

THE No.1 VIDEOGAME MAGAZINE



HANDS-ON

METAL GEAR SOLID 4

We beat it! What you need to know

EGM™



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35 RETRO REVIVALS

Forgotten franchises return for Round Two!



Including the world-exclusive first look at the new **SPLATTERHOUSE!**

- +** Street Fighter IV •
- Sonic Unleashed •
- Alone in the Dark •
- Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff •
- Golden Axe: Beast Rider •
- Bionic Commando •
- and more! •

HOLY CRAP!

DARK VOID

The hot new shooter from the Crimson Skies team

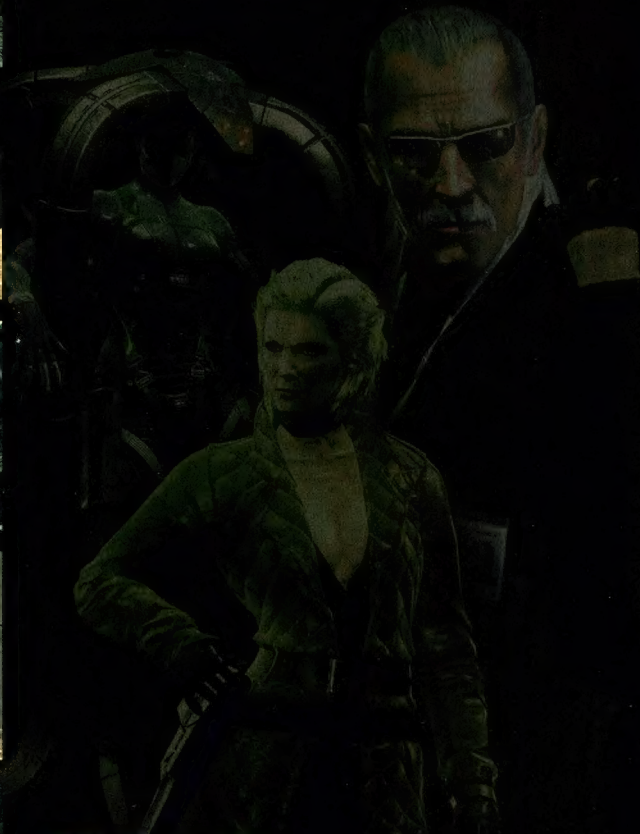
SOULCALIBUR IV

Hands-on with Yoda and Darth Vader



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MATURE 17+

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Blood
Crude Humor
Strong Language
Suggestive Themes
Violence

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Online Interactions Not Rated by the ESRB



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PLAYSTATION 3



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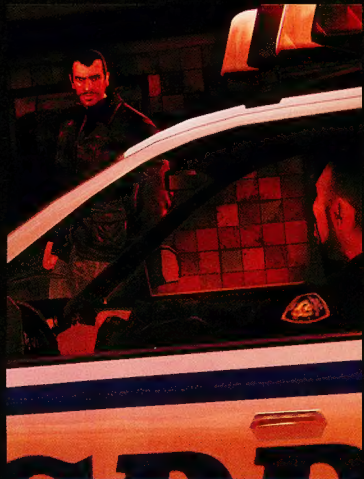
Back to the Future



AS A TEEN GROWING UP IN THE '80s, I remember exactly where I wasted all of my mom's quarters, and that was in every arcade game I could cram them into. Today's gamer won't understand the thrill of being part of the crowd huddled around a new arcade game, quarters lining the top of the marquee, indicating who had the next turn. I was there when *Space Invaders* first invaded my local department store, and that game was quickly followed by *Asteroids*, *Star Wars*, *Double Dragon*, *Alien Syndrome*, *Forgotten Worlds*, *Ikari Warriors*, *Tron*, *Tempest*, and more.

Now that many classic videogame franchises are nearing the quarter-century mark, we're seeing more and more anniversary-based revivals. Take Namco Bandai's *Splatterhouse* reboot—which you're seeing for the first time *anywhere* in the pages of this magazine—as an example. *Splatterhouse* hasn't been seen in forever, but it remains one of those classic games nearly everyone knows about. In the spirit of retro gaming, we've assembled all of the best retro revivals worth mentioning in this issue, interviewed an old-school gamer in 5 Lives, and sorted through the best and worst of revivals past. It's an action-packed issue, and you have to love our *Splatterhouse* artwork, made especially for us by developer BottleRocket. So turn the page and take a look at each grizzled gaming alumnus that's giving it another shot. Do the old-timers still have what it takes to compete with modern franchises like *Call of Duty* and *Halo*? Only time will tell.

—James "Milkman" Mielke,
Editor-in-Chief



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If the cover wasn't a dead giveaway, this issue sports a "retro revival" theme. Look for this stamp throughout the magazine for retro-themed stories.

> THIS MONTH'S EGM EXTRAS

EGM.1UP.COM

Splatterhouse bleeds on...

Absorb all the juice we couldn't fit in the mag from our interview with the *Splatterhouse* development team.

SuperGuides to the rescue!

Other sites have regular guides. We've got *SuperGuides*—with the best tips, cheats, and strategies for *Grand Theft Auto IV* and *Mario Kart Wii*.



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

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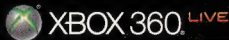
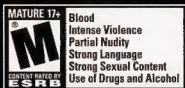


Lollipop Girl



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LETTERS

➤ politics, free-market capitalism, and geriatrics

➤ TRIVIAL ISSUE

This month's EGM question:

What is the name of *Splatterhouse* antihero Rick Taylor's son?

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

(subject head: Trivia: EGM #229) for a chance to win something potentially awesome.



Letter of the Month Smear campaigns

Videogaming has always had its fair share of (mostly) friendly rivalries. In the last few years, though, it's moving beyond something like the "Ford vs. Chevy" or the "Polaris vs. Arctic Cat" (I'm from Minnesota) debates and getting more like what we see in politics. Internet message boards have their own versions of Rush Limbaugh and Ann Coulter—people who have no shortage of ways to tell you how bad the other side is. Just about any news story you see has people who "spin" it to make their console look better, or the rival console look worse. For example, when the January [research group] NPD numbers came out, PS3 fans were quick to say that the PS3 is going to "win" because it outsold the 360 one month, while Xbox 360 fans were quick to change their story to "hardware sales don't matter—it's attach rates that are important."

Sure, we can't all afford to own every system, but can't we respect the fact that some people want a different experience than others? Some people want *Halo*, some want *Final Fantasy*, and some just want *Wii Sports*. There should be room for all of those people to enjoy this hobby without feeling like browsing through the games for their system is like going behind the beaded curtain at the video store—something that you don't want people to see you doing.

—Jim Malarmen

Your reasonable suggestions are breaking our brains.

One for the trophy case

I'm usually the first person to come out supporting game developers, but this time I feel someone should point out the potential harm of a game. *Lego Halo* really bothers me. We're making an adult game into a children's game. Not all gamers who play *Lego Star Wars* are kids, but many are, and marketing this violent game series to kids is wrong.

Just think how you would feel about *Lego Grand Theft Auto*, *Lego God of War*, or *Lego Doom*. These are all titles that should be played by adults, and making little Lego characters encourages kids to play the games



Look for *Lego GTA: Hot Coffee* next April.

they are based on. I'm very pro-game rights, but with a slew of Lego games slated to come out, I don't want to see developers take the series too far and actually give [videogame-violence hating lawyer] Jack Thompson's followers a legitimate argument. The gaming community should strive to create a line between games for adults and games for kids, and I think *Lego Halo* really blurs it.

—Dan Hoyt

You know that one scene in *Ghostbusters* where Janine pounds the big red button and screams, "We got one?" We kinda feel like that right now.

Hitting home

I recently saw an episode of the anime *You're Under Arrest*, in which

one of the officers had to protect an old woman. She lived alone because her husband was part of the Imperial Japanese military and was killed in action in World War II, and her kids died in the Allied firebombing raid of Tokyo.

After that, I felt guilty about playing *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*. I don't know if I can play that game without thinking, "What if this Japanese soldier's wife will also live to modern times alone as a widow?" If anything, I think that episode of *You're Under Arrest* did a nice job of driving home the cost of the Allied victory over Japan.

—Neil Sen

Time is on your side

Help me, EGM. I'm 15 and need your help. I know *Halo 3* is rated M, but I >



For writing this month's LOTM, Jim gets a copy of *Fuzion Frenzy*...or something else from our dusty old collection.

➤ HOW HARDCORE ARE YOU?

Your proudest gaming moments

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

When my wife and I were planning our wedding, she informed me that I would have to choose the design of my groom's cake. Though I love my wife more than anything else, videogames come in at a close second. The original NES is the system that started my hobby, and I knew it had to be my choice. It was a carrot cake, and it was delicious! All the guys at my wedding were impressed with my level of übergeekdom.

—Eric Dunaway

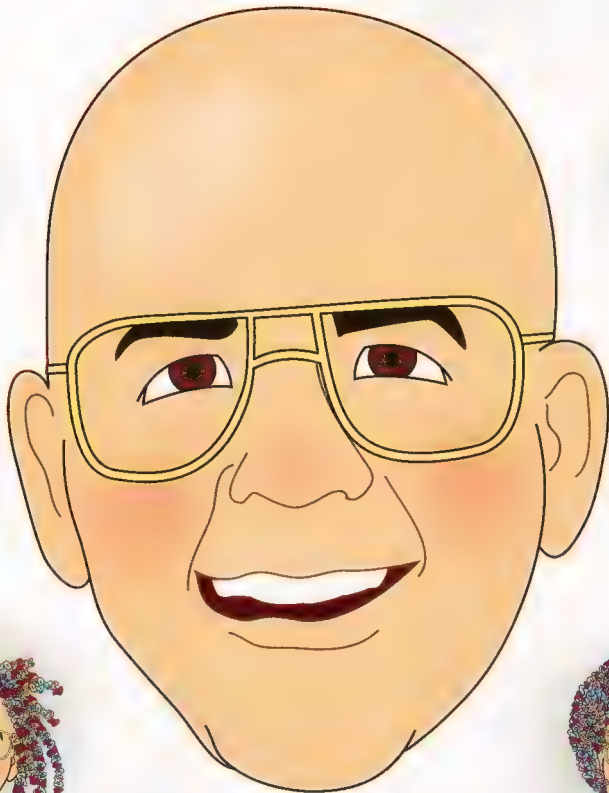


Here's hoping no one blew into the slot.

Want to see your own story in this space? All you have to do is tell us how hard-efing-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!

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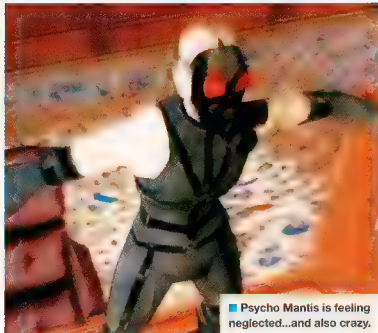
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am very mature for my age...but my dad still won't let me play it. I am already obsessed with the series; I've read all the books except *Harvest*, and I even have a paper model hanging in my room. I also have been considering getting really good at it and joining Major League Gaming. I would also like to make machinima series, mods, and more cool things. Please, *EGM*, if anyone can help me convince my dad, it's probably you guys.

—Aaron Chering

You've come to the right place; we've got a foolproof method for convincing dear ol' Dad. It's a simple, three-step program: First, make sure you're helping out around the house; this will show your maturity. Next, drop casual hints about the game so he can see you're not desperate—parents hate desperation. Finally, save up enough money to pay for it yourself; this will show your dedication.

Now, just keep that up for the next two years, and you're guaranteed to get *Halo*...and any other M-rated game you want! You're welcome!

Canis canem edit

The fact that EA is now going straight to Take-Two's shareholders to [attempt to buy out the company] is really sad. If game companies keep buying other game companies, where will the competition go? What's to stop Microsoft, one of the richer companies in the world, from buying Nintendo?

The free market thrives on competition. Stop playing dirty, and let free trade rule. Competition is good, and to lose that competition, not just from a merger, but from a hostile takeover? That's just really bad taste. It doesn't really matter, as long as I keep playing the games that I love...but how long until they stop making the games that I love? And how hard will it be for

new game companies to emerge in this dog-eat-dog business? There has to be some self-control. EA already bought Pandemic and BioWare; these megacorporations all need to calm down for a second and let the business breathe.

—Emmanuel Navarrete

Personally, we're looking forward to playing *MarioMadden 2012: The Show* on our WiiStation 720s.

Do these pants make our bias look fat?

I've noticed that since all three systems were released, you guys have become increasingly biased toward the Xbox 360. Then you guys supported the Wii and 360 but continued to hate the PS3. Then you guys made an article on how the Nintendo "Seal of Quality" is actually the "Seal of Crap" or something. And now you guys are saying that the PS3 is making a comeback! What gives?! When are you just going to make up your minds on which console you like the best?!

—Jude Nichols

Holy crap, guys—they're onto us!

Meryl is very disappointed with you

I've just finished playing *Metal Gear Solid 3* for the first time, and it's my second-favorite game now (next to *Twilight Princess*). Now I'm stoked for *MGS4*, even saving up for the PS3! But I know zero about Snake. Since he's in the first two games, I wanna get informed, but I've been told they were both really bad. Should I just wait for *MGS4* and use their dictionary in-game, or check out those first two?

—S. Papstein

Whoa, whoa, *whoa*. Back up there a second, champ. Who told you the first *MGS* was bad? Listen closely, now, because this is important: *Never believe anything this person tells you, ever again*. The first *MGS* is widely considered to be one of the greatest games ever made, and you're seriously missing out if you don't check it out. *MGS2*? Yeah, we could see some folks having problems with that. But weird-ass story aside, it's still worth playing.

Bourne at the wrong time

I'm a huge fan of the *Bourne* trilogy, and as much as the history of movie-inspired games tells me otherwise, I'm very psyched for the upcoming *The Bourne Conspiracy*. One of the major things that I've noticed in this game is that Matt Damon's likeness (so far

is not in the game. Is Sierra not even pursuing the rights to his likeness?

—Jeff Klein

According to *Variety*, publisher Sierra opted not to pursue Damon for his participation in *The Bourne Conspiracy* after he announced he had no interest in continuing his role as Jason Bourne. "The *Bourne* thing I'm definitely done with," Damon said at a 2007 Cannes appearance.

The funny thing is, in February of this year, Damon apparently had a change of heart and signed on for a fourth *Bourne* film. But it seems it was too late for the game.

Progress stops for no man

What's with Microsoft not making any games for the [original] Xbox? What happened? I am pretty pissed.

—Cade Jessop

Time happened. Welcome to 2008!

Extra life

I am 66 years old and have been playing videogames since the very beginning, adventure games mostly. Over the years, I have left many games unfinished as I got stuck at a part—usually against a stupid boss. Having arthritis now doesn't help, but I still love games like *Tomb Raider*, *God of War*, and *Prince of Persia*. Please tell these game developers who are getting carried away with these boss battles to give us old-timers a break and make the games with the ability to skip over a part when you are stuck. After all, we pay enough for these games and would like to finish them. Thanks.

—Emmanuel Ferreri

You might want to look into cheat sites—like our very own MyCheats.com—to help you with those boss battles. Game designers aren't likely to want to make it easy to skip through the game, and let's face it: The retired set isn't exactly the target demographic for most games. Now excuse us while we get off your lawn. ☘

↳ OOPS!

In last month's cover story for *SDCOM: Confrontation*, we incorrectly listed Italy's COMSUBIN and France's GIGN among the special forces included at launch. Neither of those organizations will be present—at least not in the initial version of the game.

However, France's 1er Régiment Parachutiste d'Infanterie de Marine (1er RPIMa) will be.

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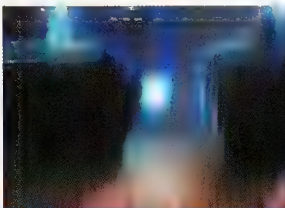
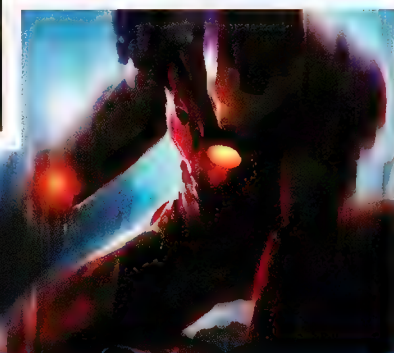
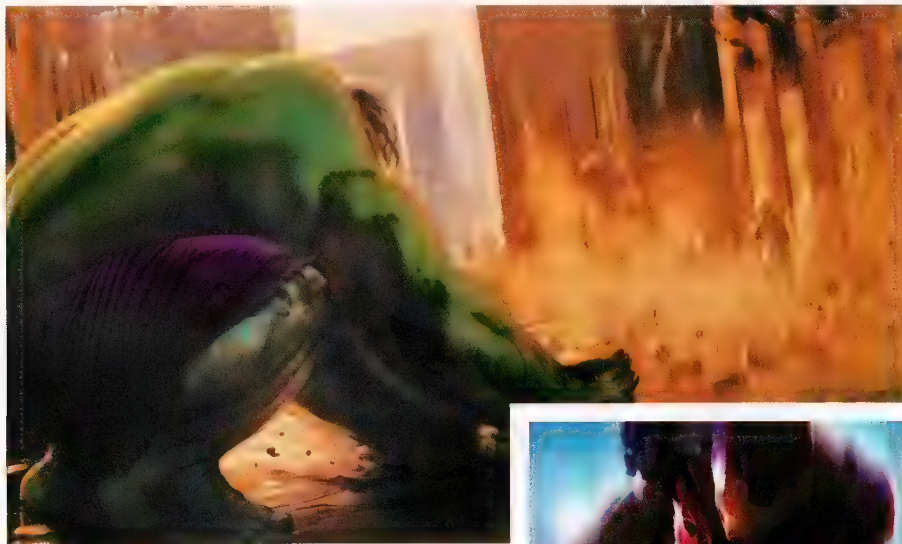
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PRESS START

> features, previews, green warriors who talk weird, they do, and other stuff



PREVIEWS: SUPERHERO GAMES

Modern Marvels

Save the world with this year's trifecta of Marvel madness

By Nick Suttner and Greg Ford

THE FINEST OF THEM: THE AVENGERS COME TO THE RESCUE IN THIS YEAR'S SUPERHERO GAMES. FROM THE LEFT: IRON MAN, SPIDER-MAN, AND THOR.



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Snake is smokin'



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Dumb retro doodads?

The Incredible Hulk

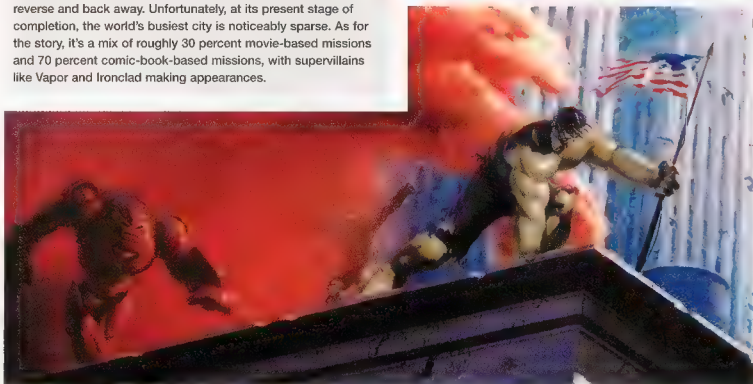
Publisher: Sega • Developer: Edge of Reality • Platform: PS3/XB360
• Release Date: June 2008

Coming out of our first look at *The Incredible Hulk*, we couldn't help but notice the beginning of a trend. And no, we're not referring to this being another open-world action game or superhero-movie-based summer release. We're talking fists. In the recent PSP action game *God of War: Chains of Olympus*, Spartan hero Kratos sports the Gauntlet of Zeus, which allows him to put a pounding on all manner of Hellenic assailants. And in this new *Hulk* game, the titular green meanie can tear a vehicle in two and place each half over his hands. Then smash, as he's wont to do. Think of this as a maximum-destruction version of those green, foamy Hulk hands you've not-so-secretly always wanted.

And that's a big draw: destruction. Do enough damage, and you can demolish whole buildings and skyscrapers in this open-world version of New York City that takes from both reality (the Chrysler Building) and alternate, Marvel reality (Stark Tower and the Baxter Building). A nice touch: As you're wreaking havoc, pedestrians will scream and run, and cars will quickly go into reverse and back away. Unfortunately, at its present stage of completion, the world's busiest city is noticeably sparse. As for the story, it's a mix of roughly 30 percent movie-based missions and 70 percent comic-book-based missions, with supervillains like Vapor and Ironclad making appearances.



First appearance: Comic books crossed into the Atomic Age when creators Stan Lee and Jack Kirby set off a gamma bomb, transforming physicist Bruce Banner into a raging monster in the pages of *The Incredible Hulk* #1 (May 1962).



■ Sure, wearing two massive hunks of metal as mittens looks cool, but does Hulk really need the extra layer of protection?

New Spider-Man

Activision • Shaba • Wii/PS3/XB360 • Fall 2008

With great power comes great blah blah blah. If you're one of the seemingly billions who've seen a *Spider-Man* film in the past six years, you know what we're talking about. Tasked with the creation of a brand-new *Spider-Man* game for Activision—based on the comics—developer Shaba really does have quite the responsibility on their hands. While the “darker, edgier” description given to us by Shaba studio head Chris Scholz and Activision Senior Executive Producer Graham Fuchs is usually a recipe for eye-rolling (see: *Prince of Persia: Warrior Within*), the *Spider-Man* games have been getting a bit stale and could use a few changes. And while the game doesn't ditch its Manhattan confines, it certainly sounds like it has plenty to offer the open-world superhero formula.

Manhattan's been invaded by...something (we're not being coy—they're just being secretive), and Nick Fury's S.H.I.E.L.D. has declared martial law and set up safe houses around the city. With Kingpin holed up in his tower, and Luke Cage organizing a final stand in Harlem, it's up to the wallcrawler to set things right, though “right” may be relative now—players can choose their allies and enemies along the way, so Spidey's allegiances between good and evil will be “clouded.” And with

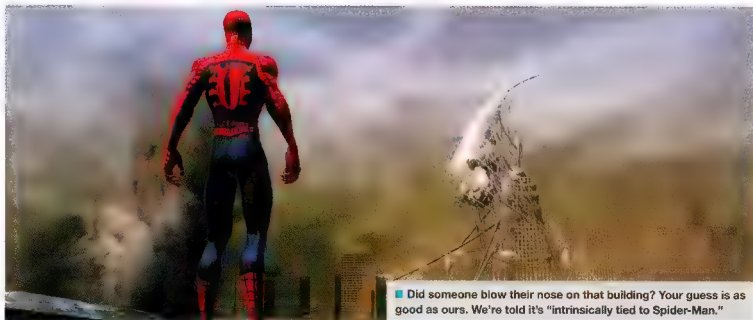
an interactive city that responds to your choices, Shaba aims to give players significantly more control over their experience.

Speaking of control, these guys are *intimately* familiar with it. After sculpting several *Tony Hawk* ports and cult hit *Wakeboarding Unleashed*, they're drawing on their extreme sports background to bring a new level of fluidity and rhythm to the series' traditionally weak combat. By adding hordes of mobile enemies, vertical combat, and a feeling of constant movement between targets, the mechanics seem to be receiving the attention they sorely need. As do the side missions, which Shaba tells us are now far more seamless—things you'll come across while playing the game instead of those taking place off on their own.

Though early, the developers go on to boldly claim that the title is “the most three-dimensional action game ever made.” We'll keep our expectations in check since all we've actually seen of the game is the below screenshot. But if Shaba managed to make a superepic sport like wakeboarding into an excellent, accessible game, we see no reason why they can't whip up an equally refreshing take on Spider-Man. Here's hoping that they do.



First appearance: Created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, Spidey first swung onto the pages of comic books in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (August 1962).



■ Did someone blow their nose on that building? Your guess is as good as ours. We're told it's “intrinsically tied to Spider-Man.”

MAKING YOURS MARVEL



How do the four-color overlords at Marvel Comics decide what passes for a great game based on their kick-ass franchises? Justin Lambros, vice president of Marvel's interactive division, clues us in on the heroic process.

EGM: What sort of quality control does Marvel interactive exercise in order to ensure that the games based on Marvel's comics and feature films don't completely suck—like, say, *X2: Wolverine's Revenge* (PS2/XB/CC)?

Justin Lambros: Well, our main job as a licensee is to make sure that our gaming partners get whatever reference material they need from us as well as approvals of all the game content, marketing material, and packaging. It's all about representing the Marvel characters and brand in the best way possible.

EGM: So how do you determine what makes a good game?

JL: There's always a lot of interest in our movie properties; as they've done extremely well, so that always gets a lot of interest. We're also interested in a lot of other comic properties, and we talk to publishers to see where their interests are. So it's really about finding the right business partner for the right content at the right time. And frankly, some comic-book heroes have more “gameable” powers, supporting characters, and rogues' galleries. That's one of the most important things up front: making sure we're doing the right kind of game for the right kind of superhero instead of putting him in a box and weakening him so that he fits some game-play mechanics. It really starts with the character, and if it should feel like a natural extension.

EGM: OK, now that we know what you guys are thinking when you speak with develop-

ers about the games they're making, what in your opinion are the best and worst Marvel-inspired titles to date?

JL: It's hard to pick just one, but I think Neversoft's original *Spider-Man* game for the PS1 was a seminal moment for Marvel's characters, because it really captured what was great about Spider-Man and allowed you to do so much of that stuff. I'm also a big fighting-game fan, so *Marvel vs. Capcom 2*, *Marvel Super Heroes*, and *X-Men vs. Street Fighter* were all a lot of fun.

Some of the older games really didn't pay attention to what the characters [could do]. Some of them were fun, but the old 2D stuff—and even some of the more recent stuff—held some disappointment. But I don't want to go out on my way to denigrate a particular title—the fans can decide which ones they like the least, and I'll worry about the good stuff—and doing the right games about the right characters.

