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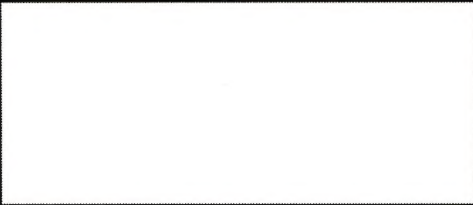
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CONTENTS

▶ issue 231 • august 2008



54

Cover Story: **KILLZONE 2**

Don't call it a "Halo killer." Really—don't. The Guerrilla team tells us why their upcoming PS3 shooter stands on its own...



18

UFC brings the pain

48

Soon-to-be sleepers?

▶ LETTERS

10 If you can't say anything nice, write to us

▶ PRESS START

14 **Where are the Games?**

We find out if there are really fewer games, or just fewer good ones

22 **Foreign Object**

Stress relief through virtual packaging materials—for real

24 **Legal Lockdown**

How four famous copyright lawsuits changed the gaming industry

26 **Aways: Shuffle Dungeon**

Our exclusive first look at an upcoming DS role-playing game from Mistwalker, the makers of *Lost Odyssey*

28 **Sick Day**

We kick off our series on gaming's scariest subcultures with a look at speed gamers

32 **Star Wars: The Force Unleashed**

Hands-on with the latest from LucasArts

42 **Afterthoughts: Boom Blox**

Mom always said, "Don't play ball in the house." Clearly, these guys weren't listening

44 **Guitar Hero: World Tour**

The game that started it all gets a few more instruments and create-a-rocker

46 **Rumor Mill**

▶ REVIEWS

66 **Reviews Intro**

68 **Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon**

68 **We Love Golf!**

69 **Battlefield: Bad Company**

70 **Civilization Revolution**

72 **SingStar**

72 **Top Spin 3**

73 **Haze**

74 **Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots**

78 **Supreme Commander**

79 **Spectral Force 3**

79 **Don King Presents: Prizefighter**

80 **Ninja Gaiden II**

84 **Final Fantasy IV**

86 **Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness**

86 **Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2**

88 **Download Roundup**

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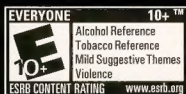
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Sea Change



AS THE MIGHTY SHIP EGM GOES FULL STEAM AHEAD, stalwart buccaneers like yourself might notice a few subtle transformations taking place, and I'll take this opportunity to explain them. The first thing you'll notice is that *EGM* is now covering PC games. My rationale is that it's better to bring you a preview or review of a hot PC game than it is to cover a mediocre console game. Don't worry—PC coverage won't take over the mag, but you will find a page or two devoted to a PC title in every issue. Now, more than ever before, *EGM* will be your one-stop spot for everything gaming-related.

Another new thing you'll notice is the addition of one-man reviews. Ryan Scott, our executive editor of reviews, addresses this in his opening editorial for the Reviews section, but the gist of it is "bigger info on smaller games." A release that gets a one-man review can still be a triple-A game, but in the case of, say, a tactical-role-playing game, you'll be better served by a bigger, more in-depth review than by three tiny reviews with less to express.

You may also notice the extra oomph we're putting into our cover designs these days (did you spot the "EGM" etched into the Helghast's rifle on our cover?). These will only improve with each passing month. It's a new era at *EGM*, and we hope you'll agree that our goal of reinventing the mag into something even greater is slowly but surely taking place before your very eyes. See you next month.

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

CONTENTS (CONT.)



70 Civilization Revolution



74 Metal Gear Solid 4



80 Ninja Gaiden II

> GAME OVER

- 90 **Seanbaby's Rest of the Crap**
Forgotten gems of the future
- 92 **Retro: The Story of Story**
How gaming narratives evolved
- 94 **Seek and Enjoy**
Brain games for summertime blues
- 96 **Top Tchotchkes**
The 10 oddest pieces of free gaming paraphernalia. Worth every penny!
- 97 **Next Month**
Done with this mag? Read this page then lay your head on your desk
- 98 **Hsu & Chan**
The hills are alive with the sound of Helghast. It's the *Killzone* musical!

> THIS MONTH'S EGM EXTRAS

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SuperGuides

Find the best *Metal Gear Solid 4*, *Ninja Gaiden II*, and *Battlefield: Bad Company* cheats, tips, tricks, and strategies, courtesy of our friends at MyCheats.com.

Seek and Enjoy

Can't find all the cleverly hidden games? Check online for the answer key.



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

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LETTERS

> band camps, familiar faces, and quickies

> TRIVIAL ISSUE

This month's EGM question:

What's the only non-Killzone game developed by Guerrilla Games?

E-mail the answer to EGM@IUP.com

(subject head:

Trivia: EGM #231) for a chance to win something potentially awesome.



Letter of the Month The YouTube-ification of gaming

For the past few months, I've been playing nothing but *Call of Duty 4* and *Grand Theft Auto IV*. I've had so many "wow" moments in both games, both in single-player and online, and it really sucks I have nothing to show for them but words. The same goes for my friends and, I'm sure, millions of others. I think it's about time that it becomes expected for great games to include replay features like that one game that came out last fall. [That'd be *Halo 3* for those of you who are a little slow on picking up the hint—Ed.]

Recording online matches is obvious: Just record recent matches. But in single-player, I'm sure they could record at the very least the last minute of gameplay, so when you do some crazy stuff, you just pause and cycle through it, saving what you want. I mean, who doesn't want to make a montage of all their encounters with those GTA ladies of the night?

—Kyle Richards

We were with you right up until that last bit there. That's just creepy.

Shooting Stars of Destiny

Suikoden for the PS1 is one of my favorite games of all time. But while I never had the chance to play *Suikoden II*, there's no way I'm ever going to pay the horrendous amount that copies are selling for on eBay.

The only glimmer of hope I've ever had was when I heard about *Suikoden I* and *II* being ported to the PSP, but I've heard nothing more than that it's being ported. I don't know if it's going to make it to the U.S., or even if it was ever ported at all. I was hoping you guys could shed some light on the situation for me. Thanks.

—Nathan Leinweber

Well, we've got good news and bad news. The good news is that *Suikoden I* & *II* was, in fact, released on the PSP, in February of 2006.

The bad news is that you need to be able to read Japanese to play it: It was released only in Japan, and last we heard, Konami has no plans to release it elsewhere. Which, if you ask us, is a damn, dirty shame. We



For writing this month's LOTM, Kyle gets a copy of *Marsy Mark: Make My Video*, or something else from our dusty old collection.



can always hope for a downloadable release on the PlayStation Network, but it's hard to say how likely that is at this point.

Battle of the bands

Yesterday, I was trying out *Guitar Hero III*'s new Muse tracks, and I have to admit that I had a lot of fun. The content was a great choice for the game. Funny that Activision's announcement of *Guitar Hero: World Tour* shows just the opposite sort of choices.

Now, I'll be reasonable; seeing a feature like song creation is great news. Some band [announcements] are pretty nice. And it even looks as though *World Tour* may buff the downloadable content features. But these things are minor compared to the real news: more instruments!

Will they even photocopy the bullet

points off the back of the *Rock Band* box? It's one thing to replicate designs from one game and put them into another, but it's a different story when the whole game is replicated.

More instruments is not necessarily better; it's just different. *Rock Band* is fantastic with a friend or three, but I can't recommend it over *Guitar Hero* for the person who will be playing alone; *Rock Band* makes compromises for the sake of the drummer, bassist, and singer.

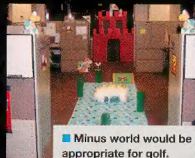
So *World Tour* will be filled with guitar solos that *Rock Band* can't afford to include for the sake of its four instruments, right? Well...no, apparently not. I hope Activision has a lot of confidence in the *Guitar Hero* name, because it seems the only thing that will be holding their sales up as both *Guitar Hero III* players and *Rock* >

> HOW HARDCORE ARE YOU?

Your proudest gaming moments

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

My workplace recently hosted a miniature-golf-course design contest. We decided to go with a theme that was truly inspiring: *Super Mario Bros*. My girlfriend and I spent weeks painting PVC tubes for warp pipes, making cutouts, and putting together a 6-foot castle. We set up a red ball that bounced back and forth between two ball launchers to simulate Bowser's fireball. Everybody loved the course, and we won first place. —March Horn



Want to see your own story in this space? All you have to do is tell us how hard-caffeine-core you are. Dish up the goods on what makes you more into games than anyone else, and send it to EGM@IUP.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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Band players are turned off.
—Andrew "Spud" Jenkins

Not so fast there, Spud. Plenty of folks were ready to count *Guitar Hero III* out when *Rock Band* started making its noise. There's no reason to doubt *World Tour's* ability to distinguish itself at this early stage.

Separated at birth?

Recently, while enjoying a *GTA4* gaming session, I decided to take a break and watch a movie. I popped in *Behind Enemy Lines*, a decent war movie. While watching, I noticed a striking resemblance between a supporting character, whose name is only mentioned as Sasha, and main *GTA4* protagonist Niko Bellic! The resemblance is uncanny: clothing, hair, not to mention the exact scar on the left eyebrow! Even gloves! I continued to make comparisons; the front box of *GTA4* even has a graphic that is dead-on! Maybe Rockstar created of! Nicky in the likeness of renegade Sasha?

—Adrian Wardlow

Holy crap, you're not kidding! Sasha was even Serbian. That's gotta be entirely intentional.

Getting serious

In a letter to your magazine (*EGM* #229, "Hitting home"), a reader contributed his story about how he watched some anime about a widow of an Imperial Japanese Army soldier and felt pangs of guilt for playing *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*. I have to question one thing: Does the writer or anyone else feel bad for the widows of the Japanese soldier's German compatriots? Because the IJA during the WWII era committed atrocities on par with their Nazi brethren.

Postwar Japan is a very different story, of course, and I'm assuming that's where some of his guilt is com-

ing from. But a simple bit of research as to why someone was an enemy and why they are portrayed that way would make you seem more educated than naively "enlightened." Then we can all get back to shooting Russian and Chechen guys in the next Tom Clancy game. Although, after reading about the Rape of Nanking, I think I'd rather play something more cheerful.

—Jay King

Ain't war games fun?

Maybe your mom can help

Memo to [Ninja Gaiden designer Tormonobu] Itagaki: Easier equals larger audience equals more money. It's called the game industry for a reason: It's a business. The original [Xbox] *Ninja Gaiden* was a great game... except 99 percent of the population couldn't play it.

—John Craig

Clearly you're just bad at games.

Jump around

I have had it with uneven difficulty in videogames. I'm so tired of dumping hours into a game just to end up stuck at a ridiculously difficult boss. When this happens, I would just about rather visit the dentist than pick up the controller again, but after putting so much time into it, it seems like a waste to quit. Aren't games supposed to be fun? Maybe it's just me, but trying to beat the same damn boss for three hours is about the furthest thing from fun I can think of.

My suggestion is for developers to give us the option to skip parts we can't get past. I don't think this will ruin the games at all; it will just give us more options for how we want to play. Movies have a fast-forward button—why can't games? It's almost to the point where I am thinking of giving up gaming altogether.

—Shawn Smith

What's with all the griping about difficulty this month? Are we becoming a nation of gaming pansies, or what?

You, at least, are in luck, Shawn: The new *Alone in the Dark* is going to feature exactly the kind of system you describe. The game will be broken up into "episodes," and you'll be able to jump around at will, just as you would on a DVD.

Difficult to stomach

The sole reason I purchased a PS3 was for *Metal Gear Solid 4*. Now I'm worried. I've played three games on it already, and for some reason, *Call of*

Duty 4 and *GTA4* make me feel sick.

Have you guys heard of this? I think it may be the camera somehow giving me motion sickness or something. I was hoping you could tell me how *MGS4's* camera is. I would hate to ruin a good gaming experience by blowing chunks all over the screen.

—James Seeva

Well, *MGS4* does dispense with the fixed camera of previous *MGS* games, so there's a chance it will also make you sick. But don't be too worried: Director Hideo Kojima experiences the same difficulties you do! In an interview with 1UP in 2005, he said, "I have a weakness for 3D sickness, so I wanted to overcome that, but I also wanted to experience, in *MGS4*, a new 3D camera that doesn't make me sick."

We'd recommend a rental before you buy, though, just to be sure.

QTE tip

Why is it that whenever someone brings up "quick-time events," they act like *God of War* invented them? *Resident Evil 4* had quick-time events, and it came out two months before *God of War*.

—Andrew Brasuell

And *Shenmue* had them five years before *God of War*, and *Dragon's Lair* had them 17 years before that. What was your point again?

Ask our lovers

With so many companies deciding not to attend E3 due to the extensive costs and lack of motivation, it seems like E3 and other big media conferences will be a thing of the past. Do you guys prefer to attend the big conferences or the "gamers' day" events of the individual publishers?

—Wayne Roper

Oh, each format has its benefits. The food's usually better at gamers' days, for example, but the open bars usually last longer at E3. Oh, yeah—and you see more games at E3. We like that.

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TIME OF DEATH: 13:04:27

TIME OF DEATH: 13:04:25

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TIME OF DEATH: 13:04:24

TIME OF DEATH: 13:04:23

BE CAREFUL WHEN YOU FIGHT THE MONSTERS, LEST YOU BECOME ONE.

-FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

TOO HUMAN



Blood
Language
Mild Suggestive Themes
Violence

Microsoft
game studios

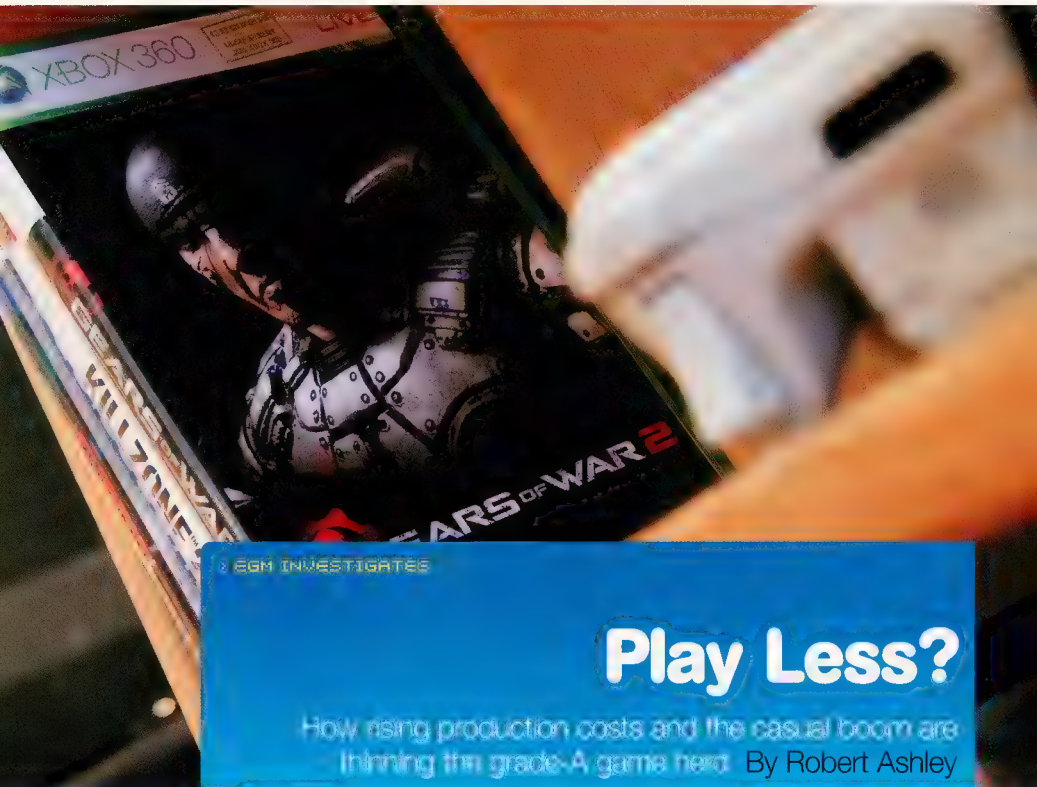
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Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE

PRESS START

> features, previews, caged men, long-winded litigation, and other stuff



EGM INVESTIGATES

Play Less?

How rising production costs and the casual boom are thinning the grade-A game herd By Robert Ashley

Even though publishers aren't pounding out the big-budget hits as much they used to, we're still seeing some make an impact from time to time. Just look at last year's *EGM* Game of the Year winner, *BioShock*—that shooter's been turned into a series.

FOR THE TANNED, TONED, AND SOCIAL, summer is a time for pool-side parties and skimpy attire. For the rest of us—partying tube-side with plastic guitars and Xbox Live friends, summer is a time of drought, a gaming Lent before the holiday feast. But if this summer looks particularly barren to you, you're not alone. We've felt what seems to be a slowing release schedule for months. Looking back over the past two years, the number of games reviewed in the pages of *EGM* has noticeably dropped off, from 280 games in 2006 to 207 in 2008. Granted, late 2006 saw the release of both the Nintendo Wii

and the PlayStation 3, whose launch games almost certainly added bulk to that year's offerings. But a drop-off of nearly one-third, even taking into account space constraints in the magazine, surely reflects some slowing in the flow of game releases.

It's not that simple, though. According to the NPD Group's retail-tracking service, which closely follows game releases and sales, the total number of games released in 2007 (including every version of every multiplatform game for consoles, handhelds, and PC) actually *increased* from the year before, rising from 1,600 to 1,700 (numbers are rounded—see

chart). So what accounts for that empty-shelf feeling? We've got a few possible scenarios. The first revolves around the game industry's big-budget race to create monster hits.

Triple-A? More like triple-\$

Admit it: As much as you profess a love for clever game design and artistic expression, you're as wowed by fancy graphics technology as everyone else. Well, it doesn't come cheap. Production costs have risen sharply over the past decade, putting more and more financial pressure on each game released. "A PlayStation 1 game cost less than a million bucks to



PAGE 18

Preview: THQ enters the octagon



PAGE 24

Feature: Copyright catfights



PAGE 32

Preview: Strong is the Force

make," says Michael Pachter, an analyst with Wedbush Morgan Securities who follows the business of gaming. "If you made 40 or 50 PS1 games, you'd be OK if 10 or 15 of those didn't work out." In the PlayStation 2 generation, however, the cost of producing a game increased five-fold, to around \$5 million on average, according to Pachter. Suddenly, failures made a much bigger impact on a publisher's bottom line, and there were plenty of failures. "There were a lot more mistakes—a lot more *True Crime 2s*," says Pachter. When developers finally made the switch over to the PS3 and Xbox 360, production costs climbed yet again, and the wiggle room for bombs evaporated. "People learned from the failed PS2 games," says Pachter. "Now they're making bigger bets and spending more time and money on making sure that what they put out is good."

Much of what serious gamers are interested in falls into the category of so-called "triple-A" games, big productions gunning to outdo *Halo* or *Grand Theft Auto*—and those games are few and far between. But there have always been appetizer discs—fun, cheap, B-list games to be enjoyed between main courses. The massive amount of money being invested in games at huge publishers like Electronic Arts, Activision, and Ubisoft, however, makes smaller-budget filler a less-appealing proposition. "The choice is to go really big and make a few really big bets or to go really small," says Pachter. "And the problem with going really small is this: If you're Electronic Arts or Activision, and you want to do \$4 billion in revenue, you would literally have to make 4,000 games that do \$1 million in revenue each. They could never manage that, so they end up doing something like 50 or 60 games."

And with so much money invested in so few games, publishers are much more wary of failure, and this greatly contributes to the industry's current bout of sequelitis. "The risk of failure is greater, so they don't take risks," says Pachter. "You can guarantee that there will be a *Grand Theft Auto V*, *VI*, *VII*, and *VIII*." The fact that so many of this year's most anticipated games are sequels (*Killzone 2*, *Gears of War 2*,



■ Beginning of the end: Big-budget flops *Psychonauts* and *Advent Rising* turned publisher Majesco to the casual market.

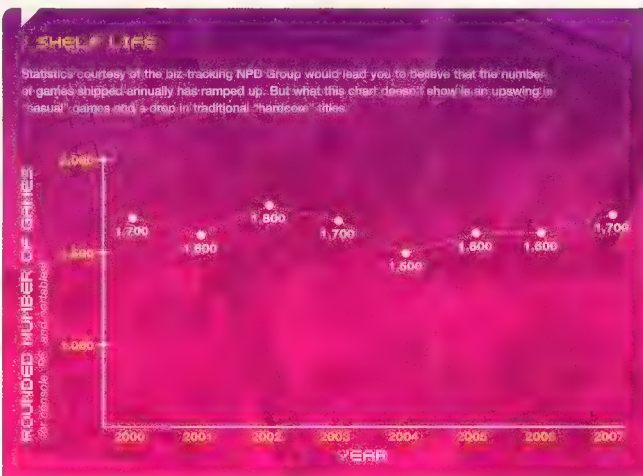
Grand Theft Auto IV) exacerbates that empty-shelf feeling. "You're just not seeing the same amount of original content as you used to," says Pachter.

It pays to delay

From the point of view of publishers and developers, when a competitor makes graphics technology or game-design breakthroughs, it can diminish the impact your games have on the audience. And so a Cold War-style arms race to stay ahead in that competition encourages publishers to spend more money and take more time. "Everyone who's making an

open-world action game knows that everything changed in April when *GTA4* shipped, because Rockstar has once again raised the bar," says EA VP of marketing Mike Quigley. "You have to keep up with the Joneses." Quigley stresses, however, that EA is primarily concerned with turning out "good games."

"Skate wasn't built with the idea of, 'Hey, we've got X million dollars, and we want to kick Activision in the teeth, so let's go build a *Hawk* killer,'" says Quigley. "That game was created because Scott Blackwood and a couple of guys on his team just wanted

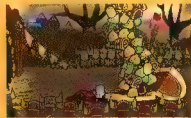
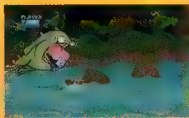
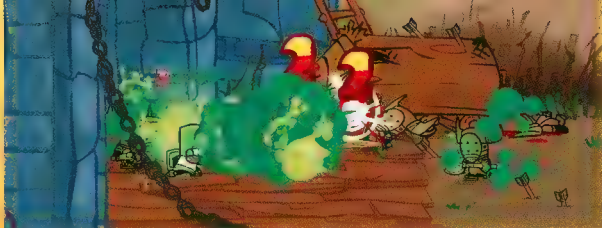


to make a real, authentic skateboarding game." But more emphasis on quality means more delays, pushing those gotta-play games onto the horizon and contributing, once again, to the empty-shelf feeling. EA, in recent months, has delayed *Army of Two*, *Battlefield: Bad Company*, *Mercenaries 2*, and Will Wright's perpetually put-off everything-simulator, *Spore*. "We have to be fiscally responsible," says Quigley. "But when there is a good idea with the right creative team behind it—and I think *Spore* is a good example of that—we don't shy away from making that investment."

Has he noticed any slowing of game releases at EA? "I don't think so," says Quigley. "Our title counts are probably going up, but the diversity of what those titles are is more varied than it's ever been." Which leads us to another scenario: Casual games—quick, fun titles designed for the masses—have grown in popularity in proportion to the success of Nintendo's democratic game box, the Wii, and their always-popular handheld, the DS. Could casual and family-friendly games be filling in the gaps while so-called "hardcore" games, ever more expensive and often delayed, land less often on the shelves?

Casual hex

"Where there has been growth in this business has not been with the hardcore gamer," says Colin Sebastian, an analyst with Lazard Capital Markets. "If you talk to the publishers, where they're seeing meaningful growth in the business is with the expanding demographics." It's not just that the popularity of casual games has grown. The actual boxes of many popular games—like *Wii Fit*, *Guitar Hero*, or *Rock Band*—have expanded, taking up more real estate at shops, and, potentially, pushing unpopular or older hardcore games off the shelves. "Think about it from a retail perspective," says Sebastian. "If you're a Best Buy or a Wal-Mart, you have,



▶ DOWNLOADABLE GAMES TO THE RESCUE

While there may be fewer titles on the shelves, online-marketplace services are stocking games you can't buy in stores. At least one developer has given up on retail for the Wild West of downloadable content. You might know The Behemoth from their hand-drawn, last-gen shooter *Alien Hominid*. This summer, they'll release their second game, *Castle Crashers*, on Xbox Live. "The [lack of] profits drove us out of retail," says producer John Baez. "Getting shelf space is really difficult, unless you're one of the top 10 games." Though digital distribution gives small companies a shot at reaching big audiences, no downloadable game has approached the sales of a well-to-do disc, a problem Baez wants to fix: "We're hoping that's going to be us."

essentially, a fixed area available for videogames. If you're dealing with a fixed amount of shelf space, you might have to allocate some shelf space away from the hardcore games and toward the casual." Something similar is happening with small and midlevel game publishers, who used to be able to afford to compete in the big-production, triple-A game market. Without the deep pockets of larger competitors, these publishers have moved their efforts to the casual-gaming world.

Such is the case of Majesco, who've recently had casual success with the *Cooking Mama* series. "When you look at the strategy of trying to build these big-budget products to compete with *Halo* and *Grand Theft Auto*, you're taking shots in the dark," says Majesco CEO Jesse Sutton. "There are companies in our industry that have been able to do that. On the other end, you've got the people who have tried and failed, Majesco being

one of those." In 2005, the company ran into serious financial trouble when two big-budget offerings—the critically acclaimed Tim Schafer adventure *Psychonauts* and the Orson Scott Card-penned sci-fi action title *Adventure Rising*—both bombed in stores. The financial fallout forced the company to cancel all of their high-profile, triple-A gaming projects. "At that point, when things weren't working out and we had this big portfolio of products that were in development already that required significant dough, we had to make a determination," says Sutton. "Do you do what most of our other competitors have done, which is go out and raise a lot more money and just keep trying? Or do you retrench and focus on the mass market?" They chose the latter, turning their focus to family-friendly, broad-appeal fare—the kinds of games that, if you're reading this magazine, you're unlikely to play all that much.

Don't despair—going casual isn't necessarily the best way to make a buck. While Majesco has straightened out on a diet of soccer-mom DS games, they're not blowing the doors off the bank vault. "They're surviving, but it's not a great business," says Pachter. "Majesco is going to do maybe \$85 million in revenue this year. Activision sold that many units of *Guitar Hero* last week." For publishers, the serious money's in your wallet—you just might be taking it out less often. Says Pachter: "If you want to make money, you've got to go big." 🎸



■ *Rock Band* not only rocked sales charts—its mighty peripheral packaging stole shelf space from other games.

“Civ” leaders are going places.



Napoleon is one of 16 Civilization® leaders you can take anywhere with Civilization®: Revolution™ for the Nintendo DS.™

LEFT Guess what girls, he's single!

RIGHT Did you know decapitated heads don't float? Limbs do. Briefly.

