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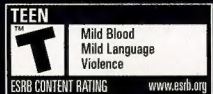
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> EDITORIAL

Goodbye



YOUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, James Mielke, was kind enough to offer me this spot to say goodbye to y'all. This is my last official issue of *EGM*. In

case you haven't heard, I've resigned (it's nothing sinister, so no conspiracy theories, please). I don't currently have anything lined up for my post-1UP Network career—I'm just taking some time off to chill and recharge, and really, it's time for me to move on (check egmshoe.1UP.com if you care to read more about that).

I want to thank the *EGM* staff for being so awesome. These are some seriously talented and passionate boys and girls that I'll really miss working with. We've done some tremendous stuff together over the years—it's been rewarding watching the mag evolve from its pre-Internet days to something more sophisticated, mature, and relevant for today's reader. I feel we've worked on something truly great, and I'm excited to see where *EGM* goes from here—I know our baby's in excellent hands.

And I want to thank you, our readers, too. You've been supportive with subscriptions and newsstand sales, your letters and message-board posts (OK, not all of them, but good enough), and your goodbyes. It's been a pleasure writing and working for you, and you've made all the years well worth it.

So I leave you all with this sappy editorial and the *Gears of War 2* cover story, though I might show up again to do a review or two. Otherwise, look for me around the industry—I'll be popping up in some shape or form soon enough!

—Dan "Shoe" Hsu,
Former Editorial Director,
1UP Network
Former Editor-in-Chief, *EGM*



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Gears of War 2

Check online for additional hands-on impressions and video footage.

SuperGuides

For the best *Metal Gear Solid 4* cheats, tricks, and strategies on the whole darned Internet, check our SuperGuide on MyCheats.com



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

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LETTERS

➤ running bulls, imaginary monkeys, and more format warfare

➤ TRIVIAL ISSUE

This month's EGM question:

Cliff Bleszinski, lead designer on the *Gears of War* franchise, made a game for a high school class. What was it called and what platform was it for?

E-mail the answer to EGM@1UP.com (subject head: Trivia: EGM #230) for a chance to win something potentially awesome.



Letter of the Month Grow up already

As I grew up, videogames grew with me. I started playing games like *Donkey Kong* and *Carnival* on the ColecoVision before I could read, and Nintendo's *Mario* titles were a staple of my early childhood. As I got older, I saw the storylines and gameplay mechanics become more intricate and engaging. When I went through my rebellious and bitchy teenage years, so did videogames. And as I grew and matured, so did the subject matter of the games themselves.

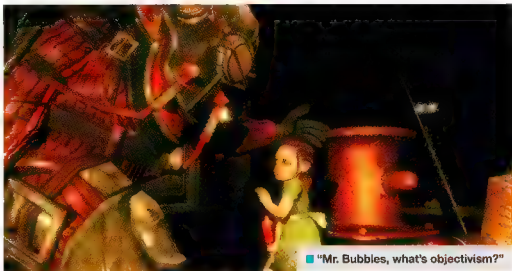
Now that I'm 22, more things are vying for my time and attention such as work, college, women, drinking, and lamenting over my long-gone and simpler childhood. Needless to say, if I'm going to devote 20-plus hours of my life to completing a game, it had better be well worth it. And to me personally, a game well worth it is one I can take something away from on an intellectual level. For example, a game that makes me question my own existence, or the war in Iraq, or the increasing disconnectedness of our modern high-tech lives would be the holy grail of gaming to me. What are the chances that gaming will finally grow once more and develop a social and political conscience?

—Eric Staskiewicz

The chances are pretty damn good. Games are more and more frequently making "statements" about society and politics—see *BioShock*, *GTA4*, even *Army of Two* for just a few examples. We'll always have mindless diversions as well, of course, but count on seeing more and more depth of theme and storytelling in the coming years.

Behind the music

Lately, I've been noticing talk surrounding *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* that degrades the idea of actually practicing instruments. I am a musician who has been playing bass for 12 years and has picked up piano along the way. All these arguments about how learning to play an instrument takes way too much time and money are irrelevant. Videogames are ridiculously expensive. I've spent thousands on them, just as I've spent thousands



■ "Mr. Bubbles, what's objectivism?"

on instruments. Also, videogames can be ridiculously hard, even harder than understanding what "G#9b5" means and what to do with it.

I guarantee you that if an average gamer spent half the time normally spent playing videogames with an instrument in their hands instead, they would be surprised at how much they could learn.

When you're playing your plastic instruments and a real musician makes a remark about how you should try playing a real instrument, think about all the time you spend playing videogames, and relate it to the fact that to be even just an average guitar player all you need to do is play one for an hour a day.

—"The Bassguy"

Well, setting aside the fact that bass

isn't a real instrument either (come on, just four strings?), we have to agree—which is why we always make fun of *COD4* players for not joining the Army and rip on *Madden* fans for not going out for the NFL.

Running away

After reading about *Sonic R* in your story about the best and worst *Mario Kart* clones ("Kart Clones," EGM #228), a game popped into my head that I can't quite place. It was a PS1 game similar to *Sonic R*, where you ran on foot through the course. I remember one of the characters was a bull, but I can't quite remember much more about it. I was wondering if any of you folks would recognize what game I'm talking about. If I remember right, the game failed horribly, and it might need to be recognized as one of



For writing this month's LOMT, Eric gets a copy of *Barbie Horse Adventures*...or something else from our dusty collection.

HOW HARDCORE ARE YOU?

Your proudest gaming moments

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

My whole family has been crazy about Mario for 20 years. Ever since I was little I have had Mario toys, games, clothes—Mario everything. Now my son is crazy about Mario, too. For his fourth birthday, we threw him a Mario-themed party. It took my wife and me weeks to make him the Mario piñata, Mario trouser fabric candy bags, Mario cake, Mario invitations, and Mario party music. Everybody had the time of their lives!

—Manuel Lerma

We'd be afraid this piñata would hit back.

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

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NINTENDO DS



XBOX 360 LIVE

PLAYSTATION 3



What, you mean rhythmic scenery doesn't add to a fighting game?

the worst as well!

—Phil Carsner

Oh gawd, you're talking about *Running Wild*. You're absolutely right that this travesty deserved to be on the "worst" list. Thanks for spoiling our day by making us dredge up memories that had been carefully forgotten.

Kind of Blu

It's obvious that the Xbox 360 is losing its fan base. Everywhere you look you see someone trying to sell their 360. The big issue people have isn't so much the "Red Ring of Death" anymore, but rather the fact that they want Blu-ray. HD-DVD is dead, and Microsoft is making a move only to benefit themselves and not the customers. Every once in a while you need to admit that you were wrong and do the right thing for the customer. The question is, why won't Microsoft stop being so proud of themselves and give us Blu?

—Chris Barnes

Wow. The 360 is losing its fan base? Because of Blu-ray? Really? This is the first we've heard of it.

Anyway, although rumors have circulated since the official death of HD-DVD, Microsoft has been careful to avoid saying they'd never go Blu. Instead, they've been pointing out that they're focusing on digital downloads and (gasp!) games.

More Def

In the May issue [EGM #228], you mentioned during your *50 Cent II* article that even *Def Jam* experienced diminishing returns as the series went on. I'd like to point out that that only happened after a number of its fundamental parts were changed drastically. The controls and fighting system of the original games were tight, varied,

easy to figure out, and, most importantly, fun. They kept me coming back for more, even after I'd seen the story too many times to count. The system in *Icon* had none of those qualities, and kept me from being able to stomach the game long enough to even see the plot.

If the game had tried refining the core concepts and building on what was already there, it would have likely done just as well as its predecessors—or even better. Making it play like a slower version of EA's boxing game, with a music-based damage system slapped onto it, isn't enough to impress.

—Jonathan Howard

Hmm, you make a valid point. But like it or not, *Icon* is still part of the *Def Jam* series, and so the point made in the article still holds. Hey, at least you can take some comfort in the fact that the game sold like complete crap and was considered a disappointment by pretty much everybody. Guess substance does triumph over style sometimes, huh?

Aren't they precious?

My friends and I are 12-year-old gamers, and I totally despise how we're portrayed in Xbox Live and the gaming community. People seem to believe that we are all screaming boneheads with no true skill whatsoever, and I think that people are being really unfair. I've read many articles that have said stuff like "I play *Call of Duty 4* instead of *Halo 3* because there are less little kids." So what? How do we degrade the enjoyment of that guy's game? If it's our voices, mute us. If it's our skill, boot us from the game. Just don't make fun of us or say we wreck Xbox Live. Would you ever just start bombing some kid with swears and insults in real life?

—Mark Kukuika

Oh Mark, one day you'll be all grown up, and then you'll understand.

Keep it in the green

In the Letters section of the May issue [EGM #228], one person pointed out that making a "clean" version of a game would be as [smart] as making a clean version of a movie intended for adults. I agree completely. Of course, TV networks have been showing "clean" versions of R-rated movies for decades now. Remove the nudity, foul language, and the worst of the violence—and if the movie is good, the edited version will be good as well.

Of course adults should be allowed to play mature games if they want.

But if a game is not interesting enough to play without being full of nudity and foul language, it's most likely a badly made game that's relying on shock value rather than good gameplay in order to sell.

—"Gutsnikka"

That's crazy talk.

Weighing Wii

What constitutes success in terms of sales on the Wii? I was reading the article "What Plays Beneath" [EGM #227] and it got me interested in just how bad sales are for third-party publishers. So I did a little research, and it turns out that games aren't doing that badly, depending on how you measure success. Is it only a success if it sells a million copies? If it doesn't produce a sequel, is it a failure? I found some numbers on games you mentioned in the article. *Fire Emblem: Radiant Dawn* has managed to sell nearly a half million copies in Japan and the U.S., right on target with *Path to Radiance*. *No More Heroes* has sold close to 250,000, having been just released in Europe. *Zack & Wiki* has hit the 300,000 mark, and even *Endless Ocean* has squeezed out nearly half a million copies worldwide. So are they failures?

—Chris Andriessen

On a system with 25 million hardware units sold to date? Kinda, yeah. Part of the problem is that games these days cost so much to produce that for a title to be financially successful it has to sell an awful lot of copies. Those are respectable numbers, sure, but they don't approach the sales of even a moderately successful game from the previous generation.

Lay off the hallucinogens

What's the deal with the monkey holding a yellow flower that keeps popping up in the "Take This Job" pictures?

—David Stoner

We have no idea what you're talking about. ☹

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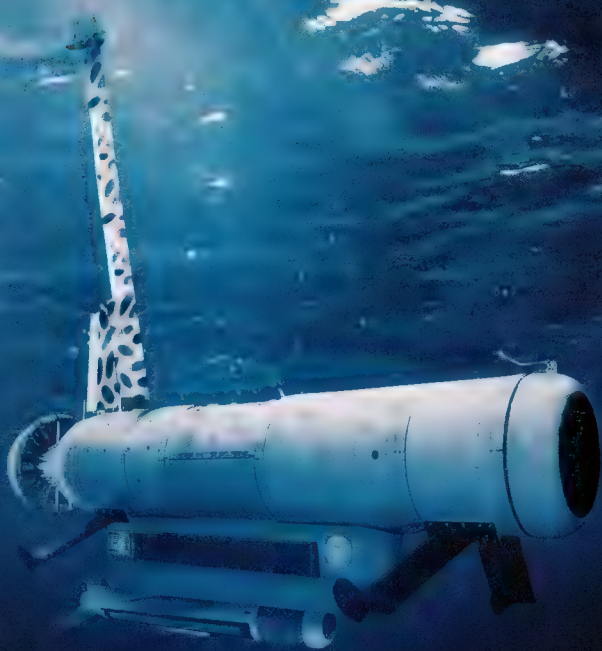
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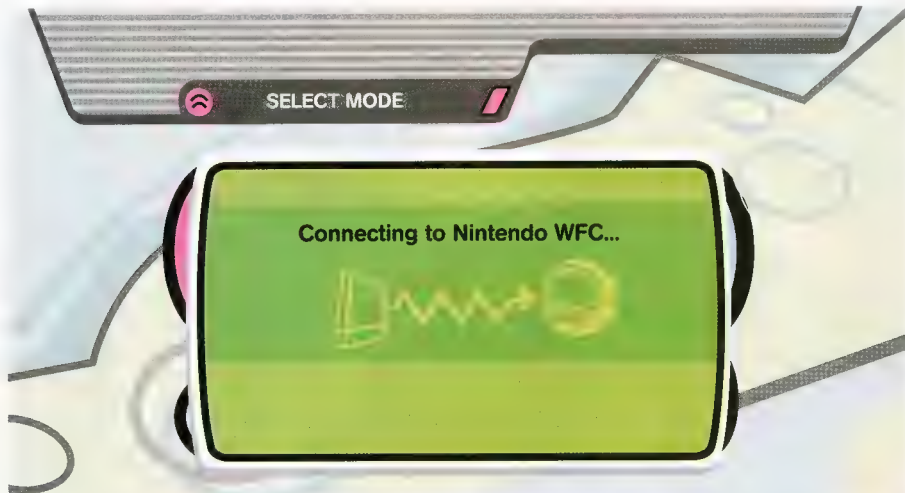
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Seeking.

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Seeking...

EGM INVESTIGATES

Feeling Disconnected

Online play on Wii blows, but does Nintendo even need to care? By Robert Ashley

THE GREAT TECHNOLOGY GODS SAID UNTO THEE:

Thou shalt be connected. And so it came to be that nearly all of our well-loved gadgets now plug into the Internet. Cable boxes seek out updated program schedules and deliver custom-picked TV content. BlackBerry and iPhone addicts page through their e-mail compulsively, sometimes inappropriately (this reporter once witnessed a game-industry executive checking his BlackBerry for e-mail while relieving himself at a urinal). New cars are creating on-the-go Wi-

Fi networks by tapping into cellular towers. For a couple grand, you can even buy a refrigerator with an Internet connection (in case you want to send an IM to your leftovers, we assume).

So it makes sense that we've also come to expect a certain level of connectivity from our gaming boxes. And for the most part, they've delivered. Where once online games were the exclusive province of pricey PC gaming rigs, we've now grown accustomed to playing with and against our online friends on all of the currently available consoles, even

Wi-Fi-enabled portables. But while Microsoft's Xbox Live service has led the way and Sony's PlayStation Network is quickly gaining features, the hugely popular, perpetually out-of-stock Nintendo Wii lags far behind.

Nintendo's approach to online gaming can be summed up by its most hated feature: the Friend Code. A 12-digit number specific to every online-enabled first-party game, the Friend Code must be exchanged with every person with whom you'd like to play online. And each code only works for one game. Coming from a





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Preview:
Plucking the
old Banjo



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Miyamoto
fits right in



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Feature:
Summer of
adventure

company renowned for user-friendly interfaces that attract customers of all stripes, the system seems like a glitch, a process so impenetrable that it could have been dreamed up by the Internal Revenue Service.

But Nintendo fans have continued to hope. *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* dangled the prospect of online play for one of the most beloved multiplayer games of all time. Even with the Friend Code barrier, players salivated over the prospect. When *Brawl* debuted in March, however, it was an unplayable mess of botched connections and severe lag, sometimes pausing the action for seconds at a time. Weeks after release (at the time of this writing), the game still suffers from severe network issues.

Online war: What is it good for?

By no stretch of the imagination could one argue that online gaming is a priority for Nintendo. But who is to say that they're making a mistake? Coming from behind this generation

to deliver a gaming box that everyone and their

Seeking.

grandmother seems to want, Nintendo arguably knows its audience better than any outsider could. Maybe online gaming simply isn't a mainstream activity but rather a geek-driven pastime unfit for a segment on *Good Morning America*. "I own a Wii, and I love Nintendo products, but I don't think that's true," says Dylan Jobe, director of the PS3 online-only shooter *Warhawk*. "If there was ever a clear-cut counterpart, look at *Call of Duty 4*. That's a remarkable title, and its legs are definitely multiplayer. It took the old adage that you're this nerd gamer sitting on your couch playing a shooter doesn't really apply anymore." Jobe is a firm believer in the power of online gaming, a form of entertainment



■ *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* offers fun online features—if you don't mind the lag.



■ *Mario Kart Wii*—with its hiccup-free online play and friendly player-invite scheme—takes the system's network in the right direction.

that breaks the isolation of the solo games of yore. "A key reason why multiplayer games are really exciting to me is that, when they're done successfully, they leverage on a lot of deep-seated human requirements," says Jobe. "You feel like you're being social. So instead of you sitting on your couch alone, you have friends, and you're interacting with them."

Seeking..

For that interaction to feel satisfying, however,

some developers feel that games should facilitate real communication, something Nintendo's online service seems to actively discourage. Not only do Wii games not offer voice chat, most of the console's online offerings feature no communication—not even simple text chat—between players whatsoever. "I think [chat] is absolutely critical," says Jobe. "How different would *Monopoly* or *Yahtzee* be if you couldn't talk to the guy directly across the table? If you can't communicate, you undercut the vast majority of the benefits of social gaming."

With the ubiquity of home and office computers, services like Facebook and MySpace create venues for long-distance relationships and offer windows into the lives of others. Nintendo's lack of a system to connect players to their friends, in contrast, seems strangely inhibiting. You can't even keep a regular contacts list. "The core concept of a friends list transcends hardware," says Jobe. "It's on my phone. It's my e-mail list. It's my buddy list on my [PS3] crossbar. It's on my 360. The excitement and enthusiasm of social gaming is directly

proportional to the ease of accessing your friends."

Online and the bottom line

If online gaming were truly important, one would think that Nintendo's reluctance to create a serious online service would hurt the company financially. Lazard Capital Markets Analyst Colin Sebastian thinks, from a

Seeking...

business point of view, poor online features have no

effect on Nintendo's sales. "If you look at distribution, we're still a ways away from the primary channel being digital online—the packaged-goods business still reigns," says Sebastian. "You couple that fact with the success of the Wii, and it's pretty hard to make an argument that Nintendo is somehow missing the boat, at least in this cycle. I don't think it's impacting their business that they haven't moved more aggressively online." Further down the line, however, Sebastian believes that Nintendo will be swayed by consumers and developers to get serious about online services. "They're going to feel pressure from their third-parties over time that consumers want online capabilities," says Sebastian. "One way or another, Nintendo is going to be pushed in that direction."

In fact, third-parties, particularly EA, already seem to be pushing the Wii into the online space more aggressively than Nintendo itself. Adopting their own EA Nation service, which allows gamers to keep a friends list that is universal for all EA games and to message those friends (at least from their home computers), the

Coping with Solitude

Tools and tips for making the most of the Wii's lousy online network...

Talk openly

Fed up with the Wii's code of silence, several folks in the EGM offices have resorted to using Skype or even the Xbox 360 and PS3 voice-chat systems to trash talk *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* opponents. Beats tapping a cellphone to your head.



Manage the madness

An entire cottage industry of Friend Code-database websites—such as www.projectcd.com and www.benmii.com—have popped up around the Wii's unwieldy buddy-management system.

Seek

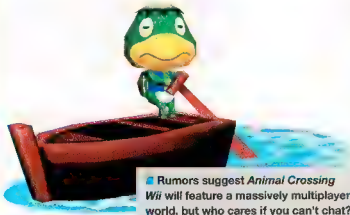
Play it late



Trying to find opponents during peak evening hours in a new online Wii game like *Mario Kart Wii* is a recipe for frustration, with frequent lost connections. Make online play a nocturnal mission and fire up your Wii in the wee hours. You can sleep when you're dead.



Rendered by Chuck Ebert



Rumors suggest *Animal Crossing* Wii will feature a massively multiplayer world, but who cares if you can't chat?



EA's Wii online interface—seen in *FIFA 08*—does what Nintendo's doesn't.



company has somewhat circumvented the limits of Nintendo's meager online offerings. It's not much, but customers don't seem to be demanding more. According to Brad Porteous, the EA designer who crafted the EA Nation interface, Wii gamers simply haven't shown interest. "We're just trying to determine what the online consumer for the Wii wants," says Porteous. "I think, as far as the numbers go, we're pretty close to the PS2, but we're not really up there with the Xbox 360 and the PS3. It seems to be a hardcore

Seeking...

new thing for Nintendo to have

Seeking.

online, and I think we're getting there, slowly." EA's designers are taking cues from Nintendo, hoping that they can bring online gaming to more people by making the user experience more streamlined. "I can't really talk about what we're doing with the online titles this year," says Porteous. "But I think it'll be about ease of use, making it easier to get into online. I think if we focus on those areas, it will resonate with the audience." It's telling that we're getting comments about the

future of the Wii's online service from third-parties, not Nintendo (although Nintendo does have something to say—see Q&A sidebar above).

Seeking..

Online future: not so bright

If the higher-ups at Nintendo woke up tomorrow from nightmares of Xbox and PlayStation online domination, could they change the Wii? They could improve their network's performance, add some new features, and spruce up the interface, but don't expect an Xbox Live-like service in the Wii's lifetime. According to Aaron Greenberg, director of product management for Xbox 360 and Live, creating Live was a long and arduous

process. "We've been working on Xbox Live for more than five years now, and we still have a huge team working to continually enhance and

Disconnected

maintain the service," he says. "We have, hands down, the best and most complete online offering in the industry, and it takes a ton of people and a lot of money to make that happen. I can't get into details about how much money...and the size of the Live team varies by what we are working on. But it wasn't easy."

That leaves the hope that the service can evolve, slowly gaining some of the functionality of the other networks. Perhaps EA will push more direct communication between players. "It all depends," says Porteous. "We talk to Nintendo, and we see what their approach is, so it's going to have to be a combined effort, where Nintendo and EA come up with the best approach." Sounds like we won't see much change any time soon. ☘

➤ **It's pretty hard to make an argument that Nintendo is somehow missing the boat, at least in this cycle.**

—Lazard Capital Markets Analyst Colin Sebastian on Nintendo's lackadaisical online plan

THE PR LINE

Q&A with Eric Walter, public relations manager for Nintendo of America

EGM: Can Nintendo players expect better network performance, (less lag and quicker matchups) in *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* further down the line, or is the current quality of online play final?

Eric Walter: We wish the current of our online-enabled games experience weren't "play at your own risk" with respect to our online play. We have been working on enhancing the quality of our online play.

EGM: Will *Mario Kart Wii*'s online play face similar issues?

EW: We're disappointed in *Super Mario Kart*'s performance, but we're committed to providing a better online experience in the next *Phantom* game. I would love to have something like *Super Mario Kart* on the Wii.

EGM: Nintendo's first-party titles are known for their workmanship, but the online components of Nintendo games thus far seem not to have been subjected to the same rigorous approach. Is that a reflection of Nintendo's ambivalence toward online gaming, or is it the learning curve of bringing Nintendo into the online sphere?

EW: We're committed to providing a better online experience in the next *Phantom* game. I would love to have something like *Super Mario Kart* on the Wii.

EGM: Many Nintendo gamers are disappointed with the limited communication options in Nintendo online games—the use of Friend Codes, lack of universal friends lists, lack of voice or text chat, and so on. Are these barriers in place meant to protect younger players and put parents' minds at ease?

A full-body image of Batman in his tactical suit, standing against a dark, blue-tinted background. The suit is highly detailed, showing the chest armor, gauntlets, and the iconic bat emblem on the belt. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of the suit.

got milk?

THE DARK KNIGHT
IN THEATERS JULY 18

Others reload. Batman refuels.

