

THE No.1 VIDEOGAME MAGAZINE

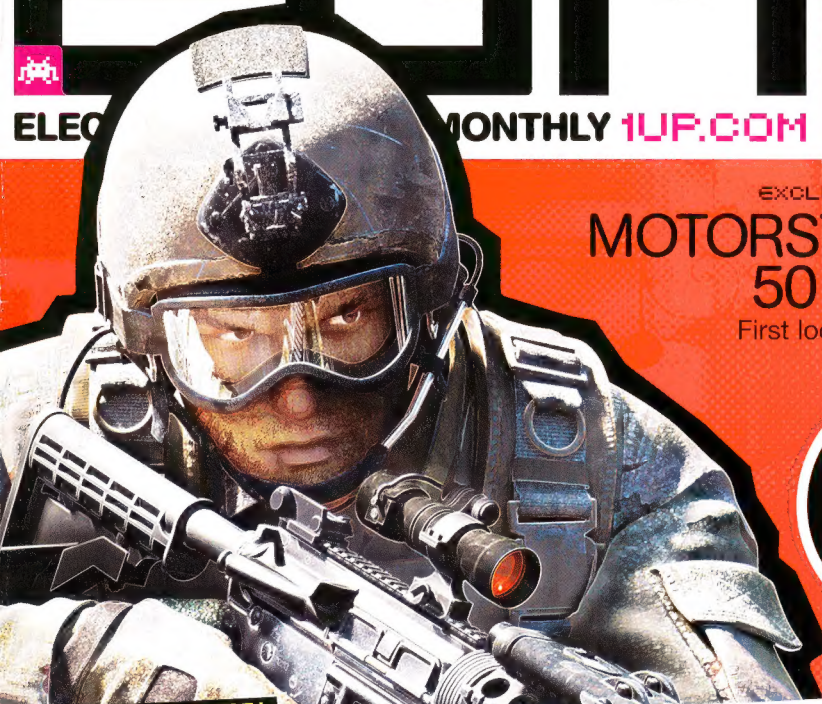


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> EDITORIAL

Big Shoes to Fill



WOW, SO THIS IS WHAT the editor-in-chief chair feels like. In case you missed the news, either on 1UP.com or in Dan Hsu's first editorial in April's *Grand Theft Auto IV* issue (*EGM* #227), regarding the 1UP Network's staff reorganization, he's moved up to the lofty editorial director position while I swiped the coveted EIC spot of both *EGM* and the "videogame" portion of 1UP.com. (Jeff Green is the PC equivalent for our sister publication, *Games for Windows: The Official Magazine*.)

While I've played a big part in the two places I've worked prior to here (*GMR* and 1UP.com), this is my first shot at taking the reins of the No. 1 videogame mag in North America. That's a lot of responsibility. Filling Shoe's shoes won't be easy; he's helmed this mag for liket, what, 40 years now and increased the readership and fan base worldwide. What's in store now that I'm the boss? I have some ideas, but I don't plan to rattle the cage just for the sake of it. *EGM* has a staff of talented, devoted people who make this magazine happen, and one person isn't any more important than another. I'll work on helping to bring you the freshest stories that celebrate games and game culture, but what you'll see take place in the pages of *EGM* will only happen with the helping hands of everyone on staff. If you've followed what I've done in the pages of *GMR* and on 1UP.com (<http://covers.1UP.com>), you should know the mag is in good hands. But even if you don't, I implore you to follow our progress over the next year and see for yourself. It should be a hell of a ride.

—James "Milkman" Mielke, EIC



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> THIS MONTH'S EGM EXTRAS

EGM.1UP.COM

Targeting download titles
Using *SOCOM: Confrontation* as a starting point, we tackle the trend of ambitious downloadable titles to see if online buying spells death for retail discs.

Cheaters, meet SuperGuides
Sucking at videogames is sad, but our SuperGuides should cheer up the sore losers—look for guides on *Dark Sector* and *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*.



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

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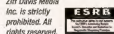
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LETTERS

> ratings revamp responses, april foolishness, and an esrb battle royale

> TRIVIAL ISSUE

This month's EGM question:

Which developer made the first console *Call of Duty* spin-off?

E-mail the answer to EGM@1UP.com

(subject head:

Trivia: EGM #228) for a chance to win something potentially awesome.



Letter of the Month

Now where did we put that beret?

Will videogames ever be considered art? I think games will need to evolve to a higher level, beyond the instinctual desire for more polygons, bigger bosses, and more realistic hookers.

In the past, art has been viewed as a catalyst for cultural change—Picasso's "Guernica," for example, shed light on the horrors of the Nazi regime.

I believe that gaming has the potential to [become a] "catalyst for social change." While pondering the *Zelda* timeline, I recognized the potential for a global catastrophe to melt Snow Peak and flood Hyrule, effectively paralleling the current struggle with global warming. The *Metal Gear Solid* series has made me more aware of the limits of humanity, sacrifice, and destiny. *E.T.* and *Custer's Revenge* on the Atari cemented my belief that there is, in fact, a hell.

I guess, in the end, I'm asking developers to be aware of what videogames have the potential to become. Games can be more than fantastical stories that show off the processing power of the newest hardware. Games like *Shadow of the Colossus* and *Okami* have proven that games are capable of stepping away from the typical genres; these examples have skirted the art house/indie aesthetic and survived. Not all gamers are mindless button mashers looking for the next big thing; some of us are actually looking to be moved in a way that only art can achieve.

And zombies. I'm always looking for zombies.

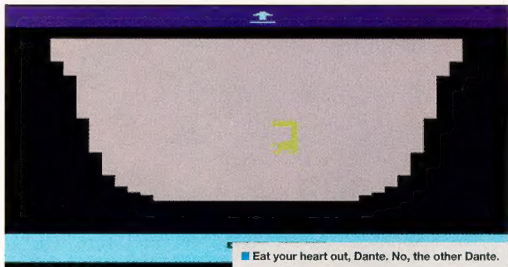
—Phil McCollam

Sorry, Phil—*Mario Paint* is the only art game we know.

Rating the raters

I read the ESRB [Entertainment Software Rating Board] special report ["How to Fix the Ratings System," EGM #227], and I have to say it was quite enlightening.

Then I read the response to it. It really seemed like [ESRB President] Patricia Vance was more into taking down [author] Jerry Bonner than sticking to the issue. The first four paragraphs are more smugness than



anything. I viewed the article as the rebuttal to a nonexistent debate. Whether Jerry stated facts or just made it up isn't the issue. There is no issue. He was just [proposing] some ideas to change a system, one that clearly needs some changes if Patricia Vance is president of it. She coldly attacked him, rather than admitting that changes could be made.

—Kyle Chandross

Wow, this head-to-head ESRB brawl inspired some heated feedback.

Here's a look from the other side:

Is Jerry Bonner's article in April's issue a joke? His argument sure seems like one. I am certainly not a hardcore gamer and don't follow the industry at all, and even I can see the flaws in every single one of his points.

The author suggests that the games should be played to completion, and if it takes too long, the ESRB should just hire more testers because he knows they can afford it. How does he know this? He was a rater, not an accountant.

He states that nine out of 10 times the raters were unaware that the current game they were reviewing was part of a series. Then he says games should not be rated based on previous games within the series. Sounds like that is already being done.

He doesn't like the fact that the ESRB keeps its raters away from the media and the publishers in case they leak information or accept bribes. I think it's a great thing that the ESRB tries to minimize such [influences]. Why does he want to talk to the media anyway? He's a rater, not a rock star. >



For writing this month's LOTM, Phil gets a copy of *E.T.* and the *Cosmic Garden*... 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!

During the past few months, my friend and I have spent our time crafting the ultimate weapon of destruction: the M41 SSR MAW/ AW Rocket Launcher as featured in *Halo*. However, instead of firing rockets, our version uses a slightly unconventional form of ammunition: potatoes. The project took about five months of work and about \$100 worth of material, but was worth every ounce of effort it took to produce.

—Kevin Rorabaugh



Want to see your own story in this space? All you have to do is tell us how hard-effing-core you are. Dish up the goods on what makes you more into games than anyone else, and send it to EGM@1UP.com, subject head: "I Am Hardcore." Remember, it doesn't count if you can't prove it, so send photos, too!



There's no way to lower the bridge and get across without inserting the crank into the correct slot!

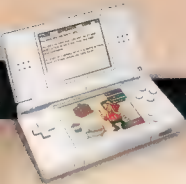
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4.5. I played *Assassin's Creed*, and it deserved the mixed rating you gave it. But on 1UP, the game now gets a B-, even though averaging the numbers you gave it equals 5.8, which should be a C. Sounds like you caved to me.

—Robert L.

Oh, is there anything more adorable than completely unfounded conspiracy theories? They just make us feel all giddy inside.

Look here, champ: *Assassin's Creed* got a B- on 1UP because the 1UP review was written by Michael, and thus equates to his original 7.0 score. It's not an average of the three EGM scores.

Keep working on those precious conspiracy theories, though. One of these days someone might use the adjective "smart" to describe you.

Blockheads

I didn't actually play *Halo*, but *Lego Halo* is the perfect way for me to get into it! I loved the *Lego Star Wars* games and have a feeling I will love this. I am going to be so excited in the fall. I really hope that they don't push the release date back, because I can't wait that long. If you guys get more screenshots, please either send them to me or put them in the magazine.

—Nick Bappe

Don't worry, Nick—we talked to developer Bungie and they agreed to send you n copy of the game early. Because it's totally done. And totally real.

Too bad this guy below doesn't believe us:

I just got finished reading the *Lego Halo* article. You had me for a second. I was working my way through the article with a look of disgust. I've always expressed fears of *Halo* becoming the next *Star Wars* (with loads of poorly made games and hundreds of books by tons of different authors), and for a moment, I felt as if my terrible prophecies were beginning to come true. Thankfully, about a third of the way through I realized it was the April issue.

—Riley Coulter

Come again? What does the April issue have to do with what looks to be Bungie's next blockbuster? In fact, not believing *Lego Halo* is real makes you a fool. An April fool.

Choice is bad?

I was thrown off by April's letter calling for "kid-friendly" cuts of games ["Self-control," EGM #227].

Despite what you seem to think, this proposal is absolutely not a "really good idea." Even disregarding how ridiculous it would be to make a "clean" version of, say, a movie intended for an audience of adults, the idea still, frankly, sucks.

I think it a bit naive to think that you can sprinkle a bit of censorship on a Mature-rated title and expect it to be fine for Junior to play, and I would seriously question the wisdom of any parent who recognizes that their child lacks the maturity to deal with crude language or sexual content but is completely willing to allow them access to what is increasingly photo-realistic violence.

—Eric Steele

Look, different people parent in different ways. Some are fine with violence but not sex, some with sex but not violence, some with naughty language but neither sex nor violence.

Would the option (note the use of the word "option") to bleed out words, pixelate boobs, or tone down blood really be that bad a thing?

"I drink your milk, Snake!"

So I'm in the kitchen making some food when my roommate calls to me, "Hey, are you going to get the new *There Will Be Blood* game?"

I said, "What the frak are you talking about?"

And he said, "The new *There Will Be Blood* game! It'll probably be pretty boring, though."

I look over and he's holding my EGM #226, and the cover says "There WILL be blood," referring to the new *Ninja Gaiden* games. I explained that to him and he said, "So why is the guy from that movie, Daniel Day-Lewis, on the cover?"

He was talking about the aged, mustachioed Snake. What an ignorant bastard my roommate is.

—Dan Cristofori

Your roommate is an ignorant bastard, yes. And you are an all-knowing dick for telling us. 🍌

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It sounds like a rant from a disgruntled employee. I can't believe you guys published this article in your magazine.

—Richard Chon

You know, in spite of all his, er, strident Vance-hating, Kyle had a point: Bonner was primarily offering suggestions from the position of someone who's had hands-on experience with the rating process. The idea was to encourage folks to take another look at the way the ESRB does things...and judging from the amount of mail we've received, it succeeded admirably.

Rating the ratings

I approve of the new review lettering system. Even though you stated it in every single issue, people just couldn't grasp that "5" meant "average." It was like asking them to divide by zero or something...it just couldn't be done in their minds. It probably pissed off a lot of game publishers as well. This is why I hate people.

With the new lettering system, it should be clear what is average, and a C still looks really good compared to the grades lots of kids get these days. Publishers will love that and will hopefully stop being such cornholes about it.

Just be prepared for the onslaught of angry readers when a superhyped game gets an A instead of an A+.

—Joe Redifer

Oh, you just know there's a dissenting opinion coming!

As a longtime subscriber to EGM, I was very disappointed to see you change your rating system. I can't help but think it was due to the fallout you received from your *Assassin's Creed* review. Giving a game a C or C- sounds much less harsh than a

> OOPS!

In last month's cover story on *Grand Theft Auto IV*, we said the game would have 14 radio stations. It will actually have at least 18. We also said the game's cell phone could be upgraded to play MP3s, letting you listen to music while you walk around town. That feature was in the version we played but won't be in the final game.

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PRESS START

> features, previews, half-dollar rappers, and other stuff



3D Render by Chuck Ernst



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Preview:
50 Cent
cashes in



PAGE
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Feature:
Gambling
gamers



PAGE
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Preview:
GTA4's
multiplayer

EGM INVESTIGATES

Destination: Déjà

Why games take us to the same places again
and again and again... By Robert Ashley

GAMES TRY TO HANG OUT WITH THE MOVIE CROWD,

hoping to catch an air of respectability by flirting with film directors and mimicking the effects-glazed action of summer blockbusters. But deep down inside, they know they don't belong in Hollywood. The best games have more in common with an exotic vacation than Michael Bay CGI-fest; they transport us to the strange shores of imaginary worlds, places, and situations not bound by the constraints of reality.

So why does it seem like every time we

go to book an in-game flight most of the available destinations are the same places we've been visiting for years? World War II beaches (*Call of Duty*, *Medal of Honor*, *Brothers in Arms*), Tolkien fantasy forests (*The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*), crime-infested cities (*Grand Theft Auto*, *Saints Row*, *True Crime*), futuristic war zones (*Halo*, *Gears of War*, *Killzone*), and a few other favored locales pop up again and again. The *Call of Duty* series recently jumped from the done-to-death backdrop of

World War II to the done-to-death backdrop of modern warfare (see: anything with Tom Clancy's name on the box). So what attracts game developers to these familiar places and themes over and over again?

The obvious answer: "You'll see the same setting again and again if it's popular, and that's because it's popular," says Robert Bowling, community manager for *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* developer Infinity Ward. "For a while, it was WWII shooter after WWII shooter. Publishers saw that they did really well, and publishers wanted to do really well." In other words, publishers supply what gamers demand. And it seems that gamers demand a steady diet of been-there-done-that. Amy Hennig, game director at *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* developer Naughty Dog, noticed the phenomenon while observing gamers in their natural habitat, online message boards: "On the NeoGAF forums [neogaf.com] a while back, somebody put up a thread with a bunch of images of games that they were excited

about, and they were all [of] people in space armor with yellow visors. I just thought, what are the chances?"

The chances are pretty good if yellow-visored space marines fly off the shelves, and *Halo's* Master Chief certainly does. With the seemingly ever-increasing production costs for games in this generation, publishers go for the sure-thing payday. "Same-y-ness is safe," Hennig says. "If something's been successful, then leveraging that success is a safer bet when we're investing so much money in these titles. Everybody needs a blockbuster these days."

Shooting sprees

Even the most overused game locales began as a fresh idea, a spark that inspired armies of imitators. "I think [these genres] work because there was something special about them initially," Bowling says. "With WWII, the special thing was that it was completely different from any modern game. You have your single-shot rifles, these more primitive weapons

➤ In games, [conflict] has to be externalized. You need something you can shoot at, something you can hit.

—Naughty Dog Game Director Amy Hennig





Old-timey shooter *Faith* and a .45 is settling on a new setting: the '20s.

that required a different kind of skill. The problem was, five or six WWII games down the road, it was no longer special because it had been done to death."

The way Frank O'Connor, writing lead at *Halo* developer Bungie Studios, sees it, it's the interactive elements that fuel the continuing popularity of certain game worlds. "All these genres have cool stuff," O'Connor says. "In a game, the stuff you use, explore, and play with is every bit as important as the atmosphere the genre provides. WWII in particular has an excellent set of stuff: clear-cut bad guys and good guys, almost absurdly well-balanced class-based weapon sets." Bowling agrees: "There are certain things that are staples, things that people really like. People just really like shooting plasma guns in sci-fi games. I dare someone to make a no-plasma-gun game fun. It can be done, but it's really going to be a battle."

Beyond the financial risks of originality, games tend to suffer from the narrowness of nerd culture, those beloved books and movies (*The Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars* series,

Blade Runner, and the like) that game developers fell in love with as adolescents. "Developers are all pretty similar in age and taste, so we're all drawing on the same influences and points of reference," Hennig says. "We all grew up on the same movies, the same comic books, and the same TV shows. The reason we see those same ideas popping up again and again is that we're all drawing on the same zeitgeist of experience, having grown up on *Star Wars*."

A love of ray guns and aliens isn't the only thing developers get from movies. They also look to them for ways to engage players in a narrative. According to Hennig, those storytelling possibilities can be thematically constricting. "All stories need to be about conflict in some way, and games need to be as well," Hennig says. "In movies the conflict can be internal or interpersonal, and so you have this huge range of possibilities and genres you can draw from. In games, that conflict has to be externalized. You need something you can shoot at, something you can hit." So where movies can fall into so many categories—comedies, romances,

historical dramas, and 100 other flavors—games only work when the lead character has something physical to fight against. It's hard to wrestle inner demons or tackle relationship troubles with an analog stick. "We almost always have to tell action-movie stories," Hennig says. "So we're already pushed into a pretty narrow channel at that point. There are only so many types of things to do. We see original games that still have conflict in them, but sometimes those don't sell as well because they're a little more off the beaten track."

Exceptions to the ruling class

But sometimes the games that venture off the beaten track *do* sell well, often well enough to throw the proven-equals-profit equation into doubt. In the years before *Halo* became the standard bearer of mainstream success in the game industry, first-person shooters (with the notable exception of Rare's *GoldenEye 007*) had a tough time in the console gaming arena. The Greek mythology epic *God of War* made the world safe for Hellenic violence, selling plenty of discs in the process. And a little game by the

➤ **People just really like shooting plasma guns in sci-fi games. I dare someone to make a no-plasma-gun game fun. It can be done, but it's really going to be a battle.**

—Infinity Ward Community Manger Robert Bowling

name of *Grand Theft Auto III* so forcefully launched the virtual crime wave that competitors still have trouble matching its success. Given these anomalies, how well can publishers predict what will and won't sell?

"Some things are pretty certain," says Deadline Games' Soren Lundgaard, director of the upcoming (and quite unconventional) Bonnie and Clyde-inspired shooter *Faith and a 45*. "*Madden 09* will probably hit EA's sales estimates. In general, the sports genre is one [of] the few constants in the games industry. And sequels to hits are pretty reliable as well. A good brand is hard to kill: *Tomb Raider* is [an] excellent example of this. I think it's safe to say some things can be predicted pretty well."

What certainly can't be predicted is the unexpected dark-horse hit. Airtight Games' Jim Deal is hard at work as the executive producer for a game that he hopes can become just that kind of outsider hit, the steampunk-styled sci-fi action game *Dark Void*. "Many games are published every year that are safe and sell a respectable amount," Deal says. "Overall, I

think the industry knows what these genres are and how to turn them out consistently. Every so often, though, something incredibly unique comes along that takes everyone completely by surprise. It doesn't fit into the old ways of thinking and sells a ton." Lundgaard believes that these surprise hits will grow more frequent and will be harder to predict: "We feel that since the industry is changing so rapidly, with new hardware cycles nearly every five years and larger games taking two to three years to create, it is, in fact, nearly impossible to predict anything. When it comes to games with new ideas and settings, a lot of the theory goes straight into the garbage bin."

As a developer hoping to catch a break with something a little bit more ambitious, Lundgaard sees positive signs in the commercial showings of recent trendsetting games. "We're excited by the success of *BioShock*," he says. "That's a great example of a game that is highly original and yet commercially successful at the same time. It is also encouraging to see a developer like Valve harnessing its

financial success to drive new and unexpected trends like *Portal*, as well as the unique graphic style and humor of *Team Fortress 2*."

New is nice, good is better

Gamers hunger for new experiences, new virtual vacation destinations to visit from the comfort of the couch. But there's an upside to a marketplace that repeats itself again and again: It encourages refinement of the core gameplay elements that make games fun. "Sometimes we're exploring and building off of ideas from other people's games, trying to change things up," says Hennig, whose *Uncharted* is a textbook example of refinement over originality. "There's a communal dialogue going on with developers where we take each other's ideas and try to build on them, and as that goes around and around, the games get better and better. That wouldn't happen as much if we were all trying to be completely new and original."

Probably not, but at least video-games' corps of space marines could take a little leave for a change. ☘

FRESH CLIP

A selection of novel game destinations

If you're on the beaches of Normandy or the bridge of the USS *Space Cliffs*, then where should games take us? On the face of it, the possibilities seem endless. Realistically, a setting needs to offer gameplay possibilities and, well, something to shoot at. So from the historical to the fantastical, we humbly suggest five settings that haven't been done to death.



Ecological apocalypse

Nuclear Armageddon is out; environmental Armageddon is in. The possibilities are dangerously fun: New York City, flooded by a sudden, massive glacial ice melt, becomes a modern Venice. London, besieged by refugees from climate-devastated former colonies, falls into Third World living conditions. Inhabitants of a submerged South Pacific island create a new city on a giant floating pile of garbage. Ruined landmarks combined with crazy weather equals an epic action setting.

Retro futures

Science-fiction games in particular suffer from a lack of creative visual ideas. For a fresh take on the future, developers could revisit how primitive people imagined it back in the past. From this steam engine-powered gear-and-cog obsessions of the Victorian era to the sleek American car industry-inspired designs of the '50s to the minimalist, early computer-age aesthetic of the '70s, the vast possibilities of sci-fi reveal themselves in the pop culture of yesterday. Think Disney's Epcot theme park or the grade Law flick *Sky Captain and the World's Biggest Airplane*—really good.



The mind of a madman

In games, we fight our wars on the battlefield, but the conflicts audiences find most compelling (in books and movies at least) take place within ourselves. Psychonauts proved that games can explore that internal space by transforming a character's personal demons into enemies to fight and worlds to explore. Imagine a thriller that instead of pitting players against a homicidal maniac lets them act out the internal struggle between his schizophrenic personalities in a world constructed from the killer's strange obsessions and troubling memories.



1968

Forget the future. We want to play the past. And what better time than the turbulent end of the 1960s? In '68 alone, the U.S. felt the sting of two political assassinations (Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy), an escalation of the war in Vietnam and violent protests in Chicago, all while American culture continued its drug-fueled ascent into an episode of groovy, that would take years to come down from. With militant antiwar protestors, black power groups, anticommunist crusaders, killer music, and a freak-out fashion sense that would pop out of the screen, '68 is fertile ground for gaming.



Delaware

Just imagine all the fun you could have if developers took the second-smallest U.S. state and turned it into a virtual sandbox. *Dead Rising*'s mall should have been set in Delaware—the state has no sales tax. You blow it, Capcom! We can't wait to collect 100 peach blossoms (the state flower) to unlock the state bird (the Blue Hen chicken) to help us find the state mineral (zillimanite). Mine enough and you'll finally be able to afford a tall glass of the state beverage: milk. Delaware's state logo is "If a good thing's first." So which developer will be first to take in millions with a game set in Delaware?

Cupcake Queen: Naomi Henderson

Aussie native Naomi Henderson knows how to make nerdy cupcakes look cool—the accomplished baker has been

watering mouths with her delectable treats inspired by classic video-games like *Super Mario Bros.* and *Pac-Man*. We recently caught up with the sweet lady to find out why she's playing with the past.



EGM: You've done a lot of old-school cupcakes. Why are you neglecting recent games? Master Chief too many for cupcakes?

Naomi Henderson: Are you saying Mario isn't as manly as Master Chief? So I actually have two reasons for doing old-school games: 1) they are 2D, which is a lot easier to translate to a cupcake top, and 2) they are pixelated so it's easier to make them look right. Plus, cupcakes and old-school games seem to go well together because they have a similar nostalgic value to them.

EGM: Do you actually eat your cupcakes or do you let them get crusty? If it's the latter, can you send them to us? We're hungry.

NH: Don't worry, they get eaten! They taste really good (if I do say so myself), so I'm happy when people eat them.

EGM: Be honest: How bad would you kick our ass in *Cooking Mama*?

NH: It is on my "to-buy" list, so I haven't played it yet. But I'm guessing I'd be pretty kick-ass. [Laughs]

EGM: OK, last question: Is the cupcake a lie?

NH: Uhh...no way. Cupcakes are the only truth.



■ Sweeter than a mushroom.



> FOREIGN OBJECT/JAPAN

Bokura no TV Game KENTEI

Mind games for nostalgia whores

Platform: PS3

Language: Full voice

Genre: Arcade

ESRB Rating: E

Developer: Namco

Publisher: Namco

Release Date: 2010

Price: \$49.99

Score: 8.5

Reviewed by: [Name]

Another Namco Museum? Ugh, no; this is better than another Namco Museum. It's a bit like all those 2D arcade games that are making a killing with the locals. But this time around, you aren't trying to synthesize your brain waves at learning how to beat a boss or "beat the game" — instead you're working to bring game skills to six different categories (shooting, action, role-playing, racing, sports, and adventure). The game starts by taking you through a history of vintage titles, absorbing you the classics, and is presented as a match with the classic matching and can compare a history of game changes through the years.

Is there any science behind this? Probably not, but it's a great idea for Namco's part. Not only have they repackaged their old home-ent arcade library yet cut down on 36 different titles and over 500 cartridges based off them, but with the way they're using TV Game Kentei, you actually want to play these again. The categories aren't simple enough — a basic fan of *AB! Baseball* won't ever come across *Mario Chess* unless the game knows history or *Shogun* — and the graphics get home and more interesting as you goes you know, I guess, and you're transported to the heart of the video arcade... about 30 years ago, which is a thing you'd be made you know.