A whole new Civilization

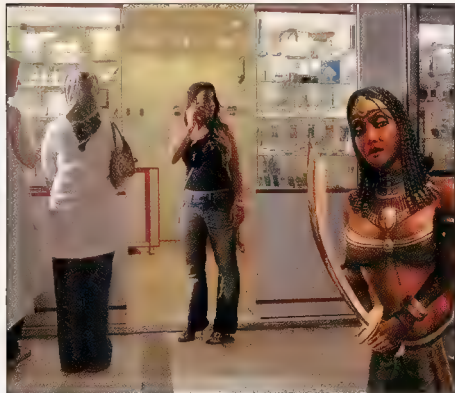
For nearly two decades, the *Sid Meier's Civilization®* franchise has been the benchmark for turn-based strategy games. Now, “Civ” arrives for the Nintendo DS™ in the form of *Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution™*, a revved-up, portable version of the mega-addictive title that many have called, “the world's greatest strategy game.”



Build an empire from the dawn of man to the space age as you compete against (or ally with) 16 classic civilizations and warlords for world domination. A streamlined time scale delivers faster games and constant action, coupled with an overhauled interface custom designed for portable play. Simple and natural touch screen controls allow you to command massive armies, delegate tasks and build civilizations, all with the use of the stylus and buttons.

Multiplayer options abound with support for both local wireless battles and worldwide challenges on the Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. Grow your empire peacefully with tactful diplomacy and technological innovation, or steamroll other nations with superior weaponry and military might.

No game can match *Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution* for fast-paced, strategic fun and combat action—and now you can conquer the world—anytime, anywhere on your portable Nintendo DS.



Civilization: Revolution
for the Nintendo DS.
Now you can
conquer the world
on the go.



LEFT Cleopatra hits the local mall.

RIGHT Revved-up time scale and console interface for quicker portable play.

Problems: 20000 pounds of prot...
Eaten: Weight: 400 tons.
Train: the 16 Alpha Centauri of...
Catalogue of service: 2772 out of 2000?



SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION REVOLUTION™



NINTENDO DS

FIRAXIS
GAMES

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GAMES



EXCLUSIVES: COLLECTIVE FIRST LOOK

UFC 2009

Eight sides of coin By Michael Donahoe

Platforms:
PS3/XB360

Publisher:
THQ

Developer:
Yuke's

Release Date:
Spring 2009

SORRY, EA—THQ is winning the shirtless-videogame-studs fight. Along with the greased-up wrestlers of World Wrestling Entertainment, the macho publisher is now entering the eight-sided cage with an official game based on the Ultimate Fighting Championship. Now's the perfect time to start pounding, too—over the last few years, mixed martial arts has gone from a sleeper pay-per-view sport to a mainstream hit. With MMA's popularity currently at its peak, THQ is faced with a huge challenge: knocking out UFC's die-hard fans in its debut match.

Talented trainers

Just like any up-and-coming fighter, will tell you, all of the potential in the world doesn't mean jack without a tip-top trainer. So while THQ's tutoring all of the fancy UFC touches for

their first game (over 80 fighters, the inclusion of official announcers Mike Goldberg and Joe Rogan, and even some polygon-packed ring girls), it all means squat if the developer can't hang in the ring. Luckily, the guys at Yuke's—the company making *UFC 2009*—are the in-ring veterans of the *SmackDown vs. Raw* series. Sure, they've perfected sweaty, man-on-man action, but some cynical fans may be wary that Yuke's will simply borrow the dated *SVR* engine for *UFC 2009*. Don't get your spandex in a bunch, naysayers—THQ has told

us that Yuke's is building a brand-new engine for the game. Couple that with full motion-capturing and face-scanning from the UFC talent and things *should* turn out smashing. Especially if it controls well—something THQ hopes Yuke's will pin down the first time through.

"We plan to deliver intuitive controls that satisfy the needs of our brand-new combat system," says THQ Project Manager William Schmitt. "At the same time, our goal is to make the game a simple, pick-up-and-play experience right from

➤ "We plan to deliver intuitive controls that satisfy the needs of our brand-new combat system."

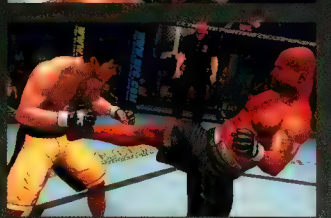
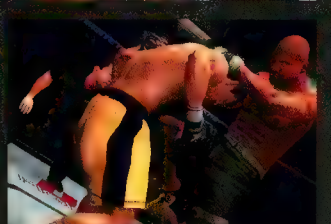
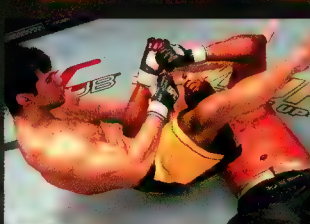
—THQ Project Manager William Schmitt

one like Quinton 'Rampage' Jackson, would be attempting to posture up and slam the opponent on his back through a combination of the face buttons and right analog stick." Of course, this is UFC, so fights don't always end in such a calculated and predictable manner. "A second option would be to try a technical escape by using the right analog stick exclusively in a more nuanced manner," says Schmitt. "This would have the fighter trying to roll out of an armbaar attempt."

Loaded roster

While it's unlikely that the average UFC fan will know (and, more importantly, care to play) the 80-plus fighters in the game, at least THQ is making sure hardcore fans will get pleasure knowing they can mount almost any man they want. Obviously, the mainstays will enter the octagon (right now, we can confirm Jackson, Forrest Griffin, Chuck Liddell, Anderson Silva, BJ Penn, Matt Hughes, Roger Huerta, Wanderlei Silva, and Michael Bisping), but the fate of past fighters is currently up to the legal judges. Obviously, popular stars who've had past disputes with UFC octagon master Dana White (namely, Randy Couture and Tito Ortiz) have a better chance of sporting spandex in the next *UFC 2009*. But that doesn't mean THQ isn't ruling out including some old-school favorites. "We do want to stay true to the UFC brand and provide fans with an extensive number of popular fighters who are active in UFC at the time of the game's release," says Schmitt. "However, we're taking prominent fighters from the past into consideration." That's a whole lot of considering—UFC's been around for 15 years. Sure, we don't expect the obscure, only-fought-one-match fighters to be in the game, but we'd love to stage a classic brawl between "The World's Most Dangerous Man" Ken Shamrock and Brazilian jiu-jitsu legend Royce Gracie.

But, of course, you can always ditch the pros and construct your own crushing machine from scratch. Like just about every other sports game nowadays, *UFC 2009* will feature a create-a-fighter mode to build a competitor to take through the career mode. Remember, UFC isn't too flashy, so if you're expecting to whip up a wacky grappler with face makeup and multicolored tassels, we're disappointed to say





that no such Ultimate Fighter fighter can be made. "While a brand like WWE lends itself to numerous costume changes," explains Schmitt, "we've tried to remain true to UFC in our videogame and will only be offering realistic changes that a fan would encounter at a live event."

That also means we won't be seeing any wacky specialty matches made specifically for the game. Remember, UFC is a very serious sport, and it seems that the game won't loosen its grip on reality for the sake of pleasing a few videogame nerds. But the content going into *UFC 2009* does seem pretty promising, especially if Yuke's is actually able to craft an engine that can handle the unpredictability of mixed martial arts. And since *UFC 2009* isn't slated until spring of next year, THQ and Yuke's have a ton of time to train their new fighter. Let's just hope that they don't pull a Brock Lesnar and blow their anticipated debut. **A-**



■ Our hopes for a weight-loss minigame got crushed—expect no exciting weigh-in shenanigans.

LAST-ROUND PICK

The remaining official sports licenses waiting to be chosen

With THQ set to release an official UFC game, the number of real sports waiting to be turned into videogames is dwindling. But a few (some what exciting sports are still ripe for the picking—here's our list of real games that should be turned into fake videogames:

1 Badminton: First, let's just get this out of the way: shuttlecock. Ah, much better. But seriously, badminton is a perfect candidate for a videogame because of its highly strategic play. And did we mention: the shuttlecock—oh, never mind.



2 Women's National Basketball Association: We're sick and tired of all of the male basketball stars hogging all of the videogame glory. Don't tell me that you wouldn't want to do a flyby with, um, that hot chick from the Dallas team. Wait, nope, Dallas even have a team? Head on, checking—nope, they don't. Our bad.



3 Horseshoes: We can't think of a game more perfect for the Wii. Well, if you exclude tennis, bowling, and curling. But horseshoes is just

sounds like so much fun. Think about it: You pitch a horseshoe on a pole. Then you—well, that's about it. Actually, this sounds like a terrible idea.

4 Trampoline: Bouncing up and down is fun, but it's not nearly as joyful as watching a polygonal trampolinist. Put in some *Tony Hawk*-like combos, and you have an immediate sports success. We've even got a spiffy one-word title for it: *Tramp*.



5 Turtle racing: The hoop of street off-road, and kart racing on the market paves the way for a different kind of relay competition: turtle racing. Have you ever witnessed a turtle power his way through a neck-and-neck heat, only to make the climatic finish? Neither have we, but we bet it'd be pretty sweet.

TRUE OR FALSE

1. GETTING CAUGHT
WITH WEED CAN
GET YOU KICKED
OFF THE SOCCER
TEAM

2. WEED ISN'T SO COOL
WHEN YOUR BABY
BROTHER FINDS
YOU HIGH

ANSWERS: TRUE, NOW, GET ALL THE FACTS AT
abovetheinfluence.com



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

> BUSTED

Legal LOCKDOWN

Great moments in videogame lawsuits By Julian Murdoch

The court of public opinion isn't the only place where game companies have to plead their cases. Here's a quick guide to some of the landmark court battles that prove it isn't a good idea to copy. We enlisted Steve Chang, attorney with the intellectual-property law firm of Banner & Witcoff, Ltd., as our tour guide and expert witness.



THE GHOSTS OF LAWSUITS PAST

Two-bit trouble

Atari tarred

Plaintiff: Atari (and Nintendo)

Defendant: Nintendo (and Atari)

The case: Atari may have conquered videogaming's Wild West, but when Nintendo started sucking all of the money out of the market, Atari started fighting dirty. Atari (through its subsidiary Tengen) sold plenty of games for the Nintendo Entertainment System but got tired of paying Nintendo for the privilege of being a third-party publisher. Instead of signing up for Nintendo's on-chip 10NES copy-protection scheme, they reverse-engineered it, peeling back the layers of the Nintendo chips with chemicals and a microscope. When that didn't work, they fell back on the hacker's most proven tool: social engineering. They sent someone to the United States Copyright Office and conned the bureaucrats into handing over Nintendo's source code.

Nintendo called foul, and dueling lawsuits, appeals, injunctions, and motions to dismiss rippled through the California legal system for years. Atari got its hand slapped, and ultimately the lawsuits ended in settlements.

Chang's opinion: "The Digital Millennium Copyright Act now has explicit provisions for circumventing copy-protection schemes. This is an early example of why that's important."

Our verdict: Crime doesn't pay, even in videogames.



Ping (Pong)

Plaintiff: Magnavox

Defendants: Everyone else

The case: No matter what history books might say, Nolan Bushnell and his boys at Atari weren't the only fathers of the game industry. He didn't even invent Pong.

In 1967, Sanders Associates took a sidestep from their normal gig as a defense contractor and led engineer Ralph Baer muck around with vacuum tubes to get a blip bouncing between a pair of paddles on a color television. Sanders eventually licensed this technology to Magnavox, who put this proto-Pong into the Odyssey, the first home videogame console, in 1972. Months later, Bushnell founded Atari and released Pong, the quarter-sucking blip-chaser that lives in our collective unconscious as "the first videogame."

Magnavox and Sanders were not amused. They sued Atari (and Bally Midway, Coleco, Activision, and Mattel). Everyone settled except Mattel, who fought hard and lost. Baer would go on to design Milton Bradley's biggest electronic-game hit, *Simon* (now available as a key chain at a dollar store near you).

Chang's opinion: "Judges have recognized that these are the pioneering cases in the videogame field. Right at the very beginning of the industry, there's this seminal set of patents that are really key."

Our verdict: We're glad defense contractors got out of the business. Oh, wait. *America's Army*.

Alternate verdict: In the long run, Atari and Bushnell still won, proving that sometimes it pays to just take your lumps and move on.



THE MODERN CROP OF LAWSUITS

Your moneymaker shakes

Spandex swipe

Plaintiff: Marvel

Defendant: NCSoft

The case: When it launched in April 2004, NCSoft's PC massively multiplayer role-playing game *City of Heroes* garnered an A from IUP.com. The flexibility of the character-creation system was (and remains) one of the things we dug the most. Trying to coax Bart Simpson out of the *City of Heroes* paint box and then putting an actual red target on his back was almost more fun than the game proper.

Six months later, Marvel sued, arguing that the game's character-creation system not only made it possible to re-create Wolverine or the Incredible Hulk but actually encouraged players to do so. It turned out, however, that the biggest in-game *City of Heroes* infringers were actually Marvel's attorneys. NCSoft, after settling out of court a year later, described the settlement this way: "This case was never about monetary issues.... The fans of their respective products and characters are the winners."

Chang's opinion: "The simple fact that some bad guy can use a tool and improperly copy someone's copyrighted character, that's beyond [anyone's] control."

Our verdict: We're still sad that *City of Heroes* isn't rated M.



Let's get ready to...

Plaintiff: Immersion (and Microsoft)

Defendant: Sony (and Immersion)

The case: Since 2001, haptic-tech company Immersion has held a patent on a "tactile feedback man-machine interface device" featuring "one or more vibrotactile units." Despite the taledildonic implications, this turns out to be what's in your vibrating game controller. In 2002, Immersion sued Sony and Microsoft for implementing said vibrotactile units in their PS2 and Xbox interfaces.

Microsoft settled in a hurry, writing a big check and buying 10 percent of Immersion in the process, with hooks to get their money back when Sony finally settled. Sony stuck it out, fighting all the way through the launch of the PS3—when it pulled vibration functionality from the Sixaxis controller, claiming it would interfere with the still-not-a-Wii motion-control functions. Sony lost, and after a lengthy appeals process, the two companies finally "concluded their litigation" last March. Microsoft is now suing Immersion for their refund.

Chang's opinion: "This one changed the market. It's an example of how the videogame industry has matured."

Our verdict: Let us know when you're done. We'll be playing *Rez HD* until we go numb in our, um, toes.



> SPECIAL WTF MENTION

The Romantics vs. Activision

This few-hit wonder sued the *Guitar Hero* maker because the game's cover band sounded too good. The judge dismissed the case. No one cared. ♪





PREVIEW: FIRST LOOK AND HANDS-ON

AWAY: Shuffle Dungeon

A dungeon crawler that pulls the rug out. By Ray Barnholt

Platform:
DS

Publisher:
Majesco

Developer:
Mistwalker/Artoon

Release Date:
January 2006

THE NINTENDO DS LIBRARY looks pretty crowded of late, but it still comes as a surprise to see dungeon role-playing games taking part in that growth, especially when most gamers would consider them from a dead genre. From *Etrian Odyssey* to *Mystery Dungeon: Shiren the Wanderer*, Nintendo's handheld is quite the source of moderately sized quests that are light on story and heavy on action. Developer Mistwalker—who you know from the Xbox 360 epics *Blue Dragon* and *Lost Odyssey*—stands ready to be the next to join the crowd. Aided by developer Artoon and U.S. publisher Majesco, *Away: Shuffle Dungeon* gives gamers a different kind of challenge in the hack-n-slash RPG universe.

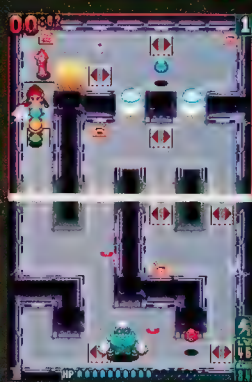
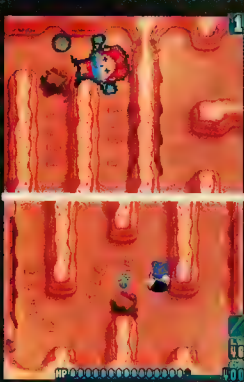
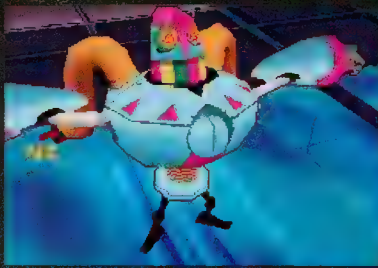
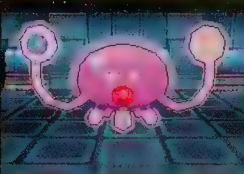
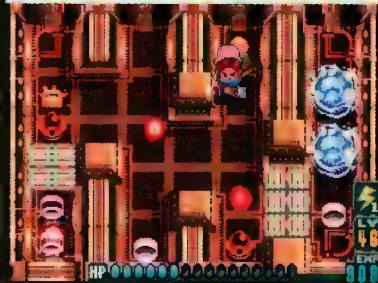
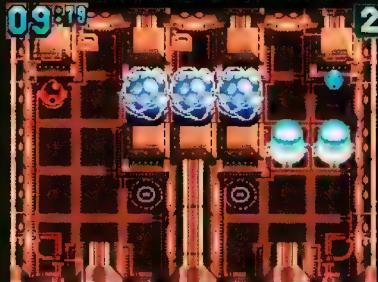
The name "Away" comes from the game's mythology: It's the name

of the phenomenon plaguing quiet Webb Village, where a mysterious force takes away a resident every hundred years. You play as Sword, a young man new to the hamlet who happens to be the sole survivor when the Away returns one day and takes everybody in the village—including Sword's girl, Anella. Oh, and the force opens a portal to a strange underground dungeon where the floor periodically moves. At its end, Sword finds the village chief. He must then find more portals to rescue the remaining villagers and help them rebuild by finding a spot to put back their houses or shops, but more on that later.

With ultracolorful graphics—2D in the dungeons and 3D in the village—plus some purposefully blocky, but no less cute, character designs from Naoto Oshima (the head of Artoon and original designer of *Sonic the Hedgehog*), *Away* has a look that's strongly evocative of the *Legend of Zelda* series, or at the least the better RPGs of the 16-bit generation. It even has some light voice acting, though outside of full-motion-video cut-scenes, the character voices are limited to one- or two-word exclamations—usually of each other's names.

The best news is that *Away* isn't as draconian as other dungeon

The best news is that *Away* isn't as draconian as other dungeon RPGs.



RPGs, but its big wrinkle provides a fair bit of challenge. The "shuffle dungeons" aren't randomly determined maps—rather, the parts of the dungeon that you see on the top and bottom screens of the DS "shuffle" into new maze formations via a countdown timer. Each cycle, you have to make it to the safe, nonshuffling side before you're literally, ahem, lost in the shuffle and severely hurt. After a few shuffles, the exit to the next floor appears, and you rush there to advance. Even though the game provides multiple indicators of an oncoming shuffle—the beeping timer, the flashing screen border—you still run the risk of getting caught due to obstacles like boulders and fireball-spitting turrets. It can be frustrating, but at least you can retry as often as you like.

And you won't always be alone in your quest, either. Sword comes upon a race of cute, blobby little creatures he calls "fupongs," which he can recruit to trail behind him when he's underground. They come in different elemental types and can shoot beams of fire and ice, for example, in order to hit enemies from afar or knock out other obstacles. Fupongs get worn out once you use them, but they continue to follow Sword until they recharge, and they can eventually grow into larger, longer-lasting creatures. Several fupongs can follow Sword at once, but you risk losing them in shuffles, even when Sword himself makes it to safety—that's why it's important to be quick on your feet.

While the central goal of *Away* involves the rebuilding of the village, there's an important (if ridiculously

simple) simulation aspect. Like in *Animal Crossing*, the entire village subscribes to feng shui. As a result, placing buildings of the right colors and in the right locations can alter their rate of growth, which leads to the merchants offering better items that come up for sale sooner than they otherwise would. And yet these stores only grow when you give them special dungeon-only items that kick-start the upgrade process. It's clear that *Away* already stands out among a glut of similar dungeon crawlers, and this additional interaction between adventuring and building only solidifies that separation. The only bad news: Although we've seen a nearly complete English-language version of *Away*, don't expect to see it soon, as Majesco plans on releasing it at the start of 2009. ☹

Speed FREAKS

Our monthly look at gaming's scariest subcultures *by Jon Dinkley*

Remember our Take

This Job series?

Welcome to its replacement. Each issue, we'll look at hardcore players who go above and beyond the call of gaming.



YOU MAY BE FAMOUS for your *Donkey Kong* world records, Billy Mitchell (see the excellent now-on-DVD documentary *The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters* for his story), but the two-and-a-half hours you took to complete the game would leave a different breed of competitive gamers in agony. Welcome to

the clock-watching, points-be-damned world of videogame speed runners, where the top slots belong to the folks who can take a game— from title screen to end credits—or any particular segment in between— in less time than most players spend

topping the first boss. These hot-shots go through years of planning and practice to shave off every last bit of extraneous game time, often edging out the competition by mere seconds. Worthy of a Hollywood documentary? Maybe not. But watch runners like Besmir "Zoid" Sheqi tear flawlessly through *Metroid Prime*



in barely over an hour, and you'll wonder why the big deal is about *Donkey Kong* anyway.

Fast cash

Speed running has an obscure but active community that's been giving Web-trolling gamers something to marvel at for years. Hop on YouTube and search for most any game, and you'll typically find at least one video of someone busting through it like there's money involved. And as it turns out, there is. At the unofficial hub of speed running, Speed Demos Archive (speeddemosarchive.com)—call it SDA when mingling with the locals), curious benefactors offer cash "bounties" for speed runs of select games. "Bounties are offered for a variety of reasons," explains Tom Votava, who holds more than a hundred high-score records on competitive-gaming tracking site twingalaxies.com and can still plow through *The Legend of Zelda* faster than most folks can cook a frozen pizza, "but it usually comes down to an individual wanting to see an achievement badly enough to pay for it. I offered a bounty for *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, and one member submitted a beautiful run. He didn't take a single hit. It was definitely worth the price of admission."

Others post bounties as a challenge to the competition to try and topple a record-holding run. For example, if you think that you can zip through *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*'s Emerald Hill Act 1 in less than 18 seconds, it's worth \$75 of veteran speed runner Joe Stanski's money. The tricky part is that like most speed runners, Stanski has played

the holy crap out of his choice games. If 18 seconds is the best that he can do, chances are that record's not going anywhere. "There was about a two-month stretch where I played *Sonic 2* every day for at least two hours a day," Stanski recalls. "You have to have a lot of patience; I spent two hours today speed running Chemical Plant Zone 1 [in *Sonic 2*] and never got past eight seconds into the level."

Live fast

But the speed-running community isn't just about nominal cash prizes. Together with the record-keeping site archive.org and series-specific gaming sites like highspeedhalo.net and metroid2002.com (guess what they cover), SDA hosts hundreds of videos made by the site's regulars.

They also offer forums for folks to compare notes and post personal speed-running achievements as well as employ a handful of moderators who verify run authentication and establish rules for the 4,600-odd members. "The three basic speed-run categories are 'any percent,' as fast as possible; '100 percent,' all items collected; and 'low percent,' complete the game while collecting as few items as possible," says SDA moderator Mike Uyama. Uyama explains that runs are sometimes filtered further according to tech-

niques used by the authors, such as "death abuse" (using frequent deaths to save time) and "save warping," which takes advantage of some games' policy of respawning at a predictable location and can serve as a time-saving transporter when dealing with a large map (see any *Legend of Zelda* run for an example).

Regardless of the type of run, perfecting a speed pass through any game takes tons of perseverance and practice time. "The most important skill is dedication," Votava says. "Playing a game at this level of skill requires hundreds, if not thousands, of practice runs. One has to be willing to spend several weeks/months on only one game, which is difficult to do without losing interest."

If you're feeling up to the challenge, have a look at Votava's strategy in the sidebar and visit the SDA forums for tips on getting started. "You have to have a creative mind to be able to come up with routes, glitches, and shortcuts the programmers did not intend," Stanski explains. "Most people don't have the patience or skill to produce runs good enough to be up there with the great runs out there, just like it used to be that most people had no chance to ever touch arcade high scores." But hey, if everyone did, nobody would pay to see a movie about it. **EA**

The Four Most Mind-blowing Runs

See videos of these speed runs at speeddemosarchive.com.

4) **Super Mario Bros. (NES)**
5 min., flat
By Andrew Gardikis



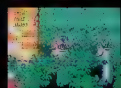
This is thought to be a perfect run through the game that everyone's played a million times. Somebody wanna try and break the four-minute barrier?

3) **Beavis and Butthead (Genesis)**
12 min., 41 sec.
By Adrian Felertag



We're just impressed that somebody had the patience and level of crap tolerance to speed run this game.

2) **Sonic the Hedgehog 2 (Genesis)**
18 min., 12 sec.
By Joe Stanski



The best part about this run is watching Sonic sidkick Tails trying—and failing—to keep up with Stanski through every single level.

1) **Metroid Prime (GC)**
1 hr., 3 min.
By Besmir Sheqi



This video made us want to give up gaming. Anyone who's ever tried to pull off one single chain of those annoying bomb jumps will watch watching Sheqi doing it repeatedly on command. Check out the sick targeting with Samus' scanner and weapons, too.

“Most people don't have the patience or skill to produce runs good enough to be up there with the great runs.”

—Speed runner Joe Stanski

READY TO TRY THIS AT HOME?

Seasoned speed runner Tom Votava outlines the steps for success

Pick a game

"This can actually be difficult. It has to be something I have a lot of interest in at the moment, so I usually end up speed running a game after recently playing through it for fun."

Do the research

"Look up the game on every gaming resource you can find and read up on all known secrets, tricks, and shortcuts. I then spend as much time as it takes to try them out and see what works."

Plan your route

"I now have a little 'bag of tricks' ready and have to figure out what combination of them will yield the fastest time. Deciding which items should and should not be collected can be a large part of this."

Do the run

"This comes down to repetition. The run will usually not go very well at all during the first few tries, but it comes together with time. For me, the key is to limit the number of attempts to a single day,

as I find that I do progressively worse if I go for long stretches without a break."

Learn to adapt

"In trying to execute the plan it's likely that I'll find a new trick that I didn't know about during the planning phase. This sometimes requires me to go back into planning mode for a while and make a revised route based on the new information."

Do it again

"Once I successfully beat the game using my plan, I do it

again. I find that the second and third times are significant improvements over the first. I can usually watch my video and calculate the amount of time spent on mistakes—I feel that I can do better still, try it again!"





Computer Gaming World

By Jeff Green

So here's something you may not know! You see that machine on your desk? The one you use for e-mailing and chatting and looking at pictures of buxom wenches? Well, guess what? That machine, which those of us in the business like to call a "computer," also plays games! Really! No joke! And we don't just mean *Solitaire* and *Minesweeper*, either!

Or maybe you already have five level 70 Shadow Priests and don't need our condescending attitude. Whether you're a hardcore PC gamer, a lapsed PC gamer, an in-the-closet PC gamer, or a yet-to-be-initiated virgin PC gamer, this column is where one humble, yet strikingly attractive, editor will interrupt your regularly scheduled console-gaming articles to shine a light on that big, wacky box and all of its glorious games for your edutainment pleasure.

The one thing I'm not going to do, though, is defend the platform. Because it doesn't need defending. And because at this point in time, only nimrods get territorial and judgmental about gaming platforms. So don't be a nimrod. If you keep your mind open, you can find fun games to play on every platform. Heck, I bet even the Gizmondo had one or two games that didn't completely blow chunks. (Though, sadly, the Gizmondo-exclusive *Mamma Can I Mow the Lawn*, a game that endlessly intrigued me at the time—because, like, what kid would ever ask if he could mow the lawn?—was never released. No wonder the system failed.)