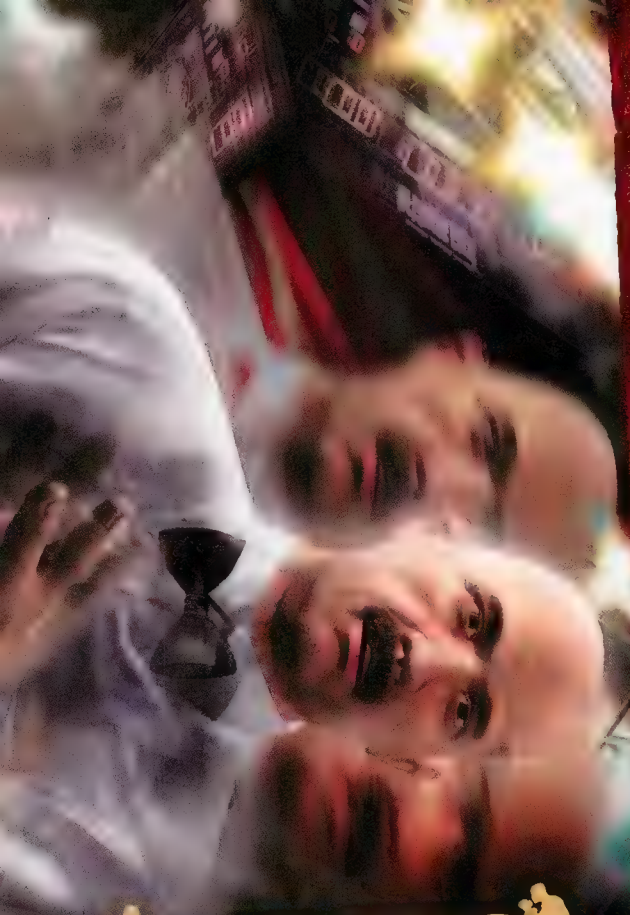
Research suggests that milk's unique mix of nutrients can help athletes recover after exercise. And its protein can help build muscle.

So train hard and drink lowfat or fat free milk, because the Batmobile™ isn't the only thing that needs to refuel.

body  milk

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Through adversity and triumph.
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▶ PREVIEW: HANDS-ON AND EXCLUSIVE SCREENS

Banjo-Kazooie: NUTS & BOLTS

We take a Rare opportunity to check out a bold new bear. By Nick Suttner



Platform: BANJO-KAZOOIE: NUTS & BOLTS—specifically, the "Nuts & Bolts" part—

Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
came as a surprise. But, really, you know what to expect from a mascot-driven adventure at the moment?

Developer: Ratchet & Clank has the action angle covered, you can't very well compete

Release Date: Rare
November 2008

directly with *Super Mario Galaxy*, and Rare's last foray into the genre—Xbox 360 launch title *Kameo: Elements of Power*—received a mixed reception. So what's left? With *LittleBigPlanet* (PS3) on the horizon and user-generated content being pushed harder than ever to casual consumers, it's not really a surprise that *Nuts & Bolts* is taking a...creative approach.

The game is a vehicle-based action-adventure platformer, if you can wrap your head around that. What I played recently is very much *Banjo-Kazooie* in its adventure elements and gorgeously vibrant world, but it has a heavy focus on vehicle construction and vehicular objectives. Banjo can still run around the mammoth levels on foot, but

it's tough to accomplish much that way (especially at any reasonable speed). The real pleasure comes from finding a task to do or spotting an out-of-reach puzzle piece you'd like to acquire and then hopping into your workshop to build the appropriate vehicle to reach it.

"It came from a very simple idea of wanting to combine [construction parts] with different abilities," says Rare Creative Director Gregg Mayles. "The beauty of the concept was the player could combine those pieces in any order they wanted...and at the end of it, whatever they created...it

would just work."

"The platform game genre—it's quite traditional in its approach," continues Mayles. "So we thought, 'If we're going to reenter that genre, we need to do something that's going to make people look twice,' rather than just dismissing it as, 'It's Rare, there are going to be millions of things to collect, and everything will have googly eyes.'"

And they're doing something quite different. Mumbo Jumbo, the shaman who helped Banjo and Kazooie transform into different things in the first two games, now runs a

▶ **If we're going to reenter [the platforming genre], we need to do something that's going to make people look twice at it.**

—Rare Creative Director Gregg Mayles



> CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

The vehicle-building interface involves manipulating pieces and finding connection points for them in a 3D space. It can be a bit disorienting depending on the angle you're working from, but it's worth the work—seeing your vehicles soar is an instant creative high. Who says games aren't art?



workshop where you design vehicles. The workshop allows you to build from templates or create something from scratch. The actual construction interface is surprisingly similar to the one found in Sega's 2006 mech brawler *Chromebrigs* (XB360), though during a visit to Rare no one I talked to admitted to hearing of it. You start with a cockpit, attach various building pieces and extensions to it, and add as many tires as you feel are necessary. You can add wings, springs, and even bits that break away at the touch of a button. And you can always swap pieces out later with better ones if you can find them, as you'll acquire more by discovering them throughout the world.

Once you slap on a coat of paint and give your vehicle a silly name, you're ready to roll. That is, if it rolls. Several of my creations simply toppled over as soon as they appeared in the game world, as they were either too heavy or simply impractical. *Nuts &*

Bolts uses the Havok physics engine, so just about everything's dictated by weight, momentum, and force. It can be frustrating to find out that your dreamboat doesn't float, but mucking around in the editor is an integral part of the experience (though you can also play the whole game using premade vehicles).

Mayles is very much into the idea of putting that creative power into players' hands: "We looked at how traditional games have approached that—the designers create the abilities, we give them to the player, and the player can only use the abilities as we've defined [them]. So we thought, 'Can we approach that from a different direction, where the players actually get to define their own abilities so they can choose how they want to complete whatever task they've been set?' And then, suddenly, we had this concept sitting here, this idea of approaching platform games from a different direction, and then we



IN RARE VISIT

We journeyed all the way to Twycross in rural England to visit Rare (we needed a plane, two trains, and a drive through the sheep-dotted English countryside to get there), and the pastoral home base explains a lot about their infectiously creative catalog of games. There's plenty to see even before you get to the workspaces—a pond humming with bird life, a cadre of bonsai trees donated by Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto, and a high-complete Rare museum of games, gadgets, and memorabilia in the lobby.



brought the two together."

While at Rare, I was able to check out a pair of examples to see how this mixes into the game missions. One involved vacuuming up a patch of coconuts, while another focused on getting as much air as possible off of a giant ramp in a stadium level known as World of Sports. Both did a great job of showing off the way the vehicle construction integrates into the actual, ahem, "nuts and bolts" of the game mechanics, as there were several ways to approach each of them with very different vehicles. It remains to be seen if this unique design approach can stay fresh for an entire game, though. The building mechanic is engaging and generally works well, but it's tough to envision how it fits into any sensible narrative structure.

Some fans will surely yearn for a classic *Banjo-Kazooie* approach, and they'll at least get a taste of it in the hub world, Showdown Town. You'll get to explore it in between the primary stages in traditional Banjo fashion, hopping and bopping through enemies and climbing around town. Kazooie's role has been scaled back to work only with physics-based actions, as she wields a beam-emitting wand that you can use to move objects, flip your vehicle if it falls over, or tweak your creation's construction in the wild without going into the garage to edit.

And whether the whole formula ultimately works or not, the game at least looks astounding. Absolutely popping with bright colors, interesting textures, and fanciful character and art design, it already stands as a jaw-

dropping showpiece for HDTVs. Even Banjo's fuzzy fur impresses, and the environments never take the easy way out: Nutty Acres features a giant LCD screen as a sky-blue backdrop, with sheet-metal clouds hanging in front and what looks like a stitched grass quilt stretching over the landscape.

Nuts & Bolts takes a bit of explanation, apparently, as I haven't even gotten to the story or the multiplayer elements. Online multiplayer features competitive eight-player modes, and—as you can imagine—you can again use preset vehicles or design your own. While modes like a King of the Hill variant are currently a bit too chaotic to provide more than mindless fun, we're hoping to see team-based objective games, as there is *huge* potential there. Rare doesn't currently have much to say about the story; suffice it to say, the evil witch Gruntilda (Gruntly, affectionately) is back, only now she's a head in a jar propped up on a constructed body.

Between the optional objectives, the multiplayer, and a grading system to encourage replaying challenges, the game should have plenty of content, but I'm most intrigued to find out whether *Nuts & Bolts* comes together in a cohesive, creatively invigorating manner. It's certainly new and exciting...but when playing, I had a tough time determining whether I was actually having fun or was simply so fascinated by the novelty and entertained by the vehicle-building that it was compelling enough on those merits alone. Or maybe that's the point? ☹



■ Some vehicles look ridiculous, but they get the job done.



VIVA PINATA: TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Heading back to the garden



While a new *Banjo* title is a big deal, that wasn't the only thing we played at Rare. We weren't sure we'd ever see a true sequel to 2006's bizarrely sublime garden simulator *Viva Pinata*, but *Trouble in Paradise* is at least halfway there. It keeps everything from the original intact, while adding an enormous list of features and functionality: new areas to catch Pinatas (Desert Desert, the Pinarctic), which you can then send to your garden; local cooperative play (online TBD); a photo mode to snap pictures, which can be uploaded to a community website; toys for Pinatas to play with; and tricks to teach them. You can also look for several user-interface tweaks, so you'll be able to cycle through all of your Pinatas and items more easily.

Trouble in Paradise even has a simplified "Just for Fun" mode for younger players to hop into with easier goals and progression. And, on the slight-wonder completely optional side, you'll be able to scan special "Pinata Vision" cards using the 360's Vision camera, which will affect your garden in various ways (think bonus items). While the fundamentals might not be different enough to bring back part-time *Viva* fans, *Trouble in Paradise* is definitely the most complete version of the game and an ideal fit for those who never gave the original a chance.



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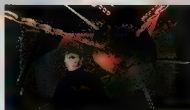


Killing Time in LIBERTY CITY

Five things we bet you didn't do in your first Grand Theft Auto IV playthrough... By Crispin Boyer

> HEART ATTACK

Swipe a hell and soar to the Statue of Happiness, and then ball out above the walkway right below Lady Happiness' feet. The "no hidden content this way" signs here are totally lying. Head inside and climb the four-story ladder to see Liberty City's giant, pumping, bleeding heart. If you're like us, your first instinct is to attack it with everything in your arsenal. Too bad this town's got one tough ticker.



> THE EASY WAY

What's a little cheating in a town where vehicular manslaughter merits a slap on the wrist and hamburgers grant full health? Head to any in-game computer, log on, and enter www.whattheydonotwantyouknow.com into the browser. Up pop maps showing the location of every "flying rat" pigeon, health pack, hidden weapon, and stunt jump in Liberty City. And while you're in the cheating mood, call 369-555-0100 on your cellphone to spawn a police chopper, 267-555-0100 to lower your wanted level, and 468-555-0100 to change the weather. Editor's note: EGM does not condone using the phone while drive-by shooting.



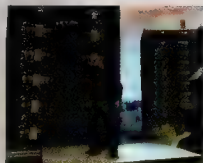
> DAY AT THE PARK

Liberty City can be such a tease sometimes. It has a theme park with rides we can't ride, a minigolf course with no balls or putters, and an airfield full of jumbo jets we can't jack. But on the docks just to the west of Westminster, you'll find a skate park complete with graffiti-covered halfpipes. And while the game doesn't contain any skateboards (again, what a tease!), the park is still pretty fun on a dirt bike.



> GO RETRO

You can dress like it's 2001 all over again if you kill a certain someone about halfway through the single-player game. When Playboy X asks you to take out Dwayne, turn the tables and kill X instead. You'll inherit his safe house. Check his closet for a set of vintage GTA3 duds.



> ROCKETEERING

Once a dangerous tactic reserved for enterprising first-person shooter aficionados, rocket jumping has landed in Liberty City multiplayer. Blast a rocket-propelled grenade right at your tootsies during the few seconds of invulnerability after respawning and you'll launch yourself across the map. Try to land somewhere on high, though, or the fall will prove fatal.



▶ SPOILER ALERT!

Don't feel like replaying the game? We tell which big decisions affect the finale.

While most people know Grand Theft Auto IV's story reaches right through the end of the game, there are a few things that can affect the ending. And if you have beaten it but are one of those people with a job to do, we figure you don't have another spare 25 hours to replay the game and see how things play out if you had done things differently. So we're going to take your online conversations at the game to the next level and see whether you can get a better ending. We'll tell you what you need to do to get a better ending, including which cars to kill, which weapons to use, and which areas to visit. We'll also tell you which areas to visit and which areas to avoid. We'll also tell you which areas to visit and which areas to avoid. We'll also tell you which areas to visit and which areas to avoid.




EGM Extras: Haul ass to EGM.1UP.com for our GTA4 SuperGuide, where you'll find lots more secrets—and can even enter your own!



ALONE IN THE DARK

JUNE 24, 2008
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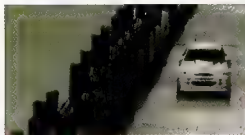
ZOMG: Gears of War 2 coverage

Waiting for this game has just become more unbearable thanks to new gameplay footage and an interview with the makers at Epic Games.



FYI: Review Crew podcast

For your listening and viewing pleasure, download the weekly show featuring editors from the 1UP Network.



TUNES: Super Mario remote-control car music video

Some guys perform the classic song using a toy car and a crap load of beer bottles. Wonder what they did with all of the bottle caps....



KEWL: Dark Void exclusive first look

Why fly a jet plane when you can take to the skies with a jetpack in Capcom's sci-fi action game. Eat your heart out, Rocketeer!



▶ ONLINE SCENE

Perfect Match

Multiplayer done right (and wrong)

By Michael Donahoe

Solo play is fun; but battling your buds online is better. But multiplayer doesn't always work. To prove our point, we chose three categories where one game did right: on-friend right and one failed to make a connection.

▶ LAST-MINUTE MULTIPLAYER ADDERS

Best case: Gears of War (XB360)

Gears of War (above) introduced us to the gory glee of dismembering unfortunate foes with a chainsaw gun. Even though we've grown attached to detaching our friends, multiplayer isn't the main focus of *GOW*. Strange, considering it's the game's most popular mode.

Worse case: Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence (PS2)

We won't argue about how brilliant the single-player experience is for *Metal Gear* games (we'll hold off on bitching about the wacky plots), but we will say that *Subsistence*'s multiplayer addition failed to hit the mark. It's an admirable effort, but we prefer the single-player sneaking.



Metal Gear Online is Konami's second attempt at creating an online shooter with a stealthy twist.



■ Box-hiding is one thing missing from, well, almost every game.

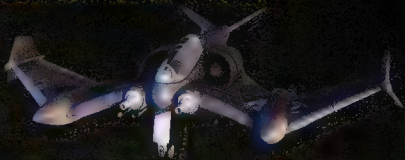
> MASSIVE ROLE-PLAYERS



Best case: Phantasy Star Online (DC)
 Online role-playing games have yet to really take off on consoles, but *Phantasy Star Online* proved that it is possible to wrangle together thousands of world-searchers successfully. And this was back on the Dreamcast. Funny how it's been seven years and we're still waiting for something to really wow us.

Worst case: EverQuest Online Adventures (PS2)
 Technically, *EverQuest Online Adventures* should have worked. The *EverQuest* series was popular on PC, so there's no reason why it couldn't also work on the PS2. Well, except for one: No one played the damn game. Yeah, that's a good reason.

> SINGLE-PLAYER DITCHERS



Best case: Warhawk (PS3)
 Usually, developers opt to dump multiplayer when the deadline crunch closes in, but *Warhawk* devs Incognito did the opposite and sliced off the single-player instead. Sure, the *Warhawk* series started off solo, but we had no complaints about the multi-only move.

Worst case: Resident Evil: Outbreak series (PS2)
 Though *Outbreak* was a cool idea, the multiplayer-focused spin-off of Capcom's popular single-player series *Resident Evil* failed to reanimate the franchise on the PS2. Two problems sealed its grave: the lack of voice chat combined with its reliance on cooperative play.



> AFTERTHOUGHTS

The World Ends with You



This quirky DS adventure may lack the cachet of Square Enix's other role-playing greats, but *World* feels far hipper than any recent *Dragon Quest* or *Final Fantasy*. We asked Tatsuya Kando, the game's director, about developing this fashion-forward quest.

EGM: Did you consider trying to remove all of the game's overt references to Tokyo in order to make it more appealing and culturally relevant to Americans?

Tatsuya Kando: We wanted North American users to realize that a city exactly like the one in the game actually exists on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, thus helping the setting feel more real and adding increased depth to the in-game world. Because of this approach, we realize that some Western players may experience a cultural gap. However, we believed that by showing those players what types of fashion or music are popular in Shibuya [a ward in Tokyo], as well as giving some insight into the minds of the Japanese youth, they would begin to show further interest in Japan and its culture. We wanted to make a game that would help players from around the world feel closer to their gaming counterparts in Japan and thus increase their interest in the country. Once players have completed the game, it would be wonderful if they could come to Japan, DS in hand, and explore the real Shibuya.

EGM: Is it actually possible to play effectively while controlling both characters? We get headaches if we don't use autobattle for the upper screen.

TK: Players should first concentrate on becoming comfortable with the lower-screen controls. Once they feel [that] they have a grasp of them, they can try their hands at the upper-screen controls. By keeping an eye on both screens and the balls of light that appear with the finishing moves, players can further improve their efficiency.

EGM: World reminds us of Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories—replace the pins with cards and you're halfway there. Is there a deeper connection? Did World evolve from Chain, and if so, how?

TK: Because the development teams were almost the same, some aspects of the two games, such as their logic systems, have similarities. However, when developing the overall gameplay of *World*, we tried to forget what we had done in the past and start fresh. We believe that we were able to construct an optimal system combining real-time action battles and stylus input.

EGM: You created a lot of cool in-game fashions (pins, clothes, etc.). So how long will it be before we see Square Enix designs on a fashion runway?

TK: If enough users expressed interest in bringing those designs into the real world, and the pins and characters from *World* could successfully make that transition from the game world to the real world, events such as fashion shows, and more, may be conceivable. It would be exciting if something like this could be realized.

▶ PREVIEW: EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK

BIO SHOCK

The wet and wild Xbox 360 shooter drops anchor on the PlayStation 3 By Crispin Boyer

Platforms:
PS3

Publisher:
2K Games

Developer:
2K Marlin

Release Date:
Holiday 2008

CANNONS AND CANINES' GUARD

the brain trust in charge of the *BioShock* universe, now sequestered in U.S. Navy hangars, converted to office lofts in a suburban Northern California location that defies

MapQuest directions. This is the site of 2K Marlin, a Novato, CA studio spun off of *BioShock* developer 2K Boston six months ago. And while new-carpet smell still lingers here, so does an air of guardedness. Sure, those Navy cannons were decommissioned long ago, and the canine is actually a 15-pound pug named Sissy—beloved pet of the studio's president—but we spy white boards, freshly-erased and bulletin boards covered in paper. "You're at the heart of *BioShock* right now," says Jordan Thomas, 2K Marlin's creative director.

The exuberant, kousie-haired Thomas designed *BioShock*'s wildly twisted Fort Frolic recreation zone. Now he's leveled up to the job of franchise front man, while, presum-

ably, 2K Boston Creative Director Ken Levine focuses on other things (think of Thomas as *BioShock*'s equivalent of Cony Barlog, the *God of War II* director who took that series' reins from David Jaffe). "Next time you come here," Thomas continues, "that white board won't be erased, and that one won't be covered with paper. Think of it as an unlockable."

For now, it's clear that all lips are locked when it comes to talk of a *BioShock* follow-up (although we do our best to eke out info—see the "Power of Two" sidebar). Instead, the topic on the table is a PlayStation 3 version of the best-selling original. Due at the end of this year, the PS3 version of *BioShock* will remain largely true to the 360 original, right down to the quality of the graphics (although some PS3-specific additions are in the works—more on that later). "We don't want to mess with success too much," says Lead Level Designer JP LeBreton. "This is mor-

like a Criterion Collection version that a director's cut. We do not in fact reveal that anyone is a replicant." (Hit up Google if you don't get the joke, and then smell down your geek badge.)

Spoiled rotten

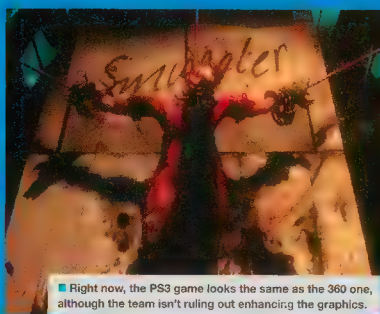
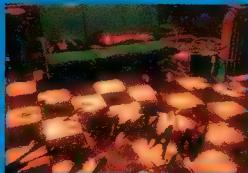
In a just world, PS3 owners would be clueless about this heady and beautiful first-person shooter. They wouldn't have read about its plot twists and red herrings in any number of 2007 Game of the Year write-ups, including ours. But unless they really did live in an under-the-sea dystopian metropolis last year, most players have probably had some elements of the game spoiled. And according to 2K Marlin, that's regrettable—but it's also not a deal-breaker. "*BioShock* is an experience that holds up from a bunch of different perspectives at once," Thomas says. "There's obviously a script payload that's delivered, but



▷ SPOILER SPORTS

We totally don't ruin *BioShock*'s story with these vague descriptions of our four favorite moments. Try to decipher them, *BioShock* vets.

- The secret behind "verb pronoun adverb."
- Remember when you got heavy, with child?
- Atlas comes clean.
- Jack's birthday surprise.



■ Right now, the PS3 game looks the same as the 360 one, although the team isn't ruling out enhancing the graphics.

It's not just about surprises—it's about emotion and tone. The world itself is a narrative of architecture. There's a lot going on in *BioShock*, no matter what you may have read on the Internet.

No matter your level of familiarity with the game, we're going to leave the plot vague and merely bring you up to speed on the fundamentals. *BioShock* begins in 1960 with your character adrift in the North Atlantic after a plane crash. A lighthouse towers above the sea. Inside, you find a bathysphere that carries you down to Rapture, a city of submerged skyscrapers connected by Habitrails of pressure-proof glass. Here, in this opulent art deco utopia of terrazzo floors and rich woods festooned with Jules Verne machinery, you stumble into a power struggle between a rich cast of Rapture residents. One man wants you to "harvest" the city's population of genetically altered 8-year-old girls called Little Sisters

for their ADAM, stem-cell goo that grants superpowers. A former Nazi scientist wants you to save the girls. Either way, you'll have to take down Big Daddies, eyes-on-high, beam-pressure-suited monstrosities that protect the Little Sisters, and bellow in honorous whale song.

Along the way, you'll tweak your character with a huge assortment of Plasmid powers (everything from telekinesis to a goop that lures Big Daddies to your side), wield garaged-together weapons, and hack hovering robo-buddies that soar like two-stroke-powered mosquitoes and deliver a heavy-machine-gun sting. Inventive players will find ways to combine towers with weapons and the environment, setting Rube Goldberg-style traps that lead enemies from bad to worse. It all adds up to one brainy game—customizable play in an *Ayn Rand*-inspired dystopia. "Our running joke during development on this was 'how many

▷ BECAUSE THEY SAY SO

Two Sony-centric developers tell you why you need to play *BioShock*.



"*BioShock* is one of the finest examples of narrative in videogames, because the world of Rapture engages the player as an active partner in the telling of the story."

—Amy Hennig, creative director of *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* developer Naughty Dog



"For us at Insomniac, seeing *BioShock* come to the PS3 is big news. As gamers, we're all huge fans of the title. As PS3 developers, we're stoked to see another standout game coming to the platform. And as designers, we learned a lot from what [the game's] developers did to create an incredible sense of place. There are few other games that immerse players as completely as *BioShock* does, and if you own a PS3, you're going want to pick this one up."

—Greg Price, president of Resistance: Fall of Man developer Insomniac

BIOSHOCK (cont.)

unique concepts [we had to sell]," Thomas says. "Hey, we're making an underwater objectivist utopia. That's why we were tickled that people did seem to get it and enjoy it and it wasn't too weird for them."

