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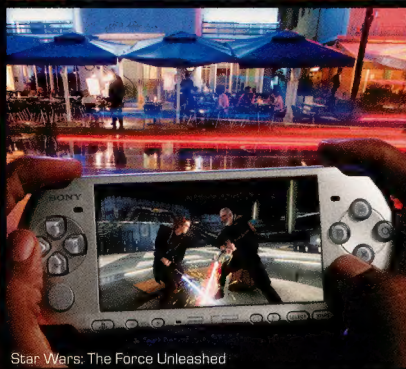
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> EDITORIAL

Eye of the Owl



TWELVE YEARS AGO, I wasn't writing for EGM for a living; I was working for Marvel Comics as a freelance illustrator on some of their little-known Marvel Music comics. That period of my life was like a dream come true—my parents still have a photocopy of my first paycheck from Marvel. So you can probably imagine the heady buzz I felt working on this issue's cover story. *Watchmen*, originally published in 1986 by Marvel's crosstown rival, DC Comics, was a landmark event in comics history. *Watchmen* opened my eyes to what the comics medium could truly become. Turning the industry on its ear, it presented its cast as mostly middle-aged crime fighters past their prime. But as with all great crime novels, the details spool out in deliberate doses, and over 12 issues, writer Alan Moore and artist Dave Gibbons carved out a meticulously precise supermystery—with an ending as shocking as anything I've ever read. Still, few believed *Watchmen* would ever see the big screen—and similarly, not many thought it'd ever become a game. But a game it is—and it's a prequel worthy of the *Watchmen* name. Over the course of this issue's cover story, we speak with *Watchmen* heavyweights like the movie's director, Zack Snyder, original *Watchmen* artist Gibbons, and prequel scripter and comics veteran Len Wein. Once you've read the story, I'm sure you'll share in my renewed enthusiasm for *Watchmen*.

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

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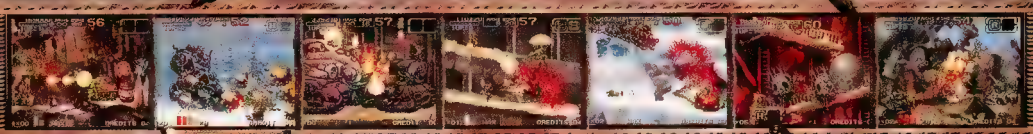


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Strong Language
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1UP Family

This month, we meet
1UP user Davin Loh
(jinpei05.1UP.com)

EGM: What's the longest gaming session you've had, and for what game?

Davin Loh: In college, my friends introduced me to *StarCraft* (PC), and it awoke the crazy Korean *StarCraft* addiction genes in my DNA. If I remember correctly, we ended up playing for 72 hours straight, stopping only to eat and use the bathroom. Good times!

EGM: What's your favorite gaming console?

DL: It's a dead heat between Dreamcast and PlayStation 2.

EGM: What are your favorite games? Why?

DL: My favorite PS2 games are *Hokuto no Ken* [*List of the North Star*] and *Street Fighter Alpha Collection*. My favorite Dreamcast games are *Power Stone* and *Marvel vs. Capcom 2*. I'm a fighting-game freak!

Trivial Issue

This month's

EGM question:

In what year does the *Watchmen* game take place?

E-mail the answer to

EGM@1UP.com (subject head: Trivia; **EGM** #235) for a chance to win something potentially awesome.



For writing this month's LOTM, Dustin gets a copy of *Karaoke Revolution*, or something else to exercise his vocal cords with.



Rip Off: When arcades started getting friendly.

Letter of the Month**Vox populi, vox Dei**

I'm sure that as reviewers, you have the game industry's full attention when you offer feedback and suggestions. But what about all of us out here that aren't a part of the industry? I used to think that the only way I was able to communicate my likes and dislikes to the gaming industry was by voting with my money. But about two years ago, I began getting more proactive with my input. I started e-mailing companies. Now, for whatever reason, there's this unspoken thought that when a company gets an e-mail from Average Joe Gamer, they file it right into their "deleted mail" bin. But it's not true at all! I've always gotten a response from the companies I've written to.

But when we write these guys, it has to be done right. No "leetspeak." No insults. No profanity. Make a solid case for what you're suggesting. Give reasons why it would work. Give praise where it's due. These companies are like politicians—I once heard a politician say, "I represent about 100,000 people in my district, and if I receive just seven phone calls about an issue, the input from those seven calls can sway my vote to their side."