Anyway, the point I'm trying to make is that there's a time and place and gaming platform for everything. And certain types of games, like the real-time strategy titles discussed on these two pages, still function best (for now, at least) on the PC. OK, so maybe *StarCraft II* won't be as epic as *Mamma Can I Mow the Lawn*. But, then again, what is?



1UP PC Editor-in-Chief Jeff Green will try to answer that troubling question that has tortured generations of philosophers in this column next month. If you know the answer, e-mail him at jeff.green@1UP.com so he can take credit.

4-VS.-4 SKIRMISH

PC real-time strategy games go to battle

While consoles try to see the strategy games like *Supremacy*, *Command & Conquer 3: The Runes of Magic*, and *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne* as the top games to get on the PC, it's the real-time strategy games that battle for the top spot. In this section, we'll look at the best of the best.

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II

PC • THQ • 2009

Key strengths: "A lack of long-term goals gives me t***in' bats***," *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II* Producer Mark Noseworthy says, shaking his head. How does a developer address the poor sense of persistence, inadequate reward systems, and the resulting shortage of attachment and accomplishment endemic to RTS games? Look to addictive RPGs to convince gamers that their time translates to material gain, however immaterial an unlockable cannon actually is. And so *DOW2* abandons base-building, along with the need to assemble a new army from the ground up before each battle. You command the same five squads along with assorted Dreadnoughts and other tactical units—each with a leader that Noseworthy claims "has a name and face." In turn, campaigning from planet to planet opens up War Gear perks—chainswords, flamethrowers, warhammers, and personalized power armor.

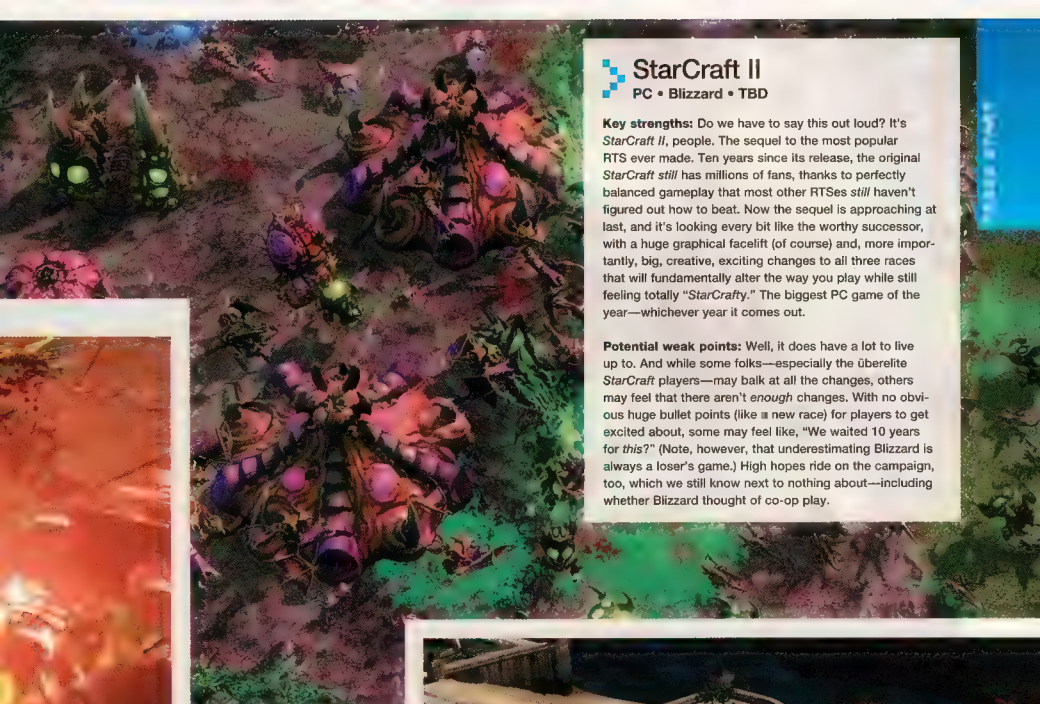
Potential weak points: *StarCraft II*. *DOW2* is almost another genre (i.e., real-time tactics), but Blizzard's titan will still siphon all of the attention.

BattleForge

PC • Electronic Arts • Holiday 2008

Key strengths: Combining traditional RTS combat with *Magic: The Gathering*-style cards may sound gimmicky. But *BattleForge* may solve the perennial RTS problem of "if you built the wrong stuff at the beginning, you're screwed at the end." When you play a card, you summon the unit or spell instantly, so you can immediately trump an enemy's paper with your scissors—and hope they're not hiding a rock up their sleeves.

Potential weak points: EA plans on charging real money for virtual booster packs. The trick for developer Phenomic is to ensure players who *don't* want to spring for boosters can hold their own—a death-defying balancing act of stats versus skill.



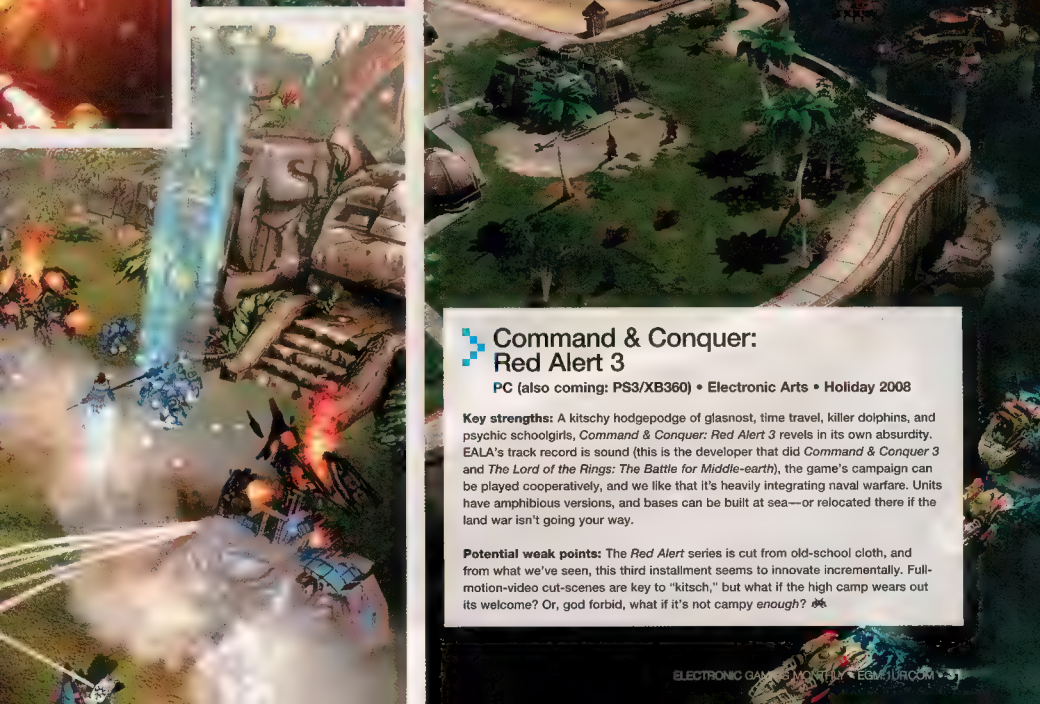
A vibrant, colorful screenshot from StarCraft II showing a dense battle between Zerg and Protoss units on a lush, alien planet. The scene is filled with various creatures and structures, with bright green and purple lighting.

StarCraft II

PC • Blizzard • TBD

Key strengths: Do we have to say this out loud? It's *StarCraft II*, people. The sequel to the most popular RTS ever made. Ten years since its release, the original *StarCraft* still has millions of fans, thanks to perfectly balanced gameplay that most other RTSes still haven't figured out how to beat. Now the sequel is approaching at last, and it's looking every bit like the worthy successor, with a huge graphical facelift (of course) and, more importantly, big, creative, exciting changes to all three races that will fundamentally alter the way you play while still feeling totally "StarCrafty." The biggest PC game of the year—whichever year it comes out.

Potential weak points: Well, it does have a lot to live up to. And while some folks—especially the überelite *StarCraft* players—may balk at all the changes, others may feel that there aren't enough changes. With no obvious huge bullet points (like a new race) for players to get excited about, some may feel like, "We waited 10 years for this?" (Note, however, that underestimating Blizzard is always a loser's game.) High hopes ride on the campaign, too, which we still know next to nothing about—including whether Blizzard thought of co-op play.



A screenshot from Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3 showing a coastal base with a large, curved concrete wall. The base is surrounded by lush greenery and palm trees. In the background, there are industrial structures and a large, multi-story building. The scene is set during the day with bright lighting.

Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3

PC (also coming: PS3/XB360) • Electronic Arts • Holiday 2008

Key strengths: A kitschy hodgepodge of glasnost, time travel, killer dolphins, and psychic schoolgirls, *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3* revels in its own absurdity. EALA's track record is sound (this is the developer that did *Command & Conquer 3* and *The Lord of the Rings: The Battle for Middle-earth*), the game's campaign can be played cooperatively, and we like that it's heavily integrating naval warfare. Units have amphibious versions, and bases can be built at sea—or relocated there if the land war isn't going your way.

Potential weak points: The *Red Alert* series is cut from old-school cloth, and from what we've seen, this third installment seems to innovate incrementally. Full-motion-video cut-scenes are key to "kitsch," but what if the high camp wears out its welcome? Or, god forbid, what if it's not campy enough? ☹

> PREVIEW: HANDS-ON

STAR WARS: The Force Unleashed

Of hokey religions and ancient weapons *By Andrew Rafter*

PRESS START





■ Lightsabers can be customized for color and abilities.

IN THE STAR WARS FILMS, a common theme is certain characters failing to realize, not comprehending, or otherwise underestimating the so-called power of the mystical (turned scientific—thanks, mid-chlorians) Force. But other than some simple mind control and being able to jump *really high*, the most impressive display of the Force as portrayed in the films is either Emperor Palpatine sticking Luke in the deep fryer for 30 seconds or Yoda lifting a starfighter out of a swamp.

Big deal.

Never one to shy away from a *Star Wars*-related side project, George Lucas gave LucasArts the green light to explore a certain idea a little further in *The Force Unleashed*. The concept? "No, seriously: You're underestimating the power of the Force."

Like *Shadows of the Empire* (N64) before it, *The Force Unleashed* is

canonized as official, Lucas-approved *Star Wars* fiction. The traditional opening yellow crawl reveals that the events of the game occur in the gap between *Episode III* and *Episode IV*, bridging the events of the new and old trilogies. Darth Vader is getting adjusted to his new life as part-machine when he happens upon a young boy with great attunement to the Force. This yet-to-be-named prodigy (who's also appearing in *both* versions of *Soulcalibur IV* as a playable character) is taken as Vader's secret apprentice,

who he hopes to use to overthrow the Emperor and resolve some lingering relationship issues.

The game opens on the Wookiee homeworld of Kashyyyk, with a playable Vader on a mission where he finds the young boy. This serves as a training ground for getting familiar with the Force powers and the styles of play you can choose. When confronted by an enemy, a variety of results can occur. You can use a lightsaber for up-close melee combat, blaster deflection, or to throw at enemies (it

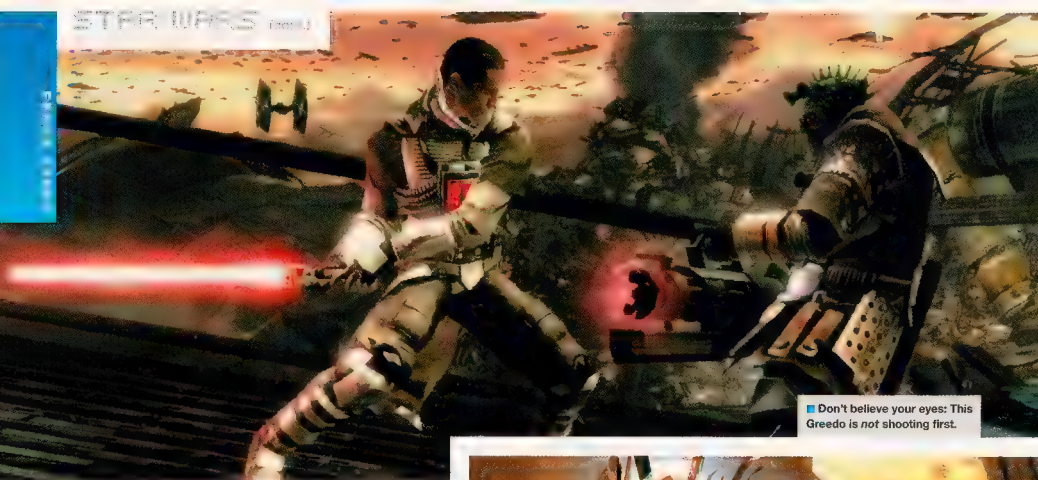
Platforms:
PS3/XB360
(also coming:
Wii/PS2/PSP/D6)

Publisher:
LucasArts

Developer:
LucasArts

Release Date:
September 2008

➤ You can yank a ship off its mooring and send it careening through the hangar—and then do it a few more times for laughs.



■ Don't believe your eyes: This Greedo is *not* shooting first.



returns like a boomerang). You can bust out Force chokeholds to immobilize individual foes or bowl over larger groups with a Force push (a move that can then be used to blow open large doors). If you're not feeling any of those methods, you can use telekinesis to grab objects and then throw them into explosive devices, off of bridges, or into airlocks (the concept will be familiar to anyone who played the overlooked *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy* and *Second Sight* from gaming's last generation).

The Force is seriously strong

But these are mostly moves we've seen Vader, Yoda, Luke, and the Emperor pull off in the movies. The difference in the game is the scale: One of the apprentice's first missions finds him running through a cavernous TIE fighter hangar. The natural temptation is to try to use your grab power on one of the TIEs and launch it into an unsuspecting squad of stor-

troopers. And, thankfully, that urge is rewarded by the ability to actually do it: You can yank a ship off its mooring and send it careening through the hangar—and then do it a few more times for laughs.

The game is not stingy with this showy ability: You earn it early. You can level up each of the Force powers while also learning new passive abilities that further enhance the apprentice's combat skills. The dreaded Force Lightning makes an appearance and can be modified to charge throwable objects as makeshift energy grenades, surge through multiple enemies as a chained attack, or serve as a powerful defensive shield. Abilities such as Fortitude and Saber Mastery increase your health and lightsaber damage, and on top of everything related to combat, a style-based combo system grants points depending on certain combinations of Force powers and melee attacks.

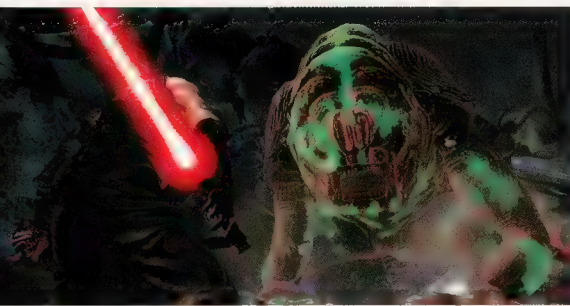
The result is something we're see-

ing more of in games: a linear push through a series of encounters that can be approached and resolved in an open manner. The player is encouraged to experiment with tactical combinations and might naturally gravitate toward one or two preferred methods (the "grab and toss" is particularly stimulating). The key in such a design is to change up the objectives and enemy variety so that those preferred moves aren't used as crutches—because what fun would it be to just Force push your way through the entire game? From what's been shown so far, LucasArts seems to have a handle on this. Even the basic stormtrooper-level units are armed with various weapons, and when different Wookiee soldiers and rancor monsters are thrown into the mix, a balanced approach is required.

The developers also seem to have a grasp on the cinematic feel of the game, which is somewhat necessary given its official capacity as the bridge



■ You'll have to adjust to enemies' advantages, like jetpacks.



between *Revenge of the Sith* and *A New Hope*. The developers employed body and facial motion capturing to record actors' performances for the cut-scenes, the soundtrack features original music performed by the San Francisco Symphony recorded at Skywalker Ranch, and a decent James Earl Jones soundalike voices Vader. It's even movie-like in its boss-battle presentation, with camera changes to more dramatic angles and a timed button-pressing event at the conclusion of the fight (which only occurs after the battle has been won, preventing unexpected deaths) that plays out choreographed finishing moves. Like most *Star Wars* works, *The Force Unleashed* mixes new locations and characters with the familiar: the Wookiee tribes on Kashyyyk, wrecked Star Destroyers, a strange organic planet called Felucia II (which you'll later revisit in a different state), and though LucasArts wouldn't confirm it, any story set in this time period

that involves Vader must also involve the construction of the first Death Star—we fully expect some epic fights to occur there.

In fact, it appears that we're being set up for many epic moments. The very first trailer for *The Force Unleashed* showed Vader's unnamed apprentice effortlessly bringing down a Star Destroyer with his hands and then stopping its tremendous crashing momentum at his feet. To allude to acts like that and not deliver them in the game would be incredibly disappointing. Not that we're expecting to be able to lock on to the Super Star Destroyer *Executor* with the right trigger and swing it around like a really, really expensive paper airplane (it's more likely that we'll see that scene play out in a button-pressing event), but for all of Palpatine's huffing and puffing about the *dark side of the Force*, it's time to put up or shut up.

Or we'll go hang out on Dagobah with Yoda and that X-wing. ✈

COMBINED EFFORT

The Force is all around us

LucasArts' multiplatform approach for *The Force Unleashed* is intriguing. Given that each of the current viable platforms has its own strengths and peculiarities, each version of the game—Windows (above), PS3, Xbox 360, PS2, PSP, and DS—mostly features different content while following the same plotline. The PS3 and 360 versions (on which this preview is based) are the same, even visually, and serve as the core, high-end experience; the PS2 version includes optional "lect" trails, which are various tests of skill in the Jedi Academy an Obi-wan; the DS version has a surprisingly effective "combo system" based on sliding the stylus across the touch screen in various patterns; the PSP version includes "historical missions," like the classic Vader-versus-Luke Cloud City showdown, as well as a multiplayer "Duel mode," and the Wii version includes a different "Duel mode" and has motion control for lightsabers and Force pushes.



Show Business

By Hal Halpin

For years, you likely read about the old Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles and yearned to attend, play prerelease games, party with other gamers, and revel in all things interactive entertainment. I can tell you firsthand that despite the downsizing of E3, those opportunities remain and that you need not travel far—or spend a fortune—to enjoy them. The best bang for your buck may well be to wait for a concert called Video Games Live to come to your area. Run by industry veterans Tommy Tallarico and Jack Wall, the concert celebrates the important role of music in games, blending a live-action show with a full orchestra, projected game imagery, and a pre- and postshow meet-and-greet. Tallarico plays host while Wall conducts the orchestra. Seeing the sea of DS Lites in an auditorium is worth the price of admission alone.

Penny Arcade Expo (PAX), held the last weekend in August each year in Seattle, is now indisputably the largest gaming-focused consumer show. PAX creators Jerry Holkins and Mike Krahulik have remained true to their mission, growing the event in a controlled and measured way. The mood and passion of the attendees is contagious—and you'll find yourself smiling while exploring booths, exhibits, concerts, and panel discussions all tailor-made for hardcore gamers.

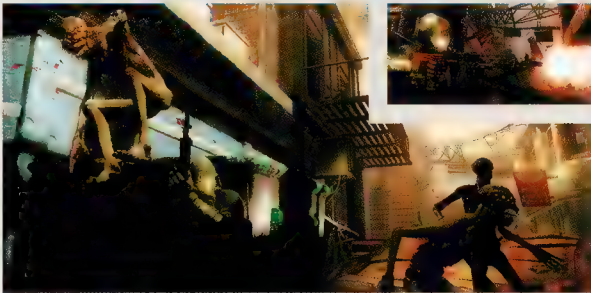
Additional shows include Comic-Con International in San Diego, Gen Con in Indianapolis, and DigitalLife in NYC. While not game-specific, these expos tend to attract leading publishers and gamers; if interested, you should definitely check out each of their respective websites to get a better feel for the mix of attending companies. The tone is very different from event to event, so I'd recommend as much research as possible—to match your budget with your hopes and expectations. For a listing of all game-related events, check out theeca.com and click on the "Games Shows & Conferences" subforum.



Hal Halpin is founder of the Entertainment Consumers Association, a nonprofit organization dedicated to watchdogging gaming legislation. Join its cause at www.theeca.com.

THE BIG ONES

Mini updates on monster games



Resistance 2

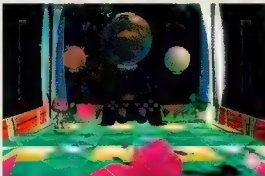
PS3 • Sony CEA • Fall 2008

With dedicated servers hosting 40-player games from data centers, the first *Resistance* brought large-scale online-shooter action to the console world. Jumping the player count up to 60 for the sequel sounds almost out of control—even developer Insomniac admits battles that size can get chaotic. They also claim to have some answers for that: huge maps—several times the size of what you've seen before—and a squad system that keeps the fighting controlled to more intimate firefights. Of course, every so often they plan to bring everyone together for a massive battle, too. After all, what's the point of having all those players if the war doesn't get messy once in a while?

LittleBigPlanet

PS3 • Sony CEA • Fall 2008

After the initial excitement over its potential, *LittleBigPlanet's* build-your-own-game-with-burlap-sack-puppets approach left many wondering if it might feel a bit too much like work. But any concerns on that front disappeared recently when we got an extended chance to fool around with the game. If anything, the challenge will be to stay on task once you start to build something. Not only are the DIY tools very easy to use, but they also spawn new ideas as you browse through them. If you bring a couple of other designers/players into the level, you'll likely wind up with levels far more fantastical than you originally planned.



Fable II

XB360 • Microsoft • Fall 2008

Fable creator Peter Molyneux dreams big when designing games. At a recent press event, he explained that in *Fable II*, he wants to tell a story you remember—and he's intentionally borrowing his favorite bits from other tales to do that. But building a story also puts him in a bit of a predicament, because *Fable II* is a "role-playing game set in a simulated world," as he puts it. As part of that, he wants players to feel free to affect his story. His solution: giving you the option to fool around during cut-scenes—to the point of even killing the characters doing the talking. How the story holds together through it all will be interesting to see.

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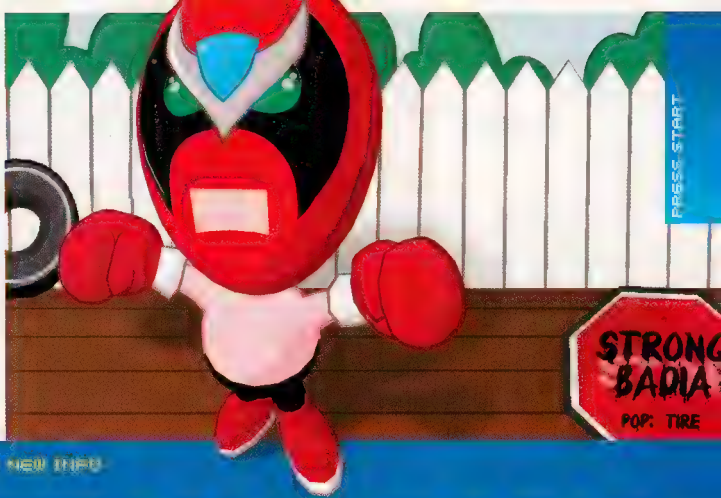
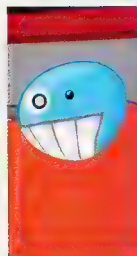
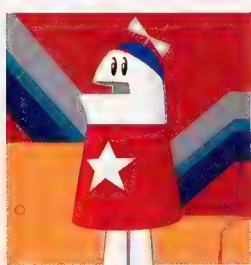
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FREE START

PREVIEW NEW INFO

STRONG BAD'S Cool Game for Attractive People

Bumrating your Wii in its sheer Strong Badness

By Ryan Scott

Platform:
Wii

Publisher:
Telltale

Developer:
Telltale

Release Date:
Summer 2008

"PLEASE STOP TRYING TO HANDLE MY STYLE," Strong Bad bellows, freshly awakened from another night of *Super Punch-Out!*-riddled dreams, "cause you can't—no, you can't—handle my style!"

HomestarRunner.com's gravelly voiced, lucha libre–masked, boxing-gloved wise guy hardly needs an introduction. Since 2001, he's starred in his very own episodic Flash cartoon, answering oddball audience questions about himself and the quirky world that he and his surreal neighbors inhabit. And now he brings his act to an episodic point-and-click adventure for Nintendo's WiiWare platform, courtesy of the wizards at Telltale—the people behind the popular *Sam & Max* PC (and soon to be Wii) adventure series. Yes, *Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People* (or, as Strong Bad refers to it, *SBCG4AP*) gives fans the opportunity to try their hand at the star's inimitable style.

The game's innocuous story stays

true to form: Upon discovering neighborhood goody-goody Homestar Runner prepping for an upcoming race (the tri-annual "Race to the End of the Race"), Strong Bad vows to win.

Population: Tire

This silly plot really just provides a thin excuse to explore Free Country, U.S.A.—Strong Bad's bizarre, colorful stomping grounds. The town exists nonlinearly; various events and branching conversations open up new areas, which players may freely place on Strong Bad's map however they see fit. The map acts as a quick-travel mechanism, zipping Strong Bad from his multistory house to the local concession stand to the pseudo-kingdom

of Strong Badia (populated—true to the cartoon—by a lone tire).

Extracurricular activities fill out much of *SBCG4AP*; Strong Bad can besiege Free Country's goofy citizenry with prank calls, cheat for high scores on his home Videlectrix gaming console, collect wacky outfits, or create his own crude comic strips via an in-game version of the Homestar site's cartoon-within-a-cartoon Teen Girl Squad feature. A scorecard tracks the objectives, and we're guessing something special happens if you uncover everything. You can even snap photos of goodies and e-mail them to friends using Strong Bad's computer. Now, if only we could figure out how he types with those boxing gloves....

➤ **The plot just provides a thin excuse to explore Free Country, U.S.A.—Strong Bad's bizarre stomping grounds.**

> NOW SHOWING AT
GAMEVIDEOS



As always, we've collected the best of the best videos for your viewing enjoyment over at GameVideos.com/EGM.



ZOMG: Exclusive Huxley gameplay clips

New footage from the Korean beta of this first-person shooter/MMO hybrid, heading to Xbox 360 and PC.



KEWL: Our new show, RSVP

Erik Wolpaw (*Portal*), Jonathan Mak (*Everyday Shooter*), and Dylan Cuthbert (*PixelJunk* series) chat about game development and Uwe Boll.



LOLZ: WWE Superstar Challenge 2008

EGM's Michael Donahoe runs wild on the stars of WWE before WrestleMania XXIV. Diva-to-Mom phone calls ensue.



L337: Gears of War 2 analysis video

We dissect and explain developer Epic's first gameplay footage. How designer Cliff Bleszinski gets his hair like that is still a mystery.