Rerapping Rapture

Despite its accolades and top-seller status, *BioShock* wasn't perfect. Even Levine admitted to us that its third act could've been better. So now that 2K Marin is tasked with developing both the PS3 version of the original and the sequel, what's to stop the team from tweaking a few things for the sake of the franchise's future? "Resisting that urge to become a pathological revisionist is something that anybody creative sort of struggles with," says Thomas, "but we believe very strongly in the vision of the first game. We don't want to mess with the experiential yield that

other people have made canon. If we do augment [it] in some way, it's hopefully something that fits very well with the existing fiction, but doesn't mess with what's there."

The team does admit to having something in the works with Sony for the PS3 version—something that could potentially "extend and augment the game." They say it's too early to talk about these theoretical features, and Sony officials had nothing to reveal yet, either. We figure that whatever 2K has cooking, it'll involve Sony's plans for its virtual-world online network, Home, which has its big push this fall. Beyond that, the PS3 version of *BioShock* will ship with the bonus Plasmid powers and gameplay options addressed in an update for the Xbox 360 version. Chief among these tweaks: a fixed widescreen mode and the ability to switch off the Vita Chamber check-

points that some players felt made the game too much of a cinch.

From what we know about PS3 *BioShock* now, it seems like a faithful version that'll certainly show anyone not familiar with the game what all the fuss was about, while fans of the Xbox 360 original can walk on by without fear of missing anything new. Thomas, however, isn't quite sold on that idea. "Whatever we end up with via our discussions with Sony, coupled with the fact that *BioShock* allows you to go through and roll your own shooter in the first place—those two factors together would turn into a motive for a replay," he says. But even if only new players sign up for the *BioShock* experience, Thomas figures that the game will still do just fine when it ships this holiday. "We're pretty confident we have the underwater objectivist utopia market cornered," he says. ☐

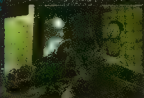


■ The team won't say whether PS3 *BioShock* will incorporate Sixaxis motion-sensing control.

THE POWER OF TWO

The little we know about the *BioShock* sequel

Before we commuted across the Golden Gate Bridge to visit 2K Marin, the company's PR issued one simple rule: Don't ask about a *BioShock* sequel, because we won't tell. Nevertheless, this is the studio spearheading the franchise's next step, and the folks here—most of them 2K Boston vets—can't help but drop a few hints in their enthusiasm. "The team is at a high point," says Creative Director Jordan Thomas. "The artists had their children in over the weekend doodling Little Sister-based art on the walls."



Ah! So the sequel will see the return of the first game's genetically engineered girls, right? Or at least more kindergarten-caliber graffiti. Seems like a given, regardless. A comment from Lead Artist Hogarth De La Plante is juicier, revealing that the first game's sunken metropolis will serve as a setting in the follow-up. "I think Rapture is a rich world that I can keep mining," he tells us. "There's so much more we can get out of it."

Wherever *BioShock 2* ends up taking us, we know it'll be the product of the same collaborative environment that produced the first game. Thomas calls the process "a farming of crazy," as staff members from every discipline are called together for input on everything from level design to weapon functions. "We're nerds, for our own game here," he says.



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Mixed Messages

By Scott Steinberg

Hooray for free speech, because if this were 17th-century Salem (or *Resident Evil 4*'s Spanish countryside), you'd already be primed to lynch me for the following revelation: Videogame marketing isn't the blasphemous, soul-searing art many still believe.

Sacrilege? Maybe. But do the math: Among TiVos, social networks, IM clients, 3D chat rooms, online role-playing games, and mobile handsets, you've got more ways to waste time than ever. And corporate shells—infuriated with audiences' tendencies to tune out the traditional "push" marketing methods (e.g., banner ads and 30-second prime-time spots)—are increasingly pulling their immaculately coiffed hair out because of it. Enter the era of "pull" methods, where pitchmen are suddenly self-avowed "creative thinkers" and "storytellers," and ads themselves have to be so damn amusing that you voluntarily seek them out.

First came Microsoft's "lovebees" *Halo 2* campaign. Next, *BioShock*'s "exclusive" Cult of Rapture, offering subscribers limited-edition downloads and gear. *Devil May Cry 4* pushed screenshots and videos using desktop widgets that users lined up to install. Same goes for Rockstar Games, which invited players to call in and pose as irate red-staters for a *Grand Theft Auto IV* talk-radio station. Entire teams of female pro gamers (sorry, we don't kiss and tell) appear overnight to hock oh-so-carefully trailed Ubisoft products. "Leaked" trailers of *Frontlines: Fuel of War* suddenly flooded the Net. Oh, and *Rock Band*? With 8 million-plus downloads, it's the best commercial music industry that execs ever created; its own designers call it not a game but a "platform."

Where does the rabbit hole lead? Nobody knows. Thankfully, one thing's certain: With a baby girl due shortly, I'm putting my foot down on you goofballs naming her "Turok," no matter how much you pay.



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

THE BIG ONES

Little tidbits, big fun



Halo Wars

XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios • Fall 2008

Halo Wars just wrapped up a private "alpha" multiplayer playtest. "We wanted to get some real-world feedback about our game's pace and controls while giving our multiplayer servers a test drive," says Lead Designer Dave Pottinger. "We knew the fan interest was going to be huge, but the amount of participation and excitement in the alpha absolutely obliterated our wildest expectations." But then, of course he'd say that.

This new screen grabbed from the heat of battle shows what some of the fuss is about. As the award-winning PC strategy game *Company of Heroes* proves, the combination of troop squads and individual vehicles makes for intense tactical combat—and "intensity" is what you want from *Halo*. Look closely above and you can spot a new unit in the top right corner. We're assuming that half-track missile launcher is a dedicated antiair vehicle—at least if that fire it's sending at the Banshee is any indication.

Killzone 2

PS3 • Sony CEA • Fall 2008

With its special-effects-filled screenshots and long development incubation, *Killzone 2* had many thinking it might suffer from the screen-chugging slowdown that plagued its predecessor. Posting on the PlayStation forums, a community manager for developer Guerrilla Games says such fears are unfounded: They're aiming for a semismooth 30 frames per second at a sharp 720p resolution. Guerrilla ruled out 1080p because it would cost too much in the "neat effects" department. Does this trade-off pay off? Head to killzone.com, link your PSN account, and maybe you'll see for yourself in the game's upcoming public beta test.



ARE YOU UP TO THE CHALLENGE?

9 out of 10 - Official Xbox Magazine, June 2008



IN STORES JUNE 2008



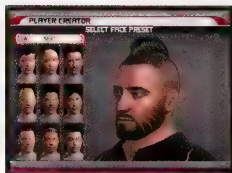
Easy to "Pick Up & Play" - Simple controls provide players with incredibly exciting, action-packed fun right from the start



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> GAMING EVOLUTION

Survival of the Fittest

Nintendo's fitness—and perhaps the industry's as well—depends on Wii Fit. By Jeremy Parish

WHEN LEGENDARY NINTENDO DESIGNER SHIGERU MIYAMOTO

introduced *Wii Fit* at last year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, you could almost hear the collective clatter of a million gamers furiously pounding out epitaphs to their favorite hobby. Here was the inventor of Mario and Zelda completely ignoring his brilliant work in progress, *Super Mario Galaxy*, in order to talk about what appeared to be a glorified bathroom scale. *Wii Fit*, hardcore gamers proclaimed, would be the death of videogames.

In Miyamoto's mind, however, his new exercise-trainer-cum-minigame-collection is essential to gaming's survival. "The core gaming market didn't buy the Wii to play *Wii Sports*," he says, referring to the system's ultra-casual sports pack-in. "But it was a means by which gamers could get the nongaming people in their lives to take an interest in their hobby. *Wii Fit* will play a similar role: It will continue to broaden interest in videogames. That's important for the core gamer—the bigger the audience, the greater the chance for something that's new and unique to succeed."

Many gamers reject the notion that games need saving. The industry's profits are blossoming even as the global economy withers on the vine. But games are hardly the first medium to thrive on the enthusiasm (and liberal spending habits) of young men, and the fate of former "sure things" demonstrates that short-term success is no guarantee of long-term health. The comics industry was flush with cash in the early '90s but soon marginalized itself; the music industry is currently wracked by what could well be its death throes. Miyamoto's own frame of reference is Japan, where console gaming is dying a sad, slow death as gamers who made the PlayStation a 32-bit colossus move along to new and different pastimes.

"We've gotten to a point where videogames are no longer something everyone can enjoy," he laments. Both of Nintendo's current systems, the Wii and DS, were conceived as remedies for Japan's troubles by making gaming accessible and inclusive. To be sure, the company's traditional titles still have a huge audience the world over; *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* sold a stunning 2.7 million copies in its first week in the U.S., and *Mario Kart Wii* has turned in equally astounding numbers in Europe. But that's not enough, Miyamoto says. "The sales [of hardcore games] all come in the first three weeks, and the drop-off is so dramatic that you're not really selling any volume after that."

Instead, he looks to the likes of *Brain Age* and *Animal Crossing* for gaming's future: strong sellers that continue to move at a steady rate for months, sometimes years, by targeting consumers who don't feel compelled to make a day-one purchase of the latest hot release. "Games like *Wii Fit*, *Animal Crossing*, and *Nintendogs* are exhibiting a steady, longer-selling sales trend we haven't seen before," Miyamoto notes. "Creating games that sustain sales over the long term is going to be essential to the growth of the industry."

Granted, Nintendo has a rare ability to create software that appeals to both casual and core gamers. *New Super Mario Bros.* was an instant hit upon its 2006 release and continued to sell steadily over the next year and a half, racking up a grand total of 13 million copies sold by the end of 2007. But few games have quite the same universal appeal as a good old-fashioned *Mario* adventure, and even Nintendo realizes its endlessly popular mascots can only go so far. *Wii Fit* conspicuously lacks the friendly characters that would make for an easy sale; instead, its fitness routines are dictated not by Mario but rather by featureless and realistically proportioned human instructors. Not only does this make for a title that neatly sidesteps the "kiddie" stigma that plagues the company's catalog, it also makes *Wii Fit*'s steep \$90 price tag easier to swallow. "As a videogame,

the audience looks at a price of \$100 and thinks, 'That's very expensive,'" Miyamoto admits. "But for people who are purchasing exercise equipment or fitness DVDs—in those terms, \$100 is actually very cheap."

So far, Nintendo's ambitions are panning out. *Wii Fit*'s first week in Japan saw a quarter-million units sold—it's certainly respectable, but it's not even enough to top the week's charts. Four months later, however, its total numbers are closing in on 2 million, and early reports from the U.K. launch suggest nationwide sellouts. Of course, that only adds to the alarmist tone with which hardcore gamers discuss *Wii Fit*, but Miyamoto says that their fears are unfounded. "As the people around you who haven't been playing videogames take an interest in things like *Wii Fit*, it's going to change the impression that people have of what videogaming means," he says. "Rather than be concerned that we're abandoning them, core gamers should realize that we're creating a better environment for their hobby."

Besides, ultimately a game is still a game, even if you're killing calories rather than alien invaders. "*Wii Fit* is a game about discovering the joy of becoming more aware of your body, your fitness, [and] your weight. It's about setting a goal, finding a path to that goal, and then determining a new objective—which, in my mind, is very much the same as what you do in a *Mario* game." ❄



Want to see how fit our reviewers think *Wii Fit* is for gamers? Check out our review on pg. 76.

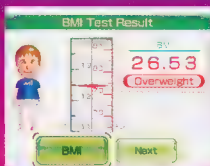


➤ We've gotten to a point where videogames are no longer something everyone can enjoy.

—Legendary Nintendo Designer Shigeru Miyamoto

PERIPHERAL PERIL

As anyone who's ever owned a Nintendo console knows, the company's brilliant at inventing peripherals...but not so great at supporting them. The GameCube Broadband Adaptor is probably the most infamous of these—even Nintendo didn't bother making any games for it! So what's to guarantee that the *Wii Fit Balance Board* won't end up being another \$90 wasted? We put this question to Shigeru Miyamoto, and his answer was reassuringly simple: popularity. "In Japan, sales of *Wii Fit* are beginning to reach 2 million," he says. "Third-parties are actually contacting us to see how they can make their games compatible with it—Bandai Namco has already released the game *Family Ski* [in Japan]. We're trying to encourage them to make *Balance Board*-compatible games. That's really what we've tried to do with all the peripherals we've released over the years. Ultimately for peripherals, install base is the key." In other words, if the *Balance Board* ends up being another pointless-lump-of-plastic, you can blame all of your friends who didn't jump on the *Wii Fit* bandwagon.



THE HISTORY

This is the game that wouldn't die



If you get the urge to play game journalist for a day, go look through press-release archives online and you'll find two curious announcements—one in 2006 from Atari saying it would publish all future Spark games, and another in 2006 from Sierra saying it would publish a Spark shooter in a "modern setting." Both sound like they should encompass *Legacy*, but if you look at our info box on the opposite page, you'll see neither of those publishers listed. What happened? "It's been a wild ride," says Garcia-Shelton, who notes that the publisher musical chairs helped *Legacy* come together on Spark's terms. "I think part of what we have is...we were able to control so much of [the project] ourselves and really say for ourselves what we thought was going to make a great game."

THE GOOD

The creatures make the game



One of the big marketing points for *Legacy* is that the developers set up the environments as showcases for smart enemies, with creatures that scale buildings, break through background walls, or throw boulders at you. Another point is that you face off against two enemy types—the mythological creatures from Pandora's box and the soldiers trying to take them, and you, down. Mix those two concepts together, and the combat gets good. After playing through about a third of the game, we're pretty confident in saying that enemy behavior is the game's best feature; it's very tough to predict where and how they'll attack. The game also does a good job letting you choose how to tackle certain areas—you'll come across werewolves in giant glass cages with explosives sitting next to them and can opt to free them and let them join the fight. It's not the most subtle choice we've seen in a game, but it's fun all the same. And we're sure that People for the Ethical Treatment of Werewolves will be stoked.

THE BAD

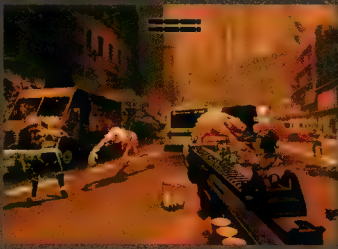
Why are we in a sewer, again?

Given that *Legacy* starts with you opening Pandora's box, creatures flooding New York's streets, and your escape from an art museum before it collapses, it's clear that the designers know a thing or two about making a good opening stage. Unfortunately, from what we've seen of the rest of the game, not all of the environments match that level of creativity. We spent a couple of hours with the game and found ourselves in bland warehouses, stone buildings, and a subway station complete with a run-down train. While we're hopeful that the parts we haven't seen will bring back the excitement of the intro—Garcia-Shelton says one level features an all-out battle in Times Square—so far *Legacy*'s level design isn't living up to the game's name, especially since the graphics aren't quite on the same level as the game's big-budgeted competition.



THE MULTIPLAYER

Because different is better than better



To date, *Legacy*'s biggest secret has been its multiplayer mode, but Garcia-Shelton shared some early details with us—along with the first-ever multiplayer screenshot over there on the left. "We haven't invested in strict deathmatch or team deathmatch because, you know, there's a lot of great games that do that," he says. "What we went after was putting our werewolves in the multiplayer game and really tying the creatures into what leads to success or failure in our multiplayer game. We wanted to do something that was different so that when people want to play *Legacy* multiplayer, they're playing it for what makes us unique... We're independent. We don't have a million people. We can't compete, resource-wise, with some of these huge multiplayer teams where every detail is just awesome. For us, we want to go deep on one experience, one great game mode, and make sure that it is great, because we can do that." 🐾



PREVIEW: HANDS-ON

Project ORIGIN

Unraid to come outside and play By Garnett Lee

Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
Warner Bros.
Interactive

Developer:
Monolith

Release Date:
Fall 2008

A SEQUEL WITHOUT THE NUMBER. *Project Origin* delivers the *real* follow-up to the paramilitary paranormal scare-shooter *F.E.A.R.* from developer Monolith, which owns everything (including the game engine) but the name. Maybe that works out to be a good thing. The PC crowd might have raved about the challenging A.I. and spectacular firefights in *F.E.A.R.*, but the generic environments and unintelligible story didn't connect nearly as well in console form.

With the new name, then, comes a chance to reboot the franchise. "Right from the get-go, when we were talking about doing the sequel, one of the goals that we set for ourselves [was] variety," says Lead Designer John Mulkey. "We wanted to push things in more directions—get more visual variety, more color, a variety of spaces, and really push it so that you don't get that sense of 'I've just been through the world's largest office building.'" Craig Hubbard, who led the *F.E.A.R.*

team and is helping out here while also heading up an unannounced game, puts it more bluntly: "We didn't do a very good job with the storytelling, so a lot of people didn't know what was going on." Playing as the mysterious Point Man, who Mulkey terms "a nameless vessel...simply just a means by which you interact with the world," failed to help you connect with the story.

This time you know exactly who you are: Michael Becket, who is part of a Special Forces squad called into the situation. And to help it all make sense, this game starts just before the devastating explosion at the end of *F.E.A.R.* Your team is sent to retrieve

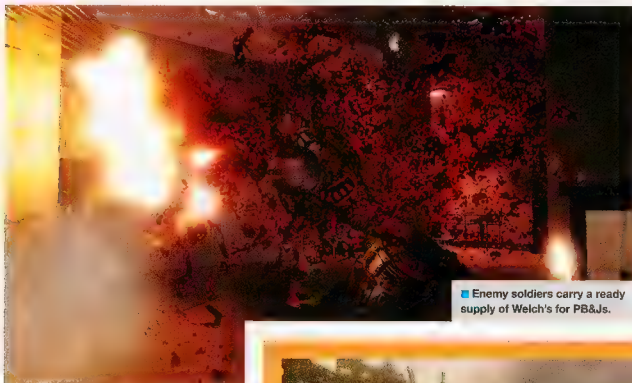
an executive from the offices of a military contractor. Yes, that means you start off fighting in an office building. It also puts you near a window at just the right time to witness the nuclear bomb-like psychic blast created when Alma (a creepy little girl with super-psychic powers) escapes from her military-constructed prison.

Taking it to the streets

After one of the more impressive—to the point of almost being disturbing—re-creations of such a violent detonation, complete with an amazing mushroom cloud, there's no doubt that the streets of Auburn must have been left in complete chaos. Naturally,

✦ **We didn't do a very good job with the storytelling, so a lot of people didn't know what was going on.**

—Monolith Designer Craig Hubbard on *Project Origin* predecessor *F.E.A.R.*



■ Enemy soldiers carry a ready supply of Welch's for PB&Js.



your team gets tasked with heading to ground zero to investigate. Fast-forwarding a few levels ahead, we found ourselves among the rubble and locked in a street fight.

Opening up the environments to include the outdoor streetscapes of the ruined city provides a most welcome contrast to the indoor spaces. Crossing more than a few feet of open ground leaves you vulnerable to snipers perched behind signs and hiding on fire escapes. And at ground level, the enemies seem equally at home outside as indoors. They make use of all the rubble, circling abandoned buses and flanking through bombed-out buildings to get a jump on you.

You encounter a particularly creepy new opponent on the sidewalk. Going about their business, seemingly oblivious to the devastation around them, the "Remnants" burst in a flash of psychic energy when your presence breaks them from their trance, turning them hostile. But rather than fight you



➤ **STOMP**

In some areas, *Project Origin* lets you take to the streets with a mech called the Elite Power Armor, or EPA. Equipped with dual Gatling guns and a missile launcher, it significantly ratchets up the destruction quotient. Lead Designer John Mulkey tells us that Monolith has been working on it from day one and has recently reached a point where it feels sufficiently badass. The amount of airborne debris alone (yes, that's what you're seeing cloud the view in the screenshot) makes it clear they aren't kidding about that part.

directly, they raise the surrounding dead from the streets. Like marionettes lifted on strands of psychic energy, the fallen soldiers are dragged toward you, guns blazing, while the Remnant, who you must kill to take the soldiers down, eludes you, darting into and out of sight.

Over the course of the game, these outdoor areas also aim to stitch the experience together in a way absent from the first game. Throughout your journey you'll discover landmarks, many of which will later become key locations, and these points provide an ongoing framework by which to track your progress. That contextual base lays the foundation for their goal of delivering a more cohesive story this time out. Hubbard concludes, "The idea in this is that it all has to add up to something." 🦾



Monolith assures us players will get plenty of in-mech playtime.

COMBAT PLAYGROUND

We take the controls and step off the elevator onto a rooftop courtyard. Despite having just watched Lead Designer John Mulkey run through the same area, things start surprising us pretty fast: Soldiers pour onto the patio from a number of spots and engage us. They circle, taking advantage of the bar and various planters for cover, all the while applying steady pressure without making ill-advised dumb rushes.

While we play, Mulkey tells us that the new

A.I. treats each environment much like a child does a playground. "We want the A.I. to be reactive to the player's choices," he says, "so it feels like a logical response." To do that, as part of the various behaviors it could take, the A.I. needs to know a whole other set of actions. This allows it to interact with any potential object—and improvise depending on how things unfold.

The firefight continues in a fluid dance through the entire space as we pull over more

tables and chairs for quick cover, move to keep obstacles in the way of the enemies, and liberally use main man Becket's reflex-based slow-mo power to gain an advantage. Only when the dust settles do we realize how comfortable it all feels. Monolith Designer Chris Hubbard had told us earlier that they set *Call of Duty 4* as the benchmark against which to judge their controls. From what we felt playing through this area, they look to be well on their way to hitting that goal.



EGM Extras: Go to EGM.1UP.COM throughout June for even more on Project Origin, including the history of F.E.A.R., our full interviews, and videos.

Cell Screening

Licensed mobile games just keep on coming—here's our guide to the next wave. By Andrew Podolsky



Oregon Trail

Gameloft • Gameloft • June 2008

Remember the good old days, when bratty siblings died of dysentery and fording the river meant losing all of your favorite wagon oxies? This remake of one of the best educational games ever made picks up new nineties and cartoony art style, but ditched deadweight like buying spare parts from the general store.

Wolfenstein RPG

EA Mobile • Mid Mobile • Late 2008

The granddaddy of all World War II first-person shooters returns again in a turn-based game similar to *Doom RPG*. While you'll be able to use weapons from throughout the *Wolfenstein* series (from Gatling guns to flamethrowers), the developers have toned down the Nazi imagery to appease mobile carriers' *Mein leben!*



Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull

THQ Wireless • Universomo • May 2008

This is the only game directly based on the long-awaited *Indiana Jones* movie, but in our time with it, Indy's slow-paced platforming and ponderous whip tricks were tough to control. Spill new comer Mutt Williams (played by Shia LaBeouf) seems slightly more energetic during his scenes, simply because he runs through them without stopping.



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

THQ Wireless • Universomo • September 2008



The most recent *Star Wars* mobile game, based on *The Empire Strikes Back*, was total bantha poodoo, but *The Force Unleashed* seems much more promising. It looks phenomenal, even though it requires only minimal interaction. After weaving iconic designs with the keypad, you call back when you'll Sith-Lord-in-training kicks-ebony Stormtrooper butt.

Spore

EA Mobile • Electronic Arts • Fall 2008

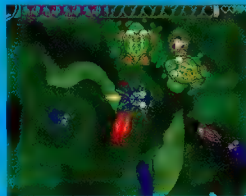
On PC, EA's takes on evolution follow your creature's form from all the space ship to the mobile version, you swim, eat, and grow while in a petri dish—think of it as *Evolution* with more goody eyes. The developers have more planned, but we don't know that all scope yet. We're excited for the full and touch-screen controls promised for the iPhone version, though.

