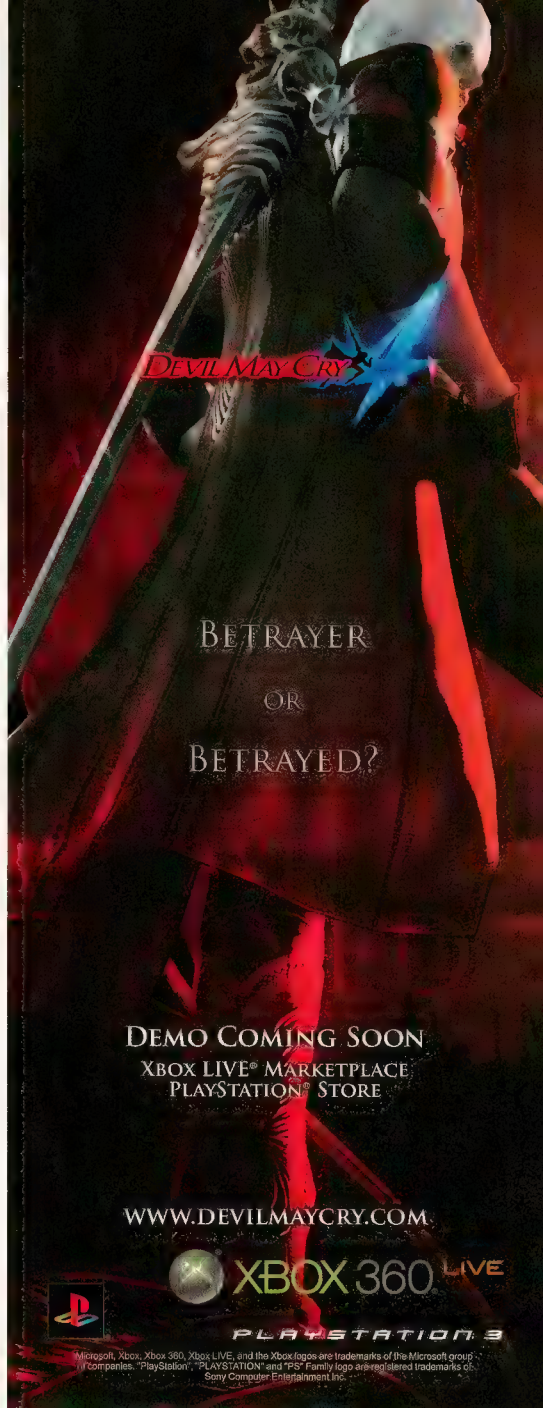
✦ **NICK:** *Saga* is a fitting second chance for the PS2's beloved obscurity *Culdcept*, even if it doesn't make the most of its 360 debut...to put it lightly. For those who missed out on the first game (most everyone), turn the words "monster *Monopoly*" around in your head, throw in an addictive card-battling element, and you're not far off. Collecting new cards postbattle (win or lose) and tweaking your deck are quietly engaging, and the matches themselves—while lengthy—provide all the strategic depth and unlikely victories you could hope for, provided you put in the time to learn the ruling minutiae. Unfortunately, you'll find little in the presentation to distinguish this as a 360 game: crisp, colorful character sprites have been swapped out for ho-hum 3D models, and the abhorrent story still interferes far too often. It's ultimately all about the core game behind it, and the online play and \$40 price point supersedes the problems.

✦ **SHANE:** Just as Nick says, stomaching *Culdcept Saga*'s ramshackle presentation isn't easy—the simplistic graphics, hefty load times, and amateurish cut-scenes here make Burger King's promotional *Sneak King* game look like cutting-edge new-gen fare. To make matters worse, the game's absurdly steep difficulty curve (you will lose the first match) will undoubtedly scare off a large chunk of its potential fan base. But soldier on and you'll find an addictive *Monopoly*-meets-*Magic* hybrid that offers immeasurable strategic depth. Adding online multiplayer sweetens the deal considerably.

✦ **SHOE:** Good thing for those postbattle card rewards for losing, because the computer is relentless at times and has an uncanny knack for rolling the exact number you don't want it to roll (and we have confirmed single-player die rolls are somewhat predetermined due to players cheating on the first game with save/load tricks). But then the game offers you a powerful new spell or monster, and your deck (and enthusiasm) is revitalized for the next match. The interface may be intimidating, but the strategy is deep, and the many come-from-behind victories are near exhilarating.