Iron Man

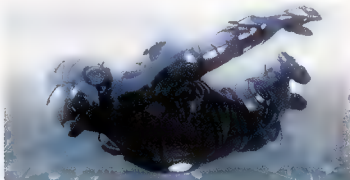
Sega • Secret Level • Wii/PS3/XB360 • May 2008

Iron Man has had his fair share of gaming guest appearances (see *Marvel vs. Capcom 2*, *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance*, *Captain America and the Avengers*) but he's never received top billing in anything relevant (sorry, *Iron Man/X-O Manowar in Heavy Metal*). The run of successful superhero films over the past few years has opened up opportunities for second-tier heroes to take leading roles, however, making this his time to shine...in theory.

Developer Secret Level definitely gets a few things right: Iron Man looks gorgeous as he nimbly whizzes through missile trails and outmaneuvers fighter jets. And in the heat of such action, his abilities also allow for plenty of variety in the wide-open battlefield. Bombing runs, ground-based combat, and timed button-presses for feats like pulling the top off a tank or steering a jet into the ground really let you mix things up.

If it only worked as easily as Iron Man makes it look. Based on the latest version we played, the flight controls are fairly clumsy and unintuitive, and they aren't close to offering the sort of pinpoint precision and responsiveness needed to support an experience based primarily on moving freely. The control issues could be the result of making sacrifices for the ground combat. But while fighting on land is a nice extra option, the trade-off isn't worth it if it comes at the expense of the flight controls.

A steady supply of go-there-kill-that missions gives you plenty of chances to learn how the game works, but it starts to become frustratingly repetitive when you have to restart all the way from the beginning each time you die. Still, it hits the feel of playing as the red-and-gold powerhouse, something Iron Man fans will relish. This leaves it precariously treading a fine line between movie cash-in and comic-book relevance; we've got our fingers crossed for the fans.



First appearance:

It took the combined brains of Stan Lee, Larry Lieber, Don Heck, and Jack Kirby to build Tony Stark's Iron Man armor in issue #39 of *Tales of Suspense* (March 1963).



■ If you're willing to sacrifice a significant portion of your energy, you can charge up a massive shot from the core of your codpiece.

and let's not forget the little guy

Iron Man for DS is a completely different game than its big brothers, and its better for it. Where unpolished controls detract from the console versions, the handheld game takes advantage of the DS's simpler interface. You guide the flying Iron Man through enormous top-down levels with the U-pad while tapping the touch screen in the direction you want to shoot and boosting with the triggers. It's an excellent setup that makes the lengthy levels work quite well, especially against the impressively large groups of foes that you'll face. ❖



Puzzle Proposer: Bernie Peng



It's debatable whether videogames actually cause violence, but it's pretty clear (at least in this case) what they do

cause: everlasting love. Computer programmer Bernie Peng used his nerdy skills to win over his future wife, Tammy, through a homemade version of the casual puzzle game *Bejeweled*, in which a wedding ring appeared after she reached a certain score. We recently had a chance to chat with Peng about earning the biggest achievement of his life.

EGM: Why *Bejeweled*? Was *Tetris* not romantic enough for you?

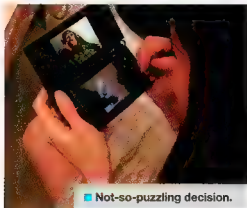
Bernie Peng: Well, *Tetris* is so easy—I made *Tetris* in an intro to computer science course back in college. But I knew *Bejeweled* was Tammy's favorite game, so I wanted to go with something she actually knew.

EGM: Were you afraid your fiancée would take too long to hit the proposal-triggering high score and, because of that, quit?

BP: I thought about that. It could have gone that she never hit the high score. Or she could have lost the game. So I tried to set the score pretty low so she'd get there pretty quick. I also changed it so that in case she did happen to lose the game, the ring would have also dropped. No matter what she did, the ring was going to drop eventually!

EGM: Who's the better *Bejeweled* player? (Don't worry, we won't tell!)

BP: I think she is. I sometimes play on her computer, and I'll just stare at the board trying to figure out what to do, and she'll be like, "Go over here! Go over here!" So she definitely has the experience, and she's definitely a better player than I am.



■ Not-so-puzzling decision.



> FOREIGN OBJECT/JAPAN



The Legend of KAGE 2

Vintage ninja nostalgia

Platform: PS2

Developer: IGA
 Publisher: IGA
 Released: 2002
 Genre: Action
 Rating: ESRB: M
 Price: \$49.99
 Website: www.igaworld.com

If you're bored pining for Kage to deliver a sequel to its influential slash-'n-jump arcade classic. The sequel of Kage, those 23 years of waiting have finally paid off. We're seriously excited to have this following get gratified after such a long time (and then, Kage fans have to make do with IGA's rather 2D-ambitious *Chosen Kage*, and not to put us down to feel that's what this is all about). The original Kage had a great atmosphere, and it's a shame that the sequel didn't have that. But the original Kage had a great atmosphere, and it's a shame that the sequel didn't have that. But the original Kage had a great atmosphere, and it's a shame that the sequel didn't have that.

Well, it took those over 20 years to make the game damned good again. Why even put it on DS? While it's true that Kage 2's controls might remind you of that of the original, it's really a more refined form. The addition of a second playable character is an improvement, and the multiple levels, including the new and the old, are a welcome addition. The game is a platformer, but it's a platformer with a twist. The game is a platformer, but it's a platformer with a twist. The game is a platformer, but it's a platformer with a twist.

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The Best a Man Can Get



PREVIEW: HANDS-ON

Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots

War has changed...can you? By Shane Bettenhausen

Platform:
PlayStation 3

Publisher:
Konami

Developer:
Kojima Productions

Release Date:
June 2008

UNLIKE ITS PREDECESSORS, *Metal Gear Solid 4* unfolds across several self-contained acts, and nearly every single image and video you've seen so far hails from the game's first act, dubbed Liquid Sun. Before the action begins, Snake gravely says, "War has become routine," but in reality, *MGS4*'s warfare is far from routine. From the outset, you'll be stunned by just how many long-held, seemingly ironclad tenets of *MGS* have been radically reworked here. First off, you're not sent on a "solo sneaking mission" like old times—now, you have help. Grizzled and gruff well beyond his natural age, Snake journeys to the Middle East to track down Liquid Ocelot (you know, triple-crossing series regular Revolver Ocelot with *MGS1* antagonist Liquid Snake's arm/

personality grafted on) and meet up with a mysterious backup team.

You arrive in a war-torn desert city with a group of local militia members, and you can choose to fight alongside them against the skilled PMC (private military contractor) troops controlling the streets. As long as you're wearing their garb and don't engage in too much friendly fire, the militia guys will leave you alone. But realistically, you won't have much luck keeping your buddies alive in this act—with Snake's limited arsenal and deadly chaos erupting all around you, stealthy survival becomes your immediate goal.

Expect to spend the first 10 minutes of playtime carefully crawling through smoking rubble and silently slipping past guards. During this time, you'll scarcely stop to consider just how much easier and more instinctive *MGS4*'s controls feel compared to what came before. Throughout development, Kojima Productions has been open about wanting to simplify, refine, and Westernize the gameplay, and they've done a stellar job. You're no longer wrestling with the camera,

you won't get stuck while crouching and crawling, and aiming and shooting now feel entirely natural (once you've disabled the stifling autoaim function). It's tough to verbalize precisely how the overall "feel" of *MGS4* has changed, but it's as if an entire layer of unnecessary obfuscation has been removed—the controls feel less abstract, and you're pressing fewer buttons yet doing more than ever before. As someone who once defended the series' top-down perspective as crucial to the *MGS* experience, it's at once both humbling and inspiring to see the gameplay evolve so far beyond those staid constraints.

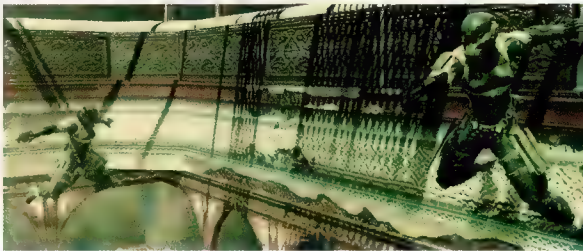
While you're busy avoiding the PMC troops and acclimating to the new controls, it's tough to not get sidetracked by the game's stunning audiovisual presentation. Sure, we've all seen this environment before, but when you're in the thick of it—watching power lines sway in the dust-filled wind, noting the subtly realistic tricks of light and shadow, and hearing muffled voices and explosions from two buildings over—the exacting attention





Joe Camel's got nothing on pack-a-day role model Old Snake.

PRESS START



Handy new OctoCamo replaces MGS3's clumsy camo system.



to detail simply amazes. You'll spy an insane amount of unique art assets: When you explore a multifloor booby-trapped mansion halfway through this act, every room looks completely distinct. Don't expect to see cookie-cutter, copy-and-paste level design here.

Once you've infiltrated a bit deeper into the mission (and likely met an untimely end or two), it's time to shake off the shell shock caused by the revamped gameplay and visuals and get serious. A codec call from Snake's old pal Otacon signals a special delivery of new equipment—the cuddly Metal Gear Mk. II robot drone (perfect for remote recon from a safe distance), Snake's multipurpose Solid Eye ocular patch (it offers a zoom scope, night vision, and onscreen enemy intel), and some much-needed weaponry. Now that you're properly outfitted, it's time to reassess and determine how to best reach your goal. Although MGS4's missions aren't as wide-open, go-anywhere as some may have expected, you will find that you have far greater freedom as to how to complete them. Using

the game's handy pause-screen map, you can chart the safest path to your rendezvous point. The streets remain quite deadly, as tanks and choppers make quick work of you and your militia buddies. It's far wiser to stay out of sight by traversing rooftops, shimmying through grates, and moving from building to building as stealthily as possible. Snake even has some clever new disguises to help keep him out of trouble: a decidedly low-tech oil drum (that doubles as a weapon if Snake opts to go bowling for baddies while inside it) and the super-high-tech OctoCamo that mimics any surface that Snake lingers next to for a few seconds. This new camo doesn't seem quite as effective at fooling guards at close range as MGS3's, but its versatility (no more going to an obnoxious subscreen every few min-

utes) makes it far more user friendly.

Since MGS4's gunplay feels better than ever before, it's fitting that Konami has crafted a wildly customizable new weaponry system to maximize your firearm fun. Midway through the first act, you'll encounter Drebin 893, the golden-haired Sissō look-alike you've seen in the trailers. This mysterious arms trader can unlock the ID-controlled guns dropped by foes (otherwise, Snake can't equip them) or trade them for "Drebin Points," currency that Snake can use to customize guns or purchase ammo. This gun economy quickly becomes addictive, and you'll soon be looting corpses in hopes of saving up for some kick-ass grenade launcher attachment.

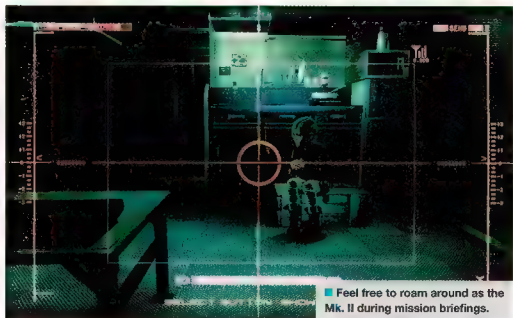
Once Snake has a more effective arsenal, you can start going toe-to-toe with the PMC goons—whether

➤ The controls feel less abstract, and you're pressing fewer buttons yet doing more than ever before.





■ Meryl's first words to Snake? "What happened to your face?"



■ Feel free to roam around as the Mk. II during mission briefings.

you choose to obliterate them with a well-placed mortar strike (you'll run across several installations during this act) or humiliate them with close-quarters combat is entirely up to you. As always, it's possible to make it through this MGS without killing anybody. But expect your bloodlust to increase after meeting up with your backup team, an elite strike force called Rat Patrol. Unbeknownst to Snake, *MGS1*'s fiery Meryl Silverburgh leads this team of nanomachine-enhanced supersoldiers. Reuniting with such an important person from Snake's past so soon in the game comes as something of a shock...especially for Snake, who has to contend with Meryl's shocked expression after gazing upon his FOXDIE-ravaged face.

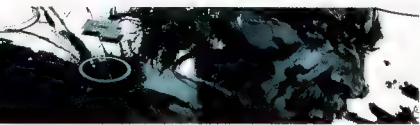
Snake's health quickly becomes a legitimate concern in *MGS4*, and

the game expertly illustrates this in subtle ways. In the heat of a shoot-out, you may see Snake grimace in pain and grab his lower back—it's a nicely nuanced animation that really humanizes our hero, but it's potentially deadly at the same time—one second of hesitation can quickly lead to a life-ending ambush. You'll have to constantly regulate Snake's condition by keeping an eye on the new Psyche and Stress gauges: Psyche reflects how Snake's mind reacts to the battle around him (when things get too crazy, he'll have trouble aiming), while Stress combines mental and physical factors (high stress can lead to a Combat High, a period of heightened accuracy and defense that unfortunately segues into a sluggish, post-high crash.)

Without giving away too much more, I'll say that all of these factors coalesce to form one of Act 1's most compelling segments—a tense indoor battle alongside Rat Patrol against the Haven troopers (aka FROGS), elite female warriors with enhanced agility and high-powered weaponry. If you're accustomed to *MGS* enemies offering

little in the way of A.I. surprises, these ladies will leap, flank, and grenade you to oblivion. You'll certainly have to master some new tactics to deal with this menace, but they're far from being considered "bosses." When the game's ready to start throwing actual bosses at you, you'll be floored.

Every aspect of *MGS4* holds untold surprises, and Kojima Productions has even found ways to innovate in areas that most developers ignore. Take, for example, the game's wild new "flash-back" minigame. Every time Snake encounters some character, place, object, or situation from his past, you can jam on the X button to uncover additional memories (illustrated via images from the past games). It's purely optional, but surprisingly fun and challenging (and worthwhile, since doing so nets you bonus Drebin Points). For even zanier out-of-the-box thinking, check out the mission briefings between acts—here, you can choose to either simply watch a cut-scene or opt to explore Snake's home base as the Mk. II, gathering hidden items while the conversations transpire around you. 🐸



TNA IMPACT!

TNA challenges the WWE for the wrestling-game gold

Platforms: PS3/XB360

Publisher: Midway

Developer: Midway
Los Angeles

Release Date: Summer 2008

WRESTLING NUTS ARE ABOUT TO GET THEIR BELL RUNG—2008

is the first year No. 2 wrestling fed Total Nonstop Action (TNA) Wrestling will be competing against the WWE's current king of the gaming ring.

SmackDown vs. Raw. Luckily, the result of this anticipated contest isn't as slap-your-forehead obvious as an Undertaker WrestleMania match. Sure, *Impact!* lacks the in-game ring experience of *SVR*, but from what

we've seen (and played) so far, it's certainly no jobber. But to really see if *Impact!* has what it takes to pull off a controversial upset, we broke down its gameplay repertoire and compared it to the current champ's

> GRAPPLE SYSTEM

Wrestling is nothing without greased-up men groping each other, so it's vitally important that it's fun to get your grapple on. The developers at Midway's L.A. studio did their homework, citing the Nintendo 64 wrestling classic *WWF No Mercy* as the inspiration behind of the game's grapple system. After stepping in the ring ourselves, however, we really didn't feel the connection. Sure, the systems are similar (utilizing weak and strong grapples), but pulling off moves didn't feel as natural as it did in *No Mercy*. And we missed the intuitive flick-the-analog-stick grappling from *SVR*. But the groundwork for a great grappling system is definitely there.

Verdict: Still green



✕ MOVES

Unlike the safe sissies over at the WWE, the TNA stars have no qualms about performing bone-breaking maneuvers every week. And that's what makes *TNA Impact!* stand out from the standard hip tosses and ambars you see in the WWE. Not only are the moves awesomely innovative, but they're also perfectly motion-captured by (most) of the stars who perform them. Of course, you probably haven't heard of half the TNA roster, but who cares? Not you, we hope—the moves are fun. And, really, that's all that matters.

Verdict: Wins clean

> MATCH SYSTEM

TNA has been whipping up some ridiculous gimmick matches lately (reverse battle royal—no thanks!), but luckily, *Impact!* focuses on the ones that fans actually want to play. The best of the bunch, of course, is the Ultimate X match. This high-flying contest has wrestlers vying for a large red "X" placed at the center of two ropes that cross above the ring. As cool as the Ultimate X match is, *Impact!* simply can't compete with the insane number of match types that *SVR* offers...not yet, at least. Remember—this is TNA's first game.

Verdict: Still green



TOTAL PACKAGE?

Not at the moment, but *Impact!* is definitely a worthy contender for the gold. And since we're still a few months away from the game's summer release, *Impact!* has some time to beef up for its upcoming title bout with the WWE's reigning grapple champ.



Trained robot squirrels at GameVideos have gathered up the best clips and stashed them at GameVideos.com/EGM for your perusal. Appreciate it!



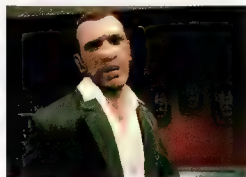
ZOMG: Resident Evil 5 gameplay footage

The interview with Producer Jun Takeuchi may be in Japanese, but the first-ever *Resident Evil 5* gameplay footage is in the international language of awesome.



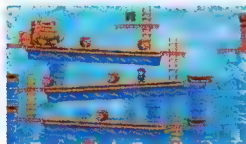
<3: Lego Indiana Jones

Love or hate the latest *Indiana* flick, you're going to want to play this game. Everything's better with Lego.



FTW?: Review Crew: Grand Theft Auto IV

Yeah, you could read the review on pg. 80. And you should. But you should also watch the video!



KEWL: Braid

Indie maverick Jonathan Blow gives us an inside look at his time-bending action game *Braid*, which is heading to Xbox Live Arcade.

> ONLINE SCENE

Free Play

WI BROWSER NOW, PAY NEVER By Scott Sharkey

Most budget game collections don't have a browser. But now you can find a ton of user-submitted Wii-friendly browser games sorted by user rating. You'll find plenty worth playing, like *Tactical Assassin* and *3D Logic*.

WiiCade www.wiicade.com

Who needs to buy minigame collections for Wii when it already has a web browser? WiiCade has an ever-growing collection of user-submitted Wii-friendly browser games sorted by user rating. You'll find plenty worth playing, like *Tactical Assassin* and *3D Logic*.



Dark Cut 2: Bivouac www.armorgames.com/play/353/dark-cut-2

Dark Cut 2 is essentially surgery-sim *Trauma Center: Under the Knife*, except set in a Civil War field hospital, featuring all the accompanying filth and horror. Whiskey is your best anesthetic...and you might need some yourself to steady your hand on that rusty knife.

Rose & Camellia www.nigoro.jp

It's no *Wii Boxing*, but if you need to train your pimp hand for some slapping, *Rose & Camellia* is the next best thing—and it doesn't involve any felonies. Bonus: It's just like reading a Jane Austen novel...if Jane Austen novels had health bars and boss fights.



Original www.original.com

Most of Original's library isn't intended for Wii, but many of the site's simple games (like *Bubble Bees*) work just as well with a Wii Remote. Even better, their watercolor aesthetics and relaxing music make them great for helping you unwind a little.

Hot Air 2: All Blown Up www.nitrome.com/games/hotair2

An adorable and infuriating game where you blow hot-air balloons through spike-filled mazes with a fan controlled by your Wii-mote. It's a great way to kill time in the office—judging by how much gets done around here—but even better on the couch at home.



Tech KNOW

We go anti-retro with a look at five hot technologies popping up in today's—and tomorrow's—games. By Evan Shamoon

ABOUT-FACE

Image Metrics' facial animation

Proprietary technology from Image Metrics analyzes video input and essentially does what some seriously expensive equipment, a bunch of people, and a whole lot of little white balls used to do before: capture facial animation. Nearly all the detail in the video is analyzed by the software, then mapped onto a CG 3D model. It may not look perfect—there's still a hint of creepiness, as is the case with all facial animation—but in terms of ease of use, it's a breakthrough. Oh, and it's already being used in a bunch of games, including *Devil May Cry 4* and *Grand Theft Auto IV*. "I challenge anyone [else] to do the volumes that we need in the time that we need at this level of quality," says Alex Horton, art director at Rockstar Games.



Built to last? Realistic facial animation is a major hurdle for the believability of narrative-based games (even *Mass Effect*, one of the better attempts to date, looks decidedly fake). With major studios like Rockstar backing Image Metrics, it may have the tech that moves things forward.

BONING UP

Euphoria biomechanical A.I.

Star Wars is making waves again—not because Jar Jar Binks is getting his own sitcom, thankfully, but because LucasArts is integrating some sweet new tech from a company called NaturalMotion into *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*. It's called Euphoria, and "true biomechanical A.I." is how the developers are describing it. We'll translate: Imagine you're holding a stormtrooper in the air using the Force, and he's flailing his arms and legs trying to break free. Well, rather than using a canned "flail" animation, Euphoria gives that character a sense of place: As you swing him around, knocking him into walls and dangling him over vats of lava, he'll try desperately to grab on to any nearby object—or grab on to a weapon that might be within his reach. *GTA4* uses this tech for its character models as well—to particularly hilarious effect when you get your character drunk and wobbly.

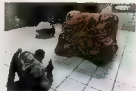
Built to last? Totaly. Although *Unleashed*'s characters look a little silly flailing about, this tech looks much more natural and understated in *GTA4*.



UNREALLY REAL

Unreal Engine soft physics

Epic Games recently showed off the latest version of its Unreal Engine, and it's...meaty. In addition to an increase in the number of onscreen characters (well over 100 *Gears of War* Locust soldiers scurried through a war-torn cityscape), the new engine offers a crowd-pleasing feature demonstrated via a "meat cube." It's essentially a soft physics demo showing a large hunk of grade-A digital beef, attaching itself to characters that get too close. Gross...but awesome news for blobby creatures.



Built to last? The Unreal Engine isn't going anywhere. While this year's update isn't the most revolutionary, we're imagining hundreds of Locusts onscreen in *Gears of War 2*, and it's giving us a meat cube.

WHAT MATTERS MOST

Digital Molecular Matter

Featured in this fall's *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* (as well as LucasArts' upcoming non-*Lego Indiana Jones* game), Digital Molecular Matter (or DMM) is a middleware physics engine developed by Pixelux. Where traditional game physics tend to be based on rigid systems, DMM is more natural: Objects have properties, and when put into action, they behave as they would in real life. Throw an ax into wood, and the wood splinters. Throw a piece of steel into a pool of Jell-O, and *thwump*—it'll get sucked right in. (*Thwump* sound not included.)




Built to last? DMM could be a big leap forward for physics. Of course, it has to compete with a half-dozen other products looking to do the same...

GRAPHIC HAVOK

Havok's Destruction and Cloth technologies

Havok's Destruction (illustrated below) allows for nearly everything in an environment to be wrecked. The company also showed off some cool technology recently called Cloth (which produces realistic cloth effects). The key with all this Havok tech? It's cheaper, faster, and easier to implement than other physics tools.

Built to last? Havok remains the most ubiquitous physics engine on the market, and these cool additions certainly won't hurt the cause. 

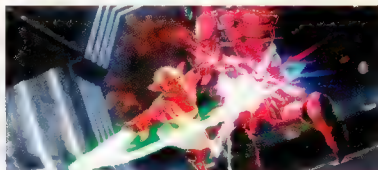




PREVIEW: HANDS-ON

Soulcalibur IV

A fresh infusion of Force powers and fatalities forever changes the stage of history. By Shane Bettenhausen



Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
Namco Bandai

Developer:
Namco Bandai

Release Date:
June 2008

NOTHING IS EVER SACRED IN SOULCALIBUR.

While Sega's genre-defining *Virtua Fighter* franchise deliberately strives to maintain an air of solemn martial-arts realism, Namco Bandai's crowd-pleasing, weapons-based fighter has never been afraid to take chances. You're guaranteed to find a few surprises in each new installment, whether it's a completely original single-player mode or anachronistic appearances from the likes of *Spawn* or *Zelda*'s Link. *Soulcalibur IV* will be no exception: With its cadre of unexpected guest characters and some shocking new gameplay innovations, it's ramping up to be the most adventurous iteration to date.

The recent announcement that beloved *Star Wars* characters Darth Vader and Yoda would be joining *SC4*'s fray sent shock waves through the *Calibur* community—how could these bastions of sci-fi possibly feel at home in a medieval tale of souls and swords? After some serious hands-on time with both Jedi masters, we're stunned by just how comfortably they mesh with the crew. First off, they look great. "We've been able to take animation data directly from the CGI used in the prequel trilogy," says *SC4* Director Katsutoshi Sasaki. More importantly, though, they offer innovative new fighting styles that make them more than just clones



STAR WARS

of existing fighters. Both Yoda and Vader possess unique Force powers: Vader has nasty Force push and choke maneuvers, while Yoda uses the Force to vault himself into the air to bust out all those crazy leaps and kicks from *Attack of the Clones*. Of course, there's a catch: These moves use up Yoda's and Vader's special Force Meter—and once that's spent, performing them saps your health.

Of the two fighters, Vader feels far more accessible thanks to his heavy hits, solid defense, and long range. Getting impressive results out of the diminutive green Jedi Master isn't quite so easy—his miniscule lightsaber and weak constitution mean that you'll have to work twice as hard to take down your foe. His tiny size comes as something of a boon, at least. "Yoda is difficult to play because you have to vault him into the air to be effective," Sasaki says. "But at least a lot of horizontal attacks miss him because he's so small."

Yoda and Vader aren't unlockables: They'll be ready to throw down from the game's outset. Don't worry about

having to choose between these disparate Jedi masters, though—Namco Bandai has already made that decision for you based on which platform you'll be playing the game on. "Vader will be in the PS3 version, and Yoda will be in the 360 one," Sasaki says. "They are exclusive to the respective consoles, and we intend to keep them separate." At least both versions will sport multiple *Star Wars*-themed stages, complete with the expected musical cues and classic sound effects.

While these guest-starring Jedi will clearly appeal to the global nerd community at large, SC4 also features other interlopers specifically targeted at pleasing Japanese players. So far, two new characters designed by renowned anime artists have been revealed: Scheherazade, an all-new rapier-equipped hottie spawned from the pen of Yutaka Izubuchi (*Patlabor*, *RahXephon*) and Angol Fia, a sexy, three-eyed, staff-wielding witch controlled by Mine Yoshizaki (*Sgt. Frog*). And the full roster still remains unknown—expect to see a few more fresh faces come summer.