> ONLINE SCENE

Freedom of Choice

Some of GTA4's other online modes

By Bob Mackey

Using *Grand Theft Auto 4*'s developer Rockstar Games's sense of open-ended fun, EA's *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* has a lot to offer. It's a very different game, but it's still got that same old-fashioned fun that you can't get anywhere else. It's a game that's not just a game, it's a way of life. It's a game that's not just a game, it's a way of life. It's a game that's not just a game, it's a way of life.

> THELMA & LOUISE

It's you against the law in this modern-day tragedy for two players. Grab a friend or a well-meaning stranger and then hop in a car and exclusively target the A.I. police officers. How long will you last? It actually doesn't matter—because, much like *Thelma and Louise*, you aren't allowed to eject from your steel-and-fiberglass coffin. You get bonus points for finding a precipice to plummet from before the inevitable solidarity-laden explosion. While Liberty City lacks any vast canyons, the cliffs at Westdyke are sufficiently Ridley Scott-esque for this purpose.



> LEMMINGS: THE NEXT GENERATION

Unlike *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, *GTA4* doesn't provide you with jetpacks, parachutes, baggy pants, or anything else that could marginally break a fall. This doesn't stop plucky *GTA* fans from plummeting from the highest of in-game heights—like the tremendous Rotterdam Tower—and by no means should it stop you. In fact, organize a party consisting of a helicopter pilot and people with no regard for virtual life for your adventures in self-destruction; no life is complete without hearing the chilling sound of a suicide countdown over a gaming headset.

It's common for players to immediately run for the most carnage-inducing weaponry—but after a while, this becomes old hat. Rediscover the simple joys of knife violence by forming your own band of charmingly ethnic street toughs who wield blades and may or may not sing in harmony. While the knives might not have much of an effect in terms of massive destruction, you and your online teammates' reputations will soar as you become “those guys who just won't shut the f*** up!” And taking someone out with the weakest weapon in the game evokes a certain appeal unseen since the endless slaughter of old in *GoldenEye 007* (N64). Just imagine how fun this is when it's done in a swamp.

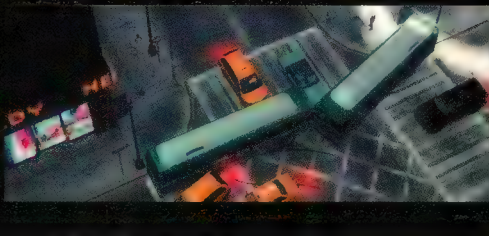


ENMITY EN MASSE

Given *GTA4*'s immense popularity, it's inevitable that you're going to run into some jerks—some even in their enchanting preteen years. And sometimes, brutal mob justice is the only way to deal with a problem; after all, the best way to get rid of Frankenstein's monster involves 15 bloodthirsty folks and an ever-shrinking escape route. If it seems unlikely that so many people would work together in such a chaotic world, trust us: Few things can get gamers to unite for a common good like an annoying jerk.

BUS JOUSTING

All the fun of jousting without the haunting stench of a Renaissance fair! More could fans of chivalry ask for? You'll find that bus jousting is much like jousting of the equine sort, except these horses weigh several tons and explode when they lose—which really would have made the Middle Ages a hell of a lot more entertaining, if you think about it. Another new feature of this contemporary take on the classic sport is that the loser can easily take out the winner in the game-ending explosion—most buses don't have a prayer of escaping this blast unless they're equipped with an onboard Keanu Reeves.



5 Lives:
Jo Garcia

It's not hard to believe that girls like to play games, but it is a little perplexing to think that a *Playboy* model enjoys fooling around with a joystick. But gorgeous clothes-deprived gamer (and *Playboy*'s 2008 Cyber Girl of the Year) Jo Garcia really does like to play. So we threw five random questions at her to see how well she performs under pressure.

1. What famous '80s teen sex comedy was turned into an Atari game?

Jo Garcia: I'm guessing *Porky's*.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining:

2. Who's better in a threesome: Hugh Hefner or Kratos?

JG: I'm going to have to say Hugh.

EGM: Incorrect. It's Kratos.

JG: I have to pick Hugh! I work for *Playboy*! Come on!

EGM: We had to pick Kratos, because he's kinda the god of war and all.

JG: Yeah, I can believe that. I've seen him; I've seen some of his pictures.

Lives remaining:

3. What game series is known for its hyper-realistic boob physics?

JG: It's not *Grand Theft Auto*, is it?

EGM: Incorrect. It's *Dead or Alive*.

JG: See, I'm going to die—I knew it!

Lives remaining:

4. Choose the correct name of the all-girl wrestling game published by Konami:

- A) G.L.O.W.
- B) *Rumble Roses*
- C) *Boobs 'n' Body Slams*
- D) *SmackDown: There Goes Your Girlfriend!*

JG: It's not *Rumble Roses*, and it's not *Boobs*. It has to be A.

EGM: Incorrect. It's actually *Rumble Roses*.

Lives remaining:

5. Who's hotter: Mario or Luigi?

JG: I think Mario's hotter, actually.

EGM: Correct.

Lives remaining:

Game Over: Obviously, someone doesn't study sexy games as much as we do. What gives, Jo—you don't like boobs or something?



▶ AFTERTHOUGHTS

Boom **BLOX**

We toss around some questions with the game's producer
By Nick Suttner



LOUIS CASTLE is a former member of every major team at EA, from the Xbox 360's *Command & Conquer: The Generals* to *Alphabet Chase*, which was promised, but never sprung up.

WE WEREN'T SURE WHAT TO EXPECT from Steven Spielberg's *Boom Blox* when it was unveiled this past February. It may be the first of several EA collaborations in the works with the famed film director, but what does he know about videogames? Well, more than we thought—*Boom Blox* turned out to be an absolutely excellent Wii game, nabbing our Game of the Month honors last issue. (And after seeing the new *Indiana Jones* flick, we're starting to think that maybe he should dedicate himself to games *entirely*.) We spoke to Louis Castle, vice president of creative development at EA Los Angeles and executive

producer of *Boom Blox*, to find out whether we should've seen this coming—and to gripe about the game's imperfections. The *Boom Blox* team is currently on "recovery time," so unfortunately we had to resort to a less-than-ideal e-mail interview. Next time we have Castle cornered, we'll

be sure to pummel him with follow-up questions and get the real juice on head-tracking...

EGM: *Jenga* is an obvious influence—but at what point in development did it go from "manipulating blocks" to "throwing balls at them"? How many of the main gameplay mechanics were cut down to arrive at the six or so that are in there?

LC: Actually, *Boom Blox* was all about the "throw" for a long time. Steven just wanted to let people break things by knocking them down, so we made a bunch of

games from there. The grab levels came later and were inspired by the dozens of classic games built on pulling blocks out of stacks without causing everything to crash down.

EGM: Be honest now—how much did Spielberg *actually* have to do with development? How hands-on was he, how often was he around, and what were his biggest contributions? Is he a diva?

LC: It was his idea from the beginning. Seriously, Steven was deeply involved in creating *Boom Blox* from concept to ship. We met with him for hours at a time on a very regular

▶ **"I don't think *Boom Blox* is 'kiddie' any more than flying turtles or big, puffy ghosts are."**

—Louis Castle, vice president of creative development at EA Los Angeles

basis. It's impossible to separate the contributions, because he had so much to do with the entire game.

ESIM: Very easy to knock over the characters when the general idea and execution has a much more all-ages appeal?

LO: I don't think Boom Blox is "lighter" any more than flying turtles or big, puffy ghosts are. Teens and adults will play great games in all visual styles, but younger kids and their parents really enjoy the happy fun approach.

ESIM: Did you intend to use the Minis from the Sims?

LO: We are the Minis, but they really don't fit as well in the world of Boom Blox (a fun, custom-created best). The blocklike nature of our cast makes them uniquely Boom Blox.

ESIM: Moments with the strongest emotional charging points of the game, in which players lose the "No Bombs" or a lightbulb? There seems to be less tension than the rest of the game, and they seem unnecessarily where they are already so messy when Mini players cannot see that much.

LO: We have two powerful elements to appreciate: and the physics we hope that was really visible, as the opportunity to play in "physics" that would cause the blocks to bounce all over the place. The throwing and juggling levels are really easy (especially Boom Blox) but have the most interesting sense of the level controls you'll get in a Mini game. If you can't get the physics right, why not do it?

ESIM: How did you manage to do it? In Boom Blox, there's a "No Bombs" or a lightbulb? How did it work?

LO: There's no "No Bombs" or a lightbulb. But that's not a game. It's a game. It's a game. It's a game.

ESIM: Do you have any other ideas for Boom Blox? Or any other ideas for Boom Blox? Or any other ideas for Boom Blox?

LO: I think the world is to play the "No Bombs" but it's not a game. It's a game. It's a game. It's a game.



■ If you haven't done it yet, set off an explosion of blocks and then hit the pause button. Matrix-style awesome!



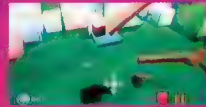
> THE WIDE WORLD OF BOOMBLOX

One of the best and most overlooked features of *Boom Blox* is the ability to create your levels or edit any existing level by using a huge palette of unlockable pieces. We forged the filthy depths of YouTube to bring you a few of our favorites. Do a search for "Boom Blox created" to watch them in all of their moving glory.



Complex Machine 1, posted by EFRUCHT

This is really the cream of the crop of what can be accomplished in a minute-and-a-half-long Rube Goldberg-esque chain reaction that must have taken hours to build. It takes full advantage of the powerful physics at work in the game behind the scenes and uses all of the main block types to accomplish a very impressive display.



Sheep Destruction, posted by whatinthe1

It's tough around the edges, but this is another awesome chain reaction with plenty of explosions. The titular sheep destruction is easily the highlight, though. As hectic as everything is for a few seconds, it ends with an old cartoon sheep getting knocked off his perch by a rather large block. The genius is in the simplicity.



Dong, posted by CameronBudde

Really, what sort of a create-your-game game would this be without a random wang? Admittedly, this is a horrible example of custom dogongy. If only you could see our hideous creations in *Graffiti Kingdom* or Senior Editor Scott Sharkey's *Pensaurus in Space*'s creature creator. Truly, we are masters of all things immature.

Guitar Hero: WORLD TOUR

The battle of the band games wages on By Nick Suttner

Platforms:
PS3/XB360

(also coming:
Wii/PS2)

Publisher:
Activision

Developer:
Neversoft

Release Date:
Fall 2008

AFTER AN EXPLOSIVELY SUCCESSFUL HOLIDAY SEASON

for rhythm games, it seems only three types of gamers remain: those who own *Rock Band*, those who own *Guitar Hero III*, and those who own both. So you'd be forgiven for feeling like you don't need any more plastic instruments clogging up your shelves. Though as lukewarm as we've been about the prospect of a fourth installment in the *Guitar Hero* franchise, we walked away from a recent press demonstration of *World Tour* feeling far more excited than we ever thought we'd be. Longtime *Tony Hawk* developer Neversoft did an excellent job of taking the *GH* reins from Harmonix (who went off to make *Rock Band*) with *GH3*, and *World Tour* is anything but a sophomore slump; it's a reinvigoration of the brand, an innovative music-creation and online-sharing tool, and a ballsy direct shot at the competition.

If you've played *Rock Band*—yes, *Rock Band*—you'll have a good idea of what to expect. *World Tour* has gone multi-instrumental, with a badass set of drums and a microphone for vocals (alongside a new guitar).

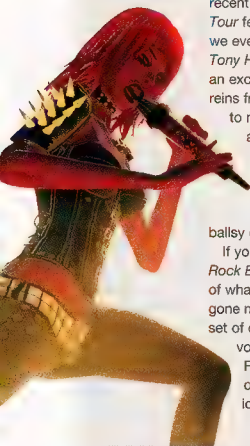
For better or for worse, the onscreen note-chart layout is identical to *Rock Band*'s—a

scrolling drum track in the middle of the screen, bass and guitar on either side, and the vocal track up top. The characters themselves, though slightly more realistic-looking, are still cartoonishly ugly and hypersexualized, a criticism of *GH3* that unfortunately still hasn't been addressed.

For the meaty details about *World Tour*'s new content, check out the sidebars below. It's an impressive feature list, but the real intrigue comes from the added instruments and the new means of creating music.

Let's start with the drums—because as much fun as *Rock Band*'s drums are, and as much as they add to the experience, *World Tour*'s setup is better. The hardware itself is a huge improvement: two adjustable silicon cymbals to hit (that have just enough floppiness in their construction to provide the "give" that makes them feel just right), three drums between them (also silicon for quieter feedback), and a foot pedal that matches up to a horizontal bar onscreen, just like—you guessed it—*Rock Band*. All of the pads are velocity-sensitive, so lightly rapping on a cymbal produces quieter splashes while whaling on it provides a satisfying crash (it's all wireless and sturdy to boot). Though Neversoft

hasn't fully figured it out yet, you'll be able to execute drum fills anywhere in a song, not just in predefined areas (you currently activate them by hitting both cymbals at once).



THE QUICK-AND-DIRTY FACTS: www.rockband.com

> WORLD OF CREATION

If you tire of *World Tour*'s cast of rock superfreaks, you can create your own characters to precise specifications with a crazy number of sliders and options. You can age them, mess with their bone structure, and even adjust the tips of their ears. Using most any color you can come up with and a powerful layered illustration tool, you can also create custom designs to be used as makeup, a tattoo, a drum head—even an album cover for when you start sharing songs online. You can also create your own in-game instruments now, customizing a guitar or bass down to the strings, highways, and fret inlays, and busting out a hilariously massive drum kit for your drummer (or even a mic and mic stand).

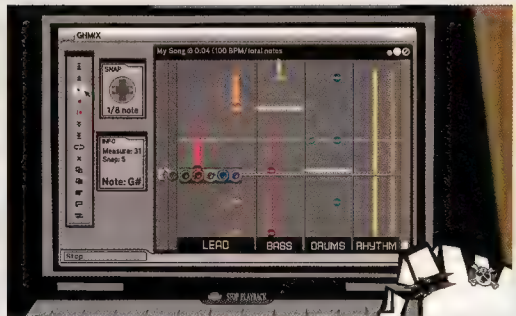


> IT'S TOUGH BEING FAMOUS

Though it may not sound exciting, *World Tour*'s career structure has quite a few changes, and it improves on several of *Rock Band*'s niggling faults. Firstly, you can switch difficulties midcareer if things get too tough for you. Secondly, you can change instruments at any time between songs, so if something is too tough on bass, you can hop over to drums and give it a shot. Also, you now share Star Power in a pool anyone can use, though it's better to activate it together.



■ This is the basic interface you use to build your tunes. Simple but rocktacular.



The new, not-yet-unveiled guitar holds a few secrets, though—and the developers used *GH3* axes during the demo to avoid unwittingly spilling any details. We did see a few sections of a new type of note scroll by, which will apparently have something to do with some new functionality/input of the guitar; in other sections, you'll be able to simply tap the buttons and not worry about the strum bar.

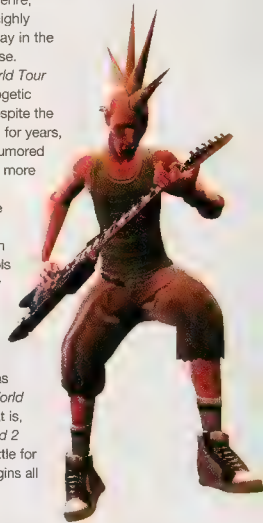
It seems likely that any new input methods would be in service of the new studio modes, where, for the first time in either rock 'n' roll series, you'll be able to create actual songs—from scratch!—with your various instruments. We don't know enough about the technical side of music to understand—never mind communicate—all of the options we saw, but that alone should help give you an idea of the toolset's depth. Once in the virtual studio, you can lay down tunes in a four-track, choosing and customizing your scales and assigning different sound sets to both the drums and guitar (from the pedestrian crunchy or clean guitar to crazy 8-bit bleeps and potentially disturbing Speak and Spell sets). You can change the octave by tilting the guitar (neat!), assign different samples to the drums for hitting them either soft or hard, and add a melody track

for vocalists to sing along with. We watched in awe as our Neversoft hosts played an impressively accurate rendition of Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit"—simply because they knew how, not because they were following any predefined notation. If you really want to be ambitious, you can delve into the GH Mix mode, a sequencer that allows you to do note-by-note step recording on the actual note chart. And for those with no music knowledge and no desire to get into the thick of it, there's a pick-up-and-play drum-machine arpeggiator, where you're simply activating and deactivating different looping samples by pressing buttons and hitting pads. Combining "hip-hop" drums and "indie rock" guitar, our hosts casually turned out a minute or two of the most interesting music we've heard recently *anywhere*. Incredibly easy and cool.

Once you create music in any of these modes, you can save your songs and share them online. You'll be able to search and filter the created

songs by various criteria—genre, rating, etc.—and the most highly rated songs will even autoplay in the background while you browse.

Yes, on the one hand, *World Tour* comes across as an unapologetic *Rock Band* impersonator (despite the fact that it's been worked on for years, starting out life as the long-rumored *Drum Villain*). But it offers far more to do out of the box and a more customized experience for various levels of music enthusiasts: Creative folk can go nuts with the creation tools and populate the community with a stream of new content for everyone to enjoy. If Neversoft's plans for downloadable content turn out to be near as excellent as *Rock Band*'s, *World Tour* just may have it all. That is, until the inevitable *Rock Band 2* makes its debut, and the battle for rhythm-genre supremacy begins all over again. 🎸



➤ **World Tour is anything but a sophomore slump; it's a reinvigoration of the brand, an innovative music-creation and online-sharing tool, and a ballsy direct shot at the competition.**

➤ **ROCK NATION**

World Tour's career structure casts you as a musician for hire, and you'll browse bulletin boards for gigs, playing three to six songs at each stop. On the multiplayer side, you can hop online with three other people to play as a band—if you can't get the necessary bodies locally—and battle other four-man bands. You can even split up the eight players into any combination of local and online, so four different households with two rockers each can still form teams, or eight players can play from their own houses.

➤ **WHAT YOU ROCK AND WHERE YOU ROCK**

World Tour will come with 90-plus songs out of the box, and all of them will be master tracks (no more shoddy covers). And though we saw quite a bit of the massive list, we're only *allowed* to tell you that Van Halen, the Eagles, Linkin Park, and Sublime will be in the game. This is frustrating because we saw some stuff that we've been waiting *ever* so long for. You'll also be playing in a handful of new venues, including a goth club, an aircraft carrier, and a state fair. As for what you'll be playing long after release...it's yet to be determined. Neversoft has big plans for downloadable content and all the ambition of weekly songs and full albums, but they've got nothing specific to announce quite yet.





RUMOR MILL

Skate park full of scuttlebutt By Quartermann

Resurrected Rumors

A lot of my recent rumors are still slowly cooking (and boy, do they smell delicious), but here's one tidbit that I recently got right: Confirmed in last month's *Geek of War 2* cover story, the game will feature 5-on-5 multiplayer matches, which I correctly called.

AH, IT FEELS GOOD TO BE RIGHT.

After months (and months) of saying last year's Game of the Year winner *BioShock* would eventually resurface on the PlayStation 3, the totally-not-false news finally washed up in last month's issue. Remember, rumor-lovers, never doubt The Q. I never intentionally lie to you. OK, that's not entirely true (see, I don't lie!), but I do try to spread only the best scuttlebutt. Like this month's crop:

Hawk Hero

It's no surprise that megapublisher Activision loves sequels. A lot. Too much, in fact—just look at what the yearly rereads did to the *Tony Hawk* series. Apparently, things may be changing—my skater spy says Activision is building a new fancy plastic peripheral (think *Guitar Hero*) for the next *Tony Hawk* game. Weird, huh? Well, it gets weirder—I also hear that longtime series developer Neversoft will not be making it.

God of Soul

At this point, no *Soulcalibur IV* character reveal should really surprise anyone. But while you shouldn't be

shocked by the rest of the secret characters waiting in the wings, you should be stoked for the one I just heard about. A mighty mole revealed to me that the star of a certain godly action game for the PS2 will be joining the ranks of the *Soulcalibur IV* crew. Guess we'll find out soon enough.

Grand Theft Greaser

If you're worried about *Grand Theft Auto IV* stealing away your time now, don't expect it to get better soon, thanks to the upcoming exclusive downloadable content hitting the 360. If time is of no concern to you, though, you'll want to hear this one: My Rockstar rumormonger tells

me that the *GTA4* DLC will star a biker character. This is just for episode 1, too. Who knows what kind of character will debut for episode 2. A fisherman? Mime? One-legged *American Gladiator* contestant?

Out of the Box

The people at Microsoft are pros at making things that sell well. Now, stuff that works well? Hah—that's what warranties are for. Unless this doozy that my mole dug up is true: Apparently, Microsoft is going to allow third-party manufacturers to make Xbox 360-compatible hardware. That means Microsoft can let other companies (Samsung, Philips, etc.) deal with red rings. ☹

Q-TIPS

- The music pros at Q Entertainment seem to be tuning up a new game for the PlayStation Network. How does another version of *Aez* sound to you?
- Speaking of the PlayStation Network, look for even more experimental content to hit later this year. Example: a bizarrely awesome music visualizer.
- If you haven't bought a PS3 or Xbox 360 yet, good—keep on waiting. Word is both pricey systems will be getting a hefty price cut this fall.

AUGUST 2008



COMING SOON

Gaming's August rush

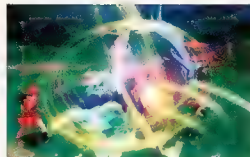
PREORDER



Too Human

XB360 • Microsoft Game Studios

In the world of *Too Human*, cybernetically enhanced humans fight the very thing they're scared to become—machines. With an intriguing mix of sci-fi themes and Norse mythology, the game is equal parts flashy sword-and-gun combat and loot-gathering role-playing, allowing players to choose from different classes at the start and to customize weapons and skills as they battle through the game.



Tales of Vesperia

XB360 • Namco Bandai

While the Wii sequel to *Tales of Symphonia* looks great, wait till you lay your eyes on the first XB360 *Tales* outing, *Tales of Vesperia*. Gorgeous cartoony art style aside, the hardware also affords this role-playing game flashier battle effects, more onscreen enemies, and downloadable content.



Sam & Max: The Devil's Playhouse

Wii • Sega

Everyone's favorite maraca-shaking, sombrero-wearing monkey is making the natural motion-controlled jump from Dreamcast to Wii. Bringing with him a crazy cast and colorful fiesta venues, Amigo will have you shaking the Wii-mote and Nunchuk—high, middle, and low—in rhythm with over 40 tracks, including "Hot, Hot, Hot" and "La Bamba."



Madden NFL 09

Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2/XB/PS/P/DS • EA Sports

Madden turns 20 this season—the videogame, not the man (boom!)—and for its platinum anniversary, the series is finally delivering online leagues with up to 32 teams, along with an overhauled presentation, upgraded snow effects that you'll want to make angels in, and a new difficulty system (coined Madden IQ) that adapts to the way you play.

MORE AUGUST RELEASES

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2008

Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2/PS/P • EA Sports

Brothers in Arms: Hellfire Highway

PS2/XB360 • Ubisoft

Warcraft: World of Warcraft

PC • Blizzard

Skull 1: Rescued

PC • Madfinger

Mykonos: The Battle of Agincourt

Wii • Focus

Rescue & Recovery: The

Wii/PS2/PS/P • Ubisoft

Avatar: The Last Airbender

Wii/PS2/PS/P • Nickelodeon

High Impact

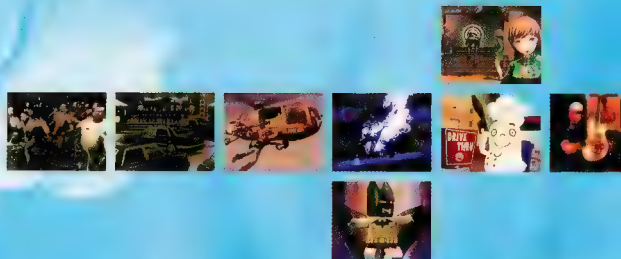
PS2/PS3/PS/P • EA

Littleton: The Battle of Littleton

Wii/PS2/PS/P • EA

Wii & PlayStation 3

(All dates on this page are subject to change.)



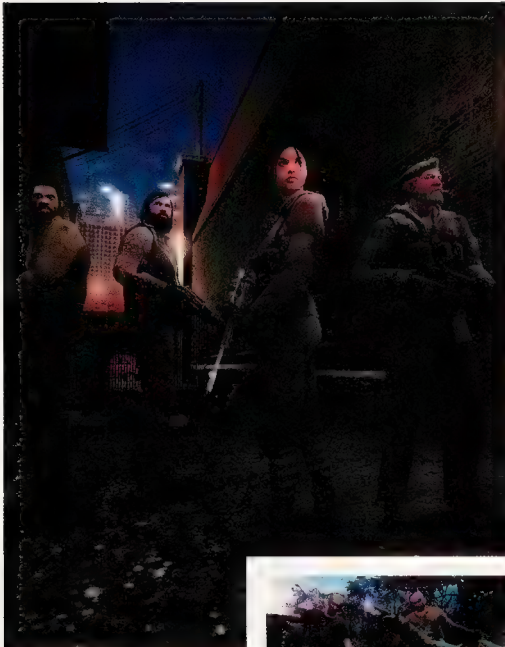
Forget- Me-Nots

Shining in the shadow of E3

WITH THE ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPO industry-trade-show onslaught of high-profile games right around the corner, it's easy to lose track of some of the lesser-hyped releases. But some of those quieter titles might very well prove just as interesting as the biggest names coming out of Los Angeles in July.

We've chosen eight games that we think are worth keeping an eye on as the E3 hype train picks up speed. Some are brand-new games, some are sequels to underappreciated predecessors, and some just look neat to us. They may end up being overshadowed by the show's biggest names, but each has the potential to shine in its own right.

LISTEN UP
FOR THE
LATEST
GAMES
AND
MORE
ON
PAGE
100



Left 4 Dead

XB360 • Valve/Electronic Arts • November 2008

What is it? It's a survival-horror game. It's a first-person shooter. It's built around the idea of cooperation but driven by seriously advanced A.I. And it's unpredictable.

"*Left 4 Dead* is not a dreary take on the hopelessness of the zombie apocalypse," says writer and Project Manager Chet Faliszek. "It's a fast-paced, frantic game about working together and being on a team."

The basic premise pits a team of four humans against innumerable hordes of rabies-infected enemies. You could call them zombies, but that doesn't really get the idea across; these creatures thirst for blood and feel no pain, sure, but they also move at serious speed and come in a wide variety of sizes and abilities.

But the real kicker is that the game will make its own decisions—different every time—about how many Infected to throw at you, where you'll find them, and how they'll behave. In a survival-horror game, a gradual feeling of confidence usually offsets the sense of fear as you learn the location and relative strengths of the different threats in the game. *Left 4 Dead* knocks that flimsy support structure right out from under you.

Why would it be forgotten? It's hard to make a first-person shooter stand out from the pack these days, even if you are the developer responsible for the *Half-Life* series. If the game doesn't have a number at the end of its title (middle doesn't count!), you can expect an uphill battle against the inertia of players firmly entrenched in the online communities of their FPSes of choice. Notice how none of the screens show the traditional behind-the-gun perspective? That's no accident; developer Valve wants you to think of this as more than "yet another" FPS.