The Good: Unique, addicting, sensibly priced
The Bad: Playing a two-hour game, only to lose
Now We're Really Excited For: *Culdcept DS*



DEMO COMING SOON

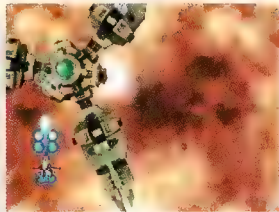
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DS

NANOSTRAY 2

■ Publisher: Majesco ■ Developer: Shin'en
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

RAY
6.5
 AVERAGE

A. FITCH
6.0
 AVERAGE

NICK
5.0
 AVERAGE

The Good: Looks good, few gimmicks
The Bad: Ridiculous continue system
That Retro Feelin': If possible, play it on the original DS with its superior D-pad

Blasting away one nanometer at a time

✦ **RAY:** Regardless of whether you played the first *Nanostray*, try to forget it: *Nanostray 2* is a better arcade-style shoot-'em-up that doesn't force stylus-only control or use weird camera angles. It's traditional horizontal- and vertical-scrolling action for almost anyone who enjoys the likes of *R-Type* or *Ikaruga*. And it does cleverly use the touch screen by allowing you to finely adjust the directions of your secondary-fire drones—most shooters just give you preset formations.

NS2 isn't as extreme as the aforementioned *Ikaruga*, but you can play clearly for loss: If you reach the second loop of stages and lose every continue, you're always kicked back to the very beginning. Sounds normal for a shooter, but you're shown the

halfway point without being able to restart there afterward, so it feels like an unfair tease. On the bright side, the actual flying and shooting are pleasing to the eye and thumb, so even casual shooter enthusiasts can find some fun.

✦ **A. FITCH:** Funny you should mention casual shooter fans, Ray—why do developers assume the only gamers still into this genre are hardcore freaks with shrines to the *Gradius* series' *Vic Viper* in their bedroom? If anything, two-player co-op only makes this tough game even harder with its slowdown, gimped firepower, and similarly colored bullets crowding the screen. I like the option to customize your ship speed and shot angles, and the game does capture that

mid-'80s Japanese shooter vibe—but those of us who grew up on those games are older now, and our reflexes ain't what they used to be....

✦ **NICK:** Spot on, chaps. Shot customization and traditional controls in, multiplayer (way too small a screen) and forgoing structure out. Actually, I *could* stomach the archaic start-all-the-way-over-when-you-die approach—simply because hardcore genre fans will find little else on DS—if the game had any sort of unique hook or visual design. You could quite easily mistake *Nanostray 2* for a game in any other shooter series, but it lacks the focus and polish that make series like *Gradius* and *R-Type* great. Turns out beggars *can* be choosers.



PSP

PURSUIT FORCE: EXTREME JUSTICE

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Bigfish
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS (OUT OF 10)

G. FORD
5.5
 AVERAGE

JOE
6.0
 AVERAGE

MATT
6.5
 AVERAGE

The Good: Variety in levels and gameplay
The Bad: Infuriating on-foot levels, multiplayer
Co-op Multiplayer
Driving: Not as easy as you'd think

Tempered thrills

✦ **G. FORD:** A smorgasbord of action bits and play styles, *Extreme Justice* brings an interesting but unremarkable ride to the PSP. The game puts you in control of Pursuit Force, a SWAT-like squad that specializes in high-speed takedowns. Depending on the play mechanic, though, those takedowns can be hit-and-miss.

Driving delivers a nice sense of speed and features a cool "leap from your car to the enemy's" mechanic, but ramming enemy vehicles lacks a satisfying heft. Boss battles mix things up appreciably. Sniper and mounted-gun sections are solid; the loose-controlling hovercraft parts, not so much. The biggest downer, though, is the lame on-foot sections, which feature unwieldy controls—aiming, moving,

and strafing can be a huge pain.

With 30 missions that mix in all these elements, you'll enjoy some and be relieved when others end. The same can be said about the stand-alone challenges that give you goals to meet in quick-hit missions based on parts of the story mode. For a game that should be a nonstop thrill ride, I just didn't find it too engaging.

✦ **JOE:** The driving in *Extreme Justice* is *much* more user-friendly than in the first game, even on water (though, yes, the hovercraft is a pain). But why the hell did they add so much *more* of the atrocious on-foot shooting?