The Incredible Hulk

Hands-On Mobile • Hands-On Mobile • June 2008



Contrary to the Hulk's image, this official movie game seems to put weak Ultimate destruction isn't a priority here, outside of the occasional smashable wall or throwable car. At least you can pick up soldiers and toss them around, or laugh as their own tanks accidentally run them over. Funny, but not exactly the kind of fun we want to pay money for.





5 Lives: Haden Blackman

Usually, we complain when movie mastermind George Lucas forces *Star Wars* guest appearances and spin-offs down our throats, but with Darth Vader and Yoda's upcoming cameos in 3D fighter *Soulcalibur IV* and this summer's prequel-bridging *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, we're actually saying, "Ahh!" Because we're stoked about lighting our sabers, we challenged *Force Unleashed* Project Lead Haden Blackman to a duel of wits.

1. What creature does Darth Vader turn into in the first level of the Famicom version of *Star Wars*?

Haden Blackman: A scorpion.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining:

2. *Star Wars* star Mark Hamill is also an accomplished voice actor. Which famous superhero did he portray for a videogame?

HB: Superhero? Well, he's done the Joker a bunch; that's a supervillain. [Long pause] I'm going to get all these questions wrong. Batman?

EGM: Incorrect. He played Wolverine in X2: *Wolverine's Revenge* (PS2/XB/GC).

Lives remaining:

3. Which *Star Wars* Atari game was completed but never released?

HB: Ah, man! This is unfair! I'm in the middle of crunch; I'm so tired. It's on the tip of my tongue—I'm going to kill myself. *Attack on the Death Star*?

EGM: Incorrect. It's actually *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*—*Ewok Adventure*.

Lives remaining:

4. Who is the Queen for the Empire in the Sega CD version of *Star Wars Chess*?

HB: I don't even know the rules of chess. I don't know—I'm going to go with Vader.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining:

5. Which *Star Wars* character appeared as an unlockable bonus character in *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4*?

HB: Darth Maul.

EGM: Incorrect. It's Jango Fett. Darth Maul was in *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*.

Lives remaining:

Game Over: Do or do not, Blackman at least tried. Too bad his mid-chlorian count is severely lacking. That, or he doesn't have a wealth of ridiculous *Star Wars* videogame knowledge stored in his noggin. We're betting on the former.



Photograph by Sarah J. Adams

Unlike other companies' presidents, Jeffery isn't afraid to use his Hulk hands.

worked in entertainment as a film executive, producer, and executive producer. He worked for Warner Bros. and European companies like the BBC. Then Jeffery took writing home with him and started his own production company, Jeffery Productions. He's worked on a number of TV shows, including *The Simpsons*, *The Simpsons Movie*, and *The Simpsons: The Movie*.

biology. After working his way up through various midlevel jobs throughout the industry, Jeffery eventually became president of Lucasfilm. In his position, half a year ago, he saved the *Star Wars* franchise from looking for a new president. When the opportunity came up, he was in Japan to meet with movie executives—and he was there.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

BlackBerry
"I don't do it well."
"I'm really good." Doing a product pitch goes wrong. Blackberry not working. This is a common problem.

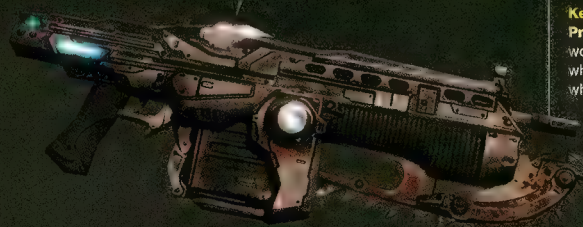
Microsoft
"I don't do it well."
"I'm really good." Doing a product pitch goes wrong. Microsoft not working. This is a common problem.

Apple
"I don't do it well."
"I'm really good." Doing a product pitch goes wrong. Apple not working. This is a common problem.

GUN SHOW

A real military expert takes aim at videogame weaponry to reveal the good, the bad, and the just plain silly. By Evan Shamoon

We don't sign up for bullet-plazing firefights with the intention of peacefully talking things out. No, we play these games to kill, to murder, and to pretend like we're not totally crazy. Plus, it's a blast to blow things up with wacky weapons. To find out which of these badass, death-bringers would work in real life, we enlisted *Call of Duty* series military adviser and real-life war vet Hank Keirse to grade the craziest guns in gaming.



The gun: *Gears of War's* Lancer

A typical assault rifle with an atypical chain saw bayonet.

Keirse says...

Practicality: "Real chain saws are heavy. They don't work really well if the thing being cut is thrashing around, which pretty much every victim would do—at least for a while. And consider the gore factor: Not only would you be covered with blood, human meat, and viscera, but your primary weapon would also be gummed up. Firing your rifle with a chunk of intestine jammed in the barrel isn't wise."

Historical precedents: "None—medieval blood-gouging weapons are the closest."

Lethality level: 7 (out of 10)

The Gun: *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath's* "live ammo" crossbow.

Live animals serve as ammunition for this unconventional crossbow. Deadly results depend on the critters you choose (e.g., explosive "boombats" and rapid-fire wasps).

Keirse says...

Practicality: "I shoot with a bow all the time. But I always wanted to use explosive bats. Unfortunately, I never could find them at Cabela's. I like the idea. Problem is range—I'm really only good with a bow within 30 yards—so the deer figure that out and prance like at 40 and 50 yards. With an explosive bat, I would think you could extend that range a bit and get the added benefit of terminal guidance. Likewise with the wasps. Though I bet the exploding bat would damage a lot of meat. And the wasps could forget who they hate most—nothing more irritating than having your own wasps turn on you. There's never any dignity in a human that confronts a mad swarm of wasps—never."

Historical precedents: "There've been lots of creative uses of crossbows and bows—like using flaming goo on the tip."

Lethality level: 5



The Gun: Halo's Needler

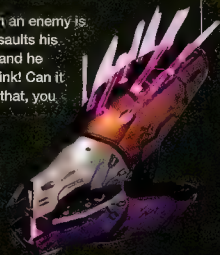
A weapon that fires a stream of pink crystalline projectiles. These stick in the enemy and, presumably, hurt. Then they explode.

Keirsey says...

Practicality: "Using pink things to stick in an enemy is great. It hurts, and at the same time, it assaults his manhood. There he is, wallowing in pain, and he looks at his belly and says, 'This thing's pink! Can it get any worse?' While he's musing about that, you run up and bayonet him."

Historical precedents: "Amazons of ancient myth probably painted their daggers pink to achieve the same psychological unhooking of an opponent."

Lethality level: 7



The Gun: Half-Life 2's Gravity Gun

The thinking man's death tool, this weapon lets you toy with gravity to kill foes with everyday objects.

Keirsey says...

Practicality: "Not very."

Historical precedents:

"The ancients learned very early [how] to use gravity to their advantage—but this usually involved rolling rocks down hills or pouring boiling oil down the castle walls. Those that failed to respect gravity suffered. For example, the guys that based their plan of attack on rolling rocks up hills—Google Sisyphus: That's a name of a guy, not the disease of your college classmate—or pouring the boiling oil up the wall."

Lethality level: 2



The Gun: Doom's BFG (Big F***ing Gun) 9000

Huge hand-mounted cannon that fires green balls of room-clearing plasma energy.

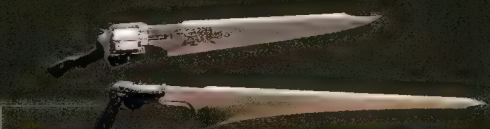
Keirsey says...

Practicality: "My experience with plasma guns is limited, but I like the idea. I imagine a big chunk of packaged energy flying with laser speed to hit a target. I hope they invent one soon so I can try it on an overseas adventure."

Historical precedents:

"There's been some work with lasers. Nothing practical has actually been employed yet to my knowledge."

Lethality level: 10+



The Gun: Final Fantasy VIII's Gunblade

Part revolver, part sword. Completely ridiculous.

Keirsey says...

Practicality: "To attack someone with a sword, you need a firm hold on the handle, which should be in a direct line with the blade. Cutting or stabbing with the Gunblade would put awkward pressure on your wrist. Also, the rounds look too big for the bore of that pistol. And the handle is in an awkward position for firing the weapon. With rounds that big and a gun that small, you're going to experience a massive kick."

Historical precedents: "None that I know of, but I'm sure some fool tried this in the past, and I hope he got his butt kicked."

Lethality level: 2

The Gun: Team Fortress 2's sticky-grenade gun

It fires grenades that stick to their targets.

Keirsey says...

Practicality: "The practice of making grenades so gooey that they would stick has been around for a while, so I think this one might actually be possible. However, if your aim is good enough to stick a grenade on a guy, you might as well just have the explosive charge point detonate when it hits him. So, practical? Maybe not so much. However, the fun factor is probably high—e.g., watching the guy run around trying to pull off this phosphorescent chunk of soon-to-explode stuff."

Historical precedents:

"See *Saving Private Ryan* for further research on the use of sticky grenades."

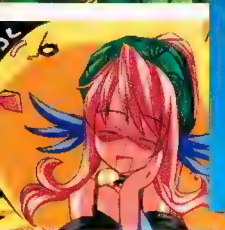
Lethality level: 10



> WHICH WEAPON WOULD HE BRING TO WAR?



"I would pack the BFG9000," Keirsey says. "The pulse of energy would certainly pack a wallop... Hopefully, [your target] would still be a bit irradiated as well—so [that] the graves-registration unit would have little problem locating his remains even in low-visibility conditions. The shock value of having the brilliant pulse rounds hurtling about the battlefield would test the nerve of the most stalwart opponent. As Napoleon once said: 'Even in war, moral power is to physical as three parts out of four.' And I'm sure at the time, as he lay on his bunk in exile on Saint Helena, he was musing about pulse weapons and how they might have turned things around at Waterloo." #6



RETRO ROLEPLAYING

Old-School SUMMER

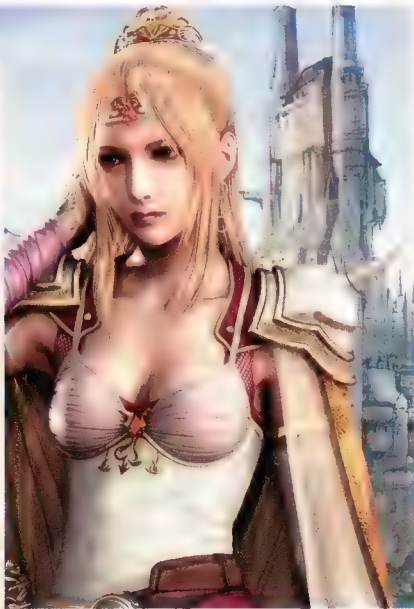
Some old-fashioned RPGs to grind away your summer vacation. By Jeremy Parish

Shiny graphics and cutting-edge gameplay aren't all there is to life; sometimes, you just want to sit down with a tried-and-true role-playing game and level up for a while. Well, good news: Once you're done battling through *Final Fantasy Tactics A2*, *Grimoire of the Rift*, and *Etrian Odyssey II: Heroes of Lagaard* (see our reviews this issue), the summer still holds plenty of old-school RPG excellence for you... with even more coming this fall.

A sullen hero with a hidden past, a moon-eyed love interest, a jealous friend, and a mysterious connection to the bad guy (who's actually just a puppet of the true villain): Sounds like every *Final Fantasy* game in memory, right? But the formula was established in 1991's *Final Fantasy IV*, and fans will soon have a chance to revisit this seminal RPG in fine style.

This is no mere port; like 2006's remake of *Final Fantasy III*, *FFIV* sports considerable improvements in its DS incarnation. For starters, the graphics: Gone are the squatty sprite munchkins of years past, replaced instead by lanky polygonal munchkins. The action still moves at a pleasantly brisk pace—load times between battles are quick, and combat can be adjusted to play out as quickly as your fingers can fumble through the command menus. And it sounds great; the classic soundtrack has been slightly upgraded while key plot sequences feature full voice acting. The U.S. version, redubbed into English, upholds the high standards of recent *Final Fantasy* games.

FFIV experts can expect plenty of subtle gameplay tweaks to keep them on their toes. Longtime fans have each legendary boss encounter down to a science...and the developers have taken this into account, giving many enemies new abilities and behaviors designed specifically to trip up arrogant heroes who think they know the game inside and out. Fortunately, the game also offers new tools to help players come to terms with the boosted challenge level. Each party member retains their individual class-based skills from previous versions of *FFIV*, but these have been changed to add new tactical depth. Cecil's Darkness skills work like the Dark Knights' of *FFIII*, and formerly useless bard Edward is now armed with genuinely powerful song skills. Better yet, these abilities aren't lost forever when the topsy-turvy plot kills off a particular hero; it's possible to imbue characters with a departed comrade's special skills. All in all, players should expect to find a fresh new experience lurking in this old favorite.



> READING ASSIGNMENT: THE HISTORY OF FFIIV

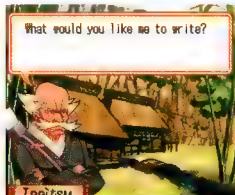
If you haven't been paying attention to the revisions and corrections Square Enix has been lavishing on the *Final Fantasy* series for the past decade, this remake of *FFIV* might catch you off guard. For starters, it's the same game that arrived on the Super NES as *Final Fantasy II*. It's also *insanely hard* compared to the Super NES chapter; the game we relished as *FFII* was watered down for fear that our feeble American constitutions couldn't handle a true challenge.

This is hardly the first time *FFIV* has been released in the U.S. with its proper name and difficulty intact—the most recent case was the 2005 remake for Game Boy Advance. While shoddily programmed, it featured additional content missing in this edition, including a massive bonus dungeon and the ability to handpick your final party. The DS game is probably the closest we'll ever see to a definitive version, but *FF* fans should definitely track down the GBA title for an interesting (if apocryphal) take on a classic.

Izuna 2: The Unemployed Ninja Returns

DS • Atlus • July 2008

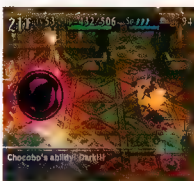
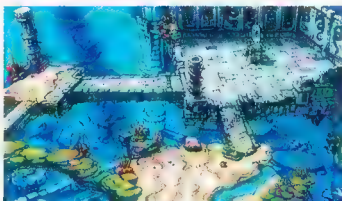
The state of the economy is making for some tight times, but history is cyclical—and Atlus' *Izuna 2* chronicles the doldrums of ancient Japan, an era when even ninjas couldn't find work. But this is no economics lesson; like its predecessor, *Izuna 2* is a hardcore dungeon hack full of random dungeons and no mercy whatsoever. Fall to a foe while exploring and it's back to town without your money or gear. Sounds like a rough job, to be sure, but it's a living. Between dungeon outings, players follow the story of the titular Izuna, a young female ninja whose search for gainful employment inevitably leads to tragedy. (Hilarious tragedy.)



Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon

Wii • Square Enix • July 2008

American gamers wrinkled their nose at 1999's *Chocobo's Dungeon 2*—probably because its odd mix of cutesy mascot characters and insanely challenging gameplay made for strange bed-fellows. Perhaps the big bird will fare better this time around now that the *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon* games have broken in RPG fans with the full force of pocket-monster franchising. Besides, Chocobo's latest outing looks to add some new elements to the *Mystery Dungeon* mix; throughout his adventure, the adorable little hero will gain the ability to change into different *Final Fantasy* classes such as Black Mage and Thief. As a rule of thumb, *FF* games featuring a job system (*FFV*, *FF Tactics*) are completely awesome...hopefully, *Fables* will keep the streak alive.



> READING ASSIGNMENT: MYSTERY DUNGEON PRIMER

Both *Izuna* and *Fables* can be considered "roguelikes"—RPGs descended from an ancient ASCII-based computer RPG called, yes, *Rogue*. The *Mystery Dungeon* series in particular is closely related to *Rogue*; check out Sega's recent *Mystery Dungeon: Shiren the Wanderer* for an example of how ruthlessly difficult this little niche of gaming can be. (At the other extreme is the gentle, forgiving *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon*.) But what is a roguelike, exactly? In short, it's a game that looks like an action-RPG but is actually turn-based, it features randomly generated dungeons, and when you die, you're whisked back to town with no money or items—and sometimes no experience. The genre has a certain masochistic appeal, and the tension of having no safety net appeals to self-abusive gamers.



From the Abyss

DS • Aksys • Fall 2008

While Square Enix's *Mana* series has lost its way, fans of cooperative dungeon crawling may have cause to cheer anyway thanks to Aksys' *From the Abyss*. Looking remarkably like a cross between *Secret of Mana* and *Children of Mana*, *Abyss* allows two players to join up and kick ass through a series of randomly generated dungeons. But rather than simply slapping together a mishmash of tiles and sprites every time you go spelunking, *Abyss*'s randomly generated dungeons remain consistent through subsequent quests. Gamers can decide for themselves if this interesting twist helps *Abyss* measure up to its obvious inspiration when it arrives this fall.



> READING ASSIGNMENT: BACK-TO-SCHOOL RPGS

Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride DS • Square Enix

In case *Dragon Quest IV* isn't enough slime-grinding fun for you, not to worry! Its sequel hits Japan in July, and a U.S. release is practically assured. Square Enix has registered a trademark for the subtitle "Hand of the Heavenly Bride," which sounds like *DQ5* to us—finding Ms. Right is a big part of the story.

Mazes of Fate DS

DS • Graffiti

Mazes of Fate for GBA was a first-person RPG whose late arrival guaranteed its obscurity. Luckily, its daunting, complex mazes are slated to return in an upgraded version for DS this fall.

Black Sigit: Blade of the Exiled

DS • Graffiti

The creators of *Black Sigit* must love *Chrono Trigger*—their creation was heavily influenced by Square's time-hopping classic. And it's hard to see that as a bad thing.

Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen

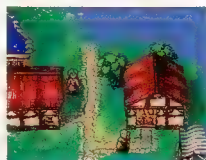
DS • Square Enix • Late 2008

Many gamers regard *Dragon Quest IV* as the high point of the long-running RPG series, despite it being a mere NES game. Sure, the original game suffers from a few limitations of 8-bit design, such as clumsy menus and the need to grind for experience—oh, so much grinding—but it was absolutely revolutionary for its time. Its intriguing chapter-based structure, which the game's new English-language subtitle reflects, makes it seem likely to play well in this new DS incarnation.

DQ4 begins with the tale of a stalwart knight named Ragnar, but once he's completed his mission, the focus switches to a rebellious young princess...and then to an aspiring merchant,

and finally to a pair of sisters. The player follows each of these characters through their own personal quests until they ultimately come together to accompany a young hero whose destiny is to save the world. It's a simple storytelling device, but the compelling characters sell it. *DQ4* has been modernized a bit for DS, with 3D graphics and other niceties, too: Players now have control of formerly computer-controlled party members...and can open doors without a menu command.

Square Enix hasn't confirmed a U.S. release for *DQ4*, but intrepid gaming sleuths have already uncovered its English title and ESRB rating, so it's just a matter of time now. ♣





RUMOR MILL

Gossip Girl can't dish like this **By** *Quartermann*

Resurrected Rumors:

A while back, The Quiett reported that we'd soon see new installments of the classic Tecmo Bowl series for DS and Wii. We had the first info on Tecmo Bowl Kickoff last month.

GAMING SCUTTLEBUTT MIGHT NOT SEEM THAT SCANDALOUS in an age obsessed with pop-culture train wrecks such as Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan, and Amy Winehouse. Games simply aren't that sexy (although a pic of study *Crash Bandicoot* creator Jason Rubin made it into a recent *Star* magazine). But trust us, if there's a Lara Croft nip slip or an upskirt photo of Cream the Rabbit, you'll see it here first.

Revival instinct

It's been over a decade since Rare released a new installment of its combo-crazy *Killer Instinct* fighting franchise (*KI Gold* hit the Nintendo 64 way back in 1996), but fans of rendered werewolves and patriotic tank tops may soon have cause to celebrate. Our spies at Rare claim that work is underway on *Killer Instinct 3D: Death, Destruction, and Doom*, an all-new chapter for Xbox 360 that eschews the previous titles' 2D gameplay. Apparently, the game still looks rather early at this point, but expect it to feature the familiar cast of characters pummeling one another in fully 3D arenas.

Honorable mention

Despite steadily losing market share to Activision's wildly popular *Call of Duty* series, Electronic Arts isn't about to wave the white flag and concede in the military-first-person-shooter war. The next *Medal of Honor* game for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 will take the franchise in a grittier, more realistic direction while abandoning the played-out WWII setting—expect to wage war in modern-day Afghanistan.

Transforming waggie

We've followed rumors of Wii Remote-inspired motion controllers for both PS2 and Xbox 360 during the last year, but now we're hearing

that Sony has something even more ambitious in the works for PS3. This new peripheral allegedly "transforms" into several different configurations, with one perfectly suited for first-person shooters.

Animals are laughing at us

Everyone knows that Nintendo is developing a new *Animal Crossing* for the Wii. Hell, they've already teased Japanese fans with a sly reference to its existence in the AC anime. But don't get too excited just yet—we're hearing that North American gamers will definitely be waiting until 2009 before they get the chance to chop their friends' fruit trees down.

Q-TIPS

- Remember Spec Ops? Neither do we. 2K hopes to revive the former budget brand as a co-op squad-based shooter set in the fashionable Dubai.
- Rumor has it that Sega will finally bring lean-into-it arcade skateboarding classics *Top Skater* and *Ollie King* home for use with the Wii Balance Board.
- Sony plans to launch its on-demand video service for PlayStation Network right around the time of this year's E3 gaming summit, taking place mid-July.

JULY 2008

COMING SOON

Games flying by in July

PRE-START



Soulcalibur IV

PS3/XB360 • Namco Bandai

This highly anticipated fighter is nearly upon us. Featuring online play where you can create a custom character for versus matches, that wonderful new-gen shine, and welcome guests—namely Darth Vader and Yoda (exclusive to PS3 and XB360, respectively)—*Soulcalibur IV* should easily heat up summer for fighting fans.



NCAA Football 09

Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2/PSP • EA Sports

Another year, another football game. This 12th entry in the collegiate football series should see the usual visual upgrades, but with online dynasties and roster sharing, customizable mascot celebrations, and mascot games, *NCAA 09* looks to take a few more incremental steps closer to perfecting the college stadium experience.



N+

PSP/DS • Atari

The immensely popular Flash game-cum-Xbox Live Arcade hit is making its way to the portables, complete with new sets of levels and the ability to create your own. The series is known for its minimalist visuals and deviously difficult platforming stages, mixing fantastic physics with *Lode Runner*-style level design.



Space Chimps

Wii/XB360/PS2/DS • Brash

Based off the computer-animated film that features *Saturday Night Live* funnyman Andy Samberg as the curious chimp hero Ham III, this action-adventure game will have you swinging from vines, jumping off walls, and beating up baddies in colorful alien environments.

