

# GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

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## THE No.1 VIDEOGAME MAGAZINE

# EGM™

### ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY



### Dissecting the Wii

Which games work (and which don't)

Exclusive

# grand theft auto IV

The **REAL** story you won't read anywhere else



- Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII
- God of War: Chains of Olympus
- Fixing the ESRB
- Spielberg's Wii game



IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS DARKNESS.



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<b>MATURE 17+</b> <b>M</b> CONTENT RATED BY ESRB	Blood and Gore Intense Violence Nudity Sexual Content
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# GOD OF WAR

CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

Long before his battle with Ares, Kratos was a servant to the Gods. Ordered deep into the underworld, the Ghost of Sparta faced an impossible choice: Redeem himself or save the ancient world from eternal darkness.



"9 out of 10. Reaches legendary heights."  
- Game Informer





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▶ issue 227 • april 2008



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 Ernst, Jay Freeman, Ingobert  
 Nordman, Tom Mc Shea, Sean  
 Michiko, Jay Plickly, Ray  
 Sarano, Evan Shamoon  
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CONTINUES WHERE  
IT ALL BEGAN...

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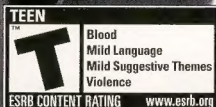
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SQUARE ENIX



# Big Changes



## EGM'S EVOLUTION OVER ITS

19-year life span is quite fascinating (for us staffers, anyway). We've changed our logo, the way we review games, and how we cover games, period. Yet this month's alterations might be the biggest yet.

A few months ago, I announced I'd be taking over editorial director duties for the 1UP Network, which consists of *EGM*, *Games for Windows: The Official Magazine*, 1UP.com, GameVideos.com, and more. At the time, I was still acting/interim editor-in-chief of *EGM*, but now we're ready for the next phase in Operation: There Will Be New Blood.

Recognizing the way our readers absorb media nowadays, we decided to integrate our print and online staffs into one supermega editorial team that's working on both the time. So for example, that means the *EGM* editors you've grown to love (and hate) will be working on 1UP.com content and vice versa.

Now that this reorganization's official, allow me to introduce to you the new and improved *EGM* editorial staff. James "Milkan" Mielke, former executive editor at 1UP.com and *EGM* alum, is now the editor-in-chief, videogames for our group. That means he'll be running *EGM* (as well as the videogame portion of 1UP.com) starting with the next issue. Crispin Boyer is now senior executive editor, videogames, and Shane Bettenhausen and Matt Leone are executive editors, videogames for the 1UP Network.

Don't worry (or maybe this is cause to worry?). The rest of us are still here in various new roles, so you'll still be seeing Jennifer Tsao, Bryan Intihar, Michael Donahoe, and me around the pages of *EGM*. After all, we all feel like *EGM*'s our baby, so we won't be letting go of it... probably ever!

In other *EGM*-is-changing news...well, why don't you turn to pg. 68 and read what our outgoing reviews editor (and new *EGM* Managing Editor) Greg Ford has to say about our new ratings system...

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Editorial Director

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## > THIS MONTH'S EGM EXTRAS

### EGM.1UP.COM

Can't get enough *Grand Theft Auto IV*? Gear up for your return to Liberty City with a detailed GTA series retrospective, a special *GTA4* travelogue, and exclusive podcasts.

Our SuperGuides are here to help When you inevitably get stuck in *Last Odyssey*, *Condemned 2*, or *Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword*, we're here to help you cheat.



And check out our podcast on [EGMLive.1UP.com](http://EGMLive.1UP.com) and our message boards at [boards.1UP.com](http://boards.1UP.com).

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Contact anyone on  
this masthead via e-mail using  
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EGM: 800-778-1774  
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I WANNA MAKE BIG PLAYS,  
AND REPLAYS, AND REPLAYS.



# I WANNA STEAL HOME SO MANY TIMES YOU LET ME KEEP A TOOTHBRUSH THERE.

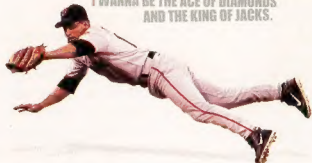
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WITH THE SWEET SOUNDS  
OF CHIN MUSIC.



I WANNA RUST YOUR FENCES  
LIKE A BAD NEIGHBOR.



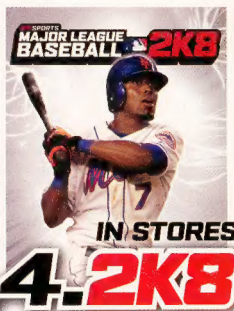
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# LETTERS

> semantics, cheerleader antics, and the color of rock

## > TRIVIAL ISSUE

This month's EGM question:

What city and state is the Funspot Arcade (as seen in *The King of Kong*) located in?

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

Trivia: EGM #227) for a chance to win something potentially awesome.



## Letter of the Month What's in a name?

There is an issue that absolutely needs to be addressed in the gaming community, and that is the continued use of the term "videogames." The industry has grown and changed so much over the years that the name just doesn't fit anymore. What we play nowadays aren't games—they are experiences that players immerse themselves in.

Hearing the term "videogames" brings to the average person's mind visions of *Super Mario Bros.*, *Pac-Man*, and *Pong*. It's no wonder that legislators are pushing so hard to regulate something that is perceived so widely to be a child's toy.

If the industry is to grow any further and evade the perennial scowls of the uninformed, it needs to at least sound respectable. Changing the name and coining a term like "interactive experiences" or "interactive entertainment" would make a world of difference.

"The No. 1 Videogame Magazine" brings back memories of the early '90s when school kids everywhere were arguing about Sega versus Nintendo. "The No. 1 Interactive Entertainment Magazine" sounds like it's for a new generation of gaming and, most importantly, like a publication representing a respectable form of expression.

—Al Huerta

The problem with "interactive entertainment" is that it brings to mind the barely interactive atrocities that were foisted upon us at the dawn of the CD era. (Two words: *Night Trap*.) But your point is a sound one—trouble is, it's probably too late to do anything about it. Highbrow fans of cinema have been trying to weed out the term "movies" for, what, 120 years now?

### Self-control

I started playing games at the age of 4. My parents didn't really pay attention to what I played, but they did make sure I understood what was real and what wasn't—and more importantly, what was right.

But nowadays, the language and sexual content in games (not just nudity, since that's rare, but the sug-



Ryu Hayabusa demonstrates what happens to sloppy editors.

gestive themes) are more than I would care for my kids to see. Why haven't game developers offered options on curbing language and sex?

I would have no problem with letting my kids play *Mass Effect*. But couldn't they put in a few lines of code to block off the options to have sex in the game? Or have a non-cussing version? Hell, even music labels do that for radio stations! Why can't we have more power over the games we play?

—James Pikover

That's...a really good idea, James. We're not sure why anyone would think that more control over controversial content would be a bad thing. And we certainly have the technology. The real difficulty would be in deciding exactly which words

or themes would be allowed at which level—but perhaps the ESRB could develop a set of guidelines.

### Ninjas are mammals

In EGM #225, you listed the upcoming previews for next month's issue, and you mentioned *Ninja Gaiden II*. But you put that it is for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. Will PS3 owners really be receiving NG2, or will it remain a 360 exclusive?

—Jason Kinchen

Yeah, sorry about that. It was a simple typo. As far as we know, *Ninja Gaiden II* is still a 360 exclusive.

### Ringin' in the new year

So I was booted up my 360 about a week ago for some *Team Slayer* and... red lights! Although I called Microsoft >



For writing this month's LOTM, Al will receive a copy of *Night Trap* or something else from our dusty collection.

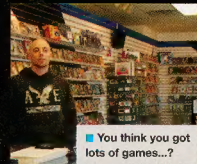
## > HOW HARDCORE ARE YOU?

### Your proudest gaming moments

The next contestant in our monthly harder-core-than-thou competition arrives!

In 1999, I opened up a small booth at a local flea market to buy, sell, and trade videogames. I started with a single broken showcase and a meager 14 games from my personal collection...and I began building upon it. I spent six years building my small, beginning inventory into a fully functioning, full-time retail location. My new store is called Level One Games. It's a store built by gamers, for gamers.

—Chett, aka Gamer Muzz



You think you got lots of games...?


Want to see your own story in this space? All you have to do is tell us how hard-core you are. Dish up the goods on what makes you more into games than anyone else, and send it to EGM@ziffdavis.com, subject head: "I Am Hardcore." Remember, it doesn't count if you can't prove it, so send photos, too!



got milk?

Unbelievable.

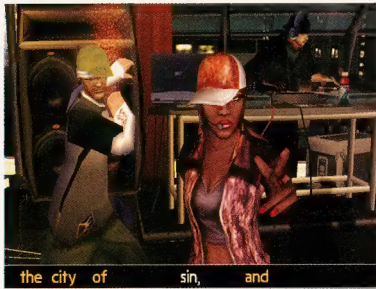
Nothing tastes better than victory. So I down the milk. The protein helps build muscle. And some studies suggest that teens who choose milk instead of sugary soft drinks tend to be leaner. Savor it.

body  milk

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and am getting my machine repaired, all I have for gaming in the meantime is an out-of-date PC and a PlayStation 2 with no games! In addition, I live in a small town, so I can't go out and buy PS2 games! What do I do to satisfy my gaming desire while my Xbox is being repaired?

—Sean Berger

**Sounds like you're a perfect candidate for some rental-by-mail action. Check out GameFly.com or, GameZnFlix.com—they're like Netflix, but for games. You might even be able to score a trial subscription that you can cancel when your 360 comes home.**

### Rock block

I do understand the fact that a lot of gaming mags and sites, possibly including yours, are made up of a good number of thirtysomethings who grew up listening to rock music, but that's not the entire gaming demographic. The response to Jon Harris' e-mail [EGM #225 Letters, "Coming 2009: Tejano Band"] was uncalled for. A rap- or R&B-inspired rhythm game similar to *Guitar Hero* or *Rock Band* would sell and could potentially be a great game. Open your eyes: Not every gamer out there is like all of you.

—Kenny Gould

**OK, apparently we need to spell this out a bit more explicitly. The game is called *Rock Band*. As in, a band that plays rock music. You're absolutely right, Kenny—games like the one you describe might indeed do well (though *Get on da Mic* may be to disagree). But the game in question was *Rock Band*. Why on earth would anyone be upset or surprised by the fact that a game about rock contains primarily rock music?**

**Read on for more responses to this surprisingly hot topic.**

I just want to say to Jon Harris that he seems like the racist one. Whoever said rock is not for African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans? I am a proud Hispanic-American, and I love rock music and the songs on *Rock Band*. So before you speak for a whole race, remember that music (just like videogames) has no color.

—Jeremy O.

Oh, yes, all African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans like everything but rock, and only white people listen to it. I'm a mix of several races (Filipino, African, German, Polish, just to name the main ones), but I'll admit that I'm mostly into rock music. On the flip side, I know white people who only listen to rap and black people who can't stand it. And if you think that a race isn't being represented just because it's rock music, then I'm afraid you're the racist, not the gamemakers. There are plenty of non-white rockers out there (Bloc Party, Rage Against the Machine, Skin, etc.). You're only continuing the stereotypes if you teach your children that a certain form of art or style is a representation of a certain skin color.

—Joseph Bennett

To think that *Rock Band* is made for just white people is plain idiotic. It's just a game. Sure, maybe some people don't listen to rock. I know many white people who don't. The game is fun no matter what music you listen to. And why is rock the main genre in this game? Because the actual "target audience" are teenagers.

—Chris So

**There were more responses just like these but, you know, we only have so much space.**

### Banned!

I just wanted to take a moment to commend you on your decision to not give in to the threats that a few videogame publishers have imposed upon you recently (as per Shoe's editorial in EGM #225). I think that your actions speak volumes about the kind of magazine that you run: an honest, objective one. I think this also shines a bright, revealing light on how little these companies, as a whole, care about gamers.

I honestly couldn't think of a worse PR move for these companies. Do they realize how bad they look? I feel ashamed to have owned anything by any of these companies.

Fooling people into spending hard-earned money on a product that is lacking is just plain bad business eth-

ics. I care about quality and sincerity. I like to know that what I'm reading about a game isn't rooted in trying to push reserves or helping a company recoup its losses...and I know I'm not alone in this.

—Jordan Hill

**Thanks for the vote of support, Jordan.**

### Gimme an "H"!

I am a high school student in California. I play videogames, and I am a huge fan of all three *Halo* games. I'm sure I am not alone in that, but it is not a pastime that my whole school shares.

So you can imagine my surprise when I went to one of our pep rallies and watched as our school cheerleaders started to dance to the *Halo* theme song! I'm pretty sure they had no idea what song they were dancing to, and just about every guy at school either started in disbelief or started laughing.

—William Ash

**This letter is worthless without any photographs.**

### Mistaken identity

One of the 2008 games I'm most excited about is *Legacy: The Box*. But I've noticed something weird about the game: Every time I hear about it, the developer changes! When I first heard about it, they said that Infinity Ward was developing it. Then I heard it's being developed by Shiny. And when I went to 1UP.com, I saw that it's being developed by Spark Unlimited! Do you know for sure who's developing *Legacy*?

—Ashe Welch

**It's definitely Spark. We can sort of see where the confusion came from, though: Both Infinity Ward and Spark were started by former members of *Medal of Honor* development teams, and both studios ended up working on *Call of Duty* games. As for Shiny? We have no friggin' idea. A short name starting with "S," maybe? 🙄**

### CONTACT EGM

E-mail: [EGM@ziffdavis.com](mailto:EGM@ziffdavis.com)

Snail mail:

EGM Letters  
101 2nd Street, 8th Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94105

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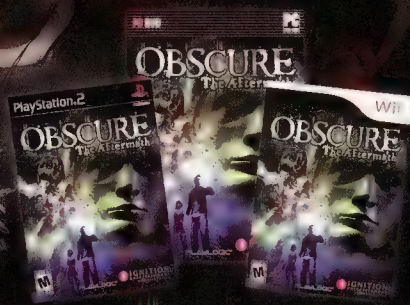
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### ➤ OOPS!

In last month's "Achievement Whores" story, we inadvertently implied that website MyGamerCard.net plays host to Xbox Live account hackers. These cheaters have nothing to do with the site. Also, our release info for *Facebreaker*, *Bully*, *Scholarship Edition*, and *Crisis Core: FFVII* listed 2007 as the release year. We obviously meant 2008. Same goes for the date on any checks we wrote last month, too.



Reality Ends  
This Spring!



# OBSCURER

## The Aftermath

All is not right at Fallcreek University. Both students and faculty have begun experimenting with mysterious black flowers that have inexplicably sprung up on campus, and a dangerous, hallucinogenic substance is discovered within them. A handful of students soon learn there is much more to the flowers than once thought, and the bad trips suddenly turn into a horrifying reality.

[www.obscureraftermath.com](http://www.obscureraftermath.com)

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# PRESS START

> features, previews, weeping devils, and other stuff

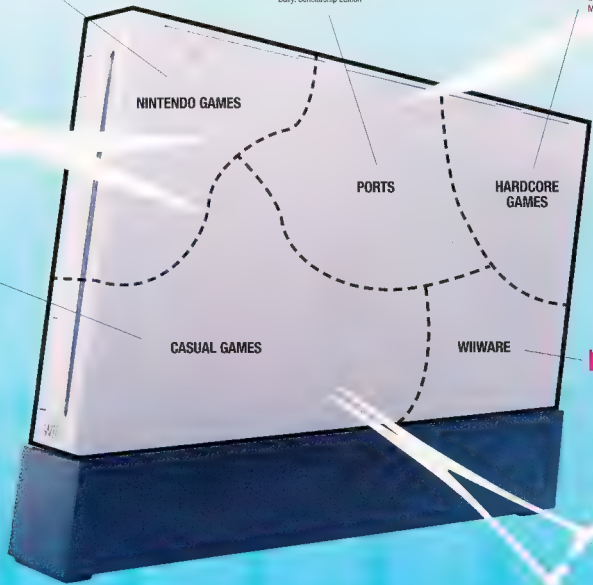
- 1 NINTENDO GAMES**  
The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess  
Metroid Prime 3: Corruption  
Super Paper Mario  
Pokémon Battle Revolution  
Mario Strikers: Charged  
Super Mario Galaxy  
Super Smash Bros. Brawl  
Mario Kart Wii

- 2 PORTS**  
Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition  
Uzumi  
The House of the Dead 2 & 3 Return  
Bully: Scholarship Edition

- 4 HARDCORE GAMES**  
No More Heroes  
Zack & Wiki: Quest for Barbaros' Treasure  
Metal of Honor: Hermes 2

- 3 CASUAL GAMES**  
My Word Coach  
Carnival Games  
EA Playground  
Cooking Mama: Cook Off

- 5 WIIWARE**  
Brusler & Scratch  
Phal Fantasy Crystal Chronicles:  
Little Kingdom and the Promise Country  
Pokémon Farm



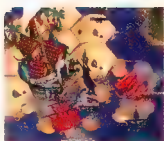
> EGM INVESTIGATES

## What Plays Beneath

We dissect the Wii to see which types of games will live (and die) this year *By Michael Donohue*

The Wii is a mystery. Yeah, it's been out for a year, but third-party publishers still haven't been able to figure out what really works on the system. So we decided to pry open the Wii's innards and study the different kinds of games that make it tick. Our results uncover which types of titles are healthy and which ones need to go on life support.

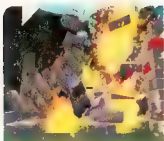




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We rate  
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## 1 NINTENDO GAMES

The money-pumping heart

Big surprise—Nintendo first-party titles continue to be the most popular hits on the Wii. Don't believe us? Believe consumers—11 of the 14 million-copy-selling Wii games are made by Nintendo. More impressive still is how Nintendo covers all the bases: hardcore (*Metroid Prime 3: Corruption*), casual (*Wii Play*), and downloads (*WiiWare*). Hell, at this point, Nintendo doesn't need any support. But at least they acknowledge third parties may catch up soon. In its recent financial report, the company had this to say: "Our software sales percentage is currently high because our internal teams know the Wii's special characteristics best, and they started development quite a bit before the Wii's release. However, we believe that eventually that will change."

We hope so, too. Mostly because we want to play more than five games a year. But it did take the DS about a year before it really took off with third parties, so 2008 should hopefully be the year that Nintendo (finally) gets some much-needed competition.

**Diagnosis:** Extremely healthy. Right now, it seems like Nintendo can do no wrong (well, except for last year's *Donkey Kong: Barrel Blast*). Look at Nintendo's 2008 lineup, though, and it doesn't seem quite as mammoth as it was last year. Sure, *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, *Mario Kart Wii*, and *Wii Fit* will likely top the charts for the rest of the year (if not years), but we wonder if this trifecta can sustain the Wii's current momentum. Wait...what are we

saying? No doubt it will. "Nintendo has plenty [of first-party titles]," says Wedbush Morgan Securities Financial Analyst Michael Pachter. "I think that pent-up demand is sufficient to all but guarantee that we see Wii sales that are higher than last year." Well, Nintendo is off to a great start already—*Super Smash Bros. Brawl* sold almost a million copies during its first week overseas. And aside from all the announced games we know about, both *Kirby* and *Animal Crossing* were put on Nintendo's recent financial report, so we'll most likely see them this year...in Japan. We'd cross our fingers in hopes that both of these titles will also come to America in 2008, but we'll leave the hand cramps to you guys.



■ *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption*



■ *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*



■ *Mario Kart Wii*

## 2 CASUAL GAMES

The respiratory system that breathes fresh fun

Nintendo proved with the DS that casual games can bring in a whole new audience. This notion—effortless titles anyone can enjoy—has spread onto the Wii. So much so that Nintendo has been focusing its creative strengths on wrangling nongamers with simplified software like *Wii Sports* and *Wii Play*. Third parties want to play, too, and some of them are winning. Publisher 2K won itself a massive hit with its minigame-filled *Carnival Games*. And it wants to keep on winning. "Our 2K Play label is 100 percent committed to the Nintendo platforms," says Steve Lux, vice president of business development at 2K Play. "Our goal at 2K Play is to make games that are fun and family-oriented." So casual games, right? "We never use the term 'casual games,'" says Lux. "For

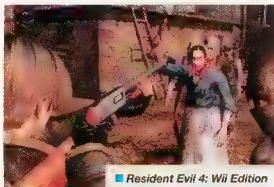
starters, I don't even know what that means but if you look up the word casual in Webster's dictionary it certainly doesn't apply to what we do." Right—anyway, it's obvious that the casual craze is becoming less of a trend and more of a mainstream option for the Wii.

**Diagnosis:** Healthy. Like 'em or not, the only place casual games are going is onto store shelves. Almost every third party is hoping to bank on the influx of nongamers gobbling up the Wii. With the success of *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock* on the Wii, it seems casual music games are the new chart-toppers. Majesco—distributor of the successful *Cooking Mama* series—has teamed up with *PaRappa the Rapper* creators Masaya Matsuura and

Rodney Alan Greenblat for a new marching band game entitled *Major Minor's Majestic March*, while THQ is tuning up its *Guitar Hero*-like rhythm fighter *Band Mashups*. And that's just the music spectrum. So if you think there are too many simplistic games now, wait until you see how many pop up this year. "I think that the market will become saturated," says Pachter. "But I think that will just make the handful of really good casual games stand out more." Still, even Nintendo President Satoru Iwata realizes more is not necessarily better. In a recent interview on Wii.com, he had this to say: "If all our games mirror games like *Wii Sports* or *Wii Fit*, our gamers would soon grow bored." Iwata's right—copying will never outdo creativity. No matter how accessible it is.

## 3 PORTS

Transplants that keep giving



■ Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition



■ Ninjabreadman

Casual games seem easy to produce, but they do take some creativity. So when making something new is too difficult, third-party publishers tend to resort to the next best option: porting old games to the Wii. In most cases, these retools have worked well—Capcom's *Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition* proved old games resurrected on the Wii can live even longer lives. Not all ports have the benefit of being based on critically acclaimed hits, though. For every *Resident Evil 4*, we get tons of European PS2 trash like *Ninjabreadman*, *Anubis II*, and *Billy the Wizard*. Capcom knows that, when it comes to porting, it's best to choose the games that are, y'know, good. "There's a lot of garbage on the Wii," says Nisuke Fajors, vice president of marketing at Capcom. "And it's being driven by that insight, 'Hey, we have a lot of titles that we can port to the Wii for a pretty low price.'

"We don't want to get into that space." Instead, Capcom is cherry-picking its ports, like the upcoming Wii edition of the PS2 hit *Okami*. (Though we worry how well *Okami* will do sales-wise considering it flopped on the PS2.) Nisuke remains hopeful, however. "Our expectations for *Okami* are not what they are for *Resident Evil: Umbrella Chronicles* and *Resident Evil 4*," he says. "For *Okami*, when we look at our preorders and we look at what we're selling now, it's dead on target for our expectations."

**Diagnosis:** Well. Ports are currently the simple solution for publishers, but there are only so many oldies that can benefit from updated Wii controls. Some upcoming classics play great (Sega's *The House of the Dead 2 & 3 Return*) while others (Konami's *Target: Terror*) deserve to die in the bargain bin.

## 4 HARDCORE GAMES

The atrophic abdomen

It's not easy figuring out why hardcore games aren't exactly making a killing with consumers. Sure, a big chunk of the Wii's audience prefer lighter fare, but that doesn't mean that meaty, ambitious titles have to wither away. But (most) third parties are finding out the money is not where the blood is. Even developers are angry—*No More Heroes* creator Suda 51 recently complained about his Wii game bombing in Japan (we're still waiting to see how it fares here in the States). He's not the only one complaining. Capcom's critically acclaimed puzzle-adventure game *Zack & Wiki: Quest*

for *Barbaros' Treasure* also wasn't exactly a consumer fave. "We're not thrilled with the sell-through [of *Zack & Wiki*]," says Fajors. "But we're learning as we go." But a year's not enough time to perfect a plan, so publishers aren't quite ready to pull the plug just yet.

**Diagnosis:** Sickly. Hardcore games may thrive on the 360/PS3, but they're not faring too well on the Wii. But they're not dead...yet. "I think what we're noticing is that there's two types of groups that make up the Wii demographic," says Jeff Karp,

senior vice president of marketing at EA. "One is what we call Nintendo fanboys and the other is the more casual consumer, and I think there's an opportunity for both of them." Publishers obviously want to please both, but don't expect to see a whole lot of original hardcore games this year. "Priorities will remain low [to create original hardcore games for the Wii] compared to Xbox 360 and PS3," says KBC Securities Financial Analyst Hiroshi Kamide. "But if the risk/reward is appropriate, than yes, it will happen." Key word: risk. Gotta take one now and then, publishers.



■ No More Heroes



■ Zack & Wiki: Quest for Barbaros' Treasure

➤ **Even developers are angry—*No More Heroes* creator Suda 51 recently complained about his Wii game bombing in Japan.**



## WIIWARE

A small service that could have long legs

Nintendo's upcoming downloadable service sounds good in theory: a cheap platform for developers to experiment with smaller titles. Great, right? Sure, if you ignore the fact that Nintendo is letting everyone, including developers of Web-based Flash games, jump on board. So while we'll no doubt get amazing games from Nintendo and other accomplished developers, it's also likely that we might see more crap

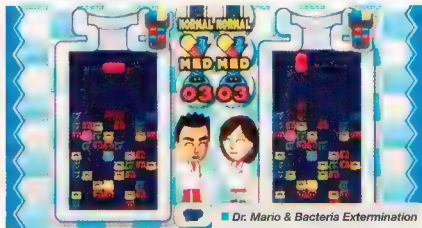
than classics. "It's possible [WiiWare] will become a dumping ground for ports," says Steel Penny Games President and WiiWare developer Jason Hughes. "Nintendo has left that up to developers to manage, and leaves it in the hands of the players to decide what to buy."