Why should it be remembered? For the BFF factor. Our hands-on experience with the game has been almost universally positive so far, leading us to believe that the team-based aspect should work well with the survival-horror theme. We wouldn't mind seeing a mode where human players turn into Infected after being bitten, but Faliszek says that contradicts the goal of the game. "You're part of a team trying to overcome incredible numbers to escape to safety," he says. "Our focus is on strengthening that bond between teammates. If you turned, it would become a competitive game. For the core game, we want it to be noncompetitive. Your friend who doesn't regularly play FPSes can play with you because you work together, not against each other."

What is it? Another gritty, hyperdetailed tour through the seedy underworld of organized crime on the mean streets of Japan. The first *Yakuza* followed the story of a reformed operative in the yakuza (often called "the Japanese Mafia") who gets drawn back into a life of crime after spending a decade behind bars. It delivered a smart story written by renowned Japanese crime author Seishu Hase and an almost absurdly accurate re-creation of Tokyo's Kabukicho district. *Yakuza 2* draws protagonist Kazuma once again into the depths of gangland crime, this time sending him ranging through yakuza hotbed Osaka in addition to Tokyo.

Why would it be forgotten? Well, it's a sequel to a game that sold fairly poorly in the U.S., and it's coming out exclusively for PS2. That's a tough one-two punch to dodge. But Sega doesn't appear to be concerned: "This is a dark, gritty, mature story that's told in a very action-packed, cinematic way," says Producer Kevin Frane, "and that really transcends the matter of hardware."

It also doesn't help that by the time it comes out here, nearly two years will have elapsed since its launch in Japan. As for why it's taken so long, Frane offers this explanation: "We thought it was worth the extra time to make sure the game that comes out is the game that fans have been waiting for." That's an answer that, though heartwarming, lacks enough detail to inspire confidence.

Why should it be remembered? We understand why Western audiences may have found the original confusing; with little or no prior exposure to Japan's brands, culture, and storied history of organized crime, you could find yourself a stranger in a strange land. But if you avoided the game for those reasons, you missed out on a tightly scripted, well-acted adventure that combined some of the best elements of *Grand Theft Auto* and Sega's own *Shenmue*.

And we're expecting even better things this time around, especially with regard to the original's promising (but occasionally wonky) combat. "The combat system has been greatly expanded," Frane says. "It's much more streamlined, geared toward fighting multiple opponents coming at you from different directions. And the 'HEAT Actions' [powered-up attacks and finishing moves] have been greatly expanded upon, with far more environmental triggers."

And finally, for those true purists, the game will feature the original Japanese dialogue, with English subtitles. Which brings us back to the question: What, exactly, is taking so damn long?



➤ It's a sequel to a game that sold fairly poorly in the U.S., and it's coming out exclusively for PS2. That's a tough one-two punch to dodge.

Mercenaries 2: World in Flames

PS3/XB360/PS2 • Electronic Arts • August 2008

What is it? A free-form jazz odyssey of destruction. As a soldier for hire, you'll plow through the cities and jungles of Venezuela, laying waste to...well, to anything that looks like it might blow up real good. Oh, you'll find a story in here about energy crises and global militarization, but with all the cutting-edge demolition available, we're not sure we care.

Why would it be forgotten? Timing. In spite of receiving high marks pretty much across the board from reviewers, the first *Mercenaries* didn't make as big a splash as its designers would have liked, so developer Pandemic was hoping to get the sequel out early this year to catch some attention in the postholiday drought. But now that it's been delayed to late August, it's definitely encroaching into fall-madness territory.

Why should it be remembered? *Grand Theft Auto IV's* multiplayer features have shown us how much of a blast it is to wreak large-scale havoc with a pal. *Mercs 2* is taking things a step further by including the ability to play through the whole game in two-player co-op. "It's an interesting challenge for us," says Lead Designer Scott Warner, "not only to go to the next-generation tech but also to take all our game-design philosophies and apply them to having a second person in the world with you at all times."

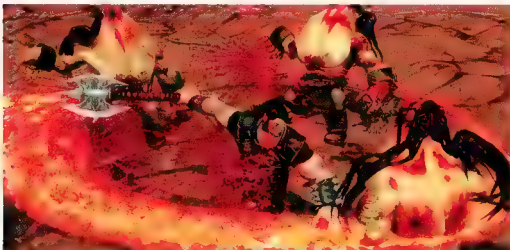
Brütal Legend

PS3/XB360 • Sierra • Late 2008

What is it? A gritty, quirky, and occasionally goofy homage to all that is good and holy in the world of metal. It follows the story of roadie Eddie Riggs, who finds himself transported to a heavy-metal fantasy world in the wake of a bloody tuning accident. With the help of a cast of metal mentors, he must do battle against the forces of glam and emo in free-roaming brawler style, with a few light strategy elements thrown in for kicks. It's kind of like a Manowar song come to life.

Why would it be forgotten? The works of Tim Schafer never seem to quite get the respect they deserve right off the bat. See *Psychonauts* and *Grim Fandango* (PC), which were almost universally praised by critics but took a surprisingly long time to catch the public's attention. And in this sequel-happy world, creating an all-new property doesn't help things.

Why should it be remembered? The game seems to be pulling off a magnificent balancing act between tongue-in-cheek satire and earnest metal appreciation. On the one hand, Jack Black voices the main character. But it also has Lemmy Kilminster of Motörhead, Rob Halford of Judas Priest, and Ronnie James Dio providing voices as well. No matter—metal fans will dig it either way.



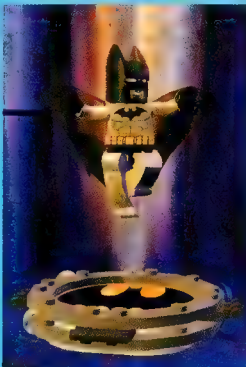
Lego Batman

Wii/PS3/XB360/PS2/DS • Warner Bros. Interactive
• September 2008

What is it? If you've played any of the *Lego Star Wars* games (and if not, how come?), you know the drill: Familiar characters and locations get the blocky *Lego* treatment, infused with a healthy dose of irreverence and self-referential humor. In *Lego Batman*, the designers are drawing on scenarios, settings, characters, and villains from throughout the Caped Crusader's stylistically varied career.

Why would it be forgotten? Because some too-cool-for-school gamers seem to think that the *Lego* games are only appropriate for kids, which simply isn't true. What *is* true is that the basic idea doesn't seem to have changed much through the three *Lego Star Wars* games and *Lego Indiana Jones*. And this could lead to the perception that developer Traveller's Tales is turning into a formulaic *Lego*-license mill.

Why should it be remembered? The *Lego* games have proven to be reliably entertaining (and occasionally hilarious) send-ups of beloved franchises, and *Batman* seems like no exception. We're particularly looking forward to being able to step into the shoes of a number of *Batman*'s legendary enemies (like the Joker, the Penguin, the Riddler, and more) and complete special missions designed just for them. Best of all, the darker Gotham setting may also finally convince the stubborn holdouts that the *Lego* series ain't just for kids.



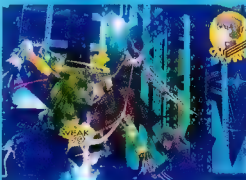
Persona 4

PS2 • Atlus • TBA

What is it? Another entry in the perennially underappreciated (in the U.S., at least, and this one hasn't officially been announced for our shores yet) *Persona* series. *Persona 4* follows a group of high school students (natch) who discover the ability to enter a mysterious world through their TV sets at the stroke of midnight. In something of a departure from previous *Personas*, this one appears to have a slightly retro feel, with more of a '70s or '80s vibe as opposed to the traditional modern-day setting.

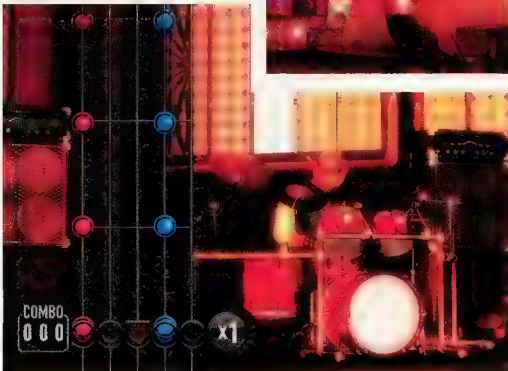
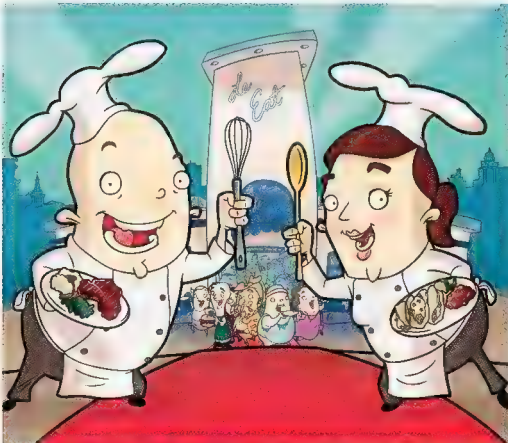
Why would it be forgotten? We have no idea why this smart role-playing series has been so overlooked over here while any fantasy-themed game starring an effeminate, oddly coiffed, world-saving orphan sells like gangbusters. But that's the way things appear to be—and, honestly, however good *Persona 4* might be, we'll be surprised if that changes this time around. And it certainly doesn't help that the game's coming out on an 8-year-old system.

Why should it be remembered? The *Persona* series has offered clever writing, interesting characters, and almost absurd amounts of playtime since its PS1 inception. Though the series has been largely ignored outside of a small, devoted circle of fans, *Persona 3* made it to the top of plenty of best-of lists last year; it was even a nominee for Game of the Year in our own 1UP Awards.



In something of a departure from previous *Personas*, this one appears to have a slightly retro feel.





Order Up!

Wii • Zoo Games • Summer 2008

What is it? While Majesco's *Cooking Mama* titles have achieved great success with their simple Wii Remote food-preparation minigames, they're not exactly serious culinary simulators. *Order Up!* expands on the basic food-prep premise by offering multiple restaurants, a wide array of dishes ranging from simple diner staples to *Top Chef*-worthy haute cuisine, and the ability to cook multiple dishes at once while delegating smaller tasks to sous-chefs.

Why would it be forgotten? Going up against *Mama*'s empire won't be easy: Will fans feel the need to pick up another cooking game? (Not to mention the value-priced *Major League Eating* hitting WiiWare this summer.)

Why should it be remembered? Virtual gourmands seeking a deeper food sim will dig the more complex gameplay. With more realistic Wii-mote gesticulations, the ability to tailor spice levels to customers' tastes, and a true sense of progression through the demanding restaurant world, *Order Up!* masks a meaty game beneath a whimsical facade. It'll likely be remembered as the next step for *Mama* vets. "I think *Mama* would very quickly find herself 'in the weeds' here," says Creative Director Lee Cummings of developer GreenScreen. "Her seemingly OCD preoccupation with cooking one dish at a time in a frustratingly linear sequence would leave the kitchen full of dishes getting cold as she struggled to get the rest of an order completed."

Rock Revolution

Wii/PS3/XB360/DS • Konami • Fall 2008

What is it? Long overdue, for one thing. Konami's *GuitarFreaks* was unquestionably the major influence on *Guitar Hero*, and its interfacing with *DrumMania* set the stage for *Rock Band*. But Konami has never released these games in the West. Now the company's finally angling for a piece of the sweet musical pie.

Why would it be forgotten? It's entirely possible that music-game fans don't have room in their hearts (or their living rooms) for yet another game requiring fancy, pricey, space-consuming peripherals. And while the song list released so far includes a few standouts (Skid Row's "Youth Gone Wild"? Hell yes!), it also appears to be packing in plenty of retreads. Or perhaps we didn't hear about a new law that requires all new music games to feature the Ramones' "Blitzkrieg Bop," Wolfmother's "Joker & The Thief," and KISS' "Detroit Rock City."

Why should it be remembered? *Rock Revolution* is looking like it'll turn out to be the most drum-centric of the music-game genre, with a controller sporting a staggering seven inputs (that's six pads plus the bass pedal). We're also digging what the designers are aiming to do with the Wii version: The idea is to do away with the need for special peripherals and instead allow players to rock out with just the Wii-mote and Nunchuk in true air-guitar (and air-drums) fashion. 🎸



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ZONE DEFENSE

Guerrilla Games explains that **Killzone 2** was never delayed, was never meant to kill Halo, and will look every bit as good as that infamous trailer from 2005

By Shane Bettenhausen ▶



Prepare to commandeer some vehicles: The second level of *Killzone 2* climaxes with a tense tank battle in the outskirts of the Helghast capital city.

KILLZONE WAS NEVER "JUST ANOTHER FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER."

By the time most people caught on to developer Guerrilla Games' PlayStation 2-exclusive blast-a-thon, the gaming press had already saddled it with the audacious "*Halo* killer" label. While that comparison immediately vaulted the title to the forefront of the sketchy PS2 shooter lineup, it created some sky-high expectations. "When we started out on *Killzone*, we were just a bunch of guys who got together and formed a game studio," says *Killzone 2* Technical Director Michiel van der Leeuw. "Working on something as phenomenally big and

highly anticipated as *Killzone* was daunting, and we honestly felt a bit dwarfed by the experience."

Leaping from relative obscurity onto the front lines of the console war put Amsterdam-based Guerrilla and its game under a tremendous amount of scrutiny. "That *Halo* comparison gave us a hell of a lot of attention and caused a lot of hype, but *Killzone's* always been a very different beast than *Halo*," says Guerrilla Managing Director Herman Hulst. "So none of us really wanted to make that comparison." Unfortunately, both critics and players held Sony's effort up against Bungie's finest, and unsurprisingly

found that it didn't quite measure up. Technical hiccups, A.I. problems, and control issues clearly kept the shooter from supplanting Master Chief's escape as the console-shooter king. Even so, the game would go on to sell over 2 million units worldwide, making it enough of a hit to inspire both a PSP spin-off (*Killzone: Liberation*) and a full-fledged PlayStation 3 sequel, due in February 2009.

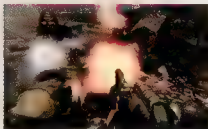
Once freed from the shackles of trying to breed a game that could somehow silence *Halo*, Guerrilla narrowed its focus on creating a PS3 *Killzone* that directly addressed the first game's shortcomings. But back

Catching Up

Previously on Killzone...

So you've somehow missed the earlier two *Killzone* titles, and you're curious whether or not you'll be completely befuddled by *Killzone 2*'s already-in-progress narrative. No worries—we're here to quickly get you up to speed on what came before the PS3 sequel.

Killzone • PS2 • 2004



Set in a spacefaring "near future," the original game casts you as heroic Capt. Jan Templar, who, along with three other soldiers in the Interplanetary Strategic Alliance (ISA), must defend the colony world of Vekta against the encroaching Helghast army. Led by the cruel and ruthless Scolar Visari, the Helghast seek to undermine and destroy the ISA through a combination of pure military might and political duplicity. Although imposing and seemingly inhuman, the Helghast themselves are actually ex-humans that have evolved due to the harsh, toxic environment on the colony world of Helghan. Luckily, before the bad guys can take their misplaced aggression out on an entire planet, Templar and his crew keep them occupied until cavalry from Earth can arrive.

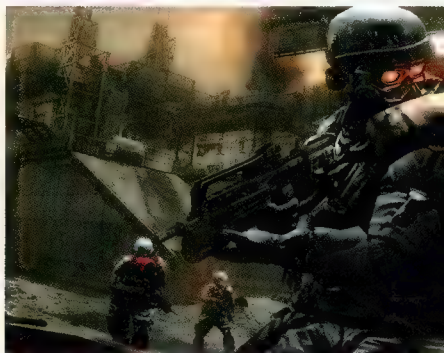
Killzone: Liberation • PSP • 2006



This handheld follow-up continues the saga of planet Vekta, as Jan Templar and friends seek to completely liberate it from Helghast control. Along the way, the bad guys lose one of their most feared leaders (the sadistic Gen. Armin Meترac), but they also gain a tactical advantage by stealing a cadre of powerful ISA nuclear weapons. With a fragile peace restored to Vekta, the ISA council reveals plans to invade Helghan and arrest the menacing Visari.



▶ **REPLICATED** Although this game, we found these little enemy vehicles from the safety of our ISA mask, but brave foot soldiers can attempt to stop it, too.



in 2004, before any actual work on the game began, they decided to craft a CG-animated "visual target" clip for inspiration and promo purposes at the 2005 E3 trade show. "We wanted to have a very clear vision of what *Killzone 2* should look like, and what [PS3] games in general should deliver in terms of intensity, detail, and movement," says van der Leeuw. "When you go back and look at that trailer, there's so much in there. We're still really keen on achieving that." Three years later, they're still trying to live that controversial teaser down (see sidebar on pg. 63), but based on our hands-on experience with the game, it

may actually come close to reaching their seemingly unattainable target.

Major re zoning ahead

Odds are that you won't hear veterans of the original *Killzone* bemoaning the myriad changes being made to its sequel. Several aspects of the first game simply didn't work, and Guerrilla has no qualms about rethinking fundamental design choices. "*Killzone* was our first game, so of course you're going to find some mistakes and glitches," says Visual Designer Roland IJzermans. "We really had to figure out what people liked and didn't like about the first game and then fix

what was broken." Their first order of business? Add a jump button. "I had no idea that everyone thought jumping was so precious!" IJzermans says. Another big design shift pares the number of playable characters down from four to only one, fresh-faced protagonist Sev. "We wanted to have one stronger main character as opposed to having four separate heroes," says Game Director Mathijs de Jonge. "We feel that having one hero will lead to a better experience."

That doesn't mean that Sev's blasting through the Helghast home planet by his lonesome, though—in both of the levels we've seen, he always

ISA vs. Helghast Tech

Spotting friends and foes amid the fray just got easier

Considering the "us versus them" concept central at the heart of *Killzone*, it's imperative that you're able to quickly and clearly identify ISA and Helghast troops and equipment on the battlefield. Thankfully, the designers have made it easier to label someone a friend or foe in *Killzone 2*. "We were still experimenting in the first game, but now we're much more focused on the differentiation between the ISA and the Helghast and their disparate structural styles," says Technical Director Michiel van der Leeuw. ISA technology doesn't look that far removed from modern U.S. military gear, as evidenced by a slightly ostentatious tank or an extra-shiny silver Desert Eagle.

By comparison, the Helghast stuff looks downright diabolical, with lots of matte black metal and superfluous blades. And since the game is set on the Helghast planet, Guerrilla's art team had plenty of dark gear to design. "We extrapolated their society from what we already knew—that they are a fascist, totalitarian regime," says van der Leeuw. The coolest Helghast weapon we spied: The Arc Cannon, a huge beam that harnesses the power of Helghan's apocalyptic thunderstorms. We hear there are more weather weapons, too....

ISA



HELGHAST



Technical Director Michiel van der Leeuw defends his highly detailed gun models and reload animations because "you stare at the gun for the whole game!"



Guerrilla isn't ready to discuss online play, but the constant presence of "buddy A.I." partners seems to make co-op play an absolute given.



has at least one surprisingly effective A.I.-controlled squad member at his side. You don't even have to worry about issuing commands to your buddies (even though it worked so well in *Killzone: Liberation*, Guerrilla thought it would be too clumsy in a first-person game), but you can revive them when wounded, help them over obstacles, and assist them in other context-sensitive ways. Implementing a new cover system also makes *Killzone 2* a far more user-friendly experience. Much like in *Gears of War* or *Uncharted*, a simple button press anchors you to your nearest available cover point. From there, you can either lean-and-

peek to fire at your target or instantly pop up and zoom in for a quick headshot. This new defensive dynamic radically changes up the game's pacing—it's now definitely less run-n-gun and more stop-and-pop.

Killzone 2's effective new cover system doesn't just benefit you and your Interplanetary Strategic Alliance (ISA) pals, though. Helghast troops now routinely make snap tactical decisions on the battlefield, leaping behind a safer cover point if you start to pepper their current hiding place with gunfire. The original *Killzone* wasn't exactly renowned for its clever enemy A.I., and the guys at Guerrilla hope to

correct that here by giving its foes the ability to intelligently navigate maps by climbing over obstacles and a desire to relentlessly pursue you should you attempt to run like a coward.

The addition of vehicles should also have a profound effect on the game's pacing, but our limited hands-on time felt a tad...inconclusive. We squared off in the climactic tank-on-tank melee shown in these screens, but the slow-moving controls and narrow battlefield made for a frustrating experience. Let's hope that *Liberation*'s hovercraft and jetpack reappear here, possibly with Sixaxis motion control. So far, the only gestural implementation we spied was

Meet Alpha Squad

Killzone 2 debuts three fresh faces...and one old favorite

COVER STORY

Cpl. Dante Garza

Garza's a wisecracking smart-ass from a privileged family; his parents sent him to a military academy at a young age to straighten him out. While the ISA wasn't able to stamp out his rebellious streak, at least they shaped him into an expert sniper and skilled technician.

Master Sgt. Rico Velasquez

Rico has served the ISA for 12 years, including a tour of duty with Templar defending Vekta (*Killzone 1*). However, during that conflict, he was captured by the Helghast and tricked into betraying his side. Despite a full pardon, he's still coping with his past choices....

Sgt. Tomas Sevchenko

Born on the colony world Vekta, Tomas lost several close family members during the Helghast invasion. He's a hard-working, by-the-books leader who exudes quiet professionalism. Called "Sev" by his friends, he's your avatar through the entire single-player game.

Cpl. Shawn Natko

Hailing from humble, working-class beginnings, the cynical, pessimistic Natko spent many years toiling on the Terranium rigs before joining the ISA. He's the Alpha Squad's best hand-to-hand fighter and demolitions expert, relishing close combat.



Killzone 2's supporting cast

Everlyn Batton

This sultry scientist worked on the weapons seized by the Helghast during the events of *Killzone: Liberation*. Now she's returning to help the ISA deal with the newfound nuclear threat.



Scolar Visari

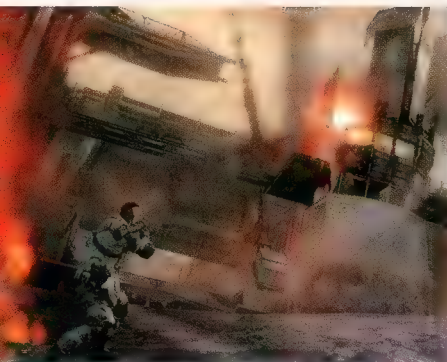
The elusive leader of the Helghast (that's not even him pictured, just some random baddie in his employ) prefers to stay out of the limelight. His capture (and eventual public trial) remains your primary goal in *Killzone 2*.



Col. Jan Templar

The hero from the previous two *Killzone* games earned a promotion and now helms the massive ISA battle cruiser *New Sun*, tasked with invading Helghan and arresting Scolar Visari. He handpicks Sev to lead Alpha Squad.





in a brief wheel-turning puzzle. Hulst promises "a lot more Sixaxis content where that came from."

Sensory overload

Honestly, we were somewhat surprised that *Killzone 2* felt so accessible and engaging. We were less shocked to find ourselves gawking at the game's audiovisual splendor, however. While it's not quite up to the level of that E3 trailer yet, this game looks *choice*.

Even though you spend most of the game staring down a gun barrel, Guerrilla has put tremendous effort into creating characters that look,

move, and act naturally. Motion-captured animation lends obvious realism to both the cut-scenes and in-game content, and just as in *Heavenly Sword*, the same actor who's delivering the lines is also running, jumping, and leaping while covered in ping-pong balls. "Being able to simultaneously capture the dramatic line reading, actual lip sync, and physical mo-cap session makes a far more believable final performance," says Cinematic Lead Jonathan Kray.

Once you look past the stellar animation, much of the game's beauty lies in complex special effects that give everything a stylized edge. In the

demo level we played, we constantly felt like we were in a colossal, unpredictable firefight—frequent airstrikes, grenades, and heavy-artillery assaults make for a chaotic battlefield. "There are tons of effects going on that you may not even notice," says van der Leeuw. "We try to get it to a point where you don't even see polygons.... You should be so immersed in the game, it should be so dense around you, that you forget it's only a game."

The developers are quick to reveal the man—or, rather, the machine—behind the curtain, boasting about the benefits of deferred rendering techniques and how they've maxed

Trailer Trashed

Can the real Killzone 2 look as good as that infamous E3 clip?

COVER STORY

Now this just seems masochistic: Having just survived endless *Halo* comparisons with the first *Killzone*, Guerrilla wowed the crowds at 2005's E3 gaming expo with a gorgeous CG "visual target" trailer for the planned PS3 follow-up. Why would they purposefully set such high expectations for their next project? "We put a lot of pressure on ourselves," says *Killzone 2* Visual Designer Roland IJzermans. "But we set such lofty ambitions because we're so ambitious ourselves." But were they trying to pass that rendered clip off as actual gameplay footage? According to them, never. "I think that something went wrong regarding that trailer and how it was communicated," IJzermans explains. "Suddenly, everyone was all, 'You had better match that, or else!' but it's never going to be a pixel-by-pixel match."

The level presented in the trailer won't even appear in the final game, although bits and pieces of it may show up in other areas. But everyone on the team seems assured that the final product can live up to their original vision. "That 2005 trailer communicated our goal; that's what we're making, what we're striving for, and what we're actually realizing," says Guerrilla Managing Director Hermen Hulst. "If we internally felt that we couldn't deliver on that promise, maybe that milestone from 2005 would have become a millstone, but it's not, because we feel good about our chances to exceed those expectations."



While the in-game visuals aren't quite to the level Guerrilla still hopes to attain, the goal



Since all the screens here feed from one level, Jim I expect the entire game to look so bleak. Guerrilla will highlight the "natural beauty" of Helghan.



At 50 fps, both levels show up just with an 180-degree drop. Earlier crash-landing on Belgium. "It's just a coincidence," says Visual Designer Roland Kjaermans. "I swear, they work most of the time."

out four-and-a-half of the six cores powering the PS3's Cell chip, but they're also quick to give shout-outs to other Sony teams that have shared invaluable tools, tech, and info. "Sony basically has an international forum for sharing character technology, animation tools, and graphic shaders," says van der Leeuw. "We've taken a few tricks directly from the *Resistance* guys at Insomniac, and we've even been talking directly to the *God of War* guys in Santa Monica." Guerrilla obviously isn't afraid to ask for help, and they've already bolstered their 130-man team by enlisting various outside contractors and even "bor-

rowing" several key members of Sony Europe's Studio Cambridge (*Primal*).

That effort to delve deep into the PS3's graphical well has paid off: During our hands-on demo, we spied one of gaming's most impressive visual showcases to date. Midlevel, you pause to destroy an enemy-infested building with a rail gun, aiming for explosive-rigged supports. When the structure finally collapses, the resulting effect is positively eerie—huge chunks of wall tumble down, followed by billowing smoke clouds that realistically cascade, solemnly settling over the battlefield. Then, look up and you see leftover airborne debris glinting in the

shafts of light streaming through the clouds. At this point, you're probably not hunting for seams in the polygons.

Delay? What delay?