MORE JULY RELEASES

- WrestleMania: The Game**
Wii • THQ
- WrestleMania: The Game**
Wii • THQ
- WrestleMania: The Game**
Wii • THQ
- WrestleMania: The Game**
Wii • THQ
- WrestleMania: The Game**
Wii • THQ

(All dates on this page are subject to change)

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 2X NVIDIA® GeForce™ 9600GT 512MB Video Card-SLI™ Enabled
 20x Double Layer DVD±RW Drive, 16x DVD-ROM Drive
 Surround 3D Premium Sound
 GB Ethernet LAN
 600 Watt Surround Sound Speakers
 Logitech Deluxe Keyboard & Optical Mouse
 Free Wireless 802.11g 54Mbps Network Adapter

Color Options

GAMER PALADIN 885MX™



NVIDIA® 750i SLI™ Chipset Dual PCI Express Motherboard
GENUINE Windows® Vista™ Home Premium
 Certified CPU Liquid Cooling System - Overclocking Proof
 GigaByte® Poselidon Gaming Case + 800W SLI™-Certified Power Supply
 Corsair 2GB DDR2-800 Memory
 500GB SATA II 7200RPM Hard Drive
NVIDIA® GeForce™ 9800GTX 512MB Video Card
 20x Double Layer DVD±RW Drive, 16x DVD-ROM Drive
 Surround 3D Premium Sound
 GB Ethernet LAN
 Logitech Deluxe Keyboard & Optical Mouse
 Free Wireless 802.11g 54Mbps Network Adapter

Color Options

GAMER PALADIN 850XZ™



NVIDIA® 780i SLI™ Chipset Dual PCI Express Motherboard
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Bloodbath

It's time for more guts and more glory (and a lot of other stuff, too) in multiplayer **Gears of War 2**

By Dan "Shoe" Hsu







WE DIDN'T EXPECT TO BE ROLLING OUR EYES during the world debut of multiplayer *Gears of War 2*. "It's bigger, better, and more badass," says an enthusiastic Cliff Bleszinski, reiterating the three B-words that were up on a large screen in a conference room in developer Epic Games' Cary, NC-based offices. But can the marketing message be more...marketing? We're sure other companies have spoken those same generic, feel-good words about their sequels—just maybe not out loud to the gaming press and their notebooks and tape-recorders.

And we're sure we've never heard

such clichés out of Bleszinski's mouth. The 33-year-old lead designer on the *Gears* series may be slick (he drives a \$200,000 Lamborghini Gallardo Spyder), charismatic (MTV created a show around his life and his role in the development of *Gears of War*), and PR savvy (he must've done at least 14 hours of interviews over two days for this *Gears 2* event), but he's still got legit geek cred. The guy loves horror movies, *Optimus Prime*, and, without a doubt, videogames (his name once made it into *Nintendo Power* as a *Super Mario Bros.* top scorer, and he made an Apple game called *Where in Panama Is Manuel*

Noriega? on 5 1/4-inch floppy for a high school class).

But if Mr. Legit Geek is going to say stuff like, "It's bigger, better, and more badass," then we're going to have to reality-check this. Thankfully, our day with *Gears 2*, due out this November for the Xbox 360, wasn't all a rah-rah PowerPoint presentation (where, incidentally, Epic also shared with us how many awards they've won and how many bajillion units of *Gears* it that they've sold). We had over six hours of hands-on multiplayer time, so we could see for ourselves whether the game was bigger, or badder, or more badass. >

On the Brink

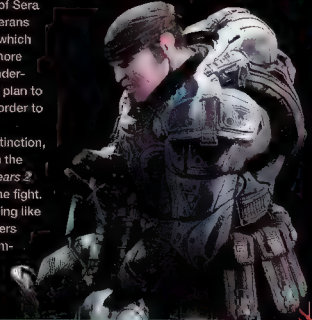
The single-player story so far...

COVER STORY

The first *Gears of War* ends with COG soldiers successfully detonating the Lightmass bomb, which was supposed to exterminate the human-hating Locust, extra-crispy style. Someone must've watched a few hundred thousand sci-fi or horror movies, however, because in true clichéd fashion, you find out that *you didn't get them all*, conveniently setting up a sequel. The monsters regroup, then start burying entire cities on the planet of Sera via massive sinkholes. Surviving Serans last-stand it in the city of Jacinto, which sits on dense bedrock, making it more resistant to enemy attacks from underground... though the Locust have a plan to perforate all the outlying towns in order to sink it as well.

Tired of being on the brink of extinction, the COG decides to go all-in, taking the conflict directly to the Locust in *Gears 2* in order to—dare we say—finish the fight. You don't have to worry about feeling like a coal miner, though—the developers promise less than a third of the campaign will take place in the dark, cavernous maze that makes up the Locust underworld.

In the campaign mode, you'll see new enemy types (including Kantus priests, who can revive Locust comrades, and massive rock worms, which act as moving cover for you and your team), a more emotionally charged storyline (might Dom finally find his long-lost wife?), and huge (and we really mean *huge*) battles with hundreds of enemies on the screen at the same time.



Dead and spectating? Snap a few in-game screenshots and see how you score on the leaderboards.





■ The developers are considering implementing a live, onscreen scoring ticker to show you how much damage you're dealing and how many points you're earning during a match.

Bigger is always better

Yes, *Gears of War 2* is bigger. Not necessarily in terms of individual map acreage—the three stages that we got to play didn't feel larger or smaller than what we were used to. Maybe "more" is the more accurate adjective. More players (support for up to 10 players now). More weapons. More modes (that aren't all cookie-cutter versions of each other, thank god). More maps. And...more. Epic upgraded *Gears'* old 4-versus-4 setup to fit players 1 and 10 (and if you don't have that many friends, we got word that *Gears 2* might offer A.I. bots to fill in the

blanks). The 10-player limit doesn't change the complexion of *Gears'* standard multiplayer game too much, except in Wingman, a new, multi-team 2-versus-2 (versus 2 versus 2, up to five pairs total) mode whose victors are determined by an overall kill goal. Here, you and your partner will share the same character model, since *Gears* doesn't use the entire spectrum for its armor colors (à la *Halo*), so you'll see groups of two Marouses, two Doms, two Locust chieftains, and so on running around the map, attempting to take out the other couples.

Meatflag is another new mode that

is essentially capture the flag, only the flag is a person with a gun and a lot of sass. The loudmouth meatflag is played by one of the Stranded, those lost-soul civilians you run into during the campaign. This A.I. character sits in the middle of the map, shooting anyone who gets near him (he even has his own scores in the postgame report). If you can damage him enough to down him—he can't die, mind you—then you can carry him back to your team's designated scoring area. If he gets free, however (if the opposing team kills you or knocks the meatflag out of your grip), then your team has a certain

Side-by-Side

A look at the old and the new

Gears of War 2 looks better than its predecessor, but it might not be that obvious to the casual observer unless you're doing side-by-side comparisons. That's not a knock on *Gears 2*'s graphical improvements, however—it's more a testament to how good the original *Gears* still looks today.

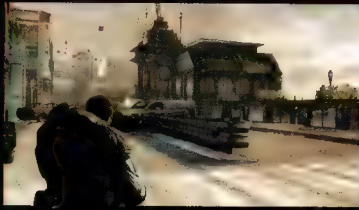
On the right, compare the original Gridlock map from *Gears 1* to its *Gears 2* upgrade. Notice the slight haze in the distance, the moss and overgrowth in the environment, and how much more vividly

lit everything is. What you can't see are papers and debris blowing in the breeze or chunks of the stage fragmenting off from gunfire and explosions.

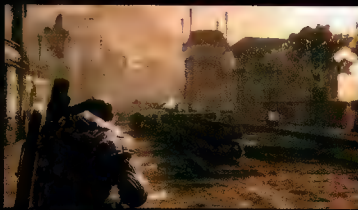
On that note, you won't be able to completely destroy any piece of cover that wasn't meant to be destructible (like the armchairs or couches in the Mansion level from *Gears 1* were). But according to Bleszinski, you will be able to expose a little bit more of that dude squatting behind the concrete barrier by whittling away at its edges with hot lead. "If I'm

behind cover and somebody does chip away at some of it, they do actually have the ability to get a little bit of an angle on me to do a little bit of damage," he says. "It does actually chip away for a couple inches of depth, even though a core mesh will remain underneath to keep the cover intact. We want the game to be about flanking and taking out your enemies, instead of 'How can I destroy this environment as quickly as possible?' and thus having the game devolve into a free-for-all, *Quake*-style deathmatch."

GEARS OF WAR



GEARS OF WAR 2





Take your pick: Choose the more beginner-friendly Lancer (with chain saw bayonet) or the more advanced Hammerburst assault rifle to start the match with.



The developers call this move "chainsodomy." We'll be calling it that, too.

amount of time to get him down and into your possession again before the goal marker moves to another location. Yeah, it's still capture the flag. But things are a lot more frantic and fun when the flag has bite.

The third new mode we got to play is called Guardian, which combines elements from the past: "We really liked Assassination in *Gears 1*," Senior Producer Rod Fergusson says of the original game type where only the designated leader can pick up new guns for himself or the rest of his team. "But it was probably our least-played original mode. Then Annex went out as part of a little

update in *Gears 2* and introduced the notion of respawn: What if we apply that to Assassination?"

So the premise in Guardian is as long as the designated leader is alive, his team can continue to respawn. Clear indicators always point to both leaders, so dull stalemate situations should be kept to a minimum. But this mode is way more intense and exciting than anything *Gears* has offered before. Your team must protect its leader while simultaneously hunting down the opposing side's equivalent, and if you lose yours, it feels like the end of the world (and if you make a comeback

from there, it's all the more thrilling). *Gears of War 2* will have more than these three modes (including Warzone, the standard elimination-style deathmatch), but Epic isn't revealing what they all are at the moment. But all three of the ones we played seemed to work equally well on all three of the maps from our demo: Gridlock returns with its courtyard of rubble and rusted-out husks of old cars, only much prettier (see pg. 63). We didn't play it, but run-down (well, everything's pretty much run-down in this universe) and rainy Subway will make a comeback as well—but that's all as far as returning

Weapons of Bodily Destruction

New ways to turn your opponents into unrecognizable piles of meat

NEW WEAPONS



Scorchers flamethrower

This short-range flamethrower is one of the new additions to the "got to get" class of power weapons that appear only once on a map (similar to the grenade-launching Boom Shots). It turns foes into glowing, charred briquettes of coal and can be made to shoot farther with a perfect active reload (via Gears' minigame-esque reloading system).



Gorgon burst pistol

This pistol has two clips, giving it a greater rate of fire. It shoots in short bursts with each pull of the trigger and is perfect for when your left hand's tied up holding up your "meat shield" (see the flowchart on pg. 67).



Poison grenade

Anyone caught in this grenade's purplish, smothering cloud of death will...well, meet death, if he doesn't get out quickly enough.

Shield

Pick this up and walk around for some bulletproof fun (it's less messy than a meat shield). Your free hand can fire a pistol, and you can plant the shield into the ground to use as a standing piece of cover that you can squat behind. Any exposed body parts are still fair game, though.



UPDATED WEAPONS

Lancer assault rifle

Now when two revved-up chain saw bayonets meet at the same time, the victor is no longer decided by coin-flip chance. Instead, a frantic B button-mashing will determine the winner. It's possible (though improbable) for a tie, in which case the two push off of each other and can go at it again.

You can now chainsaw someone from behind, starting at the ass, between the legs, and moving upward in a body-splitting move the developers (lovingly call "chainsodomy" (or is it "chainsawdomy"?). And good news: Now, during any execution-style animations like chainsawing, the attacker is no longer invulnerable like he was in *Gears 1*. So go ahead and put a few bullets in that chainsodomyist.



Hammerburst assault rifle

Epic tweaked the Locust assault rifle to be better suited for more advanced players. It full-autofires more slowly than the COG Lancer, but is more accurate at longer ranges and does more damage per bullet. You can also fire more quickly by rapidly pulling the trigger ("fanning"), but you'll get more recoil kicback this way, lessening your accuracy.

Boltok pistol

Now fires more quickly after a perfect active reload.

Smoke grenade

These largely unused toys now come packed with extra punch, a concussive blast that temporarily disables nearby players and knocks any shields out of their hands. You can now also stick any of the three grenades (poison, smoke, frag) on walls to act as proximity-mine traps.

What else?

Epic told us that they have plenty of other new armaments to reveal at a later date, including some in the superweapons class (alongside the Hammer of Dawn). We got some hint of a mortar-type weapon along those lines.



■ One of the new maps, Security (left), hides power weapons behind deadly laser fences that will instantly fry you if you don't deactivate them first. In River (right), two tall cottages separated by a bridge hold sniping weapons. We'd call them sniper towers, but they're more like tall, decrepit shacks.



■ Epic hinted at A.I. bots in the multiplayer game. As long as they're smarter than co-op Dom....



■ Hot tip: That glow means the Scorching flamethrower is armed and ready to cook.

maps go. The rest are all new, and the plan is to have plenty of them. "It's looking like over 10 new maps, at least," says Bleszinski.

Badder is always better, too

A lot of new gameplay changes not only make a visceral game even more visceral (thus the "badder" part of the equation here), but they just plain make sense, too. Would-be lumberjacks will have a lot more gut-ripping fun with the Lancer in *Gears 2*, but at the same time, they won't be invulnerable like they were before (see the weapons sidebar on pg. 66). Other new moves like wall hug-

ging, the ability to interrupt doorway "SWAT" turns, being able to crawl to safety while bleeding out, and a ton of new execution styles give the game more realistic combat options.

Some weapons now have "stopping power," which the developers put in specifically to stop the silly antics *Gears 1* players have resorted to. "We had some issues with the way that *Gears* multiplayer was played when it was released into the wild," says Fergusson. "Our favorite weapon, the Lancer, was getting underused, and it became more of a shotgun battle. One of the things we saw people doing a lot was just

charging, evading, and then shotgunning up close. It became a constant shotgun/evasion battle." So in *Gears 2*, if someone's running right at you, a few rounds from an assault rifle or a pistol can slow him down to the point where he'll have to turn away and look for cover or die in his tracks, thus nullifying the old charge/evade/attack tactic. It won't take long for most folks to get used to the idea that dashing toward an armed target is no longer a good idea.

After the initial adjustment period, *Gears 2* players should end up more well-rounded warriors than their *Gears 1* counterparts. In the

Down and Out...or Not

Sadists, take note: Once you down an opponent (by dishing out enough damage without outright killing him), you have many more options with which to finish him off. The victim also has a few options of his own, besides waiting for a teammate to come and rescue him. Follow the flowcharts to see how it all works.

ATTACKER

Gets defender
"down but not out"

Go for an up-close
and glorious kill?

Yes

No

Finish defender
off from a distance
by shooting him (yawn)

Curb stomp (X button)

Foot meets face...skull meets concrete. This head-exploding finishing move is signature Gears, but in *Gears 2*, you first flip the victim around onto his back before the big crunch.

Execution (Y button)

The Y button gives you the fanciest finishing moves, but they're also the riskiest because they can take up to three seconds to complete (that's about two years in sitting-duck time). But these race- (and sometimes weapon-) specific moves are so gruesome, you'll want to try them out. For example, a COG soldier will pulverize his victim's face with his fists, or a Locust will rip off his opponent's arm and beat him with it. Our fave: taking a downed guy's head and placing it on a Torque Bow's blade tip, then using your foot to pop that noggin off.

Grab (A button)

Grab a downed opponent with one hand, using him as a human "meat shield" while shooting a pistol with the other. The victim is considered "dead" by game terms (so he can respawn in modes that allow it), but the body can absorb quite a bit of direct damage before disintegrating into bloody nibblits. You can always end the hostage situation early by breaking his neck (B button) and letting go.

Melee (B button)

This finisher is a quick (half-second) weapon-specific bash. Use the shotgun, for example, as a golf club and tee off on your opponent's head. Or grab the Longshot sniper rifle's barrel with both hands and drive the butt straight down into your victim's skull.

DEFENDER

Goes "down
but not out"

Went down with
a frag grenade
in hand?

Yes

No

Martyrdom (R trigger)

When an enemy steps up to execute you, hit the R trigger to detonate the grenade, taking both of you out in a wet, chunky boom.

Raise your hand (R trigger)

When down on all fours, you can raise one hand to call for help (your "man down" icon will flash on your teammates' screens while you're doing this)—or it can just look like your pathetic little self is begging for mercy when an enemy is about to curb-stomp you.

Crawl (A button)

In *Gears 2*, when you're down, jamming on the A button no longer extends your "bleeding out" period. Better: it lets you slowly crawl around, so you're able to get to safe cover if it's close enough (you will leave a blood trail, though). You'll still eventually bleed out and die (unless a teammate can get to you and save you first), but this huge gameplay improvement cuts down on those moments where an enemy mows you down and keeps on moving until you're kaput, never giving you a chance to get saved to make a comeback.



■ Party time: The game will no longer boot everyone to the menu when the host has to change options, and players can vote for which map they want next.



sequel, some maps' power weapons will rotate in between matches. So where a Longshot sniper rifle used to be a Torque Bow may sit in round two. The general class of offensive hardware will be the same (like those two sniper-style weapons), so you should still have a basic idea of what you're getting into without it being too predictable. And the new Achievements will help make sure players aren't running around like jackasses, trying to complete their "Kill 100 enemies with chain saw gun/grenade tag/curb stomp," etc., goals. Now the game will only count one of those specific kills per

round toward that corresponding Achievement in order to encourage everyone to use different weapons. Of course, you can't be "badder" if you're dead and spectating from the afterlife sidelines. The new, dynamic battle cam, however, lets you study the remaining players in new ways. You can still track individuals with the traditional "follow cam." You can also observe parts of the map from a bird's-eye perspective, only the camera will automatically shift around, giving you a cinematic view of the action. Gears 2 also offers a completely free-floating, user-controlled "ghost

We asked our readers on our message boards (boards.1UP.com) if they had any questions for developer Epic Games. They did. So we posed them to Lead Designer Cliff Bleszinski....

EGM: "Zeouterfimits" asks how you're planning on supporting *Gears 2*, since *Gears 1* was riddled with exploits.

Cliff Bleszinski: We actually supported the game as far as tweaking and patching up a lot of those exploits. Grenade tagging being way too easy was my f***-up, and I apologize for that one. It was initially set to be way too easy, and we ended up patching that. We also tweaked the "rookie run" and some weapons....

You do your best job at balancing the game before it hits store shelves, but things can slip through. That's what title updates are for.

EGM: "Old School Gamer" wants to know if the hosting problems are going to be fixed.

CB: We're doing a tremendous amount of optimizing of the Net code to make sure that only the crucial data that needs to be sent is sent, so we have the smoothest online performance possible. There are other things we're doing as far as off-loading the voice server in the games, so that one [system] isn't dealing with having to play all those complaints and curses that come over Xbox Live through a narrow bandwidth. This is very much at the forefront of my concerns, as well as the programming team's.

EGM: Can you put a percentage on the increase in performance here?

CB: Well, being seven months from [release], a lot of the optimizations will come online in the last few months. So I would wager that it would be better—I would say at least 30 percent better, if not more.

EGM: Have you ever considered using dedicated servers to help offset that host advantage?

CB: We considered it at one point, but... we want every player who has a copy of the game to be playing with somebody else instead of just leaving a PC or a 360 up in the background to [host games].

EGM: But can't you guys host dedicated servers yourselves?

CB: We could consider that, but it's one of those cans of worms that we really don't want to get into. We're full up with every single last body that we have

You Want to Know

Our readers grill the maker of Gears of War

getting ready to ship this product and dealing with *Unreal Tournament 360* and everything else that's going on here.

EGM: "Bright" asks if Epic will "fight the power" and give us future downloadable maps for free from day one.

CB: In *Gears 1*, we had a multiplayer map pack that was sponsored by the Discovery Channel, and that was free for download. Some of our other map packs, we did charge a fee for a certain duration, and then after that they became free—it's kind of this early-adopter tax. But if gamers were willing to wait a couple of months, they could absolutely get them for free... and that's the model that we generally tend to follow.

EGM: But you guys have always been vocal about supporting the community and putting out content for free. Is it an issue working with Microsoft where you're not in total control of everything?

CB: Well, we are the ones who make the call as far as what goes out with our games. And Microsoft has been an amazing partner. That said, we do have to keep the lights on here. The guys still need to feed their kids. We are very much a business, and we do want to do well in this business. So we will make every attempt to make as much free stuff available to the gamer as possible, as we've proven in the past.

EGM: "AlchemistX" wants to know if Xbox 360 owners are going to be f---ed out of levels and bosses again when you do the inevitable PC port. He wants to know because, if so, then he's not buying *Gears of War 2*.

CB: That's a valid question. I can tell you that there are things in *Gears 2* that make the levels in *Gears 1* PC look like a day at the beach. The product, as it ships, will very, very much be worth the price that it ends up costing. And we haven't said anything about a PC version yet!

EGM: "BauerStyle" asks if you ever plan on releasing the [PC-only] Brumak chapter for 360.

CB: That's not gonna happen.

EGM: Why not?

CB: Because you will be up to your ears in so many f---ing Brumaks in *Gears 2* that you won't know what to do with them.

EGM: But that's several months away....

CB: I think it's OK for certain gamers to miss the game for a little while [to get excited about a sequel]. If we do that episodic-content thing and continue to release single-player expansion packs... people will just tune out the news about a game after a while if they keep hearing about it every week.

EGM: "Socialgamer" brought up *Gears of War* introducing the chain saw bayonet and wants to know what new weapon combo *Gears 2* will introduce.

CB: Well, that's a funny thing. We set down to talk about a lot of the new weapons that we put in *Gears 2*, and we had all these goofy ideas like, "Let's put a sander on a blender!" And it all just felt cheesy, you know? We feel like, with the Lancer... the bayonet is our lightsaber. We feel like anything else that tries to do that is just going to detract from the coolness of the chain saw.

I think it's possible. There's a fine line between weapons that are unique and cool, and weapons that are just gimmicky for gimmick's sake. I think you just need to toe that line and be very careful. Otherwise, players can smell when something's just cheesy and gimmicky, right?

EGM: But the Lancer...if somebody told you they were going to put a chain saw at the end of an assault rifle...that's totally gimmicky!

CB: When I was pitching that to the other leads, they said, "Well, is that really going to be the thing that separates the game?" I said, "Well, that sounds pretty damn cool, and I want to see somebody getting out in half with that." It always seemed like a natural evolution of that weapon. If you look at some of the things we're doing with, for instance, a flamethrower that you can then active-reload and shoot farther, a burst pistol with two clips that you can take hostages with, we're taking other elements of original shooter weapons and game design and kind of twisting it in the *Gears* universe.

EGM: "Eski914" wants to know if we'll get to see who or what the Queen is, is she really a Locust?

CB: We've never really confirmed or denied who that character is, the one that speaks in the voiceovers. Certain mysteries remain to be revealed in *Gears 2*.

EGM: We just know her as the one who scolds you if you lose in multiplayer playing as the Locust.

CB: Yeah, she doesn't like failure, who ever this person is.

EGM: "Invasion01" has a personal question: What kind of styling gel do you use?

CB: I think it's some sort of Redken stuff... just some sort of hair goo. It's definitely not semon.

EGM: "Nystofmind23" is curious if there will be four-player co-op.

CB: *Gears 2*, I have said from the get-go, will be "bigger, better, and more badass." The co-op will be "bigger, better, and more badass." How it is remains to be announced.

EGM: From "The Diabolical": With all the features that Bungie put into *Halo 3*, like recording your matches, and the perks that Infinity Ward put into *Call of Duty 4*, will *Gears of War 2* have anything similar?

CB: From the get-go, we're going to have screenshot capture, which will then be uploaded to a website where people can rank and vote on and share them. Achievement tracking is our way of doing a kind of meta RPG-style game.

As far as the RPG wrapper that allows you to get a new scope and whatnot, that's really not the kind of game we're playing. We want players to be focused on different ways that they can execute other players, as well as the sheer variety of maps and game types for our multiplayer set.

There's also a couple of things we haven't revealed yet that you'll see and hear about later this summer.

EGM: One more question from "MyMand." There's an alligator and a crocodile. Would you rather have the alligator bite you or the crocodile? He says the answer to this will dictate whether Canada buys *Gears of War 2*.

CB: Um...let's see. I have to go with the crocodile. I think the crocodile has a far friendlier smile and looks like it would hurt less.

EGM: Do you have any idea what that question means?

CB: I have absolutely no idea. But can I ask you a quick question?

EGM: Sure.