**Diagnosis:** Presumably well. Regardless of the quality of games, we predict the ser-

vice will no doubt be successful. Only one ailing feature may cause some pain for potential buyers: the Wii's modest storage space. "The Wii has limited storage capability, so when you run out of blocks, you have to start managing what is currently on your system," explains Hughes. "Redownloading games that are in the hundreds of megabytes will not be popular." You're telling us...



■ Pokémon Farm



■ Dr. Mario & Bacteria Extermination

## NINTENDOMINATION

The strength of the Wii's success

Everyone knows that first-party Nintendo games sell well, but not many people realize how many copies actually leave the store. Factor in what these popular hits sell around the globe and the numbers get even larger. Below are all of Nintendo's worldwide million-sellers. To give you an idea of how impressive these stats are, Capcom's critically acclaimed gem *Zack & Wiki: Quest for Barbaros' Treasure* sold only 300,000 copies worldwide (and a meager 67,300 units here in the States). But not all Nintendo games are golden—*Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn* managed to sell only a paltry 109,000 copies in America. Makes sense—the Wii's current audience just doesn't find hardcore strategy titles as appealing as minigame-filled casual fare.



■ Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn

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# Devil May Cry 4

The man behind the demon hunters spills his guts

By Steve Boxer and Jason Schreier



Prior to producing *DMC4*, Hiroyuki Kobayashi honed his craft on both the *Resident Evil* and *Dino Crisis* series.

**DEVIL MAY CRY 4 UPS THE ANTE** by offering two different demon-hunting protagonists, each with a penchant for complex sword-n-gun combos. Unfortunately, it also ups the frustration factor with some serious backtracking and repetition. Producer Hiroyuki Kobayashi bravely answers our questions, addresses our criticisms, and even weighs in on upcoming rival *Ninja Gaiden II*...

**EGM:** We really enjoyed *DMC4*, but we didn't love that you have to fight all of the main bosses three times. Do you think this is overkill?

**Hiroyuki Kobayashi:** Bosses are always supposed to be tough to beat, and it would be less exciting if they could be easily defeated. In fact, even after you beat them once, it is fun to think about new fighting tactics to beat the bosses again.

**EGM:** On a similar note, do you feel that you may have overused that dice-rolling board game?

**HK:** Yes, I do feel that we put a bit too many of those in...

**EGM:** Dante's gals, Lady and Trish, are so damned sexy, but they are definitely underutilized in *DMC4*. Why keep your hot chicks out of the spotlight?

**HK:** That was our intention. Anything that good should always come in small doses.

**EGM:** Pandora has to be the coolest weapon we've ever seen in a *DMC* game—how did you come up with the idea?

**HK:** Our designers viewed Pandora as kind of a dream box that could collect all sorts of cool ideas into one dynamic, transformable weapon. It has many amazing hidden attacks—I think you are supposed to master Pandora in order to fully



Sadly, don't expect Nero to slash his way onto PSP anytime soon.

master playing as Dante, aren't you? Try experimenting by combining Pandora with the Devil Trigger and different combat styles....

**EGM:** The storyline of *DMC4* focuses on a corrupt religion that is eerily reminiscent of the Roman Catholic Church. When you have Nero fighting a guy who looks like the Pope, do you worry that people might be offended?

**HK:** We were very careful to try not to make it similar to any existing religions. We clearly define that it is an imaginary religion, so if there is anyone who thinks that it appears similar to a certain religion, those people have some preconceived notions about that religion.

**EGM:** Gamers have been closely scrutinizing the performance of the Xbox 360 and PS3 versions in an attempt to declare a clear winner. Do you think one version has a slight edge over the other?

**HK:** Although the PS3 version offers a slight difference in the loading times due to its hard drive installation, overall, they are the same in appearance as well as content.

**EGM:** Dante's personality seems a little wilder and weirder in this game...he's bordering on Captain Jack Sparrow territory. What happened to him?

**HK:** Seriously, Dante hasn't changed at all! He's always been like that—he only seems wild compared to Nero. As for his appearance, he ages in the order of *DMC3*, 1, and then 4.

**EGM:** Dante spouts some dirty sexual innuendos, including a speech that's a thinly veiled love letter to his own manhood! Did you worry about taking it too far?

**HK:** I think it depends on how you look at it. Those who are very sensitive about sexual issues might feel that way. But the question is, do those people have a problem when they see a violent scene where you get stabbed with a sword?

**EGM:** Developer Team Ninja's head honcho, Tomonobu Itagaki, has been an outspoken critic of the *DMC* series. With your game and his *Ninja Gaiden II* releasing around the same time, do you have any comment on that series?

**HK:** The *Devil May Cry 4* team does not think that the *Ninja Gaiden* team is our competitor. In our view, our only competitors are the titles that we have previously produced.

**EGM:** Hey, what ever happened to the *Devil May Cry* title that was mysteriously announced for PSP four years ago?

**HK:** No comment.



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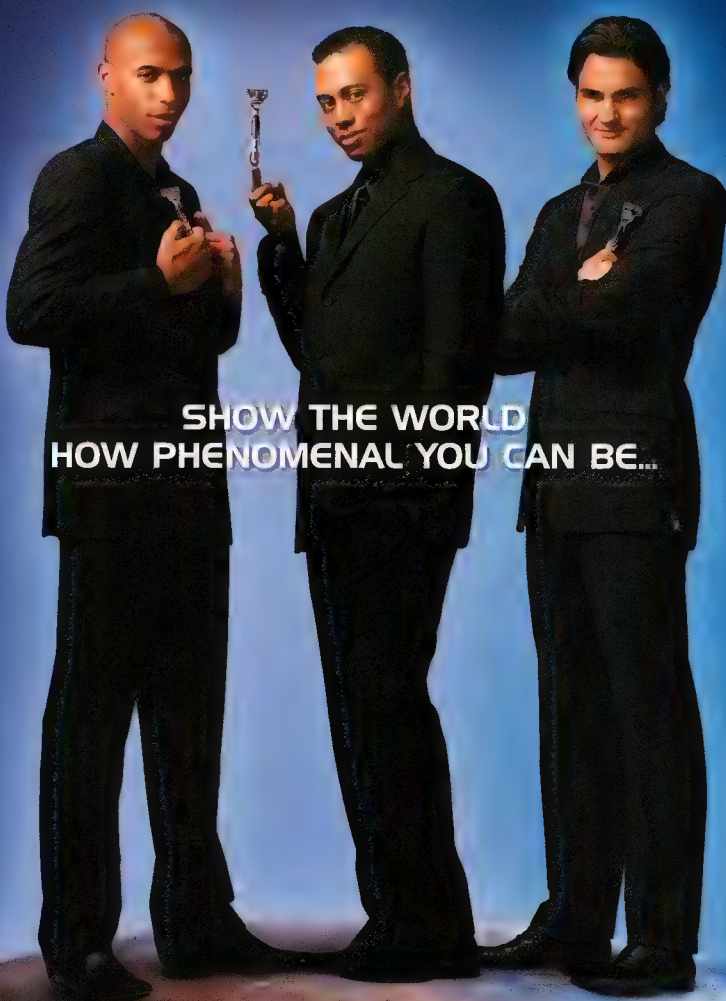
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Three men in black suits stand on a globe against a blue background. The man on the left is bald and holds a razor. The man in the middle has short hair and holds a razor. The man on the right has long hair and holds a razor.

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# THE BIG ONES

Quick updates on the heaviest hitters

## Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

PS3 • Konami • June 2008

Motion controls on the PS3 haven't exactly taken off—and don't expect Konami's stealth-action game to help change that. Over the past few months, developer Kojima Productions has actually removed several of the planned Sixaxis mechanics from the game (like maneuvering Snake's Mk. II robot). "I think the problem with this feature is it was severely overhyped," says Assistant Producer Ryan Payton. "It was talked up as Sony's answer to the Wii Remote. The trick is to use Sixaxis sparingly and have fun with it. I don't think anybody wants to play a long game while consistently having to tilt the controller around. Rather, it's fun for the player when they're given a chance to use it in short bursts—that's how we're approaching Sixaxis in *MGS4*."



## Gears of War 2

Xbox 360 • Microsoft Game Studios • TBD

By the time you read this, Gates' gang may have already announced a follow-up to this beautiful shooter. If not, at least Microsoft has made some moves to imply another one is very much on the way. The publisher has hired Kudo Tsunoda as the general manager of the *Gears* franchise. The outspoken Tsunoda previously ran the now-defunct EA Chicago studio, which is best known for the *Fight Night* series. So don't be surprised if Marcus and Dom are throwing some hurtin' bombs in *Gears 2*....



## Street Fighter IV

TBD • Capcom • TBD

It looks like the band's gettin' back together, as Capcom has revealed a slew of new-yet-old additions to the *SF4* roster. The lineup currently totals nine, including the likes of Guile, E. Honda, Zangief, Blanka, and Chun-Li. And for everyone wondering about the lady's famous thighs, just look to the left—yep, it looks like she still hits the squat rack three to four times a week.

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help you reduce friction  
and increase razor glide

Gillette



The Best a Man Can Get

# PLUNDER

We finally spot some pimps at sea By Matt Leone

**Platforms:**

Xbox Live Arcade, PlayStation Network

**Publisher:**

Capcom

**Developer:**

Certain Affinity

**Release Date:**

June 2008



Ex-Bungie developers finally get to see their pirate-game dreams realized through *Plunder*.

**WE KNOW IT LOOKS SUSPICIOUS**—EGM having an exclusive on a pirate-themed game from ex-Bungie guys in this very issue. But you're going to have to trust us that, unlike the *Halo* makers' ongoing *Pimps at Sea* April Fools' joke, *Plunder* is an honest-to-goodness real-time strategy, download-only game. That's not to say you won't find a connector between the two. "I'm pretty sure the impetus behind doing [a game about] pirates and sailing ships came from thinking about *Pimps at Sea*," says Max Hoberman, president of developer Certain Affinity and former multiplayer lead on the last two *Halos*. "But not a lot more than that."

Instead, *Plunder* takes its primary

influence from the *Settlers of Catan* board game and plays out as an RTS where each player steers a ship and competes to capture the most land. Using a tile-based interface where you move from spot to spot by pushing around a big red 'X,' you conquer towns, kill enemy ships, earn upgrades, and figure out the best ways to repeat these actions most effectively. The goal is always "first team to capture a set number of towns wins," but with a lot of back-and-forth (towns are easier to steal from other players than to conquer in the first place) you quickly realize the importance of collecting resources to boost town and ship abilities. To keep things from being too simple, you occasionally come across Curses that you can use to attack and set traps, but that's about as complicated as the interface gets.

Even if you've never played an RTS, "I'll probably take only a few minutes to get you up and around the rules." From day one, we've always had this goal of accessibility," says Hoberman, "that anyone can pick up the game and play it." The idea is to let players spend time coming up with strategies rather than learning mechanics. So you'll have to decide

if you want to block an enemy path, so a teammate can capture a town uncontested, or if you want to move an a group to overwhelm enemies. With up to eight players in a game, team coordination is key.

Given Hoberman's roots, it's probably not a surprise that *Plunder* will feature a tall stack of online options. From four-player, splitscreen support to a *Halo*-esque matchmaking system that allows players to stick together in parties to a map editor for that! Let you upload and share custom maps, it's clear the designers know the importance of options. "You don't see these in most full-blown retail games," says Hoberman.

While Certain Affinity is working on one of those as well, the studio is helping Valve and developer Turtle Rock port the upcoming coop zombie shooter *Left 4 Dead* to the Xbox 360. *Plunder* is the company's first original game and they're clearly excited about it. After some early hands-on time, so are we—it's rare to see an RTS elicit trash talking almost instantly, and if *Halo*'s rich history of multiplayer balance carries over, here, this could be one of the summer's standout download-able titles. **A-**







These four top hats are all the same height, but the length of the brim is different. In other words, the hats are equally tall but vary in width.

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**WE MIGHT FINALLY** get a chance to play *Final Fantasy XIII* soon. Chain-loving *Final Fantasy XIII* mastermind Tetsuya Nomura recently told the Japanese gaming press that a demo of Square Enix's 13th unfinished fantasy series will be appearing later this year. And by later, that probably means late winter. But, hey, at least we'll get a chance to test-drive the PS3's biggest role-playing game.

**LOOKS LIKE IT'S TIME** for another *Prince of Persia* game—publisher Ubisoft confirmed a new wall-running *Prince* will be revealed later this year. Speaking of sequels, Tecmo also announced Nintendo will publish (wha—?) *Fatal Frame IV* for the Wii. But wait, it gets weirder—*No More Heroes* creator Suda 51 will be over-looking the paranormal project.

> OVERHEARD

"[*Uncharted* protagonist Nathan Drake's half-tucked-in shirt] encapsulates the contradiction that you are: the shy extrovert, the organized slob, the guy who likes to shop at Banana Republic but also likes to fall into the Gap when he's feeling a little crazy. The half-tuck reassures the ladies that you're a man who cares about personal grooming, but who, at the same time, couldn't give a f\*\*\*. Who doesn't like that? **Of all the treasure I found on this quest, I think this little fashion tip is the one I will cherish the most.**"

—*Psychonauts* creator Tim Schafer points out what really matters in games: stylish main characters.



DOUG BISHOP/SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT



> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS

# Universe at War: EARTH ASSAULT

Boring name, revolutionary game

Platform:  
XB360

Publisher:  
Sega

Developer:  
Retroglyph

Released  
Date:  
March 2008

**UNIVERSAL ASSAULT? EARTH AT WAR?** Bah, it's not easy remembering this real-time strategy game's name—it's as generic as a made-for-Sci-Fi-Channel movie title. But it's hard to forget what the game itself actually offers: three distinct races to play as, 360-vs.-PC multiplayer (eh...no thanks), Achievements that actually affect gameplay, and huge-ass walking fortresses that destroy everything in sight, especially...cows?

Many RTSes offer "distinct races" but don't really mean it beyond a few different unit types; *Universe at War* does. Let's see how its three sides tackle this war of the world.



## HIERARCHY

Tactics: Rape, pillage, and destroy

The Hierarchy summons Walkers down to Earth's surface. These giant crablike mobile bases start crawling across the countryside, scooping up everything (especially cows, which are more valuable for some reason) in their warpaths to use as resources. The Hierarchy player can upgrade these Walkers to emphasize troop creation (to make smaller ground and air units) or technology advancement, or he can add on weapons and shielding to the Walkers' hardpoints to turn them into gargantuan death-dealing mechs.



## NOVUS

Tactics: Transport, hit, and run

The Novus are a race of sentient machines, descendants of a biological life form wiped out long ago by the Hierarchy, and they're now here to protect Earth from extinction. While the Hierarchy are roaming, the Novus are busy creating a network of nodes so they can transport across long distances at high speeds (careful, though: Say goodbye to any units en route if a supporting node gets destroyed). This allows them to hit-and-run quickly against the massive Hierarchy Walkers.

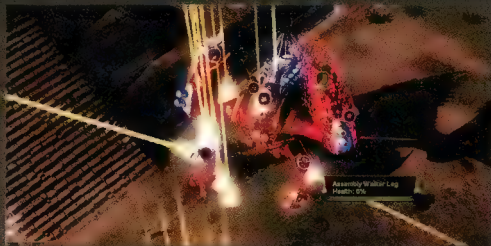


## MASARI

Tactics: Light and Dark modes

Meanwhile, the Masari are off in one corner of the map, building bases that they have to defend, collecting resources, and pumping out troops from various structures—basically, these guys take on the role of a more traditional RTS team. But their twist is the ability to switch between Light and Dark modes. Light mode lets Masari fly, move faster, and use ranged weapons. Dark mode grounds them but gives them extra shielding and melee attacks.

The Masari have been lying dormant on our planet for thousands of years, but all that earth trembling from Walkers stomping about and Novus hitting-and-running must've woken them up.



## A TRUE ACHIEVEMENT

From what we've seen so far, *Universe at War* really advances the RTS genre on consoles with its three very unique, playable sides that offer many different customization options and ways to play...even within one race. Sega and Petroglyph have also advanced the very concept of Achievements on the Xbox 360 by giving players—gasp!—tangible benefits when one's unlocked. Called "Medals," UAW's Achievements (earned through very specific conditions within multiplayer, including collecting 200 cows) will give players bonuses for certain races and units such as increased speed, more damage, or faster resource gathering. We hope this starts a bigger trend with other 360 developers.

## > THE GAME OF LIVES



## 5 Lives: BioWare Doctors

BioWare founders Dr. Ray Muzyka and Dr. Greg Zeschuk knew how to heal ailing role-playing-game lovers last year. The cure was simple: *Mass Effect*. Answering our five questions, however, is not so easy. But with two heads working together, surely these brainy doctors can survive our game, right? Perhaps. Or perhaps not....

### 1. *Mass Effect* isn't the only RPG to feature gay themes. What Japanese Famicom RPG featured a gay bar?

**Ray Muzyka:** I'm at a loss—this is super old-school.

**Greg Zeschuk:** Does this game include hints?

**EGM:** Nope, sorry. The answer is *Dragon Quest III*.

Lives remaining: **DDDDX**

### 2. Name the games in which these doctors appear: Dr. Light, Dr. Derek Stiles, and Dr. Kawashima.

**GZ:** [Laughs] I think you guys amped up the difficulty a little too much. Kawashima is *Brain Age*.

**RM:** Dr. Derek Stiles is *Trauma Center*.

**GZ:** Dr. Light is *Mega Man*?

**EGM:** Correct.

**RM:** I can't believe we answered that correctly.

Lives remaining: **DDDD**

### 3. Your upcoming *Sonic RPG* isn't the only Sega series to delve into a different genre—what is the title of the *Virtua Fighter* RPG?

**RM:** It's probably a really obvious answer.

**GZ:** *Virtua Fighter Battle!*

**EGM:** Incorrect. It's *Virtua Quest*.

Lives remaining: **DDDX**

### 4. Darth Revan from *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* was made into an action figure after he received the second-highest number of votes in a *ToyFare* poll. What *Star Wars* Jedi beat Revan in the votes?

**GZ:** Shaak Ti?

**EGM:** Incorrect. It's Quinlan Vos.

Lives remaining: **DDX**

### 5. Idiots think *Mass Effect* is porn. It's not, but name three Atari 2600 games that were.

**RM:** I was more of an Apple guy.

**GZ:** *Custer's Revenge* is one. That's all we can think of.

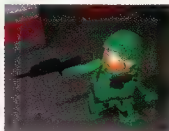
**EGM:** Sorry, you only got one.

Lives remaining: **DD**

**Game Over:** The game's not over yet—vengeful from their doctors, the two doctors challenged us to our own game. Head to [EGM.1UP.com](http://EGM.1UP.com) to hear them challenge *EGM* on an upcoming podcast.

# LEGO HALO

Bungie takes Halo back to the building blocks. By Michael Donahoe



**Platform:** XB360  
**Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios  
**Developer:** Bungie  
**Release Date:** Fall 2008

## HALO 3'S FIGHT IS OVER.

Finished, shall you say. Or is it? Of course not! Master Chief might be good at saving the universe, but he's better at something else: making mountains of money. That's why developer Bungie is looking to construct some more cash with their newest project: *Lego Halo*.

Like *Lego Star Wars*, *Lego Halo* will let players relive the entire *Halo* trilogy...only with 100 percent more blocks. The move might seem strange to some, but to Bungie, it's a perfect fit. "When we thought about where to take the *Halo* series, the obvious answer was to make a spin-off," says Senior Project Lead Lee Carlton. "But with the Peter Jackson project addressing the missing holes in the *Halo* universe, it gives us the freedom to develop something a little different." Different for Bungie, yes, but anyone who has played *Lego Star Wars* should be familiar with how *Lego Halo* will work. Not surprising, since the folks at Halo happen to be big fans of the block-filled blockbuster. "Everyone on the team was so impressed with how well the *Lego Star Wars* games captured the magic of the movies,"

explains Carlton. "We really feel like the *Halo* trilogy is as strong as *Star Wars*, and that's why we're excited to take our rich universe and present it in a way everyone can enjoy."

Hardcore *Halo* fans (should) know the original didn't start out as a first-person shooter. Before we saw combat evolved through Master Chief's eyes, *Halo* was a third-person action game. *Lego Halo* is taking Bungie back to its roots, as 90 percent of the game will feature this perspective. The other 10 percent? Standard *Halo*. "While this a third-person adventure, we still want to please our loyal fans," says Carlton. "I can't spill everything now, but I will say that at least 10 percent will be the traditional first-person *Halo* you know and love." From we what gather, some classic levels (don't sweat—it won't be the Library) will be remade in blocky first-person.

Like *Lego Star Wars*, you'll play as multiple characters during the

campaign. Master Chief will no doubt be the main brick breaker, but also expect to see Avery J. Johnson, the Arbiter, and even Chief's main virtual squeeze, Cortana. Just because *Lego Halo* chronicles the first three games, however, doesn't mean new characters won't be introduced. "New characters are definitely something we plan to include in *Lego Halo*," says Carlton. "In one bonus mission, Master Chief will be battling the Covenant with Burt-041, the brother of Kurt-051 from the *Halo: Ghosts of Onyx* novel."

Even though *Lego Halo*'s fall release date seems close, Carlton ensures us it's not being rushed. "We started work on *Lego Halo* shortly before *Halo 3* was finished," he says. "Making [*Lego Halo*] is almost easy after completing *Halo 3*." Judging by how popular *Lego Star Wars* is, it's pretty obvious *Lego Halo* will be mighty big. Hell, we're putting in our 7-11 preorders now. ☘



➤ **We really feel like the *Halo* trilogy is as strong as *Star Wars*.**

—Senior Project Lead Lee Carlton





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> PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS

# WALKYRIA

You got some Ghibli in my Rainbow Six By James Mielke

Platform:

PS3

Publisher:

Sega

Developer:

Sega

Release Date:

Fall 2008

**DESCRIBING SEGA'S UPCOMING PART-REAL-TIME, PART-TURN-BASED STRATEGY** game *Valkyria* (apparently, the Japanese title, *Valkyrie of the Battlefield*, was way too cool for North America) isn't the easiest task, as it's an unconventional amalgamation of disparate-yet-bold influences. Visually, the game's unique "canvas" graphics system seems to borrow a page from the Studio Ghibli anime house (*Princess Mononoke*, *Spirited Away*). And who would think a game that looks so artsy would even

feature *Rainbow Six*-styled, squad-based combat?

*Valkyria* takes place in a fictionalized Europe during the 1930s, which finds two major factions warring with each other. The East European Empirical Confederation (or simply called the Empire) and the Atlantic Federal Organization (aka the Federation) are both attempting to use military force to unify Europe, resulting in what, in this alternate-reality, ends up being World War I. As a result, a small nation known as the Duchy of Gallia is caught in

this power struggle, but among the Gallian people are the Valkyria, a powerful race that was once instrumental in unifying ancient Europe. In this time of need, the Valkyria rise up again to repel the invaders that would trample their tiny homeland.

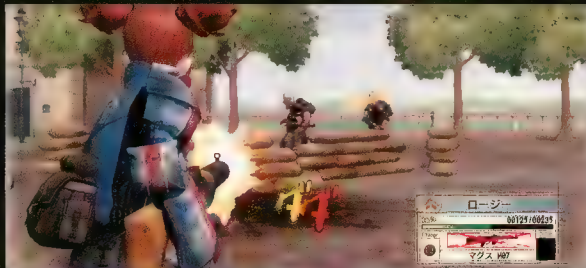
While the story in this game features a romantic arc between the main hero, Welkin (leader of the Seventh Gallian Platoon), and fellow platoon member Alicia (who's of Valkyria descent), we're going to focus here describing how the action in *Valkyria* plays out.



## INTEL

Over the course of 30 different stages, you must move the Seventh Platoon through ravaged countryside and war-torn Gallian villages to oust the Empirical forces. To achieve this—whether in single-player or multiplayer modes—you position your particular characters around the battlefield according to how many movement points they have; different jobs have different movement points. Heavy artillery users have less, while snipers have the most freedom in the battlefield. Each character gets to move around in real time until their movement points run out, at which time the game becomes turn-based and you can choose to wait, attack, or perform some other task.





### ▶ GATHER THE TROOPS

According to Sega, over 100 customizable characters are playable, with many undoubtedly recruited from liberated Gallian villages. Want to create a female-only death squad? Go for it. Amass an entire platoon of long-range snipers? That's your prerogative, which should make for some compelling online matchups.



### ▶ COPY THAT

Each specific squad role has its own unique play mechanics. Snipers, naturally, can zoom in extra close on their targets for precision aiming. And since they advance more quickly than others, you can also use them for reconnaissance (such as climbing buildings to get a lay of the land).



### ▶ MOVE OUT

As you position your players around the map in a chesslike duel against the Empire's forces, you'll find that using what Sega calls a "Blitz Tactical Battle System" is more organic than a quick glance suggests. Taking out the enemy's bazookas with some skillful sniping makes it safer to wheel out your tank, in what may be the prettiest game of rock-paper-scissors you've ever seen. With your tank in place to hammer entrenched enemy troops, you can use the vehicle as physical cover, around which you can steadily advance your own heavy militia and riflemen.

While a set-in-stone release date has yet to be confirmed, Sega is hoping *Valkyria* will land Stateside this fall. The publisher isn't known for producing tons of strategy games, but when it does, they're usually good ones (see: *Dragon Force* for the Saturn). And because of that, we're psyched to see how the finished product turns out. An unusual visual style and user-friendly tactical combat? We're there.