Newcomer Scheherazade plays a bit like vampiric dandy Raphael.



CRITICAL FINISH

Fatalities in *Soulcalibur IV*



through the *Soulcalibur* development team has never shied away from making unexpected additions to their games; they rarely mess with the series' fundamental fighting gameplay. *Soulcalibur IV* dares to break that rule by adding a controversial new system: Critical Finishes, wildly over-the-top maneuvers that end the round with one incredibly dramatic supermove. "If you do a Critical Finish on a foe, they will be defeated for good—no matter how many life points they have," SC4 Director Katsutoshi Sasaki says. "It's like a permanent KO from battle."

If this sounds distressingly like *Mortal Kombat*'s Fatality system (or even worse, *GUILTY GEAR*'s arbitrary Instant Kills), know that these moves aren't just an excuse to squeeze some gratuitous violence into the proceedings. You won't spy any gore-splattered flesh feasts

or terror rounalms here—just killer combos that are flashier and even more outrageous than the *Calibur* norm. Unlike *Mortal Kombat*'s tricky Fatality motions, SC4's CFs are incredibly easy to perform. While the CF animations are unique to each character, the same simple input (Vertical+Horizontal+Kick) executes them across the board—but the move will only work under very specific circumstances.

In order to pull off a Critical Finish, your foe's Soul Gauge (the round orb next to their health meter) must be flashing red. To make that happen, you'll have to whittle away at the armor protecting specific body parts. This won't take long if your foe chooses to repeatedly block your strikes—once one piece of their armor is gone, feel free to go in for the kill!

If anything, Critical Finishes should help widen the gulf between skilled players and

untrained neophytes by giving veterans a chance to punish overly defensive players. "Players who tend to turtle should be really worried," Sasaki says. "But you can keep yourself from succumbing to a Critical Finish by effectively Guard Impacting and slight-waiving instead of blocking."

If you've managed to make it this far as a *Calibur* player without mastering the game's other defensive options...the jig is finally up. If you want to have any hope of hanging against SC4's online competition, you'll simply have to learn. Although you'll need pinpoint timing in order to deflect strikes, the basic philosophy behind Guard Impacting isn't tough—essentially, SC4 keeps the GI system from SC3 completely intact. Spend some quality time with the Training Mode, and you'll be well on the path toward victory. **A-**

The poster features a dark, atmospheric scene of a city skyline, likely New York City, viewed from an elevated perspective. The sky is filled with heavy, dark clouds, and a bright light source, possibly the moon, is visible in the upper right. The city buildings are illuminated from below, creating a stark contrast with the dark sky. In the foreground, a dense forest of trees is visible, with a path or stream cutting through it. The overall mood is mysterious and ominous.

ONE NIGHT
ONE APOCALYPTIC SECRET

ALONE
IN THE DARK

JUNE 2008

CENTRALDARK.COM



Net Loss

By Hal Halpin

The Entertainment Consumers Association is one of over 500 non-profit organizations that have signed on to a federal bill called the Internet Freedom Preservation Act of 2008. In short, the bill seeks to preserve the Internet the way that it is now. You may be more familiar with the coalition and its cause through the awareness campaign for "Net neutrality."

Net neutrality refers to the fact that you can presently visit websites, play games, post videos, and surf all sorts of depraved...er, educational sites around the Web. You can use the search engines that you like, join social networks that you want, and all is right with the world. It's a wide-open road with no tolls or speed bumps.

The reason for the Net neutrality movement can be blamed on a couple of executive slipups. In calls with analysts and at conferences, executives at some of the nation's leading Internet service providers (ISPs) have made casual—and sometimes not so casual—mention that they see business opportunities in your surfing enjoyment. In their minds, these conglomerates have invested tons of money in infrastructure that you're using to visit and support their competitors. Let's use Time Warner Cable as an example: Time Warner doesn't like YouTube, both because a competitor owns it and due to the bandwidth-sucking that videos require by nature. Well, if the Net doesn't remain neutral, it may be that ISPs decide to slow down the access to some sites, block others entirely, or just require you to pay more to access them.

Why is this important to gamers, above and beyond the "educational" sites we talked about? Turns out that games tend to use the most bandwidth—way more than your mom's text-and-photo e-mails—and we also like to chat, post videos, and interact, all of which pushes a lot of data. Want to get involved? Hop online while it's still an even playing field and go to www.gamersfornetneutrality.org.



Hal Halpin is the president of the Entertainment Consumers Association (ECA), the non-profit membership organization that represents gamers. Join its cause at www.theeca.com.

THE BIG ONES

Huge games, moderately sized updates

Resistance 2

PS3 • Sony CEA • Fall 2008

Metal Gear Solid 4 isn't the only game that can fill the ample space on a dual-layer Blu-ray disc. In a recent interview, Scott Steinberg, Sony's VP of product marketing, said that *Resistance 2* also packs the full 50GB worth of data. Developer Insomniac has cooked up two full campaigns—one each for single-player and co-op multiplayer. It'll take at least that to handle the continuation of the story that finds hero Nathan Hale hopping across the pond to defend the good of U.S. of A. He'll have plenty to keep him busy, with 12 all-new Chimera enemies in the works.



Fable 2

XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios • Fall 2008

Fable 2's canine companion sucks in everyone with its cute factor, and the drop-in cooperative play looks fun, but much of the game's potential rests on the new combat system. Dubbed "Crescendo Combat," it relies on rhythm and tempo rather than complex button combos. From only seeing the swordfighting so far, we've been skeptical that it might be too simple. The addition of magic, though, could dramatically change things. With each spell offering two versions—one for individual attacks and one for area of effect—a whole new range of options open up. Combat becomes a far more elaborate dance with fire and lightning mixed in.

Madden NFL 09 & NFL Head Coach

Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2/PSP/DS • EA Sports • Summer 2008

Madden kicks off its 20th-anniversary season August 12. We expected a special edition, but from the lukewarm reception of the first *Head Coach*, its exclusive availability as part of that special edition came as a surprise. On his blog, Peter Moore, president of EA Sports, promises that this will be an entirely new game, and the option to make your own plays that you can then import in *Madden* sounds good. But, frankly, we'd take online leagues over any other "extras."





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ATARI

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PREVIEW: HANDS-ON

Ninja Gaiden II

Slashing its way into our hearts By Garnett Lee



■ Ryu's blades slice and dice better than anything you can buy for \$19.99 on late-night cable TV.



Photo: Sega

Platform:
XB360
Publisher:
Microsoft
Developer:
Team Ninja

Release Date:
June 2008

NINJA GAIDEN II WASTES NO TIME on fond remembrances. Hero Ryu Hayabusa bursts onto the opening scene right on cue: just in the nick of time to disrupt the abduction of a voluptuous blonde in skintight leather (she's a CIA secret agent—you gotta love creator Tomonobu Itagaki's skewed vision of reality). Just like that, you find yourself right back in the thick of it, waist-deep in Black Spider Clan ninjas.

Like its predecessor, *Ninja Gaiden II* demands that you learn how to play with finesse. While the action may say "button masher" at a glance, without technique II becomes a struggle to progress much past the

first level. Veterans of the first game can expect their skills to come rushing back once they settle into the fever-pitched rhythm and remember that, no matter how hectic the melee appears, success depends on isolating opponents and then knowing how to make short work of them. The long list of moves for each weapon offers plenty of stylish options; the key comes down to mastering those that fit your style.

Do so and Ryu tears through his foes with the efficiency of a human food processor. Blood and bits fly with such enthusiasm that *Ninja Gaiden II* seems to revel in the dismemberment, but for more than just

effect. Enemies who lose limbs go into a frenzy, fighting with reckless abandon, but become susceptible to brutal new finishers.

Put it all together and you orchestrate carnage worthy of top billing at a samurai film festival. Turn on the optional Kurosawa filter and the game even plays the part, appearing in black and white with scratches on the film from apparent years of wear and tear. Great for a replay, sure, but the effect throws off depth perception too much to seriously play that way. And from our experience with it, taking NG2 too casually leads to frequent appearances of the continue screen. **B+**



COLOR US IMPRESSED—

Internet site ColorWarePC.com is letting gamers spiff up their consoles with customized color schemes. Repainting your gear is simple, too: Choose your system (Wii, PS3, XB360, or DS—sorry, PSP owners!), pick out your signature colors, and then send it in for a snazzy dye job. Of course, if you don't want to part with your system, you can always buy a jazzed-up new one. Just expect to cough up a hefty amount of dough for a brand-new, fully pimped system.

TURNING YOUR DS INTO AN INSTRUMENT sounds awesome,

and publisher AQ Interactive is letting you do just that with *Korg DS-10*, which enables your DS to play the sweet sounds of the Korg brand of synthesizers. The music-creating tool isn't so much a game as it is a faithful re-creation of the popular synthesizer. Originally, *Korg DS-10* was only available in Japan, but AQ recently confirmed it's also coming out here, meaning you'll soon be able to annoy commuters with a portable rendition of Europe's "The Final Countdown."



■ If you're not into mixing beats on the bus, then we'd recommend playing a real "game."

> OVERHEARD

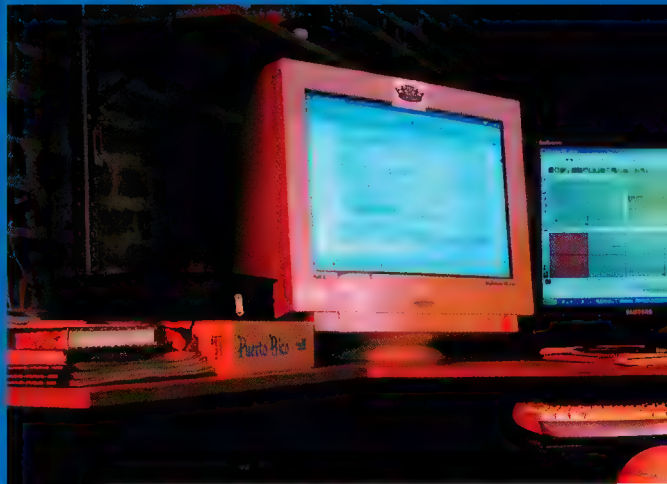


"I thought we could make the world of *Mario* a

little more for boys, so I agreed right away about adding [motorbikes] to [*Mario Kart Wii*]."

—*Mario* creator Shigeru Miyamoto explains how bikes are much manlier than those girly go-karts—yeeek!

Quote source: us.ign.com



> TAKE THIS JOB

Gameplay Programmer

Our monthly look at the industry's most interesting gigs by *Adam Sherman*



This month: Video games, gameplay programmers are capable of a colossal **Recommended education:** Degree in computer science from a reputable college in **Salary range:** \$30,000 to \$100,000 per year, depending on experience and making game modifications a plus

What's a gameplay programmer?

"Someone who works closely with the design team to implement the various gameplay mechanics," says Kipnis. "Something like AI is peculiar to the game's gameplay and under the hood, while one always making a budget. That type of programming is often a separate role, but sometimes it's combined with the design team. It's a very specialized role, and it's often a very high-paying one."

It's not typical day

After a long morning meeting, you'll be working on the game's code and game mechanics. You'll be working on the game's code and game mechanics. You'll be working on the game's code and game mechanics.

"It's a very specialized role, and it's often a very high-paying one." says Kipnis. "Someone like AI is peculiar to the game's gameplay and under the hood, while one always making a budget. That type of programming is often a separate role, but sometimes it's combined with the design team. It's a very specialized role, and it's often a very high-paying one."

How'd she get the gig?

"I started programming in high school and went to college for computer science. I was working on a game project in college and that's how I got the gig."

PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

Dark VOID

Because gravity is so 2007 By Matt Leone

Platforms:
PS3/Xbox360
Publisher:
Capcom
Developer:
Airtight Games
Release Date:
Early 2009

WHEN WE HEARD the people behind *Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge* (now regrouped at Airtight Games) had a character-shooter in the works, we expected some kind of small aerial twist to pay homage to their roots—maybe a flight level or a hijackable vehicle. We didn't expect that the game's entire focus would be keeping your feet off the ground, with rock climbing and rocket-pack flying as the star features. But maybe we should have. The developer's name is "Airtight," after all.

And *Dark Void's* "flight fusion" concept is certainly worthy of attention. When you're scaling walls, a "vertical combat" system lets you take cover and attack from underneath ledges, putting a twist on

the cover-happy approach of many shooters these days. And when you're in the air, a flight suit lets you fly like a plane and hijack UFOs. But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

You start out as everyman cargo pilot Will, who crashes one day while flying through the Bermuda Triangle, ending up in "the void," according to Airtight Lead Game Designer Jose Perez III. You meet up with others who crashed there and discover an enemy group called the Watchers, who have been messing with Earth for a long time. "You can kind of think about all sorts of things that they may have manipulated if you think about the Nazis or Britney Spears," says Capcom Director of Design (and former *EGM* editor) Kraig Kujawa.

Where it gets fancy is in how you can use the Watchers' technology to upgrade yourself over the course of the game. By the end of the first mission, you'll earn a jetpack that lets you hover and scale walls; by the end of the game, you'll have the rocket-pack and the ability to fly at will. It even has a bit of a *Too Human*-like conflict; you have to decide how much of this technology you want to use since you become less human as you upgrade.

Mix in a second playable character (your love interest, Ava) and space battles, and you have plenty of features competing for your attention. So let's break down the two key concepts—what you can do while on a wall, and what you can do in the air—to figure this one out.

You'll be flying UFOs, then jumping onto airships...then jumping back off those and grabbing other UFOs and *Star Wars*-ing the whole thing by 30 percent.

—Airtight Lead Game Designer Jose Perez III

ON A WALL

Turning combat on its side, literally.

Climb rocks

While *Dark Void* doesn't take place strictly on walls (it has ground combat, too), a lot of it does, and much of the game sees you hanging from the sides of mountains, jumping from spot to spot, or grabbing enemies and throwing them down below. (Picture a *Honey, I Shrank the Kids* scenario where you're trying to scale a *Jenga* wall.) Most of the time you have free camera control, but in certain cases the camera zooms out to put you through "Donkey Kong-style" platforming segments, says Perez.

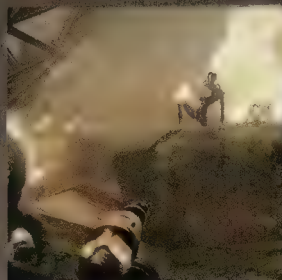
Take cover

The big trick up Airtight's sleeve to make rock climbing interesting is the ability to take cover while on the sides of these hills. It's what the developers call vertical combat—you hide beneath ledges and can peek out, fire blind, and in some cases destroy the environment to make enemies fall to their death.

Worried that this might get disorienting? "One of the things we learned really early on is that when you're doing the vertical combat stuff, it's good to keep it on the side of cliffs or in an outside area so you can tell there's sky and there's ground...and there's a clear horizon line," Perez says.

Hold on

Dark Void has all kinds of walls; it's not just jumping around on mountains. In some cases, that even means using your techniques to scale and attack the sides of bosses inspired by those in *Shadow of the Colossus*. "The idea there is that you're going to use your jetpack to latch on to these things and kind of scale them," Kujawa says. "It's almost like pecking at this giant boss." And much like in *Shadow of the Colossus*, there will be parts of these fights where you'll need to hold down a button to keep the bosses from bucking you off.



IN THE AIR

Taking things one boost at a time

Hover

Early in the game, you earn a jetpack that allows you to hover while firing your guns, reminding us of the combat in Sega's upcoming *Iron Man* game (see preview on pg. 19). "I think *Iron Man* is going to be a little more passive," Kujawa says. "I think *Iron Man* is more about just flying and taking out a lot of other aerial obstacles. It's also about kind of walking out in the open and using your gun and shooting big tanks.... In *Dark Void*, you're much more human. You're much more vulnerable and have more options at your disposal."

Fly

Once you get going in *Dark Void*, you can upgrade to a rocket-pack that lets you fly like a plane. "We literally are taking the same flight mechanics that we had—our ideas that we had—on *Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge* for how the camera worked and applying that to the rocket-pack," Perez says. "When you go into the rocket-pack mode, we're literally using the same code that we used for the planes."

So why not just fly to the end of each level once you get the upgrade? "Three words: heat-seeking

missiles," jokes Kujawa. "No, I mean, we may do something a little cheap like that, but I think [Perez] and the team have been thinking of a lot of issues with that. There are ways to make it more advantageous for players to want to go up vertical cover. If the enemies have advanced weaponry that can kind of home in on someone that's jetpacking, maybe you'll want to take the more careful route. But if the player's really, really good, he might be able to survive that stuff, and that's a tribute to his talent."

Hijack UFOs

Since this all takes place in the Bermuda Triangle, *Dark Void* ramps things up by letting you hijack UFOs that you find while flying around. Using a minigame involving the grip system mentioned on the previous page, you'll be able to take out the pilot and control his ship, or you can rewire the ship and use it as ammunition in large-scale battles. "We've got some airship stuff that you deal with, so you'll be flying UFOs, then jumping onto airships and trying to take them down as well, [and] then jumping back off of those and grabbing other UFOs and *Star Wars*-ing the whole thing by 30 percent," says Perez. ☛





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WII
WHEEL

New VS. Old

We pit recent and retro contraptions against each other to determine whether new really equals improved. By Scott Sharkey

The crappy plastic-steering-wheel thingie that comes packed with *Mario Kart Wii* is just the latest in a long line of doodads, add-ons, and controllers that have promised to improve our gaming lives. But old fogies might argue that they had it better back in the day. Only one way to settle this argument: Prepare for battle!



Where's R.O.B.? Despite Robotic Operating Buddy's resurgent popularity thanks to his appearance in *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, we left him out of this battle due to his lack of an opponent: Imaginary Friend for Pathetic People Who Don't Have Anyone to Play Nintendo Wii! is a concept that just hasn't been explored since 1985. Even though he sucks at Gyromite (NES) and breaks if you stare at him hard, he'll remain the best there is at whatever it is he does, until Sony starts packing mail-order brides with their PS3s.



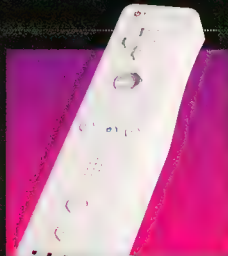
Wii Wheel

VS.

ColecoVision Driving Wheel

If you covered the Coleco wheel in crap and set it on fire, it'd still win by virtue of actually doing something. The *Mario Kart* wheel doesn't really offer anything you couldn't get by janning your Wii Remote into a bagel sideways, which is both cheaper and delicious.

The Winner: Old



Wii Remote

VS.

Power Glove

One of these gadgets requires ultrasonic sensors, a code book, right-handedness, and a willingness to look like a straight-to-DVD cyborg. Wii Remote wins unless you're dressing up for the Space Prom.

The Winner: New



DualShock 3

VS.

Interactor

The Interactor vibrating vest might represent the peak of tactile virtual reality. It feels exactly like you're in a fighting game when friends are punching you in the stomach for wearing a moron-vest. However, if you have some problem with dying from a ruptured spleen, the DualShock 3 is worth the loss of fidelity.

The Winner: New





Xbox 360 HD-DVD Drive

VS.

Sega CD

It's a close match between an add-on that plays a crappy selection of movies and an add-on that plays a crappy selection of games. They both kind of suck, but Sega CD marked the beginning of Sega's era of forgetting about their own hardware faster than a coked-up ferret.

The Winner: New



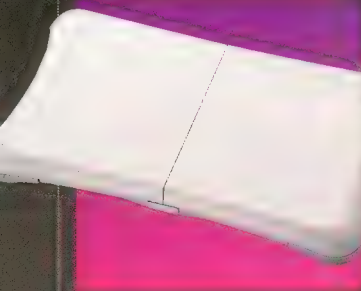
Wii Zapper

VS.

NES Zapper

Nintendo is determined to keep us safe, especially with the Wii Zapper. They've designed a lightgun that will never, ever be mistaken for a gun. Or anything else, for that matter. Which is kind of disregarding the fact that guns are shaped like guns because they're easier to shoot things with that way.

The Winner: Old



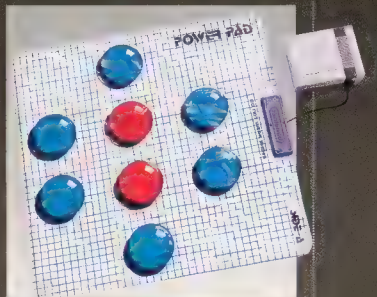
Wii Balance Board

VS.

Power Pad

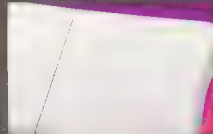
While the NES Power Pad can't differentiate between a fat kid jogging on it and a fat kid kneeling and just slapping at the thing, the Wii Balance Board can at least tell if you're standing on it and read your weight. And even though it might not help you lose that weight, it'll at least save other people the trouble of pointing out that you'd be worth a fortune if you were sold by the pound.

The Winner: New



FINAL VERDICT: NEW WINS!

You done good, kid. We knew you had it in you. We ain't afraid to leave this world in your hands. Just remember to do the same when your young'uns come after you and there's nothing for you to do but let them melt you down to a nutrient-rich slurry to be fed intravenously to a bunch of kids with their brains wired directly to their Nintendo MindCubes. 🎮



Shifting GEAR.S

A trio of challengers look to alter the brawling field By Ray Barnholt

Guilty Gear was once a superniche series that quickly rose to prominence, keeping 2D fighters relevant. Now, developer Arc System Works moves the franchise to an entirely different genre with *Guilty Gear 2: Overture*. But worry not: Arc also has two new (not-so-guilty) fighters in the works.



Old man...
...you are doing that...?



■ *Overture* eschews 1-on-1 combat in favor of a blend of tactics and brawling.



Combo
2
Total
78

500

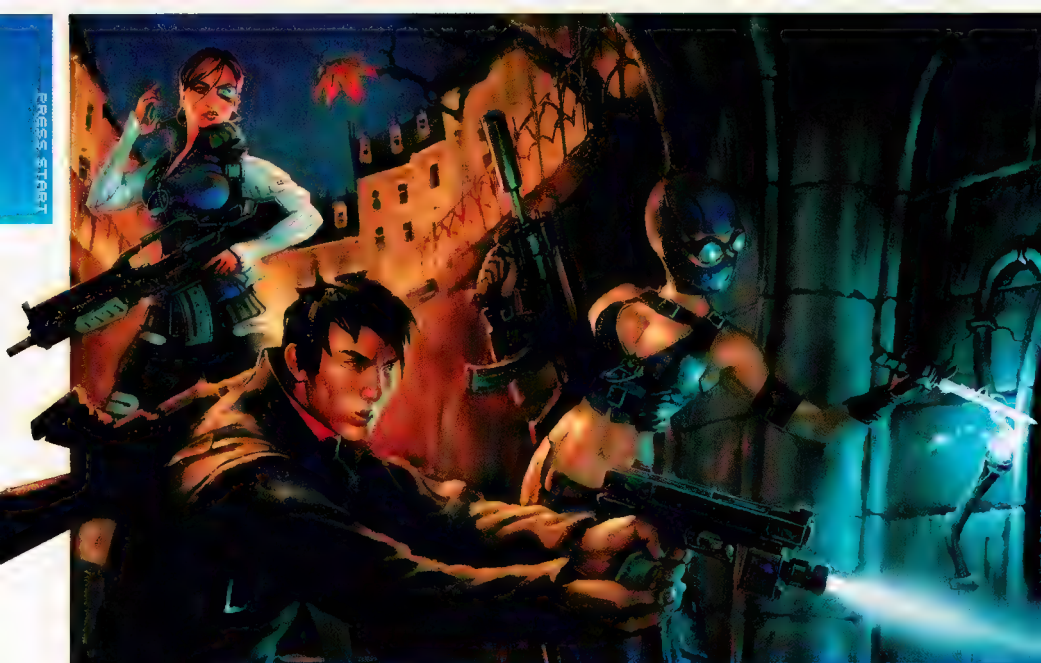
Guilty Gear 2: Overture

99999 • Arc System Works • Arc System Works • PlayStation 3/ Xbox 360

The original *Guilty Gear* was a niche 2D fighting game that found success in the niche of the fighting game genre. However, the success of *Guilty Gear* was not enough to sustain the franchise, and the series was canceled. Now, Arc System Works is bringing the series back with *Guilty Gear 2: Overture*. The game is a 3D fighting game that features a new character, Sol, and a new story. The game is a 3D fighting game that features a new character, Sol, and a new story. The game is a 3D fighting game that features a new character, Sol, and a new story.

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> SPECIAL REPORT & PREVIEWS

A Massive GAMEBLE

Making massively multiplayer gaming
Work on consoles By Joe Rybicki

Above: *The Agency* attacks the console-based MMO challenge from a new angle: It's being built as a console game first and an MMO second, rather than the other way around.

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE GAMING has had an interesting history. Starting out as a niche market, the genre has grown to virtually dominate the PC world—largely thanks to *World of Warcraft*, which recently surpassed 10 million subscribers. But nearly every massively multiplayer console attempt has withered. Only *Final Fantasy XI* has enjoyed enduring success on the console side that comes close to that of even moderately popular PC MMOs, maintaining a subscriber base around half a million across the PC, Xbox 360, and PS2.

And yet, developers haven't given up on the console as a viable platform for massively multiplayer gaming.

Two high-profile titles are preparing to step into the bleak landscape of

the console MMO: Sony Online Entertainment (*EverQuest*) is preparing *The Agency* for a late-fall release on PS3 and PC, and Cryptic Studios (*City of Heroes*) is working on *Champions Online*, slated to hit 360 and PC in 2009, supporting cross-platform play.

Bucking the trend

So why are the folks behind these games venturing into the land where MMOs go to die? Because, according to both teams, designers of console MMOs just haven't been doing it right. "No MMO has truly been designed from the ground up to play like a game that is familiar to console players," says Michael Lewis, president of Cryptic Studios.

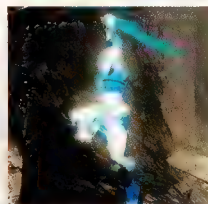
Hal Milton, lead designer of *The Agency* at SOE Seattle, agrees.