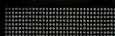
CB: Are there stairs in your house?

EGM: Uh...yeah.

CB: OK. That wasn't right. Haaah! Gotcha. That's a Something Awful reference....



Cliff Bleszinski: Not quite as beefy as Marcus Fenix.





■ The fastest button masher will win this chain saw duel.

team." No big deal, you might say, but Epic's letting you have some fun with this. "We're going to have this photo mode [like *Pokémon Snap* or *Dead Rising*]," says Ferguson. "When you press the A button, it shows you your screenshot and automatically scores it based on how many particle effects are going off, how close the characters are to the center of the screen, is anybody bleeding, is there an execution going on..." To keep this off-action action competitive, the game will automatically upload your screenshot and score to a website leaderboard, so you can compare your wartime photojournalism skills to other players. We also suspect *Gears 2* will have

some sort of video-capture mode (like the one seen in *Halo 3*). No one at Epic confirmed or denied this, but we did see status messages saying "Watching a video" instead of "Playing *Gears of War 2*" in our Xbox Live players list during our demo. Simple placeholder text (the game is still in development; after all) or a hint at a new feature to come?

More badass

We probably would've been satisfied with more weapons, maps, and (especially) modes for multiplayer *Gears of War 2*. But the gameplay tweaks may be the stars here. A different animation here, a new move there... Epic's making it difficult for

us to go back to the old game (just being able to crawl is a huge deal).

So is *Gears 2* bigger? Definitely. In the features department, yes. Badder? The game is more violent, so...check. And more badass? Yeah, we'll have to give that to the 33-year-old Lamborghini-driving geek. "We're feeling really good that we're going to be delivering something incredibly special," says Bleszinski. "We're looking forward to chainsawing the hell out of you guys." **A+**



Epic Extras: Make sure to check out EGM.1UP.com for even more on *Gears of War 2*'s multiplayer, including additional hands-on impressions and video footage in late June.



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REVIEWS

➤ sneaky snakes, bodacious blocks, fitness rocks, and a boy from hell

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BOOM BLOX (GAME OF THE MONTH)



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THIS MONTH IN REVIEWS

Casual is the New Hardcore

It's Nintendo's word—we just live in it

WHERE I COME FROM—EGM's now-defunct sister pub, *Games for Windows: The Official Magazine*—the idea of a "casual" game dominating a platform's collective mindshare isn't all that new (see: *Bejeweled*, etc.). With that in mind, it's interesting to observe the reaction to a lot of what Nintendo and other developers have focused on with the Wii. *Wii Fit*'s a smashing success overseas, and with the attention it's received here U.S. for being such an unconventional "game," I'd say it's an easy sell for Nintendo's loyal new audience of stay-at-home moms and bored senior citizens.

And *Boom Blox* sure came out of nowhere, didn't it? Again, I'm not shocked that a game centering on the manipulation of colorful shapes would set the world on fire, but it's great to see the Wii tap so effectively (as our trio of rave reviews shows) into that rare sort of *Tetris* magic. Huzzah!

—Ryan Scott, Exec. Editor, Reviews

HOW WE RATE

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

GRADES AND AWARDS

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

Awards: We dole out awards to games based on their grades. Platinum: all A+s; Gold: All A-s and better; Silver: Nothing lower than a B. Game of the Month goes to the highest-rated game with unanimously "Good" grades, and Shame of the Month is the reverse. Simple.



**METAL GEAR SOLID 4:
GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS**

PAGE
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Asps—very
dangerousPAGE
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A2: Grind
with mePAGE
83**Agent**
Clank: The
solo robo

THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

A few review monkeys short of a barrel



James "Milkman" Mielke

Editor-in-Chief

Milky spent this month catching up on *Advance Wars* (fun!), grinding through *FF Tactics 2*, and cleaning up the mean streets of Shibuya in *The World Ends with You* (emo).

Now Playing: *Advance Wars: Days of Ruin*, *GTA4*
Blog: milkman.1UP.com



Greg Ford

Managing Editor

Ford realized that playing games can affect real life. After terrorizing the world of *GTA4* with the in-game bat, he banged out three hits in his next softball game. Uh oh, how are the politicians gonna spin that one?

Now Playing: *GTA4*, *Space Invaders Extreme*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



Crispin Boyer

Senior Executive Editor

Now that former *EGM* Editor-in-Chief Dan Hsu has exited the building, Crispin is officially the old-timer on staff. So look for him riding the bus for free or at the local dinner buffet at 4:30 p.m. Also, get off his lawn. Now!

Now Playing: *GTA4*, *Gears of War*, *Condemned 2: Bloodshot*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com



Ryan Scott

Executive Editor, Reviews

The 1UP Network's newly crowned reviews overlord spent the past month juggling arcane three-man assignment spreadsheets, fending off the worst flu virus ever, and farming *Team Fortress 2* Achievements.

Now Playing: *Team Fortress 2* (PC), *Mario Kart Wii*
Blog: gfwryan.1UP.com



Shane Bettenhausen

Executive Editor, News

Shane assumed he'd be a suitable foe for those dastardly space invaders, as they're both products of the late '70s. Unfortunately, their extreme new methods of torture prevailed.

Now Playing: *Space Invaders Extreme*, *GTA4*, *Soulcalibur IV*, *Super Valls IV*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



Sam Kennedy

Site/Editorial Director

Sam's read *EGM* since the early '90s, and he's worked on it directly (and indirectly) for the past nine years. So, when Dan "Shoe" Hsu decided to call it quits, Sam took his job...and then his couch!

Now Playing: *Echochrome*, *GTA4*, *Crisis Core: FFVII*
Blog: capnsmak.1UP.com



Jennifer Tsao

Group Managing Editor

Jen's been looking forward to *Wii Fit* for months, and now that she's had a chance to give it a whirl, she's...well...stunned to report that during her time with the fitness game, she put on five pounds. She's shocked! What happened, Nintendo? **Now Playing:** *Boom Blox*

Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



Matt Leone

Senior Executive Editor

As one of the few people in the office to not have a desk lined with action figures and *Star Wars* crap, Matt was confused this month when he moved to an office with way too much space for his nothing.

Now Playing: *Metal Gear Solid 4*, *Hail to the Chimp*
Blog: bigolaf.1UP.com



Nick Suttner

Associate Editor, Reviews

Nick drove down to the Monterey Bay Aquarium this month with Alice (Reviews) and Anthony (MyCheats). Nick liked the jellyfish and octopus. A lot. And now he yearns for a simpler life under the sea.

Now Playing: *Lost Cities*, *Boom Blox*, *Echochrome*, *GTA4*
Blog: rockskidaudio.1UP.com



Garnett Lee

Executive Editor, Previews

With friends playing *GTA4* on both consoles, Garnett looked into cloning himself so he could exist in both worlds simultaneously. That proved cost-prohibitive, so he had a divorce lawyer draw up a visitation schedule instead.

Now Playing: *GTA4* (duh)
Blog: gl4.1UP.com

Also on deck...

Sean Molloy
Senior Executive Editor, PC Games

Jeremy Parish
Senior Editor, Expanded Content

Michael Donahoe
Senior Writer

Andrew Pfister
Producer, Podcasts

Alice Liang
Associate Editor, Previews

Tyler Barber
Staff Reviewer

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John Davison
Senior Writer

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Andrew Fitch
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Staff Reviewer

Anthony Gallegos
Staff Reviewer

Gord Gobie
Staff Reviewer

Richard Li
Staff Reviewer

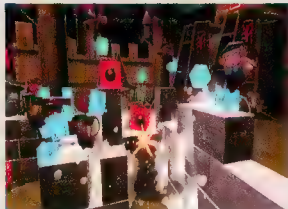
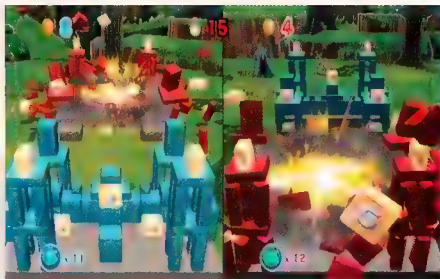
Eric Neigher
Staff Reviewer

Mike Nelson
Staff Reviewer



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

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



Explosive games usually don't generate interest in Boom Blox.

Wii

BOOM BLOX

■ Publisher: EA Games ■ Developer: EA Los Angeles ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone



The Good: Fun and addictive for all ages, tons to do, powerful level editor
The Bad: Not for the shaky-handed
Beats the Pants Off Of: Jenga

An explosively good time

➔ **NICK:** I've been waiting to be able to say something like this for a year and a half. If this is the future of casual gaming, motion controls, and Wii, count me in. *Boom Blox* may not be the best Wii game, depending on your proclivities, but it's definitely the best use of the Wii yet. It's immensely accessible, wonderfully tactile, and stands as one of the best uses of gaming in a 3D space.

Boom Blox employs dozens of different variants on box-stacking, target-smacking, and tower-dismantling, put to use in several hundred inspired puzzle setups. Whether you're tossing balls to knock over point blocks, carefully sliding individual pieces out from a larger stack—Jenga style—or setting off elaborate, Rubé

Goldberg-esque chain reactions, the motion controls are subtle, responsive, and impeccably precise. The medal system provides a challenge for everyone, the multiplayer is excellent, and you can make your own levels and share them online. *Buy this game.*

➔ **JENNIFER:** *Boom Blox* hit me over the head like a ton of virtual bricks—I didn't even know it was happening. As I grumpily played the tutorial, I couldn't get the hang of the throwing motion or the Wii-mote's seeming oversensitivity. Next thing I knew, hours had passed. Only when I heard myself severely trash-talking with my multiplayer buddies (of whom several are confirmed Wii haters) did I realize it was 2 in the morning, my throwing

arm was sore, and I had a new far-and-away favorite party game.

➔ **SHANE:** While *Boom Blox* might be the fruitiest thing to spring from the fertile mind of director Steven Spielberg since *The Terminal*, I'm certainly glad for it. Not since *Wii Sports* has a game felt as naturally suited to the console's specific bent—tossing balls at blocks with your Wii-mote feels stunningly realistic, as the game accurately reflects the speed of your throw. The vast single-player offerings provide hours of addictive challenge, but *Boom Blox's* multiplayer block-busting (offline only) handily steals the show. Listen up, adults: Don't let the kiddie trappings fool you—this is your new go-to party game. 🎮



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Side ways: Leg Lift

Reps 6/10



▶ [Spartan workout room, grayscale](#)
 ▶ [Instructor—could \(I think\) look any less exciting!](#)



Wii

WII FIT

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



The Good: Balance Board's a decent controller

The Bad: Very limited multiplayer
 For an Upper-Body Workout, Play: Boom! Box

Power Pad 2008

▶ **JENNIFER:** *Wii Fit*'s doing something right. A couple of days into the game's workout regimen, I didn't want to keep playing—it *is* exercise, after all. But I persevered, and eventually I improved at the minigames, felt physically challenged on some exercises, and generally felt better after racking up 15 or 30 minutes a day of Wii fitness. But I never really *wanted* to play. Which, I suppose, is the rule of exercise—it's exhausting, but keep it up, and you'll feel great at all other times of the day.

That's mostly how *Wii Fit* is. The yoga and strength training aren't really even games; you just follow along with a trainer, working out in the world's most lifeless, depressing gym. The aerobic and balance minigames

(dancing, skiing, hula-hooping, etc.) are much more fun and lively. All activities award credits, which unlock more exercises and minigames. You can also weigh yourself each day and test your core muscles to gauge overall progress. This structure is good, but I wanted more of it—more guidance, more demands. Instead, you have complete freedom to choose what you want to do.

Now, remember: This is a workout game. While I did self-motivate on plenty of challenging activities (running in place, lunges), I found myself doing lots of simple yoga poses and rudimentary calisthenics to unlock more stuff with minimal effort. I'd hoped an exercise videogame would make fitness more fun. But in this regard, *Wii*

Fit—despite its innovations—falls just a little bit short.

▶ **RYAN:** I'm no fitness expert, but I don't see *Wii Fit* supplanting gyms or aerobic instructors anytime soon. Not that it's bad—I find the various yoga poses and strength-building exercises to be a fair workout. But that's just it: *Wii Fit* is a fitness program for people (like me) who don't know the first thing about fitness. While I suppose any exercise is better than no exercise, it sometimes feels strange to hear my onscreen instructor lavish praise upon me when I'm not even sure if I'm stretching quite far enough or in quite the right way. Given *Wii Fit*'s hefty \$90 price tag, I'd expect less uncertainty from my workout.

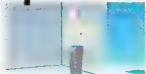


Exercise in Futility

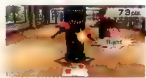
Wii Fit's most pointless minigames



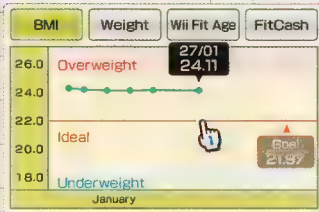
JENNIFER: For the devoted sloth who needs desperate measures to build up fit credits, deep breathing is your go-to exercise. Breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out, repeat! Bonus: It can be performed while holding beer, tapioca pudding, and other high-caloric food items—the Balance Board is none the wiser.



RYAN: I still have no clue what the boxing minigame wants from me. It's some combination of stepping right and left, punching with the Wii-mote, and... pushing buttons, I think. What the hell?



ALICE: The step-aerobics minigame is a prime example of why cardio is *Wii Fit's* weakest link. Though hula-hooping or jogging in place seem silly, at least those minigames can make you break a sweat if you play long enough. But *Dance Dance Revolution* this minigame isn't—it's more like line dancing for 90-year-olds.



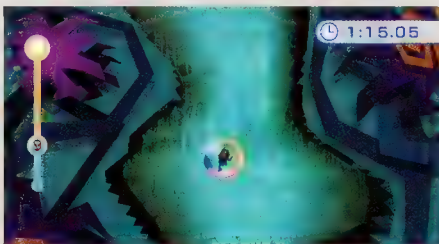
Back

1 month

Dance



Very stable. Well done!



Still, if you're a couch potato looking to add a smidgen of physical activity to your day, you can consider *Wii Fit* a decent gateway drug. The accompanying Balance Board peripheral is heavy, sturdy, and responsive—and, if nothing else, the game couples positive encouragement with a semi-

accurate snapshot of your day-to-day weight gain/loss trends.

✦ **ALICE:** I admit it: My thighs were sufficiently sore the day after my first Wii-enabled fitness session. It was quite appalling to realize that even the initially available batch of lifts, twists,

and balancing activities proved taxing. But given how frail and out of shape I am, your mileage may vary. Certainly, those motivated individuals already dedicated to a healthy lifestyle—or, at the very least, subscribing to some sort of exercise regimen—will find *Wii Fit* more of a novel means to fitness maintenance than a replacement for a true-blue fitness plan.

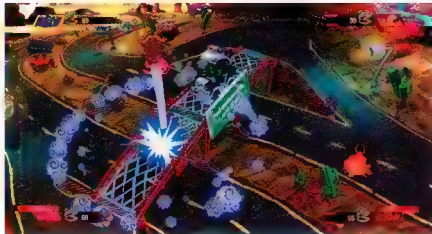
But I'm not one of those people. This is almost perfect for my personal needs—building up core strength and working on balance and weight distribution. It's too bad that *Wii Fit* misses out on tapping that addictive goal-reaching hook we gamers fall prey to—it gives you absolutely no indication as to when a new activity will be unlocked, and it offers no structured exercise plan to help you meet your specific goals. 🐌



Level 4

30

Just call it *Marble Madness 2006*: leaning left and right to sink balls into holes is just as frustrating.



PS3/XB360

HAIL TO THE CHIMP

■ Publisher: Gamecock ■ Developer: Wideload
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen

When hippos and armadillos attack

➔ **MATT:** Any game that mixes animal politics with tournament fighting and a fictional cable news channel to create an assortment of wacky minigames better be funny—otherwise, bad things happen. So I'm glad that *Hail to the Chimp* has a good personality; between collecting votes and battling over fun, politically themed objectives (sling mud on opponents' signs or avoid bombs in a political minefield), you unlock lighthearted video clips of candidate interviews and commercials. They're not all hilarious, but the hit rate is pretty good for this kind of thing. As I write this, I have *Chimp* running in the background just to hear news anchor Woodchuck Chumley's ongoing menu screen chatter, which is something I've never been able to say about a game before. I wish the single-player mode offered more to do—since it's just multiplayer with bots—and more to play/less to watch in general, but a \$40 price helps.

➔ **CRISPIN:** Matt's comment about the hilarity hit rate being pretty good is, well, pretty generous. I groaned more than I guffawed at the unlockable video clips. In fact, the entire game's political theme feels forced and is about three puns away from complete nonsense. But the actual multiplayer game modes are both funny and often chaotic fun, with mad scrambles to collect clams (votes, in *Chimp* parlance) while teaming up or backstabbing at just the right moments. Still, I'm not sure who this game was made for. It's too kiddie for adults and too political and Teen-rated for little kids.

➔ **NICK:** You're both *partially* wrong. Matt's right about the writing and humor being mostly worthwhile—the commercial jingle for “Grass!” will live in your head for days—but I'm equally unsure who *Chimp*'s audience is. It's a bit too late to parody the current administration, but it feels weirdly uncalled for without a specific target. The game's definitely unique, though, and reminds me fondly of the 1980 animated Olympic spoof *Animlympics*. If only it featured more varied game types—instead of a dozen different ways of spinning the clam-collecting battles—I could get behind this one.

The Good: Bizarre concept works, great art style
The Bad: Basic single-player mode
Chimps: Not included



PS3/XB360

DRAGON BALL Z: BURST LIMIT

■ Publisher: Atari ■ Developer: Dimps
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

New name, same fighter

➔ **ANTHONY:** *Dragon Ball Z: Burst Limit*, the latest fighter set in the DBZ universe, is unsurprisingly a fans-only affair. Multiplayer is the title's biggest strength (go Piccolo!), as the single-player element—though substantial—features fights that range from far too easy to frustratingly difficult. While it's still fun, the story and characters are so poorly fleshed out that it's unlikely to appeal to anyone except hardcore fans.

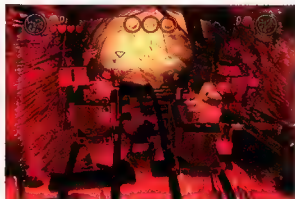
And no matter how much you love DBZ, you'll be disappointed by how closely *Burst Limit* echoes last generation's DBZ: *Budokai* series. The combat and story missions are basically repurposed from older games and given new names and faces—the “Drama Pieces” (nonskippable cut-scenes that randomly occur during each battle) are the only major addition. Goku and the gang never looked so good, but it would have been nice to see some new content—I'm getting tired of the same old story arcs.

➔ **RICHARD:** “Just one more game,” I said after losing to Anthony in a close match. As one match turned into 10, I yearned for more action in the beautifully rendered world. While the combat mechanics feel dated, the visuals vastly improve on *Burst Limit*'s predecessors. Unlike Anthony, I enjoyed the short stories (I felt that previous DBZ games were bloated by excessive narrative)—but the Drama Pieces break the momentum of matches and become a distraction. Get rid of the drama, though, and *Burst Limit* becomes a delight.

➔ **MILKMAN:** Unlike young Anthony, I don't have any problem with the repurposed plot since the story is 20 years old anyway (*all of Dragon Ball* is repurposed at this point). *Burst Limit* is a surprisingly solid fighter, easily on par with the best *Naruto* offerings. It may not be dramatically different than what's come before, but it's a good-looking game that's fast and fun, with plenty of technique and versatility embedded in the engine—making it (as Richard says) worth returning for “just one more match” over and over again. It's an excellent game for *DBZ* fans that does the license proper justice.

The Good: Lots of fan service, accessible battle mechanics
The Bad: Little innovation from the previous DBZ fighters
Here's an Idea: Where's our Buu saga?





PS3/XB360

LEGO INDIANA JONES: THE ORIGINAL ADVENTURES

■ Publisher: LucasArts ■ Developer: Traveller's Tales
■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

It's not the years, honey—it's the number of blocks

➔ **RYAN:** Everyone's favorite treasure hunter swings back into action in this Lego-fied re-creation of the titular film trilogy. Like the two *Lego Star Wars* games before it, *Lego Indiana Jones* mixes button-mashing action and environmental puzzles, putting you (alongside a friend or A.I. teammate) in the blocky shoes of Indy and his supporting cast and stringing the story along with cute cut-scenes. Oddly enough, the three campaigns reflect the *Indy* flicks' relative quality: You get the excellent *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (the Cairo street fight and Well of Souls levels feature excellent puzzles), the lighthearted *Last Crusade* (some overly frustrating brainteasers with a standout Grail Temple level), and the love-it-or-hate-it *Temple of Doom* (you might pull your hair out here). The game doesn't muck with the established formula—nor does it need to.

➔ **ALICE:** While I agree that Indy's outing into the *Lego* world is similar to the *Lego Star Wars* games at its core, the

two franchised series have distinct differences. The immediately satisfying break-everything and co-op shenanigans are, as always, part of the package, but it's unfortunately the smaller canonical concessions that make the journey through the three films a somewhat rocky mine-cart ride. Being able to switch characters over long distances and stickier money are welcome changes—having short-range fists and your whip while enemies have guns is not. Prepare for some frustrating deaths.

➔ **MICHAEL:** *Lego Indiana Jones* may not be gaming's Holy Grail, but don't ignore this entertaining artifact. Yes, the game is made for little whippersnappers. And, yes, it's a cinch to complete. But at least playing through this plastic-filled adventure is better than all of the other schlocky licensed kiddie games out there. Like *Lego Star Wars*, though, it's way more fun to treasure hunt with a friend (your computer-controlled pals are mostly klutzes), so partner up before you hop on the globe-trotting red line that tracks Indy's progress.

📺 *Belloq and Mola Ram getting you down? Hit up our [Lego Indy SuperGuide](#) at [EGM.1UP.com](#).*

The Good: Fun, humorous *Lego* re-creation of Indy's adventures
The Bad: Some puzzle solutions are a little too obscure
Best Special Move: Diva Willie Scott's glass-shattering shriek

THE VERDICTS

RYAN
B
GOOD

ALICE
B
GOOD

MICHAEL
B
GOOD



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PS3/XB360

HELLBOY: THE SCIENCE OF EVIL

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Krome
■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen



What the hell happened here?

→ **TYLER:** Developer Krome nails the look and tone of the *Hellboy* comics in this third-person brawler, but they stumble—and sometimes fall flat on their face—in several crucial aspects of the combat. The action focuses on Hellboy's signature giant forearm's ability to hurl Nazis, zombies, and Nazi zombies into each other. The trouble is that it doesn't work half of the time. *Science* is also too easy, and the emphasis on two-player co-op (online or spitscreen) only makes it easier. And though it's cool that the alternate co-op characters feature different skills, they're significantly weaker than Hellboy. The fluid animation and visual effects impress, foreground and backgrounds blur and sharpen according to your targets, combos are graceful,

and the Samaritan (Hellboy's trusty revolver) is visceral in sound and feel. Brand loyalty saves *Science* from eternal hellfire, but broken combat is the devil's work.

→ **G. FORD:** I'm not sure if Tyler's a hellspawn apologist or what, but he's too generous. The problem isn't that the game's easy—it's empty. As in, you'll find a gaping void where you'd typically find decent visuals (sorry, Tyler), creative enemies, clear objectives, and grabs that consistently connect. Sure, it's nice to have Ron Perlman reprise the titular role, but what's the point if his delivery of such winning lines as "Boom!" and "Ugly alert!" lack excitement? For a licensed brawler, *Science* does the minimum.