*A thousand years of  
memories lost.  
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*The Next Generation RPG,  
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An immersive and deep  
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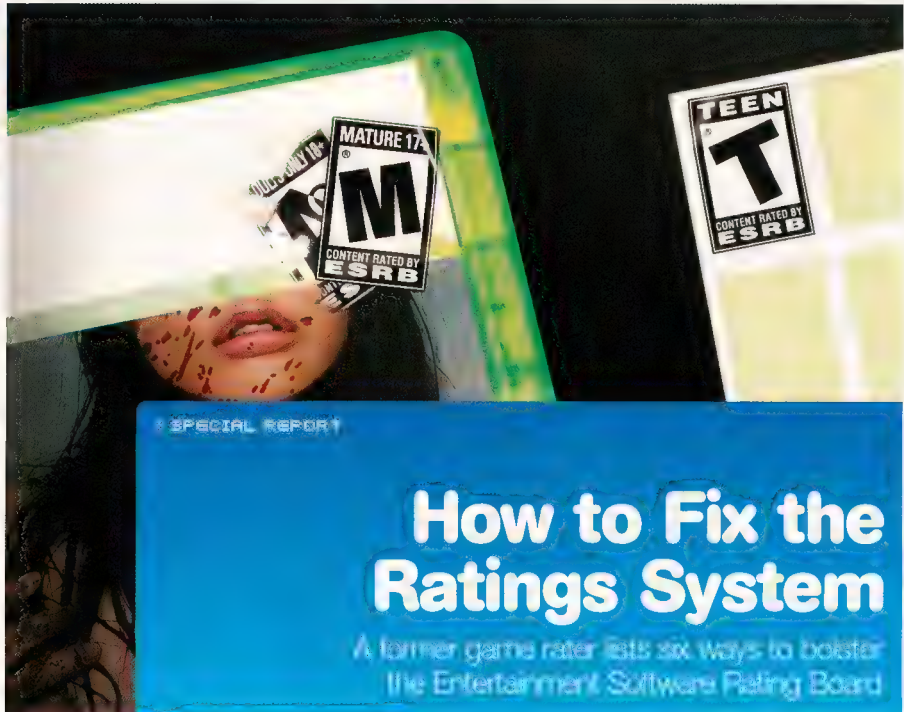
XBOX 360 LIVE

MYST WALKER

Microsoft  
game studios



Language  
Suggestive Themes  
Use of Alcohol  
Violence



SPECIAL REPORT

# How to Fix the Ratings System

A former game rater lists six ways to bolster the Entertainment Software Rating Board

This article was submitted by New Jersey writer Jerry Bonner, former senior game content rater for the Entertainment Software Rating Board. We shared Bonner's points with the ESRB so they could offer a response, which you can read at the end of this article.

**I USED TO SCOFF** at videogame reviewers who complained about all the terrible games they were "forced" to play. I don't do that anymore, because I *understand*. I worked for the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), the industry's only official body for evaluating and labeling game content, and I rated approximately 700 games during my time there.

So I know what it's like to play (and, more often, watch) lousy games. More importantly, I know what's wrong with the industry's rating system, which has had a rough ride lately after the *Grand Theft Auto Hot Coffee* scandal, *Manhunt 2* Mature-rating controversy, and—worst of all—pressure from politicians to legally regulate the system.

I'd like to point out the problems and offer solutions. But first, a word about the ESRB itself. The majority of the people I encountered there were hardworking, intelligent folks who were just as passionate about videogames and the gaming lifestyle as you or I. My intentions here are to speak to those at the ESRB who truly care about videogames and to kick them out of their complacency. You

have the power to change the ratings system before it becomes irretrievably lost. Something desperately needs to happen here because the alternative—a government-mandated and controlled rating scheme—is a downright frightening concept. Here are six ways to improve things....

## 1. Reboot the system

The ESRB should be flexible, ready to change quickly or move forward as fast as this rapidly evolving industry. They did adopt the E10+ rating in 2005 and hired six full-time raters this past spring. While these changes are nice, I believe they need to go a bit further.

First and foremost, the ESRB's ratings system desperately needs to be updated. Its fundamental flaw is the "lame duck" Adults Only rating that no one will support (Nintendo, Sony,

and Microsoft have repeatedly stated that no AO game would be allowed on their consoles, while retail outlets like Wal-Mart and Target have refused to stock AO-rated games, thereby banishing them to a retail version of the Phantom Zone).

ESRB management has talked about changing the system, but for now that's all it is—talk. Any monumental change would have to be approved by the board at parent agency the Entertainment Software Association, and they do nothing on a whim. My suggestion is this: Change the letter ratings to E(veryone), E(veryone)10+, T(een)13, T(een)16, and M(ature). AO goes the way of the dodo and Mature now becomes the top of the scale, recommending that players be 18 and older to purchase. My other strong suggestion

➤ **Something desperately needs to happen because the alternative—a government-controlled rating system—is a frightening concept.**



is to do away with the static content descriptors ("cartoon violence," etc.) and use a more free-form approach like the Motion Picture Association of America, which tailors its descriptors for specific movie content.

## 2. Play the games

What the general public may not know is that the ESRB's current pool of full-time raters (six people: three men and three women) does not actually play the games that they rate. They just watch submitted videotapes or DVDs of someone else playing the game. Now, when the switch was made from the use of a large pool of part-time raters to the current group of full-timers, the ESRB did decide to have the full-time raters actually play games as well, but these were rare games that we dealt with in the rating process. They were just "random" titles from the vast ESRB archive, culled for busywork. And the raters were only required to play the games for four hours, anyway. For some titles, this is more than enough; for others, it is woefully inadequate.

Instead of watching videotapes or DVDs of gameplay on a never-ending quest for the ever-elusive "pertinent content," I would strongly suggest having the raters play the games to completion and carefully log their findings throughout the playtest. "I've already heard the ESRB's argument on this one: "That'll take way too long and it will compromise our turnaround time." My solution to that is simple: Hire more people. The ESRB is a relatively small organization with about 30 full-time employees. This can be bolstered a bit, and I'm sure the developers and publishers can wait an extra week or so for their ratings if they know that a better, more thorough job is being done.

## 3. Forget parity

Parity to the ESRB is like dots to Pac-Man or blood to Dracula—a life-sustaining fuel. The logic goes like this: If game X gets a Teen rating, then it stands to reason that the sequel will get the same and so on and so forth into infinity. In my time as a rater this concept just handcuffed us more than helped us, because nine times out of 10 the other raters had no idea that the game we were viewing was the sixth in a continuing franchise. Not knowing "the parity" became a huge, confusing issue.

Forget the whole concept of parity, or minimize the dependence on it, and judge each individual game solely on its content and nothing else. It just makes things easier that way.



■ Rate expectations (clockwise from top): *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* struck our reviewers as the most violent Teen-rated game yet. *Manhunt 2* was edited to avoid an Adults Only tag. *Lair's* developers called the ratings process a "charade."

## 4. Drop the curtain

I used to tell a joke while working at the ESRB that their acronym should be changed to CIA—I never understood why the board was so secretive about their modus operandi and why we, as raters, couldn't be known to the general public or ever speak to a reporter. I finally asked about this and was told that it was for our protection, to "save" us from unscrupulous publishers or journalists who might offer us money for a favorable rating or some inside information. The idea of it sounded absurd to me—people going to those shady lengths over game ratings? Seemed a bit excessive....

Realistically, there is *nothing* to hide at the ESRB. Everything was above board as far as I could tell and all the employees are well-adjusted adults who can handle themselves in complicated situations. But by acting in a secretive, mysterious way, the ESRB creates an *appearance* of impropriety. This serves no purpose.

And if the day does come when the ESRB drops the curtain, then the general public would be in a position to offer its own ideas on improving the system as well.

## 5. Let the raters rate

It was my understanding when I was hired that I would actually be rating games. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case in some instances. The raters were viewed as more of an "electoral college," and our ratings were not always the final ones issued. Sometimes, we'd see a full letter rating change (a game we gave an M would be lowered to a T, for example, or a T raised to an M). Other times it would be a simple content-descriptor change (we would give a game the "mild cartoon violence" descriptor and it would be changed to "comic mischief"). To be fair, if/when our ratings were altered, it was usually just a simple content-descriptor change. But when this would happen, we were rarely given a sufficient explanation as to why the rating was tweaked.

This was extraordinarily frustrating. The other raters and I would debate long and hard to come up with what we thought was a logical and intelligent rating for each and every game. To have it changed without any input from us was, in a word, ridiculous. Trust the raters. I know, firsthand, that they are smart and conscientious >

people. Let them do the jobs they were hired to do.

## 6. We need competition

Back in the day, the ESRB wasn't the only game in town. For a time, Sega and 3DO had their own internal ratings systems, and there was also the Recreational Software Advisory Council, which folded in 1999. I know that the ESRB is the only ratings system "officially" recognized by Congress in 1994, but it seems that Congress has fallen out of love with the ESRB as of late. Who is to say that some upstart entrepreneurs couldn't contest the ESRB's status, especially now? Who says that the ESRB has to be the only game in town? The threat alone of a competing ratings entity would force the ESRB to take a long, hard look at how they are doing things and, in turn, make the

necessary changes to move forward.

Some may say that a competing system would just confuse things further, that it could invite government regulation because politicians could claim that the industry no longer has the ability to field a single, dependable regulating body. But what I'm suggesting here is capitalism at its finest—the American Way, if you will. Compete or perish. We all know that the best *Madden* games are made when 2K puts out a strong contending product, right? So there you go. Competition produces results. Lack of competition...well, you get the idea.

## End game

In a perfect world there would be no need for the ESRB or anything like it. Parents would do their jobs, pay attention to their children, and make informed decisions when it came to

what their children could and could not play or view.

It isn't a perfect world. I know this all too well. Parents now are busier than ever and things, important things, slip through the cracks from time to time. Being a parent myself, I'm not really happy about that, but I cannot change the way of the world. I can only try to change my piece of it.

The ESRB's way of doing things isn't perfect either, but it's what we've got...so let's fix it before things really get out of hand and a new government-appointed "Secretary of Interactive Entertainment" is making the decisions as to what we can and can't play.

I know I don't want that. I know you don't want that. And I know that the people at the ESRB don't want that.

Let's all make damn sure it doesn't happen, shall we? ☛



## A RATING SYSTEM THAT MEETS PARENTS' NEEDS

ESRB President Patricia Vance responds

A wise man once famously said that when it comes to addressing complicated issues everyone lentified to his own opinion, but not to his own facts. So in 1994, I was named ESRB's first president by former ratee Sega. I've since worked to make sure that the ESRB is the only rating system.

The primary priority of the rating system is to help parents determine what games are appropriate for their children. To achieve this goal, ratings must be objective, trustworthy, and clearly communicate organization and game information independent sources must set the format. The Commission on Children, Youth, and Families' findings were instrumental in setting these standards for accuracy. Most notably, scientific research, as conducted by the National Center for Human Growth and Development, demonstrated that parents are the best people to make these decisions.

The FCC recently announced proposed rules that will help parents make informed decisions about their children's use of video. The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) joined with ESRB to lobby for the rating system. The Commission also recognized that the ratings system is a key component of the industry's self-regulation.

While it would be nice to have a perfect world, it's not realistic. Parents need to be able to make informed decisions about their children's use of video. The ESRB is the only rating system that meets parents' needs.

Parents of our society at large can't expect a system to accomplish this task. And, as anyone who closely follows the industry can attest, we have never taken an "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" position. In recent years, we have made numerous and significant enhancements to the system, such as the addition of the ETOA rating category and strengthening of our enforcement system. We will continue to do so if such changes serve to improve the effectiveness of the ratings.

Mr. Bonnet's article includes numerous misleading statements, actual inaccuracies, and misrepresentations with respect to key aspects of the rating system. The author also fails to describe the unique and limited nature of the strongest benchmark that ESRB, which is wholly new staff of full-time raters now being hired and trained, being our position as a public trust, and our statements about our system, the legitimate interests of all consumers, friends, and family.

The author's clear and obvious purpose is to mislead the public. He says that the ESRB is not the best, although his rating recommendations and their consequences demonstrate the principal deficiencies being addressed by a rating system that meets the needs of parents. He avoids stating it clearly. In fact, he states that the ESRB is the only rating system that meets parents' needs. He also states that the ESRB is the only rating system that meets parents' needs.

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# ALL FATE BREAKS LOOSE.



## FINAL FANTASY DUAL CHRONICLES Ring of Fates

ALONE OR WITH FRIENDS,  
THE ADVENTURES BEGIN  
**MARCH 2008**



EVERYONE 10+  
**E10+**  
Fantasy Violence  
Online Interactions Not Rated by the ESRB



NINTENDO DS™

SQUARE ENIX™



## Universal Ratings By Hal Halpin

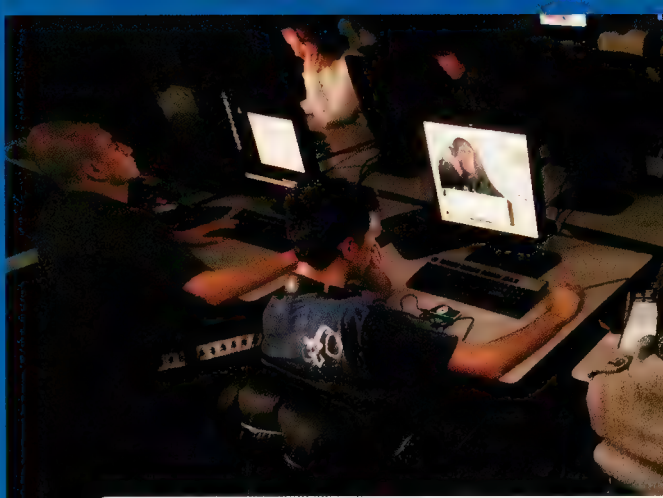
Many of the industry's greatest critics can (usually) agree on one thing: The Entertainment Software Rating Board is the best rating system for entertainment products, far surpassing the meager Recording Industry Association of America labeling system, which places "Parental Advisory" stickers on packaged goods but does nothing to discern why a product is appropriate for one age group but not another. And while the ESRB is similar to the Motion Picture Association of America rating system (a jointly operated venture between movie studios and theater owners), game ratings go far beyond it by employing content descriptors. It really is the best rating system available. But that's precisely the point that some federal legislators make: It's the best of what we have, not the best of what we're capable of.

The "Universal Rating System" is an alternative being proposed and even endorsed by some politicians. They believe all entertainment products (music, movies, games) should be reviewed and rated on the same universally known system. Furthermore, a movie—and the DVD or game based on it—should have the same level of appropriate content. After all, some argue that it's unfair to have a movie that a 13-year-old can see but a companion game that's available to "everyone." The inverse also occurs: One can watch the movie but not play the game owing to different ratings. Yet it's still an imperfect system—the manufacturers are different, the medium is different, and (as game publishers like to point out) the experience is different. That's the gaming biz's argument against the Universal Rating System.

The argument "for" is simple: Less consumer confusion—no need to try to figure out if your kid should watch, play, or listen to something based on your understanding (or lack thereof) of each of the systems, because there's only one. It's simple and easy to understand—but as equally unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future.



Hal Halpin is founder of the Electronic Consumers Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to watchdog gaming legislation. Join its cause at [www.theeca.com](http://www.theeca.com).



## > TAKE THIS JOB

# Game-School Teacher

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



Missed a gig from a past issue? Catch up with our job series online at [1UP.com](http://www.1UP.com).

**This month:** Jason Elliott, game art & design instructor at the art institute of Vancouver  
**Recommended education:** A bachelor's degree in subjects related to your course is preferred, but not necessary. More important: relevant experience in the game biz itself.  
**Salary range:** \$30,000 to \$65,000

### What's a game-school teacher?

It's an industry veteran—hired to give students of game design school theoretical and practical education. The course revolves teaching students about a particular game job and how to go about doing it. "I am teaching level design," says Elliott. "The theoretical concepts would be how to use the software and tools you have available, and how to put the level together."

"Practical education, on the other hand, is the 'nuts and bolts' of the subject matter. This is by far the most important to impart," Elliott says. "Using level design as an example again, this would be explaining why you need pathfinding, why you need

area placed where they are, why some levels are faster and others are not..." This is where having industry experience fits in. "You need to have examples of how different companies/projects/teams may do things completely different," Elliott says.

### Elliott's typical day

Each of his classes lasts four hours, a mix of lessons and labs. "Generally you show up before class with all of your materials previously prepared," he says. "You take attendance and outline for the class what you're going to be discussing that day." Elevating the rest of the class, Elliott sometimes lectures, but he also interacts with students and asks them to work on pre-reading assignments.





Photograph by videogameheadlines

### How'd he get the gig?

After working as lead artist at Konami of America and game designer at Radical Entertainment, Elliott fell into teaching. "I'd been laid off and was looking for something different," he says. "It happened to see an ad to teach a course in illustration and though it'd be interesting." After his first

class full of energetic students looking to break into the industry, he was hooked. "I started taking more classes [and] decided to come on full-time," he says. He's developed courses, and in his work helping students create their portfolios, he's become a sort of consulting coach. "I'd like to see the gatekeeper for the industry."

### TOOLS OF HIS TRADE

#### Strong voice

"You need to make sure the students at the end of the class are confident in their voice. It's not just about the art, it's about the communication."

#### Microsoft Office

"I don't use this software. It's not a good way to learn. The students are used to it, but it's not a good way to learn."

"A lot of your applications, spreadsheets, [and] presentations, and you probably it to the students as well." He says.

#### Humor

"Making humor is important. And it's a good way to learn. It's a good way to learn."

http://www.gamedev.com  
They make the class a fun experience. I'd like to see the gatekeeper for the industry."

#### Bottled water

"I'd like to see the gatekeeper for the industry. It's a good way to learn. It's a good way to learn."

### > THAT SUCKS



### THE ONLINE ROAD

for *Burnout: Paradise* has a dead end for hard drive-less 360 owners. EA recently confirmed that anyone who purchased the cheaper Core and Arcade 360 packs will be unable to take to the online streets; the lack of a hard drive means there's nowhere to store data transferred while racing over the Internet. And considering the online mode is *Paradise's* big selling point, it's a big bummer for stingy Xbox 360 owners.



### SONY HATES COLOR

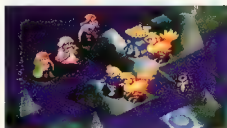
here in America. Over in Japan, Sony recently debuted a slick new silver PlayStation 3 that will not, apparently, come to our shores. Or at least at the moment—Sony Computer Entertainment America recently told IGN that it has no plans to release the sleek silver model here in the States "at this time." Instead, we get a dozen different hard-drive configurations—thanks, Sony!

### PUBLISHERS ARE REALLY STRETCHING

for new game licenses. Masfitt announced it acquired the license for everyone's favorite sports league that doesn't involve sports: Major League Eating. Uh, do we really need to play a hot dog-swallowing minigame? No.

### > BY THE NUMBERS

## Speedy specialists



**5 hrs., 19 min.**

Record-setting completion time for *Final Fantasy Tactics*

**7 hrs., 46 min.**

Record-setting completion time for *GTA: San Andreas*

**30 min., 37 sec.**

Record-setting completion time for *The Legend of Zelda*

**3 hrs., 17 min., 50 sec.**

Record-setting completion time for *Halo 2* on Legendary difficulty without losing a life

Source: Guinness World Records; Game's Editor 2008



PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS AND INFO: HANDS-ON

# BOOM BLOX

Steven Spielberg makes things go boom on the Wii

By Jennifer Tsao



**Platform:**  
Wii

**Publisher:**  
EA

**Developer:**  
EA Casual

**Release Date:**  
May 2008

**GOOD IDEAS ARE A DIME A DOZEN.** Legendary filmmaker Steven Spielberg's good ideas are a bit harder to come by. So even if the concept for his upcoming videogame sounds suspiciously schlocky—*Boom Blox* is a family-oriented puzzle game that uses the Wii's signature motion controls—it's wise to consider the source before dismissing this one as just another piece of casual crap.

The first of Spielberg's three-game deal with EA's Los Angeles studio,

*Boom Blox* was born of a simple idea that had captured the director's imagination. "We want to see what we can do with building stuff up and breaking it down," Spielberg told the team early on in development. He'd played an early version of *Wii Sports* and was intrigued by how motion controls might work for a game based on that very familiar concept—playing with blocks.

Based on our hands-on time with *Boom Blox*, it works pretty darn well.

You use the Wii Remote to toss a ball at a bunch of blocks, hoping to start chain reactions to clear as many blocks as possible in the game's physics-based universe. Throughout approximately 300 single- and multi-player stages, the game evolves from simple puzzles that merely familiarize you with the mechanics to mystifying mind-benders that require logic, experimentation, and, perhaps, even brilliance. Some levels require you to clear the blocks in as little time as

## > A MATTER OF CHARACTER

These characters are more than just eye candy for the kiddies. As you earn medals in the game, you'll unlock different characters that then become available in the construction set. Each of the characters—the game features over 30—has unique behaviors and gameplay functionality. So besides making your levels more animated and lively, they'll have a purpose if you design them properly. But sometimes, the appeal is more basic. "It's fun to just throw in a whole bunch of these characters and just watch what they do," says Associate Producer Amir Rahimi. "We find that what kids want to do is just place down a whole bunch of different characters and figure out how to explode them. Every kid we focus-tested, without fail, at some point loves to do that."



**Beaver**

Lights up bomb blocks like sticks of dynamite

**Chicken**

Lays bomb blocks







Build mode has a review feature to let you see how objects interact.

> NO VANITY PROJECT



Steven Spielberg may be busy with the latest *Indiana Jones* flick, but that doesn't mean he's not directly involved in the development of *Boom Blox*. We ask Associate Producer Amir Rahimi to tell us a little about working with the man:

**Does he really work with the team?** "He comes in

once a week—the only time he's not around is if he's really busy at the end of a big shoot. We'll collaborate on specifics, and then we work on it, and he comes in the next week and reviews it."

**And just how well does this film genius know gamers?**

"We'd be focus-testing the game to find out, say, what an 8- to 12-year-old would think about X, and he would predict to the tee what that 8- to 12-year-old would perceive when they saw the game. We would be skeptical and think, 'Well...maybe.' Then we'd do the focus test, and he would be spot-on. It would just blow me away. He really knows his audience and understands what's compelling at the core of everything."

**Is this really the guy who did *Saving Private Ryan*?**

"His vision with *Boom Blox* was not to tell big, elaborate stories. He just wanted to create worlds and give a wrapper of emotional context to what you're doing while you're breaking stuff down."

**But does he even play games?** "Almost every time he comes in, he'll drop a reference to a game he's playing.

This week he was two levels away from beating [the PC game] *Crysis*. I know he's a big *Counter-Strike* guy. He plays a bunch of different genres. He truly believes that this industry will be able to tell really compelling stories."



possible. Others might ask players to complete the stage with as few ball tosses as they can. And in turn-based multiplayer, you compete with up to four players to complete goals faster.

So you'll find plenty of ways to break the blocks down. But *Boom Blox* also intends to let gamers build them up with its level creation mode, in which you modify existing levels or create new ones. You'll be able, for instance, to take a familiar level you've played and add vanishing blocks or

change the basic ball to a bowling ball. Or you can make your own, completely original, Rube Goldberg-esque maze—for real (the tools look way more user-friendly than those found in EA's recent *MySims*...thankfully). And motivated architects can plug in the Nunchuk and watch their explosions happen in slow motion—useful for fine-tuning more complex chain reactions. This should add lots of depth for gamers seeking a little more boom in their *Blox*. **B+**



**Mama Gorilla**

Destroys anything in her path to get to her babies



**Grim Reaper**

Hunts down other characters in the level, with extreme prejudice



**Bear**

Collects precious gem blocks and makes 'em disappear



• Spielberg art-directed everything, from the characters to the worlds.

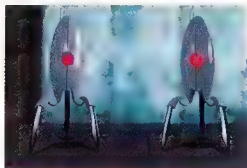


As always, we've collected our favorite game-related clips from the entire Internet and put them in one spot, just for you: [GameVideos.com/EGM](http://GameVideos.com/EGM).



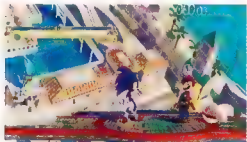
### 1337: GDC 2008 Highlights

Only the best of Game Developers Conference 2008: interviews, game-play clips, and trailers from one of the industry's biggest events.



### LOL: Portal: "A Day in the Life of a Turret"

Two gun turrets pass the time in this great short from Smooth Few Films. "I think I hate you more every day."



### NOOB: MyCheats' Super Smash Bros. Brawl strat videos

Pro tournament players lend a hand with MyCheats.com's SSBB survival guide. It's the only way you'll ever beat jigglypuff.



### ZOMG: 1UP Profiles: Nobuo Uematsu

The famed *Final Fantasy* composer talks about his time over at publisher Square Enix, his band the Black Mages, and future projects.

## ONLINE SCENE

# Battle of the Beats

Stacking up **Rock Band's** and **Guitar Hero's** downloadable tracks

**THE TOUR ISN'T OVER YET** for *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero III*. Both games have been keeping the rock alive with downloadable B-sides. But with so many hits to sift through (at least for *Rock Band*), we're wondering who's topping the charts. So much so that we tracked down the stats for each title to see which bands are winning the DLC battle.