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PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

50 Cent II

Places in the Middle East By Shane Bettenhausen

Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
Sierra

Developer:
Swordfish Studios

Release Date:
Fall 2008

Although 2005's *50 Cent: Bulletproof* (PS2/XB) effortlessly sold over a million copies, we can't imagine that it satisfied many customers. While 50 laughed all the way to the bank, his fans were left to contend with a repetitive, sloppy shooter that completely squandered its rap-royalty guest stars such as Dr. Dre and Eminem. Unfortunately, 50's flawed gaming debut wasn't some random fluke, but it was in line with the industry's status quo: Successfully marrying the video-game and hip-hop realms has always proved to be a deceptively tricky

endeavor. From the embarrassingly corny *Marky Mark: Make My Video* (Sega CD) up through 2004's fundamentally broken rap-karaoke debacle *Get on da Mic* (PS2/XB), nearly every title that attempts to tap into hip-hop has failed miserably. Even the once-promising *Def Jam* fighting series quickly met with diminishing returns. Perhaps the true problem stems from how publishers approach rap culture: 'Slapping crack-slingin', gangbanging stereotypes into lazy, derivative game concepts has yet to yield a memorable title. That legacy of failure

obviously influences 50 Cent's next (currently untitled) project, a game poised to dispel gaming's hip-hop curse by taking the rapper out of the hood and placing him and his posse in an unexpected setting—the war-torn Middle East.

So how in the hell did Fiddy and his G-Unit cronies end up firing grenade launchers at shrouded insurgents in some sandy hovel half a world away? As it turns out, 50 Cent himself demanded a change of pace for his second interactive outing. "50's involvement has been pretty exten-

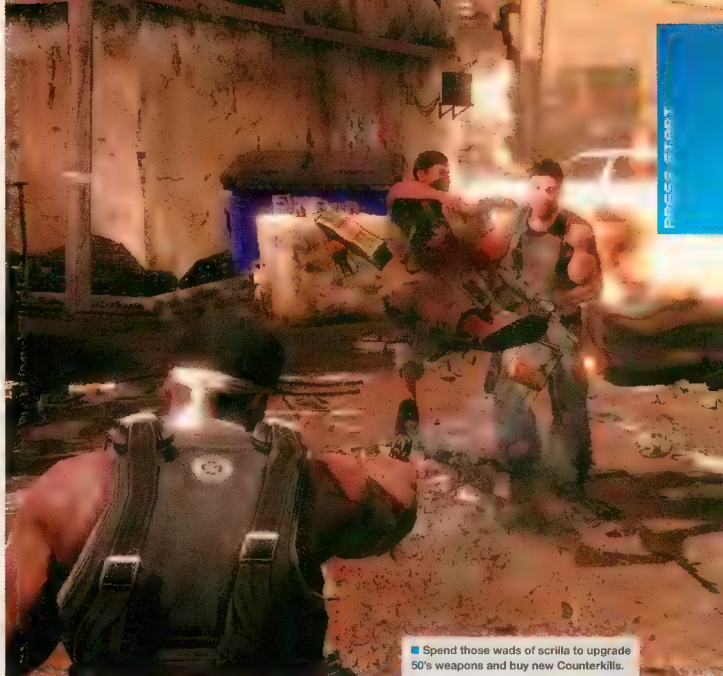
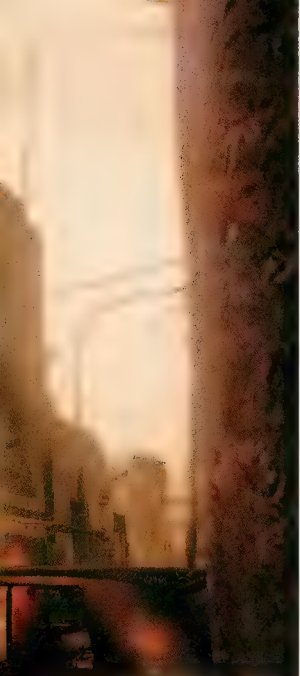


PHOTO: BULLPROOF

■ Spend those wads of scriilla to upgrade 50's weapons and buy new Counterkills.



sive this time around," says Producer Aaron Blean. "He really challenged us to create a more compelling setting, and he didn't want us to limit it to a simple run-and-gun game. He felt like he'd been there, done that already."

To even call this effort a *Bulletproof* sequel does it a disservice—while 50 and his crew portrayed fictional characters while shooting up that game's gritty urban environments, here they're simply playing themselves. That doesn't make this game's premise any less fanciful, though: 50 and his buddies fly to some vague Middle

Eastern country to play a benefit concert, get stiffed for their payment (a diamond-encrusted skull, no less), and end up embroiled in a massive firefight with several warring factions over the aforementioned bling. Along the way, expect plenty of pithy quips (all recorded by 50 and his posse) and, according to the producer, perhaps even a little romance (50 falls for a shorty in a burka?). Are the G-Unit guys in over their heads when it comes to dabbling in international conflict? Probably, but it's definitely a fun and unexpected "fish out of

water" turn for Curtis & co. to take. "Basically, just expect a fun crime story," Blean says. "Think of it as *Three Kings* meets *Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels*."

It's immediately obvious that this game has more going for it than *Bulletproof* ever did, and that's largely due to the new people and technology behind it. Developer Swordfish Studios (creators of the underrated *Cold Winter* for PS2) are using the popular Unreal Engine 3 (the same tech behind games such as *Gears of War* and *Mass Effect*) to forge a flashy,

pick-up-and-play third-person shooter. Although the title's looks impress even at this early stage, getting the feel right remains a paramount concern. "I think the biggest complaint we heard about the first game was that its gameplay was too simplistic," Blean says. "But this time, we're really emphasizing quality [and] trying to make fundamentally great gameplay."

That "great gameplay" clearly borrows elements from other established titles, whether it's the context-sensitive cover and blindfire from *Gears of War* or the new "Gangster Fire" superslow-mo ability nicked from *Max Payne*. And the promise of all-new vehicle-based levels opens the door for all sorts of typical 50 Cent experiences—expect to commandeer choppers, turrets, and Humvees this time around. A few elements from *Bulletproof* do persist, though: 50 can still pull off his brutal Counterkill melee reversals (although they now require that you follow onscreen commands à la *God of War*) and his G-Unit posse (Tony Yayo, Lloyd Banks, and DJ Whoo Kid) still offer much-needed backup. This time, however, another member of your crew always has your back, either as an A.I.-controlled partner or via drop-in/drop-out online co-op play through the campaign. "Expect some co-op puzzles," Blean says. "You will find these locked areas that require you to call over your homey to open up inaccessible areas, boost you up to a higher area, and so on." The developer is also toying with the idea of giving Tony, Lloyd, and DJ Whoo Kid character-specific weapons and Counterkills.

With its unexpected setting and admirable commitment to delivering solid gameplay, 50's new game stands poised to outclass his previous effort with ease. Yet the game's out-of-left-field concept could ignite some unwelcome controversy for publisher Sierra—based on the setting alone, industry watchdogs could potentially accuse it of cultural insensitivity. Sierra and Swordfish Studios hope to make it clear that this isn't a game about gunning down Iraqi soldiers or civilians. "It's a purely fictional setting, with no real dictators and nothing that overtly references any religion," Blean says. "We want to use warfare as a backdrop, but you'll find nothing that crosses the line or offends anyone." **A**



■ Tony Yayo: Big on self-promotion, not so concerned with desert camouflage.

50 CENT: WOULD YOU BELIEVE?

Trust us—we know that the concept behind 50 Cent's new game sounds awfully far-fetched, but everything this guy does seems to defy everyday expectations. (He survived nine gunshot wounds before even having a hit single, remember?) So, before you dismiss the G-Unit's Middle Eastern shootout as unadulterated nonsense, see how it stacks up against these other seemingly unbelievable 50 Cent rumors.



Rumor No. 1: Is 50 juicing?

A recent report by New York District Attorney David Soares alleges that 50 Cent purchased both illegal steroids and human growth hormone, using the alias "Michael Jordan" to receive shipments. **Cleve**

Believable? Sure, the 50's always crazy ripped. That said, we're not so sure that Mary J. Blige (who's also named in Soares' report) has been hitting theroids.



Rumor No. 2: Is 50 done rapping?

Last year, 50 went toe-to-toe with Kanye West in a highly publicized battle for CD sales supremacy when both egomaniacal artists dropped new discs on the same day. 50 claimed that he'd possibly give up rapping if good if he were defeated.

Believable? Not a chance: Kanye's *Graduation* handily trumped 50's *Curtis*, but you can still expect to hear a new 50 Cent CD. *Before I Self Destruct*, in the next year. He has said that *Destruct* "could be his last," but we've heard that before.



■ 50's new game revives *Bulletproof's* Counterkill system, which allows you to disarm or execute foes at close range in brutal, sadistic ways. Expect at least 20 all-new, all-grisly Counterkills here, and this time they require more than merely a single, well-timed button press—you'll now have to follow multipart onscreen commands.



■ Despite the setting, don't expect to hear dueling ouds—50 and the G-Unit guys will provide a full album's worth of fresh tracks.



Rumor No. 3: Is 50 vitamin-rich?

Last year, when Coca-Cola purchased Vitamin Water manufacturer Glacéau for \$4.1 billion, 50 Cent (a major Glacéau shareholder who even inspired his own flavor of Vitamin Water) reportedly made out like a bandit.

Believable? Yep, 50 made at least \$400 million from the sale, and he even rhymes about his unbelievably good fortune in "I Get Money," saying: "I take quarter water sold it in bottles for two bucks," but Coca-Cola came and bought it for billions? What the f---?



Rumor No. 4: Is 50 a serious actor?

50 didn't venture far from his comfort zone for his autobiographical role as a gangbanger in 2005's *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, and nobody saw his turn as a shell-shocked veteran in 2006's *Home of the Brave* (seriously, it only made \$51,708 at the U.S. box office), but we hear that his big film break is still in the works.

Believable? Unlikely as it may seem, look for 50 Cent alongside living legends Al Pacino and Robert De Niro in the hard-boiled police drama *Righteous Kill* this September.

Rumor No. 5: Is 50 a self-help author?

50's already proven himself to be a capable coauthor, collaborating on both a memoir (*From Pieces to Weight*) and eight G-Unit novellas, but we're hearing that his next literary project will be a self-help book due out this fall.

Believable? The idea of Fiddy dispensing sagacious wisdom may seem patently absurd, but it's seriously going to happen: He's teaming up with Robert Greene, author of *The 48 Laws of Power*, to create an urban update dubbed *The 50th Law*; he's getting shot nine times the first step to absolute power?





Little Big Year

By Scott Steinberg

Today's most exciting game-biz developments aren't necessarily taking place on a single system. And they may bear as little resemblance to traditional gaming as Atari's first coin-ops did with the mechanical amusements so prevalent decades prior. Here's your cheat sheet to 2008's most important trends, along with our predictions for when they'll nab—or miss—mainstream critical mass....

On the download

From all-star originals (*Super Stardust HD*, *PixelJunk Monsters*) to killer updates (*Bombberman Live*), gamers are officially hot-wired.

Defining moment: March 2009, when the fiscal-year dust settles and we find out if, for the first time in 25 years, publishing a game becomes within everyone's reach.

They might be giants

Independent titles—quirky, low-budget outings like *Everyday Shooter*—are finally offering the interactive equivalent of indie films.

Defining moment: Nintendo's WiiWare (due this May) and Xbox Live's amateur-friendly Community Games platform (coming in the fall) are destined to either reshape the industry or see small-fry development short-circuit permanently.

The personal touch

From *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*'s user-generated levels to upcoming platformer *LittleBigPlanet*'s community features, gaming is all about you now: Get ready to connect, commiserate, and even create. Enthusiasts? Hell, this year, we're more like pioneers.

Defining moment: When the second round of word-of-mouth buzz surrounding amateur-made expansions restores a previously played-out title to the top-10 charts—or when tomorrow's next legendary designer goes straight from the bedroom to executive table.



Scott Steinberg is managing director of game-industry consulting firm Embassy Multimedia Consultants (www.embassymulti.com) and author of the new how-to book *Get Rich Playing Games* (www.getrichgaming.com).

THE BIG ONES

A 111 look at the most-wanted titles

Gears of War 2

XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios
• Fall 2008

Now that Microsoft has officially announced Delta Squad's second mission, the next few months will surely be full of *Gears 2* speculation. Can we expect prettier visuals? Duh. More multiplayer options? Naturally. A narrative that doesn't ooze cheese? Damn, we sure hope so—*Gears*' story and dialogue were anything but award-winning. Perhaps comic-book scribe Joshua Ortega (he's penned the likes of *Spider-Man* and *Batman*) can help. Popular website ComicBookResources.com recently reported that Ortega is working on the script for this sequel. Even though most of his work has been with the funny books, he couldn't produce anything worse than what we got in the original, right?



Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

PS3 • Konami • June 2008

Sony's Blu-ray may have won the format war, but it hasn't exactly won the heart of Hideo Kojima. The *Metal Gear* series creator shocked many when he admitted that Blu-ray's 50GB of storage capacity (which is huge by today's disc standards) wasn't quite enough for this PS3 stealth-action game. It forced the *MGS4* development team to compress certain aspects of data, thus diminishing their quality.



Street Fighter IV

PS3/XB360 • Capcom • 2008

While we've only seen Capcom's anticipated fighter running on arcade units, it's a sure bet that PS3 and 360 editions are in the works (as we all know, the coin-op scene ain't exactly boomin' these days). But don't be surprised if it lands on other systems as well. In an interview with *Wired.com*, *SF4* Producer Yoshinori Ono mentioned that the game could totally run on the Wii (with downgraded graphics, naturally) and more. "We could make it on Game Boy, for all we know, right now," he said. "As long as the rules are the same, that can be independent of the visuals. So we're not going to be limited by any hardware specs; we're going to aim as wide as possible."

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The Aftermath

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SPECIAL REPORT

Put Up or Shut Up

A new gaming-gambling service lets you play for keeps. By Robert Ashley

Keeping a close eye on WorldGaming's operations, some players can see how the site will fare. Financial success or failure depends on the decisions made by its investors, but it's hard to see how it will fare.

EVER THIS VERY MINUTE, in college towns and living rooms across the country, savvy gamers are putting their money on the table, challenging their roommates, friends, and sometimes enemies to gaming competitions for cash. Some will win. Some will lose. Some will drop out of school and spend their lives doing nothing between shifts at a restocking plant. Such is the fate of all humans, subject to the vicissitudes of chance in the struggle of the fittest world.

These gamblers, now businessmen, have appeared in this scene helping to capitalize on the gaming public's taste for gambling by fostering play-for-keeps matches across the internet. In one such company, Toronto-based WorldGaming, has its way, it will continue to provide online gamers with the same thrill that board games once offered the live scene.

I had many great business ideas, but WorldGaming was a prescient one.

ing service that will allow gamers to play-for-keeps on a range of Xbox 360 and PS3 games (plus some PC and Xbox 1/2s), when it launches this April, began in a pizza parlor and beer-stained college bachelor pad. "We were playing cash for keeps," says William Levy, president and founder of the company. "We always did. That's how we grew up, with the concept." One day, Levy and fellow founders Zack Zeldin noticed that while they were busy being mean to each other in person over games of Madden, a friend with a laptop was absorbed in online games, losing money to people all over the world. Inspiration struck. "We thought, 'Hey, we can do what we're doing here online,'" Levy says.

Play Tough

Unlike for many kinds of live play, Levy and Zack Zeldin used a pay-to-play model.

brought into action. Upon launch, WorldGaming will offer several options for gamers eager to put their money for confident that their skills will pay. Using a social-networking interface that any Facebook addict will find familiar, the site will allow users to challenge each other to staked games—compatible titles include Halo 3, Resistance Fall of Man, MotorStorm, and most of the great EA Sports games—from some change \$5 stakes to bank-breaking \$1,000 bets. WorldGaming makes its share by taking a 10 percent cut of the winner's pot, up to \$25.

But if it's not all about the money, "gambling for years has been based on bragging rights. The better man and said that kind of thing," Levy says. "We really based the service around the competitive spirit and getting people to challenge each other to spur their skill and competitiveness." In that spirit,

▶ You could be spending your money on meth or prostitutes... You're definitely not going to be making any money. With us, you actually have the chance.

—Advertisement for WorldGaming.com

WorldGaming users will be able to play challenge matches without putting money on the table, and the site will sponsor a number of free-entry tournaments for prizes. Perhaps the site's greatest feature is its age limit: 18 or above. "With Xbox Live, one of the biggest frustrations for me is that I'll do a ranked match in *Madden*, and next thing I know, I'm playing some 12-year-old kid who's screaming into the microphone the whole time," Levy says. "Here on our site, you know you're going to be playing against people who take the game seriously."

But let's face it: The ability to bet money on games will define the site. And at a time when games still face so much negative press and political pressure for sex and violence, do we really need to throw gambling into the mix? For players who develop an unhealthy game-gambling habit, the site will feature a page of suggestions for responsible gaming and the ability to self-impose spending limits—not exactly the strongest deterrents for abusers. "We're talking about adults," says WorldGaming CEO Alex Jost. "You could be spending your money on meth or prostitutes. And with all that stuff, you're definitely not going to be making any money. With us, you actually have the chance."

Going legit

And then there's the issue of cooperation from the game publishers and console makers on which WorldGaming's service depends. Part of the reason the site seems to be ahead in the online game-gambling race is that, unlike several competitors, WorldGaming receives win/loss reports directly from game servers instead of relying on players to honestly report the outcome of their matches. "We're only offering games that provide gaming data directly from the servers," Levy says. "We've built a proprietary technology that uses the match criteria created on our site and goes and retrieves that information. By the time you come back to the computer after the match is over, it's updated on [the site]. It's that technology that will, hopefully, prevent hackers from cheating the system." Since the information really is coming directly from the server, there's no time for someone to hack in, Levy says.

Right now, the games on offer at WorldGaming broadcast this data to the public, but what happens if Microsoft, EA, or Sony decides that they don't appreciate a third-party

company making money—gambling money at that—from their well-known franchises? "The NFL certainly doesn't mind the fantasy leagues or gambling that go along with pro football," Zeldin says. "It just boosts their profits." And if they call in the lawyers? "This is open territory," Levy says. "We've had a lot of legal advice, and there are no real legal grounds for there to be resistance."

Even if WorldGaming clears those hurdles, a few faltering competitors in the game-gambling arena suggest that creating a space where enough gamers are willing to put up their dough and play may be difficult.

"When we first opened the beta, we were using cash," says Mike Patak, CEO of GorillaGamer.com. "But we

realized that gamers are not really cash-rich." After launching over a year ago on a play-for-pay model similar to WorldGaming (though not nearly as slick), GorillaGamer recently switched to a system that allows players to bet points instead of cash, redeeming their competitive earnings for prizes like Subway and Pizza Hut gift certificates. "We noticed that in order to create the critical mass of players necessary to always find a user ready to play, [it] is pretty difficult when you use cash. Cash had an allure, but it's just so hard to get gamers with money in their pockets who are willing to dump it on challenges losing \$20 is a lot to these kids." The guys at WorldGaming are getting otherwise. ☞



■ Wanna bet? Once you sign up for an account at WorldGaming.com, you can troll game-specific lobbies for worthy opponents or enter massive tournaments. The site holds your bets and winnings, but you can cash out at any time.

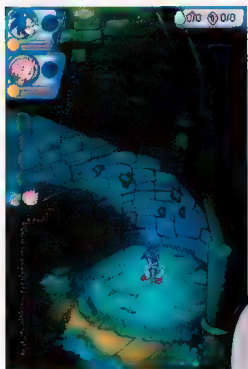
IT'S A GAMBLE?

The fine line between games of chance and skill.

WorldGaming President William Levy contends that betting on a game of skill isn't like other forms of gambling. "It's not like betting on a sports game," he says. "It's your skills that are going to win you the money, and it makes the experience that much more exciting." But that excitement may get some gamers into trouble. Addiction experts contend that when it comes to compulsive gambling, whether it's skill or chance, it's all the same. "What the people in clinical research would say is that there is no difference," says Bruce Roberts, executive director of the California Council on Problem Gambling, a nonprofit that directs problem gamblers to treatment. "What you're playing is not the problem. What makes it become problematic is the impulse control system of each individual. A compulsive gambler will bet on anything."

Roberts suggests that gamers who think they might have a gambling problem answer the following two questions: 1) Have you ever lied to anyone about your gambling? 2) Have you ever gambled longer or spent more than you planned? "Yes" to either one of those is a clear indicator that they need to do a more expanded screening, Roberts says. You can find the screening test at www.caiprobblegaming.org.

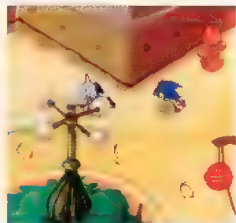
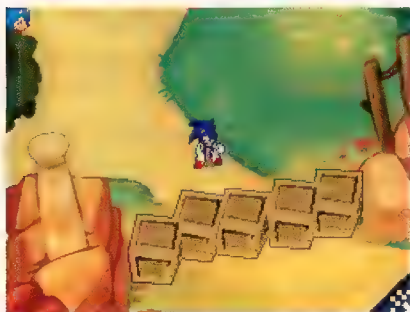
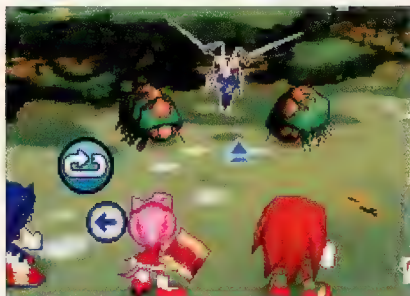
Regardless of WorldGaming's stance on the gambling issue, its service won't be available in a number of states because of legal restrictions: you're SOL if you want to bet on your skills in Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Montana, Tennessee, and Vermont.



PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS AND INFO

Sonic Chronicles: THE DARK BROTHERHOOD

BioWare turns Sega's speedster into one serious roleplayer By Jeremy Parish



Platform: DS
Publisher: Sega
Developer: BioWare
Release Date: Fall 2008

SONIC EQUALS SPEED. From the very beginning, Sega's prickliest mascot has always been about break-neck pacing and lightning reflexes. So just how is a *Sonic* role-playing game supposed to work? These types of games are usually more a test of your patience than your hand-eye coordination. But then, *Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood* is the work of BioWare, a company that's built its reputation on the likes of *Baldur's Gate* and *Knights of the Old Republic*—RPGs that many people rank among the best work anyone's ever done with the *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Star Wars* franchises, respectively. And even at this early stage, *Chronicles* is looking like a more enjoyable take on the series than its recent console instalments.

That's quite a feat for a turn-based RPG. Yes, turn-based—Sonic and three of his friends stumble into random battles and take turns putting the hurt on foes through menu-driven battles. The fights are quick and streamlined though, much like those in *Super Mario RPG: Legend of the Seven Stars* (SNES). As in Nintendo's great-granddaddy of mascot role-playing spin-offs, many attacks can be enhanced (or defended against) with properly timed inputs. As characters gain experience, they learn

special techniques whose development players determine by allocating skill points—a process that should be familiar to fans of BioWare's most recent hit, *Mass Effect* (XB360).

And it wouldn't be a BioWare game without tons of branching dialogue paths. *Chronicles* impressively streamlines *Mass Effect*'s conversation system by reducing dialogue options to simple icons. Tapping an icon will cause Sonic to respond appropriately: A normal Sonic is a neutral remark, while a smirking hedgehog is an "attitude" response. Other conversational icons include question marks (to explore a subject in depth), ellipses (Sonic ruminates on the topic at hand), and additional characters (to discuss amongst his party). Although we're told the core story has a single outcome, trying out different dialogue options will unlock various side quests—not to mention a romance subplot, another BioWare staple.

Outside of battles and conversa-

tions, *Chronicles* demonstrates a noble effort to mix the series' trademark action with an RPG overworld through isometric, hand-drawn environments graced with dynamic 3D elements. The overall effect is again reminiscent of *Mario RPG*, but with more loops and ring collecting—think of it as *Sonic 3D Blast* (Saturn) done right. Tapping special icons will cause Sonic to jump or dash in specific areas, and certain segments require the party to split up to solve environmental puzzles.

In short, it looks like a clever fusion of two very different game types, benefitting from BioWare's refined RPG sensibilities. Our only concern with *Chronicles* is that it fits into the series' main continuity. Last we saw Sonic, he was making out with a human girl, and BioWare's already shown a willingness to explore interspecies love scenes with blue creatures. So brace yourself for some potentially uncomfortable moments. **A-**

➤ **It looks like a clever fusion of two very different game types, benefitting from BioWare's refined RPG sensibilities.**



> PREVIEW: MULTIPLAYER HANDS-ON

Grand Theft Auto **IV**

Rockstar's superseries finally pulls onto the superhighway

Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
Rockstar

Developer:
Rockstar North

Release Date:
April 2008

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV IS KINDA A BIG DEAL for some obvious reasons. It's the epic open-world series' first entry on PS3 and Xbox 360, it's gorgeous, it brings the action back to a beefed-up Liberty City (the GTA world's version of New York City made popular in *GTA3*)—but perhaps the most notable component is its online multiplayer, a first for the series on consoles.

GTA games have featured cross-system multiplayer before. The two PSP entries, *Liberty City Stories* and *Vice City Stories*, each had deathmatch, racing, and capture the flag variants. And Jeronimo Barrera, VP of development at Rockstar, says that while the developers had fun with that multiplayer and learned what worked in the GTA world with it, they were limited by the system's power. That's no longer the case. "We had planned multiplayer from the day we saw the specs of the consoles we'd be working on for this game," he says. "They would let us make something that was sufficiently interesting to stand alongside the

single-player game." According to Barrera, doing this means multiplayer must offer the "freedom to do what you want, but [with] consequences for your actions; a living, breathing world; and immersive gameplay scenarios that feel really cinematic but give the player plenty of choices."

This starts with the identical setting. ("With all the multiplayer modes, we made sure to integrate the biggest single-player character into the multiplayer, that being Liberty City," says Barrera.) As for delivering a compelling story, Barrera says co-op helps fill that role by giving lesser characters expanded roles: "We approached multiplayer in the same way we worked on sequels on follow-up games in the PS2 era of games—multiplayer and co-op are both supposed to complement single-player, exist in the same world, but not be part of the same story. Co-op has a greater story component than [the rest of] multiplayer, [featuring] characters referred to in the single-player game."

As of now, we know the game will

include co-op play, deathmatch and team DM, races, and some specific team-based modes. Does that mean a massively multiplayer online game is the next step? "[An MMO] isn't a natural evolution," Barrera says. "It's a completely different game experience—just as multiplayer is a completely different experience from single-player, and in some ways co-op is different from multiplayer as well. We will always explore new ideas and ways to give the player the ultimate GTA experience, but it has to be unique, and it has to work within the core values of the game—that is what makes the game fun and what makes it what it is. We think we have achieved that with this first proper execution of multiplayer, but we are always looking to develop and learn from the experience of making games."

Rockstar wasn't ready to show off all its multiplayer plans at a recent hands-on demo, but we did get some time with the aforementioned modes. Take a look at what we found out, with our impressions on each...