→ **GORD:** Cut-scenes that can't be cut. Third-person cameras that too often allow pertinent action to fade away into distant scenery. A frustrating visual and practical ambiguity when interacting with objects and enemies. Though *Science* successfully conveys a sense of sheer physical exertion and certainly delivers enough basic moves, smackdown combos, and graveyard-centric exploration for genre disciples, it ultimately bears multiple hallmarks (hellmarks?) of slipshod gamemaking. That its online component is limited to a linear and moderately laggy co-op mode—and therefore feels even more ponderous than the single-player game—does little to spirit this comic book tie-in from gaming purgatory.



The Good: Hellboy's gun is pretty cool
The Bad: The rest of the game really isn't
Ron Perlman: Totally freakin' awesome... just not when he's stuck in a bad game



PlayStation 3

GRAN TURISMO 5: PROLOGUE

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Polyphony
■ Players: 1-16 ■ ESRB: Everyone



Good: Looks great, drives better
Bad: Online racing lacks options and falls prey to abuse
Promised Patch: Voice chat and racing with friends

A high-performance test-drive at a luxury price

→ **GARNETT:** For a series defined by its encyclopedic collection of cars, exactly re-created racetracks, and realistic driving experience, each new version of *Gran Turismo* takes longer and longer to develop. The \$40 *Prologue* intends to bridge the gap before 5 proper; while it's less than what we've grown to expect from the "full" game, it offers more cars, tracks, and features than a mere demo. Its core markedly improves again: The detail in the driver's-seat view alone amazes me, and the sensation of controlling a car comes through more naturally than ever before.

I'd love to give it a proper workout against real people, but the immature online racing mode comes up lacking, as the other reviewers will explain.

While I dig the GT TV feature, which lets me watch car programs and races, I'd gladly trade it for the ability to create my own games and invite my friends to them.

→ **MIKE N:** I say *Prologue* is a demo. It lacks enough tuning options to keep the hardcore gearheads interested, doesn't have enough content for the casual racing fan, and—as noted—the online options are elementary. In a "gen" where multiplayer features are becoming very relevant to a game's longevity, *Prologue* manages to feel half-century. Offline, only two of the six tracks (Fuji and Suzuka) offer a real challenge against some very impressive A.I. opponents. It's still a great racing simulator if you want to be a

beta tester. Otherwise, wait until the real GT5 arrives.

→ **JOHN:** Let's hope the new downloadable features for *Prologue* come soon (and cheap—preferably free). Garnett is too kind to the online action, as the lack of private races or in-game chat mean that it's little more than a curio right now. For the game to evolve in the way Polyphony President Kazunori Yamauchi declares it will in the bonus video content, this stuff just can't come soon enough. That said, I still really like the single-player game. Playing the more forgiving and slide-happy "standard" mode evokes a similar gameplay feel to *Project Gotham Racing*, which was quite unexpected.



Xbox 360



DS

OPERATION DARKNESS

■ Publisher: Atlus ■ Developer: Success
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Mature

Show us the light

➔ **MICHAEL:** When I first set my eyes on World War II horror strategy-role-playing game *Operation Darkness*, I couldn't help but smile. And laugh. Mostly laugh, since it features one of the most unintentionally funny videogame plots involving vampire Nazis (sorry, *BloodRayne*, but even your sucky setup can't beat this).

Once you get over the fact that Hitler was apparently in cahoots with a bunch of bloodsuckers (they didn't teach you that in school, kiddos!), you're left with a fairly primitive turn-based strategy game. It's actually pretty darn fun, but the completely awful camera and primitive PlayStation 2-quality visuals drain the life out of *Darkness*. Even online co-op, the one feature that actually justifies the game's presence on the 360, is about as fun as waiting to get your blood drawn. So unless you fancy a hammy feast, turn the lights off and leave the room.

➔ **A. FITCH:** *Darkness* badly botches what a horror-loving history buff like myself should've lapped up: It turns a bloody conflict featuring anime-styled SAS werewolves into an exercise in tedium. The core game, a WWII-themed take on *Fire Emblem*, has potential...but the horribly slow pacing, confusing interface, and too-close camera combine to make waging this war as clunky as a Sherman tank. Outside of combat, the endless loading screens, unskippable cut-scenes, and pretentious, ham-fisted storytelling (who the hell takes vampiric SS officers *seriously*?) severely tried my patience. *OD* isn't even so bad it's good...it's just bad.

➔ **DAVID:** Agreed—*Darkness* takes a quirky concept and sucks all the life out of it. The characters are one-dimensional, which goes right in line with them having only two or three frames of animation during the often lengthy and unskippable cut-scenes. As Fitch says, the camera and controls continually get in the way of enjoying the strategic elements of the game. If you can handle inelegant controls, graphics, and story, and a text-heavy menu system, this might hold some appeal. Otherwise, avoid it like lycanthropy.



The Good: Wacky story, cover system
The Bad: Terrible camera
Wolfman's Got: 'Nades

ETRIAN ODYSSEY II: HEROES OF LAGAARD

■ Publisher: Atlus ■ Developer: Atlus
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

An ode to the old school

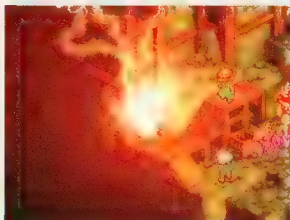
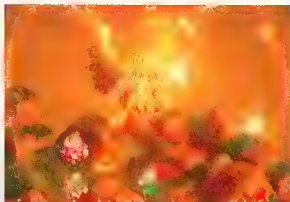
➔ **A. FITCH:** I spent much of last summer entrenched in the original *Etrian Odyssey*, Atlus' loving tribute to the hardest of hardcore classic dungeon crawlers, so forgive me if I ventured into *Heroes of Lagaard* with a bit of ill-advised hubris. Like the first game, *EO2*'s starter mission tasks the player with mapping the first floor of a seemingly interminable labyrinth—but that's where the similarities end. As did my hubris once fang-bearing caterpillars summarily dispatched three-fifths of my party. I staggered back toward the exit, dragging three of my comrades' corpses...only to realize that in my rush to escape, I hadn't actually mapped the necessary portion of the dungeon—and the exit was now off-limits until I'd finished my quest. And that's just one of many examples of how (despite recycling sprites, backgrounds, and classes from the original game) *EO2* manages to keep things fresh: Just when you think you have the answers, it changes the questions.

➔ **JEREMY:** This sequel feels like the original game on expert mode—and that's a good thing. *Etrian Odyssey* constantly surprised me with its ability to keep me on my toes with a fairly limited palette of gameplay, and its successor throws in plenty of new wrinkles to make things even trickier. But it retains the same sense of progress, of exploration, of personal accomplishment, and of attachment to a team of heroes who never once speak, making for an engrossing old-school experience. Every serious role-playing-game fan should give it a play.

➔ **ERIC:** I had the same experience starting *EO2* as Andrew (those beginning monsters are too dang hard), only I didn't find it entertaining or fresh. Sure, *EO2* is a solid dungeon-crawl, but it lacks that certain special something that pushes an RPG from entertaining to "must level up one more time before sleeping!" It improves on the original *EO*, though; the augmented interface makes equipping characters easier, and new classes and abilities add layers to combat. Mostly, it doesn't try to fix what was already pretty solid.



The Good: Improves on first *EO* in every conceivable way
The Bad: Can't shake that "expansion pack" feel
Take a Break: To listen to the rockin' Yuzo Koshiro tunes



DS

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS A2: GRIMOIRE OF THE RIFT

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ Developer: Basiscape/Square Enix ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+



The Good: Immeasurable depth and customization
The Bad: Borderline meaningless plot (tactics Alliance: We need a Vagrant Story sequel, stat!

Little people doing little things slowly

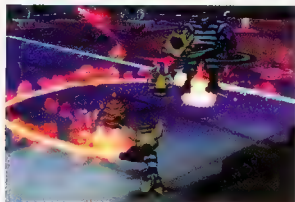
➔ **MILKMAN:** It's been years since onetime series director Yasumi Matsuno (*Vagrant Story* and *FFXII*) helmed the original *Tactics*, blending chesslike game mechanics with *Final Fantasy* fan service—and his absence shows. In the 10 years since *Tactics*' U.S. debut, the series has transformed from overly complex political soap opera to *FF Tactics Advance*'s clash of two teenagers' angst-ridden inner psyches to—with *FFTA2*—one kid's afterschool punishment blues. While turn-based strategy fans grow older, the series' plotlines grow younger, and while the game mechanics haven't exactly been dumbed down, they haven't advanced much, either. Everything's still buried in clumsy menus, with too few enhancements

added to the battle system. While the long-standing depth of the series' item mechanics and job classes remains, the game's pacing is so glacial that superior, faster-moving handheld strategy games like *Advance Wars: Days of Ruin* relegate this latest *Tactics* to the "for serious fans only" bin.

➔ **JEREMY** Yes, *FFTA2* should've been better. True, it offers all of the things fans of *FF* locale Ivalice expect—bazaar bartering, a job system, a Basiscape soundtrack, familiar monsters, and turn-based battles—but the juvenile storyline and watered-down combat mechanics really hurt. Meanwhile, the cramped and inefficient interface that plagued the GBA chapter is *still* an issue, even spread

across two screens. The underlying game is addictive and fun, but I can't help but think it could've been better.

➔ **GARNETT:** Not every fantasy has to take itself so seriously; *The Neverending Story* style here fits comfortably with the laid-back way that I play a handheld game. Not that I dispute the continuing shortcomings of the series—unwieldy menus and the inability to adjust the map make playing the game more difficult than it ought to be. But it remains worth it for all of the reasons that made the original *Tactics* so engrossing: Switching between different jobs, mastering new abilities from your gear, and recruiting and building your clan all remain as appealing as ever. 🐉



PSP

SECRET AGENT CLANK

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: High Impact Games
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Still rattlin'

➔ **SHANE:** Ever since Insomniac's heroic furry Lombax debuted in the 2002 platformer *Ratchet & Clank*, it's no surprise that legions of fans have rallied behind his diminutive robot sidekick—with his bone-dry humor and atypical arsenal, Clank's easily stolen the show from his humdrum partner. But Clankomaniacs need to temper their enthusiasm for his long-awaited star vehicle, as *Secret Agent Clank* can't quite measure up to Ratchet's outings. Although its audiovisual trappings and clever writing match that of the previous *R&C* adventures, Clank's new stealth-centric gameplay feels alarmingly limiting. The game forces you to utilize Clank's gimmicky spy equipment to slowly traverse levels, and the frustrating, manually manipulated camera guarantees mission failures aplenty. The addition of a few blast-happy Ratchet levels, some nifty vehicle-based sorties, and a handful of hilarious Captain Qwark stages will keep fans playing, but this isn't the awe-inspiring Clank celebration they desire.

➔ **JAY:** Assign the strafe controls to your analog stick—it's the best way to manage Clank's erratic camera. Technical flaws aside, I enjoyed this delightful spin-off. The campy secret-agent plot delivers plenty of the series' signature shtick: Stealth puzzles, brilliantly designed Gadgetbot levels, action-packed battles, Ratchet areas, and Captain Qwark's hilarious fictional boss encounters combine to incorporate nearly every gaming genre known to man. Some of the levels drag on, and most of the weapons are a snore, but Clank's big break is still a worthy addition to *Ratchet* canon.

➔ **SEAN:** Early on, you fight a boss named Jack of All Trades—add the usual "master of none," and you've got a pretty apt description of this game. Snowboarding, stealth, and rhythm-based missions are in fuller force than usual; each mission type isn't quite fully baked, and the straightforward *R&C* action continues to underline the PSP's control weakness (moving the camera sucks, surprise!). But the charming presentation and humor elevate it all. I especially liked Captain Qwark's clever "here's how it happened" boss sequences—it's fun to watch his embellishments come to life.



The Good: Clank's rapier wit, creative weaponry
The Bad: Constrictive level design, forced stealth segments
Needs More: Captain Qwark

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DS/PSP

SPACE INVADERS EXTREME

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ Developer: Taito
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone



Celebrating 30 glorious years of xenophobia

➔ **SHANE:** Much like recent retro-revival gem *Pac-Man: Championship Edition*, *Space Invaders Extreme* wisely keeps the series' time-tested gameplay intact while adding a few clever twists and a funky coat of post-modern paint. Fundamentally, you're still moving a dumpy little turret on a flat 2D plane, desperately fending off an encroaching armada of pixelated monstrosities. But as you progress through the engrossing single-player game, you'll quickly leave the simple pleasures of 1978 behind as power-ups, pesky new invader types, and challenging bosses enter the mix. These additions aren't necessarily shocking, but the immense variety and unpredictability should put even seasoned coin-op veterans on edge.

Plus, copious branching paths, secret stages, and a simple-yet-addictive online versus mode give you plenty of reasons to keep coming back. You might need to turn the trippy full-motion video backgrounds off, though...it's tough to keep up with the action amid the chaos.

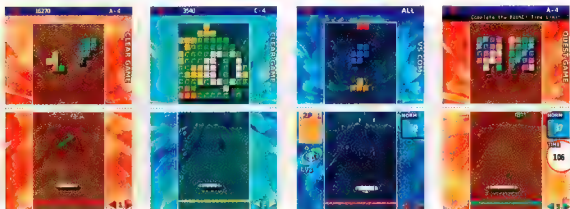
➔ **RAY:** I get the feeling that *Space Invaders Extreme* is partly targeted to "youth" like me who hadn't even been born when *Space Invaders* was the hip thing, but I have felt the pain caused by recent lame remakes. The good news: While Taito's new version isn't necessarily more relevant to my generation, it brings the franchise into the 21st century. The chain-focused mechanics and colorful, epileptic

aesthetics add a lot of depth and fun to the formula while managing to stay simple—and pretty groovy to boot.

➔ **G. FORD:** "Groovy," "trippy"... however you want to describe it, *Extreme* does right by the classic. It's a tight package—perhaps a little too brief, though you'll want to replay to go down the alternate, tougher paths. The enemies get appreciably more challenging, bouncing back shots or deflecting your powered-up laser. Also, the one-trick two-person multiplayer is simple fun as you try to outlast your opponent, each with your own board, dropping extra invaders on your foe. But the real success: the game's robotic yet slightly sexy disembodied prestige voice.



Good: Addictive, stylish, value-priced
Bad: Some PSP backgrounds are a bit too busy
Bangin': Techno soundtrack by Tokyo's hottest DJs



DS

ARKANOID DS

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ Developer: Taito
 ■ Players: 1-2 players ■ ESRB: DS

One 'noid you shouldn't avoid

➔ **RAY:** The original *Arkanoid* is one of my favorite arcade games. True, it's basically a clone of the classic "bounce a ball to bust the bricks up top" *Breakout*, but *Arkanoid*'s various power-ups—such as slowing down the ball or a laser that lets you shoot blocks—help keep the ancient brick-breaker interesting. *Arkanoid DS* deftly incorporates the touch screen, which doesn't replace the arcade original's dial but still feels more intuitive than the alternative D-pad solution. One thing that may annoy some is the game's use of both screens, especially since the ball travels through that "void" between them. It's a bit disorienting at first, but by the time the stages get harder and faster, tracking the ball becomes second

nature. The game also features an awesome (if out-of-place) soundtrack that runs the gamut from trip-hop to hard rock. *Arkanoid DS* isn't the best interpretation of the original, but it's not a bad one, either.

➔ **SHANE:** While *Arkanoid DS* doesn't deliver a retro renaissance quite on the level of *Space Invaders Extreme* (reviewed above), Taito's latest variation on the block-busting classic still feels like a worthy revival. Acclimating to that void Ray mentioned takes time, but the increased verticality opens the game up for more skillful ricochet calculation and wild trick shots. Outside of that one major change, it's familiar fare—you're still moving your paddle left and right, gathering power-ups,

and desperately trying to clear that obnoxious final block. Online versus play modernizes the proceedings, but the weak visual overhaul's something of a disappointment.

➔ **JEREMY:** Shane pegged it: While *Space Invaders Extreme* is a breath-takingly fresh update of an old Taito standard, its cousin *Arkanoid DS* is merely business as usual. Not that this is a bad thing—what we have here is a damn fine brick-breaking game, and it's hard to complain about that. The single-player mode has plenty of variety, and the multiplayer manages to work in some competitive puzzle elements. It plays well, and the price is right—and, really, what else could you want from *Arkanoid*?



The Good: Retro simplicity fits DS like a glove
The Bad: Following the disappearing ball
Recommended: The for-now-Japan-only Paddle Controller

REVIEWS WRAP-UP

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

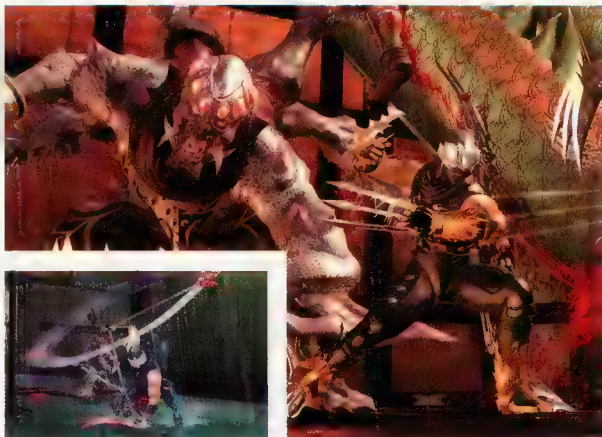
XB360

NINJA GAIDEN II

■ Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios ■ ESRB: Mature

Threatening enough in its "accessible" Path of the Acolyte mode, *Ninja Gaiden II* hasn't gone soft—even if it isn't calling those of us who choose the difficulty setting "ninja dogs" this time. Flailing fingers guarantee losses against the game's rogues' gallery of samurai dogs and gaudy demons, which is to say that the plot sucks but can't suck the genius from *Gaiden II*'s incomparably cool swordplay.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** We might moan about the piss-poor camera (it was shoddy in the game's preriview state), but we'll rant and rave about *Gaiden II*'s acclaimed fighting.



PS3/XB360

ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

■ Publisher: Activision ■ ESRB: Teen

From what we've played of *Quake Wars* (from a nonfinal build), we can safely say it's worth checking out if you're tired of the other online offerings out there. This port of the well-received PC shooter sports expansive, chaotic battlefields, lending matches the feeling of being part of a larger war that's being waged around them. And though the game is focused strictly on multiplayer, you can play solo, with bots filling out the remaining player slots. But who wants to do that?

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** If you can get some friends—or, better still, a clan—playing alongside, you'll be in for a multiplayer treat.



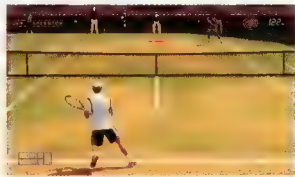
DS

POKÉMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: EXPLORERS OF TIME & DARKNESS

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ ESRB: Everyone

If you played 2006's *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Red & Blue Rescue Team*, this game holds no surprises for you. If not, brace yourself for a collision of two very different kinds of role-playing games: the collect-everything-and-level-it-up mentality of *Pokémon*, and the dungeon-hack intensity of *Shiren the Wanderer*. The result is a bit too simple—at least until the postgame dungeons, which are a delicious challenge.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** A mix of two genres that masters neither, *Explorers* does at least offer enough powerleveling and monster-capturing to keep Pokéfanatics amused.



PS3/XB360

TOP SPIN 3

■ Publisher: 2K Sports ■ ESRB: Everyone

Forget everything you've learned from *Virtua Tennis* and the first two *Top Spin* titles. OK, maybe not everything, but you're definitely going to have to make some serious timing adjustments. *Top Spin 3* is all about proper positioning and releasing the swing button at the right time; once you make that adjustment and start thinking about things like footwork and tiring out your opponent (stamina actually makes a noticeable difference this time), some true tennis strategy emerges.

➔ **BOTTOM LINE:** While nothing was wrong with the old system, the new stuff works just fine...if you have some patience.





■ *MGS4* takes a basic from *Western*-developed paradigm by sometimes giving Snake a square-A.I. buddies.

PlayStation 3

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Kojima Productions ■ Players: 1-16 ■ ESRB: Mature

Our 11th-hour mission briefing

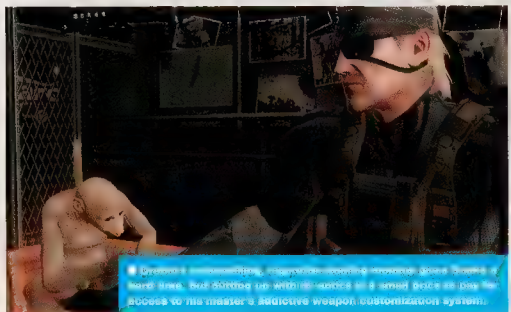
METAL GEAR SOLID 4 will hit store shelves shortly after this issue of *EGM* lands in your hot little hands. And four *EGM*/1UP editors—Matt Leone, Jeremy Parish, Andrew Pfister, and Shane Bettenhausen—have already invested plenty of time in the game. So why don't we have a full review this issue? Simply put: We weren't happy with the limitations Konami wanted to impose on our comments, and rather than publish compromised reviews in the interest of being the first to rate the game, we'd rather wait until next issue, where we can be completely open and thorough with our thoughts. In the meantime, our *MGS4* vets sat down for an informal chat about the game (and remember—you can find the full review on 1UP.com!).

✦ **JEREMY:** *Metal Gear Solid 4* probably represents the truest expression of the "Metal Gear" concept the world will ever see. I've been a fan of the series ever since I saw those awesome "Gear Up!" ads in my funny books 20 years ago, so this final chapter is pretty bittersweet for me. I hate to see the series come to an end, but at least it goes out in style.

Developer Kojima Productions completely rethought how the game plays: the sneaking, the shooting, the fighting. *MGS4* reworks the gameplay without changing the intrinsic "Metal Gear"-ness of it. You still control Snake, and while he's a bit older, he's still as stealthy as they come. The most fundamental change that *MGS4* brings is a revised control scheme—a

welcome alteration after *MGS3*'s intricate gameplay suffered for being bolted onto an 8-bit framework. While *MGS4* still lacks a few modern action-game niceties (no cover system—really?), Snake's mission objectives are much friendlier than ever before.

It's a necessary change that reflects the new approach *MGS4* takes to stealth—which is to say, you don't have to be stealthy if you don't want to (in fact, massive firefights like the one that marks the debut of the UN peacekeeping force called the Rat Patrol are almost impossible to play stealthily). The environments Snake fights through totally differ from the narrow corridors and military bases that typify the series; the unnamed Middle Eastern city where the game



▶ Dreyfus's iconic blindfold, along with the prosthetic eye, were both found in level files. But sorting up with the controls is a special feat as this was access to his master's additive weapon customization system.

begins is an urban war zone whose areas are at once more open than *MGS3*'s jungles and more intricately dense than *MGS2*'s Big Shell. Bullets and shells constantly explode around you, and half the time you're stuck in the middle of a raging conflict between local rebels and Patriot-controlled privatized military squads.

And yes, that's Patriots as in "La-Li-Lu-Le-Lo." In addition to redefining how the series plays, *MGS4* also undertakes the unenviable task of sorting out the entire *Metal Gear* saga. That's a tall order, but it starts out well: By the time you've battled your way through the Middle East, you'll have learned a great deal about who the Patriots are, what happened to many of Snake's old comrades, and what that bastard Revolver Ocelot (or is it Liquid Snake?) has been up to.

And yeah, you'll even find out what "La-Li-Lu-Le-Lo" means.

▶ **ANDREW P:** The new camera—which lets you see just about anywhere at any time—is a welcome relief, and I wish it'd been present throughout the series. I never felt the need for a dedicated cover system, though you could argue that Snake's "leaning against the wall and peeking around" technique you back in *MGS1* acted as the precursor to today's more elaborate forms of cover. In any case, I was too busy rushing into battle and scavenging dropped weapons for Drebin points (the in-game currency for purchasing and upgrading weapons). To me, the game really encouraged a run-and-gun approach instead of the traditional "silent intrusion." It's nice that you can play it both ways.