### > ROCK BAND TOP-DOWNLOADED SONGS (as of 1/17/08)

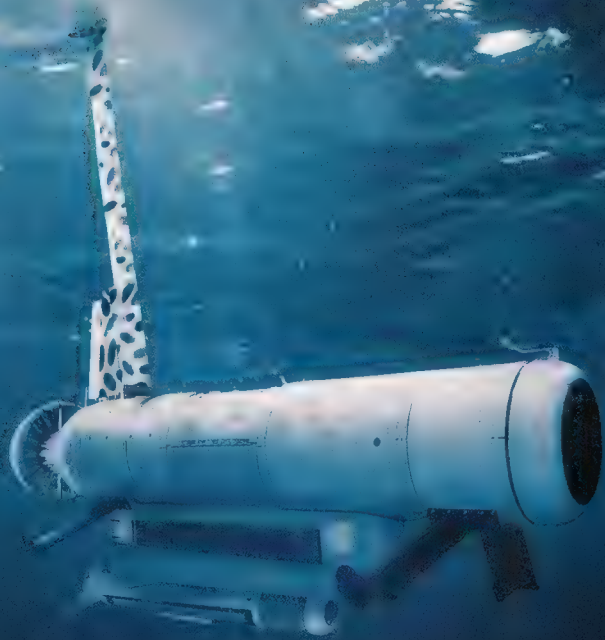
1. **Metallica Pack:** "Ride the Lightning," "Blackened," and "...And Justice for All"
2. **Tool Pack:** "Car," "Band Crying," "Pneumonia," and "Symphonically W"
3. **Black Sabbath Pack:** "N.I.B.", "Sweet Leaf," and "War Pigs"
4. **Beano of the Stone Age Pack:** "P.O. & N.O.," "S.O.K.," "S.O.K.," and "Little Sister"
5. **David Bowie Pack:** "Heroes," "Moonage Daydream," and "Queen Bitch"
6. **Beano of the Stone Age Pack:** "S.O.K.," "S.O.K.," and "Little Sister"
7. **Facepunch:** "Take It Back Here"
8. **Soundwave's Coverstar Festival:** "Fortunate Son"
9. **The Knack:** "My Sharona"
10. **The All-American Rejects:** "Greatest Hits: Sweet"



### > GUITAR HERO III TOP-DOWNLOADED SONGS (as of 2/5/08)

1. **Rock Theme:** "Riptide" by Kill
2. **Boss Battle Pack:** Slash's boss track, Tom Morley's boss track, and Steve Oulmette's "The Devil Went Down to Georgia"
3. **Steve Oulmette:** "The Stone Song"
4. **Foo Fighters Pack:** "All My Life," "The Paradise," and "The Runaway"
5. **Warner/Reprise Pack:** "Stagnation," "The Running of the Suits," and "Guitar"
6. **Warner/Reprise Pack:** Linkin Park's "No Intro Current," "Reverend," "Sleeping Giant," and The Used's "Pretty Handmade Automobile"
7. **Steve Oulmette Pack:** Boston's "Forever Mind," Foreigner's "Luka's Song," and "America's "How Was Your Week?"
8. **Die Fantastischen Vier:** "British Was My Sister"
9. **Warner/Reprise:** "Guitar Hero III"
10. **Extremadura:** "So Playas"





**BECAUSE BOMB-SNIFFING DOGS DON'T WORK WELL UNDERWATER.**

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<http://www.navy.com>

**NAVY**



# RUMOR MILL

Cracking down on rumors **By** Quartermann

**Resurrected Rumors:**

Last year I had a little tidbit some of you role-playing game lovers probably got excited about; I reported that *Kingdom Hearts* director Tetsuya Nomura's DS game, *The World Ends With You*, would be coming to our shores.

**I CAN FINALLY FEEL MY FEET** again. After enduring another cold and depressing winter, The Q is happy to report that the lovely springtime weather has warmed him up enough to scout for new scuttlebutt. 'Bout time, too—it's hard to hunt for juicy rumors when you're basically a human icicle. Well, now that I'm heated up and ready to go, why don't you go ahead and check out what I dug up this month.

**Out of orbs**

It's crazy to think that many of you pessimists originally wrote off *Crackdown* because it came bundled with the *Halo 3* beta. Ironically, now most of those same people are clamoring for a sequel. Too bad it may not come—my orb-hunting mole tells me that, despite what Microsoft has been saying lately, a *Crackdown* sequel is not likely. And even if it does happen (and that's a pretty big "if"), don't expect it to be made by original developer Realtime Worlds.

**PSP smorgasbord**

While the DS is still the portable champ, it's silly to ignore all the awesome games coming to the PSP.

Still, some may complain we're only getting a small trickle of hits. To all you complainers out there: Sony knows this—my portable spy tells me to **expect a major PSP renaissance this year**. Word is all the major Japanese publishers (Capcom, Square Enix, Konami, etc.) will be announcing a slew of unique and original titles soon.

**EA mixing it up**

When it comes to sports games, EA boasts enough titles to make any jock happy. Still, the megapublisher is missing one sport: Not for long, though—my Octagon insider is telling me **EA plans on entering the cage with a mixed martial**

**arts game**. Makes sense since the Ultimate Fighting Championship is becoming a huge deal. But since THQ is already gearing up to release an official UFC game, EA's fighter would have to feature grapplers from other leagues (Bodog Fight, International Fight League, etc.).

**Evil coming sooner**

We originally thought Capcom's *Resident Evil 5* wouldn't be coming out until 2009 (hell, the game's producer joked 2010), but that may be changing. It now appears that ***Resident Evil 5* will indeed be haunting store shelves just in time for the holiday shopping season.**

**Q-TIPS**

- ✦ Quirky rhythm-based strategy game *Patapon* is perfect for the PSP. And possibly the PlayStation Network—expect a spin-off to pop up soon.
- ✦ Last month I reported a scary rumor about a *Dead Rising* sequel being made in Los Angeles. Well, a sequel is coming, but it's not being created in L.A.
- ✦ *Wii Fit* is out in Japan, but we're still waiting to get our balance on. Why the delay? Apparently Nintendo is making a more durable board for our fatties.



APRIL 2008



COMING SOON

April's gaming showers

PRESS START



## Gran Turismo 5: Prologue

PS3 • Sony Computer Entertainment America

This highfalutin' \$40 demo (available as either a disc or a download) finally gives hungry PS3 owners a chance to test drive Sony's eerily photo-realistic racing simulator in 16-player online matches. But with only 37 cars, five tracks, and zero customization, this will only sate gearheads for so long...

## Rondo of Swords

DS • Atlus

Atlus continues to cater to its loyal fantasy-lovin' niche by delivering quality role-playing fare like *Rondo*, a tactical RPG in the vein of *Fire Emblem*. Expect surprisingly diverse strategic options, a gaggle of unique characters, and the promise of multiple endings.



## NBA Ballers: Chosen One

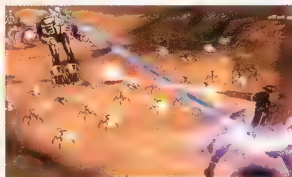
PS3/XB360 • Midway

It's back to basics for Midway's blinged-out arcade hoopster, so expect much-improved action on the court (and players that don't walk around like they have humpbacks) with none of *Phenom's* open-world lameness.

## Supreme Commander

XB360 • Aspyr

Better known as *SupCom* to its friends in the PC gaming realm, this ambitious real-time strategy sim arrives surprisingly intact on the 360. Prepare for some large-scale warfare: You're able to instantly zoom from close-up skirmishes all the way out to a planetary view.



### MORE APRIL RELEASES

Broken Sword

DS • Ubisoft

Dream Pinball 3D

Wii • SouthPeak

Grand Theft Auto: IV

PS3/XB360 • Rockstar

Monster Madness: Battle for Suburbia

PS3 • SouthPeak

My Life Coach

DS • Ubisoft

Quick Yoga Training

DS • Ubisoft

Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution

PS3/XB360/DS • 2K Games

Teenage Zombies

DS • Ignition

UEFA Euro 2008

PS3/XB360/PS2/PSP • EA Sports

Wild Earth: African Safari

Wii • Majesco



be the  
**weapon.**

become the  
**hero.**

**darks**





unleash the  
power.

# Dark Sector

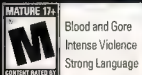


PLAYSTATION 3



XBOX 360 LIVE

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# Sweet Land of Liberty

We pay a rare visit to Rockstar North—ground zero for development on **Grand Theft Auto IV**—for unprecedented access to the team, a candid interview, and a test-drive of this year's biggest game

By Crispin Boyer

## "I'M AMERICAN. IT'S OFFICIAL."

says Rockstar Games founder—and newly minted U.S. citizen—Sam Houser, who moved to New York City 10 years ago from England to start his company. And while it might seem odd that Houser would go through the daunting process to become a citizen of a country where Senator Hillary Clinton once asked the Federal Trade

Commission to investigate Rockstar Games, consider this perk of pledging U.S. allegiance: "I can vote now," says Houser, who celebrated his naturalization a year ago with a cake covered in red-white-and-blue icing. "When I [lived in England], I never voted. But now I actually will vote—because I'll vote for anyone but Hillary Clinton."

We're in a conference room at

Rockstar North, the Edinburgh, Scotland-based studio responsible for putting the virtual rubber on the virtual roads of the megamillion-selling *Grand Theft Auto* series. One floor down, second-shift testers are full-throttling cigarette boats into piers, starting Krav Maga brawls with pedestrians, fouling up side missions—just doing everything they can, around the clock,





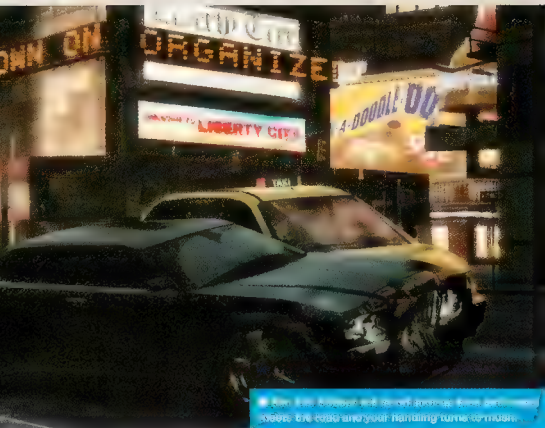
### Company man

Word around Rockstar is that GT4 hero Niko Bellic was inspired by a favorite driver in the company's car service.

to beat the bugs out of *Grand Theft Auto IV* before its fast-approaching April 29 release on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. *EGM* being here is kind of a big deal. More people have seen the monster in nearby Loch Ness than visited this studio or sat down with its founder. And Houser, an animated man prone to fussing with his bristly beard and avalanche of dark hair, is >







ing surrounded by architectural relics in the medieval city of Edinburgh. We meet the various team leaders. They sit at cubicles mostly unadorned with the toys and action figures that often clutter game-development workspaces. Even the roomy office of Rockstar North President Leslie Benzies is spartan: no TV, not much furniture, little decoration—except for a Freddy Krueger standee, a gift from his staff. "I just like the *Nightmare on Elm Street* movies—well, at least the first and third one," he tells us when we seek a hidden meaning, or at least an in-joke, behind the cardboard Krueger.

The most interesting place for us at Rockstar North is a smallish room with a mammoth high-def television, surround-sound speakers, and walls coated with soundproofing foam. Here's where we get our hands on *GTA4*, under light supervision and with very few guidelines other than to pick from a menu of missions and have fun. We're playing the 360 version today, although Houser assures us that the PlayStation 3 game will look and perform identically, except for minor differences such as the PS3's minutely warmer color palette. On the HDTV, we see main char-

acter Niko Bellic standing on a street corner. We're not at the start of the game—more like seven or eight missions in—but early enough to take easy jobs that serve as tutorials. Niko has already been introduced, his backstory established. This immigrant from Eastern Europe, hardened from the conflicts there, has been lured to America by his cousin, cab-company owner Roman, who falsely promises a good life of wealth and women. Niko has to work to make this American dream come true. His cell phone rings. It's Roman, asking Niko to pick up a Rastafarian named Little Jacob. >

# game forged, fixed, and left fouled up

## WITH VISIBILITY

When you're driving, you can see the car's front end. The car is now a total loss and you'll have to replace it.



When it's all over, you'll see the car's front end is completely destroyed. The car is now a total loss and you'll have to replace it.

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When it's all over, you'll see the car's front end is completely destroyed. The car is now a total loss and you'll have to replace it.

## WITH NEW ACTION

When you're driving, you can see the car's front end. The car is now a total loss and you'll have to replace it.



When it's all over, you'll see the car's front end is completely destroyed. The car is now a total loss and you'll have to replace it.

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Before we even accept the mission, though, we fiddle with the phone—a crucial gizmo in *GTA4*. Tapping up on the D-pad brings up the phone's screen. Here we can access messages, an organizer (to help remember appointments), multiplayer modes (more on those later), a camera, and contacts, who are added to the list as we meet them. A more advanced model of the phone acquired later adds an MP3 player, letting Niko listen to the game's 14 radio stations while hoofing around town.

Tapping up on the D-pad a second time brings up the phone's keypad. Dialing 911 calls a cop car, ambulance, or fire truck, which respond in real time from their stations throughout Liberty City's five boroughs. It's a handy trick for any missions that require you to steal emergency vehicles. Police cars are especially useful; you can use their computers to research people you meet. An even handier trick: Since cops will now try to stop any crimes they see—whether committed by you or others—you can give them a call if you're on the losing end of a gunfight or brawl. The fuzzer will pull up and arrest the aggressors, helping you for a change.

More than just a cool toy or a means for getting missions as in previous games, *GTA4*'s phone is your tool for staying in touch with contacts and courting ladies. Managing relationships takes commitment on the player's part. You'll need to make the occasional call and invite people out for drinks or minigames. But keeping those contacts happy isn't as easy as it sounds. As Houser explains...

**Sam Houser:** Cultivating relationships, like the real world, is bloody hard. People get pissed off with you; they expect you to call them back. That's one of the things that I've personally

been obsessed with in games for years.... I think the first time I really felt that in a videogame—not a PC game—was in *StarFox* on the N64.

**EGM:** Your copilots?

**SH:** Yes, that's it! The little froggy mate or the rabbit. I'd be flying in and looking across [the game world], and there they'd be. I thought, "That is hot!" I was probably 20-odd [years old], and I remember my friends saying, "You're getting a little bit too into this." You didn't want to see them get hit, even if he is just a rabbit. That stuck in my mind: one of those things where that felt different. With games, to me, it's all about the feeling—it's about making original, unique sensations and emotions. [Like] the mission "Bomb the Base" in *GTA3*, where you're sniping for 8-Ball; I remembered the feeling between the two of us then. I remember thinking, "That's cool." So we pushed it along a little bit for *Vice City*, and we pushed it on a little bit for *San Andreas*. But in this one, because of the amount of resources and power that these new machines give us, we're able to bring it to life so much more....

**EGM:** And you get material as well as emotional rewards. Little Jacob brings you weapons; another guy will bring a helicopter....

**SH:** Yep. It's very integrated into it like that. The idea is that if you do cultivate these relationships, you'll do fun things with them. They'll be amusing people to hang out with, and then other things will come from that: Either they'll introduce you to other people who will introduce you to other things to go and do, or they'll come and bring a present for you of some description, whether it's a



weapon or what have you.... But it's a really important area to explore. The idea of having feelings for a bunch of polygons is very profound. It's something that I want to see more games push, and I certainly want our games to keep on pushing it....

**EGM:** And once a player is invested in the characters, that's when you can do things like kill them off....

**SH:** Yes, exactly. Once you're invested, then you can turn them on their heads. There's a mission where you have to rescue Roman from some rather hostile characters. You can hear him yelling down at you, and you're yelling up at him, but there's about 15 scary Albanian guys in between: That feels heavy.... There's an emotional charge to [our game], to why you're doing it, that makes you feel very different about it.

**EGM:** *San Andreas* put a lot of emphasis on customizing your appearance to interact with other characters, but now that's out.





▶ To outrun cops, you must escape from a where-shapes-dance-one-that-appears-on-your-map. The greater you wanted level, the bigger the cone.

**SH:** Yes. You spend more time working at the relationships rather than working on yourself, to some extent. You have to put time in with the friends doing activities or errands for them, or just hanging out, going and having a drink, playing a game of darts, playing a game of pool. The darts is particularly my favorite: I actually win at it, which I can't believe. I've always been terrible at darts my whole life.... But if you put the effort into these relationships, I think—as in the real world, really—they blossom and grow and evolve. And if you don't, you start getting these more and more pissed-off text messages and phone calls from them. They're like, "Look...! I haven't seen you in a week. What the f\*\*\* is this all about?"

**Straight shooting**

"Go easier on the gas." "Don't rely on the e-brake so much for turns." Rockstar reps are backseat driving while we come to grips with *GTA4*'s vehicle controls. We're on Roman's mission, en route to pick up Little Jacob in a stolen car, and the

handling's a bit more slippery than what we remember from *San Andreas*. Unlike in that prequel, in which car handling improved subtly as main character CJ leveled up his driving ability, Niko's wheelman skills are locked for life. It's up to us to get the hang of Liberty City's new physics.

We find Jacob easily enough, thanks to a much-appreciated GPS feature that—as in the *GTA*-inspired *Saints Row*—plots routes on the mini-map as you drive and even recalculates a new course if you make a wrong turn. (Luxury cars add voice, giving terse, turn-by-turn directions in the same dulcet tones as a real-world GPS.) And by the time we pull up to Little Jacob, we've gotten a knack for the squirrely handling. Jacob, who talks in rapid-fire Rastafarian lingo so

think we turn on the subtitles, lights up a non-tobacco product and asks Niko to drive him to a "business" meeting.

Smoke from Jacob's joint billows from the car when we open the doors at our destination—a nice touch. Now it's time to try out *GTA4*'s new aiming controls, an area of the series that's been a source of chronic gripes since *GTA3*. As Little Jacob's drug deal goes wrong, we learn that a full pull on the left trigger locks aim onto the nearest target—although you can quickly cycle to others—while a little wiggle of the right analog stick finetunes the crosshairs for headshots. A half-pull of the left trigger gives more of a free-form aiming system similar to that of *Resident Evil 4* or *Gears of War*. The camera slides in for an over-the-shoulder perspective (a click >

➤ **The little froggy mate or the rabbit. I'd be flying in and looking across [the game world] and there they'd be. I thought, "That is hot!"**

—Rockstar Games founder Sam Houser on *GTA4*'s StarFox connection

of the left stick zooms your view to a factor determined by your weapon). It's an improvement over the past games' gunplay mechanic for sure, although holding the left trigger at half pull in the heat of battle will be hard for players prone to spazzing out.

In the next mission, which ends in a firefight at a house in Bohan—Liberty City's version of the Bronx—we're introduced to *GTA4*'s cover system. Tapping the right bumper sucks Niko to the nearest source of cover—a wall, barrel, hot-dog cart, anything—which he uses automatically and intelligently. Slide along a wall with a window, and he'll auto duck under it. Just pulling the right trigger makes Niko fire blindly around corners and over ledges. To aim properly, you'll need to use the left trigger to autolock or free aim. It took us a bit to get the hang of aiming from cover; the process of peeking out while Niko draws his gun feels a little sluggish. Of course, the game's unfinished and Rockstar still has time to tweak the cover system.

Aiming while driving isn't easy, either, but possibly so—shooting while operating a moving vehicle is hardly conducive to bull's-eye accuracy. And *GTA4*'s system is much better than the drive-by-shooting scheme of past games in the series. Pressing the left bumper while behind the wheel makes Niko smash out the driver's-side window. Holding the bumper

hangs out his gun—any gun in his arsenal—while the left analog stick aims. Ultimately, we figure all our gunplay will improve as we spend more time with the game, but aiming and taking cover in *GTA4* isn't something you master in the first five minutes.

Many of *GTA4*'s gameplay improvements, such as the previously mentioned GPS, fall in the convenience category, a way to "integrate" the full *GTA4* experience, says Houser. Flag down a cab, and it'll take Niko—and anyone going on a mission with him—to the appropriate destination, immediately if you like, without having to futz around with stealing a car and crossing town. Mission dialogue changes slightly each time you retry a failed attempt, keeping the briefings from getting stale.

It's little touches like these that do away with the previous games' frustrating gets-old-fast busywork and instead lets *GTA4* players focus on what's fun: driving, exploring, and going on missions. And make no mistake: Despite the serious tone of the game's initial trailers, *GTA4* is fun. The humor, as always, is a mix of juvenile yuks and multilevel parody of American culture. Star Junction, Liberty City's version of Times Square, sports a billboard for *America's Next Top Hooker*. In-game conservative talk station WKTT (*We Know the Truth*) parodies Rush Limbaugh and irate

red-staters with dialogue recorded from real *GTA* fans.

The humor extends beyond the story and the radio stations (hilarious DJ Lazlow returns) to new multimedia features that, unfortunately, we're not allowed to talk about yet. Meanwhile, the ramped-up physics and character-animation systems allow for even more of those ludicrous only-in-*GTA* moments that make player experimentation so entertaining. Take Liberty City's lack of seatbelt laws. Smash into a wall at full speed, and Niko will soar through the windshield (as will the drivers of other cars if you ram them just right). One Rockstar rep recounted how he used this feature to escape the law by slamming into a waterfront curb head-on and launching Niko into the harbor, where he swam to a boat for a quick getaway.

Or consider the new drunk-driving minigame. Take one of your contacts out for drinks, and you'll both leave the bar a wobbly mess. Just walking to the car is a challenge, but the actual drive home is a Technicolor smear of scenery and seasickness-inducing





shifts of the camera. It's a fun, funny sequence that will no doubt offend critics of the series who could latch on to a perceived glorification of drunk driving. It's an issue that prompts a passionate, seemingly cathartic response from Houser....

**Sam Houser:** We take our games very seriously, but we don't take ourselves very seriously. Because I think that's a slippery slope for life. So we take the piss out of ourselves, and we take the piss out of anything we can think of. It's sort of unilaterally offensive. No one can get their nose put out of joint, although I'm sure they will. One of the jobs that Dan [Houser] and Lazlow and those guys really have had to do...is keep being funny, but make it get older and more mature and more sensible.... I feel that they have absolutely retained the *GTA* humor and attitude. But it's grown up, because people who enjoyed it in 2001 are seven years older. Kids that were 10 in 2001 can now play it.... The world is seven years older. When we made the first game, blogs didn't

really exist. Now blogs are a way of life. What would this game be without a bunch of bloggers in it? So we have bloggers in there....

**EGM:** When you think of what Rockstar has been through lately, it's like there are two ways you can go. You can play it supesafe, or you can push it. The American media can take one thing, like the drunk-driving minigame, and make it a bullet point for the news.

**SH:** Our games are consciously made for adults—it's why we started the company.... [From 17 years old] and up, I think we have a right to play what we want to play. And that's that. And as long as it's not touching on themes that are socially inappropriate—and some films do it, and I think games should be allowed to do it, but let's be respectful—as long as you're not doing that, what's the f\*\*\*ing problem? Adults should be able to play what they want. America, the country I'm now a citizen of and love, is built on that premise....

I think the problem that games have got is that they're called "games," and that makes people think of 8-year-olds and Mario.... I've been a fan of Mario games as long as I've been playing games. My hat goes off to [Nintendo]—we learned so much from those people—but it obviously skews younger.... We're doing our thing. But I think, for politicians, for lawyers, and for parasites, you go "game" and you go "killing" and you go "children," and it's too easy. It's a nice way to get half a page in the paper.... When you look at how much work goes in to making this stuff, and how much passion and creativity and ambition is behind it, to boil it all down to that is really, really depressing. One of the things that I've struggled with during *Hot Coffee* is, *San Andreas* is a game that I think is absolutely wicked, top to bottom—a seminal piece of work—that's now going to be remembered for *Hot Coffee*. I think actually we're getting past that now, just about two or three years later, but that stuff really upset me, because it boiled it all down to a bunch of salacious, cheesy muck. >



● Although 9/11 portions of *Liberty City* aren't used at the game's beginning because of a terrorist alert, you can still watch—just expect a very dramatic response.



• Vehicles still go boom! If they take too much damage, but they won't blow up. You just turn them on anyone.

We're just not about that. We're not going out to court controversy from anybody. We're looking to make stuff that inspires us, turns us on as young people that are involved in this incredibly powerful, incredibly exciting, incredibly no-rules medium where we sit and go, "What should we make? Let's make this! Let's make that!" All this wonderful energy.

Going back to your point about [the reaction to things like drunk driving], I know there was some reaction to the previews about that, but it never even crossed my mind.... This is something that Strauss Zelnick, who's the chairman of [Rockstar parent company] Take-Two, has spoken to me about, because he has a lot of experience now. He was at BMG, and he had to go and defend rap lyrics in the '90s. He was in Congress doing that, so he

was a really good guy.... He was able to give me some great counsel and support.... One of the things that he [brought up] was a notion I didn't even know of before, the notion of "chilling" our thought. [Chilling is any activity that inhibits creativity and the exercise of Constitutional rights—Ed.] So when I'm making my game with my friends, we're going to make the game we want to make. If, as you said, we'd gone the other way and said, "We're all too scared—let's go talk to Mattel and get the Barbie license because I feel safer in that territory," then A, I'd probably do something wrong and get in trouble doing that, so it's probably better I don't [laughs], and B, probably if I hit that point I'd just pack it in and go do something else....

We want to push the boundaries of this medium in terms of the experi-

ences we can give. That's got nothing to do with sex or violence or any of those other things—it's just in this series of games, gangster games, there's a certain amount of content that goes with that. And it's no different to any movie or any book or anything like that. Well, it's interactive, but what happened when we went from a book to TV? When we went from printed words on a page to fully realized on a screen? It's no different. It's called evolution.... I'm obsessed with the fact that they stopped the [supersonic jet] Concorde, because it's one of those things that was so progressive, and they stopped doing it, and they've gone backward. I'm really a fan of progress in the world, new things, evolution, creativity, and maybe that Concorde thing doesn't make a lot of sense....