And sorry Greg, but I could have done with half as many on-rails machine-gun or sniper bits. It felt to

me like the best part of the game—driving, shooting, and jumping from car to car—got overshadowed. It'd be so much better as just a driving game.

✦ **MATT:** I'm a huge fan of car-jumping. So much so that I'm able to overlook limited control options and how firing a gun while on the back of a car feels like squirting water from a hose.

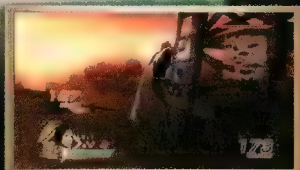
But—and I hate to be the third person to mention this, but it's that important—I have no idea why the on-foot segments are back, especially in multiplayer, where non-driving-based matches devote into people standing still while shooting each other. The mission variety *outside* of the on-foot sections, notably the smooth driving, kept me entertained, though.

DYNASTY WARRIORS 6

A THOUSAND MEN. ONE TRUE WARRIOR.



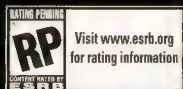
New Renbu attack system, motion-capture, and 60 frames per second deliver lightning-fast combos and true cinematic kung-fu action!



Swim and climb to evade enemy units. Advanced enemy AI and their packs of dogs are prepared to track you down.



New character designs, new weapons and new lands to conquer.



PLAYSTATION 3



XBOX 360



REVIEWS WRAP-UP

The games that were too late, or too little

PS3

HAZE

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ ESRB: Mature

From Free Radical, the developer of the *TimeSplitters* series, comes this shooter with a twist: As a private military soldier, you take a performance-enhancing drug called Nectar...except the drug ultimately has negative effects, and once you realize this, you switch your allegiance. While a tad rough around the edges, the gameplay on the nonfinal version we played (with four-player co-op support) was great, though the levels didn't seem as polished as they should be.

► **BOTTOM LINE:** *Haze* has a lot to like, but it's not quite the PS3's answer to *Halo 3*.



Wii/PS2

SONIC RIDERS: ZERO GRAVITY

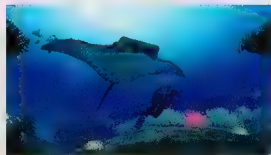
■ Publisher: Sega ■ ESRB: Everyone

Sega wisely fleshes out the hoverboarding gameplay of this *Sonic Riders* sequel by adding a host of new maneuvers (Gravity Dive, Gravity Control, and Gravity Drift) and upgradeable gear for each mascot, but good luck wrapping your head around either of the nigh-unplayable Wii Remote control schemes. Stick with a GameCube controller (or the PS2 version) if you actually want to make it to the end of a race.

► **BOTTOM LINE:** While it's not going to supplant *Mario Kart* anytime soon, *Gravity* gives Sonic's racing career a decent boost.

Electronic Nongaming Monthly

This month's nongame: Nintendo's under-the-sea excursion, *Endless Ocean*, for the Wii



Why isn't it a game? *Endless Ocean* gives you ■ sailboat and a stretch of the South Pacific to explore at 10 fathoms. What it doesn't give you is danger, conflict, enemies, a story, obstacles, ■ health bar, bosses...you know, game stuff. You don't even have to worry about your air supply. Ever tried diving without an air gauge? Diving's a supersafe sport, but if you don't follow a few simple rules, you could rupture your lungs or catch agonizing decompression sickness or just drift into a happy warm funk until you run out of air. I'm not saying *Endless Ocean* needs to give

players the bends, but it'd be nice if the occasional fish at least tried to eat you.

Wait, you mean the fish don't bite? Nope, not even when you churn the water and then reach out to pet them with your Wii Remote. *Endless Ocean's* fauna—both the fish below and the birds above the water—exists solely to satisfy your critter-molestation desires. It'd be like Mario going to the Mushroom Kingdom just to grope all the Goombas and the Koopas. At least the manta ray in *Super Mario Galaxy* will kill ya if you ride him wrong, for cryin' out loud.

Your goal here ultimately is to catalog as many fish as you can get in petting distance, stopping along the way to give dive tours to tourists who want in on the hot fin-petting action. And if that sounds more like work than a game, then bingo—that's why *Endless Ocean* kicks off our inaugural installment of Electronic Nongaming Monthly.

Bottom line: If I were to rate *Endless Ocean* on a scale between "biology class" and a "night dive in the actual ocean," I'd give it a "trip to Wal-Mart's aquarium aisle."