"Online games for consoles have to be built as online games for consoles," he says. "You can build a game with enough flexibility to support both platforms, but the console is the constraining one: [The games] need to appeal to the types of fun folks have on [consoles] while working within the mechanical constraints imposed by the controller."

Both developers appear to be making this issue their top priority, starting with the basic premises. *The Agency* forgoes the plodding pace of most massively multiplayer games in favor of a spy-versus-spy premise that relies on a quick trigger finger more than the stats- and equipment-based framework of most MMOs. And *Champions* takes a similar approach, allowing players to create their own



■ The clothes make the man (or woman) in *The Agency*. Rather than offering specific classes, the game provides different gear sets (equip the stealthy gear and you'll get stealthy skills, for instance) to help mix things up.



■ *Champions Online* is retaining at least one feature of Cryptic's first MMO, *City of Heroes/Villains*: Players can make up their own superhero costumes. It's good to look awesome without having to loot a +5 pair of Epic Pants.

superheroes and slug it out against an array of villains in real time, with controls that wouldn't feel out of place in a roaming brawler.

The 800-pound gorilla

That's all well and good, but the most action-packed, user-friendly gameplay doesn't mean much if you can't find people to play your game. Right now, *World of Warcraft* is dominating the MMO scene, with 10 times the subscriber base of the next most popular game, according to MMO tracking site MMOGchart.com. Is it possible to lure players away from such a popular game? Surprisingly, neither camp seems particularly concerned. "There are a lot more gamers in the world than there are *WOW* players," Lewis says. "Rather

than focusing on how we compare to this or that, we're thinking about... what hasn't been done before."

"There's plenty of room in the pool," Milton says. "We expect people have room for multiple games in their lives. In the end, the best way to compete with the others is simply not to. Keep the valid lessons in mind [and develop a game] that stands on its own merits, brings people together, and gives them the tools to have a lot of fun in." Certainly, building MMOs with a

console focus from the ground up can't hurt. But that's been tried with the PS2-exclusive *EverQuest Online Adventures*—a game that's only limped along since its 2003 debut, claiming just 50,000 subscribers at its peak. Will the built-in connectivity of the current generation of consoles allow developers to finally hook console gamers on the addictive world of the MMO?

Our families, significant others, and social lives sure hope not. 🐼

➤ **Rather than focusing on how we compare to this or that, we're thinking about...what hasn't been done before.**

—Cryptic Studios President Michael Lewis



RUMOR MILL

Scuttlebutt with a familiar ring *By Quartermann*

Resurrected Rumors:

A few months back, the Q reported that Obsidian was developing a CIA-themed role-playing adventure for Sega. Say hello to the recently revealed *Alpha Protocol*.

RUMORMONGERING USED TO BE A HIGHLY SPECIALIZED FIELD: Only the most skilled sleuths could dare to infiltrate the hallowed realm of game development to discover prized bits of scandalous intel. These days, it seems as if every two-bit message-board denizen and vengeful beach bum thinks they can break huge stories. Frankly, the Q welcomes the new competition—it'll only make me strive harder to deliver the hottest gossip around.

Bungie's next Halo

Master Chief's handlers haven't uttered a peep about future projects since shipping *Halo 3*, but we've heard rumblings of something major in the works—by the time you're playing *Gears of War 2* this fall, expect Bungie to reveal an all-new *Halo* prequel poised as the Xbox 360's killer app for holiday 2009. This third-person action/adventure shooter hybrid will reportedly chronicle the early skirmishes between the ODST troopers and the Covenant. While it's unclear if this is the official "Peter Jackson *Halo* project," expect involvement from his buddies at design studio Weta.

Not so BioShocking

BioShock's on-again, off-again relationship with the PS3 has finally stabilized, and the game should finally see release this September. Expect all of the downloadable content to be included, along with marginally enhanced visuals. You'll also catch the first glimpse of *BioShock 2* around the same time...and despite rumors to the contrary, neither Sony nor Microsoft has locked up platform exclusivity for the sequel.

Keep on rockin', Rockstar

The threat of having Electronic Arts buy out parent company Take-Two isn't keeping Rockstar from moving forward with projects aplenty, includ-

ing multiplatform sequels to *Red Dead Revolver* and *Max Payne*, hard-boiled gumshoe adventure *L.A. Noire* (now also coming to XB360), and an ambitious massively multiplayer *Grand Theft Auto* project.

Patient Personas

Atlus' shocking decision to kick off really old school by releasing *Persona 4* for the antiquated PlayStation 2 might have bummed out gamers hoping for some bleeding-edge, new-gen devil summoning...but don't despair. The game still looks great, and it should hit U.S. shores by year's end. Plus, all-new *Persona* games are also in the works for PSP and PlayStation 3. **A**

Q-TIPS

- It appears that you'll see *Rock Band 2* at retail this fall, but we're hearing that no additional instruments will be introduced, only new modes. Bummer.
- Castlevania*'s coming back in a big way, with at least three new games on tap: One for DS, a Wii version, and another stab at 3D on PS3 and XB360.
- If you haven't already preordered your *Metal Gear Solid 4* PS3 bundle, odds are you'll be screwed come June 12... We hear it's a very limited edition.

JUNE 2008

COMING SOON

Catch these gaming June bugs



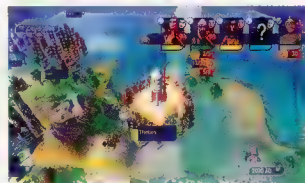
Battlefield: Bad Company
PS3/XB360 • EA Games

The single-player portion of *Battlefield: Bad Company* tasks you with leading a squad of malcontent military men on a heist to grab gold intended for a mercenary army. A recent multiplayer beta successfully introduced the world to the game's destructible environments, which was a lot of fun—unlike the idea of paying real-world money for extra in-game weaponry.



Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures
Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2/PSP/DS • LucasArts

OK, we admit it. *Lego Halo*, which we “previewed” last month, isn't real. But you still have a brown-hatted, whip-toting Harrison Ford to look forward to. Sure, he might be wrinkled on the big screen, but Indy's Lego face is as smooth as a baby's behind in this cutesy action title.



Civilization Revolution
PS3/XB360/DS • 2K Games

Build up cities, invest in culture or science, and march armies to conquer weaker-than-thou neighbors. The popular PC *Civilization* strategy series has always been complex. With *Revolution*, 2K caters to the console crowd with less micromanagement.



Line Rider
Wii/DS • Genius Products

This Internet Flash game sensation reborn for consoles gets the creative juices flowing as you draw lines and then watch toboggan-boy sled around on them. The new line-making tools, animated graphics, and story mode make it a deeper experience, but the Wii Remote and DS stylus allow a bit less precision than a mouse.



[All dates on this page are subject to change]

Photo: EA Games

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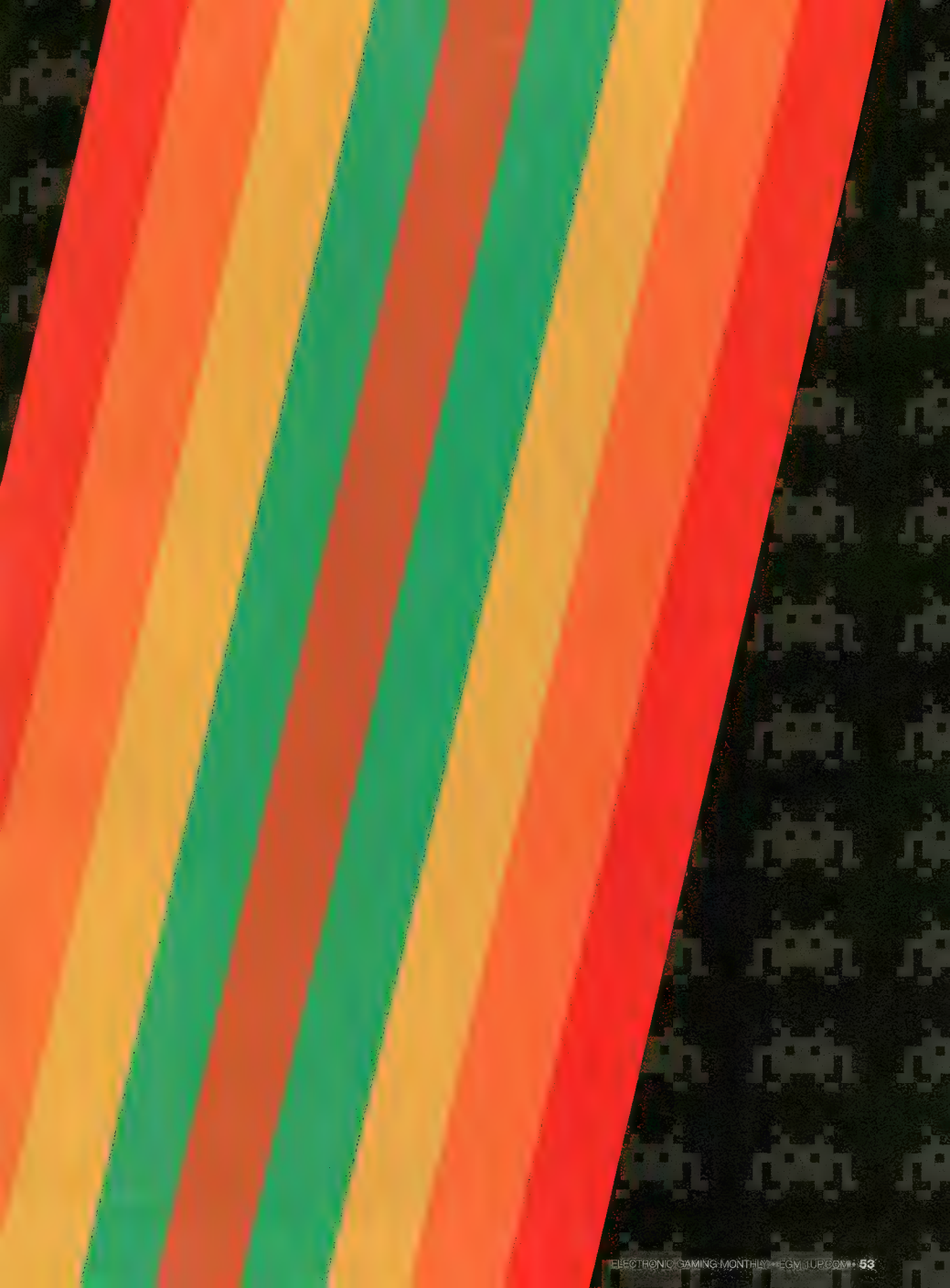


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RETRO REVIIVAL

What's old is new again, but this time it's serious. Retro games are big business these days. Whether it's due to a creative drought or just because publishers like Namco Bandai and Capcom (and Taito, Hudson, Tecmo, Atari, and Sega, etc.) think the time is right to revive, resurrect, reboot, or reinvent classic franchises, retro is *back*—and we've got the details on all of the old-school gaming glories that are mounting the comeback trail.





POWER STORM

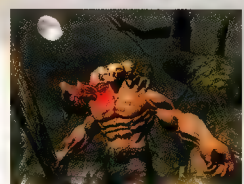
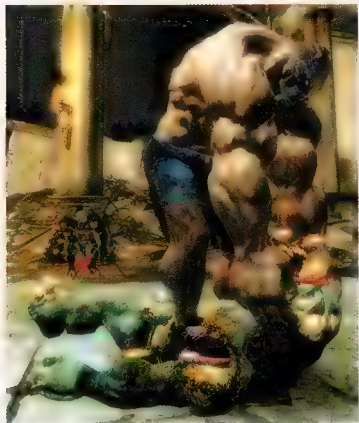


Illustration by Dave Wilkins, BottleRocket Entertainment



Return of the 2-by-4

How Namco Bandai's pulling out all the stops for *Splatterhouse*'s 20th anniversary By James Mielke

IN THE THOUSANDS THEY COME, these otherworldly, hobgoblins that invade our precious world, rife with ill intent, bristling with tooth and claw. If they were to have their way, they'd rend every one of us to pieces for the sheer thrill of it—or for nothing, more than a midnight snack. But they won't have their way today, because Rick is back, and Rick will turn this tide of horror and decay with brute force and zero prejudice! Who is this Rick, you might ask? Old

school gamers will remember him as the stout Jason Voorhees wannabe who prowled the mean streets of Namco's *Splatterhouse* some 20 years ago in arcades across the nation. While many classic gaming franchises spend years in dormant slumber, waiting for the moment when they can awaken, Rip Van Winkle-like, into a new world, most are usually exhumed and repurposed as standalone ports or as fodder to fatten the ranks of myriad arcade

collections (like Namco Bandai's own *Museum* series). *Splatterhouse* stands out because, except for a recent Virtual Console resurrection, it's languished untouched for the last 15 years. Besides that half-hearted contribution to modern gaming culture, Rick, his girlfriend, Jennifer, and their nemesis, Dr. West, have been waiting what seems like an eternity to return to the spotlight. But, as you've probably surmised from the enormous fellow exploding through



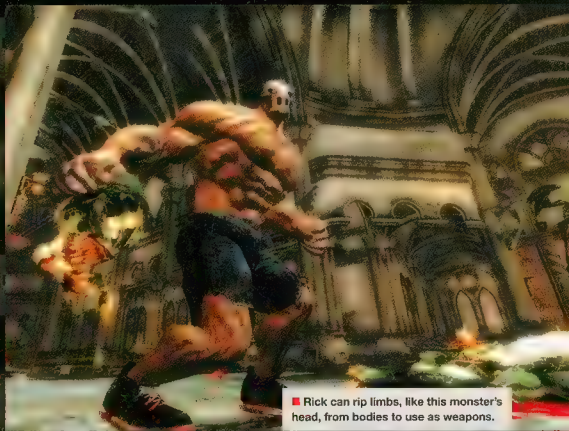
THE BIZ

Simon Bisley does *Splatterhouse*



Comic-book-loving videogame fans will be stoked to learn that Namco Bandai—despite the excellence of the BottleRock!-produced *Splatterhouse* artwork—have recruited *L.O.P.* and *2000AD* veteran Simon Bisley to contribute artwork to the *Splatterhouse* revival. Whether

Bisley's artwork actually makes it to the game's cover or simply graces its marketing and advertising efforts remains to be seen. But knowing that they've got a top-notch artist like "Biz" contributing to the game has energized both the Namco Bandai team and the artists. || BottleRock! Interestingly, the game's producers have paired Bisley up with fellow comics alumnus (and *2000AD* writer) Gordon Rennie to flesh out *Splatterhouse*'s basic plot, breathe life into the characters, and add his own understanding of the supernatural to the script.



■ Rick can rip limbs, like this monster's head, from bodies to use as weapons.

this month's cover, that time is now.

When is the right time to make a comeback? In the case of *Splatterhouse*, and with many of the games throughout this feature, a notable anniversary is reason enough to pump new blood into older franchises, and for Rick and co., they're 20 years young. *Splatterhouse*, Namco Bandai's beat-'em-up that last troubled consoles with its third incarnation—*Splatterhouse 3*—on the Sega Genesis back in 1993, 15 long years ago, seems poised to take the modern gaming era by the throat. Veteran gamers will welcome the return of the cartoon horror series, if only to see how Namco Bandai reinvents the characters and mythol-

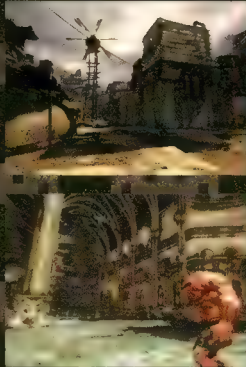
ogy for the modern age. Younger gamers who don't recognize the name's marquee value will come for the simple-yet-irresistible banquet of over-the-top action and gore. This is most definitely not your TurboGrafx-16's *Splatterhouse*.

Reanimator

Although this is a reinvention of *Splatterhouse*, it *isn't* a sequel. The plot is essentially the same as it was 20 years ago. Rick, an average guy, and Jennifer, his hottie girlfriend, attend Miskatonic University together, studying necrobiology—aka "the biology of the dead"—under the watch of their professor, Dr. West.

One day, monsters kidnap Jennifer,

maim Rick, and leave him for dead. As he crawls along the ground, leaving a trail of his own blood, he happens upon a mysterious mask that offers him near-unlimited power and strength so he can save his girlfriend. But at what price? Rick, knowing that he's unlikely to ever land another babe as hot as Jennifer, eagerly accepts the offer, places the mask on his head, and transforms from collegiate geek to hulking monstrosity. Transformation complete, Rick sets off in search of Dr. West—who, ironically, is responsible for the massive influx of interdimensional horrors (known as the Corrupted) flooding into our world through destabilized portals scattered around the globe.



▶ DON'T PICK THAT SCAB

Why you can't stop the Rick!

Splatterhouse features what has to be the most gruesome spin on *Halo*'s energy-shield system—which enables *Halo*'s Master Chief to absorb a limited amount of damage with his suit's defensive shield before taking permanent, potentially fatal, damage. Rick is able to endure physical damage in a similar manner—but with much more punishing, visual results. As Rick takes damage, the resulting scars, slashes, and gashes appear as physical wounds on his body, with five levels of deformation. Mild damage appears as bloody riffs in his flesh. More severe damage reveals bones beneath the muscle structure. Intense rending of Rick's flesh displays his inner organs in a manner that would make Leonardo da Vinci proud. Total obliteration of his physical integrity results in entire limbs being torn from his body. Sounds rough—but the body visuals have a point; they're designed to give the player some indication of Rick's well-being (or lack thereof) without resorting to an extra health bar on the heads-up display. And it's not all bad news: Rick wears a mask that gives him not only phenomenal strength, but also regenerative powers—should the player keep Rick out of harm's way for a few moments, his body will heal in short order. Marvel as Band-Aids are made obsolete through the miracle of modern necrotic energy. The better Rick looks, the quicker his health restores.



■ One Herculean flex can free Rick from being buried under an enemy "dogpile."



Twenty years ago, this premise may have been enough to put any ol' 2D sprite on the screen, stick a 2-by-4 in his hands, and let splatters pummel anything in sight. But times are different, and a new generation of gamers demands a new kind of antihero. So the producers, inspired by H.P. Lovecraft and '80s splatter flicks, were faced with reinventing Rick for the modern age.

The first ace up Namco Bandai's sleeve is its selection of developer for *Splatterhouse*: BottleRocket Entertainment. Better known as the guys behind Sony's PS2 hits *The Mark of Kri* (2002) and *Rise of the Kasai* (2005), BottleRocket has a reputation for creating attractive,

innovative, and deceptively violent action games. Anyone familiar with those games might wonder how BottleRocket would transition from, say, *The Mark of Kri*'s smooth, almost Disney-esque visuals to something more in line with today's graphical showcases. BottleRocket Creative Director Erik Medina gets right to the point: "Something like *The Mark of Kri*, which did have a much more simple shape and color palette to it, really suited its

content. [*Splatterhouse*] is just grittier. It's scary. It's a horror title.

"It's called *Splatterhouse*," he says. "Immediately, it evokes ideas of texture and grit and grime, and, you know, it's a completely different mood." The game, even at this early stage (it's set for release on PS3/XB360 in mid-2009), looks great.

Of course, Rick looks pumped. His mask has been redesigned to look more like a skull than a hockey mask, and he looks less like the moonshine

"It's called *Splatterhouse*... It evokes ideas of grit and grime."

—BottleRocket Creative Director Erik Medina



SOURCE CODE

And you thought *Ninja Gaiden* (pick one) was tough!

The new-age *Splatterhouse* is certainly far cry from the one we played back in the olden days. Notable for its sheer gore-factor and massive character graphics, the arcade *Splatterhouse* was, shall we say, a rather simple game. Unlike in most brawlers, which allowed the character to move up and down along forced perspective pathways, Namco decided to present its game strictly in 2D. Rick could move left or right—mostly right, though, since there wasn't much reason to backtrack. The unrelentingly difficult gameplay was actually entirely pattern-based, so with enough practice (and lots of quarters), determined players could perfect the game to a science: Stand at *this pixel*, and swing the 2-by-4 when the headless corpse crosses *that tile*. But...man...it sure did have lots of blood and guts and zombie puke!



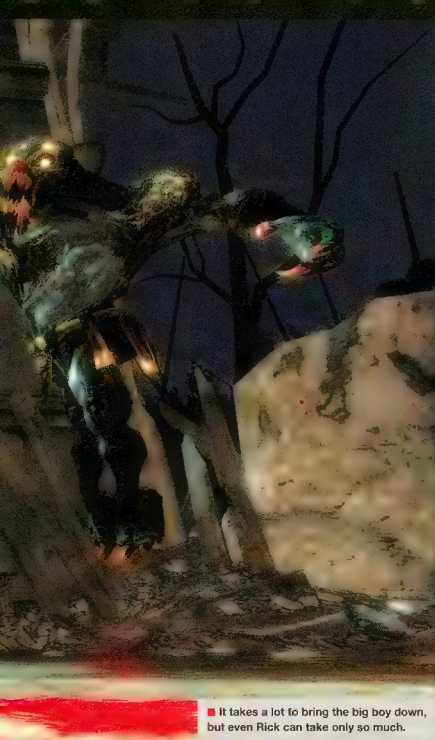
runner of games past and more like hulking comic hero The Maxx (you may know him from the short-lived *MTV* series)—which should come as little surprise, since most of the development team are comic-book fans. Namco Bandai Producer Mark Brown further defines Rick's new look: "Rick is inspired by Mr. Hyde from *Van Helsing*. He has an apelike quality to the way he moves."

Also, Rick is endowed with a little more supernatural juice than in past games, allowing him to switch into Berserker mode if his necrotic energy bar is full. Necrotic energy, which he gets from every enemy he kills, allows him to do a couple of things. The first, Berserker mode,

causes spikes to erupt from his body and gives him superpowered strength for a limited time. It's harder to control him, but the ensuing carnage is worth it. The second thing he can do with this seeping, green energy is raise the dead. With the body count high, there's rarely any shortage of worthwhile corpses to reanimate, and as long as he has enough necrotic energy, he can raise a small army of demons to take into battle or bash down doors. While the developers do not plan to turn *Splatterhouse* into a *Resident Evil*-style puzzle-solving game, they said that the reanimated corpses, the necrotic energy, and "necro-puzzles" will definitely factor into the game.

The house that Rick built

The environments and enemies are what really make the game shine: *Splatterhouse* is infused with the Havok physics engine, and stuff is destructible at every turn. Rick can really level the place by knocking enemies into the woodwork—or by grabbing baddies and using "Splatter Kills" to slam them into structures like a juiced-up WWE madman: Splatter Kills result in a lot of gore, coughing up body parts that Rick can use as weapons. If he's in a baseball kind of mood, ripping the head off a nearby monster allows him to pitch it like a fastball. If he'd rather go to bat, a nearby arm or leg will do in a pinch. Naturally, Rick



It takes a lot to bring the big boy down, but even Rick can take only so much.



KID TESTED

A 12-year-old takes on the original **Splatterhouse**



Was 1988's *Splatterhouse* as fun as we remember? Nostalgia-proof seventh grader Nathan Reimer renders his verdict...

Nathan Reimer: (Starting game) My guy looks like (Friday the 13th's) Jason.

EGM: Who would win in a fight? This dude or Jason?

NR: They'd probably kill each other. (He reaches some projectile-vomiting enemies chained to a wall halfway through the first level.) I think these guys are trying to throw up on me!

EGM: Do you play many games where enemies throw up on you?

NR: Yes.

EGM: Really? What's your favorite game where enemies throw up?

NR: *Good Hand*.

EGM: Which game has better vomit?

NR: This one.

EGM: Would your mom let you play this game?

NR: Sure.

EGM: When *Splatterhouse* came out on the TurboGrafx-16, it was very controversial—very violent.

NR: Not today. Today, [enemies] would be coughing up blood instead of vomit.

EGM: [An enemy explodes in a shower of guts.] Are you shocked at all by what you're seeing?

NR: Yeah—I thought this game would be pretty dumb.

EGM: But you're not shocked by all the disemboweling?

NR: Well, yeah, I guess that's pretty shocking. (He dies at the first boss and uses one of his continues.) Ugh. At least I'll start here.

EGM: We bet you don't. (The game starts at the beginning.) See. Does having to go back through all of this upset you?

NR: Yeah, although I guess I have a saving point right there.

EGM: In the old days, we'd play through the same level a hundred times, and we were fine with it. How one would you play this game for?

NR: I dunno...maybe two hours. It's got really good. (He reaches the second boss—a haunted room with a flying chair that attacks him.)

EGM: Is this the coolest chair you have ever fought in a game?

NR: Yes. I've never fought a chair that game I've thrown chairs at though.

EGM: They're making a new *Splatterhouse* game. What would you like to see in it?

NR: Better graphics. And more vomit.



takes damage, too (see: Don't Pick That Scab sidebar, pg. 57), and the abuse appears on his body as gashes and lacerations that reveal his inner workings. Thankfully, the mask helps Rick regenerate his health in real time.

BottleRocket has clearly spent a lot of time generating each of the game's menacing levels, which range from a dilapidated shantytown that shakes as a train full of gruesome cargo runs through its center to an abandoned carnival that rests in a foggy, overgrown bayou to an icy, underground Nazi battleship, complete with shuffling, frozen zombies. Each of the planned levels, which are accessed through portals, are

peppered with what Nameo Bandai calls "jump nodes." Allowing for platforming action without the problems usually associated with such mechanics, the jump nodes, for lack of a better comparison, are similar to the lock-on grappling hook in *Devil May Cry 4*. While not quite as automatic as those—*Splatterhouse* still allows some room for failure, providing incentive to approach these platform elements with real skill—the jump nodes allow for vertical action

in ways that the past games never attempted. In the shantytown area, Rick swings, appeals, from one node to a 2D plane. BottleRocket President Jonathan "Jay" Beard describes Rick's movement along these nodes as "monkey-cage dynamics." As Rick makes his way across the deep chasms below him, Morlocks—the enemy BottleRocket designed to make life hell for Rick in the nodes—hassle and harry him every step of the way. While

"There's going to be grandmothers fainting all over the place."

—BottleRocket President Jonathan "Jay" Beard



■ Rick goes all *God of War II* in this showdown with the "wicker man."