➤ **Adults should be able to play what they want. America, the country I'm now a citizen of and love, is built on that premise.**

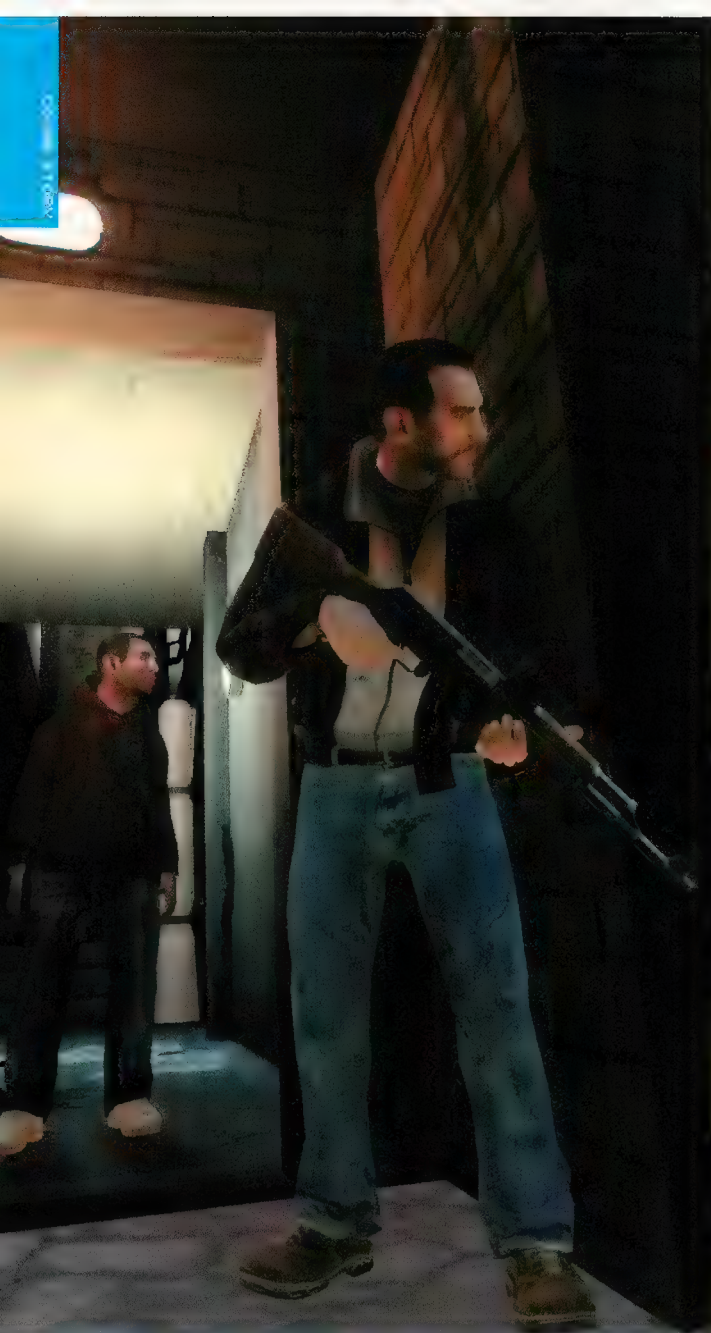
—Sam Houser

**EGM:** Games at least don't depend on ticket prices or fossil fuels. They're limited by imagination.

**SH:** Exactly.... I just like progress. You're exactly right: Why would we want to curb people's imagination,







back to the point about having the fire for this game. I felt those people were out to crush us, and if they could have crushed us, they absolutely would have. If they could have found that smoking-gun e-mail that says, "Oi, mate, stick the thing in there." Off we go. We would have been crucified. But they didn't have it....

The other thing that bothered me about that one is that if you actually know us at all and if you played *San Andreas*, that section that got unlocked was so *not* creatively in sync with everything else in the game. It was so not finished.... It was embarrassing. So for that thing to become our whole world was bloody awful.... We just didn't let them [get] in our heads. Because if I'd done that, I'd have to give up.

### World warrior

*GTA3* had a main character with no name. *GTA4*'s main character is a man with no country. Liberty City's residents label Niko with slanderous titles like "that Polack" or "that Slavic drug dealer." He just smirks or offers a noncommittal grunt. "He's from that gray part of broken-down Eastern Europe, a war-torn area," says Houser. "[He's] a guy like you and me who just did what he had to do to fend for himself."

Like past characters in the series, Niko is a likable character because he's thrust into foreign, often ludicrous situations and takes it all in stride. But unlike CJ, he's an action hero from the get-go. Niko doesn't need to level up his driving or shooting skills. For the new melee-combat system, which relies mainly on timed counterattacks, Rockstar consulted a UFC master of the brutal Israeli special-forces martial art, Krav Maga. Niko is an old soldier who spent time in third-world prisons. In short, he's no chump. And despite his hardly marquee looks, Niko is a hit with the ladies, too. Girlfriends and dating will once again play a big part of the *GTA* experience, except this time they'll be more integrated into the story. "You take them out; you enjoy their company," Houser says. "They've all got good stories—stories that end up being quite long."

Niko is also much more integrated into his environment than past *GTA* heroes. The game's new skeletal-animation system means his feet always fall naturally onto uneven pavement, stairs, curbs, or low obstacles, which he'll automatically step onto. It's a subtle feature that's explosively illustrated when Niko—or any Liberty City citizen—is run down by a car or dragged by a bumper. It's definitely a





Getting busted no longer means a ride to the pokie. Tap the A button whenever close-in, and you'll break free—at the cost of \$10 extra star (your wanted meter).

step up from the unintentionally funny limbs-akimbo rag-doll physics seen in many other games.

Niko's also nimble. Rockstar already showed us in a previous demo how he can climb to the top of a truck, then cling on for life by pressing in the analog sticks to maintain his balance. During our play session at Rockstar North, we got to try new moves that open up the city to more vertical exploration. In a mission that has Niko stealing a truckful of medicine from a garage, we start by pulling ourselves up on some low-lying structures next to a nearby building, then shimmy, Lara Croft-style, hand-over-hand across some conduits before clambering up to the rooftop. Such go-anywhere abilities could alter the course of other missions, giving you more options for approaching a potentially dangerous rendezvous. It's far from the free-form rooftop running of *Assassin's Creed*, but it's a step in the right direction for the *GTA* series.

Once we're on the roof, eyeing the thugs guarding the truck below, Rockstar enters a code that unlocks many of the game's weapons. We start blasting with the pistol, then the assault rifle, then the shotgun, then the sniper rifle. Finally, we whip out the rocket launcher—an unpredictable weapon with which we accidentally blow up the truck we were supposed to steal. That's life in a *GTA* game for ya. After a quick mission restart, we're back on the roof chucking grenades, wincing at the spectacular surround-sound effects from the incoming

enemy lead. To our surprise, once we've actually made it to the truck and gotten behind the wheel, we can still use our grenades, which Niko casually drops out the window. The longer you hold the trigger, the longer you can "cook" the grenade before letting it go, to the point where it'll explode in Niko's hand. We experiment with the cooking time, watching the dropped grenades detonate at varied distances behind our truck as swerving bad guys dodge the explosions with varying degrees of success.

It's fun. And later, when we tell Houser how much of a blast we had cooking off grenades and dropping them from the truck, he offers a hint about *GTA4*'s online multiplayer modes, which are off-limits for this story. "I like just running up to a bunch of players with the grenade cooking in my hands and taking them all out with me," he says. It gets us thinking about how chaotic a massively multiplayer online *GTA* world could be, and whether players used to mining ore and going on quests in *World of Warcraft* would even want to visit....

**Sam Houser:** I think a subscription-based *Grand Theft Auto*-type game... is very, very doable and is a very, very compelling proposition. Your question about mining ore, I think you've hit on the core of what the challenge would be. I think the basic things that you can get away with in a fantasy thing—that fantasy players don't mind doing—just wouldn't fly for the kind of mass-market users that we really

talk to. But I think that there's other ways that we can get at them, and it's definitely something that we're very keen to explore.... I do think that the combination of the multiplayer games that we've got for *GTA4* is pretty good. It's a range of different modes. It's pretty deep, pretty sophisticated. It's still *Grand Theft Auto*, so it's got a rawness to it.... Our multiplayer experiences definitely have a different vibe. [They're] a lot of fun, have a lot of character. It's got a lot of standard modes, but it's also got some modes we've not really done before.

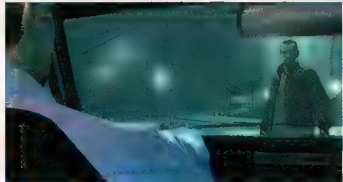
**EGM:** We actually liked the two-player modes in *San Andreas*....

**SH:** If you enjoyed that, then I think you're going to be a happy man. For me, though, the combination of what we're doing with multiplayer and what we're doing with the [downloadable XB360] episodes is the start of us putting our toes in this water and seeing how our audience...adapts to online. Is episodic content the way forward for them? These are things we're going to find out. I'm very excited about the episodes. I think they're going to work beautifully well, particularly if you played the single-player experience—how they connect. Again, without giving too much away. We're absolutely going to head down that path. We're already kind of on it....

**EGM:** Nobody's been very successful with the multiplyer thing on the consoles.... >



▶ The PS3 version of *GTA4* will use the Sixaxis controller's motion-sensing abilities in a way that makes sense, as all Houser will say.



**SH:** No one's done it, and it's like the Holy Grail. I think if you can combine the vibe and the attitude and also the gameplay and the tangibility of the games we make, with some kind of—for want of a better term—MMO subscription model, I think that's like the golden-goal kind of thing. It's such a creatively fascinating place to be.... Keeping the world like the one you experienced for a couple of hours today alive—could think of a hundred ways of doing that every day. So I think this is a world that really can support it. But it's not just a done deal. It's a complex, challenging process. Imagine that world, populated by a lot of people—it wouldn't be unpleasant, would it?

**EGM:** It might be chaos.

**SH:** Well, that's the thing: How you manage the chaos is the trick, where it's not just everybody running around and firing f\*\*\*ing rocket launchers. That wouldn't be fun. It's how you can bring mass-market people over and make them be comfortable with some amount of role-playing, in a way that *World of Warcraft* players—these are people who maybe 15 years ago were playing *D&D* or *Magic: The Gathering*—did. Those people get role-playing. We have to get mass-

market people.... We have to find ways of getting around some of those challenges. Having 2,000 people run around a map shooting each other, that's just not interesting to me.

**Small world**

When *GTA4* first hit the drawing board, Rockstar North's art director opened a map featuring Liberty City surrounded by countryside the size of New York state. "It was f\*\*\*ing enormous," says Houser. "You had the Catskills, the Adirondacks.... I'd only been to the Adirondacks once—it took me six hours to get there. It's f\*\*\*ing miles away." The megamap was the logical step after *San Andreas* and its super-sized three-city world.

And then a funny thing happened: Rockstar counteracted conventional game-biz wisdom and made this installment smaller. Liberty City itself would be the chief piece of real estate and as much of a character as any of its residents. The team started pruning features, such as airplanes and the last game's role-playing elements. The focus, Houser says, suddenly became making the whole *GTA* experience larger, rather than just the world's size and feature list. "How are we going to increase the resolution of the experience?" he says, thinking back to those planning sessions. "How could

we increase the gravity of everything, the weight of every action, the intensity of everything, if we just go further and further out? We wanted every single thing that you do, whether it's walking down the street, going into a pawn shop, using the guns, driving a car or a bike or a boat or a helicopter or whatever—just general basic interaction—to feel reengineered and reengaged so it feels new for people."

As we end our play session just cruising around this new hi-fi Liberty City, we buy into Houser's pitch. Despite some slight graphical chop-piness, this is certainly a beautiful town—with a lived-in feel, a vibrant population, and a coating of graffiti and grime that somehow seems lovingly applied. Houser says his favorite part of *GTA* is doing what we're doing: driving around, listening to music, people watching. We can only guess what he feels when he cruises these streets, a decade after laying the groundwork for the original Liberty City in *GTA3*, a year after becoming a legal U.S. citizen, and fresh out of a troubling period for Rockstar Games.

Maybe it feels a little like coming home. "It's nice to come full circle," he says. "To me this game is such a moment in time. It marks a real line in the sand. Now let's get on to the future and have some fun." 🎮

▶ **Having 2,000 people run around on a map shooting each other, that's just not interesting.**

—Sam Houser on what he wouldn't want from a massively multiplayer *GTA*

EGM Extras: *The road to Liberty City continues at EGM.1UP.com, where you'll find a travelogue of our Rockstar North visit, a GTA retrospective, a special EGM Live! podcast guest, and more.*





LOOK AT yourself MAN NO outside but you're come ON weed not yourself ON weed way more drinking enough this ISN'T YOU DON'T NEED ENOUGH ENOUGH high. you're but you're come ON weed not yourself ON weed way more drinking enough

TALK TO YOUR FRIEND. SOMETHING WILL STICK.  
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# Where would we be

**AT FIRST BLUSH**, it sounds like a sweet deal for the average gamer: Imagine, if you will, a world where presidential hopefuls didn't demonize your seemingly innocent hobby. Where class-action lawsuits didn't stigmatize your favorite game. Where you'd never have to hear that sound bite about having sex with a prostitute and killing them and somehow feel like you're a bad person. Put that way, you'd think the world really would be a better place! In Rockstar's opus *Grand Theft Auto III*, never happened. But would that really be the case, or would gamers simply be the ones who were robbed? Experts from across the industry weigh in and help paint a picture of an alternate GTA3-free universe.

## Grandiose game design

Given the infamy GTA3 garnered in the mainstream media, you'd think the game would have sold simply on its shock. As such, it's easy to overlook the real reason I made such a big impact within the industry: its revolutionary "do what you want, when you want" open-world gameplay. Whether you preferred to complete a Mafia-infused story mission or simply take in some dough as a cabbie, you chose your path. And it was this rules-free nature of its living-city setting that made the more controversial possibilities (such as capping cops till the cavalry came charging) an option—but it was always the player's choice of how to use that power.

Billy Thomson, lead designer at Realtime Worlds (*Crackdown*) and part of the team behind the early GTA games, thinks it'd be a crime to overlook that substantial contribution: "The GTA series was one of the first games to do a good job of having a set of branched, nonlinear, core-game objectives... This had a dramatic effect on how developers



created their games; no longer was it acceptable to have a vehicle in the scene that the player couldn't actually get in and drive.

And without the game's perfect storm of driving and action, humor, and diverse soundtrack, Thomson feels it would have taken a while for this distinct gameplay mix to develop otherwise. "I'd definitely like to think that the open-world genre would have taken off without the GTA series," he says. "Maybe it would have taken another couple of years for it to happen, but there's so many talented game developers out there that it would be incredibly arrogant of anyone who had any part in making any of the GTA series to say that if it weren't for us, then we wouldn't be seeing any nonlinear sandbox games being made today...but then you never can tell, can you?"

So where would the game industry be without these influences? Well, besides the delayed introduction of open-world titles, Wedushi/Morgan analyst Michael Pachter notes its effect on another genre: "If GTA has had a lasting impact on games, I'd say it's most likely the reason for the death of platformers. They're not really dead, but they have been forced to change dramatically, look

at *Super Mario Galaxy* in order to compete with the open-world concept created by Rockstar. North."

## The captive audience

As large as the gameplay contributions are, they don't amount to a huge deal unless someone's there to pay attention. Of course, with U.S. sales of over 6 million according to NPD research group numbers, GTA3 had no trouble reaching an audience. But did it serve to expand gaming's audience as a whole, or was it simply pandering to the same man-children that *Super Mario Bros.* sucked in a generation before?

Pachter falls in the latter camp, although he says without GTA3, the industry may have ended up losing its grasp on those who might have fallen away from the hobby otherwise: "I don't really think that GTA has attracted new players so much as it has kept people playing games much later in life. In other words, games like GTA that are mature in nature have brought back older gamers—guys in their 30s back in 2001—and kept them playing at more advanced ages. That probably is true of *Halo*, as well. I think that open-world and more mature games are more engaging and challenging for older gamers, and I think GTA's influence is felt in games as varied as *Resident Evil*, *Splinter Cell*, *Assassin's Creed*, and *Gears of War*, each of these is far more realistic than games from the '90s."

Thomson has similar feelings on the subject: "I'd like to think that

**I can't remember a game before or since that had people—and many that had no interest in games—talking about it.**

—Realtime Worlds' Billy Thomson





## Mercenaries 2: World in Flames

PS3/XB360/PS2 • EA Games • August 2008



**What does it take from the GTA formula?** Longtime open-world developer and recent EA acquisition Pandemic (they also made the first two *Destroy All Humans!* titles) took a page from *GTA4*, realizing that its *Mercenaries* follow-up wasn't quite ready to take any contracts. Pushing back the game's release from last October to this summer (and from what we've heard, it could get delayed even further) was definitely a smart move, as its last few showings had some journalists dubbing it *World In Flames* due to the really chuggy gameplay. "Every gamer knows that the devil is in the details," says Lead Designer Scott Warner, "and time to polish a game means the difference between good and great."

**What does it add to the GTA formula?** When Pandemic unveiled *Merc 2* (which brings the action to beautiful Venezuela) roughly two years ago, we thought online co-op mode would be its distinguishing feature. But with so many delays and other open-world titles suddenly jumping on the co-op bandwagon, it's the game's destructible environments (you can trash everything but the terrain) that set it apart. Oh, and let's not forget its insane use of fire. "Our hope is that no one will ever feel the need to harm the real-world forests again when they see that they can watch a jungle canopy erupt in a beautiful fireball and come burning to the ground," Warner says.





# Open-World Assault

The upcoming games that not only borrow from Grand Theft Auto but also try to add to its winning formula

## Wheelman

PS3/XB360 • Midway  
Fall 2008



**What does it take from the GTA formula?** Though *Wheelman's* makers consider protagonist Miie (played by Vin Diesel) "a good guy in a bad situation," it's hard to avoid comparisons to the genre-standard underworld theme.

**What does it add to the GTA formula?** *Wheelman* distinguishes itself by focusing far more heavily on driving than many open-world games. With over-the-top, vehicle-based special moves and a diverse assortment of car-to-car combat, it's primarily a driving game with a bit of open-world roaming thrown in.

## Infamous

PS3 • Sony Computer Ent.  
America • Fall 2008



**What does it take from the GTA formula?** A leading man with questionable character has always been a GTA staple. *Infamous* follows suit; developer Sucker Punch (of Sly Cooper fame) wants players to be as good or bad as they wanna be.

**What does it add to the GTA formula?** Sure, we've seen boss fights in open-world titles before, but never to the scale of *Infamous'* epic tussles. These suckers are absolutely huge and easily lay waste to the game's dark, bustling metropolis.

## This is Vegas

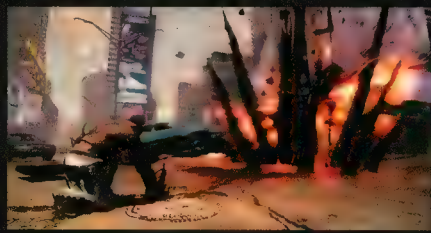
PS3/XB360 • Midway • Winter 2008

**What does it take from the GTA formula?** Sin City. Like *GTA: San Andreas*, Midway's new open-world offering drops you on the neon-lit Vegas strip, where you split your time gambling, racing cars, brawling, and loving the ladies.

**What does it add to the GTA formula?** Rockstar's titles have their moments of humor, but Midway wants to go really tongue-in-cheek with *Vegas*. Here's to it coming across as more funny than cheesy....







## Prototype

PS3/XB360 • Sierra • Fall 2008

What does it take from the *GTA* formula? A love for the Big Apple. Yet while Rockstar's next open-world opus continues to put its own spin on NYC, *Prototype* is going the ultrarealistic route. Developer Radical Entertainment (*The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*) promises that you've never experienced a virtual Manhattan like this before. "When entering iconic areas like Times Square [in other games]," says Executive Producer Tim Bennisson, "they've got no more than 20 people walking around. That's definitely not the New York we've all come to know and love. So we're aiming for a new level of density, intensity, and an overall bustling nature to the game world. We're talking hundreds of cars, thousands of pedestrians."

What does it add to the *GTA* formula? A shape-shifting main character who gains his supernatural abilities (monstrous arms that tear through concrete like it's human flesh, body armor that lets you run through vehicles with the ease of Juggernaut, etc.) by "consuming" the city's inhabitants. Things will surely get crazy here, but it's nothing compared to when you bring another freaky friend into the fray. "To give you an idea of [the game's online co-op mode]," Bennisson says, "today we had one tester piloting an Apache chopper over Times Square, and our second tester then backflipped off an 80-story building and landed on the Apache's wing, where he began ripping Hellfire missiles off the firing rack and was hurling them at tanks below."



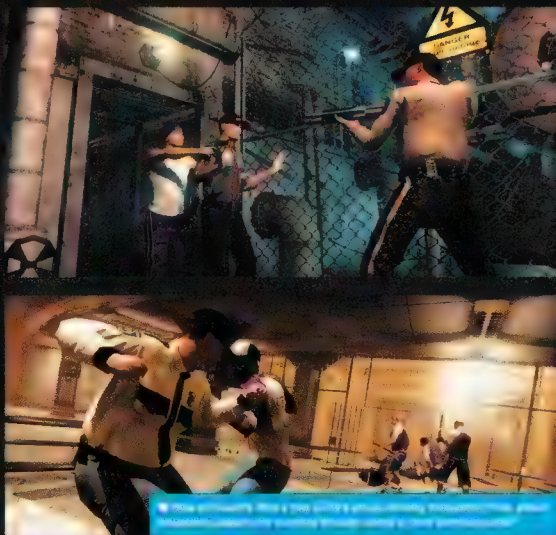
# Open-World Assault (cont.)

Saints Row

## Saints Row 2 PS3/XB360 • THQ • Fall 2008

What does it take from the *GTA* formula? The original *Saints Row* was considered by many not only as one of the most blatant *GTA* clones but also one of the best. And watch as the copycatting continues—THQ's sequel also takes place in familiar territory. Yet developer Volition swears they ain't simply recycling set pieces. "Every area from *SR1*'s Stilwater has undergone some degree of change," says Creative Director Greg Donovan, "and many of these districts are unrecognizable from how they appeared [in the first game]. We've also added completely new above-ground areas and underground areas that didn't appear in *SR1*. All in all, we've increased the city size by about 45 percent...."

What does it add to the *GTA* formula? Even though *Saints Row* rips off a lot from Rockstar's series, the game does beat *GTA*'s ass when it comes to combat (No. 4 could still learn something from *SR1*'s shooting mechanics). *SR2* hopes to set a new standard for fighting in open-world games with much more responsive hand-to-hand moves and the ability to use Stilwater locals as human shields.



## ON THE HORIZON

Here are three major players in the open-world action that we'll see will best peak into action during 2009:



**The Getaway 3 (PS3):** Will the series' gameplay finally match its pretty graphics with its third London-based installment?

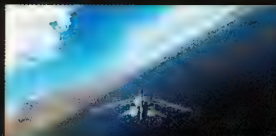
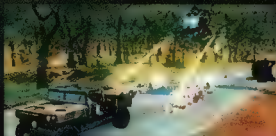


**Scarface 2 (Multi):** Let's hope Tony Montana and his old friend bring more variety to the sequel's misadventure.



**The Godfather: Part II (Multi):** If the follow-up turns out like its movie counterpart, the virtual Corleone family will be golden.





## Just Cause 2

PS3/XB360 • Eidos • Fall 2008

**What does it take from the GTA formula?** From parachutes to jetpacks, Rockstar's blockbuster franchise has become known for offering some wonderful toys in its playgrounds. The first *Just Cause* borrows *GTA*'s parachute yet adds a grappling hook, which when combined leads to some pretty amazing stunts. The sequel (which again stars Rico "Don't call me suave" Rodriguez and takes place on yet another tropical island) brings back this dynamic duo, but expect them to be much more user-friendly, and deadly. "The hook and parachute are available at the press of a button," says Lead Designer Peter Johansson of developer Avalanche Studios. "The grappling hook can now be attached to pretty much anything...if you attach it to an enemy, you can pull him down from guard towers and platforms. You can even tether an enemy to a vehicle and drag him behind it."

**What does it add to the GTA formula?** Enemies in these kinds of games tend to be knuckleheads, but *Just Cause 2* aims to change that. "The A.I. has been completely rewritten," Johansson says. "It now uses a planning system that allows enemies to do all sorts of tricks, such as using the environment more tactically, use team communication, and call for reinforcements, like parachute units and choppers." Sounds great, but haven't we heard these kinds of promises from several developers working in this genre before?

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL W. HARRIS



## Destroy All Humans! Path of the Furon

PS3/XB360 • THQ • June 2008



**What does it take from the GTA formula?** While gamers are free to bump uglies with *GTA*'s ladies of the night, the *DAH!* series has also let folks get "intimate" with its human population. Ya know, thanks to its trusty Anal Probe.

**What does it add to the GTA formula?** Uhh, how about a flying saucer? And it sure sounds like the *Pimp My Ride* crew got this vehicle ready for Crypto's latest mission. The saucer can now fly faster and higher and sports lots of new weapons, including the Tornadotron, which acts as a "massive twister that comes down from the clouds and carves a path of destruction on its own," says Creative Director Jon Knoles of developer Sandblast Games. "Or you can steer it manually."



## Saboteur

PS3/XB360 • EA Games • Late 2008

**What does it take from the GTA formula?** Stealing a page from *GTA: San Andreas*, *Saboteur* offers both city and countryside backdrops for you to traverse while battling Nazis in occupied France during WWII. This game also likes to have some fun with its side missions. "A lot of them involve f\*\*\*ing with evil Nazi figures on behalf of oppressed civilians," says Producer Phil Hong of developer Pandemic. "Like finding time to rig a limo so that when a Nazi gets in, it goes boom."

**What does it add to the GTA formula?** Actually, it subtracts something at the outset: color. But don't worry—every successful mission returns some areas to their prettier state.



EA GAMES PRESENTS A DARK, ATTEMPTED REBIRTH OF THE OPEN-WORLD ASSAULT GENRE WITH SABOTEUR. ONLY IN THE DARK CAN YOU FIND THE LIGHT.