▶ **JEREMY:** Yeah, I usually take the stealthy, nonlethal approach, but killing dudes (and ladies) was so effective this time around that I racked up quite the kill count....

▶ **MATT:** You can kind of play it both ways...on the easier difficulty modes, anyway. I went through the game on the easiest and most difficult settings, and found I could play however I wanted on easy—run through and shoot everyone without ever worrying about tripping an alarm or being punished, or sneak around most of the time—but when I upped the difficulty, I didn't feel as much freedom, and I really found a need for a cover system. In the Rat Patrol fight Jeremy mentions, you basically have to create an ad hoc cover system using whatever you can find, so it would have



The Online Trenches

Metal Gear Online—the multiplayer version of *Metal Gear Solid* that's included with *MGS4*—was still in beta as of this writing, which means we can't give it a proper evaluation. But our experience participating in that beta was sufficient to tell us a couple of things: You'll need patience with the controls, and you'll need to communicate with your teammates.

The retail version of *MGO*—currently only available on the *MGS4* disc—ships with five maps, inspired by a mix of *MGS3: Snake Eater* and *MGS4*, with some original designs thrown in. Deathmatch and its team variant are self-explanatory; the noteworthy play mode is "Sneaking Mission," which sees two teams racing each other to hunt down a camouflaged Solid Snake.

Think of *MGO* as a starter pack—the age of downloadable content means that more maps, weapons, and modes will come later, though Konami's still out to lunch about how much—if anything—we'll have to fork over to keep playing.



been more elegant if the developers expanded the wall-hugging system—which already exists—to let you peek out and aim.

Otherwise, the new control scheme (and small details, like the ability to fire from the ground if you get knocked on your back) does a great job at preventing you from feeling helpless if you get spotted. That's important, because you absolutely do get into big firefights. I don't think the controls quite match those of the *Splinter Cell* series—especially when it comes to taking out enemies silently and moving around the environments—but they're close enough that it's not a big issue anymore.

➔ **ANDREW** And in addition to the new moves, the new gear you use to handle some of the hairier action



is pretty sweet—specifically the Solid Eye, the Metal Gear Mk. II, and OctoCamo. Truthfully, these are mostly evolutions of previous *Metal Gear* support systems (radar, special goggles, camouflage), but the Mk. II is helpful in that it makes ammunition an almost-limitless resource that you can access at any time—and you can scout ahead at your leisure.

➔ **JEREMY:** Yeah, having Drebin on call at any time definitely makes

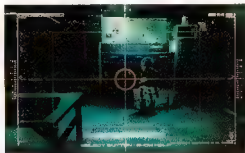
resource management less of an issue than in past games, and it also offers a ridiculous number of possible weapon choices. Although, for my money, it's best to just trick out a couple of personal favorites.

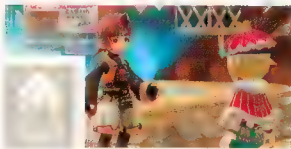
➔ **SHANE:** I loved Act 1's unpredictable pacing—series mastermind Hideo Kojima and co. bravely eschew genre conventions by ditching the usual hand-holding tutorial. Instead, you're given the chance to either

sneak through the bleak, war-torn city alongside your militia buddies or attempt a daring guns-blazing lone wolf approach...only to later engage a legion of deadly Haven troopers in a booby-trapped mansion. The game constantly toys with your expectations right before exceeding them.

Plus, I can't help but commend *MGS4*'s shockingly well-realized environments—the detailed, evocative visuals truly create a believable, lived-in setting for the world. As always, Kojima Productions' dedication to stuffing the game with oodles of minutiae elevates the artistry to a level rarely reached in gaming. And those little, seemingly insignificant details make all the difference: Watching Old Snake randomly groan in pain and grab his lower back creates effortless, unforgettable characterization. 🐉

EGM Extras:
Animal-themed bosses compromising your mission? Get some much-needed intel from our *MGS4* SuperGuide at EGM.1UP.com. And check 1UP.com for our full day-and-date review!





WiiWare

FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES—MY LIFE AS A KING

■ Publisher: Square Enix ■ Developer: Square Enix
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Royal good time

✦ **MILKMAN:** Square Enix's increasingly ambitious *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* series—now in its third iteration—is slowly overtaking the main *Final Fantasy* franchise in terms of innovation and heart. Take downloadable WiiWare launch title *My Life as a King*: Eschewing the multiplayer focus of the two previous titles and offering something of a *Populous*-meets-*Animal Crossing* "god game," *King* removes the action-RPG focus of its predecessors and arrives at something best described as a "kingdom-management sim." The resulting game is more interesting than that description sounds, though.

In your role as the titular king, you're given a kingdom to customize, adding bakeries, armor and weapon shops, houses, parks, and more to keep your increasing population prosperous and motivated. By sending your town's bravest citizens (consisting, initially, of *Crystal Chronicles*' humanesque Clavat race) out on daily missions, you not only expand your net of influence in the game world's map, but your adventurers also increase in level and buy their own equipment—provided you fund weapon research and help the local shops get their feet off the ground. As your town expands, so do your building options and your citizens' capabilities. Stat junkies will revel in *King*'s daily reports, which show what (and how well) your soldiers fought, what their spending habits are, and even how well they relate to other in-game characters, a point briefly touched upon in the first *Crystal Chronicles*.

Sure, sometimes you get the urge to beat stuff up, and the in-game "days" feel like they go by too fast, but this is fascinating stuff—much more substantial than what you'd expect from a downloadable game.



The Good: Micromanaging made fun
The Bad: No actual action, just talking and building
Downloading Added: Expands your kingdom

THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for Apr/May

#	Name	Platform	EGM Scores
1	Mario Kart Wii with Wii Wheel  Nintendo really seems to be taking the Internet super-highway seriously—the company recently added worldwide tournaments to <i>Mario Kart Wii</i> .	Wii	B+ C+ C
2	Grand Theft Auto IV	XB360	A+ A+ A
3	Grand Theft Auto IV  Everyone knows <i>Grand Theft Auto IV</i> is controversial. But did you know it's currently the most expensive game ever made? 100 million bucks says it is.	PS3	A+ A+ A
4	Gan Turismo 5: Prologue	PS3	B+ C+ B+
5	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock Bundle  Megapublisher Activision knows how to sell out a franchise: <i>Guitar Hero</i> has teamed up with convenience store 7-Eleven for a Sturpee-branded contest.	Wii	A A- B+
6	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	XB360	A A- A
7	Grand Theft Auto IV: Special Edition	XB360	A+ A+ A
8	Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games	Wii	C+ B- C+
9	Grand Theft Auto IV: Special Edition	PS3	A+ A+ A
10	Super Smash Bros. Brawl	Wii	A A- A-
11	Shin Megami Tensei: Persona 3 FES  <i>Persona 3 FES</i> recently came out, but school isn't over just yet—Atlus announced <i>Persona 4</i> in Japan, so look for it to come out here eventually.	PS2	A A A
12	Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time	DS	Not reviewed
13	Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Darkness	DS	Not reviewed
14	Rock Band: Special Edition	XB360	A A A
15	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	PS3	A A- A
16	Dance Dance Revolution: Hottest Party Bundle	Wii	Not reviewed
17	Game Party	Wii	Not reviewed
18	Professor Layton and the Curious Village	DS	A- B+ A-
19	Super Mario Galaxy	Wii	A A+ A+
20	Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection	Wii	Not reviewed

GAME OVER

> press continue for baby games, puppy games, and gears of war cosplay



> SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

Nintendo's Party of Pain

Seanbaby reviews selections from the junk pile



Seanbaby's consoles' mass ritual suicide from a white back apparently left a few survivors. This month, he helps them finish the job with a few crappy gems.

I ONCE SAW A COMMERCIAL that told me to forget everything I thought I knew about floor coverings. I immediately did so without question. Seriously, ask me about floor coverings sometime, and it's like floor-covering amateur hour. My point is that I'm very trusting of the media around me—so much so that I believe reality TV star Tila Tequila is an actual bisexual and not a balloon-headed syphilis farm. I'm so trusting of the media, in fact, that I say this believing that by the time my words reach print, you'll still remember what a Tila Tequila is.

One place where I've lost all trust, however, is with videogames. I've been doing this job too long—and I've seen too many horrible things—to believe a word these damn things say. As such, this month, I'll be focusing on how each of these lousy games lives up to what was expected from them. Will they still manage to surprise me? The answer may surprise you.

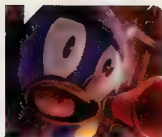
> Jenga World Tour (Wii)

Expectations: Here's an interesting fact about *Jenga*: You're an idiot for reading past the colon in this sentence. *Jenga* is something families play together only when they're too dysfunctional for talking and too poor for a home theater, so it's a daring gamble for someone to make a version that requires a Wii and a television. *Jenga*'s tagline is the ominous declaration "There is only one *Jenga*." This isn't to protect the intellectual rights of knocking crap over—it is a prophecy. This attempt at making a second form of *Jenga* shall only make the devil stronger.

What's wrong: The selectable characters are nonsense. It's like someone raided a clip-art CD-ROM for pictures ugly enough to have never been used before. You can choose among a fish, a snowman, a child astronaut, and some mess that looks like it's supposed to be a *Jenga* block man. A *Jenga* block man? *Makers of Jenga World Tour*, that's the creative equivalent of drawing stairs with an Etch A Sketch. Notably missing from the roster are two businessmen talking, the words "happy birthday," and a hot dog. As for the audio, *Jenga*'s music will beat out the graphics in a suck contest any day. No matter what level you're on, it looks like *Baby's First 3D Studio MAX Project* and sounds like a corporate training video.

Most unpleasant surprise: The worst surprise is that this never varied more than zero percent from any idiot's idea of what a *Jenga* videogame would be like. Like many things, I compare it to buying a fetish video of a man making love to a fish. Why simulate something you can do for real at half the cost and shouldn't be doing in the first place? Maybe I'm getting lost in my own analogy, but I find it disgusting that all *Jenga* players simulate fish sex.



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Tiny Stupid
Cogs

▷ Homie Rollzer (DS)

Expectations:

From what I've understood, Homies figurines are M.U.S.C.L.E.-style creatures with an urban Latino theme—the kind of thing that's probably pretty racist, but only if you've got a brain capable of thinking about Homies for more than three seconds. Mine is already starting to drift to how when I was growing up, our toys' racism was far more refined. For example, the black G.I. Joe wasn't named something like Sgt. Aframan ScaredofGhosts. He just spoke entirely in what I assume is his people's native tongue: beat poetry. See, that's a positive stereotype. Homies vending machines, meanwhile, exploit negative stereotypes, such as how children do really stupid things with quarters.

What's wrong: Everything about the racing is a failure. The physics, the graphics, the weapons, the characters—no chance exists of anyone enjoying this game. The storyline pairs racism with the supernatural; the winner of the kart races gets their greatest wish granted by Wizard, a wizard named Wizard. Each racer's wish is based around his or her most popular racial cliché, except for the racer in the wheelchair, who wants revenge and to heal his disability. By the way, the inclusion of a wheelchair racer...kind of a strange choice in a game about whimsical intolerance.

Most unpleasant surprise: I went into this expecting a little racism, but let me tell you about one of the racers—El Chilote. He's a chili pepper with a mustache, sombrero, and crossed bandoliers full of bullets. And he drives a f***ing burrito. At the risk of offending racists, are you all retarded? That's not a play on stereotypes. That's like an lowan family was playing Family Feud, and El Chilote was formed by combining their answers to "Name something Mexican."

"Survey says! Awww.... Sorry, we were actually looking for 'stick of dynamite' and 'bag of oranges.' Well, you're still going away with our home version and a year's supply of Away-José, America's No. 1 Puerto Rican spray!"



▷ John Deere: Harvest in the Heartland (DS)

Expectations: When I think of John Deere, I think of quality farm equipment. When I think of John Deere as a game, I picture glib—oh, sorry, I fell asleep while I was typing. *Harvest in the Heartland* lives up to these expectations.

What's wrong: Farming always seemed like something you'd simulate only after exhausting every other possible option. If you look through videogame history, nearly every single activity was made into a game before farming. Karate, fishing, hide-and-seek, Smurfs.... Once you and your Nintendo are pretending to do daily chores and hard labor, the two of you have run out of ideas. To prove it, look on the opposite page: Someone made *Jenga*. *Jenga* is by all means a greater tragedy, but in a way, *Jenga* would never have happened if literally every other possible thing weren't already a game. And farm sims certainly had a role in that. But that's like blaming *Teen Wolf Too* on the guy who invented dogs.

Most unpleasant surprise: The fact that the DS has an entire screen on which to use the stylus and eight pressable buttons, each thing you do in this game requires a different tool, and switching tools requires you to open your shed menu and put a new tool in your hand. This alone would be unforgivable, but it gets worse. Coming back from this menu brings up a five-second loading screen. At the risk of overmerding, how bad do you have to be at making these things to have loading screens on a cartridge game? Maybe they programmed the three-color garden-hoe graphic on a military supercomputer and never considered they'd have to port it to DS. If these people ever had to program a game with more than one moving sprite, it'd have to be done on a computer so powerful that Sarah Connor would have already killed it. Was this garbage programmed to be compatible with a tractor?



▷ Go, Diego, Go! Safari Rescue (Wii)

Expectations: I figured this was going to be a side-scroller designed to make insecure infants feel good about themselves, but I may have given it too much credit.

What's wrong: The story behind the rescue is about a mosquito that hates elephants and one day lands on a magic wand. This turns him into a magician, and his first and only act as a magician is turning all of the elephants in Africa to stone. That's not a plot. That's a thought a dumbass wouldn't even bother to have, let alone share. Game design via *Mad Libs* would be the only reasonable explanation behind this nonsense.

Most unpleasant surprise: You can't lose in a *Dora the Explorer*-related game, so it's hard to treat this like a real piece of interactive entertainment. It's more like a sequence of flashing colors to help rebuild a child's confidence after a tragic finger-painting failure. If you are near a *Go, Diego, Go!* player, please read the following aloud to them: "Look at how terrific you are at navigating dangerless jungle pathways, dumbest infant in the world! You think you earned a graham cracker for beating level two? My ass can beat level two. You earned this: Your parents' divorce was your fault. You can't beat this mess. Here's a better challenge: Point your monkey eyeballs toward the sun and stare until you win."



AMAZING BOX ART CORNER



Behold the box art for *Shifters*, a something game no one has ever played. Note carefully how awesome it is as it illustrates all four stages of man's transformation into bird monster. Step one: is to be a guy in terrible, ridiculous armor. Step two: Take off your hat. This step is both painful and awesome, so your screams will have a real depth to them. Step three: fetal stage of bird monster. Your eyes and bird system haven't quite developed, so if you want to stop during this stage for a snack, it must be partially digested and vomited into your mouth by someone who is already a full bird monster. Step four: You are now a metal-winged superbird! With the strength of a bird and the touch of a man, your screams are like electric-guitar power chords, and you can't stop knowing how sweet every variant would look with you on the side of it. Holy crap. *Shifters!* Caw! 🦅

10 Years Ago...

GAME OVER



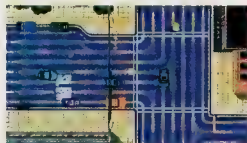
On the cover: Squaresoft Coming to America

This month's cover story dug into Squaresoft's surprising collaboration with Electronic Arts to bring some of their biggest games to the U.S., with previews of the role-playing game thriller *Parasite Eve*, sci-fi epic *Xenogears*, samurai sim *Bushido Blade 2*, and stylish action-RPG hybrid *Brave Fencer Musashi*.



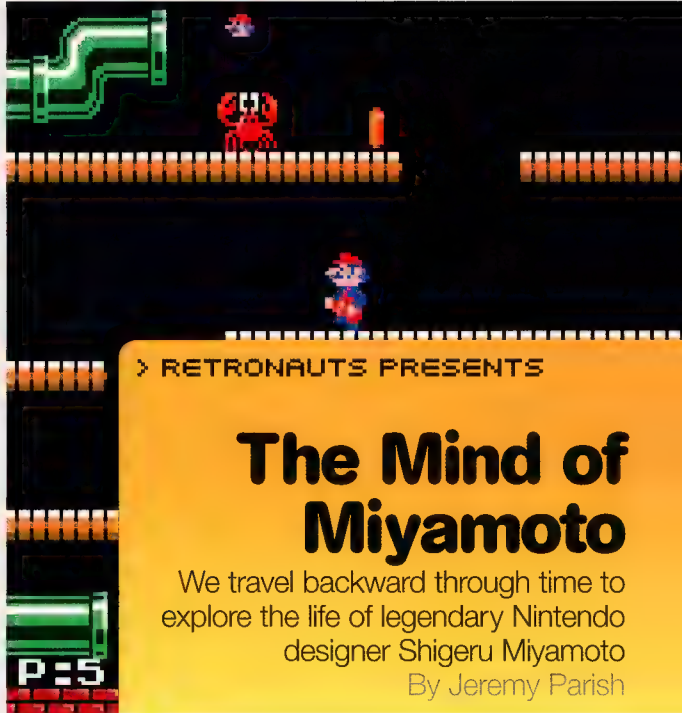
Game of the Month: Gran Turismo

Sony's car simulator made a stunning debut, snatching up our prestigious Game of the Month award. The endless number of cars to race and customize, as well as the true-to-life handling, impressed reviewers across the board. Former Editor-in-Chief John Davison even claimed, "*Gran Turismo* is the best racing game of all time."



Grand Theft Auto's debut

Today the *Grand Theft Auto* series is known for its richly rendered worlds, but the debut was met with only mild enthusiasm. We appreciated the controversial content—even though it felt like a gimmick to cover up an otherwise average game.



> RETRONAUTS PRESENTS

The Mind of Miyamoto

We travel backward through time to explore the life of legendary Nintendo designer Shigeru Miyamoto

By Jeremy Parish



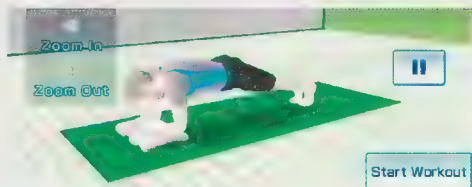
To check out more retro jibber-jabber, set your browser to bonusstage.1UP.com to watch 1UP's video podcast.



WII FIT IS ONLY THE LATEST in a long line of games created by Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto based on the inspiration he draws from his own life and interests. What can we learn about the man behind some of gaming's most notable titles by studying his creations?

WII FIT

Wii • Uncategorizable • 2008



> Inspired by Miyamoto's love of weighing himself

Wii Fit arrives in the U.S. this month, and it's sure to be a hit. But you may be surprised to discover that the health-awareness sensation was inspired by Miyamoto's realization that keeping track of your weight-loss progress is entertainment in and of itself. In other words, it's basically just an interactive chart—though really, is that so far removed from most role-playing games, which ultimately boil down to number-crunching exercises? Of course, one thing makes *Wii Fit*'s number-tracking approach to entertainment different than that of the average videogame: It's only fun when you're losing.

NINTENDOGS

DS • Simulation • 2005



➤ Inspired by Miyamoto's love of his new pet

Everyone loves puppies, and everyone especially loves to show off pictures of their puppies. But if you're a world-class game designer, you can go a step beyond posting photos of Fido—you can even go beyond puppy pics with ironic remarks Photoshopped on top! Yes, when you're a legendary game developer, you can make *Nintendogs*, a game about your favorite floppy-eared friend. Then you can rest content in knowing that millions of preteen girls are cooing over the lovable little scamp who keeps chewing up your house slippers.

PIKMIN

GameCube • Strategy • 2001



➤ Inspired by Miyamoto's love of gardening

When most people get into gardening, all you get from the deal is an invitation to dinner featuring a salad with a few underripe and extremely wormy tomatoes. When Miyamoto took up gardening, we got *Pikmin*, a brilliant strategy game that turned a backyard into an intergalactic battlefield. (Some sad tomato salads probably factored in there, too, but we can't say for certain as we weren't invited to dinner at his place.) Clearly, gardening is serious business at Nintendo, proof of the old adage that nature is red in both tooth and claw. As for us, we see *Pikmin* as a cautionary tale against the hazards of vegetarianism: Those little carrotmen may seem harmless and nutritious, but eventually, they'll turn against you.

SUPER MARIO BROS. 3

NES • Action • 1990



➤ Inspired by Miyamoto's childhood cynophobia

While the surreal *Super Mario Bros.* games may or may not have been inspired by their creators' psychedelic dorm-room adventures (what with their smiling scenery, flying turtles, and sense-altering mushrooms), we can pin down the origin of a very specific element of Mario lore: the dastardly Chain Chomp, a vicious ball of barking fury restrained only by a thin metal chain. Not surprisingly, it was inspired by an angry dog in Miyamoto's neighborhood when he was a kid. Chain Chomps grew to enormous sizes and lost their chains in *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*, which surely gave a whole new generation of children panicky nightmares. After all, you won't find a better way to conquer your fears than to pass them along to someone else.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

NES • Adventure • 1987

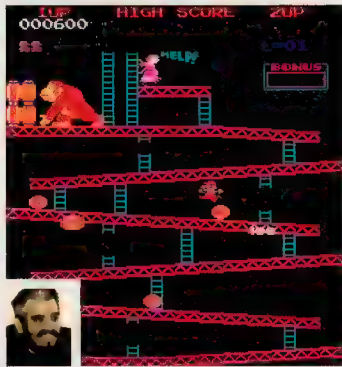


➤ Inspired by Miyamoto's love of exploring the hills near his childhood home

It's possibly gaming's sweetest origin story. Young Miyamoto loved playing in the hills near his home, imagining caves and dangers and daring adventures. Years later, he went on to translate those childhood fantasies into one of the most influential videogames ever made, *The Legend of Zelda*, the story of a young boy who braves caves and dangers in the course of his daring adventure. See? And really, what better inspiration than the wide-eyed dreams of youth? (When we get around to making our own videogame, it's totally going to be about jumping bikes over people's houses.) *Zelda*'s subtext is equally fascinating: the surprisingly large number of old men who demand that you pay to repair their doors suggests that Mr. Miyamoto was quite the hell-raiser in his day.

DONKEY KONG

Arcade • Action • 1981



➤ Inspired by Miyamoto's landlord

The design for *Donkey Kong*'s miniature hero, Mario, stems from sheer pragmatism—his mustache, gloves, and overalls helped define his features clearly at tiny pixel sizes—but his name was inspired by his resemblance to the landlord of Nintendo's New York warehouse, a man named Mario Segali. As for the gameplay...well, we'd like to think it's a parable about some muscle-bound dude who stole away Miyamoto's high school sweetheart. After all, what game-loving nerd can't relate to that? Then again, maybe he just liked *King Kong*. 🐼

EGM LIVE*

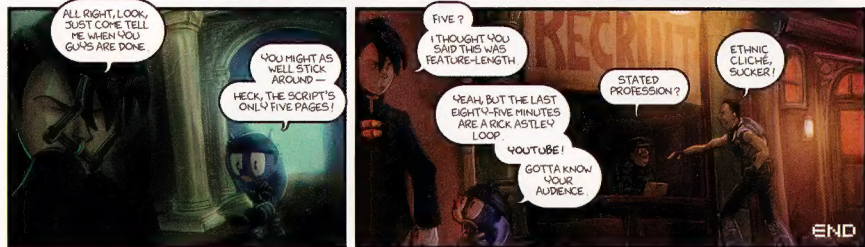
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*NOT ACTUALLY LIVE

Tiny Stupid Cogs

By Jeremy "Norm" Scott



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