WHERE WE'VE BEEN & WHERE WE'RE GOING

A little of the old ultraviolence goes a long way.

Namco Bandai and BottleRocket aren't making their ambitions for *Splatterhouse* follow-ups a secret; if this game does well, expect sequels in due time. But where else do you go with the story of a love-struck nerd-beast and his eldritch talking mask? The original *Splatterhouse* trilogy offers a pretty decent road map. In the original games, Rick ends up saving Jennifer (after being tricked into thinking she had become a demon), so they get hitched and have a kid, who is then abducted by demons (along with his mom). Rick hooks up with the mask one last time to save them both, only to learn in the end that the whole thing was a plot by the mask to conquer the universe. Diabolical! Then again, perhaps they'll just go the route Namco did when it took the series to the Japanese NES and gave us a cutesy, superdeformed Rick and company.



attached to a node, Rick can swat enemies away, but timing is key.

Not everything is on a 1-to-1 size ratio with Rick, though. We spotted giant bosses, à la *God of War II*, in our tour through the game. One guardian, which patrols Dr. West's estate, is a giant, burning wicker man (how they hide these things, we'll never know), and Rick will have to make use of jump nodes spread across the wicker man's burning body in order to reach his weak spot. It's reminiscent of *Shadow of the Colossus*, but BottleRocket's execution is wholly original.

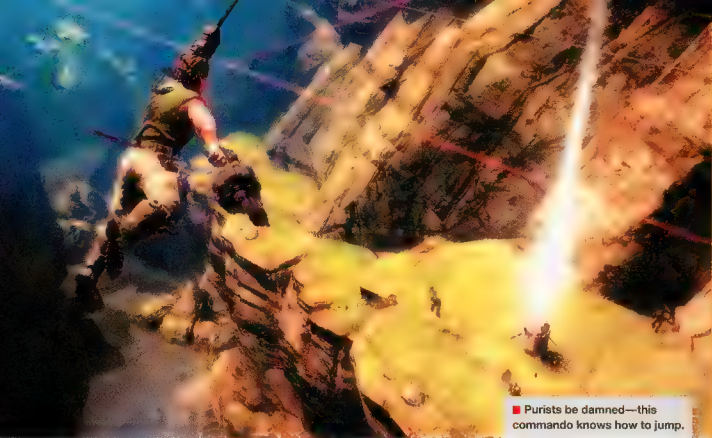
A sort of homecoming

Besides the guy in the mask, what

else about *Splatterhouse* will really scream "*Splatterhouse*"? In terms of homage, BottleRocket plans to incorporate a wealth of nods to the past that should please hardcore fans. Weapons like the classic 2-by-4 are a lock to return, as well as cleavers and shotguns—it just wouldn't be *Splatterhouse* without them. Key bosses—like Biggie Man, the giant with chain-saws for hands—returns to the fray. Other bosses, minibosses, and monsters include leeches, which any *Splatterhouse* fan should recognize, as well as creatures like Clawface (a pus-encrusted freak whose weak points are the pus sacs on his head), and Robo-Ape, Dr. West's personal simian bodyguard.

With all of these disparate elements coming together to create a bruiser of a brawler, it's worth wondering what the final, polished product will be like. "Beard has an idea. 'I think it's going to upset every mother in North America but make every father happy. Every dad's gonna be like, 'That's f***ing awesome,' and every mom's going to be like, 'I cannot believe he's doing that. That's just disgusting. There's going to be grandmothers fainting all over the place. It's going to be revolting.'"

EGM Extras: Make sure to check EGM4UP.com for the full, megahuge, behind-the-scenes *Splatterhouse* interview with Namco Bandai and BottleRocket.



■ Purists be damned—this commando knows how to jump.

BIONIC COMMANDO

PS3/XB360 • Capcom • Capcom/Grin • 2009

Last sighted: *Bionic Commando: Elite Forces* (GBA)

Although *Bionic Commando* initially swung into arcades, it's the cult-classic 1988 NES installment that gaming vets rightfully remember as an enduring classic. We'll soon have the opportunity to revisit that relic in the form of the enhanced *Bionic Commando: Rearmed* for Xbox Live Arcade and PlayStation Network (see sidebar), but consider that merely a nostalgic aperitif preceding a full-scale rebirth for this long-overlooked series.

Why revive the series now?

After numerous low-key handheld revivals fizzled, Capcom seemed prepared to let *Bionic Commando* languish in obscurity. The series earned an unexpected reprieve a few years back when Keiji Inafune, Capcom's head of R&D, noted a multitude of fans and journalists requesting a

BC comeback. He gave into their demands, enlisting maverick game producer Ben Judd to helm both the classic remake and the sequel.

The modern *Bionic Commando* reimagining wisely preserves the unique elements that made the old game so engaging—chief among them returning hero Nathan "Rad" Spencer's telescoping bionic arm. Traversing expansive 3D stages with this user-friendly grappling device offers an exhilarating thrill, and the change-averse purists need to bury the hate—the "controversial" addition of jumping greatly expands Nathan's acrobatic repertoire. And although Capcom's keeping most of the bionic arm's abilities under wraps, expect to manhandle both environmental objects and enemies themselves with your steely tentacle.

ARMED & READY

We spoke with Capcom Producer Ben Judd about *Bionic Commando: Rearmed*, a downloadable remake of the NES classic that's coming soon to Xbox Live Arcade and PSN.

EGM: How did you decide which gameplay elements to retain?

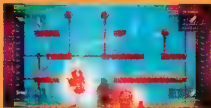
Ben Judd: We left the core elements intact, but we now allow players to switch weapons in real time, and certain weapons do more or less damage. Additionally, we've added some secret areas that can only be accessed if you have the right weapon.

EGM: The co-op mode is brilliant, but it would be even more awesome online. What gives?

BJ: The co-op mode actually came by accident. One of the programmers tried throwing in a second character model, and the team saw how fun the game was in co-op. After that, we wanted to add online co-op—but, unfortunately, the engine was never built for that.

EGM: Everyone loves "Master-D's" grisly death scene. Will any future Capcom games allow players to detonate the heads of famous dictators?

BJ: Hell, if *The Kids in the Hall* can run the same "crush your head" skit through multiple seasons and keep it funny, I can't see why a trend like this couldn't be possible.



KID TESTED

A 12-year-old takes on the original *Bionic Commando*.



Nathan Reimer: Whoa, these sound effects are awesome!

EGM: Wait until you hear Hitler's

tear explode... Oh, try and get comfortable with the controls.

NR: But I don't know how to jump... Wait, you can't jump? That sucks! I know he has this bionic

arm thing, and that's cool, but it'd rather jump.

EGM: Do you understand the map screen?

NR: Oh, it has a lot of numbers in boxes. Which number do I want?

EGM: Number one probably. So, you'll be eligible to sign up for military service in six years, or so—would you sign up if you knew you could join the *Bionic Commando* battalion?

NR: Well, I definitely had a *Bionic Commando* protecting me, maybe.

EGM: Wait, you don't want to be the guy with the arm?

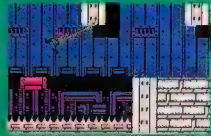
NR: Nope, because then everyone would be out to get me. Also, I like being able to jump.

EGM: Does this mesh with what you learned about Hitler in history class?

NR: Uh, I don't actually have his-

tory class right now—I have science instead.

EGM: Well, playing this game teaches you both science and history, so that's perfect.





■ Forced-2D-perspective areas evoke classic Sonic gameplay.

SONIC UNLEASHED

Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2 • Sega • Sonic Team • November 2008

Last sighted: Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games (Wii, DS)

Sega's prickly mascot isn't some long-forgotten has-been getting a lucky second shot at the big time. Nope, Sonic's a true industry bellwether who's managed to remain continuously popular over the last 17 years, retaining relevancy through near constant reinvention and relentless spin-offs (four different *Sonic* games shipped in 2007 alone). Yet the quality of the core *Sonic* titles has been consistently waning ever since the first *Sonic Adventure* (Dreamcast). And Sega's most recent attempt to turn the series around—2006's eponymous PS3/XB360 offering—served only to exacerbate the downward spiral with frustrating gameplay and distasteful cross-species romance.

Why revive the series now?

Even if his recent games haven't been gems, Sonic still commands a massive fan base—Sega would be foolish to stop milking their speedy blue cash cow now. Coming fresh from his long-awaited pairings with Mario in both *Olympic Games* and *Smash Bros. Brawl*, Sonic's poised for a comeback. The BioWare-developed DS role-playing game *Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood* will kick off his umpteenth revival this September, but Sega hopes that November's *Unleashed* will put him back on top. Sonic fans have endured count-

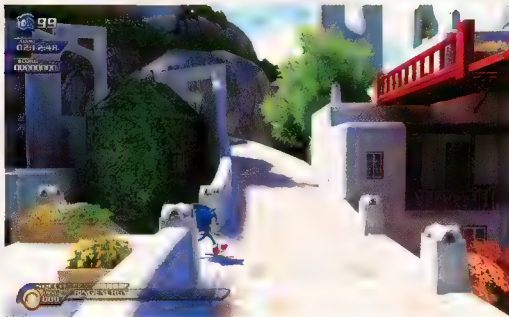
less empty promises in the past, but *Unleashed* appears to finally offer fixes for some of the franchise's most notorious problems. First, the previous game's overbearing, pretentious storylines have been completely axed, replaced by a refreshingly simple premise in which Dr. Eggman breaks the world into pieces in order to nab the Chaos Emeralds. Sega has also forged an upgraded graphical engine to power the project—even in an unfinished state, it already run circles around the last title's clunky, slow-loading tech.

The recent proper *Sonic* games have all suffered from frustrating, slippery controls that left you either careening wildly out of control or automatically advancing on autopilot. *Unleashed* tackles this problem with a decidedly retro solution: Much of the game's platforming will take place from an enforced-for-your-enjoyment 2D perspective. Sega promises seamless transitions between the 2D and 3D bits, as well as a lifelike day/night cycle that will surely factor into gameplay...thanks to Sonic's (possibly ill-advised) new werewolf form. Hey, we'll reserve judgment on this new transformation (one of several, we wager) until we find out if it means a reprieve from cameos from embarrassing Sonic hangers-on like Charmy Bee and Cream the Rabbit.





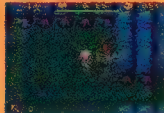
■ Sure, the level design looks simple, but it beats constantly falling off edges.



> UNAMERICAN ACTIVITIES

Prepare to be jealous—Japanese players get these revivals that may never make it out here.

Dungeon of Windaria DS • Compile Heart



What is it: *Windaria* was a 1986 *Romeo and Juliet*-style feature-length anime that more or less embodied the '80s definition of "generic." Now it's slated to return as a dungeon hack that embodies the modern definition of "generic."

Why it's doomed: This sort of role-playing game doesn't sell in America unless it has a popular license attached...and *Windaria* is no *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon*.

Umihara Kawase Portable

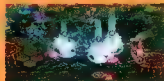


PSP • Marvelous

What is it: Like *Bionic Commando* but way harder, *Umihara Kawase* was a surreal SNES game that took the concept of grappling hooks to its absolute limit; this is a PSP port (which in turn is based on the PlayStation remake).

Why it's doomed: *Umihara Kawase* could potentially carve a niche for itself in the U.S.—but this sloppy, bug-ridden port isn't the way to win anyone's heart or mind.

Vantage Master Portable



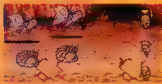
PSP • Falcom

What is it: A portable remake of a clever multiplayer strategy-RPG from the creators of *Ys* and *Legend of Heroes*.

Why it's doomed: The combination of low-fidelity visuals and the fact that you can already play the

game for free on PC should be the one-two punch that keeps this cult favorite far from America.

Final Fantasy IV: The After—Return of the Moon



Mobile • Square Enix

What is it: This might be a shocker for *FFIV* fans—but right now, Japanese gamers are enjoying a full-on story sequel to the beloved Super Nintendo role-playing game starring Ceodore, the woefully named son of Cecil and Rosa.

Why it's doomed: *Moon* is already a smash in Japan, where it's being distributed episodically for cellphones. Unfortunately, Square Enix has no plans to bring this Stateside. Even if the graphics and sounds appear to be recycled from *FFIV*, we're still dying to get a chance to play this in English....

Sega Ages: Phantasy Star Collection



PS2 • Sega

What is it: Sega celebrates its underappreciated role-playing series' 20th anniversary with a value-priced collection that offers all four of the main games, plus the rarely seen *Phantasy Star II* text adventures.

Why it's doomed: While this kind of package might fly on Xbox Live Arcade or PlayStation Network, we're not holding our breath for a domestic release for this retro dalliance. And since the Japanese version includes an English-language option for PS I-IV, you can always import.



STREET FIGHTER IV

PS3/XB360 • Capcom • Capcom/Dimps • Fall 2008

Last sighted: *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* (Dreamcast)

The glory days of jam-packed arcades and throngs of *Street Fighter II* clones remain a distant memory, but the importance of Capcom's genre-defining 1-on-1 fighting franchise has never diminished. Even though the core series has been stagnant for nearly a decade, a steady stream of rereleases and spin-offs have kept it relatively fresh in fans' minds. Unfortunately, some of those offshoots have seriously sucked (*Capcom Fighting Evolution*, anyone?) and the interminable wait for the most requested remake, the online-enabled *Super Street Fighter II HD Remix*, only seems to be getting longer (scope the sidebar). *Street Fighter*'s likely still the biggest name in classic fighting games, but it's unclear whether or not the kids of today will be feelin' it....

Why revive the series now?

Well, *Street Fighter* did just celebrate its 20th anniversary, and an all-new (and hopefully not completely awful) feature film is in the works, so the timing can't really be argued with. But, really, *SF4*'s existence stems solely from two things—fans' incessant requests for a bona fide sequel, and the tireless ambitions of one brave game creator. *SF4* Producer Yoshinori Ono single-handedly convinced his superiors that Capcom could make a

game worthy of the hallowed *Street Fighter* name.

So far, we've been handily impressed with early playable versions of *SF4*—its colorful, back-to-basics visual style really stands out, and the new "Saving" system of charge moves and cancels opens up untold tactical possibilities. And it's hard not to warm up to the fantastically expressive new characters: Rookies Crimson Viper (a dead ringer for Angelina Jolie), Abel, and loony luchador El Fuerte easily eclipse their returning *SF2*-era compatriots when it comes to showing off the game's fluid animation and over-the-top moves. Still, we're a bit worried about certain gameplay aspects: For example, jumping currently feels clumsy and defenseless, but hopefully extensive arcade playtesting will fix balance issues like this.

Another concern we've heard from fans stems from the fact that Capcom is codeveloping *SF4* with an outside firm, Dimps (best known for their work on the *Sonic Advance* and *Rush* games). Should you be worried that Capcom has outsourced its most important fighter to some middlemen? Not necessarily—Dimps has extensive experience with fighting games, cutting its teeth on a multitude of *Dragon Ball Z* titles and the respected import-only *Rumble Fish* series.



■ So far, we've been having more fun playing as *SF4*'s dynamic newcomers.

> STILL AWAITING CHALLENGERS...

What's really taking *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* so long? Lead Artist/Sprite Designer Long Vo spills his guts on the game's setbacks.

EGM: Obviously, the project has seen a few delays since its announcement.... Was it a bigger job than you'd anticipated?

Long Vo: This game requires that literally thousands of frames be redrawn. When Capcom approached us to reboot the art pipeline and start over with us at the reins, we had to set up a pipeline with an outsourced studio to produce the frames. It isn't really that simple, though, as there are more factors at play than just redrawing a sprite in HD. You then have to render, resize, and process the sprite to spec, clean up and paletteize, as well as go back over every frame to ensure consistency.

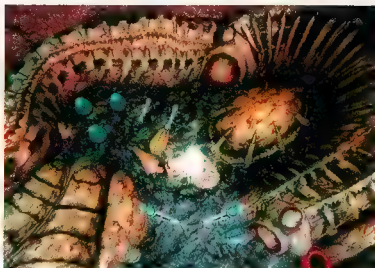
EGM: Which character presented the biggest challenge when it came time to redraw their sprites? Were you worried about ripping off all the Chun-Li fans?

LV: Surprisingly enough, Chun-Li turned out not to be as difficult as Sagat, T-Hawk, Zangief, and Dhalsim. Sagat was a challenge because his original sprite just looked way too skinny. I think fans will like the new look for him because he exudes all that coolness of a larger-framed Sagat without going too far into *SF Alpha* territory. T-Hawk suffered from an oversized head in his original sprite.... In some frames, he almost looked like a troll! With the new proportions, we're able to bring his head just slightly back to where it was originally intended in the design sketches from Capcom.

EGM: Why do you think that the time was right to revive *SF2*?

LV: There are definitely a bunch of kids who missed out on the game way back in the day, and the sad fact is that a lot of old games are dismissed because they look dated. I guess you could liken *HD Remix* to putting medicine inside a kid's favorite treat to get them to eat it.





ALIEN CRUSH

Wii • Hudson • Naxat • Fall 2008
 Last sighted: Jaki Crush (Import-only SNES)

Remember the scene in the second *Bill & Ted* flick where they ended up in hell and complained that the real thing lacked the awesomeness depicted on their heavy-metal album covers? If not, you're probably too young to remember Naxat's *Crush* pinball games, which suffered no such problem: Whether dealing with Satan or space invaders, *Devil's Crush* and *Alien Crush* offered a glorious mullet-and-black-T-shirt take on the original arcade game—a much-needed bit of arcade-rat cred for a genre whose closest prior claim to rockin' out was being the inspiration for a Who rock opera. (Featuring Elton John, even.) But the *Crush* games offered more than just necromantic visuals designed to appeal to pimply faced headbangers; they're also simply great games, with clever, interactive boards and awesome thematic hazards.

Why revive the series now?

The Wii's casual appeal makes it perfect for a genre as accessible as pinball...though, admittedly, soccer moms and grandmas may not be crazy about seeing writhing alien tentacles sprawled across their flippers or alien embryos bursting from the bonus pots. Apart from a newly 3D visual makeover and the addition of online leaderboards, this WiiWare-distributed *Crush* looks to be completely faithful to its classic counterpart.

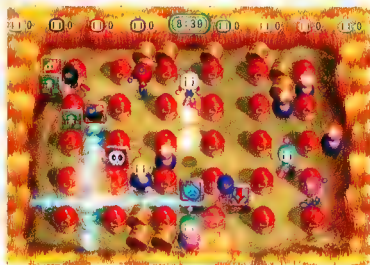
TETRIS

Wii • Hudson • Hudson • Summer 2008
 Last sighted: Tetris DS (DS)

This classic Russian falling-block puzzler has become so ubiquitous since its introduction in 1985 that you've probably played it in some unlikely places, like on your iPod, mobile phone, or keyring. A steady stream of ports, updates, and spin-offs have inundated consoles for the past two decades, meaning that *Tetris* has never really left the public's consciousness. Yet *Tetris* sequels aren't a sure thing—purists contend that the game's true draw lies in its simplicity...most tweaks, additions, and adulterations only serve to complicate the simple, fun gameplay.

Why revive the series now?

The sustained popularity of *Tetris DS* (it's now hard to find new and fetches a premium even used) proves that Nintendo fans still enjoy busting blocks, so Hudson is wise to bring a new, online-enabled version to the Wii's downloadable WiiWare service. You'll be able to face off in six-player matches, complete with Mii support, new special powers activated by shaking the Wii Remote, and the promise of downloadable content.



BOMBERMAN

Wii • Hudson • Hudson • Fall 2008
 Last sighted: Bomberman Land (Wii)

Hudson's cuddly explosives expert has been detonating his friends for well over 20 years, and despite a few tragic missteps (like 2006's laughably misguided *Act Zero* for Xbox 360), the core gameplay remains largely untouched. *Bomberman*'s best when kept simple—it's all about scrambling to get the best power-ups and then skillfully placing your bombs.

Why revive the series now?

Recent *Bomberman* offerings for DS and PSP have been remarkably strong, but the series hasn't enjoyed a high-profile console release for years. WiiWare should prove to be an excellent method for beaming bombs into homes: This new downloadable version isn't just some bare-bones shovelware—expect a full single-player experience (during which you're tasked with rescuing Mii), online battles for up to eight players, and a dumbed-down "My First Bomberman" mode aimed at tykes. Plus, look for two new power-ups (rocket and shield) and the ability to activate items by simply shaking the Wii-remote.



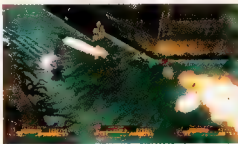
1942: JOINT STRIKE

PS3/XB360 • Capcom • Backbone • Summer 2008
Last sighted: 1944: The Loop Master (Arcade)

Back in the days when masochists would still feed quarters into machines for the chance to evade bullet barrages, Capcom's WWII-themed 1942 kicked off a series of popular top-down shooters. As the popularity of that genre began to fade, so did this franchise's profile—the last three titles, 1941, 19XX, and 1944, had scant presence in U.S. arcades.

Why revive the series now?

Although top-down airplane shooters haven't exactly become popular with first-person-shooter-obsessed modern gamers, Capcom has wisely chosen a low-risk method for reviving time-tested classics, offering value-priced remakes as downloads on Xbox Live Arcade and PlayStation Network. *Joint Strike* reimagines the series' first offering in glorious, sepia-tinted 3D, yet its gameplay remains strictly limited to the old-timey two-dimensional plane. Expect all the traditional power-ups, levels, and ridiculously huge boss aircraft from the original, along with new stages, weapons, and online co-op play.



WOLF OF THE BATTLEFIELD: COMMANDO 3

PS3/XB360 • Capcom • Backbone • June 2008
Last sighted: Mercs (Arcade, Genesis)

Capcom's original *Commando* hit arcades during the zenith of Rambo's popularity, so all that Stallone-fueled patriotism meant that an otherwise bare-bones overhead shooter was able to hang tough against more refined competitors such as *Ikari Warriors* and *Gun.Smoke*. It's not that *Commando* was necessarily bad, but it's certainly very predictable and straightforward. Also, although many erroneously view *Bionic Commando* as its sequel, Super Joe's relentless battle against enemy forces actually continues in *Mercs*.

Why revive the series now?

Hmm...now that's a good question. Revisiting a cult classic like *Bionic Commando* makes perfect sense, but this franchise has been dead, buried, and forgotten for nearly 20 years. *Commando 3* doesn't deviate far from its source material, offering top-down action for up to three players (either on the same screen or via online co-op) as they gun down baddies, lob grenades, and commandeer various vehicles. Flashy new 3D visuals give the proceedings a modern sheen, but the straightforward gameplay and blink-and-you'll-miss-it length seem mired in the past....

INTELLIGENT ADVERTISING



Promoting merchandise in videogames may still be new, but using old-school coin-ops to pimp products certainly isn't. Advertising executives at Pontiac recently quartered up a new concept for a car commercial based on the classic action/racer *Spy Hunter*. Since the slick ad impressed us so much, we tracked down Pontiac Advertising Manager Chris Hornberger to tell us how this nostalgic trip down memory lane came about.

EGM: When you approved this concept, did you say, "We're sorry, but this idea is far too nerdy for us."

Chris Hornberger: Oh, no—definitely not. We didn't think that because videogames and so forth are such a wide-reaching platform. I mean, that's the stereotype—like you said, "geeky nerds." But that's definitely not the case.

EGM: Why'd you go with *Spy Hunter* instead of something new and hip like *Grand Theft Auto*? Or even something older like *Night Driver*?

CH: For us, that '80s genre really hit hard at home. And we thought *Spy Hunter* was one of the best "car" videogames during that time frame—and a game that we thought would really resonate with the consumers we're going after.

EGM: Are you prepared for the false-advertising lawsuits when people find out the Pontiac G8 GT does not shoot unlimited rounds of machine gun bullets from its headlights?

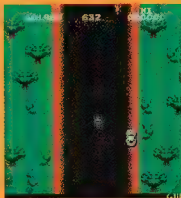
CH: [Laughs] We definitely went through several rounds with our legal team just to make sure there wouldn't be any mix-up, if you will, with reality versus the videogame.

EGM: Any plans to do more game-inspired ads? Maybe a crash-test safety commercial modeled after *Burnout*'s crash mode?

CH: No, we don't have any more focus right now on videogame commercials. But out on the Internet, we'll be having a making-of video for the *Spy Hunter* commercial.

EGM: So it's safe to say we won't be seeing an upcoming TV ad inspired by the vehicular-mass-slaughter racer *Carnageddon*, huh?

CH: Yeah, I think that's a safe bet. Getting this *Spy Hunter* commercial through legal was tough, and getting something like that through would be a little more difficult. [Laughs]



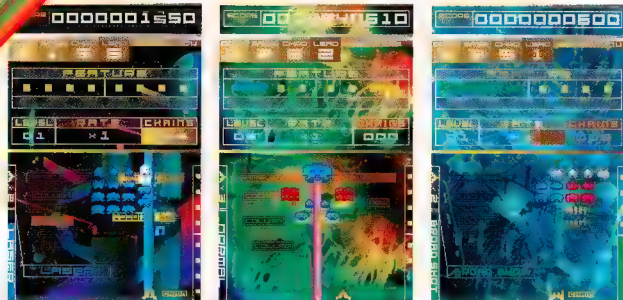
GOLDEN AXE: BEAST RIDER

PS3/XB360 • Sega
 • Secret Level • Fall 2008
 Last sighted: Golden Axe:
 The Duel (Sega Saturn)

Back in the day, *Golden Axe* rose to the top of the competitive hack-n-slash arcade market with its evocative visuals and memorable beast mounts. Unfortunately, its excellent coin-op sequel (1992's *Revenge of Death Adder*) never saw a home release, leaving a pair of uninspired Genesis sequels and a middling Saturn fighting game (*Samurai Shodown wannabe The Duel*) to squander the legacy.

Why revive the series now?

Beast Rider seems to reference two very modern touchstones: Its brutal, dismemberment-happy swordplay borrows liberally from *God of War*, while returning heroine Tyrus Flare has apparently taken styling advice from *Heavenly Sword*'s clothing-averse Nariko. Developer Secret Level (the same guys behind Sega's new *Iron Man* game) have clearly run with the old games' memorable mount concept—here, you'll get the chance to work on your animal husbandry with all manner of road-ready beasts. But we're still concerned that this single-player-only adventure needlessly neglects the co-op play that made the previous games so fun....