# Open-World Assault (cont.)

## Mafia II

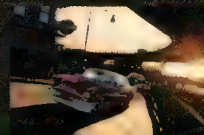
PSS/XB360 • 2K Games • Fall 2008

What does it take from the *GTA* formula? The mob. The difference being that while *GTA3*'s premise concerns present-day gangsters, *Mafia II* hopes to "epitomize the golden age of gangland America," says Producer Dan Bailey. "For this, we ensured that every building, every vehicle, and every location exuded the true essence of 1950s America." Oh, and like *GTA3* and *GTA4*, this game is giving its own name (*Empire City*) to the Big Apple.

What does it add to the *GTA* formula? From what we can tell, not much. *Mafia II* offers all the fun parts of the mob lifestyle (stealing and selling goods, participating in gang wars, fitting people for cement boots, etc.), but we can't help but get a "been there, done that" feeling. Plus, *Mafia II* is keeping this a solo experience; these days, we'd rather see a gangster game that lets us start a "family" with some online friends.



Photo by Electronic Arts. Screenplay by John Shiban. Story by John Shiban and John Marston. Characters by John Shiban.



## OPEN-WORLD WISH LIST: OUR TOP 5 IDEAS FOR THE GENRE

**1) General contractors:** Buildings need to fall down when we hit them with a helicopter. And at the same time, the environment should be restored. Buildings can mysteriously just pop back into existence when we leave the area and come back, or better yet, go through a few stages of construction in order to be less jarring.

**2) Current events:** Developers could keep urban settings feeling even more alive and up-to-date

with streaming radio stations that better yet—live call-in talk shows that play as you cruise around town during prime playtime hours. It's something that would help foster a sense of community when this genre finally makes the inevitable leap to massively multiplayer persistent environments.

**3) Instant replay:** One of this genre's greatest charms is all the ally havoc players wreak when they try missions in unexpected

ways or experiment with vehicles and weapons. So how about a way of capturing all that only-in-an-open-world chaos? We'd settle for a replay feature like the one in *Skate*, which lets you watch/save the last minute of gameplay.

**4) A female lead:** The pantheon of protagonists in the open-world genre is a real sausage fest. Time for a woman.



an's touch—and we don't just mean from *GTA: Vice City's* Candy Spoox.

**5) Legos:** A world where you build and wreck things made out of Legos? How has this never happened? If you want a playground where every brick is an interactive object, this is your easy in. Not only is that what people expect of Legos, but the simple forms and stylized characters would make the game easy on our consoles' usually overworked engines. 🎮



# HALO 3

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# REVIEWS

> crazed bums, alien scum, deity fun, perplexing sums, and one big willy

# 84

## GOD OF WAR CHAINS OF OLYMPUS (GAME OF THE MONTH)

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### THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS

# Divine Influences

And a quick lesson in ABCs

#### I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING:

What the hell is going on? And I can't blame you (although you don't have to be so crude). *EGM's* long-standing 0 to 10 numeric-ratings scale is gone, replaced with...letters? Yep, starting this issue (and reflected on 1UP.com as well), we are switching to an A+ to F scale. And when the collective powers that be decided this, we were all in agreement that this was the ideal way to go. Really, do you have any question that a C means "Average"? Yes, the scale's as simple as it seems.

That's not the only change. This is my last issue as reviews editor. It's been a fun ride, but I'm handing the reins over to 1UP's Garnett Lee and Nick Suttner. Treat them well. (I'll still be around, just in a bigger boss form.)

Finally, how about the PSP, nabbing a second consecutive Game of the Month with its new *God of War*? Hey, it's not all changes here.

—Greg Ford, *Outgoing Reviews Editor*

#### > HOW WE RATE

- A+ to A-** Excellent
- B+ to B-** Good
- C+ to C-** Average
- D+ to D-** Bad
- F** Terrible

#### > GRADES 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 grades. Platinum: all A+; Gold: All As and better; Silver: Nothing lower than a B. Game of the Month goes to the highest-graded game with unanimously "Good" grades, and Shame of the Month is the reverse. Simple.



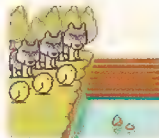




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## THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

Ch-ch-ch-changes



### Dan "Shoe" Hsu

**Editorial Director**  
All the big-boy games (*Mass Effect*, *Devil May Cry 4*) in Shoe's life have taken a backseat to life-sized downloadable fare. He's becoming a casual gamer! Also, he says hi to the *Big O* and *Dukes Show* (WJFK).  
**Now Playing:** *Poker Smash*, *PixelJunk Monsters*  
**Blog:** [egmshoe.1UP.com](http://egmshoe.1UP.com)



### Jennifer Tsao

**Group Managing Editor**  
Everything sounds fancier when you say it with a British accent, so in honor of *Professor Layton* and *The Curious Village*, Jennifer suggests you read the rest of this page with one. It's right fun, guv'nor!  
**Now Playing:** *Professor Layton*, *Rez HD*, *Condemned 2*  
**Blog:** [egmjennifer.1UP.com](http://egmjennifer.1UP.com)



### Shane Bettenhausen

**Executive Editor**  
After suffering through a slew of heartbreaking *Final Fantasy VII* spin-offs, Shane couldn't be more relieved that *Crisis Core* finally manages to recapture some of that Aerith-sliced-in-half magic. Spoiler alert!  
**Now Playing:** *Crisis Core: FFVII*, *Wipeout HD*, *Burnout: Paradise*  
**Blog:** [egmshane.1UP.com](http://egmshane.1UP.com)



### Bryan Intihar

**Senior Editor, Previews**  
Running the previews department for the entire 1UP Network means Bryan's gotta start catching up on his PC games. Will yet another editor lose his life to the massively multiplayer blockbuster *World of Warcraft*? Stay tuned....  
**Now Playing:** *Rez HD*, *NHL 08*  
**Blog:** [egmbryan.1UP.com](http://egmbryan.1UP.com)



### Andrew Fitch

**Staff Reviewer**  
An all-weekend binge on *Lost Odyssey*, combined with the devastating emui that currently envelops his life, has Fitch creepily evolving into gloomy protagonist Kaim. Check out *The 1UP Show* for the details on his descent into madness.  
**Now Playing:** *Lost Odyssey*  
**Blog:** [copydesk-fitch.1UP.com](http://copydesk-fitch.1UP.com)



### James "Milkman" Mielke

**Editor-in-Chief**  
For reasons even he can't explain, Milky continues to play *Kingdom Under Fire: Circle of Doom* like it's *Diablo II*. Makes us wonder if there's any hope for our little Milk Dud.  
**Now Playing:** *Lost Planet (PS3)*, *Kingdom Under Fire: COD*  
**Blog:** [milkman.1UP.com](http://milkman.1UP.com)



### Crispin Boyer

**Senior Executive Editor**  
Cris flew all the way to Scotland and all he got was this lousy souvenir hat. Oh, and he got to play *Grand Theft Auto IV*, too, which was cool. Actually, the hat's kinda cool, too. It has red carpeting grafted to it. Win-win!  
**Now Playing:** *Burnout: Paradise*, *PixelJunk Monsters*  
**Blog:** [egmcrispin.1UP.com](http://egmcrispin.1UP.com)



### Greg Ford

**Managing Editor**  
What's a guy to do after giving up the sweet reviews-editor gig? Sui? Nah—just make a final few assignments for the future. Takes a guess who's on the reviews for *Halo 4*, *God of War III*, and *Super Mario Galaxy 2*?  
**Now Playing:** *Rez HD*, *Burnout: Paradise*, *Condemned 2*  
**Blog:** [egmford.1UP.com](http://egmford.1UP.com)



### Michael Donahoe

**Senior Writer**  
After reviewing *Professor Layton* this month, Michael realized he learned nothing in college. Or high school. But he did learn a whole lot about humility. So when it comes to feeling like a doofus, Michael knows all.  
**Now Playing:** *Professor Layton*, *Mass Effect*, *Devil May Cry 4*  
**Blog:** [egmhoer.1UP.com](http://egmhoer.1UP.com)



### Joe Rybicki

**Staff Reviewer**  
Now that the post-holiday lull is fully in effect, Joe's ready to dive into his backlog of games from last year. Trouble is, he'll probably get only halfway through by the time the next holiday season rolls around.  
**Now Playing:** *Halo 3*, *BioShock*, *Advance Wars: Dual Strike*  
**Blog:** [opmjoer.1UP.com](http://opmjoer.1UP.com)

## Also on deck...

**Matt Leone**  
Executive Editor

**Garnett Lee**  
Senior Editor,  
Reviews

**Nick Suttner**  
Associate Editor,  
Reviews

**Jeremy Parish**  
Senior Editor,  
Expanded Content

**Scott Sharkey**  
Senior Editor,  
Features

**Ryan Scott**  
Managing Editor  
Games for  
Windows: *The  
Official Magazine*

**Andrew Pfister**  
Producer, Podcasts

**Jenn Frank**  
Community  
Manager

**Tyler Barber**  
Staff Reviewer

**Ray Barnholt**  
Staff Reviewer

**John Davison**  
Staff Reviewer

**David Ellis**  
Staff Reviewer

**Anthony Gallegos**  
Staff Reviewer

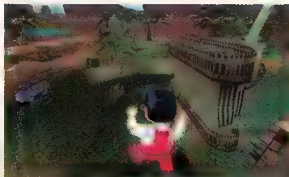
**Torrey Holbrook**  
Walker  
Staff Reviewer

**Todd Zuniga**  
Sports Guy  
Staff Reviewer



The Review Crew is the 1UP Network's expert reviewers, 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](http://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.



Wii

# DESTROY ALL HUMANS! BIG WILLY UNLEASHED

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Locomotive ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS

ANTHONY:  
**C+**  
AVERAGE

GARNETT:  
**D+**  
BAD

G. FORD:  
**C+**  
AVERAGE

**The Good:** Open-world gameplay, destructible environments

**The Bad:** Terrible multiplayer, old humor  
**Used to Perfection:** "Disco Inferno"

Taking the saucer out for another spin

➔ **ANTHONY:** In *Big Willy Unleashed*, players continue the story of Crypto, a big-headed and big-mouthed alien. Once again, he takes on missions in open-world environments in order to destroy humanity...and in this case to protect the interests of his superior's "It's people!" fast-food chain. Despite motion controls, some new weapons, and Big Willy—Crypto's mechanized Big Boy-like battle armor—the core game is so similar to previous installments that its appeal will mostly be lost on veterans of the first two.

The franchise's humor is getting old, and the game's third-person shooter action ages with each installment. I also wish the co-op from the second game (available throughout the proceedings) was present this time

around, because the limited co-op and competitive multiplayer missions here are a joke. The new motion controls generally succeed but can be a little confusing because they differ when you're controlling Crypto or a vehicle. Newcomers to the series will enjoy the mindless destruction and blowing up people indiscriminately—I'm just tired of retreading old ground.

➔ **GARNETT:** Going into *Big Willy*, I had lingering hopes that this series might fully live up to its promise of channeling the *Mars Attacks!* vibe as a fun satire of American culture. That was abruptly killed by Crypto's hack-job attempt at a Jack Nicholson voice and more adolescent "tee-hee" Big Willy jokes in the first 10 minutes than

an entire game could support. This installment comes off as if created by the pack of chuckleheads in the back of a fourth-grade detention hall. That'd at least explain its bland, primitive appearance. The Wii deserves better.

➔ **G. FORD:** Sure, the Wii deserves better, but what's here isn't bad, just uninspired. The improvements are few, though I like the smoother upgrade system for weapons and powers. Chucking cars with the Big Willy mech can also be fun. And while graphical pop-up mars the action, more criminal are the mostly generic missions (which the self-referential humor thankfully roasts) and short length. It's not often you conquer an open-world game in under six hours. ❌



Shave Lab Test #43

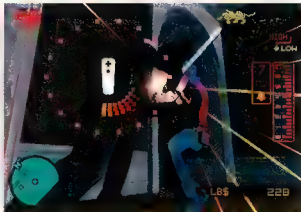
Rigorous tests prove no disposable shaves  
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Wii

## NO MORE HEROES

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Developer: Grasshopper  
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Mature

### But this guy will do

➔ **SHARKEY:** *No More Heroes* is practically two games mashed together. One is a funny, smart, stylish action game with a weird Japanese punk atmosphere. It presents not only fairly solid cut-up-a-bunch-of-guys-until-the-doors-unlock gameplay (with a combination of button mashing and Wii-mote slashing), but also serves as a send-up of gaming itself. Typical genre conventions are openly mocked as they're employed, and the game will bust through the fourth wall like a Kool-Aid Man full of blood and snark.

This enjoyable first game, however, frequently makes way for an open-world game that fails in every regard. In between bouts of awesomely gory combat, winking dialogue, and creative boss fights, you're dumped

into an embarrassingly noninteractive cityscape where every car and pedestrian slides like it's coated in Pam and you have nothing to do but run errands, collect glowing doodads, and play tedious minigames (like taking out 10 guys without getting hit, picking up coconuts, etc.). The nicest thing you can say about this part is that you can mostly ignore it.

➔ **TORREY:** I didn't know whether to laugh at the game or myself for having to collect kittens to keep the action moving. But for every whackjob minigame the game forces upon you, the following ranked-match showdown on your road to No. 1 delivers a money shot of pure awesomeness. And with tight fight mechanics plus an

ending that had me laughing out of every hole in my body, I had one hell of a ride. You'll find way more pimp than punk here.

➔ **JEREMY:** No way, Torrey—*Heroes* is 100-percent punk. Which is to say it's crude, crass, sloppy, and aggressively amateur...and that's fine, because it revels in being a videogame. The main objectives—a series of hack-n-slash missions to kill the world's greatest assassins—are primitive fun. Unfortunately, *Heroes* fails to maintain its manic energy outside those core sequences, padding out playtime with boring minigames that are more "flail" than "trash." Like the startup screen says, punk still lives... but it's gotten soft around the middle.

#### THE VERDICTS

SHARKEY

**B**  
GOOD

TORREY

**A-**  
EXCELLENT

JEREMY

**B-**  
GOOD

**The Good:** Boss fights, slashing foes, gory dialogue

**The Bad:** Boring minigames

**Slippery:** Cars, pedestrians, pretty much everything



Wii (also on PC)

## OBSCURE: THE AFTERMATH

■ Publisher: Ignition ■ Developer: Hydravision  
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Mature

### If annoying college kids get killed, does anyone care?

➔ **JENN F:** In *Obscure: The Aftermath*—a sequel that requires no knowledge of the first game—a creepy, looming darkness is brutalizing a college campus, and it's up to a plucky group of stereotypes to survive the nightmare. It's generic survival-horror, but what makes the game interesting is its two-player co-op, in which you and your fellow gamer have to work together to solve puzzles and kill baddies.

Problem is, in co-op it's too easy for one character to fall behind out of frame and possibly die during an action sequence. You're better off playing solo, in which you're paired with a ridiculously capable A.I. Apart from co-op's cleverness, the game takes the worst parts of *Silent Hill* (you

have to squint to see the action, for instance) and pairs them with cumbersome controls, a camera that often spirals out of control, and the most ungodly save points ever conceived.

➔ **DAVID:** With this game's cheesy "teen drama" dialogue and overcomplicated control scheme, it seems obvious that *Obscure's* developers are stuck in a time warp to 1998. Survival-horror has evolved since then, but this game shows no evidence of these improvements (such as efficient inventory management and better health distribution). Sure it has co-op, but given the control and camera problems Jenn mentioned, why bother? Even the interesting puzzles are tainted because your character is left help-

less to enemy attack while you try to spell out the last name of Dr. Sigmund Freud for the fifth time.

➔ **SHOE:** Notice a common theme in the above two reviews? It's all technical problems plaguing this frightfest. Conceptually, this game works: scares in a modern-day, almost too-realistic setting (it's surreal to see and hear all this teen drama in a survival-horror game)...co-op puzzles where characters with different skill sets help each other progress...creepy sounds and sights.... But the most frightening thing about this experience is how filled with hatred and rage I get when I find myself stuck in the environment or when the camera swings into "s\*\*\* view" for the billionth time.



**The Good:** Co-op is actually fun, some interesting two-person puzzles

**The Bad:** Too bad the game is broken

**PS2 Version:** Plays better...barely





PS3/XB360

## DYNASTY WARRIORS 6

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

It is what it is

➔ **A. FITCH:** The *Dynasty Warriors* series may be the whipping boy for derivative gameplay these days, but don't forget that, as a first-generation PS2 title, it was surprisingly innovative: We'd never seen so many onscreen enemies going at it in real time—and without slowdown, to boot. But as I played through *Dynasty Warriors 6*, the first entry created specifically for this console generation, one thought kept permeating my head: "This is *exactly* the same game I played seven years ago." It doesn't push the hardware like the original PS2 games did, and the "strategy," as always, is hardly the stuff of Sun Tzu: Ride in on your trusty steed, mow down hundreds of faceless Chinese foot soldiers, then track down the generals to decrease your opponent's morale. Problem is, *DW* games sell—which means developer Omega Force has no motivation to innovate...unless you count swimming and climbing ladders as new "innovations." Which I sure as hell don't.

➔ **MILKMAN:** The *DW* series is a lot like Mike from the movie *Swingers*: It just doesn't know when to give up. At least the cosmetic tweaks make *DW6* sharper-looking and better animated than *Dynasty's* past. But do we really need to plow through the Yellow Turban Rebellion again? It'd be like a U.S. developer releasing 10 games featuring the battle at Valley Forge. Yeah...fun. That so-called swimming innovation is indicative of how little the development team cares.

➔ **TYLER:** Six games into the *DW* series (not counting the offshoots) and you'd figure they'd have a decent camera—but here it's dizzying and overly sensitive (with no adjustment options!), so you're constantly wrestling it. And that alleged strategy bothers me, too: Plotting which strongholds to take over and what path to take left me crestfallen when I realized the action would be mindless and drawn-out. Hey, at least you have a thoroughbred to alleviate traversing the vast terrain. Too bad it handles like a remote-control car, bolting from a standstill to top speed in an instant. I'll pass.



**The Good:** As good as *DW* has ever looked  
**The Bad:** As monotonous as *DW* has ever played  
**Lousy A.I. Buddies:** More of a threat than actual enemies



PS3/XB360

## MLB 2K8

■ Publisher: 2K Sports ■ Developer: Kush Games  
■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Putting the B in MLB

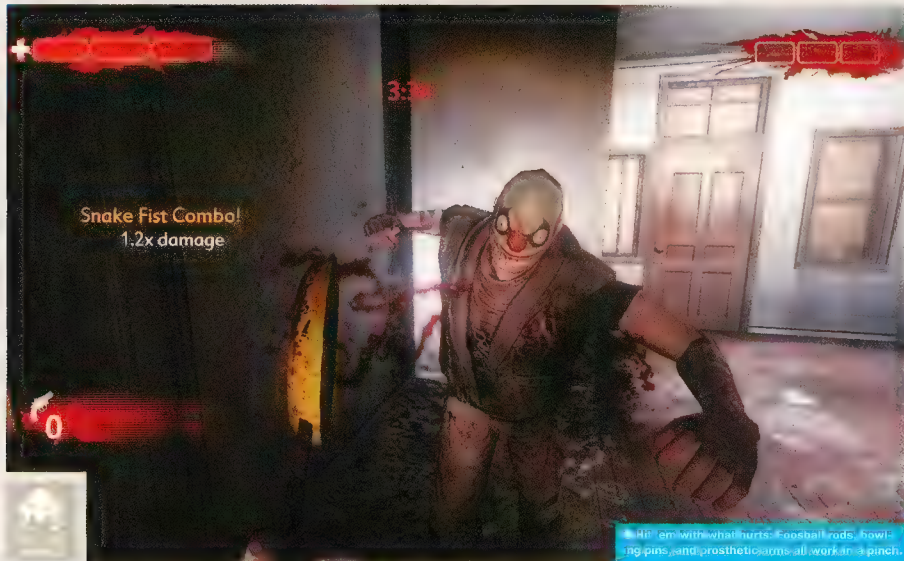
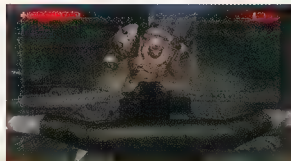
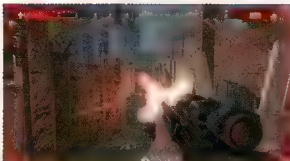
➔ **TODD:** I prematurely named 2008 the "Year of Baseball Gaming" in my head, wishfully believing both of last year's efforts were now ready for greatness. The jury's still out on Sony's *The Show* (I remain hopeful), but as much as 2K8 has upgraded, it didn't quite make the jump to must-play status. I like so much about this game: Its graphics and presentation remain impressive, the new throwing meter for fielders is airtight, and I'm really into the innovative new pitching meter. But it's the little things that take the sparkle off the diamond. I banged balls off the wall and often didn't make it to second; I turned more than one double play on a sac bunt attempt; the pitching meter led to way too many meatball homers; and some animations, like collisions and home run trots, are distractingly choppy. Plus, what's with the shots of the crowd? I don't know how these shingle-faced freaks made the final cut. They're hideous!

➔ **BRYAN:** I called out 2K7 due to its lack of innovation, but not this season. The new pitching mechanics actually made me enjoy being a hurler again (don't mind Greg; mastering these fighting game-esque motions is quite rewarding). And I'm glad to see the developers simplify stuff at the plate—no more of those "Did I pull back far enough on the analog stick?" moments. Surprisingly, last season's biggest strength—the presentation—disappoints me here. Some of the players look off (when did Big Papi go on Slim-Fast?), and the audio is whacked. I mean, why is the crowd getting more excited about a ball boy making a play than when I go yard?

➔ **G. FORD:** It's not that the new pitching setup isn't satisfying, Bry, but even while it keeps my head in the game—on every pitch, I get go gopher hunting with Todd—I still don't love it. It feels more like a chore than a game of catch. That's just part of the action, though. Fielding features the sweetest setup in years, with its simple analog-based meter. And baserunning and hitting both benefit from less-complex models. Something's still missing: Maybe it's the crowd, but 2K will need to inject some more intensity into 2K9.



**The Good:** Fielding, batting, decent baserunning...finally  
**The Bad:** Audio all around, atmosphere stinks  
**Rediscovered Hobby:** Collecting virtual cards



**XB360** (also on PS3)

# CONDEMNED 2: BLOODSHOT

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Monolith ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Mature



**Good:** Combat, creeps, collecting evidence  
**Bad:** Checkpoints, multiplayer, end levels  
**The M-Rated Boost:** Booze relaxes the trigger finger

## Bloody brilliant

**+ G. FORD:** Like any great horror movie, *Bloodshot* succeeds with its scares, turning seeming serenity into unsettling horror. (You can now chalk up bowling alleys and doll factories as places I need to stay the hell away from.) This first-person action-shooter-cum-supernatural-thriller follows the events of the first *Condemned*. But while the spooks are similar—think ambient sounds, disrupted vision, and yes, monster closets—developer Monolith has fine-tuned the gameplay. *Bloodshot's* melee system features timing that feels spot-on (unlike the first game's) and offers a satisfying heft. It's also filled with combos, giving it some appreciable depth. Great and grisly graphics accent the mood, as do the optional and disturbing envi-

ronment-based finishing moves.

Likewise, crime-scene investigating receives a boost compared to the original's straightforward yet frustrating setup. Here you spend your time looking over evidence, choosing the appropriate tool (with hints from the lab), and then prioritizing facts before sending it all in and receiving a grade for correctly identifying a victim, determining the cause of death, and performing other *CSI*-style sleuthing.

It's too bad then that the story gets so caught up in its supernatural roots near the end and loses its way, devolving too much into standard shooting. Also, the checkpoint system can be a killer, and the multiplayer doesn't add much (see sidebar). Most of the game, though, achieves

its goal, keeping you off-balance but entertained. With rock-solid gameplay and plenty of creeps, *Bloodshot* finds its soul by making your heart race.

**+ NICK:** That's too bad, Greg—I know how big a fan of doll factories you were. While the first half of *Bloodshot* is pitch-perfect, polished terror, the majority of the last five levels reminded me of last year's John Cusack thriller *1408*—the second the scares went from psychological to literal, it became a whole lot less interesting. When it toys with your senses it's phenomenal (thanks to astounding sound design and inspired scripting), so when it bogs down with fetch quests and shooting galleries it's that much more disappointing.

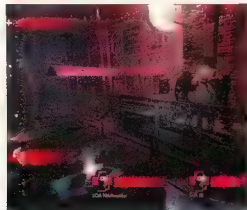




Thankfully, *Condemned* at its most mundane is still better than the best many other first-person titles have to offer. The melee combat isn't perfect yet, but it's always satisfying, and having to answer impromptu crime-scene quizzes (despite a few confusing questions) will keep you paying attention to the narrative no matter how out-there it gets. *Bloodshot* is as

refreshing as its predecessor was—it's just a shame to see it lose focus on the way to true greatness.

➔ **DAVID:** Yeah, it doesn't quite reach greatness, but it hits the right notes when it comes to horror. *Bloodshot*'s disturbing locales are better than most, and I applaud Monolith's decision to occasionally move the player



## A Multipart Problem?



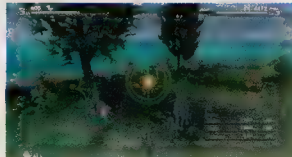
We love playing with others. Really, we do. But when it comes to online multiplayer games, we're split. For every game where multiplayer turns out to be a value-added, integral component—such as *Call of Duty 4* and *Gears of War*—we find plenty that have modes we want to file under "appendix" for being patently unnecessary. On that front we have *Metrod Prime 2: Echoes*, *The Darkness*, *Stranglehold*, and *Lost Planet*, among others.