▶ TEAM DEATHMATCH

The setup: This mode offers what you'd expect: Up to 16 players battle it out, with teams in any configuration (we played with a max of eight throughout the session). Players create a character (no story-mode characters here) with a quick editor. The host can then set multiple match options, including available weapons, police presence, traffic and pedestrian density, weather, time of day, and location inside the city (be it a confined portion or the whole damn thing), among others.

Execution: Old-standby mode Team Deathmatch seemed like a good place to dip my toe into GTA4's multiplayer pool, seeing as surprises, at least in terms of general rules, would be kept to a minimum. And it played out as such: Eight of us split into two teams of four. The first match was on Happiness Island (think Ellis Island), and our back-and-forth battle usually centered at

the statue's base, with shootouts focused on the stairs. We continued our matches in different locations. A solid strategy I picked up on quickly: Vehicles make a difference, because teams can split up and go for drive-bys or quick escapes. It's hard to aim accurately from a car, but the mobility makes up for it. A wonderful X factor is the po-po, who essentially act as a third faction you have to worry about should you piss them off (highly likely since the bullets rain). In one tense match on an island known as Charge off of Algonquin (the game's take on Manhattan), the cops and their cruisers outnumbered the players at least two to one.

Best GTA moment: Seeing the blip of an enemy through some trees from a two-story-high roof, grabbing a rocket launcher, and then letting her rip for a long-distance splattering.



■ Niko won't have you reaching for the sky in multiplayer: You'll play with created characters.

▶ GTA RACE

The setup: The whole of Liberty City again serves as the backdrop, in this mode, with race routes winding through various boroughs and accommodating all modes of transportation, including boats and choppers. The host wields the power to choose the vehicle type, weapons, police, traffic, and more. The goal is simply to be the first (of up to 16) to cross the finish line, hitting all the checkpoints on the way.

Execution: The races may be straightforward, but the openness is divine. The ride you start with by no means has to be the one you finish with. In one match, everyone ditched their initial putt-putting mopeds within minutes. In fact, it'd be an accomplishment if any original jalopy makes it to the end. With weapons enabled (which puts ordnance icons throughout the route you can run over to pick up) and collisions always encouraged, the action rarely focuses on precision driving. Hell, after falling hopelessly behind, Rockstar's Barrera seemed to take a perverse pleasure in sitting up a makeshift

roadblock of abandoned cars at the end of a bridge, and then waiting, weapon drawn, for the next lucky racer. A pain in the ass, no doubt, but a fun one. And the result? I wound up finishing the last 100 yards on foot. Also impressive: jets taxiing and then taking off through the airport race route.

The fun of traveling by air or sea, however, turned out to be more muted. Controlling the choppers was easier than expected (and made for some impressive under-bridge needle-threading), but the wide-open airspace made for some lonely, if visually stunning, stretches. Meanwhile, the boats, even the "fast" ones, felt slow and floaty, and in terms of replayability, the water races had a short-term, one-and-done feel.

Best GTA moment: Corner-cutting is encouraged. But not over a fire hydrant, did so on the first turn with a motorcycle and got knocked off the bike—and 10 feet into the air—from the resulting geyser. At least the guy behind me took a spill as well.



■ Crouching in multiplayer makes that pesky name above your head disappear; take cover, and the dot disappears as well.

X COPS 'N' CROOKS

The setup: A team of crooks and a team of cops face off. The crooks' goal is to get their boss (randomly assigned among the players) to an extraction vehicle and make a clean getaway. But while the crooks can see their goal on the map, the police can't; they just see the potential escapees. If they manage to kill the boss, it's game over for the bad guys.

Execution: Multiplayer really hits its stride here. Your goal is pretty clear-cut, but the strategies are all over the place. Does the boss ride with the full entourage? Should they split up? Do the police make a beeline toward the boss icon, or do they make a guess at where he's going and lay an ambush there? Since the crooks can't see the police (or hear them provided the fuzz shut off the siren), sometimes the best bet is to hitch a ride on a crotch rocket and go for broke. A nice wrinkle, though, is that the size of your bonus (which you use to level up) is based on the number of crooks that escape.

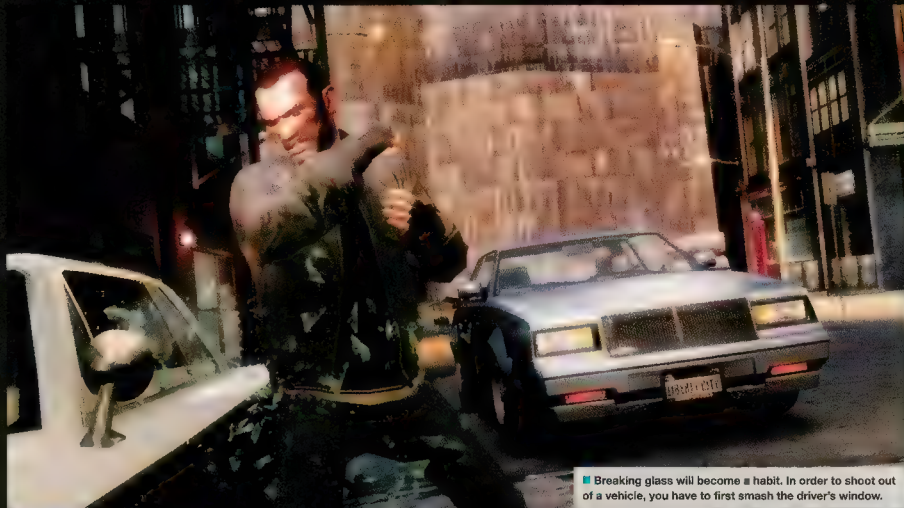
With these ground rules set, a 16-player cap, and the suite of adjustable variables, the action becomes what you make of it. When playing as the crooks, my team of four preferred the split-up method, with one guy staying with the boss and the other two playing decoy (but if you look closely, you can see the boss icon). And a skilled driver may be all you need—if you're on a nimble pace, it might be better to keep driving than to stop for that set of body armor (which, along with weapons, is marked on your map) and risk having the cops hop out of their hiding place the moment you stumble. One strategy we

constantly used involved putting the game's GPS to good use, with one of the players—ideally a passenger—taking the time to mark the extraction point on the main map screen with a waypoint while the onboard computer continually adjusts the ideal route on each teammate's minimap. And in our matches the crooks always started on foot in a remote, car-free location, meaning the action began as a frantic scramble for a ride (and yeah, that can be anything motorized you find).

As the cops, who start in a police cruiser, our first order of business was always to shut off that damn siren. No need to give ol' Johnny Lawbreaker a heads up. Then we'd usually split up, because that can be a lifesaver if a group gets a jump on the boss—should the head honcho manage to squirrel his way out and flee around the corner, he could find himself making his getaway right into the waiting backup group. And the good guys are by no means relegated to official vehicles. If you want to grab a run-down sedan, and do the undercover thing for a surprise attack, have at it. For the cops, it's worth it for at least one player to grab a rocket launcher just in case the escape vehicle is a chopper. A last-second *Black Hawk Down*-esque scenario may be a long shot, but in this world, you do have that prayer.

Best GTA moment: A car hitting inches below my feet as I climbed my way up a ladder toward an extraction point. Said the laughing opposing driver over my headset: "You have no idea how close that was."





■ Breaking glass will become a habit. In order to shoot out of a vehicle, you have to first smash the driver's window.

> CO-OP

The setup: This mode is comprised of stand-alone story-based missions for up to four players. Hangman's Noose, the mission we played (the game will ship with at least five, maybe more), involved a minor character from the single-player story, Kenny Petrovic. He has just landed at the airport...with a contingent of SWAT personnel waiting on the tarmac. The players are charged with clearing out the area enough for him to disembark and then transporting him to the extraction point alive.

Execution: This mission starts at a gallop. With a fleet of armored police waiting, we were forced to hold our position and fight them off, making extensive use of the cover system thanks to the scattered luggage carts. Speaking of which, nabbing cover grew easier over time, especially when I wasn't surrounded by too many objects—it tends to be a "sticky" feature with an annoying tendency to latch on to nearby cover spots when you just want to be cover-free. Once we cleaned things up enough, Petrovic was ready to go. Our initial strategy was to grab one of the law's armored trucks for a low-risk (relatively speaking) escape. And that method worked. The only hang-up for the first few matches was waiting for the stragglers to arrive at the extraction point, a baseball field across town.

As we replayed the mission (probably a dozen times between trying all the difficulty modes and restarts), we kept testing different strategies, like having

guys immediately peeling off and grabbing the sports car and motorcycle conveniently parked around the corner. Using those vehicles often resulted in our VIP's death, because, as you'd imagine, the cops love taking potshots at the exposed passenger. And I swear that on higher difficulties those guys turn into sharpshooters with a grudge against tires. I'd always think, "OK, I can deal" when riding on three tires and a rim, but as soon as I hit a turn and spun out, I'd be looking for new wheels as those co-gooding vultures swarmed. Another teammate loved going for the helicopter at the end of the airfield we started on. But experimentation was the name of the game. An effective technique we employed was putting Petrovic and the lead player in one car, with the others following in an armored truck, acting as a shield.

My hope is that the other co-op missions have some more varied, multi-part goals besides a simple point A to point B extraction. But fleshing out some of the minor characters with these missions, complete with quickie-cut-scenes, is a good idea. Playing as a handful of those named characters instead of just being the hired help would be appreciated as well.

Best GTA moment: Riding shotgun in a helo for some air support, and then realizing I'd be better served on the ground. I thought we were close enough to the highway to make a clean landing, but my leap ended with me nicking the concrete overpass and falling to the ground. Wasted, indeed. ☹





PREVIEW EXCLUSIVE SCREENS

Fallout

Field guide to the irradiated wild By Sean Molloy

Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
Bethesda

Developer:
Bethesda

Release Date:
Fall 2008

WHEN ARCHAEOLOGISTS FROM ONE OF EARTH'S ALTERNATE FUTURES sent us decaying scraps from a long-buried guide to surviving the postapocalypse (science fiction is complicated!), we couldn't make heads or tails of what we were reading. Luckily, *Fallout 3* executive producer and future-wasteland role-playing game expert Todd Howard was kind enough to provide annotation and commentary.

On the Subject of Companionship

Fact: It's dangerous to go it alone. Your chances for survival skyrocket when you travel with loyal and hardy companions, and few companions are as loyal and hardy as man's best friend, *Canis lupus familiaris*—the domestic dog.

In *Fallout 3*, your best friend goes by the endearing name of Dogmeat,

whom you meet early on in a random encounter. "A bunch of raiders have killed Dogmeat's owner, and he's going after them," says Howard. "You can help, and then Dogmeat will come with you if you ask him.... He's pretty badass. If he can get up on an enemy, he does a good job of tearing them apart, and he can take a lot of damage. We don't want you to have to 'manage' his health too much, as keeping him alive is not what the game is about."

Dogmeat's tricks extend past tearing open jugular veins. Order him to scour an area for ammo or drugs and

he'll leave your side, attacking raiders and other wasteland dwellers if necessary, to search for the stuff. If he can't fulfill your request, he'll come back after a few hours of game time.

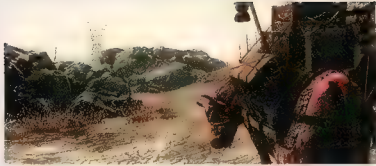
"Sorry to say, but Dogmeat can die," warns Howard, "and once he's dead...he's dead. He can die going off to look for things for you. But again, we make him pretty tough; you have to be pretty careless for him to die."

On the Subject of Ghouls

Fact: In order to survive in the radioactive wastes, one must be familiar with the hierarchy of ghoul society and

➤ **I actually spend time just wandering the wasteland with my dog, listening to the radio...good times."**

—*Fallout 3* Executive Producer Todd Howard



Take care of your puppy pal Dogmeat or expect *I Am Legend*-style heartbreak.

the subspecies' unique physiology.

At the lowest tier sits your garden-variety ghoul. "People like you and me," says Howard, "but irradiated with rotting flesh." Unpleasant to look at or smell, sure, but—in most cases—generally rational.

On the next tier sits the feral ghoul. "[These] got hit so hard [with radiation] that their brains melted. They've become rampaging beasts," warns Howard, indicating that the best form of communication is a well-timed shotgun blast to the earlike orifice.

"There are also people that got hit so hard that they've become Glowing Ones," says Howard, explaining the third tier of ghoulhood. "These are feral ghouls that glow and emit radiation. They create some interesting battles, because the radiation they give off heals the other ghouls around them." And *harms* you—naturally.

Luckily, waste wanderers don't face the ghoul threat alone—and it's not uncommon to see one of your enemies locked in combat with another. "There are a few great ways to get enemies to fight for you," says Howard. "Many enemies have a 'brain' that they use to tell friend from foe. On giant insects, it's their antennae. On robots, they have a brain module. Destroying this body part will make them frenzy and attack whomever.

The other way is by hacking computers, robots, or turrets to make them fight for you."

On the Subject of Sanity

Fact: The wastes can be lonely—and a man might succumb to the voices in his head if it weren't for the voices coming from his wrist.

"Your Pip-Boy—the wrist-mounted device you start with—has a radio receiver built in," says Howard. "The main radio station is Galaxy News Radio, complete with a DJ that talks about what's going on in the wasteland and plays music from the 1940s—stuff from the Ink Spots, Bob Crosby, and more. I actually spend time in the game just wandering the wasteland with my dog, listening to

the radio...good times."

But your radio serves another purpose. In the wake of the apocalypse, several poor souls set up emergency radio beacons in the (futile) hope that someone might find them and save them. While many operators have long since expired, their signals—and their loot stashes—persist. "So you may find a signal on your radio, and it's full of static," says Howard, "but as you get closer to the source, the static goes away and the signal gets stronger. So you kind of track the signal by listening to the static come and go, like a game of 'hot/cold.'..."

(Scorch marks shaped suspiciously like claws rendered the remaining pages of the guide unreadable.) ☛

> YOU'RE SPECIAL!

Also unearthed: a rhyming, talking baby book entitled *You're SPECIAL*, used by vault dwellers in their formative toddler years to determine their stats and affinities.

"It's a glorified menu," explains Howard, "but really fits the mood of the moment—and we can somewhat fictionalize the choice you're making, something we like to do during character generation.... My two faves: 'C is for Charisma—it's why people think I'm great! I make my friends all laugh and smile, and never want to hate!' 'P is for Perception—a long and funny word! It means what I tasted, smelled, saw, and heard!'"



Burnout: PARADISE

The game's producer pimps his ride



In real life, *Burnout* Games Producer Matt Webster drives a less-than-PCPD Rod. But he drives on the left side of the road, so the still counts.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY M. HARRIS

NOW THAT YOU'VE BLAZED through the open-world driving bits of *Burnout: Paradise*, the time is ripe for exploring some of the city's darker corners and secret hangars.

We asked Producer Matt Webster of *Paradise* developer Criterion to talk us what we may have missed.

EGM: What's the most surprising thing you've seen so far online?

Matt Webster: I can't quite believe how quickly players are learning the world. Literally within a day or two, we were playing against players who knew the best lines and the best routes and were navigating the city at high speed. Next would be how players took to the freestyle challenges. We noticed the same behavior trends that we saw in development, where players would help each other to complete the challenges, create their own game play, particularly in the Airfield, and search for top-of-the-hangers to watch their friends attempt the challenges. We're so fascinated by the users.

EGM: Are there any little secrets that nobody has uncovered yet?

MW: We get some great feedback on the significance of certain pieces—misreading the intentions of the island that you can see from distance from Angus Wharf. When they show you to fight the island will be the final location we'll be launching so to speak in the future.

EGM: In your estimation, what is the single best car in *Paradise*, and how do you get it?

MW: Well, that really comes down to personal choice. What I find to be different cars just depend on what I want to take against my friends. I'd love the PCPD Speed Rod, but I'd want to be in a different car that's different to what you have. I'd go for the Thunder Roadster and I know I could win an arena. I'm not going to say it's the Thunder Rod, but I'd want to be in a different car that's different to what you have. I'd go for the Thunder Roadster and I know I could win an arena. I'm not going to say it's the Thunder Rod, but I'd want to be in a different car that's different to what you have.

Platinum of course! My favorite car as far as looks are concerned is the Krieger Arachno Sport.

EGM: Are you as offended as we are when someone beats you using a crappy promotional car from Wal-Mart or Circuit City? Why did you make them so good?

MW: Hey, it's only a part job. We think they look really cool, and we're proud of the support that we get from those partners prior to launching the game. Both of these companies sponsor motorsports in real life, so I don't think that seeing their cars in our game is a problem at all.

EGM: We're really impressed with your intuitive, D-pad-driven multiplayer menus. How do you feel about letting other developers rip them off? We'd be OK with that....

MW: In every *Burnout*, we come up with innovation and [to] break someone else if other developers see what we did and adopt that. We're real believers that are genuine and that's got to be a great thing.

EGM: Are you still running into lots of *Burnout* vets who simply don't enjoy the new open-world focus in *Paradise*?

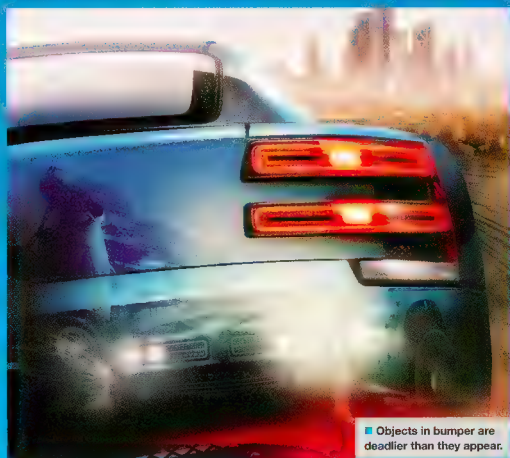
MW: I think that some players were quick to judge what we were doing before they even played the game. What we've seen since launch is that players have really gotten into it and taken it for what it is rather than what they thought it should be.

EGM: Where is the absolute best place to rack up massive stunts? We're arguing among Airfield, Quarry, and Dam....

MW: All three and then into entire world. My own repeat stunts, but there's not one area that works best. Incidentally, we thought that we had great stuntman players on our team, but we recently read that someone has just scored a billion points. Now that's commitment.

EGM: When will *Guns N' Roses' Chinese Democracy* be released?

MW: Every night it's *Democracy*. [Laughs]



Objects in bumper are deadlier than they appear.

NINJA GAIDEN



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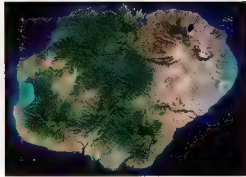
Microsoft

Team NINJA



Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE



PREVIEW: FIRST LOOK

MotorStorm

Season two catches island fever By Garnett Lee

Platform:
PS3

Publisher:
Sony CEA

Developer:
Evolution Studios

Release Date:
Fall 2008

WE SPENT A LITTLE CHUNK of real estate last year talking about how sexy the mud looked in *MotorStorm*. The mud. That clues you in to the sort of early PS3 titles, this dirty racer was the best when it came time to show off your new machine.


Well, the mud is back, and this time you'll find a whole lot more to splash across your screen along with it. *MotorStorm 2* moves the first game's "Coachella for off-roaders" racing-festival setting to a tropical island in the Pacific. Gone are dusty expanses of desert browns, replaced with a wash of verdant hues across the map. Zooming in to ground level reveals a whole new world filled with lush vegetation to whip against the windshield.

And this island is fraught with hazards. In the rain forests, swamps filled with shifting quicksand and tangled undergrowth threaten to suck your

ride under. Take to the mountains and you'll find yourself following perilous ridgelines and dodging the lava pools and clouds of ash from a volcano.

All of this new scenery means you have that many more options when trying to pick the path around those tracks best suited to your vehicle's strengths. And if you thought cutting a few ruts through the first game's desert floor was cool, you'll love the real-time deformation that realistically re-creates the wear and tear on the track from each lap, which gets a whole lot more to work with in *MotorStorm 2*. And this sequel needs that diversity; the game doubles up on its predeces-

sor with a planned 16 circuits.

And then come the rides. The returning garage of rally cars, buggies, motorbikes, race trucks, mudpluggers, and big rigs gains a stablemate with the addition of new monster trucks. In true tractor-pull tradition, they're just as likely to roll over anyone foolish enough to get in their way as go around them. As much fun as that could be with up to 15 of your friends online, it might be best enjoyed with everyone gathered around the TV in the new four-player spitscreen mode, so you can talk smack up close and personal. Hey, mudslinging's encouraged here. 

> Swamps filled with shifting quicksand and tangled undergrowth threaten to suck your ride under.



New Edge® Energy™ Shave Gel has a fragrance so bold, you'll want to save some for later.

Photograph by Kane Romero



5 Lives: Robert Bowling

When it comes to war, *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* is really winning—it's both the top-selling game of 2007 and one of the top-played games over Xbox Live. Only one major battle remains: our five questions. We recruited Robert Bowling, community manager at *COD4* developer Infinity Ward, to see if he's ready for combat.

1. Which of these four World War II games is not real?

- A) *Brothers in Arms: D-Day*
- B) *Medal of Honor: Infiltrator*
- C) *The History Channel: Assault on the Pacific*
- D) *Hour of Victory*

Robert Bowling: It is *Brothers in Arms: D-Day*.

EGM: Incorrect. It's C.

Lives remaining: 4/5

2. Arcade war game *Operation Wolf* had three sequels—name one of them.

RB: *Operation Wolf...Fang Back*.

EGM: No.

RB: *Operation Wolf...Herd Strike*.

EGM: Nope.

RB: *Operation Wolf...Throat Chomp*. I'm trying to think of wolf-type names.

EGM: Sorry, the correct answers are *Operation Thunderbolt*, *Operation Wolf 3*, and *Operation Tiger*.

Lives remaining: 3/5

3. SNK made a Vietnam game—name it.

RB: *Vietnam...I dunno!*

EGM: Sorry, it's *Nam-1975*.

Lives remaining: 2/5

4. Guess which *Call of Duty* this is based on these three missions: Breakdown, Underground Passage, and Raiding the Fortress.

RB: *Call of Duty: Finest Hour*.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining: 1/5

5. *Ikari Warriors* is a great war game. Name one of the two heroes.

RB: Billy?

EGM: Incorrect. It's Ralf Jones and Clark Steel.

Lives remaining: 0/5

Game Over: Looks like the shell shock rattled Bowling's brain a bit. At least he got one right. And getting one right is one fifth of the battle.



■ Pachter's career supports voice chat via an included phone peripheral.

How'd he get the gig?

"You either need stellar educational credentials and to start low in the system path, or you go through a lot of work experience like I did," says Pachter. A career doing analytical consulting work like EA could get you in the door, but most of Pachter's connections had careers in consulting, investment banking, or

big-name power in two games for Pachter initially wanted to become a lawyer—hence his law degree—but he "realized halfway through that most criminals are actually really nice and they didn't want to do five years," he says. And he was in business school and eventually migrated away from financial planning to a roadside hold to purchase

TOOLS OF HIS TRADE

Telephone

"I don't really use my phone anymore," says Pachter. "I guess I have been taking it to work, but I don't use it much."

HP iZa calculator

"I carried around this calculator for a while."

Internet

"I'll account for my own internet," says Pachter. "I'll account for my own internet." Pachter says he uses the internet a lot, but he doesn't use it for work. He says he uses it for work, but he doesn't use it for work.

USB flash drive

Pachter says he uses the USB flash drive a lot, but he doesn't use it for work. He says he uses it for work, but he doesn't use it for work.

PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE SCREENS, HANDS-ON

Mario Kart **WII**

Mario's back with another ticket to ride By David Ellis

Like any race-car driver, Nintendo constantly tweaks and refines its high-performance vehicle. And this vehicle in this case is its Mario Kart franchise. As the mascot-filled series heads to a new roadway this year, Nintendo's well-trained mechanics have been hard at work making some changes—both expected and unexpected. Go pit us as we test-drive this eagerly anticipated racer.

Platform:
Wii

Publisher:
Nintendo

Developer:
Nintendo

Release Date:
April 2008

> THE ONLINE EXPERIENCE

Console players can finally use Nintendo's Wi-Fi service to race or battle online by themselves or via split-screen with a friend. If you want to race against friends online, though, you'll need to share a 16-digit handshake first, as the frustrating friend codes are back. If typing long strings of numbers ain't your thing, the game supports matchmaking with random players without the need for friend codes. When joining a match midrace, the player can watch the drivers battle it out while waiting for the next round. Don't expect a wealth of social interaction, though, as Nintendo has taken its chat-design cues from *Resident Evil Outbreak* (PS2), only allowing players to communicate via a preset list of canned text comments.

Rounding out the online offerings is the Mario Kart Channel, a central hub accessible both in and out of the game where players can upload and download time-trial ghosts, check out top race times, and post their course records. Drivers will also be able to see their rankings in the new tournament mode; it's similar to *Mario Kart DS'* mission mode, where you complete objectives (for example: kill a Pokey on a desert level) in a specific amount of time.



> THE CONTROLS

Longtime fans of the series shouldn't be concerned with the transition to motion-control steering—*Mario Kart Wii* features five different control schemes. Steering with the pack-in Wii Wheel (or the Wii Remote held horizontally) feels functional but imprecise. Setting up for a powerslide boost (which now is based on the amount of time you hold the powerslide rather than rapid back-and-forth movements) in a tight turn doesn't offer the same sense of pinpoint control that analog steering provides. To grab some additional speed, racers can now pop a wheelie on motorcycles (which are new to the series) and perform trick jumps off ramps for a quick boost by tilting the Wii Remote vertically. Series veterans should feel right at home using the GameCube controller or Classic Controller, but the Wii Remote/Nunchuk combo is a comfortable middle ground, offering the precision of analog control and the simplicity of pulling off wheelies and tricks by shaking the Wii Remote.



> THE TRACKS

Following in the footsteps of its DS cousin, *Mario Kart Wii* will feature 16 all-new and 16 classic courses. Half of the tracks are unlocked at the start of the game, with the remaining tracks available after completing the first four GP cups. Mii fans should be happy, because the first thing we noticed when racing on the new maps was the cheering crowd populated by Mii's. They won't be relegated solely to bystander status, either; you'll also be able to unlock the ability to race as your favorite Mii.

The new tracks are really among the best-designed in the series. In one level, Coconut Mall, drivers can weave their way through a series of escalators that change direction after every lap for speed boosts. The usual mixtures of short-cuts are still in and, as always, provide a faster path at the risk of falling off the track. Another section on a track called Mushroom Gorge presents players with the choice of sticking with the safe option and staying on the road for a longer route or the ability to hop on a series of large toadstools in order to chain tricks to traverse the chasm more quickly. The last straightaway of DK Summit presents the most interesting use for the new air tricks. Players must boost off the half-pipe to avoid the heavier snow at the bottom, while weaving a path around snowboarding Shy Gyu's.