—Crispin Boyer



XB360/PS2

FINAL FANTASY XI: WINGS OF THE GODDESS

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ ESRB: Teen

Another year, another *FFXI* expansion. So with *Wings of the Goddess*, what do the game's 500,000 subscribers get? Well, besides a couple new jobs—Dancer (good) and Scholar (not as good)—they get the ability to travel into Vana'diel's past to experience new events and amass new items, quests, missions, armor, and other loot.

→ **BOTTOM LINE:** The Xbox 360 version is the way to go as the PS2 version's graphics just don't hold up to current standards. But while *Wings* has some decent additions, what arrived in the retail box is decidedly lacking in content.



DS

ADVANCE WARS: DAYS OF RUIN

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Nintendo shoves a rocket up casual gaming's ass with *Days of Ruin*, the most strategically hardcore game in the series. Most new units aren't just about more firepower. Rather, vehicles like the flare tank (which clears the fog of war from afar) force players to rethink their tactics. And commanding officers join the fight on the battlefield, boosting nearby units' offense and defense. But for each improvement, we get something simplified (no C.O. upgrades, no dual-screen missions, etc.).

→ **BOTTOM LINE:** *Advance Wars* gets advanced. We like—but we'll miss the MIA features, too. Our full review next issue.

THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for Nov/Dec

#	Name	Platform	EGM Scores
1	Super Mario Galaxy	Wii	9.5 10 10
2	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	XB360	9.5 8.5 9.5
			Activation loves war—the new No. 1 publisher has already announced <i>Call of Duty 5</i> . Don't get too gung ho—Treyarch (<i>Call of Duty 3</i>) is making it.
3	Wii Play (with Wii Remote)	Wii	4.5 6.0 5.0
4	Assassin's Creed	XB360	7.0 6.0 4.5
5	Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games	Wii	6.0 7.0 6.0
6	Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day!	DS	8.0 7.0 6.0
			The famed face of the <i>Brain Age</i> series, Ryuta Kawashima, is lending his noggin to publisher Namco for a mobile phone game in Japan. Smart move.
7	Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!	DS	8.5 9.0 9.5
8	Halo 3	XB360	10 10 9.0
			In case you needed proof for some reason that <i>Halo 3</i> is popular, Microsoft recently announced the game has sold over 5 million units. Yep, it's popular.
9	High School Musical: Sing It! Bundle with Mic	Wii	Not Reviewed
10	Mario Party DS	DS	6.5 6.5 6.5
11	The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass	DS	8.0 9.0 9.0
12	Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga	Wii	Not Reviewed
13	New Super Mario Bros.	DS	9.5 10 8.0
14	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	PS2	Not Reviewed
15	Rock Band Special Edition	XB360	9.0 9.5 9.0
16	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock Bundle	Wii	Not Reviewed
17	Mass Effect	XB360	9.0 9.5 9.0
18	Game Party	Wii	Not Reviewed
19	BioShock	XB360	10 10 10
			Already beaten <i>BioShock</i> ? Here's a reason to dive back in—developer 2K Boston recently added new plasmids and Achievements via DLC.
20	Dance Dance Revolution: Hottest Party Bundle	Wii	Not Reviewed

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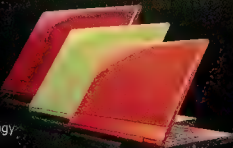
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GAME OVER

> press continue for gloom, doom, and urban rodents



> SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

Totally Dreading 2008

Oh, great. The future of videogames



Throughout his career writing about videogames, Seanbaby has made many enemies. In this column, he attempts to make a whole year's worth in one month.

THIS COMING YEAR is such a great time for games. We're getting a *Grand Theft Auto* with good graphics, PS3 titles worth owning, and my two favorite people and future Cop-idents of the Future, Jean-Claude Van Damme and Mr. T, in *World of Warcraft* ads. Can you believe how much gamers are in heaven?

As usual, this applies to everyone except me. It's my job to play the crap, and the Wii and DS alone account for over 15 Su-Su-Studios per second according to the most recent studies from the Global Sadness Measuring Union and Lobster Festival. I'm going to take a look at what we can expect this year, or, more specifically, what you can expect me (and stupid people) to be playing while you're busy with good games.



Adaptation!

Is there any chance that the flow of bad licensed games will slow in 2008?

My facts are unresearched and I'm not quite sure what a Hannah Montana is, but tickets for it are going for millions of dollars. Which almost certainly means I'll be playing two games a month about it until children stop sucking at liking things.