Considering how smoothly *Killzone 2* looks and plays at this point, we're stunned by Sony's recent announcement of a release-date shift from this fall to next February. Guerrilla is taking the change in stride. "I wouldn't use the word 'delay,' because we sat down with marketing for various territories and determined when the best slot to release it would be," Hulst says. "I believe that we could have shipped it this year, but if you take everything



Photo: Electronic Arts

into consideration [for instance, this fall's release of brother-in-arms *Resistance 2*], it's a logical slot, and it gives us the opportunity to polish the living daylights out of the game."

Hulst is quick to silence rumors blaming the release-date bump on his team's inability to code for the complex PS3 hardware. "No, I don't place any of the perceived 'delays' on difficulties with the PS3 hardware.... I don't think that we've experienced any delays, and we've always said that we'd ship the game when it's ready, and we'll do that in February," says Hulst. "And if you were to ask me if we would have shipped the game

earlier had we worked with different hardware, I don't think so."

Considering how adamant Hulst and co. seem about their game's development schedule, we were bummed that no amount of prodding could get them to divulge details on its multiplayer action. "Multiplayer is just as important to us as single player, and it's going to be very, very strong," Hulst says. "The individual features of multiplayer will be revealed at a later time." The constant presence of an A.I. partner leads us to expect co-op play throughout the campaign, and traditional deathmatch, team deathmatch, and capture the

flag all seem like safe bets. But then again, the first *Killzone*'s online play was notoriously plagued by cheaters and glitches (until it was patched), and *Liberation* didn't receive true "Infrastructure" online play until eight months after release.

Ultimately, *Killzone 2* deserves to be judged on its own merits, and Guerrilla hopes that gamers (and the gaming press) keep an open mind and move beyond the *Halo*-killer nonsense. "We've never singled out *Halo* as the one title to beat. We still don't," Hulst explains. "This year, it's been all about *Call of Duty 4*, but perhaps the next year it will be something else." 🎮

EGM Extras:
Want to go behind the scenes with *Killzone 2*? Point your browser to **EGM.1UP.COM** for exclusive interviews with key designers, artists, and musicians.

REVIEWS

> island farms, don king, stars that sing, and the master of dismemberment

74

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS (GAME OF THE MONTH)

> CONTENTS

- 68 We Love Golf
- 68 Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon
- 69 Battlefield: Bad Company
- 70 Civilization Revolution
- 72 Top Spin 3
- 72 SingStar
- 73 Haze
- 74 Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
- 78 Supreme Commander
- 79 Spectral Force 3
- 79 Don King Presents: Prizefighter
- 80 Ninja Gaiden II
- 84 Final Fantasy IV
- 86 Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness
- 86 Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2
- 88 Download Round-Up



> THIS MONTH IN REVIEW

Snakes on a Magazine

Where three became one

MULTIMAN REVIEWS have always stood as one of *EGM's* defining characteristics. Sure, four-man reviews eventually became three-man reviews, and even that was a big deal at the time. This issue's big change: We're moving forward with—gasp!—one-man reviews. Don't panic; three-man reviews are still here for the big games, where we have the space to *really* do them justice. Previous console generations were simpler times, but that's become increasingly difficult over the years, thanks to the growing complexity of games—and instead of three people saying very little in 90 or so words each, we feel it benefits our readers more when one person says a lot in 350 words.

Again: Don't panic. It's a big change, but it's a necessary one in order for us to keep bringing you the definitive, quality reviews that you rightfully expect from us.

—Ryan Scott, Exec. Editor, Reviews

> HOW WE RATE

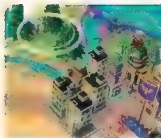
- A+** to **A-** Excellent
- B+** to **B-** Good
- C+** to **C-** Average
- D+** to **D-** Bad
- F** Terrible

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





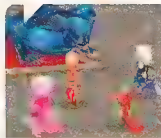
PAGE
70

Civ Rev:
Very, very
heavy lifting



PAGE
78

Prizefighter:
No Fight
Night, no sir



PAGE
84

**FFIV: A
classic, with
touching**



THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW



Dashing, debonair, will fight off killer robots/samurai/pirates for a nominal fee



James "Milkman" Mielke

Editor-in-Chief
Perplexed by Nick's gripes with *Ninja Gaiden II*'s camera, Milky ordered young Sutter to spend "quality" time with *Kingdom Hearts* and *GunValkyrie* before ever issuing a complaint about a game's camera again.
Now Playing: *Ninja Gaiden II*
Blog: milkman.1UP.com



Greg Ford

Managing Editor
Greg Ford would like to share a message that was as true in his time as it is today. Be excellent, games. Be excellent. Also, regarding Crispin: Maybe.
Now Playing: *Burnout: Paradise*, *Metal Gear Solid 4*, *Grand Theft Auto IV*, *Assault Heroes 2*, *Assassin's Creed*
Blog: egmford.1UP.com



Shane Bettenhausen

Executive Editor, News
This month, Shane jetted all over the globe to scope hot new titles. Unfortunately, somewhere between Vegas and Amsterdam, he lost all sense of time and space...though replaying *MGS4* could also be to blame for that.
Now Playing: *Killzone 2*, *Street Fighter IV*, *MGS4*
Blog: egmshane.1UP.com



Ryan Scott

Executive Editor, Reviews
As a result of previously good-timing-gone-bad, Ryan spent this issue's production cycle getting engaged and gambling away his life savings in Las Vegas...leaving poor Nick to do all the last-minute work. What a jerk!
Now Playing: *MGS4*
Blog: gfwryan.1UP.com



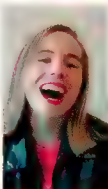
Andrew Pfister

Producer, Podcasts
Andrew's on a power trip lately, saving the world in *MGS4* with one hand and bringing it to the brink of nuclear annihilation in *Civilization* with the other. As he writes this, the idea for *Hideo Kojima's Civilization* is born.
Now Playing: *Metal Gear Online*, *Civilization Revolution*
Blog: andrewpf.1UP.com



Sam Kennedy

Site/Editorial Director
Sam's been on a major golf kick recently, hitting the links whenever possible. No, he doesn't actually practice putting in the office—but he has been playing a bunch of *We Love Golf*. Too bad his handicap isn't as low in real life.
Now Playing: *We Love Golf!*
Blog: capnsmak.1UP.com



Jennifer Tsao

Group Managing Editor
After reviewing *Civilization Revolution* this month, Jen's all about world domination. The latest salvo in her war of cultural influence? Crispin Boyer. Go forth and spread your writing far and wide, Crispin! The Aztecs won't know what hit 'em!
Now Playing: *Boom Blox*
Blog: egmjennifer.1UP.com



Jeremy Parish

Senior Editor
Parish digs the *Final Fantasy* series, sure, but after reviewing about half a dozen *Final Fantasy* titles already this year he's starting to sympathize with Sephiroth just a teensy bit. Mmm, Aerith-Kebobs.
Now Playing: *Snake's Revenge*, *Judgment Silversword*
Blog: jparish.1UP.com



Nick Suttner

Associate Editor, Reviews
Nick finally purchased his first HDTV this month. Well, not so much "purchased" as "traded his mortal soul to the devil." He gets to watch movies and play games like never before, and he simply has to have his personal resolution dialed down a notch.
Now Playing: *fOW*, *Rez HD*
Blog: rocksolidaudio.1UP.com



Crispin Boyer

Outgoing Senior Executive Editor
The end.
Or is it???

Now Playing: *Jaws Unleashed*, *MGS4*, *Boom Blox*
Blog: egmcrispin.1UP.com

Also on deck...

Jeff Green
Editor-in-Chief, PC

Matt Leone
Senior Executive Editor

Sean Moiley
Senior Executive Editor, PC

Shawn Elliott
Executive Editor, Features

Garnett Lee
Executive Editor, Reviews

Alice Liang
Associate Editor, Reviews

Anthony Gallo
Reviews Intern

David Ellis
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.



Wii

WE LOVE GOLF!

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



Well, we like it pretty well, at any rate...

➔ **SAM:** I'm not sure about the rest of you, but the one thing I'd expect from any golf game on the Wii is that you'd, you know, be able to hit the ball by actually swinging the Wii Remote like a golf club. Well, that's definitely not the case here.

Instead, *We Love Golf!* uses a variation on the system that developer Camelot created for the *Hot Shots Golf* and *Mario Golf* games. You do use the Wii-mote, but it's really not the golf experience many players will be looking for—it's more about slight, precise motions in conjunction with an onscreen meter, and less about real swings. It is, however, exactly the experience that fans of those other golf series will want—like Camelot's other aforementioned golf games, *We*

Love Golf! is supercute, lots of fun, and filled with plenty to do.

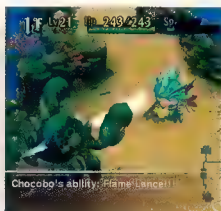
It's also really accessible—one of the trademarks of Camelot's handiwork. While most of the fundamentals of golf are here, everything's presented in a simple, fun manner that even the most inexperienced golfer can have fun with. So while you start off playing on your standard grass course, you quickly move on to beach resorts, desert ruins, and pirate-themed areas. Your characters, too, bubble with personality (and in addition to being able to use your Miis, you can unlock a bevy of established Capcom stars like Jill Valentine and Chun-Li). Uppy music plays in the background, celebratory displays accompany good shots, and an excit-

able Wii-mote character loves to cheer you on.

Where *We Love Golf!* also works well is in its variety of options. In addition to your standard tournaments, the game includes training modes, character matches, ring shots, near-pin shots, and more. Not to mention multiplayer (including online play) when you tire of hitting the greens alone.

It's enough to keep golfing fans entertained, and it's nice to see Camelot's golf system enhanced with motion controls. But like I mentioned earlier, players looking for a more true-to-life golf experience on Wii may want to go with something like *Tiger Woods*—or simply just play more of *Wii Sports Golf*, which comes packed in with the system.

The Good: From the guys who brought you *Mario Golf*
The Bad: You don't actually swing the Wii-mote like a club
You Could Just: Play *Wii Sports Golf*



Wii

FINAL FANTASY FABLES: CHOCOBO'S DUNGEON

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



Chocobos gone wild

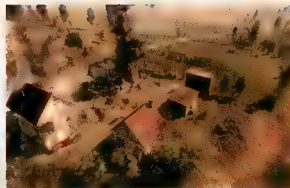
➔ **JEREMY:** The roguelike genre is seriously blowing up these days. *Shiren the Wanderer*, *Pokémon Mystery Dungeon*, *Chocobo's Dungeon*: Their tone, quality, and specific gameplay mechanics may vary, but they all belong to a distinct niche that obeys very specific (and usually very unforgiving) rules. For instance, when you die, you lose everything... often including the shirt off your back. *Chocobo's Dungeon* falls more on the challenging end of the spectrum than something like *Pokémon*, although it's not quite as brutal as *Shiren*. Death doesn't reset your noble chocobo's experience back to level 1, and you get to keep your equipped weapon and armor. Don't expect a cake-walk, though. Between this and *Final*

Fantasy IV, July is apparently the month that Square Enix decided to kick your ass and make you like it.

With such a hardcore game experience, it stands to reason that the elements that make or break it are fairly genre-specific; indeed, only roguelike aficionados are likely to fully appreciate this dungeon-diving adventure. Which isn't to say that newcomers won't enjoy it—on the contrary, *Chocobo's Dungeon* offers a forgiving learning curve to ease you into the adventure for a couple of hours before turning up the challenge level. The game features simple but lush graphics, a decent story, and an utterly gorgeous “best of *Final Fantasy*” soundtrack that will send shivers of nostalgia up any old-schooler's spine.

And therein lies the game's greatest strength: It makes a niche style accessible without dumbing it down to utter pointlessness (as the *Pokémon* iterations did). It excellently mixes all of the traditions of the *Mystery Dungeon* games—tough-but-fair difficulty, tons of improvisational strategy and the need for effective item use, special restricted dungeons, equipment forging—while incorporating some brilliant new ideas, such as the job system that allows the chocobo hero to change and develop his class and make use of innate skills. As with all games of this nature, *Chocobo's Dungeon* will mainly appeal to genre fans...but it's good enough that anyone can enjoy it (well, anyone with a slight masochistic streak).

The Good: Beautiful soundtrack, unrelenting challenge level
The Bad: Only the hardcore need apply
Kwch: Winner of the 2008 “Cute But Deadly” award



PS3/XB360



Bad Company's boys undo bullet damage by shooting up an all-purpose anesthetic—which means you more or less end up doing drugs every time you reload.

PS3/XB360

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY

■ Publisher: Electronic Arts ■ Developer: EA DICE ■ Players: 1-24 ■ ESRB: Teen

THE VERDICT

SHAWN

B

GOOD

Bring the house down

★ **SHAWN:** *Gears of War's* cover and concealment and *BioShock's* Plasmid abilities are concepts around which developers designed whole games. Concepts, not gimmicks (as in, the game needs something extra to sell it). Neither of the features named above fit that bill. You can't grouse about Plasmids apart from *BioShock's* other qualities, since both the first-person shooter's enemies and frozen or flooded environments thoroughly tie into the player's fire and electric powers. *Battlefield: Bad Company's* destructible buildings and terrain ought to amount to something of similar magnitude.

The trouble with telling us that we can demolish everything is that we'll try to. Like other shooters to make similar claims, *Bad Company* has its limits, but

while the game's world isn't absolutely breakable, it usually seems so...as long as you're using high explosives. Let me split hairs here: Grenades erase whole sections of houses; bullets, however, stop dead in the thinnest wood slat. But what *Bad Company* needs isn't a trip to a real-life firing range....

If *Bad Company's* crackshot mercs reacted to their changing battlefield, the game could squash all charges of gimmickry. Again, this is the difference between items for the backs of boxes and game-defining features—the difference between an opponent who believably runs through holes blown through a farmhouse and one who needn't ever move because he knows both where you are and that he'll hit you with every bullet he fires. Unsurprising

and incapable of being surprised, *Bad Company's* bad guys leech the fun from one firefight after another. The solution? Online opponents.

When players hear inbound artillery, they know to get to a house's bottom floors before the roof is blasted off; henpecked by sharpshooting, they deforest a sniper's blind; cornered, they demolish a back wall and retreat. EA DICE dodges the trap it's laid for itself (i.e., games devolving into grenade-launcher duels) by reducing splash damage. Unless it detonates in his face, a single explosive shell stands a greater chance of dazing an enemy than killing him outright—one smart move among the many (such as inspired map design) that make *Bad Company* a very good multiplayer game. ★

The Good: Very good multiplayer
The Bad: Inadequate A.I., dopey plot
Treasure Trove: Unlockable equipment encourages repeat play



PS3/XB360

CIVILIZATION REVOLUTION

■ Publisher: 2K Games ■ Developer: Firaxis ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+



The Good: This PC port has a great control setup

The Bad: Games can end quickly
Revisionist History: Lincoln and Gandhi were jerks

The world begins with you

➔ **ANDREW P:** As a casual *Civilization* player on the PC (Mr. Jeff Green here would likely defeat me before I could even invent paper), I came into *Revolution* expecting a slightly scaled-back version of the turn-based empire-building game, adapted to a console controller.

The abundance of information at the beginning of a *Civ* game can be daunting, but *Revolution* does a great job of appropriate hand-holding, with its array of cartoon advisers and "Civilopedia." Its control scheme is remarkably adapted to analog sticks: Selecting units is fast and easy, as is moving to new positions or issuing build orders. This is the core of the *Civ* experience, and *Revolution* gets it right. The more colorful and carica-

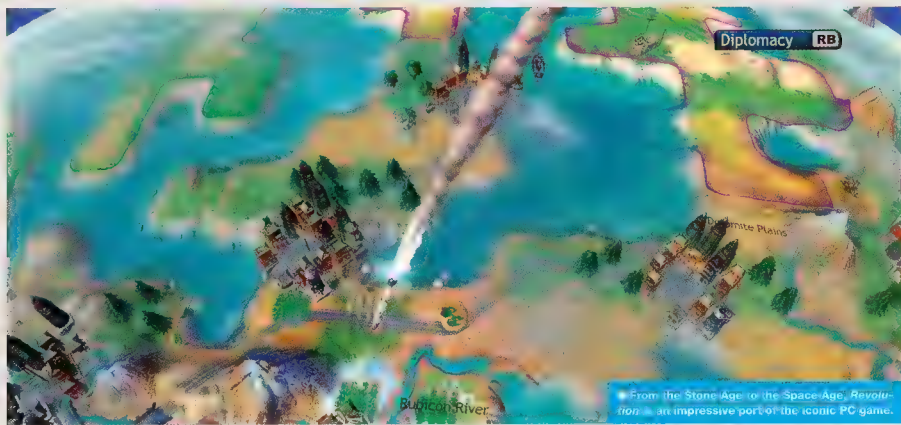
tured look of the cities and characters is also better suited to a television than a PC monitor, and the music and sound effects—though intermittent and poorly balanced at times—are classic *Civilization* elements.

But I still wasn't sold on the cuts that *Revolution* chose to make for console newcomers. I still would have liked some more terrain options instead of predetermined continent layouts. The diplomacy mechanics took a minor hit, too, with the lack of defensive alliances among the war-mongering world leaders.

But *Revolution's* greatest omission is testament to just how addictive the game is. It's disappointing not having the option to play "one more turn..." after a victory condition is achieved

and continuing to build (or rebuild) your empire. Yes, I may have lost the space race to Catherine the Great, but my battleship fleet is itching for a little payback. You want to keep playing it well past the completion of any objectives or reasonable bed time—that's *Civilization's* hallmark, and *Revolution* cultivates that same addiction.

➔ **JEFF:** The sky is officially falling. *Civilization* has long been the poster child for PC Games That Could Never Be Ported, yet here we are with a *Civ* game that not only doesn't suck but also somehow manages—despite all of the cuts Andrew mentions, and even more that he doesn't—to completely capture the essence of what makes the PC game so great.



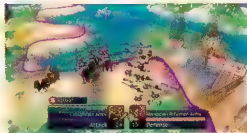
The controls are indeed a dream, effectively putting to rest the notion that a strategy game can't work on a console. The more cartoony graphics and smaller scale may make hardcore PC guys think this has been "dumbed down," but, yeah, you wish. This game will still kick your ass on the highest difficulty levels. The smaller scale actually makes it harder, especially once the other civs rally against you. You could play other humans instead, but note that the game always requires five civs, so

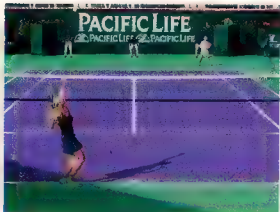
even if you just want to play 1-on-1 with a friend, the game will add three computer players automatically, which kind of sucks. But overall, even given the high expectations, this is a brilliant port.

➔ **JENNIFER:** *Civ* on PC scared me. The deep strategy, constant commands, difficult compromises, classical music—everything about it always seemed so...intimidating. So, going into the (supposedly) dumbed-down *Revolution*, I was cautiously optimistic.

And though it took me a ton of experimentation through six campaigns (several of which ended in punishing defeat), I eventually discovered that yes, I, too, could play *Civilization!* I, too, could feel joy as I watched my tanks rush in to capture Napoleon's capital. I, too, could rejoice as rival cities fell prey to my society's irresistible culture. I, too, could marvel at my civilization's evolution from bows and arrows to space stations. And I, too, could become addicted to this endlessly replayable beast.

That's not to say the game isn't still a bit intimidating. Listen to your advisers, take your time exploring the map, and play at the easy difficulty levels until you feel really comfortable. Next thing you know, you'll discover that you, too, can play *Civilization!* And that's a wonderful thing. 🎮





TOP SPIN 3

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



Tennis for the hardcore

➔ **RYAN:** I suck at *Top Spin 3*...or, at least, that's what I assumed for hours after laying hands on the game. As an ardent tennis fan going back to the good old days of *Virtua Tennis*, I found 2K Sports' latest *Top Spin* downright frustrating. If you're expecting a higher-res-skin layered atop the same familiar control scheme and physics, prepare for a rude awakening.

Top Spin 3's controls are less about the windup and more about the release. It's a difficult nuance to articulate on paper, but it's a *big* one that'll have *Top Spin* vets screaming until they acclimate. You're basically tasked with timing your button releases and shot targeting in concert with your character's animations; the button assignments for various shots

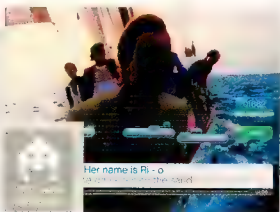
are (mostly) the same as before, and positioning is every bit as important as in any tennis sim...but until you get the new swing physics down, you'll be eating the CPU's shots—a *lot*—on even the easiest difficulty settings.

These changes ostensibly make *Top Spin 3* more intuitive; maybe I'm just stuck in my ways, but I don't get it. A crash course in the *Top Spin* School tutorial mode (an absolute *requirement* if you want to fully understand and enjoy this game) quickly convinced me that the controls were too demanding and unforgiving—and the default "I suck at everything" avatar that you guide through the career mode makes even the early matches that much more relentless. In essence, *Top Spin 3* works you twice as hard to perform

half as well, and that's quite a jarring change from the alluring simplicity of its predecessors.

It's a bit of an awkward comparison, but I see shades of *Ninja Gaiden* here: It's unassailably gratifying when the mechanics finally click and you start slicing and volleying your way to victory, but at the same time, it's prohibitive to folks who don't want to spend hours in the school of hard knocks, pursuing what *should* be a relatively uncomplicated act of learning the game's basic rules and logic. *Top Spin 3* eschews difficulty curves in favor of a difficulty *mountain*...and if you're serious about your tennis, it's going to (eventually) reward you. But if you're the pick-up-and-play type, just stick to *Virtua Tennis 3*.

The Good: Rewarding once you get the hang of the controls
The Bad: Pretty ruthless until you do
The Original Top Spin: Still the best tennis game out there



PlayStation 3

SINGSTAR

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Sony CE London
 ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Teen



Video didn't kill the karaoke star

➔ **JENNIFER:** If you're reading this, it means you're probably not that judgmental of karaoke. So let's dispense with the disclaimers about how dumb you feel sitting alone, singing popular songs while your PlayStation Eye camera records you belting out Coldplay so you can share videos of your performance with thousands of other losers—er, *fans*. Because that's what *SingStar* on PS3 enables gamers to do...and it does it rather well.

The 30 songs on the disc offer a nice, and mostly multigenerational, sampling of music—fine for a quick-and-dirty karaoke party. Serious players will run through those ditties pretty quick, though, at which point they can download additional songs for \$1.49 each. The SingStore interface is easy

to use, and songs will be added regularly, so you'll (hopefully) never want for variety. *SingStar*'s overall presentation is slick—lyrics scroll across the screen, and you sing notes to fill in bars on the display. As with all karaoke games, the performance assessment is a bit touchy. Normal difficulty means anyone with a decent ear will be a rock star on the first outing, but on hard or higher, you really need to hit the notes just right. While you're singing, the original music video plays in the background, a feature I enjoyed a lot more than I expected to. If you've got the PlayStation Eye camera, you can also choose to display your own performance onscreen.

And it's with this added gameplay element that *SingStar* truly excels.

Hook up the Eye, and the game automatically records videos as you sing. Generation YouTube will enjoy uploading videos to the game's online community, where users share and rate each other's performances. The variety here is predictable: fun, energetic videos of multiplayer parties with people in costumes having an awesome time; sad sacks singing alone in their bedrooms; a girl serenading her cat; and so on. The community provides a fun, voyeuristic activity that'll engage true performers—and amuse those looking for some cheap laughs.

SingStar isn't revolutionary, but uploading silly videos and watching other people's creations adds a new dimension. It gives you what every karaoke star wants: an audience.

The Good: Watching old Duran Duran music videos
The Bad: Watching old Blue Oyster Cult music videos
Promised: 25 to 50 new songs monthly



Mr. RedHead here isn't the only one wondering what went wrong.

PlayStation 3

HAZE

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Developer: Free Radical ■ Players: 1-16 ■ ESRB: Mature



Just say no

◆ **G. FORD:** In one of the few things it gets right, *Haze* has an appropriate title. It feels incomplete and unsubstantial—maybe it should've been held off for more seasoning, since as is, it'll soon rise into the gaming miasma of forgotten shooters. It offers a bit of creativity and decent multiplayer, but otherwise, it simply underwhelms.

Putting aside its ham-handed, puffy-chest story about neither side of a war being the right one, this bland first-person shooter has one big thing going for it: its Nectar power-up system. Nectar is a bio-enhancing medication, and its benefits include greater speed, strength, accuracy, and boosted awareness, meaning enemies handily show up highlighted onscreen. This juicing ability gives the

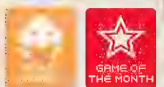
typical FPS gameplay a twist. Instead of being a superhuman throughout, you have to regulate your power in bursts. Likewise, you eventually adopt another set of gameplay mechanics, including the abilities of playing dead and stealing weapons from enemies. It's creative, but it doesn't save *Haze*, as most everything else misses the mark. The visuals are particularly bad, the weapons have no heft to them, the vehicles control too wildly, and the A.I. is decidedly amateur.

Four-player online co-op helps (and you can jump in a game at will), since playing a game with others trumps suffering alone...but it doesn't change the lousy campaign. Multiplayer offers the standard deathmatch and team deathmatch, but the choice of sides

lives them up: The troopers have Nectar at their disposal; rebels get to play dead, among other moves. Team Assault mode offers different layered objectives depending on which of the six maps you play and team you're on. On the swamp map, for example, the rebels need to burn down Nectar plants while Mantel troopers need to protect them. Most entertain for a few go-rounds, but by no means will this be a multimonth addiction. And how come it doesn't even have as many multiplayer options as last-gen's *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect* (by the same developer, mind you), a superior shooter in almost every respect?

With maybe a weekend's worth of tepid entertainment here, kicking this humdrum habit won't be hard. ❌

The Good: The Nectar boost system, some interesting multiplayer modes
The Bad: Pretty much everything else
The Ugly: The embarrassing box art



PlayStation 3

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

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



The Good: Almost as fresh as the original
The Bad: Cut-scene-heavy second act
The La-li-lu-le-lo!?: Shockingly, *MGS4* explains the entire series' plot

Solid Snake's farewell tour

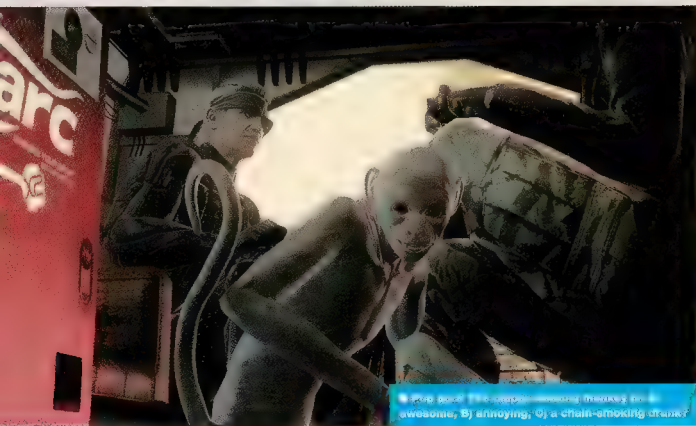
➔ **JEREMY:** I didn't really "get" *Metal Gear*'s stealth concepts back when I played the original NES game, but I've grown to love the series' emphasis on avoidance over conflict. I love its goofy *G.I. Joe* narrative, too—an odd marriage of fanatical military realism and preposterous superhero soldiers. They're strange bedfellows, allowing you to contemplate the philosophical ramifications of nuclear proliferation while battling a gunslinging Illuminati-like triple-agent possessed by the main character's cloned brother's severed hand. But this schizophrenia is part of the series' charm, and in that sense, *Metal Gear Solid 4* is the series' ultimate expression. It's obsessively detailed, ham-handedly dramatic, intensely bizarre...and never has the

divide between these disparate elements felt so jarring.