> THE ITEMS

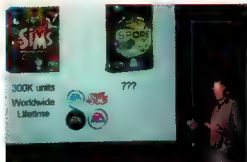
Ask anyone who's lost a race because of multiple blue-shell strikes served up by the last-place driver: Power-ups and weapons play a huge role in the *Mario Kart* series. The character-specific special items from *Double Dash!!!* (GC) are gone, but three new items make up for them. For racers who need to clear a path in a hurry, the Mega Mushroom from *New Super Mario Bros.* (DS) is in; it superizes players, allowing them to mow through everyone in their way. The POW block from the original *Mario Bros.* makes an appearance and, when activated, emits a series of three shock waves to everyone in front of you. But the lightning cloud, the final new item we saw, was the most compelling. It gives the player a speed boost like the star—but after a set period of time, it'll shrink the player with a lightning strike. Like a game of hot potato, the player can pass the cloud onto an unsuspecting enemy driver just in time for him or her to get zapped instead. We're preemptively calling bulls**** for any races lost to this switcheroo-shrinkage tactic. ☘



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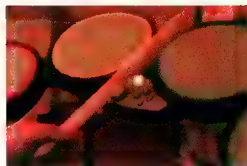
An Evening With Will Wright

Brainiac *Sims* creator delivers illuminating, rambling chat about alternate worlds, Care Bears, and Russian space programs.



PWN: APB gameplay clips

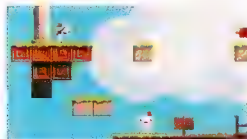
Fantastic-looking cops-and-robbers MMO from *Crackdown*'s creators encourages 'breakin' the law...or enforcing it. With bazookas.



TECH:

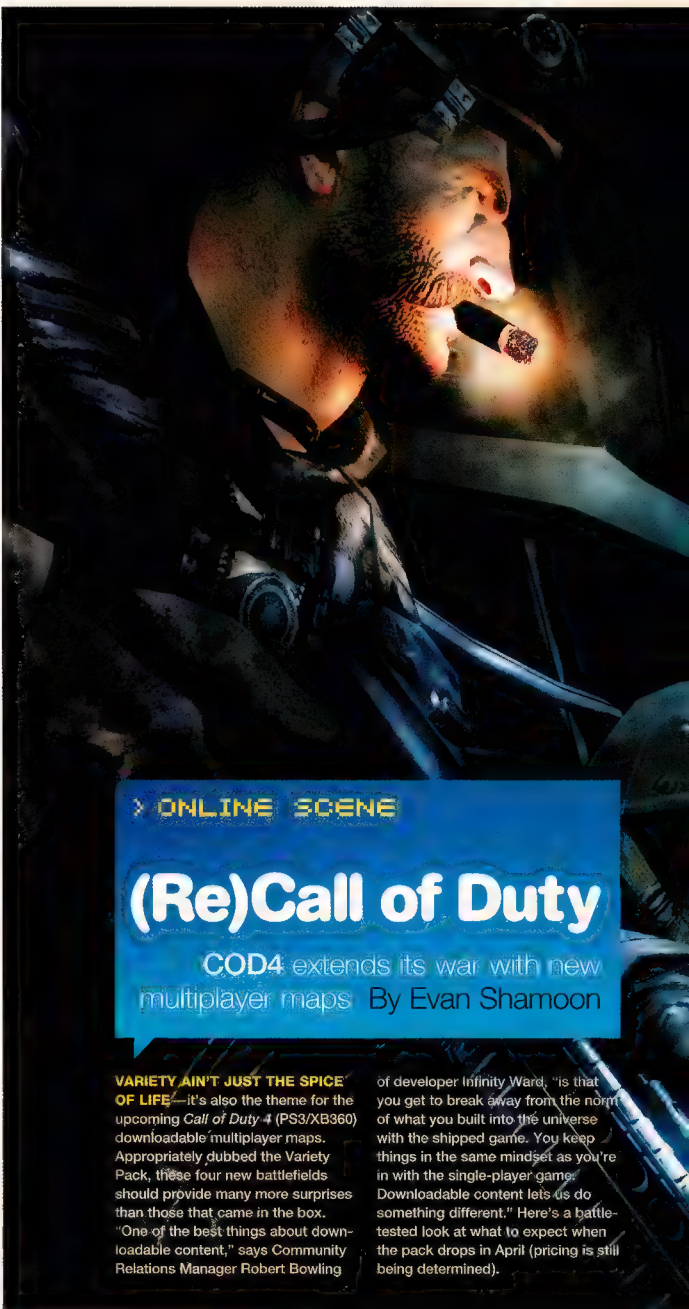
Rock Band Drum Machine

Andrew Rudson's program turns game peripheral into real electronic drum set. We rate this video five devil horns out of five.



ZOMG: Fez gameplay

Exclusive footage of the innovative *Super Paper Mario*-esque indie platformer that stole the show at this year's Game Developers Conference.



> ONLINE SCENE

(Re)Call of Duty

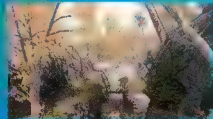
COD4 extends its war with new multiplayer maps By Evan Shamoon

VARIETY AIN'T JUST THE SPICE OF LIFE—it's also the theme for the upcoming *Call of Duty 4* (PS3/XB360) downloadable multiplayer maps. Appropriately dubbed the Variety Pack, these four new battlefields should provide many more surprises than those that came in the box. "One of the best things about downloadable content," says Community Relations Manager Robert Bowling

of developer Infinity Ward, "is that you get to break away from the norm of what you built into the universe with the shipped game. You keep things in the same mindset as you're in with the single-player game. Downloadable content lets us do something different." Here's a battle-tested look at what to expect when the pack drops in April (pricing is still being determined).

CREEK

Lay of the land: The biggest *COD4* multiplayer map for date (and perhaps the biggest departure from the original maps), Creek is set in a lush, dense forest—like something out of *Lord of the Rings* or *Lost*, but with way more AK-47s. The wide-open wooded area is perfect for snipers, with lots of bushes, trees, and rocks to hide behind (without feeling like you have to be a sniper to succeed). It's also home to a giant ravine and a sweet cave for hiding.



Battle-tested: This one's great for lots of players. Creek is big enough to support as many soldiers as you can throw at it, and the greenery gives it an expansive, open-air feel.

CHINATOWN

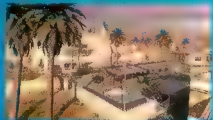
Lay of the land: Chinatown is actually based on the popular *Carentan* map from *COD2*, and it's full of tight spaces and grimy back alleys. The urban environment makes for a nice combination of full-scale street fighting and indoor, close-quarters combat. We're also big fans of the nighttime backdrop.



Battle-tested: A great remake of a great original map, it's not quite the most convincing Chinatown we've ever encountered in a game (that award goes to the John Woo game *Stranglehold*), but it's a very well-put-together map with seemingly infinite ways to move through the level and a strong feeling of interconnectedness—despite the relatively large size and setting.

BROADCAST

Lay of the land: Ripped from *COD4*'s single-player campaign, Broadcast has had many of its outside areas opened up for this multiplayer debut. The huge TV-station room has multiple floors from which to wreak havoc, and many of the conference rooms are now accessible. Sniper perches abound, and you'll find plenty of options for flanking your enemies.



Battle-tested: Fighting in office buildings can be tedious. How many bland, beige game levels have you played that look exactly like? Not so here: It's actually quite difficult to get lost, and the open central room—full of desks, chairs, and various other gun fodder—makes for a great place to stage your own shootout at the TV corral.

KILLHOUSE

Lay of the Land: Built for small-team games (read: 1-on-1 or 2-on-2), Killhouse takes place within an enclosed interior. The developers liken it to a game of Brit futuresports classic speedball, but with lots of weapon choices.

Battle-tested: Not yet. This level wasn't ready for war, so you'll have to wait until April, when you can try it yourself... 



RUMOR MILL

Head-turning scuttlebutt By Quartermann

Resurrected Rumors:

It's hard to get excited over licensed movie games, but sometimes nostalgia can blind good taste. Example: EA's upcoming *G.I. Joe* game, which I happened to call a few months back. Sure, it may suck, but that's the price of nostalgia.

SOME THINGS MAKE MY LIFE

EASIER: the Magic Bullet blender, tip calculators, and, most importantly, weeklong gaming conventions. Thanks to the recent Game Developers Conference, I was able to scrounge together an impressive list of scuttlebutt. Hell, I dug up so much dirt that I had to—get this—write everything down on paper so I wouldn't forget anything. Crazy, I know. But enough talk—have at 'em.

New turn for Ratchet

Last year's *Ratchet and Clank Future: Tools of Destruction* sure was a pretty platformer. It wasn't just cartoon-quality looks, though—we really dug the fast-paced, hop-and-pop action. So much so that the cliffhanger ending left us moaning for more. Luckily, we might get more sooner rather than later—my Sony spy tells me developer Insomniac is building a downloadable expansion sequel to *Tools of Destruction* set to be released this fall.

Tecmo touchdown

Madden may be the current king of the football field, but back in the 8-bit days, *Tecmo Bowl* held the pig-

skin crown. We've known publisher Tecmo is resurrecting the franchise, but we haven't known what systems it'll appear on...till now. Word is, **Tecmo is planning both a Wii and DS version of *Tecmo Bowl*.** From what I hear, the DS version will be a retro take on the series, while the Wii version will be an updated outing developed here in the States.

Flushing the plumber

Disney's serious about dominating the game industry. How serious? Glad you asked. Last year, the megacompany bought game-design maverick Warren Spector's (*Deus Ex*) Junction Point Studios and asked him to whip up a truly magical game.

My mousy mole tells me Disney tasked Mr. Spector with the ambitious goal of creating a platform-style *Mario*-killer starring Mickey Mouse. Uh, seems like Disney has been bingeing on too many of Mario's magic mushrooms....

PS3's new protector

It's taken some time, sure, but the PS3 is finally starting to bounce back after a disappointing first year. Not surprisingly, Sony's first-party games are what we're really stoked to see, and I happen to know about a new one. A Sony spy tells me **Sony Liverpool (*Wipeout HD*) is making a stunning character action game entitled *The Protector*.**

Q-TIPS

- Here's a little trickle of *Gears of War 2* info: It appears the multiplayer mode will feature both 5-on-5 matches and a new camera angle.
- I hear Warner Bros. is tapping its new developer, Traveller's Tales (*Lego Batman*), to make games based on the upcoming live-action *Akira* flicks.
- Man, it seems like Sony's online social service, Home, will never come out. But we may get to play it soon—word is an open beta is coming this spring.



you.

GAMER OF THE WEEK

Name: Ted Krinshaw

Age: 15

Hometown: Tallahassee, Florida

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

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

TOMMY VERTEBOTS

So instead of sitting on your couch, watching your favorite show on TV, you head to the gym, but you're too lazy to crank your head to the wind to see. You get a check book, banking. You get a party in the ground floor dog sons barking. Actually what is your dog? This is a sting, the sting of a telephone comes crashing through your roof, directly into your main nest china. You look outside to see a 6-foot robotic scorpion landing water in your neighborhood, and all you can say is "Sweet!"

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

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

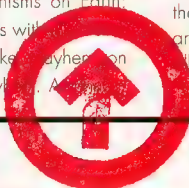
It has multi-function modes of play, from one- and two-player missions to a free-for-all bug-fest. It's a head-to-head, torso-twisting roughhouse.

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



King Scorpion

Super Fly



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MAY 2008

COMING SOON

May's gaming flowers



Boom Blox

Wii • EA Games

Hollywood icon and Academy Award-winning filmmaker Steven Spielberg is teaming up with Electronic Arts for a three-game deal. *Boom Blox* marks the first of those projects, and while it may have many thinkin' *Jenga*, this puzzler is much more. In addition to being able to build and trade levels with friends, the game's 30-plus creatures will really help vary how things go boom.



Haze

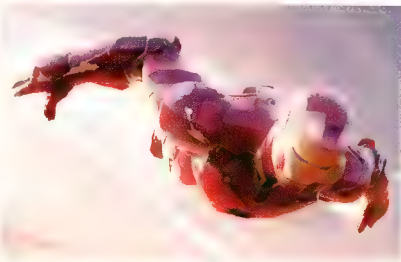
PS3 • Ubisoft

This oft-delayed first-person shooter is finally ready to inject the PS3 with its performance-enhancing nectar. We dig *Haze*'s juiced-up main character, but why did developer Free Radical have to go and spoil the game's big twist? (Halfway through you become one of the bad guys.)

Iron Man

Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2/PSP/DS • Sega

The buzz on Tony Stark's first flick is through the roof (some insiders say it's as good as the original *Spider-Man*). The talk about his game is pretty good, too—the red-and-yellow tin can excels when he's flying high and tossing missiles. Now let's just hope Stark's ground game can improve.



Midnight Club: Los Angeles

PS3/XB360 • Rockstar

This pedal-to-the-metal racer follows *Burnout: Paradise*'s lead in offering gearheads an open-world affair. Now don't expect a spot-on re-creation of L.A. here (can you imagine trying to zig and zag through that kind of traffic?), but the game certainly nails the city's most memorable spots.

MORE MAY RELEASES

The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian

Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2/DS • Disney Interactive

Indianapolis 500 Evolution

XB360 • Destination

Hail to the Chimp

XB360 • Gamecock

Horst

PS3/XB360 • Codemasters

Monster Lab

Wii/PS2/DS • Eidos

R-Type Command

PSP • Atlus

Top Spin 3

PS3/XB360/DS • 2K Sports

Unreal Tournament 3

XB360 • Midway

This is Vince Young.

Wireless Sports Updates

Of course Vince Young is into football. After all, he did win a college championship and is currently a starting pro quarterback. So you know he keeps up on everything happening in the league on his phone's MEDIA™ Net home page.

Ringtones

As fast as he is on the field, he's even faster off it. Vince is always switching up his ringtone for the latest hip-hop track he's gotten stuck in his head. Luckily, he's got over 3 million to choose from with AT&T Mobile Music.

Picture Messaging

Vince travels for work. A lot. So he likes to keep in touch with his mother and friends back home. And with unlimited picture messaging on his MEDIA™ Max Unlimited plan, he saves a lot doing it.

Me/Charity

Most people don't know that Vince isn't just about football. He's also a volunteer teacher who's working to make sure every kid has access to the technology that drives today's world.

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Outside the Box

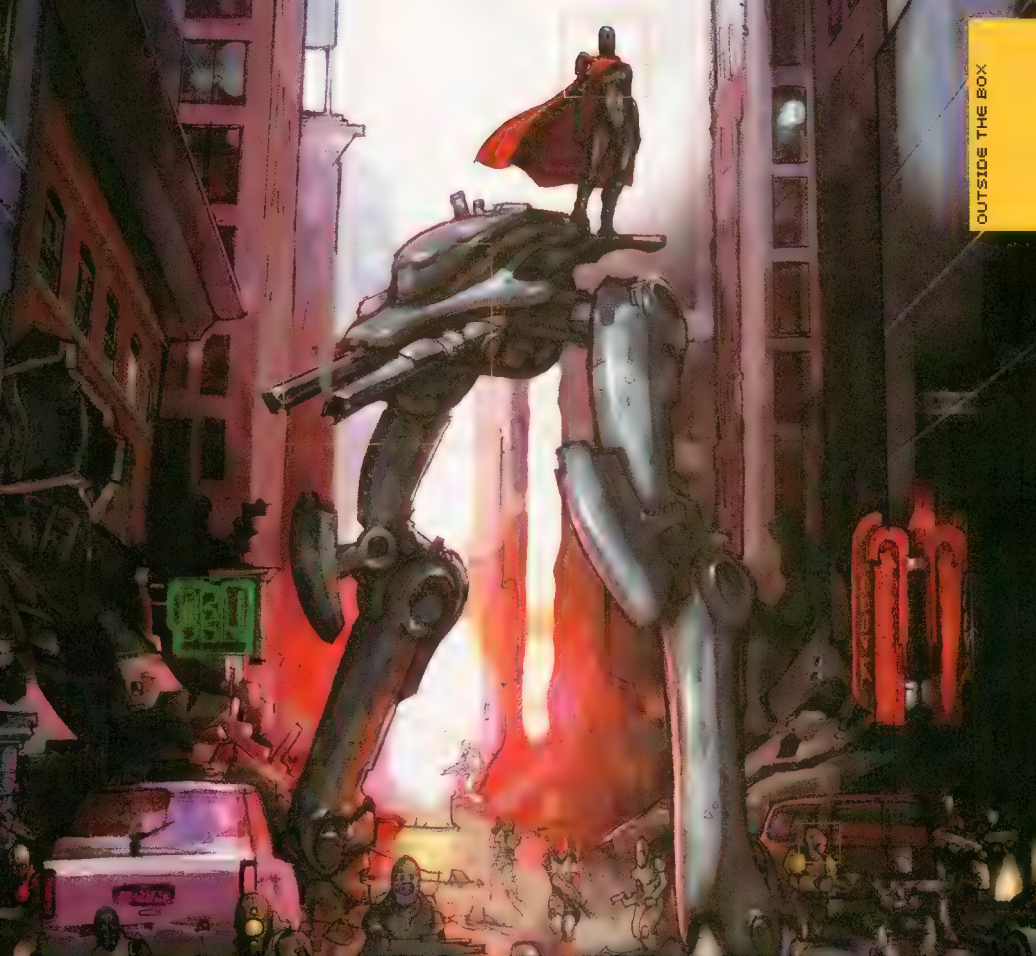
Downloadable
Games
Take Off

It's been a quiet thing, this whole downloadable-game revolution. *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved* kicked the generation off right on Xbox Live Arcade, but Microsoft's early struggle to deliver regular releases seemed to limit the medium's potential. But now, after years of baby steps, digital distribution finally appears to be taking off: Sony's selling blockbuster games on the PlayStation Network, Microsoft has too many quality XBLA titles for us to fit in a three-page feature, and Nintendo is about to launch its own platform called WiiWare. So we thought it would be a good time to look at the most promising upcoming games for all three services.



Xbox Live Arcade

Thus far in 2008, we've been able to count on at least one new Xbox Live Arcade release every Wednesday, a trend that doesn't look to stop anytime soon. XBLA currently boasts the biggest selection of original downloadable games on any console, though many of them have been criticized for not being terribly ambitious or creative. Moving forward, Microsoft is making a push to "democratize" downloadable games with their Community Arcade spin-off service. This new feature, announced at the Game Developers Conference in February, allows anyone with programming skills to make games for the 360 via Microsoft's XNA tools and then share those games with the rest of the world.



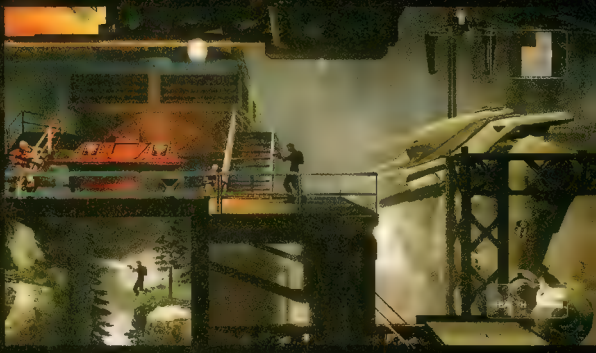
Empire: Alpha Complex

Publisher: Chair Entertainment • Developer: Chair Entertainment • Release Date: TBD

Liquid shooter *Undertow* was one of 2007's best surprises, running up impressive bullet points (16-player multiplayer and a 15-level single-player/co-op campaign in a \$10 XBLA title) within a *Geometry Wars* meets *Battlefield* design. Now its developers are back with a single-player game inspired by classics like *Metroid* and *Castlevania*.

The story and title come from Chair's larger *Empire* property, which the company previously licensed to Orson Scott Card (for a novel [with a potential retail game and film in the wings]). *Alpha Complex* presents a parallel story to the novel and reunites the team with Unreal Engine 3 for its second game—one that looks to be heading multiplatform this time around.

The download factor: Much of the Chair staff previously worked on the promising but tech-challenged *Advent Rising*. With *Undertow*, they hit their stride thanks to a stable engine.





XBLA

Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords add-on pack/ Puzzle Quest: Galactrix

D3Publisher • Infinite Interactive • Spring 2008 (Challenge of the Warlords add-on pack)/Fall 2008 (Galactrix)

Puzzle Quest must have been good to D3, because the publisher has two follow-ups on the way for the puzzle/RPG mashup. First is a *Challenge of the Warlords* expansion that will add four hero professions and a new map area offering additional quests, along with new spells, music, monsters, bosses, magic items, and so on.

And at the end of the year, we'll see the sequel, *Puzzle Quest: Galactrix*. If the title didn't lip you off, the game takes the series into the future—a science-fiction future, in fact—and introduces features such as hexagonal tiles.

The download factor: While *Puzzle Quest* is a multiplatform game, the expansion pack is exclusive to XBLA, so you'll have to enter Microsoft's web if you're looking for more content before the end of the year.



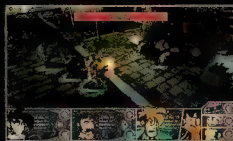
Left: *Galactrix*. Above: *Challenge of the Warlords* add-on pack character artwork.

Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness

Hothead Games • Hothead Games • Spring/Summer 2008

We could go into detail about how *On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness* is a period-piece action-RPG, how it teams you up with Gabe and Tycho from the *Penny Arcade* online comic, and how you get to play as a custom character (I) what looks to be a very funny game, but we felt that was all a bit obvious. So we asked the developers at Hothead Games to tell us something about the game we'd never heard before, and they came back with a story about how they went and purchased cans of Hobo Soup to research the Hobo Alley area of the game, which you can see in these screens.

The download factor: Unless something else sneaks in soon, this will be the first episodic game to appear on XBLA, which is a pretty big step for Microsoft's service. The episodes will be roughly four months apart, though, so there'll be a decent bit of breathing room between chapters.



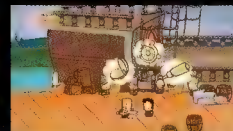
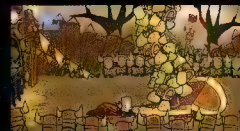
Castle Crashers

The Behemoth • The Behemoth • Spring/Summer 2008

A little under three years ago, developer The Behemoth unveiled *Castle Crashers* at the San Diego Comic-Con as a beat-'em-up prototype running on GameCube. Since then, the game has made the jump to XBLA, complete with a visual overhaul, minigames, a competitive mode, and more personality than the game industry usually deems appropriate.

It has more depth than most brawlers, too, with certain features that veer into RPG territory. As you can see in these screenshots, in one scene you'll need to locate specific items before gatekeepers will allow you on a ship, and a character-stats screen helps you keep track of your experience level, strength, magic, defense, and agility attributes. With 20 (!) unlockable characters, this should help you stay organized.

The download factor: After testing the waters with a traditional publisher method for 2D shooter *Alien Hominid*, The Behemoth found comfort in controlling their fate via digital distribution. *Castle Crashers* is a pretty ambitious project that could potentially pass as a retail game—but we're happy to see it go downloadable, since that all but guarantees a reasonable price tag.



Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix (also on PSN)

Capcom • Backbone • Summer 2008

When it was announced last year, this was the biggest no-brainer you wished you'd thought of (or perhaps had the license to)—*Super Street Fighter II Turbo*'s gameplay blended with high-resolution graphics. Boom. Go print money, Capcom. After the game missed its planned 2007 release, it fell off the radar while *Street Fighter IV* stole the spotlight, but the developers have been plugging away in the background. "The most challenging part [of development] is coming up with character art that conveys what *Street Fighter II* is but still advances the quality of the graphics to a new level," says Capcom Producer Ray Jimenez. "To be honest, this was much harder than we previously anticipated, but we're on a track that meets all of these goals."

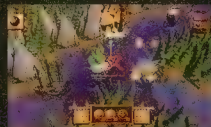
The download factor: Despite previous rumors about XBLA's file-size limitation holding back the 360 version of the game, Jimenez tells us there won't be any differences between what you'll play on XBLA and PSN. Except one: Capcom recently announced a public beta exclusively for 360 players who buy and download *Wolf of the Battlefield: Commando 3*.



MORE GAMES

We didn't have proper space to cover every upcoming XBLA, WiiWare, and PSN game, so we wanted to cram in those worthy of your attention on the side here.

MULTIPLATFORM



Plunder

XBLA • PSN

We revealed this pirate-themed real-time strategy game from Halo's former multiplayer lead last issue, and the more we see of it, the more we like its accessibility.

Bionic Commando Rearmed

XBLA • PSN

Sure, this remake partially exists to promote the 360/PS3 *Bionic Commando*, but when it's this pretty, who cares?

1942: Joint Strike

XBLA • PSN

The latest classic Capcom revival is top-down WWII shooter 1942, on the way courtesy of go-to-remake developer Backbone.

XBOX LIVE ARCADE



The Dishwasher: Dead Samurai

As one of the winners of Microsoft's first XNA contest, *The Dishwasher* earned a slot as a Live Arcade game thanks to its superstylish 2D beat-'em-up combat.

Schizoid

Billed as "the most co-op game ever," *Schizoid* asks each player to ram into enemies of their same color and avoid enemies of the secondary color, forcing players to work together.

Gridrunner++

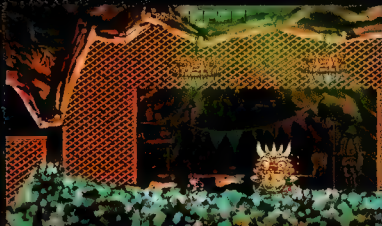
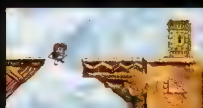
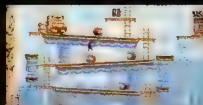
Despite frustrations from cult-favorite designer Jeff Minter (best known for Tempest 2000), over sales of his XBLA debut, *Space Giraffe*, he's returning with a new classic shooter remake.

Braid

Number None • Number None • Spring/Summer 2008

Appearances suggest a common platformer with a cute art style, but *Braid* is actually an experiment in time. Each world presents a different way in which you can bend or control time that turns what appear to be standard platformer levels into puzzles. You always have the ability to rewind time as much as you like, which adds a forgiving backbone to the whole thing, but later levels stack on rules—like running from left-to-right makes time go forward, while running from right-to-left makes time run backward. You're going to have to think in order to get through this one.

The download factor: *Braid* is all about rethinking aspects of traditional game design—it's basically a puzzle game disguised as a platformer—which is something that's usually difficult to do as part of a retail game. Failure would be too expensive, and there's no proven audience for a game like this on consoles.



RUMORS

For those who prefer their news a bit less confirmed, we dug up a few rumors on games that might be heading to Xbox Live Arcade down the road.

Ninjatown

Remember the DS real-time strategy/action hybrid from former EGM staffer Shawn Smith previewed in our February issue?