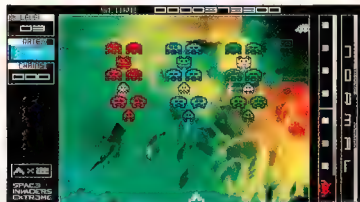
SPACE INVADERS EXTREME

DS/PSP • Square Enix • Taito • Fall 2008
 Last sighted: Space Raiders (GC)

Inarguably one of gaming's most venerated franchises, Taito's *Space Invaders* hasn't necessarily aged as well as many of its classic peers. As influential as the 30-year-old original once was, none of its sequels managed to evolve the bare-bones gameplay. The last attempt at an *Invaders* revival—2004's *Space Raiders* on GameCube—barely registered on most gamers' radar.

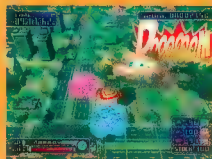
Why revive the series now?

Even with three decades of failed sequels behind them, Taito still plans to celebrate with a revamped portable version. Sure, it's the same old *Space Invaders* at heart, but enhanced visuals, new power-ups, boss encounters, and online multiplayer keep the invasion fresh.



> SPACE INVADERS GET EVEN

The encroaching aliens' 30th-anniversary festivities don't have to end with *Space Invaders Extreme*. Developer Taito has another title in the works that dares to reverse the series' long-held us-versus-them conventions. Yep, the Wii-exclusive *Invaders Get Even* puts you in control of those pixelated alien beasts as they exact revenge on the humans who've been shooting them down since the late 1970s. Gameplay blends elements of real-time strategy with point-and-shoot arcade action, and you'll be commanding up to 300 ships at one time. It's expected to launch in Japan this summer, with a domestic release likely for the fall.



KID TESTED

EGM: You've been in the original *Golden Axe*...



EGM: First you get your character. You got a barbarian.
 Nathan Reimer: I'm going to look like the barbarian.

EGM: Wait, you didn't see all the others....

NR: They looked weird. [Playing]

first level.] Yeah. Oh, I threw that guy. Awesome! I threw you! Whoa, this guy's purple!

EGM: You want to pick up these blue jars of magic, and the more you collect, the bigger your spell. Oh, get on that beast!

NR: What kind of beasts that? It looks like a parrot.

EGM: [After Nathan clears an area] Are you glad they have that flashing arrow to tell you

where to go?

NR: Yeah, because I'd get like, "Are there any more enemies?" Or maybe I'd have to go back and get more magic jars from the gnomes.

EGM: This game's from a time when you really didn't go other directions, always to the right. [Nathan reaches the end of the level] Oh, you were on the back of the turtle.

NR: Who knew?

EGM: Do you think this game's story is good?

NR: It doesn't really make sense. It's just people trying to get off a turtle right now.



REVIEWS

> demonic emo kids, banana peel skids, cities on grids, and what the u.s. calls "soccer"

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GRAND THEFT AUTO IV (GAME OF THE MONTH)

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THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS

Stealing the Spotlight

Rockstar brews another hot cup

TO GO ALONG WITH this month's retro theme, we made sure to review the reworking of two golden oldies for DS—*Myst* and *Super Dodgeball*—and a pair of old-fashioned 2D shooters for Wii. Another reason we were able to review them? Our review copies came in on time. *Gran Turismo 5: Prologue*... not so much. The U.S. online servers weren't up in time, so we decided to wait until next issue (check 1UP.com for our score now if you've been holding off).

I'm sure our Game of the Month isn't much of a shocker...we saw that awesome train coming from two towns away. Apparently, so did every other publisher, because half of the games we were scheduled to review this month scurried off to release dates later this year. Stiff competition breeds delays, and delays (usually) breed better games. Thanks for residual greatness, *Grand Theft Auto!* —*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+; 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.





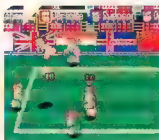
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Shikigami:
Chivalrous
shooter



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Persona 3
FES: Worth
attending



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Dodgeball:
Supereasy
to miss



THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

The peeps who tell you what you should (and shouldn't) play



James "Milkman" Mielke

Editor-in-Chief

Milky spent the better part of his stressful month trying to figure out why his left eye kept throbbing. Then he realized it's his own latent mutant power: Laser eyes. Awesome!

Now Playing: *SMT: Persona 3 FES*, *Lost Planet: Colonies*
Blog: milkman.1UP.com



Greg Ford

Managing Editor

Ford would like to thank Walgreens, weak coffee, and the San Francisco cab fleet for helping him tackle the marathon *GTA4* review. And yes, getting in a taxi after playing that game is as disturbing as you'd imagine.

Now Playing: *GTA4*, *Mario Kart Wii*, *Burnout: Paradise*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



Shane Bettenhausen

Executive Editor

Getting the chance to play through *Metal Gear Solid 4* early means that Shane has had to keep a lid on a multitude of life-ending spoilers. Cut to: him in a fetal position under his desk mumbling, "La-li-lu-le-lo."

Now Playing: *Wipeout HD*, *Wii Fit*, *Metal Gear Solid 4*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



Garnett Lee

Senior Editor, Previews

Garnett got caught in the time paradox of playing his new-gen PS3 with last-gen rumble tech thanks to the new *DualShock 3* he bought. Fortunately, the universe didn't implode.

Now Playing: *Lost Odyssey*, *Gran Turismo 5: Prologue*, *Company of Heroes (PC)*
Blog: gl4.1UP.com



Nick Suttner

Associate Editor, Reviews

Between moving into his own apartment, traveling to rural England to see magical things at *Rare*, and going through a rocky reviews deadline, Nick needs a break—the violent summer only his *GTA* title can provide.

Now Playing: *Culdcept Saga*, *GTA4*, HDTV shopping
Blog: rocksolidaudio.1UP.com



Dan "Shoe" Hsu

Editorial Director

Nick asked Shoe to review *Myst DS* this month. Shoe, a total *Myst* virgin, tried it for about 10 minutes, screamed out "What the hell is going on??" and then rolled up into a ball and cried. Nick promptly took Shoe off of the review....

Now Playing: *Not Myst DS*
Blog: egmshoe.1UP.com



Crispin Boyer

Senior Executive Editor

Tasked with beating *Grand Theft Auto IV* in under six days, Crispin kept his in-game internet dating, binge drinking, and TV-show watching down to a healthy 10 hours-a-day maximum. Just like real life.

Now Playing: *GTA4*, *Mario Kart Wii*, *Professor Layton*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



Michael Donahoe

Senior Writer

While many were worried that Michael's trip to *WrestleMania* would result in him returning to the office bruised and battered, he miraculously came back unscathed. Physically, at least.

Now Playing: *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII*, *Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection*
Blog: egmhoe.1UP.com



Andrew Pfister

Producer, Podcasts

In a cab at 2 a.m., the lines are starting to blur. Can't Andrew hit his X button and be home instantly? That guy tried to cut him off—where's his baseball bat? When was the last time his girlfriend called him...does she not like his new glasses?

Now Playing: *GTA4*, *Warhawk*
Blog: andrewpf.1UP.com



Alice Liang

Associate Editor, Reviews

Alice spent a compulsive weekend trying to get her game boxes to line up uniformly—wouldn't perfect stacks make life that much better? Unfortunately, PS3/PSP/DS/PC boxes don't see it that way.

Now Playing: *Mythos (PC)*, *Final Fantasy: CC—Fring of Fates*
Blog: aliceingameland.1UP.com

Also on deck...

Sam Kennedy
Site Director

Jeremy Parish
Senior Editor,
Expanded Content

Scott Sharkey
Senior Editor,
Features

Tyler Barber
Staff Reviewer

Ray Barnholt
Staff Reviewer

John Davison
Staff Reviewer

David Ellis
Staff Reviewer

Andrew Fitch
Staff Reviewer

Justin "Jay" Frechette
Staff Reviewer

Anthony Gallegos
Staff Reviewer

Mike Nelson
Staff Reviewer

Todd Zuniga
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 1UPRoom for reviews of games we didn't have enough time or room for.





Wii

MARIO KART WII

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Nintendo ■ Players: 1-12 ■ ESRB: Everyone



The Good: A few great new tracks and power-ups
The Bad: Dumbed-down gameplay, predictable design
AWOL: The excellent Shine Thief mode

Fresh off the assembly line?

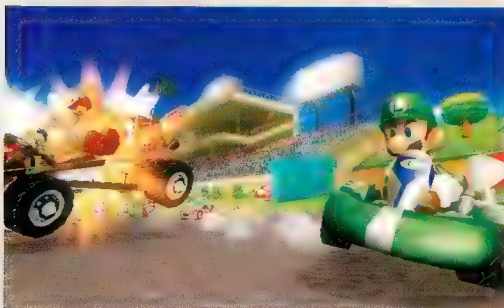
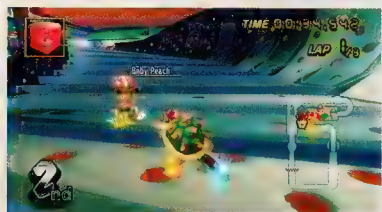
➔ **SHANE:** If you thought the aroma wafting from *Smash Bros.*' warmed-over Wii appearance seemed stale, try a whiff of *Mario Kart Wii*—it's so predictable that it's practically vintage. But don't think for a second that this latest iteration isn't still a stellar kart racer—even after over 15 years of facing contenders to the karting throne, nobody does it better than Nintendo—but series vets need to prepare for regression. While 2003's *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* (GameCube) took daring risks with the formula by adding two-man vehicles, character-specific power-ups, and co-op play, this sequel regrettably jettisons all of those additions. Now, it's clear that those radical innovations weren't all popular among the vast legion of Kart players,

but they added tremendous depth and facilitated high-level gameplay.

Mario Kart Wii feels highly reactionary, as if Nintendo willfully sought to dumb down the driving mechanics in order to even the playing field for the masses. Bundling the game with the plastic Wii Wheel contraption reinforces that commitment to democratizing gameplay: Sure, nongamers will get a kick out of careening around the course via tilt and gesticulations, but you'll find yourself haphazardly oversteering. Of the game's four available control options, the Wii-mote-and-Nunchuk combo clearly works the best: It's the only way to get both familiar analog-stick steering and the freedom to easily perform the new trick system with the Wii-mote.

Considering all the features that Nintendo has omitted from this *Mario Kart*, it's unfortunate that the fresh additions can't quite measure up. The Wii-mote trickery certainly seems fun at first, but it's easy to abuse it during jumps—random wanking motions can lead to colossal speed boosts. Likewise, the option for automatic powersliding further levels the playing field, although manual users will still have a slight advantage. And two of the new power-ups—Mega Mushroom and POW Block—serve to only further degrade the already volatile *Mario Kart* balance. These overpowered items make absurd last-place-to-first-place reversals a distressingly common occurrence.

Mario Kart Wii's 16 original tracks



don't display a tremendous amount of creativity: It's hard to get worked up for yet another revision of Bowser's Castle, Rainbow Road, or some traffic-choked expressway. Still, some of the new courses are keepers: The roller-coaster whiplash of Wario's Gold Mine, the crazed conveyor belts of Toad's Factory, and the crumbling, shifting paths through Thundering Volcano deliver plenty of thrills. The new Battle Mode stages offer a similarly scattershot array of winners (a massive roulette wheel featuring a deadly Chain Chomp ball) and throw-away losers (a bafflingly huge and empty dock area).

Ultimately, even embittered *Double Dash!!* fans will find two reasons to stick *Mario Kart Wii* in their console—online play and Miis support. Yeah, the lack of any real-time chat (either voice

or text) seriously stifles the promise of social interaction, but racing against friends (or strangers) still beats taking on the A.I.-controlled karts. And the inclusion of Miis as not only playable characters, but also as spectators, statues, and on billboards is flat-out brilliant—Nintendo has brought the game down to the masses...and the masses into the game.

➔ **MILKMAN:** *Mario Kart Wii* is, predictably, mostly the same as every other iteration you've played for the last 16 years, with motorcycles. You know the drill: Select your favorite embodiment of Nintendo fan service (e.g., Mario), race around themed levels (desert level, ice level, etc.), shoot bananas at rivals, defeat the rubber-band A.I., and, hopefully, come in first. While any red-blooded Nintendo

fan has already—against all discretion—bought this game, all others who remain less committed should first ask themselves: "Do I really need this game?"

While other publishers are breaking loose with racing games like *Burnout: Paradise*, Nintendo seems content to roll out the same ol', same ol' yet again. Granted, playing in widescreen on a huge TV is very satisfying, the wheel controls are much better than what *Excite Truck* offered, and the online multiplayer arrives in the feature list with a resounding "finally." But how many times can even the most devout Nintendo fan be expected to plow through the same gauntlet of 50cc, 100cc, and 150cc engine classes before the series wears out its welcome? The best thing in the game, for me, is the addition of motorcycles,

Running on Empty?

How to fix Mario Kart in three easy steps

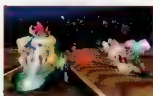
Step 1: Mix up the roster

Nintendo's clearly scraping the bottom of the Mushroom Kingdom's barrel in an attempt to shoehorn new characters into each successive Mario Kart installment. C'mon, Baby Peach? Seriously? And if we were allowed to rag on the equally disappointing unlockable drivers, trust us...we would. Since they've already broken the rules by allowing Miis behind the wheel, Nintendo really ought to expand the scope to allow stars from all of its hit franchises to take part. *Super Smash Kart*, anyone?



Step 2: Add more tracks

Mario Kart Wii's new courses run the gamut from great to awful, as does its selection of 16 tracks from classic *Karts*. Many of the most creative, beloved offerings from *Double Dash!!* and *Mario Kart 64* were rudely overlooked, while several tedious levels from the SNES and GBC games found their way in. Can't we all agree that those musty old courses simply aren't that much fun anymore? If Nintendo were really smart, they'd make the all of the old courses from the entire series available as future downloadable content.



Step 3: Fix online play

From our playtime, *Mario Kart Wii*'s online play appears to work fine... but it's still pretty lonely due to a total lack of any chat functionality. Sending predetermined text messages before and after races just doesn't cut it in 2008, especially when several of Nintendo's own DS titles (like *Advance Wars: Days of Ruin*, pictured here) offer voice chat. We expect that a lot of players will resort to using Xbox Live, PSN, or Skype as chat as a workaround, and that's just sad. Can voice chat be patched in at a later date? We're guessing that it's conceivable, yet highly unlikely.



• The secret to pulling off crazy combos and netting massive speed boosts? Curious? Wii-mote: walk away.

which in some modes feels like the 3D *Excitebike* that should have been. But based on *Mario Kart Wii*'s own merits, you can still do better than this—if you're not too concerned with online play. *Double Dash!!* and the still-stellar DS iteration will satisfy nearly every *Mario Kart* itch you could have better than this predictable stop-gap title.

→ **JEREMY:** The most cathartic thing I've done all month was to name my *Mario Kart Wii* player profile "SHUT UP." OK, random dude on Wi-Fi, so you beat me with your obnoxious, shrieking Toad. SHUT UP. Your irritatingly falsetto Peach took a chump first place with a cheaply timed Blue Shell? SHUT UP. And to those grating magic-wand sounds coming from my Wii-mote: SHUT. UP.

While *Mario Kart Wii* is predictably

similar to its predecessors, something has changed with this installment. Something that makes it feel subtly unlike other *Mario Karts*—and not a change for the better. The newly annoying sound design is just the tip of the iceberg; everything about this entry sets my teeth on edge. What we have here is another classic franchise fallen victim to Nintendo's obsession with making their games easily accessible to everyone and losing sight of the things that used to make their creations unique.

It's like Nintendo's afraid to make games that emphasize skill and feels compelled to reduce everything to a boring, uniform "party game" format. Heaven forbid someone with years of *Mario Kart* experience might beat grandmal So now the series has become something akin to *Smash*

Bros.: hyperactive, spastic, an endless string of "instant win" powers upsetting each and every race. *Mario Kart DS* skated at the edge but played it safe and ended up working wonderfully. Here the series crosses the line and plunges headfirst into the depths of cheesiness.

It's a shame, too, because the track designs are fantastic. The courses and the respectable customization options of Versus mode make *Mario Kart Wii* playable—but, unfortunately, you can only unlock all the cool characters and karts by suffering through the rigidly defined Gran Prix mode. As seems to be the trend with most Nintendo franchises these days, *Mario Kart Wii* is a modest evolution of a game we first played years ago. Except this time, it feels like *homo sapiens* lost out to the Neanderthals. ☹

EGM Extras:
Check out our special *Mario Kart* videos, *Retronsauts* podcast, and an invaluable *SuperGuide* at EGM.1UP.com.



Wii

BLAST WORKS: BUILD, TRADE, DESTROY

■ Publisher: Majesco ■ Developer: Budcat ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone



The Good: Rich level/object editor
The Bad: That's pretty much it after beating the campaign
Kenta Cho: Original creator, whose games you can unlock

The sky really is the limit

➔ **RAY:** *Blast Works* sure looks juvenile, but it's not a bad shooter—it's an enhanced version of *Tumiki Fighters*, an indie PC game that uses *Katamari Damacy*-like mechanics. As you defeat ships they stick to you, and you can use them as shields or as extra firepower (check out the original online game to get an idea of what it's like). Just watch out for those insane bullet hailstorms from the flocks of enemies and huge bosses you'll face.

The concept already makes *Blast Works* a nifty game, but the best reason to pick it up is the editor feature: You can create your own levels, ships, and enemies and tweak practically every variable associated with them. It's simple enough that anyone familiar with PC image editors can understand

it, yet deep enough to allow for unique creations. And with built-in online trading, you have a promising venue for both young and old wannabe game creators.

➔ **NICK:** Like the best make-your-own-game games (*Graffiti Kingdom*, the upcoming *LittleBigPlanet*), *Blast Works*' mechanics are first and foremost inherently fun—I really dug the pile-on ship mechanic and the hilarious screen-filling monstrosities created as a result. But honestly, giving me the chance to flex my creative muscle was all I really needed—while the editor could use an easier learning curve, once I *did* acclimate to its eccentricities, I was hooked. Sharing your creations online works beauti-

fully, and reminds me of *Halo* in the way you queue up downloads on BlastWorksDepot.com. If only I could use my own ship in the campaign.

➔ **SHARKEY:** What's better than a kind-of-OK shooter? Having the unbridled power necessary to make your own kind-of-OK shooters, with flying wangs exploding other wangs over a field of wang trees. Or if you're lazy, you can download other people's wangs. I kind of wish the wang editor was a little friendlier, but nonidiot can figure it out in an hour or so—not too bad. Even better, you can unlock a bunch of significantly more awesome freeware 2D shooters by playing enough of the not entirely great campaign mode. ☞

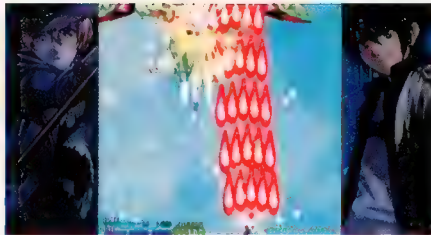
Why should I join the ECA?

- A** **Membership** is only \$19.99/year; \$14.99/year for students with a valid .edu domain extension. Sorta' like the AAA of gaming...
- B** I'm a gamer. I believe in my right to play and **want those rights defended**. ECA fights anti-games pols and activists (ahem, Jack Thompson).
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- D** I'm spending cash on game stuff every month. May as well save money while I'm at it by using my member discounts.
- E** ALL OF THE ABOVE.

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You game?





Wii

CASTLE OF SHIKIGAMI III

■ Publisher: Aksys ■ Developer: Arc System Works/Alfa System
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

Getting Shiki with it

➔ **SAM:** Given the scarcity of shoot-em-ups these days—and the relative dissimilarity of this game to the rest of the Wii's library—*Shikigami* is quite the breath of fresh air. It doesn't require any motion controls and you play it entirely with the Wii Remote on its side—it's unabashedly a shooter of old. But as a port of a Japanese arcade game, it's also a bit limited. For starters, *Shikigami* is presented in its original aspect ratio, so it's a vertical screen sandwiched by large borders. And while you have plenty of characters to choose from, each with their own shooting styles, you don't get many levels to play through. *Shikigami* also relies heavily on its Tension Bonus system, which rewards you for putting yourself in danger by being in extremely close proximity to enemies or their fire. Hardcore shooter fans may get into this, but the rest of us will likely find it frustrating.

➔ **A. FITCH:** *Shikigami* takes me back to the Japanese arcade shooters of my youth, but it's not a seamless trip—everything feels oddly forced. First, the vertical orientation squishes everything together too tightly, making it tough to navigate through the requisite "bullet hell." Second, while the bizarre too-literal translation is nostalgic (in a weird way), it seems to be delivered with a wink and a nod—it only counts as English if it's *unintentionally* hilarious! Still, like Sam said, they don't make 'em like this anymore—it's worth a look for shooter fans despite its shortcomings.

➔ **RAY:** Frustrating or not, *Shikigami* isn't a bad shooter. It doesn't innovate (the series' Tension Bonus mechanic feels like a no-brainer now), but at least it's more polished than its predecessors. Yes, the Wii's resolution isn't really made for it, but you can always play it in a TV-endering vertical-screen mode. *Shikigami*'s one of the best (and one of the only) "modern" shooters on Wii right now—aside from the golden oldies, you can find on Virtual Console (such as *Super Star Soldier* and *Axelay*), which the average person may want to try before diving headfirst into this one.



The Good: It's a shoot-em-up on Wii!
The Bad: It's too short and too tough
Smarter: Just buying some shooters on Virtual Console



PS3/XB360

UEFA EURO 2008

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

A worthy midseason FIFA follow-up

➔ **TODD:** The poor quality of EA's two-a-year FIFA-licensed games (*World Cup* and *Champions League* of late) has irritated me for multiple seasons. Not so with *UEFA Euro 2008*. Representing this summer's European tourney, *UEFA* impresses in many ways: shimmering presentation, engaging game modes, and tweaks to the problems that hurt *FIFA 08*. My favorite augmentation is the ability to slice open the defense with cunning through passes. But sometimes goalkeepers bat balls wide in a way that feels canned (something *Pro Evolution*'s nuanced shooting and goalkeeping has always nailed). The brilliantly designed Captain Your Country mode will have you cheering out loud, though—an upgrade/update of *FIFA 08*'s Be A Pro mode, this addictive way to play had me bursting with nerdy pride when it selected me Man of the Match, while my grumpy mate stewed (you can play with up to four players at once).

➔ **ANDREW:** The world's most popular sport is filled with teams, players, leagues, and tournaments—but focusing on the UEFA event helps this *FIFA* spin-off tremendously. The online integration of group statistics and organization lend a lot to the competitive atmosphere, as winning for your chosen country kicks in points to a community pool: Hooray for virtual nationalism! I'm slightly frustrated with defense and my defenders' occasional inability to challenge for possession (the ball can seem like it's magnetically stuck to the other guys' feet), but you can work around that.

➔ **DAVID:** Whether it's expertly splitting the defense for a late goal as the chants of screaming fans echo around the stadium or calmly standing in wait for a penalty kick as your controller vibrates in concert with your beating heart, *UEFA Euro 2008* perfectly captures the frenzy that accompanies an international tournament. The aforementioned defensive hiccups can lead to occasional frustration, but if you can play through those minor annoyances, you'll be treated to a first-class soccer experience.



The Good: Through passes finally work, online integration
The Bad: Goalkeepers are unreasonably good
EGM's Pick for Euro 2008 Champ: Croatia



XB360 (also on PS3)

NBA BALLERS: CHOSEN ONE

■ Publisher: Midway ■ Developer: Midway Chicago
■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

An unwise choice

➔ **TODD:** This latest *NBA Ballers* seems to have been built in a vacuum. Outside of the player faces, the generation-straddling visuals are awfully amateurish, especially when compared to those in rival (and the *real* chosen one) *NBA Street: Homecourt*. The players' clothing looks like hardened plastic, the animations lack fluidity—*Chosen One* moves like a last-gen game, which is at least consistent since it plays like one, too. I had fun at times, but the crappy rebounding frustrated me to no end, especially in *Ballers'* candidate for stupidest game mode ever: no ball checks. Here I watched opponents dunk, rebound, dunk, rebound, and repeat. Idiotic! The power moves are even worse; these canned

"Supers" made me watch an only-cool-the-first-time video for 12 seconds before the action could resume. Didn't *Homecourt's* brilliant interactive Gamebreakers teach Midway that direct control beats spectatorship every time? Apparently not.

➔ **A. FITCH:** I'm a newcomer to the *NBA Ballers* scene, but I'm no stranger to arcade hoops—*NBA Jam* was my joint back in the day. *Chosen One* seems to forget that, above all else, these games need to be accessible. A perfect example is the first chapter of the story mode, "FunDa'Mentals," which teaches the basics of the game about as well as it spells them: You're thrown into 1-on-1 competition against NBA superstars without even a cursory explanation of the controls. G. Ford even had to teach me how to activate the supermoves, cuz the game never did.

➔ **G. FORD:** I enjoyed my created character's rise from chump to chosen one, mostly for the solid pacing and variety. Jumping from an old-school scoring match (a point a bucket, two from long range) to a 2-versus-2 showdown keeps the story mode fresh. As for those Supers, yeah, the videos drag, but earning the juice to do them—mostly via timed button presses—is satisfying. Like these guys say, though, it's too bad that the rest of the action isn't as slick. *Homecourt* succeeds because it constantly engages; *Chosen One's* inconsistency keeps it from that premier level.

The Good: Chuck D live-in-studio, brings the noise
The Bad: The lame "into the crowd and back" pass
Years Behind: *NBA Street: Homecourt*



DESIGNS: MI; COMPUTER ANIMATION > DIGITAL ARTS & DESIGN > ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS > BILM > GAME DEVELOPMENT > RECORDED ARTS > SHOW PRODUCTION & TOURING



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PS3/XB360



► GTA4's cover system magically yanks Niko against nearby objects. Good for Niko. Bad for objects.