The success of *High School Musical* also means I'll have to write jokes about 84 more rhythm-action games; an cruel and impossible fate no one could predict. And I'm terrified to look at how many games based on slutty babyz and ponyz are scheduled for release. Whoever makes these games, I wish them all the best in life, but I'd like to think that

when they die, there's a special hell for all people who spell plural nouns with a Z. It would be fitting if the guy who wrote the game *Bratz* spent the afterlife with the guy who directed *Vampiyrz: Brothaz in Blood*. I think their first meeting would go a little something like this:

The Bratz guy: "Toddler bonfires? Thong diapers? This place is great!"
The Vampiyrz guy: "You made them sex baby games?! Solid!"

Prediction: Our DSes will turn on us, refusing to play so many awful games and then also refusing to stop killing the innocent.



Trends!

Will anyone win the debate on violence in videogames? Since *Mortal Kombat*,



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Retro:
Metal Gear:
WTFiction?!



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94

Grudge:
Chipmunks
vs. Trauma.



PAGE
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Comic: Hsu
& Chan !!
Brawlin'!

media watchdogs have been fighting to censor games. Will they shut up in 2008? Despite most studies on the subject finding that videogame violence leads only to videogame victory, some people are still very fussy about the topic. It just makes sense to them—seeing fictional murder should lead to real murder, right? For international idiot and anti-videogame crusader Jack Thompson, yes.

Jack Thompson imagines a child who is desensitized to violence by his Xbox and then assaults real people. It was never really clear if this was because the kid actually thinks he's in the Xbox and his classmates are space monsters, or if the Xbox just made him into a sociopath. Either way, he's probably related to those hypothetical kids who learned levitation from Satan and *Dungeons & Dragons*. And those kids' parents, incidentally, may be the imagined people who need to be told DO NOT ATTEMPT during commercials with physical activity in them.

There's one problem with using hypothetical people in your argument. Watch what I can do with them: These people were all centaurs the entire time. There, see how with the addition of one sentence, Jack Thompson is now talking about half-children/half-horses? That's what happens when your debate sources are imaginary—it's insane, impossible to prove or disprove, and one special boy can make your world a land of glorious centaurs.

I understand I can't help the people of 2008 pick a side, but I look at it like this: Even if you manage to look a baby in a tomb with no questionable material for 18 years, it will be a freak as soon as you unseal it. Censorship takes away the inoculation we need in this corruptible world of ours. I invite readers to test this theory on their own by hooking up with a girl who was raised under strict religious guidelines. Warning: This warning will not prepare your lap for the savage assault of her shame, confusion, and revenge against her father.

Predictions: We will see only more controversy with retailers and the ESRB, but thousands of nerds will have a truly moving topic for their English papers.



Gameplay:

Will escort missions still exist? If you play a lot of games, you've no doubt been put in charge of protecting a slow-moving or dim-witted something and then gotten a Game Over screen when it walked into chain saws. Why should we die because something the game was controlling got killed by the game controlling it? I've written my governor, Conan, requesting a law that any game designer who puts an escort mission in his game must spend the rest of his life with his car keys glued to a chicken. Furthermore, a government-appointed Chicken Ally will follow the two of them around and occasionally give painful electric shocks to the chicken, aggravating and possibly detonating it. I'm confident that by the end of the calendar year escort missions will be a thing of the past.

Predictions: By November, we will only die in videogames when it's our fault, not our moron sidekick's.



Systems:

Will 2008 have a Dreamcast? Or even a Gizmondo? Most of this generation's main systems look like they'll have solid life spans. With *Metal Gear Solid 4* and *Final Fantasy: Girlboy Dawn of Whispers*, even the PS3 should do OK. But don't forget that the N-Gage still exists, and Nokia has some kind of deal with the Gods of Senselessness to spend millions of dollars promoting it. It's possible that we'll see a hilarious attempt at revitalizing this system that started as a computerized space taco and has now become...hold on, let me Google it...a tremendous failure by any standards. It's so unlikely these still exist that using one of them gets about the same reaction as answering a call on your *Sports Illustrated* football phone.

Predictions: Consumers may nearly be reminded what a Nokia N-

Gage is before falling asleep during the acquisition of this knowledge.



Features!