Rumor has it the game—or perhaps another in the same universe—will pop up on XBLA.

Raptor

After impressing with the poker-infused XBLA puzzler *Poker Smash*, Void Star Creations seems to have a new title in the works—an action game code-named *Raptor*.

Multiwinia

Introversion sparked the imaginations of hardcore PC action/strategy fans when they released *Darwinia* in 2005, and it's no secret they're working on a multiplayer follow-up in the same universe named *Multiwinia*. Well, we hear it's coming to XBLA as well as PC as Introversion's first console game.



WiiWare

WiiWare is a strange beast compared to the competing download services. For one thing, it hasn't actually launched yet (look for it May 12). And Nintendo is open to letting anyone develop for it. The real question appears to be how gamers will store all their downloaded games—we know the file-size cap for each game is small, but there's not a whole lot of space on the hard-drive-less system.

LostWinds

Frontier Developments • Frontier Developments • TBD

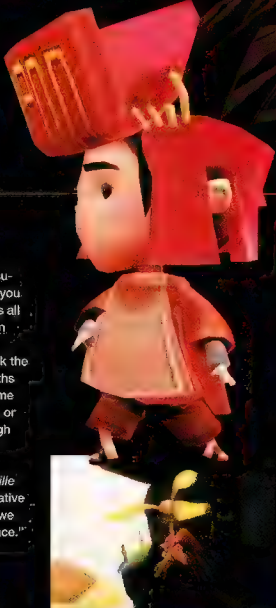
Take one look at *LostWinds*' screens and you'll see a 2D side-scroller with 3D visuals. Look closer and you'll see this is nothing like the combat-happy platformers you usually associate with the genre. Like *Super Mario Galaxy* but in 2D, *LostWinds* is all about moving your character (with the analog stick) and controlling a floating icon (with the Wii Remote) simultaneously.

You use the Remote to control wind—specifically, the wind spirit, Enril. You flick the Wii-mote up to create a draft and push main character Toku into the air, draw paths on the screen for him to follow, and earn other powers over the course of the game (such as the ability to control fire, as you can see in our screens). Without a jump or attack button, the game requires you to use Enril to help Toku find his way through each level, a process Frontier founder David Braben calls “relaxing.”

The download factor: Frontier is a big company with traditional titles like *Thrillville* under their belt, but *LostWinds* allows them to self-publish. “This guarantees creative control, of course, but also brings other challenges,” says Braben. “The lessons we will learn on the way will be invaluable as digital downloads increase in significance.”



■ You can use the Wii Remote to mess with fire as you progress in the game.



Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles—My Life as a King

Square Enix • Square Enix • May 2008

WiiWare goes hand in hand with low-budget and inexpensive games, so a glossy 3D *Final Fantasy* game might seem like an odd fit. But *My Life as a King* is not your typical epic RPG—and despite the *Crystal Chronicles* subtitle, it's not an action game. Rather, it follows a young king determined to build a kingdom, which he accomplishes by letting heroes do his dirty work for him. Players manage a growing city while assigning tasks to warriors, taking care to optimize their personal development with the proper gear and skills.

The download factor: *My Life as a King* features detailed 3D visuals and minimal, menu-driven gameplay—an interesting inversion of what you might expect from WiiWare. And having a big-name developer's biggest series on the system at launch should only help draw attention to Nintendo's digital-delivery venture.



Carla

You made this for us with your magic? [fo show our gratitude, we'll live in it!]

LIT

WayForward • WayForward • June 2008

Part trendy kids in a school overtaken by monsters, part love story between the main character and his girlfriend—if you cried when *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* went off the air, WayForward has your replacement. Only this time, it's a horror/puzzle game where your goal is to create a path of light to move from the entrance to the exit of each stage. "The Wii-mote is used everywhere in the game" says Director Adam Tierney. "In addition to being used to aim the player's flashlight and projectiles, it's used for one-to-one actions such as shaking the rechargeable flashlight, throwing cherry bombs, and answering the phone." Mix in boss fights that also incorporate the light/dark approach, and we have more questions than answers (but we're interested).

The download factor: WayForward works on a lot of licensed games for other publishers, but because of the "scope and business model for WiiWare," according to CEO John Beck, they've been able to take on an original title of their own.

MORE GAMES
(CONT.)

XBOX LIVE ARCADE

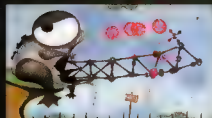
Fable 2 pub games

Prior to Fable 2's release, you'll be able to download its "pub games" and earn money in them, which you'll be able to use in the full game when it ships at the end of the year (if that actually happens).

Lode Runner

Similar to *Prince of Persia Classic*, the new *Lode Runner* is a 3D-looking game in a 2D world with a bunch of new content.

WIIWARE



World of Goo

Technically, this has only been announced as a "Wii" game, but rumors peg it as a WiiWare title, and we love rumors. At the Game Developers Conference (GDC) in February, 2D Boy cofounder (and half of the development team) Kyle Gabler hinted that *World of Goo* could release in different forms around the world, with some regions getting a retail version and others a WiiWare release. The game is a puzzler; you use balls of goo to attach physics-based structures, and then use those structures to transport goo across levels.

Mystery Telltale game

Also at GDC, Telltale—makers of the *Sam & Max* PC point-and-click adventure games—announced a new episodic series for WiiWare. And while they weren't ready to lift the lid by our deadline (look for the reveal in April on UP.com), they provided us some early details.

The game will stick to their staple adventure genre, and likely follow a monthly schedule similar to the *Sam & Max* episodes. It'll be based on "an existing—and very popular—license," says Telltale Marketing Coordinator Emily Morganti, and will be available first on WiiWare with a PC version coming down the line. Morganti also tells us that, compared to previous Telltale games, the characters here will pay closer attention to what you do and remember how you treat them. So the old adventure-game trick of doing whatever you want as long as you eventually choose the right path looks like it will have consequences.

Major League Eating: The Game

Mastiff • Sensory Sweep • May 2008

Proving WiiWare games can be as Wal-Mart friendly as games actually sold at Wal-Mart, *Major League Eating: The Game* applies fighting-game rules to the world of competitive eating. You use the Wii Remote to flip food into your mouth, "eat corn on the cob like a typewriter," and "rip the meat off chicken wings," according to Bill Swartz, self-appointed "head woo" of publisher Mastiff. And you do all of this while attacking opponents, so you might send a gas attack at your opponent, but he might counter it with a "jalapeño flame" to ignite the gas and send it back at you...all this from the developer who ported Xbox Live's most profitable game, *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting*. No joke.

The download factor: While we've seen plenty of WiiWare games aimed at hardcore players, *Major League Eating: The Game* has nary a single cute Japanese-designed character or adventure-game aspect, which may suggest that the Wii's mainstream appeal will spill into other downloadable titles.



Eternity's Child

Atten8 • Luc Bernard & Partners • TBD

Originally planned as an Xbox Live Arcade game, *Eternity's Child* recently made the jump to WiiWare. "Microsoft had too many restrictions and weren't interested in *Eternity's Child* coming to XBLA," says creator Luc Bernard. Regardless of its rocky past, it's hard to deny the impressive art style seen in the screenshots—many fans online want to like the game, despite not knowing a ton about it, because of its looks. With the system change, Bernard added a feature that lets you use the Wii Remote to control a winged heart that can shoot at enemies, while the rest of the game plays out as a platformer. It's a bit like *LastWinds* in that respect.

The download factor: "Who would buy a 2D game [at] retail now?" Bernard asks. "No one...and I can do the weirdest games possible via downloads."





PlayStation Network

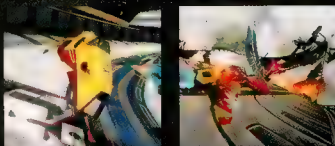
In its year-plus of existence, PlayStation Network has become known for going bigger and stranger than the competition. *Warhawk* led the way as a downloadable version of what was essentially a retail game, with a file size far exceeding anything allowed on XBLA. On the small side, Sony highlighted experimental—dare we say artistic—games with *ffOw* and *Everyday Shooter*. But we hope to see more consistency (and more content) moving forward.

Wipeout HD

Sony CEA • SCE Studio Liverpool • Spring/Summer 2006

While the series has led the way for PSP racers in recent years, we haven't seen a new *Wipeout* console game since 2002's *Fusion*. So for a refresher, Sony is porting eight PSP tracks to PS3 in this "HD" package. Look for bonuses like nice special effects and downloadable track support, but for the most part, this is all about playing established courses in high definition.

The download factor: We'd hammer Sony if they sold this for \$60, but as a (hopefully) cheap download, it makes sense as a holdover until the real PS3 sequel.

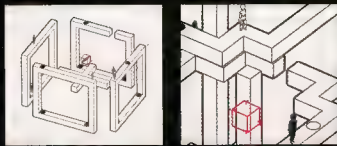


Echochrome

Sony CEA • SCE Studios Japan • TBD

It's the game that doesn't really look like a game—maybe more like a piece of modern art. Your goal is to guide a character from one location to another, while cheating reality by lining up the camera to hide gaps, blocked paths, etc. If you make it look like you can move somewhere, you can, and you can also create your own levels.

The download factor: With such simple looks, *Echochrome* would be a hard sell at retail, so it seems like a great fit for a cheap downloadable release. Notably, the game will also ship on PSP overseas.



Flower

Sony CEA • thatgamecompany • TBD

We know very little about *Flower*, developer thatgamecompany's follow-up to *ffOw*, but it's at least partially about growing flowers in a field. "It's more experimental and unconventional [than] *ffOw*," says Director Jenova Chen, "and we'll see how gamers will react to that." Oddly enough, it's also half of Sony's PSN flower assault (look to your right for the other half).

The download factor: Given the secrecy surrounding the game, we wonder if Sony might spring it on us as a surprise release one day.

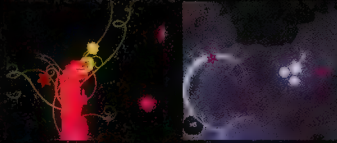


PixelJunk Eden

Sony CEA • Q-Games • TBD

As the third in Q-Games' *PixelJunk* series, *Eden* puts you in control of a blob that can pollinate flowers. As each flower grows, the game gives you a boost so you can move through the rest of the world. Mix in a modern look that is about as far as you can get from reality and you get one of the most artsy looking console games yet.

The download factor: Look at the screenshots below and tell us if you have any idea what's happening. Unless you saw the recent trailer, we have our doubts about your answer. Marketing people *hate* that.



> MORE GAMES (CONT.)

> PLAYSTATION NETWORK

New Twisted Metal

It's not a confirmed downloadable title at this point, but a new PS3 version has been verified, so it seems like a lock for PSN given the series' multiplayer focus.

Ratchet expansion?

If you read Quartermann's column on page 46, you saw word of a *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction* expansion headed to PSN. It's just a rumor for now, but a juicy one.

SOCOM: Confrontation

Want to know all about Sony's plans for one of their most ambitious PSN titles to date? Turn the page... 46

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Return to

Tales from the front lines of Sony's fan-servicing online PS3 shooter, **SOCOM: Confrontation**

By Joe Rybicki



SOMEWHERE, the mother of all firefights is going down. Somewhere close, I'm crouched against the wall at the mouth of a narrow alley; the sound of muffled gunfire reverberates off the walls. I tilt ever so slightly to the left, just nudging my head into the alley. The noise gets a lot louder.

Down that alley, through the dust and blinding North African sunlight, and past the cracked walls and debris-strewn gutters, someone is getting shot at. A lot of someones, from the sound of it. This may explain why I haven't seen or heard from any of my teammates in some

time; while I was carefully edging my way down stairs and around corners, they were running hell-bent for the central square to exchange lead greeting cards with the enemy.

I'd like to think I'm smarter than that, but perhaps it's just cowardice. You only get one life in a *SOCOM* game, after all—assuming you have enough self-respect to avoid respawn games—and I aim to make mine count. This is one of the most compelling qualities of the *SOCOM* franchise: Life is precious, and eating a bullet can put you on the sidelines for a damn long time, watching impotently through someone else's

eyes as the round plays out. So you move with care, you stay well covered, and you try your damndest to watch your teammates' backs so that they'll watch yours. Hopefully.

So here I am, summoning my courage to make a mad dash for the doorway at the end of the alley, when from behind I hear a chillingly recognizable "clunk"...followed by the unmistakable sound of something roundish and metallic rolling across the dusty cobblestones of this legendary Crossroads map. Even as I turn, I know it's too late. The mercenary dodges behind cover as his expertly rolled grenade comes to

Duty



a stop right at my feet. And then the grenade and I both cease to exist.

Revisionist history

"The grenades are all physics-based now," says Sony's Seth Luisi, director of development for the *SOCOM* franchise. He's explaining one of the many refinements that *SOCOM: Confrontation*—incoming on the PlayStation 3 this summer as both a retail and downloadable title—introduces to the series, and he's clearly excited about it. "You'll be able to decide whether you want to roll a grenade or throw it overhand. It all uses real physics, so it'll bounce

off curbs and things like that."

I've just received an illuminating demonstration of this fact, and my ears are still ringing. But this new grenade-chucking method is just one small facet of a complete overhaul of the franchise, an overhaul that takes a massive leap forward in technology—but also takes a substantial step backward in spirit, regrounding the series in the close-quarters, realistic combat that made *SOCOM* and *SOCOM II* perennial online favorites. This online-only title attempts to recreate the magic of the early games, wrap it up in a shiny package oozing with state-of-the-art technology, and

deliver it to fans longing for a return to the "real" *SOCOM*.

But pleasing fans is no easy feat—something Design Director David Seymour of Slant Six learned while on research detail. "When we first discussed the idea of working on a *SOCOM* game," he says, "I spent days reading forums and looking at what everyone had to say. And you realize, 'Oh, my god—there's this huge amount of expectation and love for the franchise. People want everything—they want it exactly the same as it always was, they want tons of innovation, and they want it now.'"

At this point, *SOCOM* fans might

Map Dissection: Crossroads

Old meets new in this expanded classic

CROSSROADS WILL BE FAMILIAR TO ANY PLAYER of SOCOM II. As one of the most beloved classic maps, it was a no-brainer as a candidate for a *Confrontation* face-lift. While the central core remains essentially the same as the original version, a ring of outlying areas has been added for the 32-player version.



1. This tower marks the commandos' start point in the 32-player version of the map.
2. This breach point opens up some roof access to help cover the approaches to the commandos' base.
3. The familiar bell tower at the center of Crossroads offers line-of-sight to both sides' spawn points...and vice versa.
4. This central area is virtually identical to the original Crossroads. The addition of more street-level cover helps ensure lots of close-quarters conflict.
5. In the 32-player version of the map, the old garage now has improved access, with a handful of pathways from the mercenaries' start point.
6. This lion statue stands above the mercenaries' start point in the 32-player map. In the 16-player version, the start points are identical to the *SOCOM II* version of Crossroads.
7. The highlands surrounding the core of Crossroads offer some snipe advantages, but players at street level will be generally well protected.





■ Leaning with the Sixaxis works surprisingly well. And don't worry if you have jittery hands; the game has adjustable sensitivity for the tilt controls—all the way down to "off."



also want to know where series developer Zipper fits into the picture. After all, *Confrontation* is the first SOCOM console game not developed by Zipper; instead, it's in the hands of Slant Six, maker of PSP titles *Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror* and *SOCOM: Tactical Strike*. We know Zipper is helping Slant Six with *Confrontation*, and they're also working on the next SOCOM game. Wait, aren't they? A Sony rep confirmed to us last year that Zipper's next game was in the SOCOM franchise, but now Luisi plays coy. "Are they working on a SOCOM game?" he says when we ask about the game.

"I thought it was confirmed," I say. "No, no," Luisi says. "They're working on something...."

Back to the game at hand, Luisi says the Slant Six team worked to identify what resonated with people in the previous games. "People were really into the urban environments, the tight feel of them," he says.

"When the environments started to get bigger and we added vehicles, it took away from some of those elements. So it's not so much trying to re-create a previous experience as much as it is analyzing the previous games—what worked well, what

people picked up on, what people really enjoyed—and moving those to a next-gen SOCOM experience."

So what kinds of features contribute to this "next-gen experience"? Take, for instance, the use of cover in a heated firefight. "Once my character's in a crouch position," Seymour says, "the Sixaxis lets me do what I used to do with the D-pad." He tilts the controller gently to the left, and his character leans accordingly. "It gives me all this range to lean and stretch out," Luisi adds. "It means that I can 'trim' with great precision how I'm using a wall or a piece of cover. So rather than having a 'snap-to' cover system, you can use anything as cover; this allows a lot more flexibility with how you use objects in the environment." Seymour chimes in: "Now, the term 'cover system' implies a certain type of gameplay—that sort of Whac-a-Mole, hide-and-pop-up stuff. What we like about this is that it's fluid; it's basically analog stance control, and you can use it anywhere."

Running men

These are the kinds of features the design team is looking at for *Confrontation*—not necessarily revo-

lutionary upgrades but rather more evolutionary refinements. Whereas *SOCOM 3* fundamentally changed the gameplay with the addition of vehicles and massive-scale maps, the goal here is to return to the classic SOCOM experience—vehicles, for instance, are gone—but update and refine it to make best use of the current hardware.

One thing *Confrontation* will have in common with *SOCOM 3*, though, is player team size: *Confrontation* supports 32 players, 16 to a side. Now, the designers have been very clear that they're aiming for a more intimate, on-foot experience, and this fact is clear in the levels I'm running around in. The Crossroads map is every bit as close quarters as *SOCOM II* players would expect, and another map (currently known by the working name of "Urban Wasteland") features plenty of restricted space, including a network of claustrophobic underground sewers. Plus, each level offers a 16-player version that knocks the map down to a tighter, central area.

But to support 32 players, the maps do need to be bigger than what players of the earlier games are used to. This brings up an issue of



Map Dissection: Urban Wasteland

A different take on urban combat



1. In the 32-player version of the map, the opposing teams spawn in these outer buildings, but the 16-player version knocks the action down to an area immediately surrounding the hotel.

2. This skybridge can be demolished, cutting off prime access from one of the spawn points to the map's central area.

3. This bombed-out hotel is the map's center and serves as a focal point for breach and demolition games. The occupying force gets access to the first few stories, which include balconies to cover the ground-level approaches.

4. A multileveled, covered parking structure offers some protection for a team

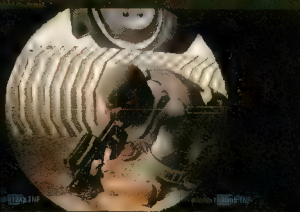
occupying the hotel...but prime sniper spots in the outer buildings have clean lines of sight into the structure.

5. Meandering down these wide-open streets would be a very bad idea due to the multitude of sniper roosts in the hotel and surrounding buildings.

6. A network of sewers and tunnels runs beneath the streets, allowing players to travel from their starting point to the center without opening themselves up to sniper fire. However, some of these tunnels can be destroyed.

7. These raised roadways offer some cover underneath...but can also prove a serious falling hazard.





simple movement, getting from one side of the map to the other. In spite of early suggestions to the contrary, vehicles are not the answer and are never likely to be. "We really like the way it's playing without them," Luisi says. "Right now, we don't ever see the need to add vehicles. We want to make it feel like there's a gunfight right around the corner, or at least there could be. At the scale of the levels you'd need to accommodate vehicles, you lose that."

Instead, the solution is more simple: a speed boost. "These maps are a little more than double the size of the original SOCOM," Luisi says, "so we wanted to add in the ability to run so that people can get from place to place more quickly but still maintain that on-foot gameplay. You can't fire when you're running, and when you come out of a run, your accuracy is going to be poor. But right now, you can run for as long as you want."

"The run is inherently balanced," Seymour points out, "because your weapon's not at the ready—you have to stop running, get your weapon up, and then fire. If you're sprinting down the street just because you like to travel fast, and someone rounds the corner, you're dead. It's still practi-

cal—the running is to go from a safe place to a safe place. If you've taken out your opponent and you see the next cover, by all means, sprint there. But if you start traveling that way [all the time], you're going to get yourself in trouble really fast."

Vision quest

Quick movement will be a factor on some levels more than others, of course. Maps like Crossroads involve mainly narrow spaces and slow, careful movement while levels like Urban Wasteland place a heavier importance on the ability to sprint across the wider streets and parking lots—that is, assuming you have no interest in taking a bullet from the snipers certain to be stationed in the ruined buildings ringing the map.

But all of the maps have certain qualities in common. For one thing, they encourage the kind of close-quarters encounters that made the early games such a hit. For another, they bristle with the kind of architectural details—lots of multilevel buildings, underground tunnels, rooftop areas, and little-known pathways—that players of most of the previous SOCOMs could only dream of.

Arguably the most significant

though, are the characteristics that come as a result of the move to the PS3. I'm talking mainly about view distance. Head to one of the outer streets on the PS2 versions of Crossroads, and you'll find that you can barely see halfway down the map. But in *Confrontation*, you can now get a crystal-clear view

SPECIAL DELIVERY

Confrontation will launch with six initial special forces available to clan members (with more to come). They are:

- Navy Sea, Air, and Land (SEALs, United States)
- Special Air Service (SAS, United Kingdom)
- Kommando Spezialkräfte (KSK, Germany)
- Unidad de Operaciones Especiales (UOE, Spain)
- Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale (GIGN, France)
- Commando Raggruppamento Subacqueo ed Incursori Teseo Tesi (COMSUBIN, Italy)

> EXPAND AND CONQUER

Confrontation is a game that's being designed from day one as a modular system. "Downloadable content" is something that is very important to this project," says Seth Luisi. "We're trying to look at different things we can offer for downloadable content, and we want to have it on a fairly frequent basis: every month or every two months, and then a larger amount of content about every three months. We're looking at characters, weapons, maps—we're looking at a lot of different things."



■ This shot shows pretty much all of the expanded Crossroads. Yes, you really can see that far. And the lack of fog makes for some seriously brutal tower-to-tower sniper battles.

across the entire battlefield—even the larger, 32-player version that expands the central core of the original Crossroads. It's like all the players suddenly got LASIK eye surgery, and you can imagine how eagle eyes will impact the role of the sniper. "It ended up changing the way the map played considerably," Luisi says, "because before, you couldn't see anybody; if you looked down an alleyway, you couldn't see the other end. Now you definitely can."

Of course, such supervision introduced the problem of snipers lying prone on street corners and dominating entire areas of the map. And this wasn't an easy issue to solve, since the team is committed to re-creating Crossroads with as much accuracy as possible. "The way we're treating classic map content is like gospel," Seymour says. "There are some tiny corrections to scale and such; as the game becomes more high-res and realistic, architectural scale becomes a very big deal. But it's essentially the same." (Incidentally, we provocatively ambiguous phrase "classic map content" perks your ears, listen up: When pressed for details about the possibility of other classic maps arriving, Seymour is carefully noncommittal. "There's a mix of old

and new in there," he says, "and people will be very happy, I think.")

Anyway, the solution to the view-distance problem was to add more objects for players to use for cover, which deprives a ground-level sniper of a wide-open shooting gallery. But in this edition of SOCOM, cover may not always be as safe as it appears. "There's some cover you can blow up," Luisi says. "We have exploding barrels, back by popular demand, and propane tanks you can blow up [and] garbage bags that can get destroyed. There's lots of objects that can be destroyed to give that look that you're just blowing the place to hell." Among these objects are abandoned cars and trucks that take realistic damage before eventually exploding in devastating fashion.

Contrary to some reports, however, the basic structure of the levels cannot be altered except in predetermined breach locations as seen in previous games. "We don't allow you to blow holes in walls," Luisi explains. "It's something we explored, but we didn't want to change the environment. The flow and layout of the map is so important to us, and maintaining that strategy is so important—and if you can arbitrarily blow holes in things, you

can really change that."

Of course, the added cover to Crossroads (and elsewhere) was implemented to counteract a potential balance issue, not to nerf the sniper role—it moves sniper activity up from ground level. "When you're down in the streets and alleys [of Crossroads], you're fairly well covered," Seymour says. "It's pretty tough to pick off people who are at ground level. But [higher up], you get these vicious sniper battles. Most of the rooftops are accessible, so there's a second layer that takes place. Snipers definitely have more opportunity to do more—the realistic ranged use of weapons definitely has more room to stretch its legs. But it doesn't dominate the play."

Group dynamics

Not all of the refinements to the SOCOM formula directly affect gameplay. Slant Six is also introducing a host of new features geared at supporting and strengthening the *Confrontation* community. Many of these have to do with enhancing clan and group play. For example, every player begins the game with two characters: a commando and a mercenary. Both of these characters can be customized with different weapon

The Old Soldiers

In the trenches with the SOCOM hardcore

IN LATE SUMMER OF 2002, SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs launched the PlayStation 2's online initiative. It was an instant sensation, introducing hundreds of thousands of console gamers to online play via a surprisingly hardcore shooter experience. Many of these players came along for the ride when the sequel was released a year later, but when SOCOM 3 debuted in late 2005, many fans of the original games turned their noses up at the huge maps, vehicular combat, and other changes to the beloved formula.

And yet, nearly six years after the launch of the original game, the first SOCOM and SOCOM II still enjoy a dedicated, vocal fan

base. We headed into the trenches of the PlayStation online forums to find out why these hardest of the hardcore still slug it out in an all-but-forgotten war. Here's what some of them had to say.

Daviddoel: "Yes, I own a PS3, a 360, and a Wii, yet I still play both SOCOM I or II online on a weekly basis. The maps, for me, are what really stand the test of time. They are some of the most well-designed, [well-] thought-out, and unique stages that I have ever experienced in an online shooter."

SMoKeYRuN: "Heart-pounding action, highly competitive gameplay, a 'life' that actually meant

something—a unique experience many shooters just don't offer."

DaT gUY: "SOCOM I and II just had a more intimate style of play, communication worked, and the games were intense. The maps were also a big part of it. Each of the maps were designed around each mode and worked perfectly for that mode."

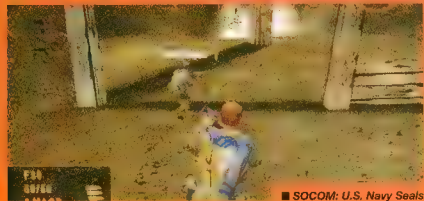
digitalgangster: "I stayed up with my clan for 12 hours straight on SOCOM II. I've never replicated that with any other online game."

The Coathanger: "To me, it's all about the community. I met some really cool people playing those

games. People I'd open my house to or help out if they were in a bind. I can't say that about any other videogame. SOCOM encourages teamwork and camaraderie."

Based on these words from some of the dedicated fans, you might think that the early SOCOMs have a larger core of players than the widely maligned SOCOM 3 and Combined Assault. But it's not quite that simple. SOCOM II's daily averages for online players are double those of SOCOM 3. But Combined Assault blows them both out of the water. Check out some recent stats on the online performance of the entire franchise on both PS2 and PSP....