And so it goes with *Bloodshot*. Its melee-based death-match modes simply become a fist-throwing mess. Bum Rush is just that: Weaker characters throw ever-respawning lives at overpowered and gun-toting law-enforcement agents. The one interesting mode is Crime Scene, with those agents trying to scan a couple heads-in-boxes (yep) hidden and protected by the other team. Interesting, but it won't keep us coming back. We can't help but wonder: Wouldn't time and resources be better spent beefing up the game proper? It worked out OK for *BioShock*...

away from the first game's dilapidated urban environments. *Bloodshot* also perfects the art of auditory misdirection and delivers an experience so haunting that one of our reviewers (let's call him...uh, Rick) had to have a buddy keep him company during some fright-filled sections.

Unlike Greg, I felt the melee combat to be imprecise, but the game makes up for this by allowing you to dispatch enemies in a number of creative ways (think industrial-press decapitations and igniting alcohol-drenched enemies via Taser). I'm not sure why multiplayer is a part of this package, as the melee gameplay's imprecision is magnified by the natural lagginess inherent in online play. Ultimately, though, the grossing experience offered by *Bloodshot* overshadows the flaws of its combat and story. 🐉

EGM Extras:  
Getting a Gold score on each level is well worth it. Hit up [EGM.1UP.com](http://EGM.1UP.com) for our SuperGuide to make it happen.



Xbox 360

# LOST ODYSSEY

■ Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios ■ Developer: Mistwalker/Feelplus ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen



**The Good:** Sharp writing, dialogue  
**The Bad:** Overlong load times, robotic character animations  
**Jansen's Words of Wisdom:** No dude plays the harp!

## Lost and found

→ **A. FITCH:** Early on in *Lost Odyssey*, *Final Fantasy* creator Hironobu Sakaguchi's Xbox 360 follow-up to the disappointingly kiddie *Blue Dragon*, it becomes clear this is not the Japanese role-playing game of your childhood. As the gloomy protagonist Kaim and his cohorts set off on their adventure, they're greeted not by pomp and circumstance but by the womanizing rogue Jansen, who stumbles in drunk, having spent the night with a trio of scantily clad sexpots who can only be described as "ladies of the evening"....

Unfortunately, *Odyssey* doesn't go far enough with the grown-up mindset, sabotaging its story with the introduction of a couple of loudmouth, grating Palom and Porom (*FFIV*)

knockoffs...and just like on a claustrophobic plane ride, these unwelcome munchkins threaten to spoil the whole adventure. Luckily, they never do, thanks in part to the aforementioned Jansen, who brings a Bruce Campbell-style levity to the proceedings as a scoundrel with a heart and ■ weakness for women...any woman.

Further amplifying the storytelling is "A Thousand Years of Dreams," a collection of well-written novellas, complete with stirring music, sound, and accompanying visual effects, that serve to illustrate the immortal Kaim's millennium-long past. While some (hi, Shanel) might deride this technique as a "misuse of the medium," I found them highly effective and exceedingly moving. Drawn-out cut-scenes

detach players from the action, but the written word requires the use of imagination and introspection, forcing you to explore Kaim's past experiences—stories that revolve around such diverse topics as unjust imprisonment, racism, and suicide. In fact, I'd like to see these refreshingly adult themes expanded on further in a sequel. Just one request, Mr. Sakaguchi: Leave the kids at home next time, OK?

→ **SHANE:** *Lost Odyssey* unquestionably embodies Sakaguchi's desire to duplicate his most beloved franchise on Xbox 360. Derivative plotlines, copycat characters (*FFIV* vets will spot glaring instances), and overt musical references (courtesy of old-school *FF* composer Nobuo Uematsu) hammer





## Slam-dunk Designer



Western audiences might not be familiar with *Lost Odyssey* character designer Takehiko Inoue, but he's already a superstar in Japan. His magnum opus *Slam Dunk* (serialized in the popular *Shonen Jump* manga anthology) follows a cocky, Dennis Rodman-esque hero's journey through the rigors of high school basketball. The *Slam Dunk* designs were clearly inspired by real-life athletes—aside from Rodman, you can also see strains of former NBA stars Patrick Ewing and Michael Jordan in certain characters. It's disappointing, then, that we don't see any celebrity resemblances in Inoue's standard-issue *Lost Odyssey* designs.



home the fact that, yep, these guys sure did indeed make *Final Fantasy*.  
Initially, the narrative doesn't seem quite so rote—the first disc offers a mature and bleak tale centered on laconic hero Kaim and mysterious hottie Seth—but soon veers back into far corner 16-bit nostalgia territory, coasting into a bland yet likable meta-*Final Fantasy* retreat. Perhaps if the developers hadn't squandered so much of the game's most involving characterization in lazy, noninterac-

tive short stories that you read, *Lost Odyssey*'s narrative would have approached that of *Final Fantasy X*.  
Luckily, Sakaguchi's experience informs *Lost Odyssey*'s expertly refined and balanced battle system. It offers satisfying interactivity and some surprising challenge (especially the bosses). But be forewarned about the load times...bring a book.  
➔ **RAY:** Well, Shane, I can't imagine an ensemble RPG being the easiest thing

to write, so I'm willing to forgive *Lost Odyssey*'s familiar framework. I'm not saying that the story is awesome, but it does touch on themes *Final Fantasy* barely gets near, like the real pain of dealing with loss (even if it means an obnoxious pre-funeral fetch-quest). Besides, all those characters mean diverse five-member parties, and they're inside a sensible battle system with fine music, too.  
But, yeah, the battles take a while to actually start, and there's a slight risk of breaking the system—immortals can adopt the skills of the mortal characters, but on the other hand, they won't be as powerful, so you may need to have your least favorite character(s) as part of your team sometimes. *Odyssey* doesn't break boundaries, but it doesn't have to—it is, in fact, a pleasant surprise. 🎮



**EGM Extras:**  
As RPGs go, this one's damned tough. Don't be ashamed to hit up [EGM.1UP.com](http://EGM.1UP.com) for our *Lost Odyssey* SuperGuide.



Wii/XB360 (also on PS3)

# SEGA SUPERSTARS TENNIS

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sumo Digital  
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

THE VERDICTS

ANDREW P.  
**B-**  
 GOOD

RAY  
**C+**  
 AVERAGE

JOE  
**C**  
 AVERAGE

## Not quite aces

**The Good:** All the Sega things we know and love, *Virtua Tennis* influence  
**The Bad:** Game speed is inconsistent  
**The Annoyance:** Is that Jon Lovitz?

➔ **ANDREW P:** Beloved Sega characters playing tennis isn't any more ridiculous than beloved Nintendo characters playing tennis. But where *Mario Tennis* takes the rules of the game and adds all sorts of additional crazy mayhem, *Sega Superstars Tennis* plays it a little safer. This is essentially *Virtua Tennis* with a fan-service skin: Sonic, Nights, Ulala, and other mascots take to their colorful themed courts behind classic soundtracks—and as far as traditional tennis goes, it doesn't get much crazier than a mostly predictable "super" shot every once in a while. That leaves you with what's essentially *Virtua Tennis*—though the controls feel a little looser—which is totally fine.

The minigames are livelier, taking

the traditional VT training exercises (hit the targets, avoid the obstacles, etc.) and dressing them up in Sega-mascot threads—it's chock-full of Sonic rings and monkeys in balls. As a stopgap between installments of VT, it's quite acceptable. But unless you grew up in a Genesis-only household, the appeal is limited.

➔ **RAY:** I enjoyed SST, but it has some lost potential. The limited controls (only two buttons?) don't get much better on Wii: Timing your swings with motion control isn't very quick, so you'll want to stick to just the buttons. I'm also surprised that it's not all that "wacky"—it's fantastical, but it's not as over-the-top as *Mario Tennis*. I can't fault the core gameplay,

though, given its *Virtua Tennis* roots—if only the multiplayer minigames were enjoyable with less than three players. But the crossover cuteness is worth it regardless of its faults.

➔ **JOE:** The Wii controls may mix things up, but after playing the 360 version, I just can't get over the feeling that I'd rather be playing VT3. The controls are indeed tighter in VT3, the minigames are more entertaining, and the character-upgrade system gives the game exponentially greater depth. I'm sure some players might enjoy the power-ups and nostalgic tie-ins with Sega classics, but I found them pretty thin: entertaining enough at first, but lacking any staying power...kind of like the game as a whole.



DS

# PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE CURIOUS VILLAGE

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Level-5  
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone

THE VERDICTS

JEREMY  
**A-**  
 EXCELLENT

MICHAEL  
**B+**  
 GOOD

JENNIFER  
**A-**  
 EXCELLENT

## Riddle me this

**The Good:** Mix of adventure and brain gaming; art style  
**The Bad:** Too many recycled gimmicks  
**The Stumper:** Everyone in this game likes riddles too much

➔ **JEREMY:** *Professor Layton and the Curious Village* takes two genres that thrive on the DS—brain games and adventure games—and mashes them together into something wonderfully unique. *Layton* presents itself as a detective-style solve-the-case mystery-adventure, but the puzzles are presented as, well, puzzles. It's a little odd at first, unraveling murders and kidnappings by figuring out how to draw a dead dog with matchsticks, but it's ultimately more satisfying than the arbitrary "attach doodad A to unrelated thing B" nonsense of the rest of the genre. The brain twisters themselves cover an impressive array of styles—math, logic, visual recognition—and are often quite tricky, although they become a bit easier after

you figure out the writers' favorite language tricks. You'll have little reason to replay the game once you've solved all the riddles, but *Layton* still offers a good 15 hours of charmingly drawn (and written) entertainment worthy of any gamer.

➔ **MICHAEL:** Boy, do I feel sorry for the little kiddos who pick up *Layton* thinking it's a simplified Sherlock Holmes romp. Behind the kid-friendly art style is a puzzle game that will make even Mensa members scratch their noggins...and me question my education. But even though playing through some of the puzzles felt more like an interactive SAT exam than a game, I cannot deny the level of satisfaction I got each time I figured

out a stumper. And luckily for *Layton*, the story itself is as engrossing as the brain benders.

➔ **JENNIFER:** This village is my kind of place. People constantly whipping out brainteasers you have to solve before they'll tell you their secrets? It's silly, but it totally works! Mulling over riddles in the context of a charming and well-produced adventure game is relaxing and enjoyable. Even though many of the puzzles are familiar, the overall quantity and variety means you won't get bored. And sure, some of these are pretty challenging, but the game makes it easy to skip the tough ones and try again later. Plus, you can't knock a game that preps you for a job interview—and makes it fun.



5'9

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XBOX 360 LIVE



PLAYSTATION 3





DS

# NINJA GAIDEN: DRAGON SWORD

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



**The Good:** Innovative gameplay, classy visuals  
**The Bad:** Brevity, uneven challenge  
**Not Ready for Dead or Alive:** Unsexy newcomer Momiji

Like a hot stylus through butter

➔ **SHANE:** The DS has played host to plenty of paradigm-busting nongames and nostalgic retreats, yet original action games that fully embrace the platform's strengths have been rare. Thankfully, *Dragon Sword* dares to radically rethink the series' renowned gameplay in order to create a stunningly new, only-on-DS experience.

*Dragon Sword* cleverly utilizes the DS' touch panel for nearly all of its input: You simply point at where you want Ryu to go, double-tap to leap, and slash with your stylus to eviscerate enemies. Sure, these fluid controls feel awfully forgiving, but that's cool by me—with little effort, you'll feel like an agile, ass-kicking super ninja.

It's unfortunate that Ryu's adventure ends far too quickly (and the harder

difficulty setting is pure murder), and *Gaiden* veterans will feel serious déjà vu in the largely recycled, newly 2D environments. But as an example of how to forge a modern action game for DS, *Dragon Sword* has no equal.

➔ **MATT:** I want to make a crack about Shane's flowery praise, but I can't. *Dragon Sword* is too good. Somehow, Team Ninja removed the series' hardcore barrier without making the game overly easy and created controls as polished as they are ballsy.

My biggest complaint: Just as the game gets comfortable experimenting with more than slicing up enemies, it ends. If it had more variety and a story that felt less like fan fiction, it'd be competing with console action games.

➔ **NICK:** I agree that it's an impressive accomplishment that *Dragon Sword* makes the transition with most of its finely tuned ninja luster intact. It's easy to appreciate the speedy, satisfying touch-screen combat, even if it's disappointing to see so much recycling after the novelty wears off. But while the basic mechanics are aces, I found all other touch-screen functionality—using magic, solving puzzles—to be stupidly simplistic. It's fun while it lasts, though—particularly the boss battles—and will hopefully pave the way for more original DS action. 🐉

**EGM Extras:** *The default mode may be easy, but when you get stuck on the harder difficulty, check out our Dragon Sword SuperGuide at EGM.1UP.com.*





DS

## APOLLO JUSTICE: ACE ATTORNEY

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

### Jury duty that doesn't stink

➔ **MICHAEL:** Capcom's wacky courtroom series contradicts real life: The legal system *shouldn't* be fun. But *Apollo Justice* manages to make typical humdrum hearings exciting. Like the previous *Phoenix Wright* games, *Justice* puts you in the role of a rookie attorney. The gameplay is similar to the previous games, but since this is the first *Ace Attorney* developed specifically for Nintendo's unique handheld (the others were GBA ports), *Justice* really taps the DS' touch screen. You'll still be doing the typical courtroom activities (presenting evidence, questioning witnesses, etc.), but *Justice* ups the forensic fun by allowing you to rub the DS in order to make footprint molds and spray crime scenes for poison traces. And the Perceive System—Apollo's mysterious

way of calling out liars via nervous tics—eliminates the worst element from the past games: psyche-locks (locks that trap people's lies). But as much as I adore the gameplay, the story is by far the best reason to take this case.

➔ **RYAN:** You know...I actually liked the psyche-locks. Apollo's eye for nervous twitches amounts to an Easter egg hunt, more distraction than deduction. The other aforementioned DS-powered features add welcome layers to the puzzle-solving, while the story puts a compelling new spin on our old friend Phoenix Wright, who's been disbarred under suspicious circumstances. Leave it to greenhorn Apollo Justice to save the day—he's a worthy and likable heir to the almighty Ace Attorney badge...and the status quo shake-up is a bold and refreshing move. No objections here!

➔ **ANDREW P:** Let's not understate the importance of *Apollo's* DS dedication: After being teased with one DS-enabled case in the very first *Phoenix Wright*, it's been a long wait for the series to advance. But here we have the return of fingerprint dusting and blood analysis, in addition to X-ray machines, 3D crime scene animations, and even full-motion video cut-scenes. And beyond the game mechanics, *Apollo* resonates with a complex plot that evolves the series with a fundamental shift in how verdicts are decided (evidence isn't everything), while remaining true to its roots.



**The Good:** Excellent writing, touch screen usage  
**The Bad:** Fairly short, waiting for the inevitable sequel  
**Missing Persons:** Maya and Pearl

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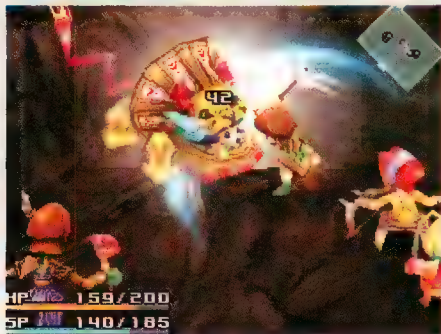
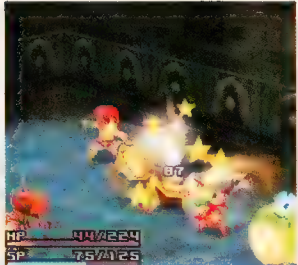
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DS

# FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES— RING OF FATES

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ Developer: Square Enix ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+



**The Good:** Great multiplayer action  
**The Bad:** Single-player, dumb team-mates  
**300:** Number of items to customize your character with

## Big adventures for little people

➔ **MILKMAN:** As charming as it was, the first episode in Square Enix's *Crystal Chronicles* action-role-playing series on GameCube featured fussy multiplayer, forced you to carry around a big ol' can (seriously), and had a crappy inventory system. The streamlined sequel for DS solves these problems while improving on things in unexpected ways.

First off, ignore *Ring of Fates'* single-player game, which is little more than an awkward tutorial hampered by inept A.I. pals. Instead, load up the A.I.-free multiplayer mode (think a cartoony *Diablo* packed with lush environments and huge bosses) and tackle it solo if you must. Of course, things get more fun with friends, and creating or joining

games takes just a couple of button presses (although the lack of true Internet play stings). That your tiny character's looks change with each piece of armor you equip is nothing short of miraculous. And thanks to the awesomely balanced difficulty curve, I haven't had this much fun dungeon-crawling since *Diablo II*.

➔ **JEREMY:** I'm not quite as in love with *ROF* as Milky, because the series' move to DS trades the old issues for new ones. The camera feels cramped, and the mixing of digital-input and touch-screen controls in the heat of combat is an amateurish mistake. And yes, the single-player game sucks—your computer-controlled companions have the worst A.I. in

years. Yet I'm inclined to be forgiving because the multiplayer experience is incredibly fun despite those problems.

➔ **JENNIFER:** I too found the controls awkward and frustrating—it's tough to manage your party and get to the right spells and potions midbattle. Inventory management is also tedious. But in the long run, I didn't really mind. As Milky said, seeing your character's new gear equipped is awesome; it really lends a sense of accomplishment in what might otherwise be a rote hack-n-slash adventure. **A-**

**EGM Extras:** *Thirsting for sets of classic Final Fantasy armor, like the Dark Knight's? Check out our Ring of Fates SuperGuide at [EGM.1UP.COM](http://EGM.1UP.COM).*



PERIODIC TABLE OF THE ELEMENTS

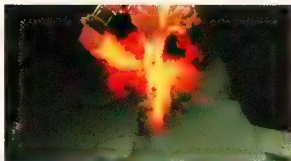
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**göt2b** CREATING GOOD CHEMISTRY

(PHEROMONE INFUSED HAIR GEL)





Soft lighting, classic architecture, hulking cyclopes. Yep, *God of War* made the portable transition intact.

PSP

# GOD OF WAR: CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Ready at Dawn ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Mature



**Good:** Best visuals and tech on PSP, great story and combat  
**Bad:** Not enough depth  
**Actually Good:** The new alternate weapon

Kratos returns younger, but just as angry

➔ **MATT:** Feature for feature, it's nearly impossible to poke holes in *Chains of Olympus*. Everything included has been executed so ridiculously well that it's easy to forget this is a PSP game and think you're back swinging your blades on PS2. Visually, the game does things you've never seen on a portable. The solid story strikes a great balance between being a slice of the *God of War* tale and something that feels complete on its own. Combat is as smooth as Kratos—hell, even evading works perfectly, despite the PSP's lack of a second analog stick. And battery life isn't a big issue like many suspected it would be. When the alternate weapon (The Gauntlet of Zeus—a giant boxing glove that breaks certain walls) is

something you actually want to use, and the story stays focused the entire time, it's clear the developers learned from what few criticisms existed of previous games in the series.

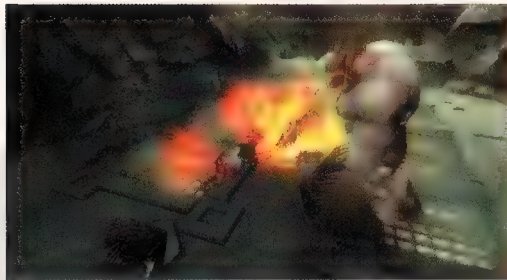
While it's easy to trick yourself into thinking this is a full-on *GOW* game, though, it's a smaller overall package. The actual length (five to six hours) doesn't bother me too much, since you can find multiple reasons to play through more than once (see sidebar), but *COO* feels a bit light because of simple puzzles, a lack of overflowing memorable moments/big boss fights, and a smaller-than-normal number of magics/unlockables/new features.

But that it got this close on PSP is remarkable. Of course, it's not fair to compare it 1-to-1 with the PS2 titles,

which is where my only real criticisms come in, but that's how good *COO* is—it makes you want to view it as a *God of War* game rather than a PSP game, and as long as you head in expecting a short story, you're going to find a satisfying experience.

➔ **NICK:** Hear, hear. I would have been satisfied by a part of either of the PS2 *God of Wars*, but having an entirely new "B-sides adventure" of sorts is fantastic. From the sex minigame to smashing someone's head to smithereens, *COO* hits all the series' libido/bloodlust-satisfying high notes, and even bests its big brothers in a few areas (I enjoyed using *all* of my spells/abilities, and the excellent final battle—both series firsts for me). Sure,





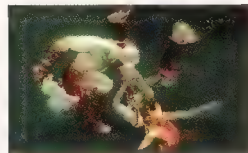
■ PETA might be pissed, but we're not sure if goatmen count as animals.

we've all slain similar giant beasts and explored Kratos' dark past before, but the setting never gets old, and the balance of depth and accessibility in the combat is still the best in its class.

My main, very specific hang-up lies with the poor placement of health and magic chests—while the other *GOWs* always threw a few at you before big battles, *COO* has a nasty tendency of putting them in the middle of battles. Combined with inconsistently difficult analog-nub motions in ■ few of the

finishing moves and enemies that can catch you up in corners, *COO* sometimes forgets its portable limitations. Still, this is a top-tier, uncompromising adventure that makes me that much giddier for the eventual *God of War III*.

➔ **JOHN:** A lack of memorable moments? Were you asleep, Matt? While the boss fights lacked presence in a lot of cases, the pacing of the story was remarkable. I was particularly happy to see that the move to a



## Short Service?

*Chains of Olympus* is over far too fast, but for those who need a certain number of hours to justify a purchase, here are some ways to extend this otherwise-divine experience.

**6 hours** Play through on Hero or Spartan difficulty; Mortal is just too easy

**4 hours** Play a second time with everything unlocked and upgraded up front

**10 hours** Head through a third time on God mode...the hardest difficulty by far

**2 hours** Conquer the five Hades challenges

**30 min.** Sit back and watch everything you unlocked

**30 min.** Wish "The Lost Levels" (pictured below) were actually in the game

**TBD** Wait for *God of War III*



portable format didn't eliminate further exploration of Kratos' character. The somewhat pathetic sex minigame and 300-style shouty dialogue aside, you're treated to some tastefully scripted exploration of the torment he's subjected to. After a very brief (but nonetheless poignant), tender, and uniquely emotional moment prior to the last level, the sense of escalating anger and need for vengeance is really quite tangible as Kratos moves toward his final goal.

Yes, the game is almost criminally short (about five and half hours for me), but it's densely packed and consistently good throughout. In fact, the only thing I didn't like was something not core to the main game. The bonus "challenges" that you can unlock are absurdly difficult and lack the elegance of the core game. ❖

**EGM Extras:**  
If you want even ■ prayer at conquering God mode, head over to [EGM.1UP.com](http://EGM.1UP.com) for our *God of War: COO SuperGuide*.



PSP

# CRISIS CORE: FINAL FANTASY VII

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



**Good:** Nuggety gameplay and a compelling story  
**Bad:** Repetitive missions, Midgar is strangely empty  
**Fantasy:** Remake FFFVII with this engine

## Final fan service

→ **JEREMY:** I was dreading *Crisis Core* a bit, because let's face it—Square Enix's *Final Fantasy VII* spin-offs have run the gamut from "awful" to "complete ass." And the opening moments bore out the worst of my fears: It began with an over-the-top movie sequence riding the coattails of one of *FFVII*'s most memorable moments and quickly segued into a shallow button-mashy action game with braindead enemies running about aimlessly—the worst of *Advent Children* and *Dirge of Cerberus* combined.

But then something unexpected happened: The game became good. The seemingly mindless combat in this action game masquerading as a role-playing game slowly started to unfold into something that, while not

precisely *deep*, is definitely engrossing. The idiotic enemies became smarter, tougher, used more dangerous attacks more frequently. Soon it became clear that button mashing alone is a quick road to the Game Over screen, and battles became a matter of timing, reflex, and evasion. The Materia system actually works better here than it did in *FFVII*, letting you instantly customize protagonist Zack for every new situation. You can also synthesize powerful custom Materia combinations—a fire spell that inflicts status ailments on foes and triples your maximum health while equipped, for instance.

*Core* defines "great portable experience." The dialogue sequences never take control of the system for

more than a minute or two at a time, the world is compact and easy to navigate, the objectives are clear. And then you have the optional missions, bite-sized skirmishes that offer a quick, addictive hit of combat (not to mention the best loot) and run the gamut from stupidly easy to oh-my-god hard. These can be a bit repetitive and the tiny, barren environments would feel superficial on a console—but they make for an ideal handheld game.

But where the game really shines is its story—a very different tale than that of most *Final Fantasy* games, and a far cry from the obtuse nonsense that seems to hover over anything attached to the *FFVII* name. Sure, you still have your nihilistic pretty boys





Now there's a queer love quadrangle that will surely inspire some cosplay.

dripping with overt religious symbolism, but the plot is viewed through a focused lens this time. Core is Zack's story first and foremost, and the relationships he develops during his rise to prominence in Shinra's Soldier organization make for a tale that doesn't require an intimate knowledge of the original game. While Core sets the stage for *FFVII*—setting straight the truth about that game's more opaque flashbacks—it dodges a dangerous prequel pitfall by not going too far with its shocking revelations and revisionism. Instead, it simply offers context and clarification as it builds toward its tragic, inevitable ending.

Core does a great job of being what it is without pretending to be something grander...a pleasantly unpretentious change of pace for the series. (Well, except for the poetry-spouting

bad guy, but it wouldn't be *Final Fantasy* without a little pretension.) A satisfying tale wrapped in simple but effective gameplay, brilliant graphics, and great music—I guess it's not so bad to be fooled by first impressions.