It comes so close to working, too. *MGS4*'s first half is perfection, finally eliminating the series' tendency toward forcing gamers to watch as much as they play. Cut-scenes are frequent but generally brief and interesting. Better yet, hero Solid Snake's support staff isn't constantly bugging him via Codec (the *Metal Gear* equivalent of Dick Tracy's two-way wrist communicator); now calls are infrequent, with essential information relayed mainly through cut-scenes and in-game voiceover.

As for the parts you play? Truly brilliant. *MGS4* initially places Snake in an unidentified Middle Eastern war zone, a far cry from the forests and bases of previous games. Solitude is

replaced by chaos—violence directed not at Snake, but instead exchanged between rival military factions. Amid this mayhem, players enjoy a fantastic amount of freedom to pursue their objectives: Lie low and avoid detection, or team up with insurgents to fight off privatized military forces. Find nonlethal solutions, or make use of the in-game currency (a series first) to stockpile a ludicrous amount of deadly ordnance. Wear a disguise to hide in plain sight, or stick to your high-tech stealth camo to sneak about in more traditional ways. It's truly *Metal Gear* as a modern experience, a combination of the series' trademark stealth with openness reminiscent, in some ways, of *Assassin's Creed*. Add a new streamlined combat interface, and



you have what is unquestionably the series' best action.

The problem, unfortunately, is that the game slips back into old habits during the homestretch. My review sessions were spread across a couple of days at Konami's offices, and the second day left me wondering if someone switched discs overnight. After several hours of open, dynamic combat, *MGS4* reverts to tired, sit-and-listen storytelling. It's an odd inversion for the franchise: When the first *MGS* took the world by storm, its cut-scenes were revolutionary while the gameplay consisted of clunky 3D action grafted onto an awkward control scheme. Here, the action feels fresh, but the narrative feels dated. *MGS4*'s second half consists of practically nothing but cut-scenes padded by brief action sequences—and while

series devotees will hang on every plot revelation and shocking twist as the epic storyline draws to its grand and satisfying finale, "interaction" begins to seem like an afterthought. The remaining shooting and sneaking segments are still solid, but the game never revisits the organic flexibility of those opening hours.

In short, *MGS4* is hamstrung by its own legacy, by a massive story with a lot of ground to cover. But the drive for closure affects the action, too; take the game's bosses, whose names are meant to echo *MGS3*'s Cobra Unit and *MGS1*'s Fox Hound (Raging Raven, for instance, evokes both The Fury and Vulcan Raven). None of the encounters with these cyborg women are as engrossing as their namesakes, relying instead on familiar gimmicks. Worse yet: The final battle throws out

all of *MGS4*'s phenomenal gameplay advances for an awful minigame that pales next to the perfection of *MGS3*'s climactic showdown—all in the name of parallelism.

I get it: *Metal Gear*'s always been self-referential, often to the point of self-parody. Yet while I appreciate *MGS4*'s symbolism and fan service, I wish the series could end with the same sense of wonder and newness that made *MGS1* so mind-blowing a decade ago. Instead, this final chapter is a work of uneven brilliance whose forward-thinking design is hampered by its role as the conclusive chapter of a massive and convoluted saga. It's a great game (no question), with an intricate story and some brilliant stealth action backed up by tremendous production values. But, freed of continuity's constraints, it could have been



more than merely great. Solid Snake always complains about the burden of his legacy—who knew, all along, that he simply spoke for his creator?

→ **ANDREW P:** It was disheartening, but maybe not entirely surprising, to find that *MGS4*'s significant game ideas dried up well before the fiction wrapped. The game is front-loaded with change, with Snake's accelerated physical decay, his alliance with rebel forces, and plenty of globe-trotting during the game's first three acts. Yet the story's rising action—and eventual parade of conclusions—give it a definite action-movie vibe.

Part one is so heavy on action that it tempts you away from the mantra of "silent intrusion." With the incentive of Drebin points (the aforementioned in-game currency) and the arsenal of

gear Snake has at his disposal, the penalty for going in loud is essentially erased. Those dedicated to the cause can still find pleasure in stealth, but when the rebel guerillas launch counterattacks, it's hard to resist joining their battle cry. Both methods work equally well, because the new over-the-shoulder camera and Snake's Solid Eye system—a multiuse eye patch with various gameplay-helping filters—gives you a clearer picture of the battlefield, whether you're looking for a target to kill or a place to hide.

But, like Snake, the gameplay starts to fade away as the end draws near, when it comes time to stop asking questions and start providing 20 years' worth of answers, and *MGS4*'s pace is forced to accommodate them. As is customary, this is in the form of lengthy cut-scenes, and that's why

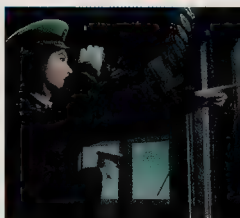
MGS4 feels like a game in the first half and a film in the second. The finale doesn't lack epic moments—but take away the standard (and, for the first time, unnecessary) bizarre boss team and the nostalgia-draped handful of set-piece encounters and you're left with emotionally charged, interactive cinema, which dominates the climax.

Yet the end should please fans regardless of how *MGS4* gets there. Nearly every question receives an explanation, a few surprises are left in store, and as long as you consider the game's sci-fi "war theater of the absurd" context, it—amazingly enough—ends up making sense. It's not meant to be taken too seriously (especially with series creator Hideo Kojima's indulgent tendency to ramble and inject heavy-handed preaching or self-referential jokes at inappropriate

Online Still Offline

We mentioned it last month, but the situation with *Metal Gear Online* (the multiplayer portion of *Metal Gear Solid 4* that's included on the disc) hasn't changed. The beta period is long over, and during our visit to Konami during which we reviewed the game, they weren't able to show us anything beyond what we already knew.

What we do know is that *MGO* is a methodical, unique experience unlike most of the first- or third-person online games you may be accustomed to. Communication is absolutely vital, and understanding how your different item and weapon loadouts work in conjunction with the level terrain and mode objectives makes *MGO* a more cerebral experience. Translation: It's worth experimenting with...but, ultimately, it's not for everybody.



times), but to maintain this kind of narrative order amid so much ridiculous chaos is an impressive feat.

➔ **MATT:** It's true—*MGS4* is more movie than game. Add up the cut-scenes, Codec calls, mission briefings, and history lessons and you basically have a full TV season here. It feels very much like a soap opera, too: Will they? Won't they? Who will die?! You're just along for the ride, jumping in to play when the game deems fit.

While the writers could have cut some story fat—or perhaps done a better job separating it from the important scenes—I'm impressed by how well the narrative holds up regardless of how much you know about previous games in the series. I came into it as someone who knew most of the characters but not the smaller details of the

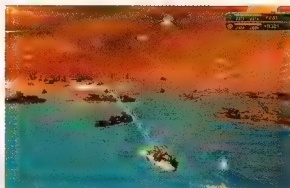
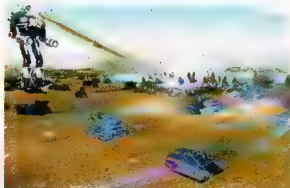
series' history, and I was able to follow almost all of what happened. And it's great fun to watch; the attention to detail in the cut-scenes, from the voice acting to the combat choreography, is pretty ridiculous even for *Metal Gear*.

My biggest questions heading into the game concerned Kojima Productions' claims that this would be a more user-friendly *MGS*. I've always preferred *Splinter Cell*'s control schemes, so I'm very happy to see the user-controllable camera and over-the-shoulder aiming systems working properly in tandem here. Combine that with a camouflage system where your suit automatically transforms when you hug a wall, and the ability to shoot while on your back if an enemy knocks you down, and the game doesn't feel nearly as rigid as previous games in the series.

You can find a few legacy quirks if you look for them—grabbing someone from behind still feels clumsy, and certain animations, like crawling, still feel stiff (which makes me wonder why the designers hid items under tables, forcing you to lie on your belly, then crawl forward a few inches, then back out, and then stand up, breaking the flow of the game)—but *MGS4* absolutely feels like a game that takes care of the player, which is not something I would've said about *MGS3*.

In some ways, *MGS4* is the *Resident Evil 4* of the series: It removes some of the franchise's notable complexities and comes up with another cut-scene-heavy story centered on a virus. But most importantly, it feels like an overhaul without losing the fun details and epic feel that have always made the series work. 🎮

EGM Extras:
Need a hand with taking out Liquid Ocelot and company? Head to EGM.1UP.com for a full mission briefing from our *Metal Gear Solid 4* SuperGuide.



■ Cybranian oceanfront property values hit an all-time low.

Xbox 360

SUPREME COMMANDER

■ Publisher: Aspyr ■ Developer: Hellbent/Gas Powered Games ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+



Brilliant strategy, unstable port

➔ **MIKE N:** *Supreme Commander* may be one of the deepest real-time strategy games to show up on consoles, but it's far from the best—it could've used a few more months of tweaks before requiring real-time-strategy fans to shell out the full admission price. As good as the tactical and strategy elements are, frequent lockups, glitches, and a limited amount of crucial onscreen information hamper the overall package.

While *SupCom* tries to deliver a classic RTS experience (gather, build, attack) on a massive scale, it's not always up to the task. Even with my review copy installed on the 360's hard drive, the game froze regularly, forcing me to restart missions. When I chose to save my game more often—

fearing future mission restarts—I encountered additional lockups.

These issues make the lost potential more apparent when the game *is* running smoothly. As with other RTS games, *SupCom*'s single-player missions introduce players to their units' functions, and the solid tutorial system makes the tactical management (involving hundreds of units) feel like a breeze during the lengthy campaign. With each of the 18 missions taking hours to complete, you'll be a near-master at each of the three races when you take your game online; the smooth multiplayer provides a great avenue to test your homegrown strategies. Zooming between the ground-level battlefield view and sky-high tactical perspective works well with the

right analog stick, but not everything's so reliable.

For instance, chaotic audio in tactical view drove me to mute my TV, and the lack of statistical detail for each unit results in a poor user interface. This info *is* in the manual, and these facts were displayed in the PC version—why not here? And frankly, the reliance on the D-pad for build queues and unit functions feels backward—not evolutionary—when compared to the 360's superior *Universe at War*.

SupCom enters a growing console-RTS market, with *UAW* as the genre's measuring stick. And while these games can work sans mouse, until the user-interface and technical issues are addressed here, *SupCom* can't stand toe-to-toe with the competition. **D-**

The Good: Massive scale, complex strategy elements

The Bad: Limited unit info, glitches
Jeremy Soule: Once again, amazing work on the soundtrack



Xbox 360

SPECTRAL FORCE 3

■ Publisher: Atlus ■ Developer: Idea Factory
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

Solid strategy stuff sans slickness

➤ **ERIC:** It took Idea Factory two years to get *Spectral Force 3* ported over from Japan, but looking at the dated visuals, you'd think those were doggie years. For all of Atlus' hype about the game's "full HD support," *SF3* looks no better than your average PS2 title.

Still, if you don't mind the watered-down aesthetic, *SF3* offers a solid strategy-role-playing-game experience—albeit one that's very Japanese. Every role-playing cliché from the Land of the Rising Sun makes an appearance here, from brooding, emo'd-out characters to animated cut-scenes that trigger when you perform a special move. Gameplay is similar to other Idea Factory titles: You set up your dudes on a grid, move them around, and whack the sashimi out of whatever comes into range. While everything's strictly turn-based, all attacks are chosen and executed with a single button press, cutting down on menu slogging and keeping the combat moving at a fairly breezy clip.

An interesting twist: The closer to death your characters are, the more powerful they get—which makes for plenty of "miraculous comebacks" and encourages risky tactics. This, in turn, leads to plenty of thrilling, against-all-odds battles.

But when you're not giving your sword a guided tour of the bad guys' intestines, things move quite slowly, usually via series after series of anime talking heads. From these, you'll learn that Neverland, the world where *SF3* takes place, is in the midst of a war among all 10 of its major powers. To the game's considerable credit, your party isn't forced to side with any one of these factions; they can freely choose whom to fight for and what missions to accept. With each country fitting somewhere on the continuum of beatific to really-not-very-nice (each also offering you differing party members), and with the 100-plus diverse mission types, *SF3* features significantly more replayability than most tactical games.

Another unexpected "strength" is *SF3*'s unique approach to voice-talent casting; the developers obviously employed some sort of wide-open casting call for the janitorial staff. Kudos to Idea

Factory for giving these needy souls a chance to display their acting skills on the national stage—and further kudos to Vizio for giving my television a "mute" button!



The Good: Your choices affect the course of the storyline
The Bad: Friends may think you're playing a PS2 game
The Voice Actors: Are back working the fryer at Carl's Jr.



Xbox 360

DON KING PRESENTS: PRIZEFIGHTER

■ Publisher: 2K Sports ■ Developer: Venom
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

This one looks a bit punchy

➤ **DAVID:** When a boxing game features (in)famous promoter Don King as the pitchman, it's hard not to take notice. But if you're looking for the second coming of *Fight Night* here—or even a viable alternative—you've gotta continue the search elsewhere. *Prizefighter* commits two boxing-game cardinal sins: It has inconsistent, spotty hit detection and unpredictable animations. As you mash buttons to throw punches (unlike *Fight Night*'s analog control), bouts more closely resemble a Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robot slapfest than an actual boxing match. Boxers react to phantom punches, arms and gloves often pass through opponents, and it's not surprising to see a knockdown from a punch to the *shoulder*. Visually, the game doesn't compare favorably to the competition, either—the character models would look right at home in a last-gen boxing title, a far cry from trading blows with *Fight Night*'s comparatively gorgeous pugilists.

Career mode is one aspect of the game that actually works, though. It's set against the backdrop of a fictional documentary about your fighter's rise from obscurity, featuring real-world boxers, promoters, and actors. You can manually work out in the gym before each fight, but the rhythm-based training minigames are so ridiculously difficult that you're better off autotraining.

Boxing can be a seedy business, and *Prizefighter* doesn't shy away from this. Occasionally, you'll be thrown extra challenges to overcome to win a fight. In one match, my opponent put an unidentified liquid on his gloves; every time he hit me, my vision went blurry. You've also got to watch out for injuries—in one match, I couldn't punch my adversary with my left hand because I'd broken two of my fingers. Inexplicably, the game never explained that punching with this hand hurt my fighter; only after getting pounded for several rounds did I notice the handicap. You'll also experience several flashback sequences taking on the role of past real-life boxers; it's interesting, but except for the sepie tone, there's little difference.

With a little more time spent in development polishing the technical problems, *Prizefighter* could've been an enjoyable experience. As it is, you'd have to take quite a few blows to the head to have much fun with this one.



The Good: Well-made documentary narrative
The Bad: About as attractive as a punch-drunk boxer
Ridiculous: Getting KO'd from a smack to the shoulder





▲ Ryu's go-to style—Sive. Surfer's scratch. Wolverine's claws, and gold ski boots. Heavy.

Xbox 360

NINJA GAIDEN II

■ Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios ■ Developer: Team Ninja ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Mature



The Good: Intense, enjoyable combat
The Bad: Crapstastic camera, inconsistent difficulty
World of Wax: Why is everything still so shiny and smooth?

Bow to master Camera

➔ **NICK:** *Ninja Gaiden's* guts were never this satisfying, and for those who thrive on such things, I won't deter you from diving in. The combat is as rhythmic and precise as ever, visually reinvigorated with fountains of blood and endless amputations. For the rest of us, though, it's never been more evident that *Ninja Gaiden* is a purebred fighting series shoehorned into an action-adventure presentation. *NG2* isn't an evolution of the game we've played for four years under various guises—it's simply a more violent but otherwise predictable sequel.

Team Ninja again chose to focus squarely on the combat. Though a partially regenerating health bar helps keep things slightly less punishing most of the time, it is again very nec-

essary to play smart and make the most of the fantastically deep fighting system. *NG2's* battles indulge a satisfying intimacy; vicious enemies don't stand around waiting for their turn to attack—they dive right in and overwhelm you when they get the chance.

If only any other area of the game received such loving attention. It may be a game about combat, but it has more than its fair share of simple platforming and exploring. Both of those elements are done horribly, as hero Ryu Hayabusa is regularly at odds with his surroundings. Invisible walls around every area maintain an awkward couple of feet between Ryu and any physical interaction with the backgrounds, which—while generally pretty—feel artificially desolate until

the bad guys appear out of nowhere.

The awful camera compounds those problems. It drags along behind you like a wounded dog and wanders off on its own when you need it most. For every satisfying battle you bloodily emerge from, you'll be walloped across the face with an obtuse design decision elsewhere. *NG2* is still a difficult game (even on the easiest setting), but it too often straddles the line between "rewarding challenge" and "annoyance." Its puzzles occupy a familiar corner of time-wasting, with minimal (but still unnecessary) backtracking to, say, open a door you couldn't open 30 seconds ago. Bosses are horribly inconsistent in their difficulty—some go down with a minute of slashing or a couple of shots from



the right type of Ninpo magic, while others require stupidly specific timing and full cooperation from the belligerent camera.

It's dismaying that these elements are simply brushed aside under the assumption that the combat can support the weight of the entire experience. When things click—like on the perfectly paced Airship level—it most certainly does, but it's an otherwise inconsistent package with almost as many frustrations as satisfactions. This is a game built squarely for *Ninja Gaiden* fans, who will play it on the toughest difficulties and upload their best playthrough videos online. For those competitive purposes, it excels; for less-devoted action-adventure fans, it's more of a violent curiosity than something to get fully—and financially—invested in.

+ **SHANE:** When Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* erupted on to the original Xbox four years ago, it completely galvanized the staid "character action" genre with its intensely demanding gameplay and staggeringly beautiful visuals. That watershed title lazily coasted through multiple rereleases (*Black*, *Sigma*), but now, a true new-gen sequel arrives in an attempt to unseat Capcom's *Devil May Cry 4* as lord of the stylish swordplay pantheon.

Unfortunately, don't expect the familiar-feeling *NG2* to have as powerful an impact as its predecessor. As Nick said, combat remains the game's strongest suit, as you're again forced to play both offensively and defensively in order to handle common, everyday enemies. Nothing's more embarrassing than being taken out by a faceless ninja thug (or even worse...

a sword-wielding dog), so you'll need to master blocking, counterattacking, and crafty weapon selection in order to survive on any difficulty setting. But again, that's hardly revolutionary for this series—although veterans will spy a few choice additions to the fighting formula (such as Ryu's grisly dismemberment moves and obnoxious suicide-bombing foes), this game plays remarkably similar to the last one.

If *DMC4* lets you switch between weapons and combat styles while you slice baddies in real time, why does *NG2* still pause the onscreen action? While the gameplay still clearly ranks among the best in the business, other aspects are beginning to feel dated. Prepare to expend plenty of energy fighting with the haphazard, manually controlled camera. Likewise, the game's clumsily handled narrative

Ryu Hayabusa and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skulls

Whether it's a nod to *Indiana Jones* or *Halo 3*, *Ninja Gaiden II*'s hidden skulls are just one of many seemingly sly references to other games out there. And as much as Team Ninja's head Tomonobu Itagaki likes to publicly brag on other action-adventure games—*Heavenly Sword* and *Devil May Cry 4*, to name two—the description of *NG2*'s Rod of Trials item has us thinking that he may have a soft spot for at least some of the competition after all:

"According to legend, this treasure was once possessed by the god of war himself." Happy accident or homage?



► If the boss fights look cool enough in battle, just hearing them talk is comedy gold. Not the good kind.



► If you lose a missing limb and still standing, hit the Y-button to finish him off. Obliteration indeed.

feels anything but modern, from its baffling pre-mission briefings to its ham-fisted, embarrassing cut-scenes.

More and more, it's apparent that Team Ninja's concept of cool involves marching out a parade of massively endowed doll-like women and rubber-suited monstrosities that Rita Repulsa might have sent against the Power Rangers. But even if these tacky trappings make *NG2* feel like a guilty pleasure, its refined gameplay warrants a purchase for gamers craving a challenge.

► **DAVID:** The lack of true real-time weapon switching is disappointing, and the unruly camera can indeed be a chore to babysit, but the combat still overshadows most other offerings in the genre. And for fans of dismemberment, *NG2* provides an outlet for

satiating their virtual bloodlust with a ramped-up violence quotient. Despite the addition of execution moves and a recharging life gauge, the series' renowned (and reviled) difficulty is left mostly unchanged. If you're not constantly blocking and dodging, you will be taken out by Random Evil Ninja No. 5. Players willing to take up the challenge and learn the intricacies of the combat, however, will be rewarded as they search for the perfect solution for dispatching enemies as efficiently as possible.

Those looking for expansive exposition can look elsewhere, though. The razor-thin plot about monsters unleashed on mankind serves only as an excuse for Ryu to embark on a world tour to extinguish evil. Taking a page from *DMC4*, many of the previously vanquished bosses reap-

pear later in the game in a series of rematches, which does little but artificially extend the story. If only the game could keep up with the stunning backdrops and massive mobs of enemies tossed your way. On one occasion in particular, I found myself suddenly thrust into an unwanted bullet-time mode for several minutes while the game chugged to catch up with the onscreen action. I also endured occasional stops in the action (sometimes midfight) as the game loaded up new areas.

NG2 feels like an opportunity squandered. The game offers the same frustrating and ultimately satisfying experience to those willing to learn its deep and complex fighting system, but several technical and design problems keep it from continuing the evolution that its predecessor began. ❧

EGM Extras:
Even *ninja* masters can use a little help with some bosses. Hit up our *Ninja Gaiden II* SuperGuide at EGM.1UP.com.



DS

FINAL FANTASY IV

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



The Good: Classic RPG, more polished than the *FFIII* remake
The Bad: 3D style feels pokier than the 2D original, ultimately superfluous
Farewell, My Easytype: Hope you like your RPGs challenging!

Play it again, Cecil...and again...and again...

➔ **JEREMY:** How many times does one game need to be remade? The DS version of *Final Fantasy IV* marks Square Enix's fourth revisiting of the classic Super NES role-playing game in seven years' time. At some point, you'd think that the word "overkill" might occur to someone over there. Still, I can't bring myself to come down too hard on this effort, because (like the DS remake of *Final Fantasy III*) it's a total, comprehensive, modern revamp featuring wholly new graphics, extra story, new game mechanics, an improved English localization—and even voice acting.

This is no lazy port; on the contrary, it appears to have been designed with the realization that its target audience has already played some version of

FFIV to death. With that in mind, the difficulty's ratcheted up to levels bordering on insanity, and tried-and-true tactics you've always used against bosses rarely work as expected. I actually found random encounters to be the most daunting aspect of the game—expect to die a lot once you enter a new dungeon. It's a nice challenge for old-timers, although sometimes the difficulty comes as a side effect of the sluggishness caused by the move to 3D. At least it's nice-looking 3D, even if its cartoony style doesn't really suit the story's melodrama. "Adult" Rydia looks like some poor, tarted-up 8-year-old "beauty queen," and good luck taking villain Rubicante seriously when his regal, menacing voice comes from what

looks like a red blob of cotton candy.

Disappointingly, the postgame bonus content from GBA port *FFIV Advance* has been tossed aside in favor of "Augments"—unique new permanent character skills that open up some interesting strategies. They're nice, but I prefer the GBA approach of bringing back lost characters and allowing full party customization. Plus, getting the most from the Augment system requires stupid, counterintuitive decisions. In other words, they're a sales pitch for the strategy guide, which just reinforces the cynical nature of this release. It's improved—perhaps even definitive—but comes much too soon after the last version. Only the game's most die-hard fans won't resent this double dip. ☹

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*Yes, you're correct in thinking that will leave the abovementioned Mr. Bettenhausen jacket-less. No, we, his co-workers, are not entirely comfortable with the prospect of working shoulder-to-shoulder, as it were, with Mr. Bettenhausen, and only a thin cotton shirt standing between us and him. Given the increased likelihood of inadvertently mixing body fluids, this frightens us because while Mr. Bettenhausen appears to be in fine health, and our medical coverage here is rock solid, let's face it, the next Ebola virus, mutated by a steady diet of energy drinks and Street Fighter IV, is probably gestating at this very minute in his sebaceous glands. Don't let this in any way detract from the allure of winning the actual jacket. Really.

The island is getting more and more lively.



DS

HARVEST MOON: ISLAND OF HAPPINESS

■ Publisher: Natsume ■ Developer: Marvelous
■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Plow, sow, water, pick...

→ **ALICE:** Unlike the *Harvest Moon* series' surprising fantasy spin-off, *Rune Factory: A Fantasy Harvest Moon*, *Island of Happiness* sticks to the old farming-simulation formula: Starting with nothing but fertile land, you go through the daily chores that growing produce and raising livestock entail, improving your estate until you someday marry one of the townsfolk. Since the series' Super NES debut 11 years ago, each iteration has offered slight variations—adding animals here, new bachelor(ette)s there, or the occasional extra farming tool—but the same methodical-yet-addictive gameplay always remains. So it goes here, with a few changes that only the most dedicated series enthusiasts are likely to notice (who you can marry, what pets you can keep, whether you need to water the grass for it to grow, etc.).

In this way, *Island of Happiness* unapologetically serves up the same daily tasks: plowing fields, sowing vegetable seeds, watering crops, tending livestock, shipping produce, and wooing honeys. Toiling through the seasons as a farmer may not be your idea of a pleasant life, but the game does its best to put some fun into what amounts to repetitive chores. (And with its bubbly art style that's more akin to *Magical Melody* on GameCube, *Island of Happiness* is certainly easy to stare at for long farming sessions—especially if you love cuddly animals.)

The *Animal Crossing*-like touch-screen controls (drag the stylus in the direction you want to move and pick up items by tapping the screen) are hard to get used to in their slightly imprecise implementation here—but they're definitely a step up from *Harvest Moon DS'* awkward setup, even though selecting and using tools is clumsy. Upgrading your house and farm costs quite a bit of money, which takes considerable time to earn early in the game, but opening up and populating the different sections of the island as your farm's exports rejuvenate the local economy makes spending your hard-earned cash rewarding. The paper-thin storyline (you're shipwrecked on a remote island and decide to put down roots there) may be

an inconsequential excuse for you to repeat the same core game of the past 11 years, but some small lessons learned along the way manage to shine through.



The Good: Same ol' *Harvest Moon!*
The Bad: Same ol' *Harvest Moon...*
Eligible Ladies: Cuter than the boys



PSP

HOT SHOTS GOLF: OPEN TEE 2

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

Still putting along

→ **CRISPIN:** Proof that even the most relaxing games will burn you out eventually, *Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2* delivers the same laid-back, cinch-to-suss-out clubbing mechanics that made the original so fun on the first PlayStation 10 years ago. And when I say "the same," I mean the same. At least recent PlayStation 3 series entry *Hot Shots Golf: Out of Bounds* changed up the swing system. To anyone who's come to grips with a *Hot Shots* game, much of *Open Tee 2* will seem as moldy as grandma's golf bag.