GAME	AVERAGE SIMULTANEOUS PLAYERS DURING PEAK HOURS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF PLAYERS PER DAY
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs (PS2)	200-300	1,000
SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs (PS2)	1,500-2,000	6,000
SOCOM 3 (PS2)	800-900	3,000
SOCOM: Combined Assault (PS2)	10,000	25,000
SOCOM: Fireteam Bravo (PSP)	600-700	3,000-4,000
SOCOM: Fireteam Bravo 2 (PSP)	2,000-3,000	10,000-12,000



■ SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs



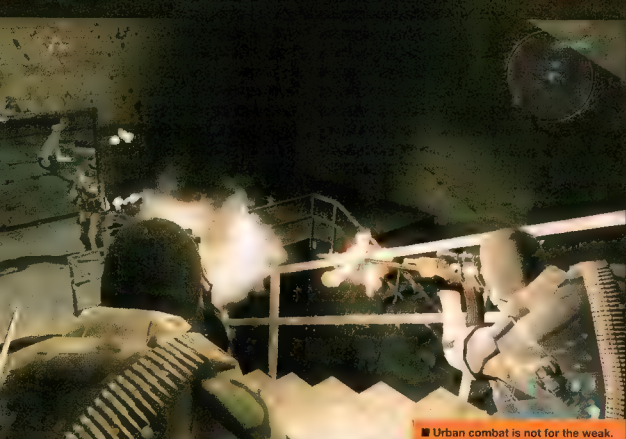
■ SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs

loadouts, outfits, and gear...but you won't get access to the full range of customization options without taking the next step. "We're continuing what was in *Tactical Strike*, the idea of real special forces—six in the first release, and more to come," Seymour says. "But you can only play as a special forces character once you join a clan. This basically upgrades your commando character into a Navy SEAL or other special force. So there's a great incentive to join clans."

"Having the special forces," Luis adds, "also allows us to have different equipment items—different camo patterns, different helmets, things like that—that are available only to that special-force team. So they'll look unique. And each special force is also going to have a couple of unique weapons that only they get." The clan leader (or designated subordinates in the new "chain of command") decides which special force the clan chooses, and he has access to additional customization

features such as special camouflage patterns and team insignias. And, while individual players can still customize their appearance within that framework, the result is clans who look like teams.

Clan management is also more accessible thanks to the launch of SOCOM.com, a website devoted to the *Confrontation* community. On the site, you can make changes to your clan's schedule and roster, exchange info with clan members and other clans, and even scout new recruits



■ Urban combat is not for the weak.



▶ DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW

When Sony first showed off *Confrontation*, some fans were incensed by the apparent move to a close-up, over-the-shoulder camera. But this move wasn't without its reasons: "The old viewpoint was a little dated," Sony's Seth Luisi says, "because it was more centered toward 4:3 TVs, and now, going to 16:9, we have a lot more area off to the sides. But as soon as we showed that, immediately all the old fans said, 'I want the old camera back!' So we have that in there as well as an option."

To be absolutely clear, we quote Slant Six's David Seymour, who posted the following on the PlayStation blog (blog.us.playstation.com): "There is an option to use [the] classic SOCOM camera! It looks and feels like the original classic camera!" Only he said it three times in a row. Apparently this is a touchy subject.

Combined Assault. Player health, for example, is closer to the early games in regard to the number of hits a player can take. The detailed (but underused) bullet-penetration system returns with a more lifelike simulation of how well different types of cover can protect you against incoming fire. All the game types of the first *SOCOM* and *SOCOM II* return as well—suppression, demolition, extraction, breach, and escort—plus control from *SOCOM 3*. Fans of the first game, however, will likely be most excited about a new game type: elimination. This is essentially a reprise of the suppression rules from the first game, which require the winning team to completely eliminate all the players on the opposing team in order to win the match; anything less than complete extermination results in a draw. This is hardcore.

If this sort of thing doesn't interest you, don't forget about the inherent customizability of the game-creation system. Players looking for a fast-action, low-pressure fragfest can set up 32-player every-man-for-himself matches with infinite respawn. Conversely, anyone looking to recreate the feel of the original games can set up no-respawn matches on

the reduced 16-player maps and even tweak the available loadouts (to restrict explosives, for example). The point is that *Confrontation* is most definitely *SOCOM*—only more so. Even with the new features, it feels like an evolution of the franchise, rather than the drastic departure brought about by *SOCOM 3*.

But of course, the game is still early in development. With an amorphous release of "summer," there's still plenty of tweaking to do to get the game looking clean and smooth. For example, while some areas of Crossroads look almost startlingly detailed, others seem to have surprisingly low-resolution textures. And although the game ran smoothly for most of my hands-on time, an occasional stutter or period of slowdown was not unheard of.

Naturally, the designers attest that these issues will be cleaned up—and given how much better the game looks now compared to its unveiling a year ago, it's easy to believe them. But you don't necessarily have to take our word for it—or theirs. The team plans for an invite-only beta test as early as right now or May with a public beta soon afterward. Want to get in on the top-secret beta?

"We're rolling out a blog site fairly soon," Luisi says. "And we want to use that site to identify some of the community leaders. And then we'll invite them into the private beta; just so we can get feedback from those hardcore *SOCOM* guys—probably only a few hundred people."

If that doesn't make you confident that the designers are serious about making a game for *SOCOM*'s true fans, well, it's likely nothing will. But the team wants fans to believe. "The spirit of *SOCOM I* and *II* is the guiding principle we use when making design decisions," Seymour says. "So whether it's the decision to leave vehicles out of the game, or the focus on more intimate maps and features that help with the tactical, close-quarters combat, that's our guiding principle. There's a lot of new stuff, for sure, but for those really hardcore fans who are scared of change, I think they'll be OK."

EGM Extras: Stay frosty, SEALs: Our coverage of *SOCOM: Confrontation* carries on at EGM.1UP.com. We dive into the trend of big downloadable games like *Confrontation* to see if the days of boxed-store-bought titles are numbered.

REVIEWS

> crazy brawls, dungeon crawls, island spoils, soldiers' toils, and the one and only wolf god

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SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL (GAME OF THE MONTH)



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THIS MONTH IN REVIEW

A Smashing Month All Around

Second chances, sexy ports, and debuts

JUST A FEW MONTHS AGO I was 1UP.com's reviews intern, playing and reviewing some of the fall's biggest games and leaving all of the real work to the bigger dogs around here. Well, now I'm the associate editor of reviews for the 1UP Network, and with Garnett Lee hopping over to run previews (that was quick) I'm currently by my lonesome. Never fear though: Regardless of what capacity I'm filling here, I'll be sure to continue the legacy of uncompromising honesty and engaging, informative reviews.

I've been an *EGM* reader for over 16 years and I couldn't be more excited to be along for the ride to see where we're headed next.

As for this month, I'm just happy to see one of my favorite PS2 games, *Okami*, get a second chance on Wii. Well, I'm also happy to finally have health insurance so I can treat my gaping wounds.

—Nick Suttner, Assoc. Editor, Reviews

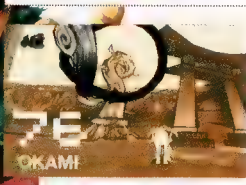
> HOW WE RATE

- 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+s; Gold: All A-s 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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Army of Two: Kill with a pal



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Hot Shots: Golf for the masses



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Universe at War: Strategy



THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

The bunch of chumps who write about your games



James "Milkman" Mielke

Editor-in-Chief

James spent the majority of his first full month as EIC trying to get the memory foam on Shoe's chair to reshape to his own ass...with little success. A momentary setback.

Now Playing: *Poison Pink, Super Smash Bros. Brawl*
Blog: milkman.1UP.com



Crispin Boyer

Senior Executive Editor

Now that Bryan's going to Insomniac Games as community manager, Crispin is thinking about becoming a community manager for the community of community managers who used to be gaming-mag editors.

Now Playing: *The Dishwasher, Professor Layton, Hot Shots Golf*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



Matt Leone

Executive Editor

Matt spent deadline on the hunt for barbecue in Texas, confused about this whole Wonder Bread phenomenon. He then returned with a shirt that said "Me Ate Meat," which he pronounced "Meaty Meat."

Now Playing: *God of War: Chains of Olympus, Dark Sector*
Blog: bigolaf.1UP.com



Jennifer Tsao

Group Managing Editor

Jennifer's still reeling from the BioWare doctors' trivia challenge on a recent episode of *EGM Live*. If you didn't get a chance to hear it, check egm1UP.com for a laugh—at Jen's expense.

Now Playing: *Okami, Professor Layton, Hot Shots Golf*
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



Alice Liang

Associate Editor, Previews

Alice has been exercising her slave-driving powers by squeezing articles from reluctant footdraggers. What do you mean you'd rather play a game for fun?! Looks like it's time to get out her pink riding crop....

Now Playing: *PixelJunk Monsters, God of War: COO*
Blog: alceingameland.1UP.com



Greg Ford

Managing Editor

A rough end to the NFL season left Ford in bad shape. Thankfully, baseball season is starting. Oh, and *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*. That helps with the anger issues.

Now Playing: *Burnout: Paradise, N+, Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Rock Band*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



Shane Bettenhausen

Executive Editor

Unfulfilled by *Smash Bros.*' cash-free gambling system, bet-crazy Shane organized an underground interoffice fight club for mascots. He is Pikachu's smirking revenge....

Now Playing: *Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Metal Gear Solid 4, Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



Dan "Shoe" Hsu

Editorial Director

Not having to worry about *EGM* deadlines has freed up Shoe's brain so he can concentrate more on his gaming. It doesn't seem to have helped, though. *Layton's* still schooling him....

Now Playing: *Professor Layton, Burnout: Paradise, Patapon, Lost Sins of a Solar Empire (PC)*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



Nick Suttner

Associate Editor, Reviews

With the 2008 Game Developers Conference having come and gone with no new game announcement from Team ICO, Nick is willing to bargain—a PS3 port of *Shadow of the Colossus*, with the cut colossi included? Or, on something.

Now Playing: *Culdcept Sage*
Blog: rocksolidaudio.1UP.com



Bryan Intihar

Outgoing Senior Editor, Previews

After five-plus years at *EGM*, Bryan has decided to make the move into game development. We wish the Fragile Eagle good luck on his new adventure...or was that good riddance?

Now Playing: *Grand Theft Auto IV, Super Smash Bros. Brawl*
Blog: egmbryan.1UP.com

Also on deck...

Sam Kennedy
Site Director

Shawn Elliott
Executive Editor

Garnett Lee
Senior Editor, Previews

Jeremy Pariah
Senior Editor, Expanded Content

Michael Donahoe
Senior Writer

Scott Sharkey
Senior Editor, Features

Andrew Pfister
Producer, Podcasts

Tyler Barber
Staff Reviewer

Ray Barnholt
Staff Reviewer

John Davison
Staff Reviewer

Andrew Fitch
Staff Reviewer

Anthony Gallegos
Staff Reviewer

Mike Nelson
Staff Reviewer

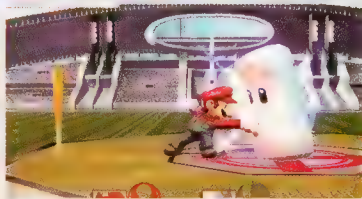
Joe Rybicki
Staff Reviewer



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

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





Wii

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: HAL Laboratory ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS

MILKMAN:
A
EXCELLENT

SHANE:
A
EXCELLENT

C. RORR:
A
EXCELLENT

Good: Every Nintendo character ever is here...almost
Bad: Gameplay and visuals not much changed since *Melee*
R.O.B.: Robot pal finally useful here

Brawl for all

→ **MILKMAN:** Nintendo lovers were already proclaiming *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*'s greatness before its release, thirsting for its oodles and oodles of fan service—no questions asked. But what about everyone else? Objectively speaking, *Brawl* is a perfectly fine evolution of the incredibly popular series. Part platformer, part arcadey beat-em-up, part galactic sumo-wrestling brawler (in which you try to knock everyone else out of the ring before you're knocked out), this is Nintendo's love letter to its fans.

Now, if you don't really care about Nintendo franchises and were weaned on, say, PlayStation or Xbox games, then this might not suit your horn. Little has changed since *Smash Bros.*' previous iteration back in

2001, *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, in terms of either game mechanics or visuals. What Nintendo has done here is simply piled on more, more, more. They've started by adding a substantial single-player element, the Subspace Emissary, also known as "the story mode written by *Final Fantasy VII* scribe Kazushige Nojima." For a story mode, though, it doesn't really have a plot, save for rolling out a democratically arranged selection of characters through a lengthy series of platform-heavy stages and watching the wordless cut-scenes that break up the action.

Plenty of incentive is still strewn through the Subspace mode, though, as well as just about everywhere else in the game—from the stadium events

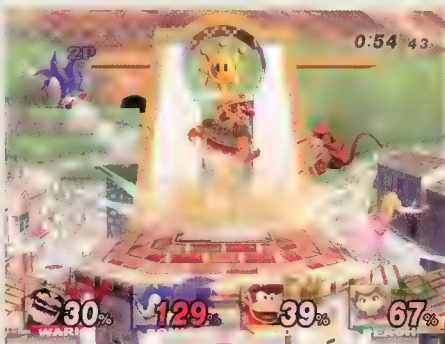
to the Training to the Classic mode (in which you simply battle a set number of opponents, fighting-game style). Additional bits of fan service appear at every turn in the form of trophies, unlockable characters, and special versions of characters (like Zero Suit Samus). If you thought *Melee* was packed with nods to past and present Nintendo glories, then you'll be shocked at what *Brawl* has to offer. Seeing characters like Captain Olimar duke it out with a selection of Pikmin at his side is expected, but finding unlockables from Nintendo's formerly import-only N64 game *Sin and Punishment* (now available on Virtual Console) is truly exhilarating. You'll even catch *Electroplankton* miscellany, and cameos from just about every



Who Is Kazushige Nojima?



The writer of *Brawl*'s "scenario"—such as it is, with no dialogue, subtitles, or discernible plot—is the man responsible for the memorable storylines of most of the recent popular chapters in Square Enix's *Final Fantasy* series, specifically *Final Fantasy VII*, *VIII*, *X*, and *X-2*, and a contributor to the whirlwind collage of Disney fan service found in *Kingdom Hearts*. The *Kingdom Hearts* experience probably prepared Nojima for the task of making sense of the disparate Nintendo timeline, with characters crossing universes at a whim. Additionally, *Final Fantasy* alumnus Nobuo Uematsuo wrote the orchestral score, thus reuniting two of *Final Fantasy*'s former creative forces.



first-party Nintendo game that's come out since 2001. I haven't personally found anything from *Drill Dozer* (GBA) yet, but I wouldn't be at all surprised if I did.

Which brings me back to my point about fan service. Do I penalize *Brawl* for being what it is—a perfectly adequate but simple brawler that's easy to pick up and play (and offers enough depth to reward competitive gaming),

but is hardly a pure fighter like *Virtua Fighter* or *Street Fighter*? Subtract the franchise fatigue of a game like *Dynasty Warriors 6*, and you have a basic button-mashy brawler with a specific hook. If you're not into China, you won't see what's special about that series beyond its basic game mechanics. But with *Brawl*, I err on the side of the Nintendo fan, among whose numbers I rank. This game was made for Nintendo fans, and so the only criterion left was this: "Does this do it for me?" The answer is an emphatic, undeniable yes.

→ **SHANE:** Nintendo's mascot free-for-all has become so ubiquitous that it's easy to forget that having Mario beat the crap out of Link still feels novel—this Wii installment marks only the third entry in the franchise, after all.

But after witnessing the quantitative leap between the series' Nintendo 64 debut and its best-selling GameCube sequel, expectations for this update run astronomically high. Does it deliver? Well, even die-hard fans will find precious little to whine about here: They'll discover the same additive gameplay, voluninous options, and reverential celebration of all things Nintendo. But when it comes to the innovations that could truly evolve the series, you'll wonder why the developers didn't take a few more risks.

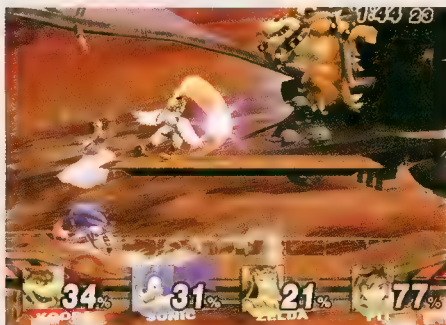
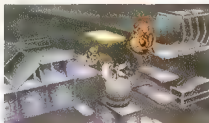
The "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" mantra persists here, allowing veterans to instantly ease back into the chaotic, over-the-top fisticuffs between legendary Nintendo glitterati. That's not a bad thing, though, as this game excels at delivering enthralling four-player mayhem.



Building Blocks

Brawl's Stage Builder mode is definitely cool. Take a few minutes with the elegant editor, and you can create a totally competent battleground that's sharable online or via an SD memory card.

But while the editing tools are easy enough, we just worry about the variety. After creating a few levels, it's likely you'll have used all the items and realize you just don't have the tools to match a Nintendo-produced level (new downloadable items would be superb). Striking user-generated gold is possible... provided you have the creativity.



The traditional *Smash Bros.* combat remains largely untouched, but a handful of fresh competitors help to galvanize the hero-on-hero action. Among the newcomers, Pit, Sonic, Snake, and Pokémon Trainer stand out as unique, challenging new archetypes. Third-party characters Sonic and Solid Snake deserve special mention—one wonders what adding even more of their ilk could have done for the game. Unfortunately, many of the other freshmen here feel like nothing more than palette-swapped rereads.

While *Brawl* remains a party game at its core, considerable effort has gone into keeping the thrills flowing even when you're playing solo. Unfortunately, while well-intentioned, the new Subspace Emissary story mode fails to impress with its repetitive enemies, meager narrative, and

wonky jumping controls. Likewise, the addition of online play deserves commendation...even if Nintendo's own strict rules (no voice chat, the necessity of annoying Friend Codes, no leaderboards) ostensibly cripple this potentially awesome feature. Seriously, smack-talking adds a lot to a game like this, and these eerily silent, anonymous online matches simply don't feel modern. That said, *Brawl* still shines as the go-to party game for a houseful of friends.

✦ **G. FORD:** First off, for any fanboys reading out there: By playing *Brawl*, you hereby waive any rights you had to complain about anything in the world of gaming for at least a year, if not the next 10. This game takes fan service to record levels with a plethora of stages, music, cameos,

and so much more that encompasses the soul of Nintendo. And as it did with *Milky*, it repeatedly pulled at my Nintendo heartstrings, leaving that part of me well sated. Actually, no, it left me downright gorged. About all this game-cum-homage is missing is a packed-in pair of ergonomically busted Virtual Boy goggles to see everything in red-hued faux-3D.

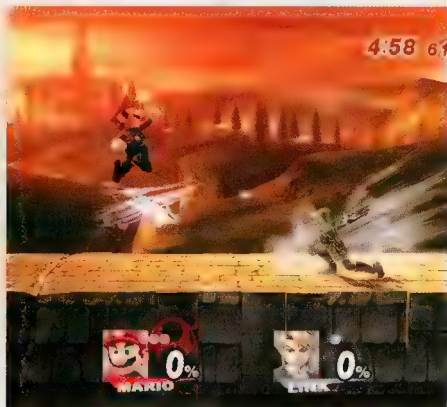
Of course, all this would be a mere Nintendo history lesson without the gameplay to go with it, but *Brawl* succeeds there as well. Its platformer-style run-and-sock action still ranks among the most accessible and satisfying of its kind—not too surprising, given the source. It has its annoying quirks—most characters can only use their ranged shots when the analog stick is idle, which can be downright painful in a game where you always

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want to be moving, for example—but it's still reliable, responsive, and endlessly engaging.

And once again (and despite one hell of a push from the seam-bursting single-player—I rather enjoyed the Subspace Emissary as a conduit for the unlockables), multiplayer is the main draw. I sank hundreds of hours

into the first two *Smash Bros.*, and I've been sucked in again. The basic setup is still to soften up the other combatants (up to four total, computer- or human-controlled), then wallop them off the stage, collecting coins or KO's in the process. It's simple, and it's fun. Eschewing the advanced techniques and combo hunts of more seri-

ous fighters, *Brawl*'s about the inevitable chaos derived from unbalanced characters (good luck with Lucas vs. Bowser), ever-morphing stages (see: PictoChat), and tide-turning items (including the often-instant-kill Smash Ball). Plus, you can brawl online—too bad, unlike Shane, I couldn't connect to the servers. Let's hope Nintendo's ironed out the online bugs by the time you read this. Customization also plays a big part; you can have matches in which the gravity is cranked way up and the characters breathe fire, among more. It all just serves to feed the addictive playground where Mario manhandles Diddy Kong and the Pokémon Trainer leads Squirrel over stocky Captain Olimar and his Pikmin. Sure, it strikes the fancy of Nintendo fans, but *Brawl* should do right by most other gamers as well. ☛

EGM Extras:
Getting smashed too much playing as Lucas? You'll find our Super Smash Bros. *Brawl* SuperGuide at EGM.1UP.com.



5'6

5'3

5'0

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WE GET IT TO YOU FIRST.
BUT IT'S NOT PRETTY.

GET IT AT ALL GAME CRAZY STORES.

04.29.08

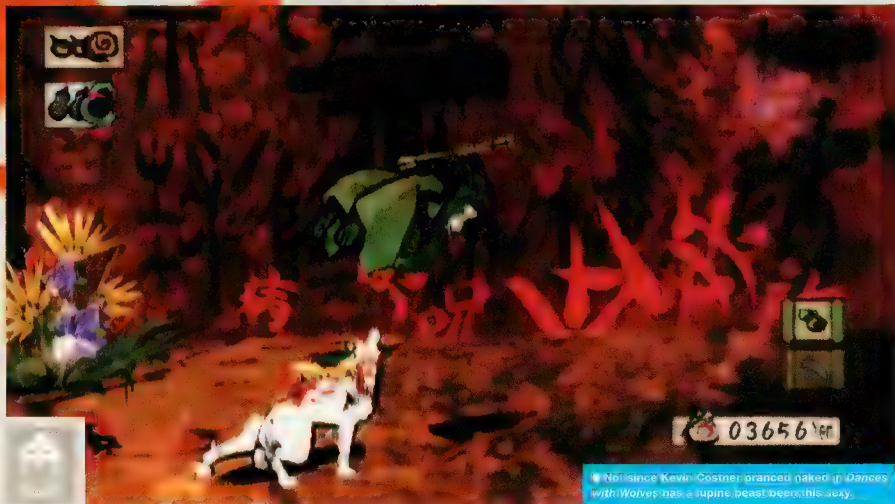
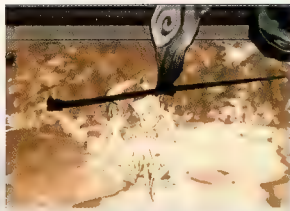
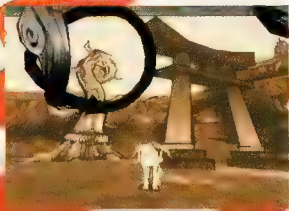
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► Not since Kevin Costner pranced naked in *Dances with Wolves* has a lupine beast been this sexy.

Wii

OKAMI

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ Developer: Clover Studio/Ready at Dawn ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen



The Good: A massive adventure, great writing.

The Bad: Unreliable motion controls, starts off slow.

Lame: No Classic Controller support.

A second chance for a deserving classic

► **NICK:** *Okami* doesn't age—it matures. It's still the same beautifully told, endlessly creative epic adventure that I immersed myself in two falls ago on the PlayStation 2. Steeped in Japanese mythology, with a story bursting with themes of life, love, and companionship (gaming-industry rarities), it's one of the more remarkable journeys I've taken.

While returning to its gorgeous *sumi-e* Japanese watercolor brush-stroke world was like revisiting a distant dream, the new motion controls were—surprise!—a slightly rude awakening. *Okami*'s paintbrush-on-canvas mechanics that drive combat and interaction with the world seem perfectly suited to the Wii Remote but simply aren't reliably precise. Many

actions take several more tries than they should, where they didn't require a second thought with the PS2's conventional controls. Still, it's one of the few games that can overcome shaky fundamentals in light of an astonishingly engaging adventure. Easily my favorite Wii game.

► **MILKMAN:** While I'm glad to say that any Wii owners who passed up the original PS2 version have a lot to look forward to here—it's practically identical—the conversion is weakest where it counts the most: in the brush mechanics. Even the most basic exercises in the PS2 version (like slicing a boulder in half) suddenly demand ■ mysterious precision on Wii, leading to unexpected and unnecessary frustra-

tion. The Wii version may be a distant second best to the PS2 iteration, but it's still a journey worth taking.

► **JENNIFER:** I played only a bit of this beauty on PS2, and perhaps that's a good thing—while everything these two say about the problematic motion controls is absolutely true, *Okami* remains transcendent. The slow pacing of the game fits its theme of restoring natural splendor in a world gone awry, and the always interesting, often haunting mythological setting is a place I enjoyed visiting for a few minutes or ■ few hours at a time. But like the real-world environmental crusade, *Okami* takes patience; clues about what to do next are often hard to come by. 🐾



Wii

OPOONA

■ Publisher: Koei ■ Developer: ArtePiazza
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

For roundabout roleplayers

➔ **RAY:** Growing up against your will is one of the underlying themes of the quirky role-playing game *Opoona*, which stars a little alien boy of the same name who must reunite his family after they crash-land on a strange planet. The battle system is particularly interesting—you flick the Wii Nunchuk's analog stick to throw *Opoona*'s "Bonbon" weapon—yet you'll be wondering where to go next in the maze-like hub towns just so you can start fighting. A woefully wonky English translation also hurts the game; the dialogue could've added a lot more character, but it ends up falling flat. Still, I found *Opoona* to be strangely soothing—the attractive environments and upbeat music (composed by *Final Fantasy Tactics*' Hiroshi Sakimoto) are nearly worth it on their own. *Opoona*'s flaws are hard to ignore, but I at least had a decent time with it.

➔ **SHANE:** With its bulbous, Playskool-style characters and weirdly frugal Nunchuk-only control scheme, *Opoona* feels custom-crafted to be "My First RPG" for young tykes. Too bad its steep, old-school difficulty curve will frequently force them to grind through countless random encounters if they hope to survive the tougher areas. Meanwhile, old-timers with a *Dragon Quest* pedigree will dig the game's stellar soundtrack and purposefully nostalgic design approach, but they'll have difficulty stomaching its dippy baby-game dialogue and repetitive, gimmicky combat (imagine traditional *DQ* battles crossed with an exhausting carnival ring toss).