What will be the next minuscule improvement to sports games? Every iteration of a sports game introduces several small features with revolutionary names and newfangled descriptions. Campus Legend Mode! Dynamic Tackle Zoning! Create-a-Dog Fighter! This coming year will be no exception. Watch for sweat to bead in real time and to stain underarms and asses in algorithmically generated pools. Downloadable upgrades will allow Brett Favre's in-game hair to stay up-to-date with current gray levels and your NBA players' inventory to reflect their latest drug possession charges.

Last year gave us amazing innovations in wrestling games, too, with gamers now able to adjust how much humping and fretting goes into each submission. Look for 2008 to also add real-time-rendered herniated-tissue bulges and a minigame that increases or increases the homoeroticism of holds.

Predictions: By the end of this year, race simulation fans will wonder how they ever lived without the Manufacturer-Specific Windshield Wiper-Blade Response Setting brought to you by Axe Body Spray.



Meat!

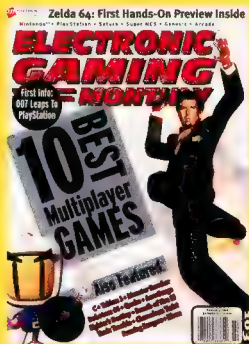
Will videogame enemies start turning into meat again after you kill them? Remember when you killed an enemy and he became meat? What happened that made us think that was ridiculous?

Predictions: Enemies will still probably drop floating red and blue crystals, as if that's less insane than a corpse transforming into steaming, delicious meat. And if meat is such a problem, how about at least turning them into a shiny, bouncing coin? Come on, future videogames.

> If you play a lot of games, you've no doubt been put in charge of protecting a dim-witted something and then gotten a Game Over screen when it walked into chain saws.

10 Years Ago...

GAME OVER



On the cover: 10 Best Multiplayer Games

Long before online gaming became popular, multiplayer titles relied on friends, carbonated beverages, and most importantly, a couch. While Nintendo 64's classic first-person shooter *GoldenEye 007* hit a bull's-eye with most fans, our top pick went to *Saturn Bomberman*.



Game of the month: Alundra

Just when the PlayStation's action-role-playing void was about to reach an all-time high, *Alundra* graced us with its presence. Satisfying our lustful thirst for a *Zelda*-esque adventure, its challenging dungeons had us all gushing. But, man, took long enough.



Evolution of arcades

Our ass-grabbing time warp into the birth of these big machines produced a few surprising tidbits. Like, did you know the granddaddy of all coin-operated machines began in the 1880s? It's true. The nickel-in-the-slot machine, a forerunner to today's jukebox, spawned all that we have today.

WTFiction!?: No. 1: Metal Gear

Deciphering silly stories By Jeremy Parish

When it comes to confusing storylines, nothing—and we mean nothing—compares to the craziness that is the *Metal Gear* series. That's exactly why it tops our list of wacky videogame plots.

START
HERE

1: THE PATRIOTS

The Patriots are the root of everything in *Metal Gear*. They're the U.S. splinter of the Philosophers, a WWII-era secret society made up of the most powerful people from America, Russia, and China, controlling every major player on the stage of world history from backstage.

5: THE BOSS

The Boss willingly allows the government to brand her a traitor when her mission to stop Volgin goes awry. She even dies to preserve international peace. Think that's hardcore? Consider this: She gave birth during battle and kept on fighting.



MANIPULATED

2: PHILOSOPHERS' LEGACY

When the Philosophers disbanded, their vast riches were dispersed worldwide. And all of it went to funding armies: First Volgin's rebellion, then Gene's "Army's Heaven," and finally Big Boss' Outer Heaven. Talk about mad money.

SOUGHT

FUNDED

SOUGHT

8: EVA

EVA's a Chinese spy pretending to be an agent of the Patriots pretending to be a Soviet spy pretending to be an American spy pretending to be in love with Big Boss. Or something like that. She'll return in *MGS4* as Big Mama, the hottest granny ever.



USED

FUNDED

3: COL. YEVGENY VOLGIN

Volgin spearheads an insurrection against Premier Kuschotsev using the Philosophers' Legacy to fund the creation of a nuclear missile bent on blowing up America. Strangely, he can also channel electricity with his body, as well as refuse to die...even after being killed.



CREATED

DOUBLE-CROSSED

LA-LI-LU-LE-LO

4: SHAGOHOD

The linchpin of Volgin's plans, Shagohod is a mobile platform for launching nuclear missiles at the U.S. from anywhere in the U.S.S.R. Well, anywhere with a few miles of flat, even pavement, that is.