➔ **MILKMAN:** Like Jeremy, I too warmed up to *Crisis Core* once it evolved beyond its "Press X: The Game" overture. Although the game is played in real time, with battles requiring actual reflexes in order to avoid or block physical and magical attacks, it's really more like turn-based-on-the-fly action. The menu, spell, and item navigation are presented in as streamlined a manner as possible (L and R triggers cycle through your options) but it's still an awkward solution that occasionally begs for a pause as you attempt to crack open

## Refresher Fantasy

Need a quick reminder of who did what in *FFVII* before venturing into its PSP prequel? Here's what you need to know.

### Zack Fair

A skilled Soldier agent in the employ of Shinra, Core protagonist Zack was the inspiration for *FFVII*'s main character's delusions of grandeur. Appeared strictly in flashbacks and died tragically. So much for a happy ending!



### Cloud Strife

Cloud's a mere pup here, but the truth behind gaming's biggest head case is a major part of Core's story.



### Sephiroth

This pretty boy went nuts when he realized his "mom" was actually a murderous alien life form. Core shows him in (some-what) happier days.



### Aerith Gainsborough

A humble flower girl who also happened to be the last survivor of a lost race holding the key to the planet's future. Has really consistent taste in men.



### Shinra Corporation

An electricity corporation turned global superpower, Shinra puts on a benevolent face as it sucks the planet dry of energy—Halliburton can only aspire to be this evil.



an Ether to replenish your MP. That Zack is characterized as an impetuous, fame-hungry youth is initially off-putting, but the gravitas of his predetermined destiny (all *FFVII* fans know the deal) lends the story weight.

Playing the game for its side missions is nearly as engrossing as the principal storyline itself and provides plenty of distraction and collection elements for hardcore RPG fans. The rarest Materia and items are found in these optional quests, which makes beating the toughest ones all the more rewarding. What's less rewarding is the irritating DMW feature (see sidebar on the next page), which utilizes a slot machine-style game mechanic to affect everything from special attacks to leveling up both Zack and his individual spells. The animations are impressive and entertaining at first



Crisis Core's brisk, responsive gambal system makes random battles a breeze.

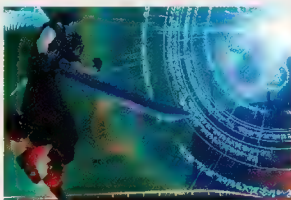


## Crisis Craps



If you're trying to make sense of that ever-spinning roulette wheel, let us offer you some advice: *Don't bother.* The DMW (Digital Mind Wave) is a crucial component of *Crisis Core's* gameplay, but its results are entirely outside your control, though it affects *everything*. At its lowest level it grants constant bonuses during combat; at its pinnacle, it determines Zack's level. All randomly!

Well, not *entirely* randomly. While you can't affect the DMW directly, it's more likely to dish out high-level attacks and levels up while you're facing tough foes. Runty weakling types do nothing. So really, it's pretty much the same leveling and Limit Break systems you've seen in other *Final Fantasy* games, just gussied up to look more exciting than it really is. Nice try, guys.



glance but become tiresome deeper into the game. Townfolk interactions in Japanese RPGs still have a long way to go, too, before button-mashing past wooden dialogue is ever replaced by the evocative conversations of a BioWare RPG such as *Mass Effect*.

I'm also not crazy about the art style. The graphics are sharp enough, and it's swell that *Crisis Core* has followed Tetsuya Nomura down the Disneyfied path of *Kingdom Hearts*-esque character design and animation, but it feels less endearing to me than *FFVII* first did all those years ago.

Overall, *Crisis Core* surprised me because it turned into a more complete game than I was expecting, but this one-man show still feels like something of an afterthought built up for the sheer purpose of cashing in on *FFVII's* popularity.

**SHANE:** Allow me to echo my comrades' shared sentiment that *Crisis Core's* gameplay improves dramatically as you progress. Yep, its seemingly stifling single-character combat quickly transforms into a customizable system that's fast, easy, and addictive—think of it as a strategically enhanced take on *Kingdom Hearts'* mash-happy melees. You'll find no turn-based tedium here—constant dodging, blocking, jumping, and dashing make for battles that are anything but dull. Plus, other new twists, such as the ability to forge unique Materia and that unpredictable DMW slot machine, further deepen the action.

While *Crisis Core's* remarkably solid combat engine certainly comes as a surprise, its engaging narrative and unparalleled presentation should not. Unlike *Dirge's* half-baked attempt to

explore *FFVII's* dismal aftermath, this prequel does the series' legacy proud with a gripping plot (artfully delivered via plenty of nicely voiced cut-scenes) and lush audiovisual trappings that blow nearly every other PSP game away. Some might give *God of War's* portable effort the slight visual edge, but *FFVII* vets will swoon upon seeing how expertly their favorite characters and locales have been rendered here. And the game's soundtrack merits mention too, as it marries a handful of tasteful *FFVII* remixes with a host of heavier, rockin' pieces that fit the game's bleak tone perfectly.

Ultimately, *Crisis Core* lacks the story closure that *FFVII* fans desire, but after three heartbreaking efforts from "The Compilation of Final Fantasy VII," the fact that it doesn't suck should be rewarding enough. **✪**



# REVIEWS WRAP-UP

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

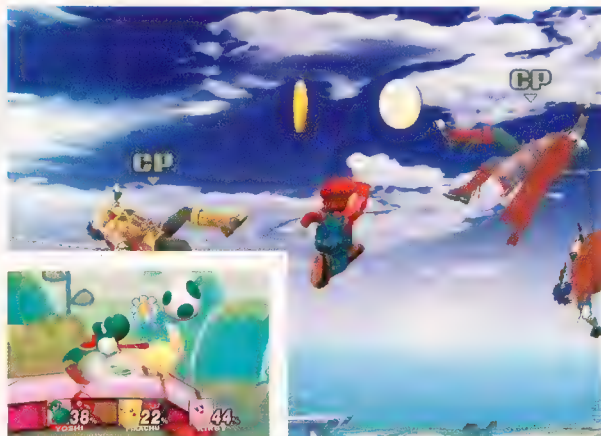
Wii

## SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ ESRB: Teen

*Brawl* is finally out—in Japan, at least—and we've put plenty of time into the import while getting prepped to review the English-language version. It has crazy new characters (plus hidden returning favorites), online play, stage building, and about a gazillion more things we can't fit in this paragraph. But is all of that worth it to the hardcore fans, much less the average Wii owner? You'll have to wait for our final word next month, but we're confident that it is, to say the least.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** So rich with content and multiplayer fun, it's stupefying.



PS3/XB360

## DARK SECTOR

■ Publisher: D3Publisher ■ ESRB: Mature

Since *Dark Sector's* unveiling four years ago, developer Digital Extremes has scrapped the space theme and added *Gears of War*-style cover to the combat. And you know what? From the roughly half of the game we've played, it works well. The environments are creepy, the visuals are nauseously real, and the over-the-top combat is satisfying. With *Dark Sector's* signature weapon—a tri-bladed glaive—you can easily slice off appendages or light a graveyard full of mutants on fire.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** It may not be the most original shooter, but it further proves that unrestrained violence is fun if done right.



Wii

## THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2 & 3 RETURN

■ Publisher: Sega ■ ESRB: Mature

The Wii's all about resurrecting old franchises, and Sega's *The House of the Dead 2 & 3 Return* is the latest shooter to rise again. Though these arcade classics are a little crusty, they both work wonderfully on the Wii (even better if you use peripheral-maker Nyko's Perfect Shot pistol adapter). But apart from zapping zombies with the Wii Remote, not much else is new except for some challenging training modes. Yes, that means the hilariously terrible dialogue hasn't changed.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Putting holes in the undead is a helluva lot of fun when you don't have to worry about wasting quarters.



Wii/XB360

## BULLY: SCHOLARSHIP EDITION

■ Publisher: Rockstar ■ ESRB: Teen

*Bully*, Rockstar's PS2 gem originally released in late 2006, makes the jump to a couple of now-gen consoles, and both versions have their advantages. But more on that in a bit. The big news: additional classes and new missions that further flesh out the story. You'll spend quality time with a rhythm-action-style music course, step-by-step dissections in biology, flag and map matching in geography, and math problems in...math.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Grab the 360 version for sharp graphics and a slew of achievements. The Wii is good for effective motion controls, especially in the bio and music minigames.







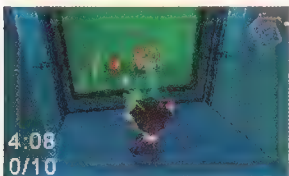
DS

## MYSTERY DUNGEON: SHIREN THE WANDERER

■ Publisher: Sega ■ ESRB: Everyone

Roguelikes—turn-based role-playing games with random dungeons and harsh penalties for death—are surprisingly well represented on DS (see: *Izuna*, *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon*). *Shiren the Wanderer* is easily the best of them. As well it should be: This is a port of the original 16-bit classic that the others are imitating—its first time in English, in fact.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Like all roguelikes, this one's for hardcore RPG nuts only. But fans of the genre owe it to themselves to play this landmark title. Just don't expect to win without a fight—it's brutal.



DS

## INSECTICIDE





■ Publisher: Gamecock ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Part platformer, part classic adventure game, and all weird, *Insecticide* tries to do a lot. But while it's always nice to see the mashup of two different genres, simply incorporating both without any blending runs the risk of alienating fans of one and not the other. Especially when the platforming isn't all that good and the adventure bits inherit the "tap all over the screen until you find the one thing you can actually pick up" annoyances of old.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *Insecticide* is worth playing for its excellent writing, characters, and "film noir with cockroaches" setting, but the gameplay itself is inoffensive at best.

# THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for Jan/Feb

Name	Platform	EGM Scores		
1 <b>Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock Bundle</b>	Wii	Not Reviewed		
2 <b>Super Mario Galaxy</b>	Wii	9.5	10	10
 <i>Mario Galaxy</i> is so good, even <i>Mario</i> creator Shigeru Miyamoto wants a sequel. Nintendo's creative mastermind recently said he's thinking about making it.				
3 <b>Wii Zapper with Link's Crossbow Training</b>	Wii	Not Reviewed		
4 <b>Game Party</b>	Wii	Not Reviewed		
■ <b>Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare</b>	XB360	9.5	8.5	9.5
 The war isn't over in <i>Call of Duty 4</i> just yet—publisher Activision recently announced new downloadable maps will be dropping this spring.				
6 <b>Rock Band: Special Edition</b>	PS2	Not Reviewed		
7 <b>Rock Band: Special Edition</b>	XB360	9.0	9.5	9.5
 Nintendo fans will soon be able to rock out with their Wii-motes out—EA (finally) confirmed it will be releasing <i>Rock Band</i> on the Wii sometime soon.				
8 <b>Wii Play (with Wii Remote)</b>	Wii	4.5	6.0	5.0
■ <b>Carnival Games</b>	Wii	Not Reviewed		
10 <b>Dance Dance Revolution: Hottest Party Bundle</b>	Wii	Not Reviewed		
11 <b>Endless Ocean</b>	Wii	Not Reviewed		
12 <b>New Super Mario Bros.</b>	DS	9.5	10	8.0
13 <b>Mario &amp; Sonic at the Olympic Games</b>	Wii	6.0	7.0	6.0
14 <b>Winter Sports: The Ultimate Challenge</b>	Wii	Not Reviewed		
15 <b>Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day!</b>	DS	8.0	7.0	6.0
16 <b>Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare</b>	PS3	9.5	8.5	9.5
17 <b>Assassin's Creed</b>	XB360	7.0	6.0	4.5
18 <b>Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock Bundle</b>	XB360	9.0	8.5	8.0
19 <b>Advance Wars: Days of Ruin</b>	DS	8.5	8.0	8.5
 If <i>Advance Wars</i> is too modern (advanced?) for you, the developer behind the series will be releasing fantasy-themed <i>Fire Emblem</i> on the DS soon.				
20 <b>Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08</b>	Wii	7.5	7.5	8.0

# GAME OVER

> press continue for extraterrestrial landfill, spicy mullets, and lord british



> SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

## The **ROCK AND ROLL**est Games of All Time

When these games plan a party, it always goes until question mark!!!



Seanbaby may be a writer, but he knows what it takes to rock: three boob babes, one red Mohawk, and a keytar.

**AS TECHNOLOGY IMPROVES,** THE PURPOSE of devices grow into one another. Phones become cameras, cameras become TVs, and you don't even want to know what this Jell-O-filled flashlight is about to become. Videogames are no different; they've combined with musical instruments to create things like *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero*.

Not since keyboards became keyboards that can make dog-barking sounds has technology seen such purpose-combining advances. It hasn't always been like this. Before someone invented the idea of just plugging a guitar into an Xbox and playing guitar, gamers required a complicated premise to wrap their head around a game based on rock 'n' roll.

The following titles were some of man's first attempts at combining

rock with game, and each one will be rated on a custom Metal Scale. Metal is a state of mind and impossible to quantify with numbers, so I'll be using numbers, since being impossible is way metal. In addition

to that, I'll carefully give each game a Better Than Bon Jovi Rating ranging from No to Yes. For example, the band Bon Jovi would have a Better Than Bon Jovi Rating of SQUAARRK!!!! ERROR.

### Power Factory Featuring C+C Music Factory (Sega CD)

**Behind the Music:** This is the story of two factory-line workers forced to edit C+C Music Factory videos using only C+C Music Factory music videos and several minutes of royalty-free cartoon footage. Which is why psychologists now use "Making a Game About C+C Music Factory" as a way to clinically diagnose mental disorders.

#### **Metal Scale:** 10

Literally all of the work that went into this game went into recording crappy actors screaming at you for making poor C+C Music Factory editing choices. Talk about metal. This game doesn't give a f---!



#### **Better Than Bon Jovi:** No

If there were a *Bon Jovi Music Factory*, C+C wouldn't even be allowed to deliver a pizza to it.





PAGE  
**94**  
Retro:  
Road  
trip!



PAGE  
**97**  
Comic:  
Has  
Your

## > Virtuose (3DO)

**Behind the Music:** You're the greatest rock star of all time, and your only escape from the excitement is the game *Virtuose*, in other words, badly digitized footage of a chunky, long-haired nerd in sunglasses battling one kind of enemy using gameplay made obsolete 10 years before its release.

**Metal Scale:** 1

This itself is a game about a child's idea of a rock star playing a moron's idea of a videogame, so it's very meta. Which is only a letter's difference from metal, but a world of meaning away. Just like how "Salisbury Steak Day" means something much different than "Salisbury Steak Day." I think.



**Better Than Bon Jovi Rating: No**

Since the only person who owns a 3DO is the guy who invented the 3DO, and the box for *Virtuose* is a picture of that guy's dungeon master, no one's ever considered comparing it to Bon Jovi. But I just did, and it lost.

## > Journey: Escape (Atari 2600)



**Behind the Music:** You control the members of Journey as they attempt to leave their concert venue. Enemies in the game include "Shifty-Eyed Promoters," which are represented

by disembodied heads with shifty eyes, and "Love-Crazed Groups," represented by hearts with legs. I'm sure that took longer for me to type than it did for them to think up. It's like they designed these characters during the world's most insane game of *Pictionary*: "A heart! A walking heart! A... a terrible creature beast! Oh! Oh! It's a Journey groupie!!!"

**Metal Rating: 8**

Journey is so metal, they don't need their own security. And furthermore, the plot of this game is that each of them is protecting their take from the door: \$50,000 in cash. Do you have any idea how dangerous it is for a rock star to run through a thick crowd of his own fans with an armful of loose cash? Phil Collins wouldn't do that. In fact, Phil Collins won't even carry his own wallet. If he gets separated from his team of accountants, he has to pay for things by putting balls in his mouth.



**Better Than Bon Jovi Rating: Yes**

In this arcade version of *Journey*, each of the members has to go into space to retrieve their musical instruments. And if you're comparing the two bands, you have to look no further than the fact that if Bon Jovi's Richie Sambora got sent to an outer-space planet made out of trampolines, that would just be stupid.

## > KISS: Psycho Circus: The Nightmare Child (Dreamcast)



**Behind the Music:** This is a first-person shooter mildly associated with peripheral characters from the Todd McFarlane comic-book version of KISS, which is easiest to describe by saying, "Darkness envelops the combination of spiders and diarrhea." Although if I'm being honest with myself, I wrote that not in the interest of good description, but in the hopes that it would become the box quote for this or any fine Todd McFarlane-related videogame product.

**Metal Scale: 0**

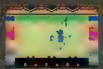
When KISS made their first comic book, they each dripped some of their own blood into the printing ink. That's both totally metal and how I got AIDS at age 8. This game used more biohazardous material during its construction, and on top of that, it kind of doesn't feature the band KISS. That would only be metal if the game were a middle-finger title screen and the words "You've been tricked by KISS, consumer!"



**Better Than Bon Jovi Rating: No**

Bon Jovi released *Wanted Dead or Alive*, a song about the thin, almost ridiculous parallels Bon Jovi himself drew between being a musician and being a gunfighting cowboy. By comparison, KISS' *Psycho Circus: The Nightmare Child* was *Unwanted and Dead* the moment it was released. So it's maybe not that it's worse than Bon Jovi so much as it's the exact opposite.

## > Grover's Music Maker (Unreleased, Atari 2600)



**Behind the Music:** In *Grover's Music Maker*, you more or less watch Grover dance to popular 0-bit tunes. Obviously, most people would consider this only the start of an idea, and that's probably why it was never released.

**Metal Scale: 10**

The Atari 2600 can make two kinds of noises: a bloop and a fart-blop. The idea of a puppet monster creating an entire song using only bloop-and-fart-blop technology would be like a caveman building a helicopter out of his Aerosmith reunion tour shirt.



**Better Than Bon Jovi Rating: Yes**

Bon Jovi hasn't ever taught anyone how to read. In fact, the lyrics from *Slippery When Wet*'s liner notes actually destroyed my brain's ability to read four letters. Luckily for me, the human face doesn't need the letter R to get locked.

## > Revolution X (SNES)

**Behind the Music:** Aerosmith adheres to the school of thought that if you're going to put yourself into a videogame, it might as well be stupid. So someone took a game they were developing around *Jurassic Park* and redrew it to be about rescuing the band Aerosmith from an oppressive government's anti-music policy. This change is ironic, geologically speaking, since Aerosmith formed in the Cretaceous Period.

**Metal Scale: 8**

You're overthrowing the government with music. And not metaphorically, like some kind of woman. You shoot actual compact discs at shock troops. It's exactly what our parents lived through when Gregory Hines assassinated the Canadian mayor with a tap shoe. And what our children will live through when Future Bryan Adams leads a marching band against Orko: Lazer Menace.

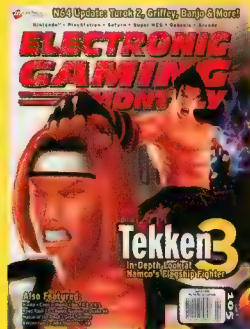


**Better Than Bon Jovi Rating: Yes**

I get that explain my perspective here. At the risk of name-dropping, I've never met Bon Jovi, but I've met over 50 Super Nintendos. And mathematically, the difference between those two numbers is nearly 51. So if Bon Jovi has seen a million faces, and then rocked them all, imagine the face damage *Revolution X* has done! Or, as Aerosmith's Steven Tyler might say, "Sir, does this ChapStick come in a much, much larger size? Yakyak YOW!"

# 10 Years Ago...

GAME COVER



### On the cover: Tekken 3

We celebrated the PlayStation 1's best-looking fighter by slapping some (awesomely) ugly character art on the cover. Inside, we yapped about how this almost-perfect port of the arcade version would feature some PlayStation exclusives, like Gon the dinosaur (yay?), *Tekken Ball* (nay), and *Tekken Force* (make it go away!).



### Game of the month: Winter Heat

Well, this doesn't happen often—not only was our Game of the Month a sports game, but it was also a Winter Olympics outing. This kind of double whammy is so rare that one might think it was our April Fools' joke. Wrong—*Winter Heat* was one of the best Saturn multiplayer games not named *Saturn Bomberman*.



### Calling all poor losers

While the feature itself wasn't all that strange (a story about sore losers), the accompanying photography sure was: multiple pictures of a giant and a little person re-creating sore-loser tactics. What a great idea...

## > RETRO

# Retro Road Trip

A classic tour of the country By Kyle Orland

The Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) may be the go-to event for upcoming games, but some us oldsters prefer the simple bleeps and bloops of the past. So we decided to make the ultimate list of old-school gaming hot spots—here's a sampling of the best retro roadside attractions and classic gaming conventions going on 'round the country.



- ★ = CONVENTIONS
- = ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS

> SAN FRANCISCO, CA  
**PlayStation Store**  
 Loads of kiosks let you try out games for every PlayStation model and the PSP.

Musee Mechanic  
 See what videogames were like back when electricity was the hot new thing.

SUNNYSIDE, CA  
**Golfand**  
 Nearby Capcom USA tests its arcade games at this famous arcade.

ALBANY, NY  
**E.T. Landfill**  
 See where Atari buried all those E.T. Atari 2600 game cartridges.

> CLAREMONT, CA  
**Southern California Classic Collectors (SC3)**  
 April  
 Cost: Free  
 sc3.classicgaming.gamespy.com  
 Less a convention and more an informal gathering of classic-gaming fans. Bring a DS, bring some food, and just hang out in the *Guitar Hero* "Room of Doom."

> LAS VEGAS, NV  
**Classic Gaming Expo**  
 July  
 Cost: \$35  
 cge3po.com  
 Plans for the country's largest convention dedicated to retro games and grizzled gamers are a little up in the air right now. Check the site for updates.

> WOODLAND HILLS, CA  
**uWink**  
 Atari and Chuck E. Cheese's founder Nolan Bushnell's latest go at a new social arcade.

> CABAZON, CA  
**Cabazon Dinosaurs**  
 As seen in the climax of the hit Nintendo commercial/film, *The Wizard*.





MIDWEST GAMING CLASSIC

**Midwest Gaming Classic**

March 29 - 30

Cost: \$10 per day

[midwestgamingclassic.com](http://midwestgamingclassic.com)

Play dozens of free-play arcade cabinets along with classic and modern consoles, plus enter tournaments in everything from pinball to shoot-em-ups.

**Nintendo World**

Get in line early enough each day, and maybe you'll get a Wii.

FUNSPOT ARCADE

**Funspot Arcade**

As seen in the documentary *The King of Kong*, this joint hosts world-record high-score attempts.

**MOUNT CHEYENNE, CO.  
HORAD**

Home of the WOPR, the game-crazed defense computer in *War Games*.

L'ONARD, IL

**Video Game Summit**

July 12

Cost: Free

[ave.atari-users.net/VGS.html](http://ave.atari-users.net/VGS.html)

Celebrate everything Atari at this small event that features vendors, tournaments, and even a classic-gaming quiz show where attendees can win crap if they're smart.

READING, PA

**TooManyGames**

Convention

May 4

Cost: \$5

[www.toomanygames.com](http://www.toomanygames.com)

Come for the cosplay, but stay for the first ever *Guitar Hero* National Championships, endorsed by high-score record keepers Twin Galaxies.

AUSTIN, TX

**Britannia Manor**

Former full-time residence of Richard Garriott (now part-time astronaut), who made the *Ultima* series.

GRAPEVINE, TX

**The Texas Pinball Festival**

March 14 - 16

Cost: \$25 pre-reg /

\$30 at door

[texaspinball.com](http://texaspinball.com)

More than 100 classic and modern pinball machines sprawl over 10,000 square feet. Win a new machine in raffles or learn how to restore old ones in clinics.

LINDEN, OR

**Luna City Arcade**

Software engineer Peter Hirschberg built his own working arcade filled with the best quarter-munching classics.

HOLLYWOOD, FL

**Rickey's of Hollywood**

*King of Kong* villain Billy Mitchell owns this somewhat classy restaurant famous for its hot sauce.





# Hsu York

By Jeremy "Norm" Scott

PONK UP 20 BUCKS AND NAIL YOUR VALUABLES TO YOUR BODY; IT'S TIME TO JOIN GILA MOBSTER'S...

## GTA FOUR NYC TOUR



Here's Just a Sample of What You'll See!



### THE STATUE OF LIBERTY

Designed by a French sculptor with severe Oedipal issues, Lady Liberty has greeted millions of immigrants since her dedication in 1886. She holds high the Torch of Liberty with a pose and expression that subtly convey the thought, "Somebody else wanna hold this for a while? My arm's tired."

In 2004, a motion was narrowly defeated to create an addendum to the statue's famous "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" inscription that would have read, "Whoa, that's plenty."

### THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING

Completed in 1931, the Empire State Building held the distinction of being the world's tallest building until it was surpassed in 1972 by construction of the World Trade Center, prompting droves of competitively minded New Yorkers to begin piling random junk atop the building in a desperate and ultimately disastrous bid to reclaim the title, culminating in the tragic "Rain of Garbage" of 1974. The Empire State Building remains a picturesque icon of New York City, attracting several thousand people, and the occasional giant gorilla, annually. Don't stand too close!



### COLORFUL STREET VENDORS

The Big Apple is the very liver of the American economy, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the streets of the city, where a variety of entrepreneurs aggressively market a wide range of goods and services, from secondhand jewelry and timepieces to involuntary windshield-cleaning and banging on upturned garbage cans until you give them some money to stop. New York City also boasts a thriving panhandling industry! Be prepared to run!

### SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES

Often overlooked in guides to New York are the contributions the city has made to science. Case in point: a recent breakthrough by Columbia University in which researchers, using a series of microscopic partitions, successfully broke down an ordinary broom closet into one million individual enclosures measuring only 10 cubic microns in volume, each of which the researchers immediately sublet as one-bedroom efficiencies.

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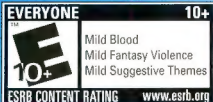
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