➔ **ALICE:** Old-school gamers looking for a nostalgic, one-handed RPG might dig the Nunchuk-only controls, but I found playing in tandem with the otherwise deadweight Wii Remote to work better in many cases. And forget the random-encounter grind. The real bummer is that the could-be-pretty-interesting citizen-ranking and license-acquiring systems are bogged down by tedious requisite side jobs—the game's equivalent of paying dues to society by having you flip space burgers. But like these guys said, the music and environments make up for the more blasé moments.



The Good: Clever battle system and cool art direction
The Bad: Rough translation, uneven pacing
Bonbons: You're only as powerful as your ball size



PS3 (also on XB360)

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Konami
 ■ Players: 1-7 ■ ESRB: Everyone

This one needed some extra time

➔ **ANDREW P:** Honestly, I've never spent hours upon hours with a created team in Master League play, signing midlevel players and tweaking formations. That higher level of play is still a big part of *Pro Evolution Soccer 2008*. But as someone who played the sport and enjoyed previous versions of the series, I couldn't help but notice that this 2008 edition screams "lack of effort."

The other guys say that the A.I. is smarter, and I'd agree—but it's smarter almost to the point of omniscience. While a struggling Angolan team can dribble through defenses, my mighty Italians can't even trap and settle balls from simple throw-ins. Pressing the Square button to apply more defensive pressure is a handy tool, but it seems like a concession to the difficulty of managing 10 field players—a feat that your CPU opponent has no trouble performing. You're better off playing against humans.

The foundation of *Pro Evo* still supports enjoyable and technical soccer, but it badly needs something new for next season.

➔ **BRYAN:** It may be fair to refer to some athletes as dumb jocks, but not the *Pro Evo* crew. From their cool-as-the-other-side-of-the-pillow approach around the goal to the way they nudge you just enough while you're dribbling along the sidelines, Konami's soccer players maintain their rep as the smartest sportos around. But aside from a slight visual upgrade (and I mean slight), this edition doesn't seem much different from the last few. To echo our gang on the *Sports Anomaly* podcast, this one plays it too safe in '08.

➔ **JOHN D:** The computer-controlled players may be a bit smarter than they were in previous versions, but it's not all good news this year. Goalies inexplicably fumble the ball with stunning regularity, and after everyone praised last year's game for being perfectly paced, this one seems to have been sped up so that it feels more like an arcade game. There seem to be some irregular visual glitches, too, especially near the goal—I missed several shots because of jerky animation. At least that's what I keep telling myself.



The Good: Plenty of teams and management options
The Bad: PS3 version looks like the PS2 version
The Unacceptable: Slowdown

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The boomerang is a great tool to use in the game, but the game's graphics are not as good as those of other games.

PS3/XB360

DARK SECTOR

■ Publisher: D3Publisher ■ Developer: Digital Extremes ■ Players: 1-10 ■ ESRB: Mature



Good: Looks great in high-def, glaive works well
Bad: Campaign feels too generic
Highlight: Most amo game hero to date

Glaives of War

➔ **MATT:** Apart from being a blatant *Gears of War* clone, *Dark Sector* is more or less an attempt to prove that throwing a bladed boomerang in a shooter can be as much fun as firing a gun. And at that it succeeds. When you toss your glaive into fire to charge it up, throw it across a room—slowing down time to steer it in midair—and then detonate it over an enemy's head, you feel pretty damn powerful.

The game's engine impresses as well, with enough technology to make it the blockbuster it so badly wants to be. Way back when, *Dark Sector* held the distinction of being the first game announced for this console generation—and over the years, clearly a substantial effort went into adding a lot of visual detail.

The rest of the game falls predictably into place. You alternate between using a handful of traditional guns and the glaive, moving from shootout to shootout; it works well enough. I just wish the content weren't so forgettable: Environments all look the same (shades of brown and blue—original!), the convoluted story takes itself too seriously, bosses and enemies are mostly faceless, and there's nothing in the campaign that you haven't seen before elsewhere.

Because *Dark Sector* doesn't use the glaive as much more than an alternate weapon and a tool to solve a few puzzles, the game ends up feeling like a straightforward shooter—a pretty decent one, but nothing that over-achieves. The whole boomerang ele-

ment doesn't exactly amount to what you'd call "pushing the boundaries."

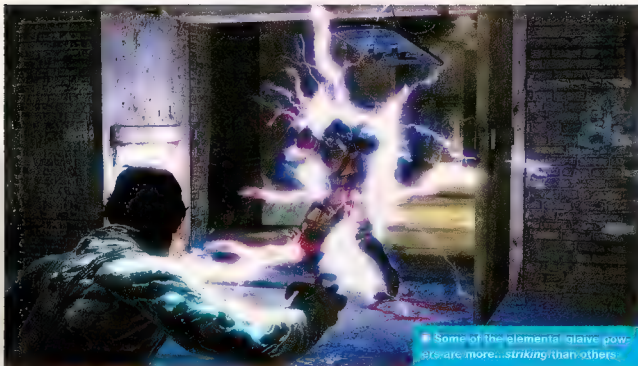
➔ **G. FORD:** I want to expand on that forgettable part, as the generally unexciting enemy designs definitely disappointed me. The generic grunts and lackluster cloaked dudes just don't stick with you like *Killzone's* orange-eyed Helghast or *Gears of War's* creepy Locust Horde. And those boss battles: *Dark Sector* had me thinking my skills were deteriorating. On multiple occasions, I was sure I was hurting a big baddie—only to realize I wasn't actually doing the right trick. Not having a life bar is fine, but not when it leads to confusion.

But don't take these complaints as hate; it's an enjoyable game. The

Don't Be Fooled by the Word "Multiplayer"

Given developer Digital Extremes' history with titles like *Unreal Championship* and *Pariah*, it came as a surprise to discover *Dark Sector's* multiplayer only amounts to a very small part of the game. We're happy that the developers took a chance on two non-death-match/capture the flag modes—in *Infection*, everyone gangs up on one target, while in *Epidemic*, two teams try to take out the opposing leaders—but most multiplayer rounds last just a couple of minutes and don't feel like much more than a temporary distraction.

Don't think we're down on the game for lack of content. The single-player campaign alone is sizable enough to carry the package, and we like seeing developers focus their efforts—but given Digital Extreme's track record, we wanted to fire a warning shot for those expecting to play online long-term.



Some of the elemental glaive powers are more... striking than others.



glaive is quite visceral, and I appreciate how you continue to gain new abilities throughout the game, including the satisfying glaive power throw (this timing-based move reminded me of *Gears'* active reloading) and your armor's out-of-thin-air shield. If only the melee combat improved as

the game progressed—how come I always seemed to be swinging through enemies?

➔ **NICK:** Indeed, gentlemen, indeed. *Dark Sector* might be the best-looking shooter on the 360 at times (trumping the mighty Unreal Engine 3 in reliable,

buttery smoothness), but after swiping every bullet point in *Gears'* arsenal, couldn't they have at least left the glum aesthetic behind? I can stomach the roadie-run rip-off, cover-based combat, and close-quarters disemboweling, but every stage looks like ■ *Gears* outbreak.

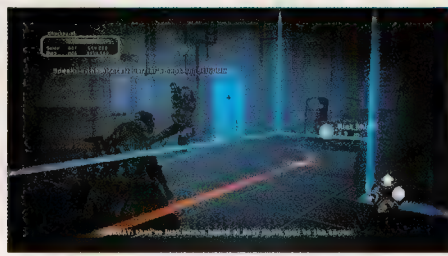
That's OK, though, since the nuts and bolts are mostly satisfying—and, like Greg, I really enjoyed the progression of new powers throughout the experience. The first few levels drag a bit, but by the time you hold your full suite of special abilities, the combat really clicks. Regardless, due to *Gears'* apparently inescapable influence, *Dark Sector* will likely be remembered for its early 2004 debut as a sci-fi *Splinter Cell* instead of the polished-but-forgettable shooter that it ultimately ended up becoming. ☛

EGM Extras:
 *Tricky test boss bummering you out? Head over to EGM.1UP.com for our supremely helpful Dark Sector SuperGuide.*





▶ The nice functionality touch, a picture-in-picture video will display the viewpoint of your partner as well.



XB360 (also on PS3)

ARMY OF TWO

■ Publisher: EA Games ■ Developer: EA Montreal ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Mature



The Good: The Aggro meter
The Bad: Bland levels and anti-mantic pacing
Not Enough: Homeropticism

Not quite double the fun

▶ **SAM:** EA's decision to delay *Army of Two* was a good one—this is definitely a better game than the original reviewable version I played a few months ago—but it doesn't change the fact that the final experience doesn't quite live up to expectations either. The original concept—a title based entirely around cooperative gameplay featuring A.I. so convincing that it would simulate playing with a real human—isn't really delivered here. What is delivered is a very solid, if unspectacular, co-op shooter that tends to tease with good ideas but only deliver on some of them. Good ideas include the Aggro meter (one player can gain Aggro by shooting more, causing enemies to focus their attention on him) and the weapon cus-

tomization system (pimping out your guns is really rewarding). Not so good are the back-to-back segments (where you essentially create an impenetrable shield with your partner) that seem arbitrarily thrown in. And *Army of Two* doesn't take advantage of its co-op sniping and weapon trading.
 When playing single-player, your A.I. counterpart is pretty reliant on your instructions, so, unsurprisingly, the game is at its best when played with a buddy. It's too bad, though, that the levels are too linear and constricted for the game to take advantage of the sort of tactical possibilities that co-op allows for. And while the game does have some high points (an attack on an aircraft carrier being one), stages often lack excitement.

▶ **JOE:** I dug the interesting co-op-themed ideas *Army of Two* throws at you for the first third or so of the game. Dragging your injured partner while he fires at enemies, going back-to-back in slow-mo, and sniping at enemies while he pilots your tandem parachute—these all feel fairly fresh even if the new ideas run dry after a few hours of playtime.
 But for me, *Army of Two* parcels out just enough interesting mechanics, over-the-top sequences, and clever writing to make it possible to overlook many of its faults. The two-man gameplay works surprisingly well even with an A.I. teammate, and managing Aggro becomes a fairly intuitive (and helpful) affair.
 I did run into some serious lag



Army of 2.0's Improvements

If you remember, *Army of Two* was originally supposed to come out way back in December, but at the very last moment (after we had completed our reviews), EA decided to give the game a few more months of development time. So what sort of things did they improve in those three months?

Loading: Here's an easy question for you: Do 30-plus-second load times sound like a lot of fun? Yeah, we didn't think so either. Thankfully, EA managed to slice these annoying waits in half.

Checkpoints: Before, if you got killed near the end of a level, you'd have to go all the way back to the beginning. Lame!

Minigames: EA pulled out its resuscitation-based minigames, which is a good thing since they completely took you out of the combat experience.

Glitches: While we still encountered a few A.I. glitches in the final version, they're nowhere even close to the sort of bizarre things we ran into before.



when playing multiplayer online, which dampened my enjoyment of the novel cash-based take on traditional deathmatch. But the fairly lighthearted tone of the whole experience makes this sort of thing a bit easier to swallow.

Army of Two definitely doesn't deliver the genre revolution some were

expecting, but I still had a good time spraying bullets with a buddy.

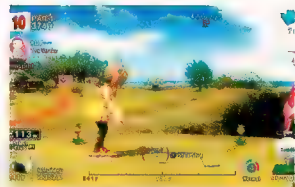
➔ **ANDREW:** To get the most out of *Army of Two*, you really need a real-life partner—all of the nifty multiplayer ideas mentioned lose some effectiveness when the other guy is just A.I.

code with poor communication skills.

Plowing through the game's gun fodder with customized weapons is a satisfying grind, but you're not so much playing cooperatively as you are setting up your partner to be a target dummy while you sneak around the back to get the easy kill.

Thankfully, Sam and Joe respond much better to quick verbal commands than to pressing Up twice on the D-pad and hoping for the best with an A.I. teammate. But like Sam says, the level design sticks to the straight and narrow too often, which means that instead of setting up elaborate traps and ambushes, it's pretty much "I'll take the left and you take the right." There's nothing wrong with that when the execution is done well, and thanks to the delay, that's what we ended up getting. **A+**





PlayStation 3

HOT SHOTS GOLF: OUT OF BOUNDS

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Clap Hanz ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Everyone



The Good: New Advanced Shot mechanic
The Bad: No voice chat, no minigolf
Stereotypical: The goofy "American" characters

On the fringe of greatness

→ **SHANE:** Ever since the original *Hot Shots Golf* (PS1) expertly dumbed down the snooty sport for the gaming masses, successive iterations have stayed the course, offering the same easy-breezy game mechanics with minimal tweaks and additions. Inaugural PS3 installment *Out of Bounds* keeps that legacy largely intact—returning vets will quickly acclimate to the well-designed courses, Kewpie-doll avatars (now eerily surrealistic thanks to the PS3 visuals), and forgiving swing system.

But developer Clap Hanz dares to break from the mold by also implementing an optional new Advanced Shot system that injects tremendous depth into the proceedings by allowing for subtle power, spin, and angle

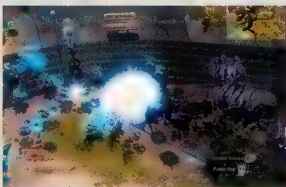
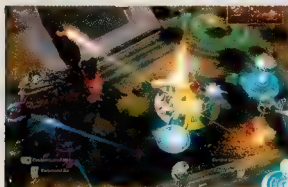
adjustments that yield longer, straighter drives than ever before.

Single-player visits to the links remain as casually enjoyable as always, but it's truly all about the online game here. With 50-player tournaments, oodles of character-customizing doodads, and the promise of downloadable content, this game should have extra-long legs.

→ **MIKE N:** Having never played a *Hot Shots* title before, I'm fairly satisfied with my first experience: I kicked Shane's and Crispin's asses in multiplayer. And while I lack a passion for deformed caricatures, the Advanced Shot mechanic and plentiful online options are awesome. But the single-player aspect is limited, offering little

difference between courses on the way to unlocking characters and equipment to take online (the best reason to tee up).

→ **CRISPIN:** As an old *Hot Shots* pro, I was hoping to see radical upgrades in its PS3 debut. Why no motion-sensing Sixaxis club control? Why aren't the visuals more photo-realistic from tee to shining tee? Why can't I crank up a custom soundtrack rather than suffer through Kenny G-inspired synth jazz? But like Shane, I fell in love with the new shot system, while the online multiplayer mode is *Out of Bounds'* hole in one. Tourneys are quick fun—and the perfect rehab if you're shell-shocked from all the recent deathmatch shooters. **A-**



Xbox 360

UNIVERSE AT WAR: EARTH ASSAULT

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Petroglyph ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen



The Good: Console RTS controls that actually work well
The Bad: Missing a few basics
Oh, the Humanity: Puny humans destroyed in prologue

Conquering console RTS command

➔ **GARNETT:** *Universe at War* demolishes the accepted rule that consoles can't do real-time-strategy (RTS) controls; its simplistic layout becomes familiar after only a couple of hours. It also doesn't make any concessions in putting a whole lot of eye-straining action onscreen at once. You see the same expanse of real estate as you would on a PC, at least on a high-def TV (I'd recommend against trying to play on a standard-definition set).

And it puts these accomplishments to use with classic style. The three warring sci-fi races offer unique play styles in both combat and resource management. With all that humming along, it stunned me to find simple RTS elements missing, like the ability to give a unit a guard command.

It's a stumble that holds *UAW* back from achieving the greatness that was within its reach.

➔ **SHOE:** The controls are console-friendly, yes, but the game itself isn't always. *UAW* offers too much in terms of upgrades, options, and different powers for individual unit types. So in the laser-heat of battle, you might be scrambling to research tech, turn on whole-army powers, activate unit special abilities, counter enemy powers... all on top of the usual RTS worries like building, resource gathering, and fighting. This game just felt like too much work for me. It's awfully clever on paper, though: The three completely different-playing sides offer genuine variety—provided everyone

doesn't just decide to play the badass Hierarchy team, with their giant, customizable walkers....

➔ **TYLER:** Just a note: Both these strategy vets got beaten twice online by this RTS neophyte. Shoe may be daunted by *UAW*'s myriad options, but the (mostly) excellent-paced campaign mode gave me all the training I needed to kick ass. Each stage unfolds in layers of complexity, ending just when it gets deep—which is a good thing, because it made me check out the game's Scenario and Conquer the World modes. Sure, the controls aren't perfect—selecting units usually boils down to an all-or-nothing strategy—but that issue aside, *UAW* is a triumph. 🎮



Goal: *Frontlines* boasts dedicated servers. Not look. The online performance sucks.

Xbox 360

FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Kaos Studios ■ Players: 1-50 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICTS:

JOE

C+

AVERAGE

SHAWN

5 DROPS

The Good: Nonlinear levels

The Bad: Multiplayer is a glitchy mess

The Diabolical: Sneaking up behind an enemy with an exploding drone

Needs a tune-up for better mileage

➔ **JOE:** I'm impressed with the freedom *Frontlines: Fuel of War* offers in its single-player campaign. The organic, nonlinear levels and array of nifty weapons and gadgets (exploding remote control drones? More, please!) allow for an unusual degree of creativity when tackling missions. The basic gunplay is satisfying, with enemies just smart enough to be unpredictable and just dumb enough to give you the satisfaction of mowing 'em down.

I wish the solo campaign were longer than eight to 10 hours, though.... "But I'm getting *Frontlines* for its 50-person multiplayer!" you say? Don't. As of this writing, multiplayer is buggy as hell, with absurd-network latency issues, lots of lobby-joining problems, and a wide assortment of other glitch-

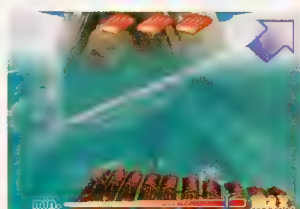
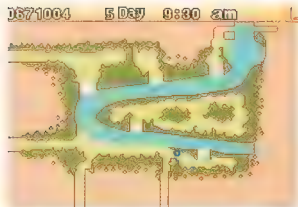
es that ruin the fun.

If you luck into a smooth, bug-free game, it can be a blast. But right now, that just doesn't happen very often. And with no clan support and just one game type, it's not really worth going to war for.

➔ **GARNETT:** While the multiplayer's not perfect, I had good enough luck online to get into some intense battles, and *Frontlines'* ability to make it fun to play both on foot and in the vehicles impressed me. The character system that lets you mix and match your gear with roles that give you special attacks keeps soldiering satisfying on a battlefield filled with tanks and helicopters. But putting all these combat toys in play exposes balance and

communication issues—I think Kaos Studios will be addressing more than online performance in future patches.

➔ **SHAWN:** *Frontlines'* battle-bot future ought to be a hydrogen battery to other ho-hum shooters' fossil fuels. There is a blueprint for originality in its borrowed *Battlefield* play—but you have to hunt for it on the better multiplayer maps while avoiding the rest of the enormous and rather bland bunch. Innovative remote control drones do the same duty as their vehicular big brothers, adding tactical, but better-balanced, variety to *Call of Duty 4*-quality firefights. Piss-poor online performance mucks it up, but as Garnett implies, future fixes ought to correct things. **B+**



DS

LOST IN BLUE 3

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

Make lemonade from...coconuts?

✦ALICE: No one said eking out an existence in the middle of nowhere would be easy; *Lost in Blue 3* makes sure you won't forget that. Shipwrecked on a deserted island, you have to find shelter, keep your health up, and slowly explore the vast tropical surroundings in hopes of escape. The daily grind of gathering life-sustaining resources is no easy job, and the arduous task of keeping yourself and three similarly stranded companions alive really brings out the game's repetitious nature. But I've been known to enjoy a little repetition—as a longtime *Harvest Moon* fan, I've got a high tolerance for deliberate progression. And that holds true here: Making the trek to a new area or discovering a new tool proves strangely

compelling. Just don't play as the girl—in an annoyingly sexist step backward, Claire can't hunt or fight, has a smaller inventory, and sucks at climbing. She's only good at cooking and talking to animals, but who wants to talk to that stupid chimp anyway?

✦ANTHONY: Glad I picked a guy as my character. Still, even with a more capable survivor, it was annoying having to put so much effort into keeping myself alive rather than exploring the island at my leisure. Repeating the same mundane tasks every day so that I could do what I actually *wanted* to do—go exploring, which was great—really got to me. If only multiplayer had allowed us to explore the island together rather than letting us play a few trivial minigames I might've had more fun.

✦CRISPIN: Maybe I'm light-headed from blowing on the DS mic to start so many campfires, but all these *Lost in Blue* games have blurred into one tedious experience for me. What started out as a novel island-surviving adventure—hunting and gathering via touch-screen minigames back when touch-based play was fresh—just feels incredibly bland now. At least this third installment puts a little more emphasis on exploration (look for a *Lost*-inspired mysterious hatch) instead of survival. Still, I feel like I'm spending way too much time picking pointless fruit and packing fulfilling lunches—and not enough time solving the game's mystery.

The Good: Rewarding sense of progression
The Bad: Lacks sufficient tutorials
Four is Better Than Two: More companions to do your bidding



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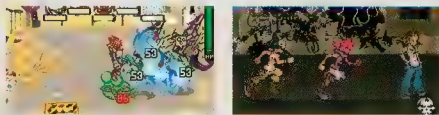
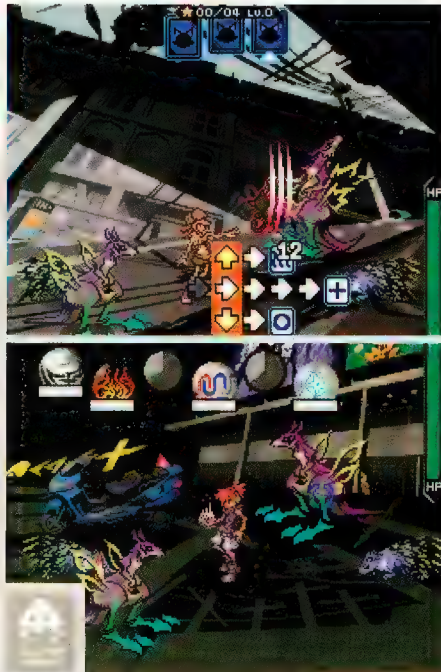
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DS

THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ Developer: Jupiter ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen



The Good: Unique concepts, sweet soundtrack
The Bad: Tries to seem more complex than it really is
Stylin': The most fashionable RPG ever

My first Shibuya shopping spree

→ **JEREMY:** In *The World Ends with You*, we have what might actually be the definitive Square Enix game. It contains all of their most tired clichés (an antisocial hero, amnesia, feathered hair, zippers) as well as their worst design habits (a cumbersome gameplay system that wants to be complex but is ultimately just complicated). But give it a chance and you'll discover that it embodies their strengths as well. It's quirky and unique, and for once those hip Tokyo fashions actually fit; much of the game centers around buying the coolest clothes in Tokyo's stylish Shibuya ward, dictating trends and tastes as part of an extremely fatal secret game. The touch-screen-driven gameplay utilizes the DS' strengths, and the action is

incredibly customization-friendly, from battle skills to difficulty handicaps. The soundtrack is sublime, too—and I don't even like Japanese rock. It's not perfect, but it's refreshingly original.

→ **RAY:** Jeremy's right: At first, the tweak-heavy gameplay (like temporarily lowering your level to get better item drops) brought back memories of dreadful games like *Final Fantasy II*, but *World* manages to stay sensible. Otherwise, it's basically an urban *Kingdom Hearts* but with a less original story where repetition becomes a plot device. That repetition bleeds into the experience, but the multitasking dual-screen battles are fast and more manageable than you'd think. Because of that, I could deal with the

chatty teen heroes regularly lamenting their existence in the cut-scenes.

→ **MICHAEL:** It's almost sad how much *World* cries out to the emo crowd. Misunderstood outcasts will probably adore main character Neku's I'm-better-than-everyone-else attitude. Me? I found it frickin' annoying. But when the whiner cuts the wistful blabbering and puts his magic-enabled pins where his mouth is, the game really spreads the joy. These other guys must be multitasking pros, too, because I had a hard time keeping track of the hectic dual-screen action. Luckily, the insane amount of customization kept me from crying foul. If you ignore the drama and focus on the gameplay, *World* is totally worth it. **A-**



DS

MYSTERY DUNGEON: SHIREN THE WANDERER

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Chunsoft
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone

REVIEWS

THE VERDICTS:

JEREMY
B+
 GOOD

FITCH
A
 EXCELLENT

SHARKEY
B
 GOOD

Wandering into an ass-kicking

➔ **JEREMY:** The roguelike genre—that very specific niche of dungeon-crawling role-playing games featuring global turn-based actions, random maps, and no mercy whatsoever—is surprisingly well represented on DS (see: *Pokémon: Mystery Dungeon, Izuna*, etc.). *Shiren* leaves them all in the dust, excelling through attention to detail and sheer viciousness. Newcomers may find themselves put off by some of its more punishing quirks, like the way dying sends you back to the start with your stats reduced to level 1. Once you figure out the game's secrets, though, you can cheat the death penalty and apply the diverse arsenal to your advantage. And while *Shiren* himself is forever caught in a *Groundhog Day* loop of

advancement, the world around him slowly changes as he inches his way through Table Mountain. Success is 30 percent planning, 30 percent persistence, and about 80 percent luck—making for a challenging, infuriating, but deeply rewarding experience.

➔ **RAY:** To me, *Shiren* isn't a game I necessarily play to "beat." I view it like solitaire: You've just gotta try and retry until you have better odds and get one or two steps further than last time. It's just a really good dungeon game, with a sweet "rescue" system (you go online and send out a rescue password so someone can load it and save you) and then send a continue password back) and environmental details that hide the gridlike maps.

Somewhere in the RPG hierarchy—between dramatic quests and grind-heavy number crunchers—*Shiren* sits. It might not make you happy all of the time, but that's part of the enjoyment.

➔ **SHARKEY:** A mage hit me so hard that I flew backward and whacked into a little girl I was escorting. She died. As further insult to injury, this caused the mage to level up. His meaner form hit me with a polymorph, which, fortunately, turned me into an arrow-shooting tank. After murdering everything, I shot my bottomless supply of arrows everywhere so that when I returned to humanity, I could pick them all up for a stock of 99. That kind of thing happens all of the time in *Shiren*, and I love it.

Good: Great remake of a classic dungeon-crawler
Bad: Expect to often start from scratch
Brace Yourself: The main game is only the tip of the iceberg



PSP

WILD ARMS XF

■ Publisher: XSEED ■ Developer: Media Vision
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

THE VERDICTS:

FITCH
C
 AVERAGE

MICHAEL
B
 GOOD

JEREMY
B
 GOOD

The "XF" stands for "eXtremely Frustrating"

➔ **A. FITCH:** I've been a *Wild Arms* fanatic since I first heard the opening strains of its spaghetti Western-inspired fanfare 11 years ago, and I've been a strategy-RPG nut for even longer. If anyone's the target for a *WA* tactical game, it's me.