TRAINED

DOUBLE-CROSSED

SOUGHT

TRAINED

8: SNAKE (BIG BOSS)

The Boss' protegee (and killer), Snake finds himself accused of sedition but ultimately proves his loyalty to America while saving the day. Then he becomes disillusioned with his homeland and starts a nuclear-capable military nation called Outer Heaven. All while sneakily pretending to be the head of America's elite FOXHOUND special-ops unit.



11: SOLID SNAKE

Series hero Solid Snake is actually Big Boss' clone. Sure, he looks the part, but he definitely doesn't act it—most of his life has been spent cleaning up his progenitor's dirty footsteps. This led him to go rogue after (mostly) killing his brother, Liquid, as he hopes to put a stop to Outer Heaven once and for all before he succumbs to the advanced aging caused by the cloning process. Sucks to be Snake.



DOUBLE-CROSSED

JOINED? BETRAYED?

10: OUTER HEAVEN

A sort of boys' club, where the "boys" are hardened warriors and the "club" is a nuclear-capable nation, Outer Heaven is Big Boss' ultimate ideal, a place to honor old soldiers while holding the world's superpowers (and possibly the Patriots) at bay. And even though Solid Snake keeps undermining it, the idea seems to linger on from game to game.

FOUNDED

FOUNDED

CLONED

RIVAL

DESTROYED

REPLACED

12: LIQUID SNAKE

The evil Arnold Schwarzenegger twin to Solid Snake's Danny DeVito, Liquid got all the good genes but still went down like a chump after trying to resurrect Big Boss' dream of Outer Heaven. He lives on through his hand, which was grafted to Ocelot's stump of an arm and allows Liquid to control Ocelot's body through a shared psychic rapport. Uh, right.



DESTROYED

13: RAIDEN



Gamers hate Raiden, but mainly because his girlfriend won't shut up. He starts out as an unwitting tool of the Patriots, who virtually train him to be a replacement for Solid Snake. With Snake's help, he eventually bucks the Patriots' control. In MGS4, Raiden turns into a badass cyborg ninja in order to trick players into liking him. And shockingly, it's working.

CRUCIAL COMPONENT

REVIVED

BUILT

9: METAL GEAR

Although rival project Shagohod is the original big boomer, the Metal Gear—a walking nuclear tank—becomes the new terror device when Big Boss uses it as the centerpiece of Outer Heaven. Eventually its specs are sold to every two-bit dictator on the planet, ushering the world into an exciting era in which the threat of nuclear extermination is but a half-frozen away.



DOUBLE-CROSSED

14: SOLIDUS SNAKE

The third Son of Big Boss, Solidus—aka former U.S. President George Sears—also dreams of reviving the Outer Heaven legacy. Although he sees it more as a means of launching a terrorist attack in order to distract the Patriots while he sneakily assassinates them. Since patricide is a recurring theme in the series, his "son" Raiden naturally thwarts his plan.

KILLED

TRIED TO KILL



DOUBLE-CROSSED

7: OCELOT

In a world of double-agents, Revolver Ocelot is the doublest. He's worked with everyone, or at least pretended to: the Soviet GRU, America's FOXHOUND, Russian nationalists, African mercenaries, U.S. presidents, and Soviet premiers. Oh, and the Patriots. Bonus: He's also The Boss's son.



DOUBLE-CROSSED

EGM Extras: Still confused? Head to EGM.1UP.com to get an extended look at Metal Gear's plot, as well as the continuation of the *WTFiction!* series, starting with Halo.



Playing Fate By Mr. Death

According to my boss, I'm supposed to welcome you to 2008 or something. Bah, I spend so much time predicting y'all's pathetic futures that I don't have time for silly salutations. So let's just get to it, OK?



Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): Keeping your enemies close may be good real-world advice, but it's probably not the best *Halo 3* strategy you've tried.

Pisces (Feb. 19-Mar. 20): A New Year's resolution to cut back on gaming will be much easier to keep once Rent-A-Center forcibly repossesses their PS3.



Aries (Mar. 21-Apr. 19): Your *Moon Patrol* high score will earn you brief local celebrity and enough tickets for any novelty pencil eraser on Prize Shelf C.



Taurus (Apr. 20-May 20): Unfortunately, after all the time you'll think you spent cramming, your math test will turn out to be nothing like *Geometry Wars*.