PS3/XB360

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

■ Publisher: Rockstar Games ■ Developer: Rockstar North ■ Players: 1-16 ■ ESRB: Mature

THE VERDICTS

CRISPIN
A+
EXCELLENT

FORD
A+
EXCELLENT

ANDREW P.
A
EXCELLENT

The Good: World, relationships, story
The Bad: Some missions canned, control takes getting used to
Warm Cores: An Achievement for stimulating conversation

Land of opportunity

► **CRISPIN:** Niko Bellic, *Grand Theft Auto IV*'s bruiser from the former Eastern Bloc, is a stone-cold couch potato, a desperate online dater with dead-on aim, and a chronic websurfer who could kill you in a hand-to-hand Krav Maga brawl. Fresh off the boat, he's an illegal immigrant pursuing the dual American dreams of quick money and mass multimedia consumption in the most vibrant, dynamic, and entertainment-packed playground in console videogame history: Liberty City. The civil engineers at Rockstar Games have upgraded this burg's infrastructure since we visited seven years ago in *GTA3*, adding basic cable (hours of programming Niko can watch on safe-house TVs), an in-game Internet rich with blogs, parody websites—even

e-mail spams—and such star attractions as [spoiler deleted] performing stand-up comedy as well as a gentleman's club filled with G-stringed strippers who buzz your controller's vibration motors as they grind Niko's lap (if you must wear sweatpants when you play, please don't share your joypad).

The upshot: Liberty City is no longer just a place you explore outdoors, looking for stunt jumps or the thrill of a six-star wanted level after nailing up the LCPD during missions. I spent hours of my week-long review session checking out the game's indoor attractions, parking Niko in front of his TV and PC, watching red-state-riffing shows like *Republican Space Rangers* while cruising personals on the game's version of Craigslist. If Niko still lived

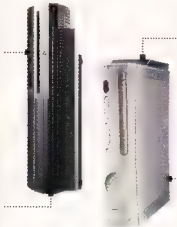
in prequel city San Andreas, where diet and exercise made a difference, he'd have weighed 400 pounds by the time I finished this game.

But Rockstar wisely toned down the character-customization elements this time and focused on a more engrossing aspect: interpersonal relationships. Roman, Niko's head-in-the-clouds cousin who lured him to America with promises of wealth and women, gives our hero an upgradeable cellphone early on. As you meet people, their contact info is added to your phone. Niko can ring them up to grab a bite, go bowling, shoot darts, get s***faced (good luck evading the fuzz while driving under the influence of the game's insane drunk-driving physics), or partake in any number of other activities.

Which Version Is the Best?

A first in the series' history, *GTA4* is hitting two systems—the PS3 and Xbox 360—simultaneously. If you've been waiting for this game before committing to a new machine, here's what each version offers...

Motion control: You can shake your Sixaxis to reload or wobble it to steer bikes (lean back for wheelies), boats, and whirlybirds—for which it works best.

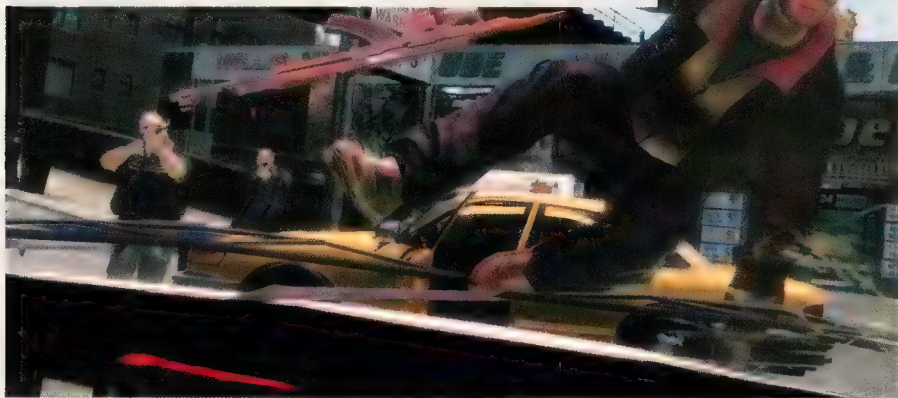


Achievements: Any 360 owner worth his weight in OCD meds knows about these time-suckers. The hardest to nab: Kill a Rockstar developer in multiplayer.

Better graphics: We put both versions of the game side by side and noticed that the PS3 game has slightly more vibrant colors and subtly sharper edges.

Additional content: Although we expect to see downloadable goodies for both games, only the 360 version is getting entire extra episodes starting this fall.

The Verdict: The 360 version is the one to get. The graphical differences are nearly imperceptible, and we can't wait to see how Liberty City's world and story grow with this fall's 360-only downloadable content.



Stay on top of these relationships and your new friends will help you. One nurse Niko dates, for instance, can heal him with over-the-phone medical advice. (The local prostitutes have learned a few tricks, however, and are as eager as ever to boost your health for a few bucks.)

If all of this networking sounds as much fun as helping a friend move, keep in mind that it's optional. I powered through the game avoiding much of that stuff—and it still took me 36 hours from start to finish. All of Niko's crucial bonding moments happen during the missions anyway, which do an amazing job of integrating your contacts, their personalities, and the city's new features. One standout job, for example, has Niko posing as a homosexual lothario on an online dating site to lure a gay thug to a rendezvous.

Yep, the missions pack all of the hilarious writing the series is famous for, except now they occasionally offer the option to spare the lives of characters you've hunted down in hot pursuits—decisions that affect the overall story. They give *GTA4* a new element of replayability, although I suspect players will quickly turn to the excellent multiplayer modes once they've completed the epic single-player game.

The story also delivers surprises and new gameplay quirks right up to the end (one late mission has you wrestling control of your car from an unwilling passenger—a cool effect that at first had me thinking my controller was malfunctioning). The squirrely driving control takes a while to master, as does the new shooting mechanic, which requires a half-pull of the left trigger for free-form aiming

and is tricky in all-hell-breaks-loose shootouts. Despite time-saving conveniences like a new in-car navigation system and cab rides that skip lengthy trips, I do wish that Rockstar had added checkpoints in the multistage missions to cut down on the grunt work of frustrating retries. *GTA4* also suffers from those little things that have always plagued the series, such as sudden pop-in of objects in the environment and the repetition of car models in your immediate vicinity.

But if I could add only one thing to this otherwise outstanding sequel, I'd want the zanier toys from *San Andreas*. Maybe Rockstar thinks the series has gotten too serious for base-jumping parachutists and auto-boosting nitrous oxide. But who's to say what's serious in a game where you can pick up your date in a stolen



helicopter and she doesn't bat an eye? Fortunately, Rockstar seems open to adding features beyond the promised online episodes (360 version only). Something tells me this version of Liberty City, as exciting and beautiful as it is, is still under construction. Maybe Niko will get a few new shows for his American TV addiction, too.

+G. FORD: I dunno, Crispin. The thought of Niko strapping on a jetpack and shooting under the Broker Bridge just seems out of place. Whereas the PS2/XB trilogy had a more stylized, graphic-novel look and feel to it, Niko's world heads down a more realistic path, both visually and with its deeper, somber tale, almost as if the game is striving to reach a certain level of maturity. Could GTA finally be growing up? (Well, the trademark

humor and satire are still there in spades...) This even applies to the ubiquitous side missions. Want to go on a Crazy Taxi-esque fare chase? Rather than stealing a cab and hitting a button, you borrow one of your cousin's cars and get dispatched. You can go the vigilante route by jacking a cop cruiser and accessing the police database, which clues you in to random crimes and the city's most-wanted list. Even things like stealing high-end cars and joining races happen through logical routes like e-mail and calls to the right people. Hell, this game's collectible "hidden packages" take the form of pigeons for you to eliminate. And while all this may sound like a series of limitations, in this new Liberty City it feels organic and just makes sense.

That said, I would've killed for a

parachute when I tried to land on Rotterdam Tower (Liberty City's version of the Empire State Building) from a chopper in multiplayer...but missed and went on a 100-story tour in record time. I was going up there for a good reason: During our lengthy multiplayer test session, the developers clued us in to one of their fave created games in the no-rules Free Mode, King Kong. Here, a few rocket-launcher-packing daredevils perch themselves on the skyscraper while the rest grab choppers and try to shoot them down (no biplanes here, unfortunately). Free Mode's fun with the right crowd, and everyone will like the expected death-match, Team DM, and race variants, plus the objective-based Mafiya Work, Car Jack City, and Turf War modes. But my heaviest time sinks are GTA Race, Cops 'n Crooks, and the co-op

You Gotta Try This



Friend or foe

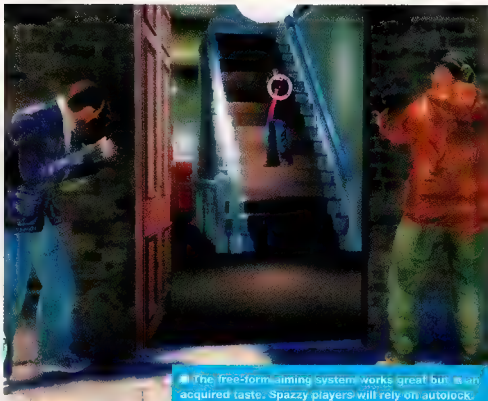
Your Liberty City chums can be so demanding, always asking to hang out. Earn a reprieve by gunning them down. Just expect their call for a ride home from the hospital later.

Elimidate

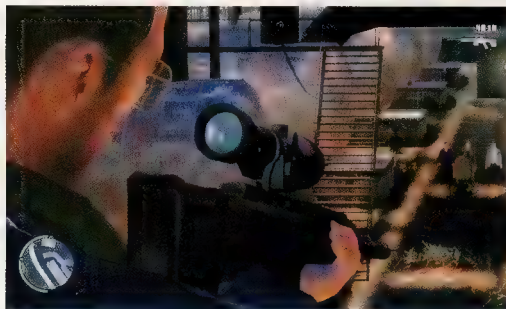
One of the girls getting on your last nerve during a night out? (And at least one will.) Take her for a full-speed head-on joyride into oncoming traffic and eject her from the vehicle.

Third base

Persistence pays off in the strip club. Pony up for at least one lap dance (we know everyone will try this once), then buy another two dances to really get your money's worth.



■ The free-form aiming system works great but won't acquire fast. Spazzy players will rely on autolock.



matches. GTA Race lets you make use of weapons, ditch your starting vehicle, and grab any ride around you...or just go it on foot. Fall behind early and your time may best be spent building a roadblock and checking your ammo to make lap two a little more interesting. Cops 'n Crooks offers entertaining team-based play as a gang of crooks tries to get their boss to the extraction point before the police team eliminates their head honcho. The co-op modes provide the semblance of a

story by stringing together massive firefights and chases for up to four people (the other modes support 16). Straightforward and enjoyable.

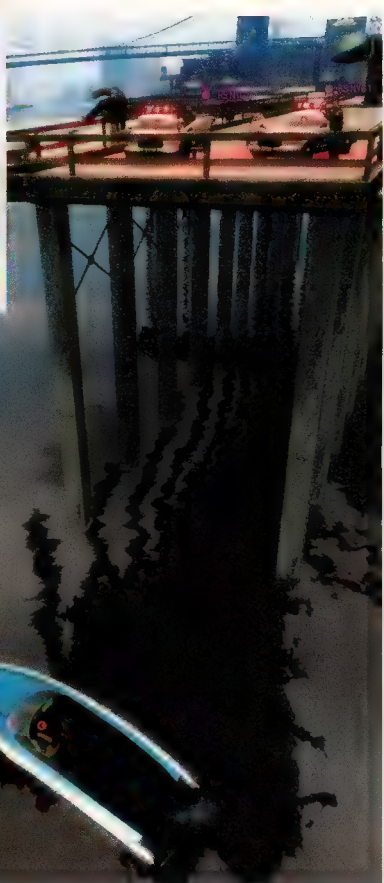
But back to the magnificent single-player—I was quickly and thoroughly sucked into Niko's adventure. I found myself wanting to know what would happen next and what fates awaited certain characters. But sometimes I enjoyed simply driving slowly or walking the streets, admiring the details and listening for the telltale coo of any

nearby pigeons. Other times I reveled in the destructive mayhem with the local law enforcement. After one such showdown, in which I took out two police choppers by sniping the pilots, I was walking down a dock with my rifle still out and past a pedestrian. She noticed me and then quickly walked away, saying: "Only in Liberty. Damn." Damn indeed.

➔ **ANDREW P:** When people talk about open-world games, the mental emphasis is usually on "open." Go anywhere, do anything...that's all fine and dandy, but *GTA4* shows us that you really need to be thinking about the world.

This reimagined Liberty City is as dense and focused as San Andreas was broad and sprawling, wherein our immensely likable immigrant hero is





driven by multiple goals, and there's no time for flying around with jetpacks or infiltrating top-secret government research bases. *GTA4* is a traditional crime story through and through, with a script that rarely strays from its purpose, a pitch-perfect supporting cast, and an expert combination of in-game storytelling and crafted cut-scenes. The expected twists and turns are familiar territory, but the characters make you care when something inevitably goes wrong.

The reason you buy into this story so quickly and so easily is because of the life Rockstar has given to Liberty City; it's beyond even what they accomplished with *Vice City* and *San Andreas*. A multimedia assault mirroring the current state of pop culture incorporates radio, television, the Internet, personal communication

devices, and the game's missions themselves. Driving to the Internet café, you hear a Weazel news spot on the radio about a serial killer on the loose. After clicking on a lawyer's webpage to set up a meeting, you then browse a social networking site that has a banner ad advertising a blog-hosting service. In those blogs, you can find an entire history of posts from a disturbed individual who reveals himself to be the serial killer. The only "game" part of that entire sequence is setting up a simple meeting, but everything melds together, creating what really is a virtual (if rudimentary) society that's running in the background while Niko is doing the usual *GTA* thing.

And the usual *GTA* thing is better than ever. It still feels exactly like it ought to, for better and worse—the

missions, the driving, the shooting—but again, everything is more focused. The cover system is adopted from a host of recent games and makes a huge difference in the gameplay—picking exactly whom you want to target is still imprecise, but staying behind cover and using free-aim gives you more time to shoot smart. And should you fail a mission, the new cellphone restart system helps alleviate the travel time for subsequent attempts (though yeah, it really does need some sort of checkpoint system).

Like Greg says, this really is *GTA* grown up—a graduation of sorts. And if Rockstar does the smart thing and uses the multiplayer and downloadable content to treat Liberty City as the permanent fixture it deserves to be, then the future of open-world games is truly exciting. **A-**

EGM Extras:
Having trouble movin' on up in the new Liberty City? Haul ass to our *GTA4 SuperGuide* at EGM.1UP.com.



PS3/XB360

VIKING: BATTLE FOR ASGARD

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Creative Assembly
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Mature

A few hams short of a feast

➔ **MIKE N.:** Trust me, I get it—*Viking* is a bloody third-person hack-n-slasher—but it never gave me a reason to care about its protagonist, Skarin. And although the large-scale siege battles are epic, gory, and wonderful while they last, the upgrade system frustrates when purchased combat moves don't inflict any additional damage. The odd respawn system frustrates even further, as dying puts Skarin back at the last checkpoint minus any items you used the previous turn. This makes every battle you replay more annoying than it should be, particularly the final boss.

While you'll see a lot in Midgard, you'll find little to do—a handful of computer-controlled Vikings serve only to dispatch fetch quests to save fellow tribesmen—and the inept compass and map system certainly don't help. *Viking* simply doesn't do enough to stand up to the more polished action experiences out there.

➔ **TYLER:** About 60 percent of the things in *Viking* that *should* have sound effects attached to them simply don't—a problem I only noticed the first time I turned around to find a pack of demon mimes waiting to trounce me. It's nitpicky, but it's a symptom of *Viking*'s ultimate offense: Everything feels half-finished. Not half-assed, mind you—just as if it shipped prematurely. It's sad, because *Viking* offers a densely populated sandbox to pillage. You'll fight to reclaim key resources, bridges, and catapults, though I couldn't shake the feeling that I was playing with stiff, jointless action figures.

➔ **A. FITCH:** First off, I gotta say that this game offends my seafaring Saxon ancestry: You spend most of your time rescuing your cowering comrades, not fighting with them—aren't the Vikings the ones who do the raping and pillaging? Even Erik the Swift and Baleog the Fierce would have their way with these Nordic nancy boys. I find the open-world setting and bite-sized mission structure strangely compelling though, as there are always new tasks to tackle. It's hardly *GTA*, but played-out fare like *Dynasty Warriors* could learn a thing or two from *Viking*'s carrot-and-stick approach.



The Good: Epic, bloody battles
The Bad: Repetitive fetch quests, no replay value
Silent Hero: Why can't Skarin talk?



PS2

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: PERSONA 3 FES

■ Publisher: Atlus ■ Developer: Atlus R&D1
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Mature

Another term with a cult classic

➔ **SHANE:** If you're a role-playing fan who foolishly slept on last year's phenomenal *Persona 3*, you inadvertently made a wise decision—now you can experience *FES*, a substantially enhanced yet value-priced new version. The core game hasn't really changed: By night, you lead a ragtag party of demon-summoning schoolkids through a massive multilevel labyrinth, but your daily classwork and social engagements play out like a classic adventure game. The same sophisticated art design, addictive *Persona*-forging system, and expertly streamlined combat engine return, and a host of new story elements and side quests help flesh out the journey.

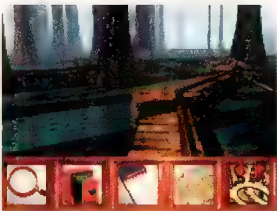
Does this bonus content warrant another playthrough for vets of the original? Probably not, but *FES*' other addition—a remarkably expensive epilogue called "The Answer" that's accessible from the title screen—simply cannot be missed. This pseudo sequel adds a huge new dungeon, over 20 *Persona*, and an original weapon-synthesis system...not to mention much-needed narrative closure.

➔ **MILKMAN:** I'm one of those who inadvertently missed this the first time around, and *FES*' arrival—at a budget price—is the best thing to happen to role-playing games this year. It's stylish and takes a very different approach to the genre than your cookie-cutter *Final Fantasy* Nomura-fest (he of *Kingdom Hearts* and *FF* fame); it's mature, controversial, and engrossing (it's about kids who summon demons, after all). It's still an old-school Japanese RPG, however, so don't expect something like *Mass Effect*.

➔ **RAY:** You're right, Shane—this is still one of the coolest RPGs around. I wasn't completely satisfied, though: "The Answer" is truly an expansion in the literal sense, because as much as I liked *Persona 3*'s dungeon-crawling, I wasn't so keen on doing it multiple times over in smaller dungeons with increased difficulty—I just wanted more story. As a result, I started a new game—seeing as all of the Social Link story events are addictive anyway. Get *FES* no matter how familiar you are with *Persona 3*.



The Good: Plenty of new content, \$30 price
The Bad: Some questionable soundtrack choices
Teenage Suicide: Don't do it



DS

MYST

■ Publisher: Empire ■ Developer: Hoplite
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone

FEATURES



An opportunity *Myst*

➔ **JAY:** Remembered fondly for ushering the adventure genre into the new CD-ROM drives of millions of PC owners in the early '90s, *Myst* is an interesting but disorientating point-and-click journey that leaves narrative bread crumbs hidden behind dozens of puzzles, each revealing a new page that sheds light on a dysfunctional family of world builders. The game drops you on the island of *Myst*, right before you have to solve its many puzzles...but right after you would've received any instruction on how to do so. This means progression is usually made by either countless trial-and-error attempts or following instructions from a walkthrough. The portable experience argues that *Myst* hasn't aged well. Once-stunning on

PC, it looks crude on the DS, with tiny, grainy images that aren't just eyesores—they also make finding interactive elements a chore. This is a weak port that doesn't do *Myst* justice; it's not worth a revisit even for nostalgia.

➔ **ALICE:** Nostalgia is exactly why revisiting the Ages after all these years *should've* been a treat. The lack of direct instructions is part of the game's subtlety—you have to explore for context. I could almost forgive the visuals for being an eyesore if that were the only offense. Unfortunately, the small screen size makes it difficult to see key hints and precisely manipulate sliders and switches with the stylus. And the one noteworthy addition, the Rime Age, feels completely tacked

on, with the puzzle to find its Linking Book missing entirely. This one gets a D for Disappointment.

➔ **JOHN:** The "new" stuff here is hardly "cool" new stuff—it's badly implemented and in part necessary just to be able to play. Without the magnifying glass, all of the reading you need to do would be impossible, but the "camera" and "notes" systems are virtually useless, and they have a really poor interface. Yes, it's a faithful port of *Myst*, but I'm shocked that no attempt was made to clean up the visuals or even explore the possibility of porting the easier-to-navigate *realMyst* (PC). Even your mom (who probably played the original) won't be too thrilled by this.

Good: Some of the new tools help...
Bad: ...though most of them are useless.
Finding Switches: High impossible thanks to the small screen



DS

SUPER DODGEBALL BRAWLERS

■ Publisher: Aksys ■ Developer: Millon
■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Everyone



Your phys ed nightmares, given flesh

➔ **JEREMY:** Revivals don't come more retro than *Super Dodgeball Brawlers*, a stripped-down remake of the NES cult classic that turned a hellish gym experience into pure entertainment. The DS revision isn't too far removed from the older game—it's still about amplifying the sheer violence of dodgeball with the cast of classic brawler *River City Ransom*—but it adds enough new features to make it worthwhile. In addition to powerful special moves, players can now employ strategies like punching, kicking, and throwing vending machines at hapless foes. The truly determined can even create their own custom teams by recruiting any character in the game. I just wish the off-court experience weren't so bare bones. *Brawlers* offers incredible

customization, but the front end looks like, well, an NES game. For that matter, the action hasn't really evolved much over the years, either...and, unfortunately, not always in the "timeless action" sense. And would it really be too much to ask for online play in this day and age?

➔ **ANTHONY:** Having never played the original, I can't make comparisons to how the game *used* to look and play. What I can say is that this version has terrible A.I.—both friendly and enemy players often seemed like they were *trying* to get hit—and woefully outdated visuals that could have used some sprucing up. And while I still had fun taking out foes with my feet, fists, and balls, I couldn't shake the feeling that

I would have preferred *Brawlers* as a bonus mode in a larger experience; it feels a little shallow on its own.

➔ **MICHAEL:** Never played the original, Anthony? I should bust your balls, bro! But I'll let it slide—*Brawlers*, though woefully underappreciated, isn't exactly a well-known classic. That's why I was superstoked for this quasi-remake...until I started the throws and blows. Sure, *Brawlers* looks (almost too much) like its old-school pops, but it doesn't really play like it. For some reason, I could never master the timing of the all-too-crucial supershots. That doesn't mean you should dodge *Brawlers*, but I'd only suggest signing up if you're a master ball tosser.

The Good: A content-rich remake, new special moves
The Bad: Short on bells and whistles, outdated presentation
Better Than: The lame GBA remake

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

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

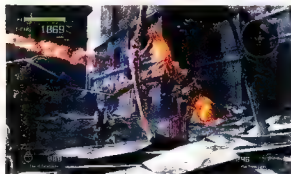
PS3

GRAN TURISMO 5:
PROLOGUE

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ ESRB: Everyone

The U.S. is last in the global line to get this taste of new-gen *Gran Turismo*, but the biggest surprise comes from what's still not there. We'll cross our fingers for the promised patch, but the lack of private races with buddies or voice chat really undermines its online racing potential. Still, for series fans, the even more realistic new suspension and handling models, behind-the-wheel view, and sexy (but limited) car roster make this a no-brainer.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** More than a demo but less than a full game, *Prologue* impresses but comes up a little short for its \$40 price tag.



XB360

LOST PLANET:
COLONIES

■ Publisher: Capcom ■ ESRB: Teen

The latest *Lost Planet* update—a nicely repackaged “greatest hits” version of the original game—comes packed with so much new stuff that it qualifies as *Lost Planet 1.5*. New characters and modes (both online and offline) not found in any previous version (including the just-released PS3 game) make it worthwhile for both newcomers and *LP* veterans, especially at a budget price. A warning, though: *Colonies* doesn't recognize game saves from the previous version, so prepare to level up online again.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** A solid action game with great online components.



Wii

BATTLE OF THE
BANDS

■ Publisher: THQ ■ ESRB: Teen

The Wii needs more good music games, but this one'll only do if you don't mind carpal tunnel—shaking the Remote up, down, left, and right while also pushing buttons to block your opponent's attacks can be hard on the wrist. The song selection is great (Def Leppard's “Photograph”? Awesome!), and skilled players will get their groove on. But even then the music switches back and forth mid-song between the genres of the two battling bands (rock to country, hip-hop to Latin, etc.), which hinders enjoyment of the tunes.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** Challenging gameplay and music-genre mashups lost the battle for us.



Wii

DEATH JR.:
ROOT OF EVIL

■ Publisher: Eidos ■ ESRB: Teen

The *Death Jr.* games keep a-comin'—even when we might wish they'd just let us all rest in peace. A port of the PSP game, *Root of Evil* retools the controls to use the Wii Remote and Nunchuk, and the setup works pretty well. But the game's average platforming just doesn't feel fresh in any way—you've seen it all before. Plus, with some minor slowdown and an occasionally wild camera, things get a bit messy. At least the *Death Jr.* license still makes for fun cut-scenes and cute characters.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** It's basically a poor man's *Sly Cooper*. Or a poorer man's *Voodoo Vince*.



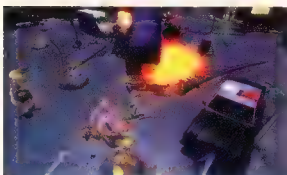
Wii

DECA SPORTS

■ Publisher: Hudson Soft ■ ESRB: Everyone

Deca Sports distances itself from other *Wii Sports* clones by offering 12 unconventional events (figure skating, anyone?). We found archery and curling to be the standout events thanks to their responsive motion controls and oddly compelling multiplayer. It's too bad that the controls in many of the other events don't hold up, and that some sports appear to have been added as an afterthought to fill out the minigame roster.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *Deca Sports* showcases some unconventional games, but its mostly counterintuitive controls and filler minigames overshadow the more enjoyable events.