When I play a *WA* title, I want to kick ass and take names with shotguns and six-shooters—which, by the way, are in short supply in *XF* despite the Wild West theme. I *don't* want to spend my time chaperoning idiotic villagers who walk right into enemy attacks, and I *hate* being forced to use specific classes to clear just about every interminable, poorly laid-out mission. This defeats the whole purpose of a job system—the freedom to take out the enemy how you see fit.

XF had the building blocks to take the tactical template in a different direction: The imaginative classes and hex-based battles are a breath of fresh air, and I admire the game's ambition...but in the end, I simply had very little fun.

➔ **MICHAEL:** Seems like Fitch really wants to duel with the developers. I'm not so inclined to put up my dukes, however—while I agree with a lot of his complaints (mainly about some of the frustratingly lame missions), this Wild West-themed romp *almost* won me over. I actually think some of the class-specific missions are pretty cool, mainly because they really make you adopt a specific strategy for each battle as opposed to going in guns (swords, spears, and fans) blazing. It's

just a shame that I didn't really feel like sticking with any of the jobs full-time. But I do appreciate *XF*'s attempt to straddle the strategy genre in a slightly different way.

➔ **JEREMY:** Wow, Fitch is so full of hate. Me, I didn't really have any expectations for this—*Wild Arms* has always been a second-rate series in my book, and I'm simply impressed that *XF* feels like its own thing rather than another *Fire Emblem/Final Fantasy Tactics* clone. Instead, its hex-based battle system is a natural expansion of *WA4* and *5*'s combat. It also looks great, the character classes are interesting, and I appreciate the puzzlelike missions with more ambitious objectives than "kill everyone."

The Good: Music, diverse job system
The Bad: Missions are punishingly tough and way too long
Hooked on
Phonics: "XF" is pronounced "Crossfire"

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

The games that were 100 late...or 100 little

REVIEWS

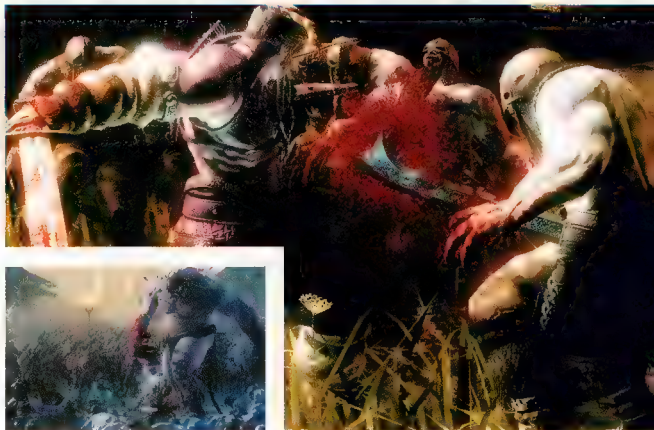
XB360

VIKING: BATTLE FOR ASGARD

■ Publisher: Sega ■ ESRB: Mature

For everything *Viking* does right—visceral gore, smooth visuals, and bellowing music—its lack of a target lock for finishing moves or the ability to sprint short distances (staples in many adventure/hack-n-slash titles) ruin the combat. Despite the novel Viking lore, the repetitive approach to levels—amass an army, conquer castle, repeat—and remedial side quests don't make for a memorable or worthwhile experience.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** If you like your games absurdly mindless, bloody, and pretty, *Viking* might be for you.



XB360

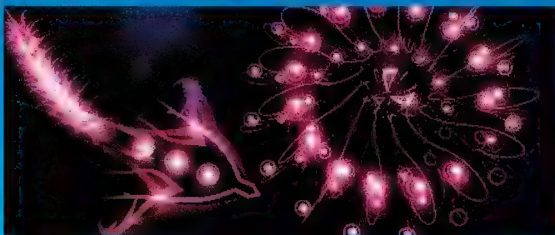
SUPREME COMMANDER

■ Publisher: Aspyr ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Cross-platform pollination can be a wonderful thing, but *Supreme Commander* proves that some games need to stay on the PC. Issues include the complex control scheme, fear of overheating your 360 during unusually long online matches, and finding mature opponents over Xbox Live (good luck)—all factors that could hamper enjoyment regardless of *SupCom*'s status as the most in-depth real-time strategy game on consoles.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Though we've had limited hands-on time with this title, it's been enough for us to say with certainty that only the hardcore RTS faithful need apply.

Electronic Nongaming Monthly



What is it? A free, general-interest magazine that includes a mix of gaming, pop culture, and technology news. It's available for free on the web and as a print edition for a small fee.

Why isn't it a game?

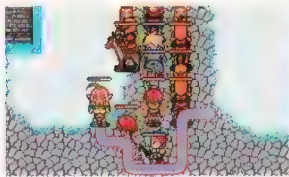
It's a magazine, not a game. It's a free, general-interest magazine that includes a mix of gaming, pop culture, and technology news. It's available for free on the web and as a print edition for a small fee.

So, what's fun?

It's a free, general-interest magazine that includes a mix of gaming, pop culture, and technology news. It's available for free on the web and as a print edition for a small fee.

It's a free, general-interest magazine that includes a mix of gaming, pop culture, and technology news. It's available for free on the web and as a print edition for a small fee.

Bottom Line: It's a free, general-interest magazine that includes a mix of gaming, pop culture, and technology news. It's available for free on the web and as a print edition for a small fee.



DS

RONDO OF SWORDS

■ Publisher: Atlus ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Tactical-role-playing games tend to feel the same after a while. You move around a grid, stand next to a bad guy, and pound away. But *Rondo of Swords* mixes things up by having you dash through multiple enemies in combat instead of trading blows with just one. Moving through allies can provide power-ups, and when you factor in impassable foes, the resulting battles require ■ tricky balance—demanding that you develop tactics unlike those used in any other game.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** A refreshingly new take on a crowded genre, *Rondo* is a tough but engrossing RPG for strategy buffs.



DS

MYST

■ Publisher: Empire Interactive ■ ESRB: Everyone

Going with enhanced visuals and sounds instead of *realMyst*'s (PC) 3D portrayal of the austere ages, this DS remake manages to adequately fit vast and hauntingly empty surroundings on the DS' small bottom screen thanks to a handy new magnifying tool—a compensation mechanism rather than an improvement. The other new tools aren't as useful, but pointing and clicking with the stylus is a good fit.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Plenty of options exist if you want to visit *Myst* Island, but for adventurers on the go, this pint-sized version is the easiest way. Time to finally beat *Myst*, eh?

THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for Feb/Mar

#	Name	Platform	EGM Score	Review
1	Winter Sports: The Ultimate Challenge	Wii	Not reviewed	
2	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	XB360	A	A- A
3	Game Party	Wii	Not reviewed	
4	Time Crisis 4 (Includes GunCon 3)	PS3	D	D+ D
5	Professor Layton and the Curious Village	DS	A-	B+ A-
	 If you've beaten all the mind-stumpers in <i>Professor Layton</i> , you must be smart. Smart enough to know you can download extra puzzles via Wi-Fi.			
6	Super Paper Mario	Wii	Not reviewed	
7	Dance Dance Revolution: Hottest Party Bundle	Wii	Not reviewed	
8	Super Mario Galaxy	Wii	A	A+ A+
9	Endless Ocean	Wii	Not reviewed	
10	Carnival Games	Wii	Not reviewed	
11	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock Bundle	Wii	A	A- B+
	 Publisher Activision has the <i>Guitar Hero</i> series on an endless tour—later this summer, it's releasing ■ new game headlined by aging rock band Aerosmith.			
12	Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day!	DS	B+	B- C+
13	Wii Zapper with Link's Crossbow Training	DS	Not reviewed	
	 The <i>Wii Zapper</i> (bundled with <i>Link's Crossbow Training</i>) is kinda crap. Thankfully, peripheral-maker Nyko released the far superior Perfect Shot.			
14	New Super Mario Bros.	DS	A+	A B+
15	Viva Piñata: Party Animals	XB360	Not reviewed	
16	Lost Odyssey	XB360	B+	B- B
17	Rock Band: Special Edition	XB360	A	A A
18	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	PS3	A	A- A
19	Rock Band: Special Edition	PS2	A	A A
	 <i>Rock Band</i> 's downloadable content rocks, but buying the tunes has been annoying. Not for long—a patch will soon affix the store to the game's main menu.			
20	Devil May Cry 4	PS3	A-	A B+

GAME OVER

> press continue for glistening quadriceps, furry kart riders, and cartoon grievers.

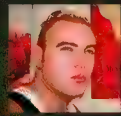


> SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP



Dancing with the Stars Strategy Guide

Learn the secrets of the "pros"!



Other people's game systems break down, Seanbaby's consoles commit suicide.

IT'S MY JOB TO PLAY BAD GAMES. Obviously, this is not a job that has to be done. Due to the nature of the games I review, I've never affected anyone's buying decision. Just take a look at the facts: I've publicly hated and unendorsed every pony I've ever shampooed with my Nintendo DS stylus, yet pony games are released so often that they now outnumber water.

The one thing that has come from this ludicrous job is that I am now a trained killer in broken or retarded games. You're probably saying, "Incredible, but what do I get out of that?" Shut up and listen: Through my years of torture, I've developed a system that can help you achieve the top scores in all of the worst uninteresting, educational, religious, or even fruity games! To show you how it works, we'll use *Dancing with the Stars* for the Wii.

Step 1: Getting started

Throw away the manual. Generally, people think everyone else is dumber than they are. So when the very stupid get together to make a game,

their expectations are low. Quite possibly lower than may actually exist. The unskippable tutorial already assumes you didn't read the manual, probably because your primitive brain identified it as sorcery. But in the case of this game, read the first page, since it's funny when Wii games suggest you consult a doctor before attempting to play them. Then indulge your imagination by picturing what the doctor might say to that. "Did you seriously come in here just to ask my permission to play video games? What possible medical condition could *Dancing with the Stars* aggravate? Too much making out with dudes?! That'll be \$2,000!"

Step 2: Select bad-game type

Obviously, the mind wanders when confronted with stimuli like this. Shake it off and select single-player.

Step 3: Select your star

Choose the first celebrity on the list: Monique Coleman and her dance partner, Brian Fortuna. Leave your Wii running while you Google these names, since *Dancing with the Stars* does not hold the word "Stars" up to incredible scrutiny. The key is to remain focused on your goal in the midst of all these distractions. Your goal in this case being, I think, "va-va-voom" and "razmatazz." Select to take control of celebrity Monique Coleman, and select "Amateur." Neither of these will make much of a difference, but only the future me knows that right at this moment.

Step 4: Dance!

Move the Wii-mote as directed by the screen, and don't let yourself be surprised by how little fun this is. You knew what you were getting into. The

> It's funny when Wii games suggest you consult a doctor before attempting to play them.



PAGE
94

Retro:
Mario Kart
knockoffs



PAGE
97

Comic:
So
Conned

simple *Dance Dance Revolution*-like gameplay is broken down into specific dances such as the Hand Jive or Mashed Potato. If you fit the age or lifestyle requirements to actually know these dances, then by all means do them, but any random, spastic wiggling will convince the game that the dances are being properly executed. Dancing is the expression of your soul, and judging it is something this machine knows it can never do.

Step 5: Fall

In most games, your goal is success. But in this special case, we want to score poorly. Not so that it will be over sooner, although I use that strategy often, but to hear the judges mock us. The only satisfac-

tion we're going to get from this is to watch our star and her dancer leave their crushed dreams on the stage. This strategy could never have been predicted by the game designers, so they created only two "disappointment" animations, a number nowhere near adequate to accommodate our level of failure. The constant replaying of the same two animations, however, allows us to notice certain things. Like how Brian Fortuna's shirt is regular in one cut-scene but unbuttoned down to his belly button in the other. Whatever you do, don't write in a popular videogame magazine that you take notice of the rendering of his pectoral muscles as your own hand explores through your Garnier Fructis-scented chest hair—wait! Dammit!

Step 6: Irreverence

Catch everyone off-guard by comically associating ballroom dancers and soap-opera actors with homosexuality. In your face, predictability!

Step 7: Eject

We both know we've seen enough of *DWTS*. Or at least enough to know that the box isn't lying. This game cuts another piece of happiness out of you, but you know that one day—one day—one of these bad games will be the key to everything. You'll be reviewing *Muffin Buddies Pet Salon*, and you'll unlock a smuggled piece of government code or a training exercise secretly placed there by the Star League to find the chosen pilot who can defeat the Kodan Armada. And then they'll all see



> BONUS STRATEGY GUIDE! MASTER...THE GAME CHAMBER!



The Game Chamber is the latest in DS cartridge-storage technology. In just under the size of a lunch box, The Game Chamber stores up to eight DS games. But before I continue, I'd like to say that The Game Chamber is pronounced with a gasp. For example: "Please excuse me from this important meeting. I need to retrieve my cartridge of *Bratz: Shaved Teenz* from my 'gasp'...The Game Chamber."

Step 1: Check your surroundings

If you've made the decision to purchase the exciting The Game Chamber, stop and examine the area around you for large one-way mirrors or doctors with clipboards. There's a good chance you've been captured and are being used in a study on the massively stupid. If so, bark like a dog at random intervals in order to confuse their findings. That should teach those scientists some humility. And it activates The Game Chamber's greatest feature—your games are protected from any standard dog bark.

Step 2: Remove a fake-game placeholder from The Game Chamber

The Game Chamber holds up to eight games. It will refuse to function if it holds any less. If you don't have eight games, slots may be filled with the included fake-game placeholders. Despite their shape, these will not work in your DS. I've found that a fun way to remember this is to not be spanned from the forced union of human and ape.

Step 3: Insert a DS game into your empty The Game Chamber's game-holding game slot

This can be any DS game featuring the coveted Official Nintendo Seal. The Game Chamber's unique design takes one cubic inch of miniaturized electronic entertainment and surrounds it with several pounds of unattractive plastic. It's very similar to the company's other invention, The Travel Yogurtur. "Mounts on the hull of your battleship to keep up to one yogurt warm!"

Step 4: Create a label to remember which game is stored in The Game Chamber's numbered game slot

Using the writing device of your choice, such as a pen promoting the *Timecop* book on tape as read by *Timecop* star Bruce McGill, write the name of your DS game on one of the eight included labels. If you call your game by a different or coded name, that's acceptable. So if you call *Hannah Montana 3* by the name *The Only Thing Daddy Left Behind*, go ahead and use that—this is a tool for you to remember. If, for any reason, you want to replace one of your cartridges' spots in The Game Chamber, simply remove the game and label and then purchase one more The Game Chamber for \$19.95 and use one of its eight included labels.

Step 5: Spinning The Game Chamber to access your next game

Fighting against friction and faulty manufacturing, rotate your The Game Chamber until another cartridge is lined up with the access hatch. Now, dig open the access hatch with a fingernail or Earth coin—or, as you might know it, just a coin. Now, go back to the beginning of step two, but don't be afraid to repeat step one several more times as this process continues. Remember that, as a precaution, The Game Chamber is designed to never spin unless all eight slots are filled with cartridges. If, for some reason, you have lost a cartridge or have simply lost interest in this level of cartridge maintenance but you still want access to the seven remaining cartridges, it is possible to trick The Game Chamber.

Step 6: Tricking The Game Chamber

Using a rock or hammer, smash the top of The Game Chamber. The team who designed The Game Chamber gave up promising careers developing Taiwanese plastic hot dogs, and you'll find that their amateurish plastic-molding abilities not only make storing and accessing your Nintendo DS cartridges difficult—it's also nearly impossible to destroy this armored brick of mistakes. But there is hope! Find a cartridge-shaped replacement and insert it into the empty slot. If that proves unsuccessful, purchase and sacrifice DS cartridges in exchange for any cartridge you want from the depths of The Game Chamber. The Game Chamber will not bargain with you. It values all cartridge shapes equally. But heed my words: Once you purchase The Game Chamber, seven cartridges or cartridge-shaped objects will be lost to time forever. ♣

10 Years Ago...

GAME COVER



On the cover: RPG Revolution

Instead of pimping one huge game on the mag's cover, we decided to show off a pack of sexy role-playing games, led by Nintendo's effeminate elf, Link, and Square's eye-pleasing creature killer from *Parasite Eve*, Aya Brea. While we did cover a ton of cool RPGs in the feature, we also feigned excitement for the stupidly titled Nintendo 64 turd *Quest 64*.



Game of the month: Wario Land II

Even though the Game Boy's technology was getting a wee bit crusty by 1998, Nintendo still managed to support the little system with fun and innovative games like *Wario Land II*. This sequel won us over with its non-linear gameplay and oodles of secrets. But we really dug not dying...because, well, you couldn't.



Power play

The Game Boy showed no signs of croaking in 1998—so much so that we let readers know via a two-page story. Looking back at this feature reminds us how much we miss the soothing bleeps and bloops of Tiger's rival Game.com. Sigh....



> RETRONAUTS PRESENTS

Kart Clones

The best and worst Mario Kart retreads

By Jeremy Parish



One game we wish we could play: Our April Fools' joke from 2004.

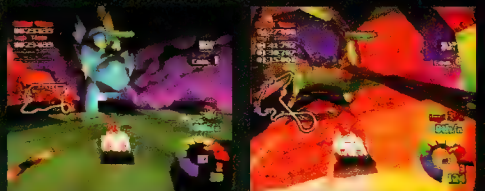
The Lord of the Rings: Mordor GP



To check out more retro jabber-jabber, get your browser to bonustage.tup.com to watch TUP's video podcast.

Mario Kart Wii is looking like a pretty sweet ride (check out our preview on page 42), but that's hardly a surprise—Nintendo seems to have a golden touch with its kart games that most other developers lack with their shoddy knockoffs (and, oh, have there ever been knockoffs). In case you want to test-drive the competition, we've rounded up the best and worst copy karts.

> LEADERS OF THE PACK



Motor Toon Grand Prix

Sony CEA • PS1 • 1996

Although *Motor Toon* doesn't quite qualify as a mascot racer given its use of entirely original characters, it was one of the first games to borrow *Mario Kart*'s style. First isn't always best, but the fact that it was programmed by the car nuts who would go on to create *Gran Turismo* means *Motor Toon* boasts perhaps the most impressive automotive underpinnings you'll ever find in a kart racer.



Crash Team Racing

Sony CEA • PS1 • 1999

Crash Bandicoot never really aspired to be anything more than Mario Lite, and that philosophy carried over into his racing debut. Again, this one's all about the pedigree: Developer Naughty Dog created *Crash Team Racing* themselves, which makes it far more enjoyable than its shoddy farmed-out follow-ups.



Konami Krazy Racers

Konami • GBA • 2001

Released a few months before *Mario Kart: Super Circuit* arrived on the Game Boy Advance scene, Konami's mascot-racer effort was so good that many players found Nintendo's entry rather redundant. Granted, that's probably because *Krazy Racers* stuck so very closely to the source material. But you can't deny a certain naughty appeal in pitting *Castlevania*'s Count Dracula against *Metal Gear* cyber-ninja Grey Fox in chubby little cars.

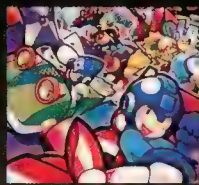


Diddy Kong Racing

Nintendo • N64 • 1997

One of the few mascot racers that ever attempted to do something new with the formula, *Diddy Kong Racing* took the kart to the seas and skies and even introduced boss battles: *DKR* is both cutesy and clever; just avoid the halfhearted DS remake—it's painful.

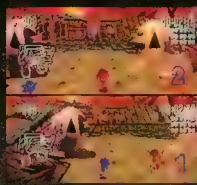
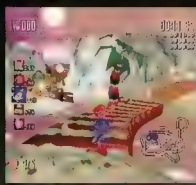
DEAD LAST



Mega Man Battle & Chase

Capcom • PS1 • 1997

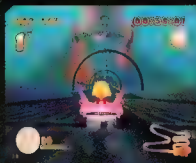
How lame is *Battle & Chase*? So bad that Capcom mixed its U.S. release after advertising the game extensively. Although it's a good idea in theory—allowing *Mega Man* to upgrade his kart with parts won from defeated opponents—the actual gameplay is about as much fun as parallel parking.



Sonic R

Sega • Saturn • 1997

Though technically not a kart racer (since everyone hoofs it on their furry feet), the spirit is the same: It's Sonic racing his pals. It also plays like an amateur weekend programming project, with terrible track design and controls that appear to have been implemented by someone allergic to joy.



Pac-Man World Rally

Namco • PS2/GC/PSP • 2006

Did you know Pac-Man, not Mario, starred in the world's first side-scrolling mascot-based platformer? It's true! And did you know that game, *Pac-Land*, had unfathomably bad controls? Well, now you do. The big yellow gobbler was more than a decade late ripping off *Mario Kart*, though. But even so, one constant remained: *Pac-Man* minus mazes just ain't fun.



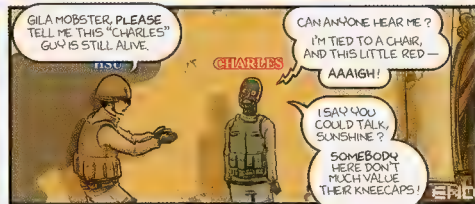
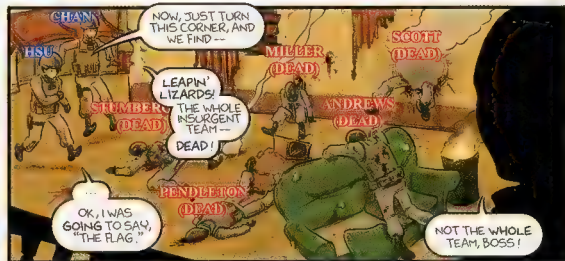
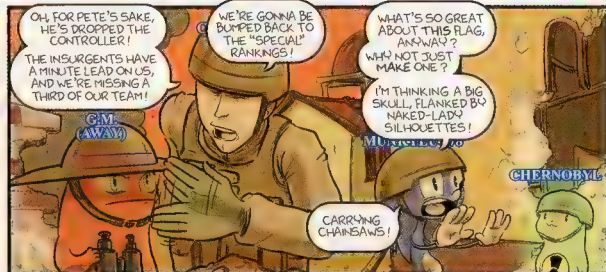
Chocobo Racing

Square • PS1 • 1999

Countless fresh-faced *Final Fantasy VII* fans eagerly snatched up copies of this *FF*-themed racer just to check out the debut of Squall, the surly hero of the then-unreleased *Final Fantasy VIII*. Then they realized how stupid it was to try to learn something about a role-playing-game character from a racing game and returned the lackluster *Chocobo Racing* in equal numbers.

So Conned

By Jeremy "Norm" Scott



GAMER PALADIN 515-SLI™



NVIDIA® 750i SLI™ Chipset Dual PCI Express Motherboard
GENUINE Windows® Vista™ Home Premium
 Eagletech® Sidewinder Gaming Case + 500W SLI™-Certified Power Supply
 Corsair 2GB DDR2-800 Memory
 250GB SATA II 7200RPM Hard Drive
 2X NVIDIA® GeForce™ 8600GT 1GB Video Card-SLI™ Enabled
 20x Double Layer DVD±RW Drive, 16x DVD-ROM Drive
 Surround 3D Premium Sound
 10/100/1000 MBps Ethernet LAN
 600 Watt Surround Sound Speakers
 Logitech Deluxe Keyboard & Optical Mouse
 Free Wireless 802.11g 54Mbps Network Adapter
 Add ViewSonic® 20" Wide VG2030WM TFT LCD Monitor @ \$258

Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor E4600	\$875
Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor E4700	\$915
Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor E8300	\$945
Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor E8400	\$969
Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor E8500	\$1059
Intel® Core™2 Quad-core Processor Q6600	\$999
Intel® Core™2 Quad-core Processor Q6700	\$1045
Intel® Core™2 Extreme Quad-core Processor QX9650	\$1835

\$875

GAMER PALADIN 625-SLI™



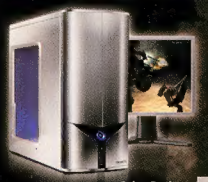
Color Options

NVIDIA® 750i SLI™ Chipset Dual PCI Express Motherboard
GENUINE Windows® Vista™ Home Premium
 Extreme Performance Overclocking Proof Certified Liquid Cooling System
 Raidmax® Aztec Gaming Case + 800W SLI™-Certified Power Supply
 Corsair 2GB DDR2-800 Memory
 500GB SATA II 7200RPM Hard Drive
 2X NVIDIA® GeForce™ 9600GT 512MB Video Card-SLI™ Enabled
 20x Double Layer DVD±RW Drive, 16x DVD-ROM Drive
 Surround 3D Premium Sound
 10/100/1000 MBps Ethernet LAN
 600 Watt Surround Sound Speakers
 Logitech Deluxe Keyboard & Optical Mouse
 Free Wireless 802.11g 54Mbps Network Adapter

Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor E4600	\$1239
Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor E4700	\$1279
Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor E8300	\$1315
Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor E8400	\$1335
Intel® Core™2 Duo Processor E8500	\$1429
Intel® Core™2 Quad-core Processor Q6600	\$1365
Intel® Core™2 Quad-core Processor Q6700	\$1415
Intel® Core™2 Extreme Quad-core Processor QX9650	\$2225

\$1239

GAMER PALADIN 885MX™



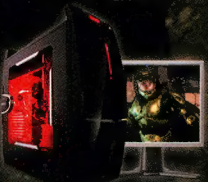
Color Options

NVIDIA® 750i SLI™ Chipset Dual PCI Express Motherboard
GENUINE Windows® Vista™ Home Premium
 Extreme Performance Overclocking Proof Certified Liquid Cooling System
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 Free Wireless 802.11g 54Mbps Network Adapter

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Intel® Core™2 Quad-core Processor Q6600	\$1535
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Color Options

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 Corsair 4GB DDR2-800 Memory
 500GB SATA II 7200RPM Hard Drive
 NVIDIA® GeForce™ 9800GX2 1GB Video Card
 20x Double Layer DVD±RW Drive, 16x DVD-ROM Drive
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- Intel® Core™ 2 Duo Processor
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iBuypower recommends Windows Vista™ Home Premium



- 17" Wide Screen WSXGA+ TFT LCD
1680x1050 Display
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- Intel® Centrino™ Duo Mobile Technology
- Intel® Core™ 2 Duo Processor
- Intel® 965 Chipset
- Intel® 4965AGN Wireless 802.11 a/b/g/Draft-n
- NVIDIA® Mobile GeForce™ 8600GT 512MB video
- 2GB DDR2-667 Memory
- 160 GB SATA Hard Drive
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