Gemini (May 21-June 21): While beating *R-Type* seems impossible, it's probably the only one of your life goals that has any chance of success at this point.



Cancer (Jun. 22-July 22): Your homemade wireless controller looks authentic, but a little research would have told you there's more to it than just cutting off the cable.



Leo (Jul. 23-Aug. 22): Yes, there's no denying you possess some insane *Rock Band* talent. Still, VH1 will respectfully decline the *Behind the Music* rights.



Virgo (Aug. 23-Sep. 22): Your Brain Age is off the charts, but that's because the game is unable to perform until you figure out how to plug in the power adapter.



Libra (Sep. 23-Oct. 22): Contrary to what your mother told you, your *Mortal Kombat* match will confirm that the way to a man's heart is through his sternum.



Scorpio (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): A misleading point-of-purchase display sees to it that your copy of *The Umbrella Chronicles* is actually a collection of Rihanna remixes.



Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): You'll learn the hard way that when it comes to crocodiles, what works in *Pitfall!* doesn't necessarily fly in real life.



Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Still disappointed by the Leapster learning game system you got for Christmas, you will now no longer let Santa choose your gifts for you.



Photo art by G505

Bang Your Head

Crushing alternative to chipmunks

The world wants an *Alvin and the Chipmunks* movie like the Wii wants another crappy rhythm game. So let's look at a potentially less-painful option to this wack title.

Alvin and the Chipmunks

VS.

Blunt-Force Head Trauma



Originality

Vintage icons get hip-hop makeover—true genius



A welcome change from usual blunt-force genital trauma.
Advantage: Trauma



Sensory Experience

Just look at this bulls***



Painful, but at least you don't have to do it to a Smash Mouth song.
Advantage: Trauma



Lasting Consequences

History will always find you guilty of playing this game



Loss of motor skills, memory
Advantage: Trauma



Better Use of a Guitar

Induces Alvin-to-nasal-Elvis impersonations



Taking a Stratoaster to the melon is YouTube gold
Advantage: Trauma



Recovery

There's no cure for Wii-moting half-naked chipmunks



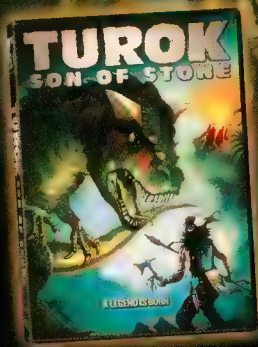
Days, even weeks of TV and bed rest
Advantage: Trauma

Winner: Blunt-Force Head Trauma

You try an hour with the 'Munks and see if you don't end up flogging your noggin.

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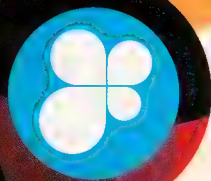
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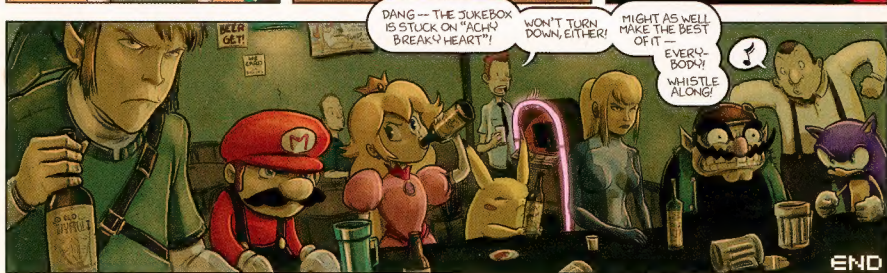
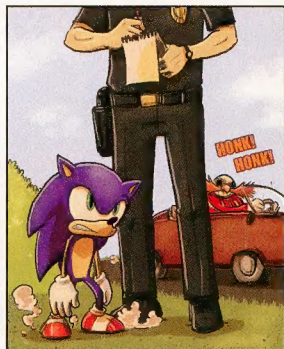
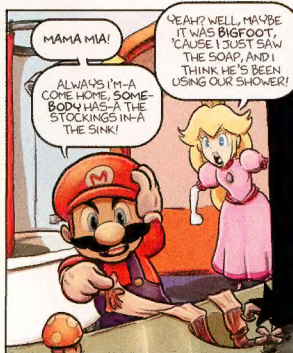
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Prelude to a Brawl

By Jeremy "Norm" Scott



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Ball Park
BREAD



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