PS3

MONSTER MADNESS: GRAVE DANGER

■ Publisher: SouthPeak ■ ESRB: Teen

The original *Monster Madness* was one of those games we wanted to love and just couldn't. It was absolutely riddled with annoyances, from a busted camera to an unforgivable excess of doodad collecting and an inexplicable lack of online co-op. The *Grave Danger* incarnation of the game, however, fixes these and most every other complaint about the game.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** *Monster Madness* never won any beauty contests, and a year later on PS3 it's looking a little shabby. But it's still a great time with a couch full of friends, and worth the \$40 if you don't own it already.

THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for Mar/Apr

Name	Platform	EGM Scores		
1 Super Smash Bros. Brawl 	Wii	A	A-	A-
Nintendo games sell well. Really well. Especially ones entitled <i>Super Smash Bros. Brawl</i> . This ultimate fanboy fighter has already sold 1.4 million copies.				
2 Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII 	PSP	B+	B+	A-
3 God of War: Chains of Olympus 	PSP	A	A-	A-
We know <i>God of War III</i> is coming. And so does <i>Sony (duh!)</i> —on the back of the <i>Chains of Olympus</i> manual, it placed an idiot-proof hint for the PS3 sequel.				
4 Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas 2 	XB360	Not reviewed		
5 Army of Two 	XB360	B-	B	B
6 Professor Layton and the Curious Village 	DS	A-	B+	A-
7 MLB 08: The Show 	PS3	Not reviewed		
8 Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock Bundle 	Wii	A	A-	B+
9 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare 	XB360	A	A-	A
War never seems to end, especially in videogame land. So keep the fight going by downloading the new multiplayer maps in <i>Call of Duty 4</i> .				
10 Rock Band: Special Edition for Xbox 360 	XB360	A	A	A
Wannabe rock stars have already been jamming on the XB360, PS3, and PS2 versions of <i>Rock Band</i> , but they'll soon be able to get down with a Wii version.				
11 Game Party 	Wii	Not reviewed		
12 Metal Gear Solid: The Essential Collection 	PS2	Not reviewed		
13 Super Mario Galaxy 	Wii	A	A+	A+
14 Mario Party DS 	DS	C+	C+	C+
15 Carnival Games 	Wii	Not reviewed		
16 Dance Dance Revolution: Hottest Party Bundle 	Wii	Not reviewed		
17 New Super Mario Bros. 	DS	A+	A	B+
18 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare 	PS3	A	A-	A
19 Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day! 	DS	A-	A	A
20 Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day! 	DS	B+	B-	C+

GAME OVER

> press continue for magic belt buckles, wrongful pongs, and nostalgic squirrels



Memorial to Captain N

Behold...the Ultimate Warp Zone!



See TV's Mr. T and Internet sensation Seanbaby in their new Saturday morning cartoon: *Seanbaby and His Amazing Friend*.

WHEN CAPTAIN N FIRST CAME ON TELEVISION IN 1989, it was a dream come true. Popular Nintendo characters teamed up to fight through popular Nintendo games, and it starred a gamer named Kevin who gets sucked into the TV to join the battle! How can you go wrong with an idea that literally every kid in the world thought of? Step one: Make the second act of every episode a joyful montage set to '50s music. Step two: Replace all of your viewers' favorite videogame characters with this crap....

> **Kid Icarus sucks—an unspoken truth among the rest of the team. He'll miss targets from 10 feet away without any explanation.**

> THE HEROES

Kevin

Abilities: Any. His Zapper gun kills anything, and his Power Pad belt buckle can do anything. If the story requires him to turn into a cupcake, why, it turns out his belt had a button for that the whole time.

Role: Most of his adventures are initiated because his dog, Duke, jumps into some kind of warp portal and either needs to be chased or returns with something that tries to kill everyone. Kevin's also the "relatable" character, and many of his B-plots are nerd fantasies like revenge against bullies or befriending the school's popular kids. Thanks for the self-esteem masturbation, Captain N.

Bringing the game to life: Somewhere along the way, the animators discovered that falling down is a quick way to build dramatic tension. So Captain N falls down. And not just when he slips or gets punched—I'm talking every scene. If something is flying at him from 200 yards away, he falls down. If something unthreatening and inanimate is near him, argh! I honestly don't know why he ever bothers to stand back up.



■ Years before rumble packs, Kevin's joypad belt buckle vibrates.



PAGE 92

Retro: Best and worst revivals



PAGE 98

Hsu & Chan: Kickin' it old school

Mega Man

Abilities: Superstrength. Obviously, this is a departure from his video-game abilities of having ordinary strength but an arm that turns into a gun. But he is a robot, so it's not like he wouldn't be pretty strong. I'll try to suspend my disbelief, like with the Mr. T cartoon in which, instead of punching, Mr. T squirts pudding and turns into a wolf—abilities he barely has in real life.



Role: Waddling through the background and agreeing with the others.



Bringing the game to life: The box art for *Mega Man* was of a dude who didn't have enough lithium to keep him from building a cosmonaut suit out of garbage. The cartoon drew its inspiration from that rather than from the game. So the fact that *Mega Man* repeats what others say with the word "Mega" in front almost makes sense.

Simon Belmont

Abilities: Gadget-filled backpack

Role: His role is like Captain N's in that he can kill everything but usually just trips—although much more elaborately. In an early episode, he tries to jump rope with his whip and it somehow starts yanking him around and ties him up. I thought all of the other characters would scream about it being the work of the devil and burn Belmont at the stake. But after watching more episodes, I realize that in this world, intense stupidity can ward the very laws of physics around you.

Bringing the game to life: Does anyone remember where having a big chin and talking like Dudley Do-Right originated? Perhaps all of these cartoons are lampooning some huge-chinned character of the ancient past. Maybe there's a 200-year-old watching this and saying, "Ha ha, it's so true! They got you again, Captain Whoever!"



Kid Icarus

Abilities: Trick arrows, sucking

Role: If *Mega Man* is too busy to state the obvious, *Kid Icarus* takes care of it. Only he ends every word in "ius," as if that's a thing to do. For example, he says things like, "Don't worry maximum!" You could call it annoying, but that'd be like calling taint cancer annoying.



Bringing the game to life: *Kid Icarus* sucks—a spoken truth among the rest of the team. He'll miss targets from 10 feet away without any explanation. And when he does hit what he's aiming at, dumb things happen. Here's one: A wolfman is slowly approaching the princess and Icarus. After 20 seconds of inactivity, she finally shoots for *Kid Icarus* to shoot him. He hits him with a "Party Arrow," which puts a balloon in the wolfman's hand. Madness? Ah, but the balloon floats away with him. The person who wrote that wasn't slapped across the fetal-alcohol face.

Gameboy

Abilities: Shape-changing face

Role: Hell if I know. They added him in the middle of the series to a team that already had three semirelated sidekicks.



Bringing the game to life: As if *Mega Man* and *Kid Icarus*' speech impediments didn't make communication Mega-hard enough, *Gameboy* speaks only in robot sentence fragments. You know, crap like "DOES NOT COMPUTE" or "BABY FLESH DETECTED. I MEAN, HELLO, I AM YOUR FRIEND." But what's so lovable about *Gameboy* is that before and after every halted announcement, he beeps and boops. Except this isn't some kind of internal-language hardware booting up like most movie robots. His lips are moving with each beep. He deliberately says them just because he likes to. "BEEP BOOP HOLD ON. I'LL GET TO THE INTRUDER ALERT AFTER A FEW MORE BEEPS. BLEEP! BOOP. BEDEEP!"

> THE VILLAINS

Mother Brain

Abilities: Unbridled vanity

Role: Most episodes start with Princess Lana, *Video Land*'s midriff-baring ruler, and Kevin playing sports and sharing sexual tension, and I get the idea that's all they'd ever do if *Metroid* villain Mother Brain didn't show up to kidnap something. One would expect the ruler of *Video Land* to have more duties than dancing or volleyball, but Mother Brain never seems surprised when she catches them doing that stuff. "Ooo-woo! I'm the space monster that killed your father and forced you to take over *Video Land*! Sorry for interrupting your sock hop, but I had to call and tell you I'm conquering Pooyan later! Thanks for not caring that I killed your dad!"



Bringing the game to life: *Metroid*—with its eerie music and alien settings—was one of the first games to create an emotional experience. So obviously its main villain should scream like Little Richard about how pretty she is. This adaptation gives me hope for my game version of *Schindler's List*, a futuristic side-scroller about pie farting.

King Hippo

Abilities: Fat

Role: As a character from *Punch-Out!*, *King Hippo*'s usefulness suffered from cartoon censors who wouldn't allow punches. It would take a very clever writer to work around this limitation. You decide if this show's writers were clever while reading the following exchange between *King Hippo* and *Eggplant Wizard* that I swear has not been modified at all: **King Hippo:** "Hey! This ain't lubrication!" **Eggplant Wizard:** "Into the pipe without any toil. Abracadabra! Vinegar and oil!" **King Hippo:** "Oooh, I'll toss your salad!"



Bringing the game to life: *King Hippo* was the go-to guy for the writers to hide their blue material. In a heated exchange with *Eggplant Wizard*, for instance, Hippo says he's going to give him *The Flying Hippo Eggplant Jam Slam!* *Eggplant* then rolls over onto his stomach while *Hippo* dives on him, pelvis first. Before impact, the camera cuts to three onlookers whose faces get covered in white goo. Subtle, *Captain N* writers.

Eggplant Wizard

Abilities: Vegetable magic

Role: When he and *King Hippo* weren't delivering the show's secret gay jokes, it was *Eggplant Wizard*'s job to basically do everything. Since Mother Brain is stuck in a jar, and *King Hippo* is an idiot, *Eggplant* did most of the team's leg work. Plus, because his power has something to do with fruits and vegetables, he seems to have limitless magical abilities. And now you know a fact that soils the entire contents of your brain.



Bringing the game to life: In NES hit *Kid Icarus*, getting hit by the *Eggplant Wizard* meant you had to backtrack, as a damn eggplant, to the nearest doctor. This was never closer than 30 minutes away and to this day is the reason many gamers hate every living thing. He was so annoying that they could have made the cartoon version of him a shrieking bee sting and it would have been close enough. But making him the eighth least-annoying character on the show means that they can't even get annoying right. ☹

> RETRONAUTS PRESENTS

Retro Resuscitation

Old series, second chances: the good and the bad

By Jeremy Parish

A FRESH START

Sometimes, a little time off is all a series needs to find its way again and return stronger than ever. These five classic series spawned brilliant sequels that are the sort of masterpieces every developer dreams of creating.

The theme of this issue is retro favorites enjoying new life, but publishers have been revisiting their classics for as long as gaming's been old enough to have classics. Over the next four pages, we look at history's best and worst revivals.

1 Metroid

Previously seen: *Super Metroid* • SNES • 1994
Update: *Metroid Prime* • GameCube • 2002

Super Metroid was a great game in 1994, and it was a great game nearly 10 years later when Nintendo finally got around to giving it not one but two sequels. Surprisingly, though, it wasn't the internally developed *Metroid Fusion* that grabbed gamers' attention but rather the Texas-bred *Metroid Prime*, a brilliant marriage of open-ended exploration and a mix of first-person adventuring and gunplay inspired by *System Shock* (PC). *Prime*'s unique feel and design made a lot of naysayers eat their words—and made *Metroid* matter again despite the series' lengthy absence.

2 Metal Gear

Previously seen: *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* • MSX2 • 1990
Update: *Metal Gear Solid* • PS1 • 1998
A minor hit in the 8-bit generation, the *Metal Gear* games fell off the radar for nearly a decade until word arrived of a mind-blowingly detailed and cinematic

PlayStation adventure that promised to bring the forgotten series into the third dimension. Its incredible graphics and mature (if sometimes overwrought) narrative forever changed the way people made videogames and turned director Hideo Kojima into a nerd-god. *Metal Gear Solid* was essentially little more than a 3D update of *Metal Gear 2* (unreleased in America at that point)—but its dazzling production values made it feel like nothing anyone had ever seen.

3 Ninja Gaiden

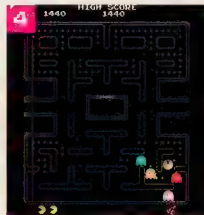
Previously seen: *Ninja Gaiden III: The Ancient Ship of Doom* • NES • 1991
Update: *Ninja Gaiden* • Xbox • 2004
While the story connections between the modern *Ninja Gaiden* games and their NES predecessors are essentially limited to the protagonist's name and occupation, Tomonobu Itagaki's 3D reinvention of the series carries over one important spiritual connection: It's ball-bustingly hard. In fact, it reveals in its challenge level, going so far as to mock players who resort to the wimpiest difficulty option. But it's rarely ever frustrating or unfair—merely demanding.

4 Pac-Man

Previously seen: *Pac-Mania* • Arcade • 1987
Update: *Pac-Man: Championship Edition* • Xbox 360 • 2007
Pac-Man's lame sequels fizzled out after the boring, isometric *Pac-Mania*. But last year, series creator Toru Iwatani returned to Namco's fold to spearhead *Pac-Man: Championship Edition*. No mere remake, *CE* is subtly, brilliantly modern in its sensibilities, offering inventive modes and features that make *Pac-Man* awesome again nearly three decades later.

5 Shinobi

Previously seen: *Shinobi Legions* • Saturn • 1995
Update: *Shinobi* • PS2 • 2002
Like its cousin ninja-action franchise *Ninja Gaiden*, *Shinobi* took a hardcore 2D action game and turned it into a hardcore 3D action game. Sega strayed a bit from the fairly staid design of the classic installments, though, and all for the better: *Shinobi* stood out from the crowd thanks to its clever combo-driven system that drove gamers to rack up tons of kills as quickly as possible.



BETTER OFF DEAD

For every success, there's a failure. Sometimes more than one! Here are five series whose revivals turned out to be more "zombification" than "resurrection."

1 Altered Beast

Previously seen: *Altered Beast* • Genesis • 1989

Update: *Altered Beast: Guardian of the Realms* • GBA • 2002

The original *Altered Beast* was, let's be honest, no great shakes. Most people remember it because the Genesis port—which was, admittedly, very impressive looking in 1989—came with the console back before Sega's hopes rested with a small blue hedgehog. But the original looks like a masterpiece next to the janky (and hideous) GBA update. Worse yet, the awful GBA game was followed by an even worse PS2 sequel—a game so bad Sega canceled its U.S. release. Better for this series never to "wise from its gwave" again.

2 Blaster Master

Previously seen: *Blaster Master 2* • Genesis • 1993

Update: *Blaster Master: Blasting Again* • PS1 • 2001

Blaster Master, the hardcore, nonlinear NES game about rescuing your pet frog, did well enough to inspire a few middling spin-offs. But when Sunsoft dug

back into its archives a decade later and decided to dredge up the series for PlayStation, it forgot to bring the fun along with it. *Blasting Again* was more drudgery than delight, losing the original's intricate level designs in favor of boring 3D shooting.

3 Frogger

Previously seen: *Frogger II: Threee-deep!* • Atari 5200 • 1984

Update: *Frogger 2: Swampy's Revenge* • Dreamcast • 2000

Frog-based revivals are 0-for-2. Sega and Konami created a classic arcade hit from a joke ("Why did the frog cross the river?"), and when sitcom *Seinfeld* reminded a generation of its wonders, 3D sequels soon followed. Unfortunately, with each update, ol' Frogger became progressively more annoying...and considerably less fun.

4 Ghosts 'n Goblins

Previously seen: *Super Ghosts 'n Ghosts* • SNES • 1991

Update: *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins* • PSP • 2006

Capcom's classic *Ghosts 'n Goblins*

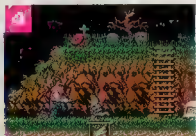
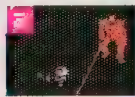
games were exquisitely difficult—but simply exquisite, too. Somehow, they always seemed to stand just on the right side of the dividing line between "rewardingly challenging" and "unenjoyably difficult." Unfortunately, the series revival for PSP lost its way, adding a few interesting new features but retaining some of the series' most arcane flaws while adding shortcomings of its own to the mix—creating something less fun and more infuriating.

5 Pong

Previously seen: *Pong Doubles* • Arcade • 1972

Update: *Pong: The Next Level* • PS1 • 1993

Pong wasn't the first videogame, but it was the first one that mattered, liberating the medium from the somber halls of academia and setting it in raucous bars and arcades where everyone could appreciate its pleasures. But the key to Pong's success was its simplicity, something Hasbro Interactive abandoned in favor of needless "features" and—ridiculously—a drawn-out storyline. *About Pong* piddles. Sigh.





GAME OVER

TRUE SEQUELS

Thanks to spin-offs and subtitles, the true numbered sequel is a rare creature in gaming. (*Grand Theft Auto IV* is the fifth sequel to *Grand Theft Auto III*.) A numeral at the end of a sequel means business...but not all "true" sequels are created equal.

1 Contra 4

DS • 2007

Last numbered sequel: *Contra III: The Alien Wars* • SNES • 1992
Interim titles: *Hard Corps*, *Legacy of War*, *C: The Contra Adventure*, *Shattered Soldier*, *Neo Contra*

Contra III wowed gamers with intense, hardware-pushing action that surpassed anything that had come before. But the fourth game wouldn't arrive for 15 years. **Was it worth the wait?** Yes—while *Contra 4* isn't perfect, it's much truer to its roots than the gimmicky shooters that followed *Contra III*. Developer WayForward's obvious love for the original *Contra* (and skill with 2D games) gave the fourth game a timeless feel.

2 Doom 3

Xbox • 2005

Last numbered sequel: *Doom II* • PC • 1994
Interim titles: *The Ultimate Doom*, *Final Doom*

Doom practically invented the first-person shooter; back in the day, we called the genre "Doom clones." But after *Doom II*, developer id moved along

to the 3D fragmania of *Quake*, leaving *Doom* to ports and expansion packs. **Was it worth the wait?** Not really—*Doom 3* felt much slower than its brisk predecessors. Its plodding action relied entirely too much on "gotcha" moments and too little on gleeful mayhem.

3 Mother 3 (import)

GBA • 2006

Last numbered sequel: *Mother 2 (EarthBound)* • SNES • 1995
Interim titles: An aborted N64 version
Kooky Super NES RPG *EarthBound* is known as *Mother 2* in Japan. Its sequel was originally slated for Nintendo's doomed 64DD add-on, but vanished for a decade when the peripheral flopped. **Was it worth the wait?** Definitely, although Americans are still waiting. *Mother 3* lacked something of its predecessor's skewed charm, but it more than made up for it with plenty of emotional moments and a brilliant rhythm-based battle system.

4 Pac-Man 2: The New Adventures

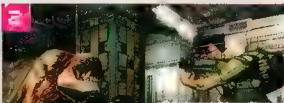
SNES/Genesis • 1994

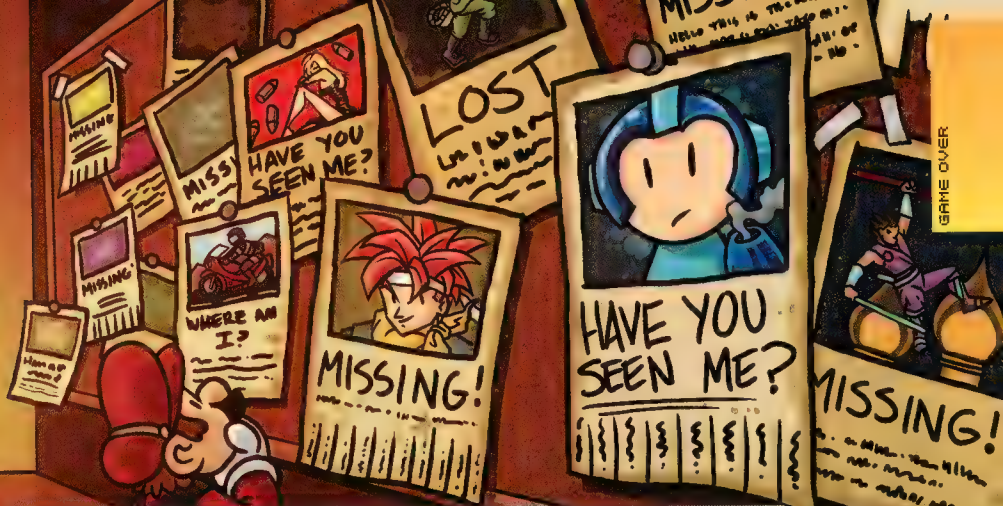
Last numbered sequel: *Pac-Man* • Arcade • 1980
Interim titles: Too numerous to list
The original *Pac-Man*'s cultural phenomenon spawned one good sequel (*Ms. Pac-Man*) and a decade of gimmicky, insubstantial spin-offs. **Was it worth the wait?** Not...really. *Pac-Man 2* was interesting and clever. But it was also a point-and-click adventure that had nothing whatsoever to do with manic, maze-gobbling action.

5 Dawn of Mana (Seiken Densetsu 4)

PS2 • 2007

Last numbered sequel: *Seiken Densetsu 3* • SFC • 1995
Interim titles: *Legend of Mana*, *Children of Mana*, *Sword of Mana*
After a decade of spin-offs following *Seiken Densetsu 3*, *Dawn of Mana*'s Japanese title designated it as the series' true update. **Was it worth the wait?** Not even close. *Dawn of Mana* failed to capture the *Mana* spirit, replacing "action" with "dickering about with physics" and eliminating anything that felt like actual progress.





MISSING IN ACTION

Sometimes, publishers miss the point entirely and let a brilliant series lay forgotten by all but its most ardent fans. We'd be thrilled to see sequels to these classics...if only someone would create them.

1 Chrono Trigger
Last seen: *Chrono Cross* • PS1
• 2000

Chrono Trigger remains one of the most beloved role-playing games ever created thanks to its innovative storytelling and streamlined gameplay. Its follow-up, *Chrono Cross*, was more like a side story than a sequel, focusing on new characters and a minor plot point from *Trigger*. And since then—nothing. Well, almost nothing: Rumors circulated of a Square-held trademark for a “Chrono Break,” which ignited speculation (it’s a break in time! Or maybe a brake, like on a car?) until the trademark lapsed. These days, all the company does with the series is quash fan efforts to remake the original—and if they’re going to all that trouble, why not put some effort into a sequel, too?

2 Mega Man
Last seen: *Mega Man & Bass*
• GBA • 2003

Yeah, yeah, Capcom’s still churning out a couple of games with *Mega Man* in the title each year, but we’re talking about the original series—the one with the cute

robots called Whatever-Man. The glimmer of hope offered by 2006’s *Powered Up* for PSP died when the game failed to sell to anyone at all. But we’d still kick for a *Mega Man 9*, with charming, weapon-stealing, side-scrolling action... and maybe an explanation of what happened to the original gang before the *X* series began.

3 Parasite Eve
Last seen: *Parasite Eve II* • PS1
• 2000

Parasite Eve isn’t entirely dead; a cellphone game called *The Third Birthday* is slated for an eventual Japanese release. But c’mon—no cellphone’s gonna do this series justice. *Parasite Eve* was billed as “the cinematic RPG,” and now that hardware is finally beefy enough to create fairly convincing cinemas, this mitochondria-fueled franchise is begging for a current-gen console sequel.

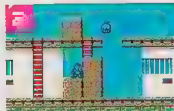
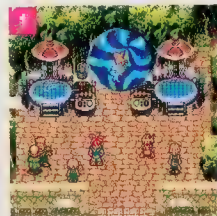
4 Road Rash
Last seen: *Road Rash: Jailbreak*
• GBA • 2003

Road Rash was sort of the great-granddaddy to modern gaming’s

subgenre of aggressive (and often crime-oriented) racing games. Would we have *Burnout* today if not for EA’s inventive chain-to-the-face motorcycle series? Quite possibly not! Unfortunately, it’s fallen off the face of the Earth in recent years; aside from a so-so GBA adaptation and a canceled last-gen update, we live in a sadly *Road Rash*-free world. We’ve heard rumblings that the franchise could be making a return in the near future, though. We just hope it can still hold its own against its slew of imitators.

5 Strider

Last seen: *Strider 2* • PS1 • 2000
Gaming’s most stylish hero, Strider Hiryu, starred in one hell of an arcade game almost 20 years ago and enjoyed a long-overdue sequel in 2000 on the strength of his popularity in *Marvel vs. Capcom*. Unfortunately, *Strider 2* tanked, and the futuristic ninja never left Eurasia alive. With Capcom eagerly revisiting their classic properties for smart modern-day updates and remakes, we can’t think of a better time for Hiryu to make his triumphant return.



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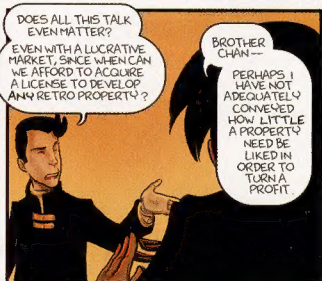
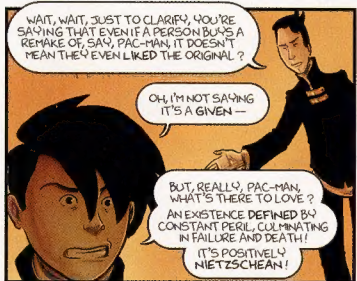
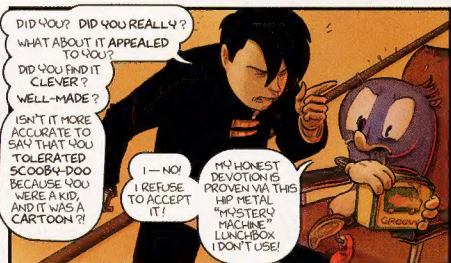
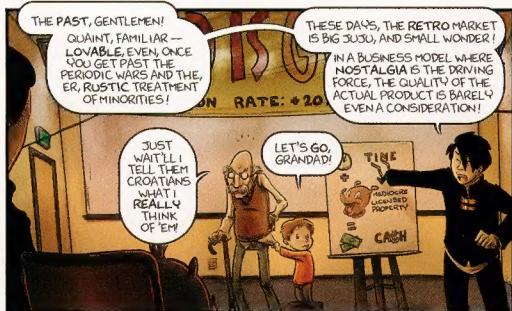
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Old is Gold

By Jeremy "Norm" Scott



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got milk?

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