Players who got used to the swing of things in past games will feel like savants here, snapping off perfect shots at every hole and then jabbing the X button to skip the time-wasting ball-landing sequence. I got into this rhythm of swing, skip, swing, skip as I rose through the ranks, to the point where I wondered, "Wait, am I even having fun anymore?" It became less of a relaxing game and more like busywork, just burning through the courses as fast as possible to keep my hands occupied during the commute.

That's not to say that *Open Tee 2* isn't a country club worth joining—as long as you meet certain membership requirements. First, if you've never played a *Hot Shots* game before, it's a no-brainer buy. The series' serene courses and emphasis on hand-eye mojo make for fun Sunday afternoons. If you're a *Hot Shots* dabbler who loves accessorizing the quirky fat-headed golfers, *Open Tee 2* ups the ante with goodies you collect by winning tournaments or scouring courses; experimenting with random clothing combos sometimes generates ability bonuses—skills such as mightier swings or finer spin control.

And if you're a *Hot Shots* hot shot ready to pit your decade of honed swinging against others, *Open Tee 2*'s new 16-player online tourney offers easy-to-access competition that's also breezy: Participants tee off simultaneously, so you're not forced to twiddle your putter while competitors take their turns. The surreal canned-phrase conversation system (sample bon mot: "The grass is covered with zits!") will keep you entertained even when you're stuck waiting for the unskippable countdown-to-game timer in the lobbies. Meet a few of the above conditions, and *Open Tee 2* is for you. Otherwise, paltry additions like a nifty hole-in-one minigame aren't worth the club dues for grizzled swingers.



The Good: Online tournaments, hole-in-one minigame
The Bad: Not much new otherwise
What We Really Want: *Hot Shots* minigolf

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XBLA

PENNY ARCADE ADVENTURES: EPISODE ONE

■ Publisher: Hothead ■ ESRB: Mature

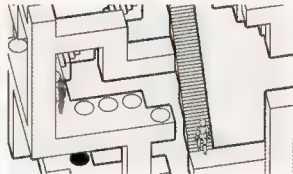
The humor in this six-to-seven-hour role-playing game relies more on the characters than the topical game-industry satire that made *Penny Arcade* popular. It's funny, but the surprise is just how good the *game* part is. Inspired, no doubt, by *Final Fantasy*'s combat system and the GBA and DS *Mario & Luigi* series, *PA:ET*'s energetic battles challenge and engage more than many of today's RPG epics.



WiiWare



XBLA



PSN

LOSTWINDS

■ Publisher: Frontier ■ ESRB: Everyone

With a story that borrows heavily from *Okami* and easy side-scrolling gameplay, *LostWinds* isn't earth-shattering—but it's well worth the \$10. You help young Toki and his pal, a wind spirit named Enri, save the world by navigating them through a lovingly rendered 3D platform environment, using the Wii Remote to manipulate the wind, complete special moves, and solve puzzles. It's a great start for the WiiWare line.



ROOGO

■ Publisher: SouthPeak ■ ESRB: Everyone

Inspired by a simple children's game—navigating geometric shapes through matching holes—*Roogoo* throws in enemies and obstacles at a sometimes absurd speed. Don't let the cutesy graphics and adorable story confuse you into thinking this one's for the kids; *Roogoo* pushes spatial-reasoning skills and reflexes to the limit, and it should satiate gamers looking for a serious puzzle challenge.



ECHOCROME

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ ESRB: Everyone

Echochrome's perceptually challenging take on puzzle games is equally suited for 3D—and somewhat restricted by it. Changing camera angles to reveal dimensionally obscured passageways will give your spatial skills a healthy workout, but the game needs to be more consistent with its own rules of what constitutes a valid path. An unnecessary timer adds undue pressure to an otherwise clever game.



THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for May

DEGREES IN: COMPUTER ANIMATION > DIGITAL ARTS & DESIGN > ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS > FILM > GAME DEVELOPMENT > RECORDING ARTS > SHOW PRODUCTION & TOURING



| Name | Platform | EGM Scores | | |
|---|----------|-----------------|----|----|
| 1 Wii Fit  | Wii | B+ | B- | B |
| The Wii Balance Board may not be required, but why play it any other way? Skiing is a fun alternative to Nintendo telling you that you're fat. | | | | |
| 2 Mario Kart Wii with Wii Wheel | Wii | B+ | C+ | C |
| 3 Grand Theft Auto IV | XB360 | A+ | A+ | A |
| 4 Grand Theft Auto IV | PS3 | A+ | A+ | A |
| 5 Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock Bundle | Wii | A | A- | B+ |
| 6 We Ski | Wii | A (on 1UP.com) | | |
| 7 Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock Wireless Bundle | XB360 | A | A- | B+ |
| 8 Dance Dance Revolution: Hottest Party Bundle | Wii | Not Reviewed | | |
| 9 Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock Wireless Bundle | PS3 | A | A- | B+ |
| 10 Boom Blox  | Wii | A+ | A | A- |
| Did you know that Boom Blox was originally designed to track your head? (See Afterthoughts on pg. 42.) We were looking forward to wearing the necessary gear. | | | | |
| 11 Super Smash Bros. Brawl | Wii | A | A- | A- |
| 12 Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock Wireless Bundle | PS2 | Not Reviewed | | |
| 13 Rock Band: Special Edition | PS2 | A (on 1UP.com) | | |
| 14 Gran Turismo 5: Prologue | PS3 | B+ | C+ | B+ |
| 15 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare—Game of the Year Edition  | XB360 | Not Reviewed | | |
| COD4's GOTY edition may come with the map pack, but Activision doesn't care; they already made over 10 million bucks from early downloads. | | | | |
| 16 Super Mario Galaxy | Wii | A | A+ | A+ |
| 17 Crosswords DS | DS | B- (on 1UP.com) | | |
| 18 Assassin's Creed | PS3 | B- | C+ | C- |
| 19 New Super Mario Bros.  | DS | A+ | A | B+ |
| NSMB is the best-selling single-version DS game. Even without a Diamond or Pearl edition, it's managed to sell over 13 million copies! So where's the sequel? | | | | |
| 20 Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day! | DS | B+ | B- | C+ |

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GAME OVER

> press continue for forgotten crap, hobbit feet, and summertime seeking



> SEANBABY'S REST OF THE CRAP

FORGOTTEN GEMS
OF THE FUTURE

Jackass for the Nintendo DS

Wiping away the turds of the past



In the future, Seanbaby will break the boundaries of jackassery by being the first human being to travel at the speed of fart.



IN PART ONE OF THIS ONGOING SERIES, I nominate a very special game as a Forgotten Gem of the Future. As an added bonus joke, none of these are gems and all are, in fact, quite bad. However, a Forgotten Gem is a game so insignificant that you may have to reread several of these sentences to remember what I'm talking about. If that's the case, use this one as your point of reference: This Forgotten Gem is *Jackass* for the Nintendo DS.

Sometimes, when you refer to a year, you might make cultural references. For instance, "It was the year 1984. America was dancing to the sounds of Michael Jackson's head on fire, and no one seemed to know where the beef was!" A Forgotten Gem will never be used in this context. Even if every event of 2008 is banned from human knowledge, no future TV special will ever say, "Armed

with *Jackass* in their DSes, the people of 2008 slept comfortably on their perfectly customized Select Comfort Sleep Number Beds." I also should've mentioned that this chilling example was taken from an alternate future where Select Comfort wins World War III and erases all history unrelated to their mattresses except for *Jackass: The Game*. This universe stars Jake Busey and Stacy Keach.

Back to our universe: Since the only rule for the selection process is that the future must, in no way, recall that this game exists, I require first-hand knowledge of all future events. There's obviously only one way to do

this: Capture a Timecop and make him tell you. But this is impossible for two reasons. One, knowledge of the future creates a paradox, which is a fancy way of saying "exploding." And two, Timecop would just do the splits when you tried to grab him. That leaves us with what I call the Final Option—an unspeakable combination of guesswork and me. Luckily, if I'm wrong, and *Jackass* is the key to the future, we'll never know because science is building robots at a rate that by 200X, the only thing humans will know...is fear. To further complicate things, this article will be written in the year 2048, the Chinese year of the

> Why is there not a digital re-creation of inserting a toy car into a human colon?



PAGE
34

Seek and
Enjoy: Fun
in the sun



PAGE
36

Top 10:
Stupidest
game swag

Laser Cock, and placed in a reverse time capsule to the Old West, where it has waited in a mystical golden idol until now.

The future remembers Jackass

As a proud resident of 2048, I'm astonished by many things. Things like children being rendered into feeding paste and piped into Taco Bell materializers and things like the zesty Zorbwestern flavor of children paste. (Time note: "zorb" is a direction invented in the year 2018.) More notable, though, is the omission of *Jackass* for the Nintendo DS from discussion among videogame academia. At the risk of breaking Future Commandment Robodeath, I will correct this error with the following report.

Let Jackassery begin

At the beginning in *Jackass*, the player designs his or its own character. (Time note: Women are illegal in 2048.) And although the ability to label one's digital avatar was already quite common, this is not allowed here. The game instead refers to you randomly. During this researcher's study, I was given the name Mr. Stallion, after a sperm-filled ride monster popular during the era. Several hairstyles and clothing combinations could be selected, as this was before all clothing was replaced by silver jumpsuits.

Single-player mode

How did humankind of the past neglect to remember such a unique game? You begin play as an intern for

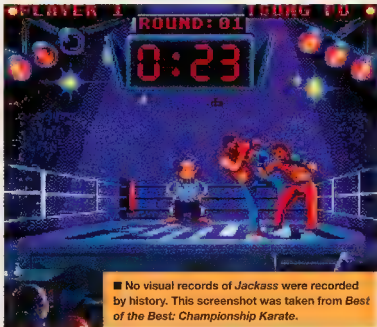
a show about youths attempting to injure themselves and others. It's similar to last fall's CBS hit *Kill Everyone in the House* but with a far less focused goal. As an intern named Mr. Stallion, your first duty is to break enough of your bones to reach a point total. You do this by launching yourself into the air and landing improperly, actions not to be re-created under nonvirtual circumstances. To further explain, this game takes place before the stupid were used to farm brain eggs. In fact, during this era they were allowed to use tools and even made into presidents, so it was necessary to warn audiences not to mimic fictional or dangerous actions, as stupids may be allowed to see it. This makes *Jackass* a grim game indeed, as it was this exact aspect of the stupid that was eventually used against them. But that's a report for another time.

Multiplayer mode

Although the game includes a multiplayer mode, it was rarely used. Instead, in the spirit of the subject matter, the unofficial multiplayer mode was handing the game to a friend until boredom overtook them and then filming yourself rubbing poop on their head as they slept.

Further gameplay discussion

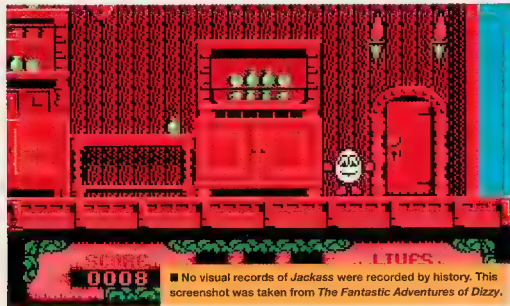
Controlling your character was a categorical failure, making the game's goal—falling into things clumsily—a near certainty. The empty 3D environment allowed for only tiny variations of visual stimuli, meaning an average mind could take in the entire experi-



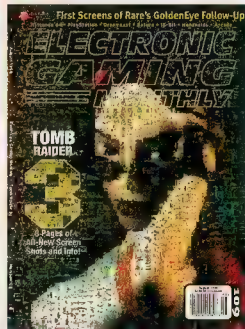
ence in less than 30 Lord-Torgozz-Controls-Allis. Or, as they were called then, seconds. This was efficiency unmatched even after game chips were put on quick-dissolve suppositories. *Jackass*' longevity relied on the player's interest in raising the attributes of Skill, Bone Breaking, Agility, and Balance. And while there were mental disorders at the time that would allow pleasure to be taken from this, they were uncommon and usually accompanied by webbed hands that made button manipulation impossible.

How did time lose DS Jackass?

One must ask why the more notable *Jackass* stunts were not included in the DS version. Why is there not a digital re-creation of inserting a toy car into a human colon? Even given the technology of the time, this could easily be simulated. Or perhaps the stunt where Johnny Knoxville pretends to kill a baby to frighten passersby? That's an activity so revered that we still honor it today by killing actual babies. Although many argue this is an unrelated horror of future society, this researcher still believes he has a point: *Jackass* is about gasping near someone eating pee. To repaint an inferior skateboarding game and forcibly insert references to the *Jackass* cast is nothing but Paris Hilton bleeding on you. (Time note: After the sexually transmitted disease DoubleHerpes was discovered, "Paris Hilton bleeding on you" became the worst vulgarity available in 2048.) ❄️



10 Years Ago...



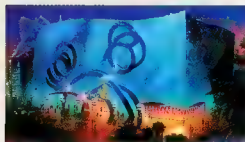
On the cover: Tomb Raider 3

With two highly successful games out and a movie on the way, Lara Croft was a big deal, so we went to *Raider* developer Core to get an intimate look at her third outing. We showed off the new effects (colored lighting!) and asked readers which actress was best suited to play the Lara in the film. Your top pick? Sandra Bullock, with a whopping 28 percent of the vote.



Thing of the Month: Game Boy Camera

We loved Nintendo's new peripheral so much that we made a separate award for it: Thing of the Month. Everyone agreed that taking pictures of friends and then adding silly graphics was a blast. Former *EGM* editor-in-chief John Davison gushed, "I think it's the best toy I have come across in a long time."



Raiders of the Revolutionary Arcades

Arcade? That's "location-based entertainment" to you, mister. Our intrepid editors traveled all over the United States and reported on burgeoning superarcades, such as DisneyQuest and Sega's GameWorks.

The Story of Story

The divergent (and sometimes convergent) evolution of gaming narrative *By Jeremy Parish*

Metal Gear Solid 4 brings the 20-years-running *Metal Gear* saga to a close through hours of expertly produced cut-scenes. But director Hideo Kojima's Hollywood-esque approach is hardly the only way to tell a story—gaming narrative has evolved in different directions over the years.

START HERE

PONG

Arcade • 1972

Pong had no story to speak of besides its instructions: "Avoid missing ball for high score." Simple. Direct. Timeless.



DONKEY KONG

Arcade • 1981

This classic *King Kong* tale offered what were likely the first cinema sequences in gaming: DK wordlessly absconding with Mario's lady love and, later, plummeting to his ignominious demise.



ZORK

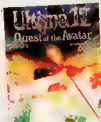
PC • 1980

As a text-based game, most of *Zork's* script was given over to defining environmental details that graphics would normally depict. Amid explanations of caves and dams, though, players could piece together the sordid history of the Great Underground Empire.

ULTIMA IV

PC • 1985

With a story provided almost entirely through sparse dialogue, *Ultima IV* posed a moral challenge for players—a simple but thought-provoking tale.



MANIC MANSION

PC • 1987

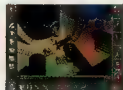
Adding a visual element to the basic "wander and explore" concept of *Zork*, *Manic Mansion* was among the first great graphical adventure games. With no need to describe the game world, the creators were freed to build a branching story packed with quirky characters and engrossing throwaway details, like microwavable hamsters.



BALDUR'S GATE

PC • 1998

Drawing heavily upon its pen-and-paper roots, BioWare's *Dungeons & Dragons*-based role-playing game featured copious narrative...and plenty of player control over the game's outcome through both action and dialogue.



PATHWAYS INTO DARKNESS

Macintosh • 1993

Somewhere between a graphical adventure and a "Doom clone," players learned as much about *Pathway's* story from its gameplay developments as from its extensive conversations with the ghosts that populated the world.



DRAGON'S LAIR

Arcade • 1983

Barely meeting the minimum requirements to qualify as a videogame, *Dragon's Lair* was basically a series of full-motion videos (FMVs) strung together with a sort of controller-based guessing game. But damn, did it look cool.

**NIGHT TRAP**

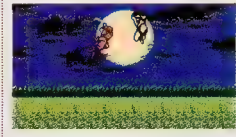
Sega CD • 1992

The most famous of the flood of FMV-based games that marked the beginning of the CD-ROM era, *Night Trap* was, happily, an evolutionary dead end—cheaply made live video bound by poorly designed gameplay.

**NINJA GAIDEN**

NES • 1989

Tecmo's NES platformer took in-game story to a new level with anime-flavored cut-scenes between every stage. The animation was rudimentary at best, and the dialogue was corny, yet the net effect was total awesomeness.

**METAL GEAR SOLID**

PlayStation • 1998

Taking *Ninja Gaiden's* cut-scenes to their ultimate end, the modern *Metal Gear* games wear their creator's desire to direct movies on their sleeve—but they work. Maybe because the exquisitely crafted story sequences bookend excellent action.

**FINAL FANTASY VII**

PlayStation • 1997

Square tossed together every trick in the book: FMV, nonverbal cut-scenes, and tons of expository dialogue in between. It was a groundbreaking effort—if only the story had made sense!

**SUPER METROID**

Super NES • 1994

After a bit of introductory exposition, *Super Metroid* told its tale through a mute, sprite-based puppet show—and managed to create one of gaming's most memorable climaxes in the process.

MASS EFFECT

Xbox 360 • 2007

As chatty as predecessor *Baldur's Gate* but with the slick, smart cinematic style of *Final Fantasy VII*, *Mass Effect* combines the best of both Eastern and Western RPG-narrative design.

**HALF-LIFE**

PC • 1998

Combining the in-game narrative of adventures like *Pathways* with the seamless cut-scenes of *Super Metroid*, *Half-Life* offered an interesting take on narrative: a fully immersive adventure in which every second of the story was seen through the main character's eyes.

**BIOSHOCK**

XB360/PC • 2007

BioShock employs most all of its predecessors' tricks—a plot that plays out in sight of the player's immersive perspective, interactive in-game events, and additional story details hidden in recorded audio diaries—to create a compelling tale in a fascinating world. 🌐

**METROID PRIME**

GameCube • 2002

The computer terminals that litter the surface of Tallon IV combined with brief cinematic interludes gave *Metroid Prime's* exploratory shooting action impressively detailed story depth...for those who cared to find it.



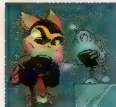
To check out more retro jibber-jabber, set your browser to bonusstage.1UP.com to watch 1UP's video podcast.

Summertime Blues

Sweating out the sucky games

By Michael Donahoe • Illustration by Bill Mudron

Washed up in the picture below, you'll find 20 references to crappy games not cool enough for the summer heat—some easy to find, some designed to leave your mind stuck in the sand. So slather up your noggin with suntan lotion and hope your brain doesn't get burned.



How it works:

Peruse the image to discover hints that represent specific videogame titles. For example, the picture above of pals Ratchet and Clank ping each other is, yep, *Ping Pals*. Now go find the rest!



EGM Extras:
Think you found all the games? Head over to EGM.1UP.com to get the solution.

Weirdest Swag

Yo ho ho and a bottle of ugh By Scott Sharkey

Mailing bizarre crap may not get journalists to like your videogame any better, but it does at least leave us with huge piles of weird junk on our desks for people to puzzle over. Below are the top 10 pieces of swag we've received and the games (both console and PC) they're "promoting."

**10 Stranglehold (PS3/XB360):
Big, scary guns**

Closer inspection reveals that these Berettas are actually a pair of cigarette lighters. You have to look pretty close, though, which makes us wonder if *Stranglehold*'s makers were trying to get us shot by confused cops who patrol near our designated smoking area.



**9 Uprising: Join or Die (PC):
Hourglass full of lubricant**

It's hard to imagine many non-AO-rated games that would warrant mailing us an hourglass full of Astroglide. Supposedly, it could be shattered in case of sexual emergency, but mostly it's just the world's grossest way of keeping time.



8 Pirates of the Burning Sea (PC): Yo-yo, Ho Hos, bottle of rum

Our first thought upon opening this chest was something like, "What the hell does a yo-yo have to do with pirates?" Upon noticing the rest of the package's contents, it became apparent that a pun cannot actually kill you, but it can cause a stroke.



7 The Lord of the Rings Online (PC): Two dozen Hobbbit feet

Feel free to mail suggestions for what to actually *do* with these faux-fur-covered footies—well, other than forcing interns to wear them while jumping up and down on a bed in slow motion. Unfortunately, human resources has informed us that this would be an unacceptable abuse of employee rights.

6 Ted Nugent Wild Hunting Adventure (PC): Dry meat

We'd never disparage the quality of Ted Nugent's weird beef jerky (because he owns a lot of guns, after all), but it's great fun to lie to people about what this stuff is made of after they've eaten it. Really, if you eat anything mailed to you by Ted Nugent, you deserve whatever happens.



5 Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater (PS2): Snake meat?

After the adventure with Ted Nugent's billong, nobody in the office seemed particularly keen on actually tasting whatever was in this mystery can. Mailing it to a reader as a, uh, "prize" led to the revelation that it was, in fact, clam chowder. Probably.



4 Every fantasy-themed game ever: Lots of swords

Somehow, none of these blades ever came with a Cheetos-stained sweatshirt and clip-on ponytail. Fun fact: If you gather together enough dull fantasy swords in one place, it will magically restore your virginity. And if you swing them around in front of a camera, you'll manage to keep that badge for life.



3 Condemned: Criminal Origins (XB360): Bloody lead pipe

One Christmas season, we received a dozen heavy white boxes tied with pretty red bows. Visions of all sorts of delicious holiday goodies flashed through our minds. Bloody lead pipes were not among them... although these pipes apparently passed through someone else's mind.



2 Voyage Century (PC): Big f*ing gold boat**

We swear that someone stole this thing out of our grandmother's bathroom. Or at least we would've thought so if everyone else in the office didn't get one as well, which would imply that an awful lot of grandmothers with downright terrible taste in interior decoration got robbed overnight.



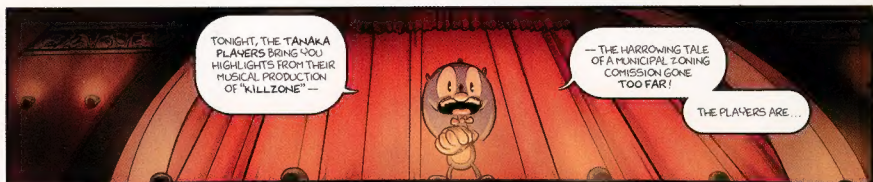
1 Gamecock: Gun full of tequila

If you like guns, and you like booze, what could possibly be better than a gun filled with booze? Considering that this stuff tastes more or less like a cat's butt, pretty much anything. You think we'd stop putting things that came in the mail in our mouths by now. ☞

> HSU & CHAN IN:

Monochrome Your Wagon

By Jeremy "Norm" Scott



TONIGHT, THE TANAKA PLAYERS BRING YOU HIGHLIGHTS FROM THEIR MUSICAL PRODUCTION OF "KILLZONE"—

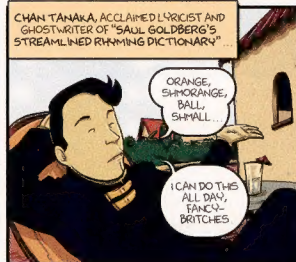
—THE HARROWING TALE OF A MUNICIPAL ZONING COMMISSION GONE TOO FAR!

THE PLAYERS ARE...



HSU TANAKA, CLASSICALLY TRAINED, CLASSICALLY EXPELLED ALUMNUS OF THE ROYAL OPERA GUILD IN AKRON...

DO... RE... M... UH... WAIT... LA? SO? DANGIT!



CHAN TANAKA, ACCLAIMED LYRICIST AND GHOSTWRITER OF "SAUL GOLDBERG'S STREAMLINED RHIMING DICTIONARY"

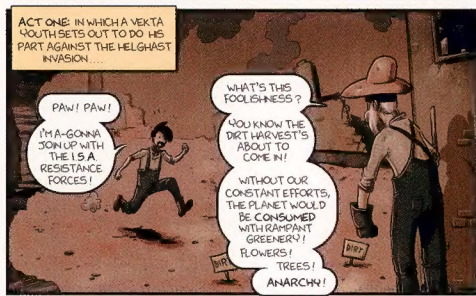
ORANGE, SHMOORANGE, BALL, SHYBALL...

I CAN DO THIS ALL DAY, FANCY-BROTCHES



AND THE HELGHAST, WHO SHALL BE REPRESENTED BY THE BASSOON.

TOOT!



ACT ONE IN WHICH A VEXTA YOUTH SETS OUT TO DO HIS PART AGAINST THE HELGHAST INVASION.

PANI! PANI!
I'M A-GONNA JOIN UP WITH THE 15 A RESISTANCE FORCES!

WHAT'S THIS FOOLISHNESS?

YOU KNOW THE DIRT HARVEST'S ABOUT TO COME IN!

WITHOUT OUR CONSTANT EFFORTS, THE PLANET WOULD BE CONSUMED WITH RAMBANT GREENERY!! FLOWERS! TREES! ANARCHY!

BUT, PANI, THAT'S WHAT I WANNA FIGHT FOR!
FOR OUR DIRT!
FOR OUR ROCKS!
FOR OUR SPRAWLING, RUSTY INDUSTRIAL COMPLEXES, AND EVERY BLESSED BROWNISH-GRAY INCH OF VEXTA CULTURE!

STUFF!
TRULLY, IT IS A JEWEL SPARKLING IN THE FIRMAMENT!

YOU HAVE MY BLESSING, SON!
GO, FIGHT, AND BECOME A MAN!



ACT THREE: THE BATTLE RAGES ON...

I WONDER IF THESE GUYS KNOW THE GLOWING, ORANGE EYES DON'T REALLY HELP THEIR CAMOUFLAGE?

CHECK IT OUT! IF YOU SQUINT, IT REALLY DOES LOOK LIKE THE '83 '05 TRALER!

TOOT!

TOOT!

AND I CAN PRETEND I'M SHOOTING JAWAS!

"KILLZONE: THE MUSICAL"
FEATURES THE SONGS:

- "MY TOWN IS BROWN"
- "TRAILER PRERENDAGIO IN G"
- "WHAT, THE HELGHAST?"
- "BETTY ORANGE EYES"

AND MANY MORE!

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT YOUR LOCAL SCALPER-SUPPORT THE ARTS!

END

BRING HOME THE GOLD!



Beijing 2008



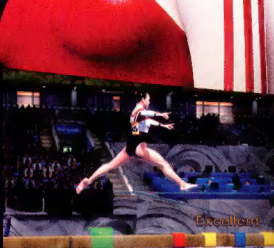
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PLAYSTATION 3

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DAMNATION

WHAT'S WITHIN
YOUR SOUL?

HOPE

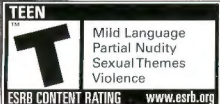
SOUL CALIBUR IV

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PLAYSTATION 3

XBOX 360 LIVE

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