Fellow gamers, we have a voice! Let it be heard!

—Dustin Paulson

You do realize, Dustin, that they were probably writing back just to try to get you to stop stalking them, right? Oh, we kid, we kid.

Cooperation innovation

I loved the co-op article in your November issue ["Adventures in Friendship," **EGM** #234], but I was disappointed to see you missed one of the earliest and most fun co-op games there was: *Rip Off*. Sure the game was fairly simple, but it was 1980, after all. Back then, it was a nice change to go into the arcade to

play a game with your friend, instead of against him.

—Dave Svenson

Good catch! Even more so because *Rip Off* wasn't just one of the earliest co-op games, it was the very first to hit arcades. Man, do those vector graphics bring back sweet memories.

The definition of "is"

I'm usually not one to argue with top-10 lists, but how could you have a top 10 of videogame politicians ["Top Ten Videogame Politicians," **EGM** #234] and forget about Bill Clinton's appearance in *NBA Jam: Tournament Edition*? There's something about our then-president dunking the ball from half-court while flames engulfed him that I'll never forget.

—Jared Thorbahn

Another good catch. And it wasn't just Bill who made an appearance in the game; Hillary did too, alongside Al Gore and Prince Charles. Is it just us, or were politics simpler back then?

Check your premises; contradictions don't exist

I've just read "Top Ten Videogame Politicians," and Scott Sharkey's comments on *BioShock* were disingenuous, crude, and quite ignorant of not only Objectivism, but *BioShock* itself and its message. His little diatribe was a malicious [slam] against Objectivism and its fans.

In past interviews of yours, [*BioShock* designer] Ken Levine stated that his purpose was not to make a game that thrashed Objectivism, but to guard against what he termed "extremism" and show what happens when a cult of personality develops around an ideologue and the ideologue is not questioned. This moral is consonant with the philosophy of Objectivism and necessary in waking up those individuals who would mindlessly

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■ Disapproving Philosopher disapproves.

▷ WINNER OF OUR COVER-GUESSING CONTEST:

1UP user Justin Yan

(Scarified.1UP.com) was the first reader to correctly submit the answer "Watchmen" as our secret December cover. He said "Sundial = Watch" and alluded to our "Manhattan-sized announcement" quote in last month's Next Month page, simply stating "Dr. Manhattan?" For his troubles, Justin has won eternal fame in the annals of EGM.

▷ OOPS!

Last month, we printed a letter about Sarah Palin's resemblance to the main character from *Bayonetta*. The letter should have been attributed to Avram Vreman, not Robert Ezzell. Sorry, Avram.

follow anyone, even Ayn Rand, and not think for themselves.

It was a small-minded and mean-spirited attack that was seriously out of place in an otherwise lighthearted and funny article.

—Vicman Linares

Sharkey replies: "I'm sorry. You've clearly proven that Objectivism doesn't turn people into jerks with an overdeveloped sense of entitlement. Please, just stop hitting me."

More numbers than fingers

At the start of Shane Bettenhausen's *Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia* review (EGM #234), he mentions that it's the fifth portable "Metroid-vania" since *Symphonia of the Night*. But isn't it the sixth? *Circle of the Moon*, *Harmony of Dissonance*, and *Aria of Sorrow* were all on the GBA, and then *Dawn of Sorrow* and *Portrait of Ruin* preceded this newest title on the DS.

—Joe Cammisia

Look, we write about videogames for a living. Do you really expect us to be good at math?

Girl, disgusted

After reading the 1UP Family profile on Amarisse Sullivan [Letters, EGM #234], I was a little disappointed in you. Thanks to Nintendo's cute, fuzzy games like *Nintendogs* and *Cooking Mama*, and massively multiplayer games like *World of Warcraft*, gaming has become a social world, and it's only right to think females would be included in the player base.

Amarisse was correct when she said "Girls playing videogames isn't quite the novelty it once was." In fact, roughly half of the entire gaming population is female! I'm sick of girls on the games I play acting like they're special and rare, like they should get items and gold just for having two

X chromosomes. And it's people (mostly males) like you who push that stereotype and encourage that type of behavior. I myself am a girl and play videogames, but unlike some, I don't boast about it.

I think what needs to be realized here is that girls are just part of the player bases in videogames now. They're not special, and they're not rare. And more likely than not, they're gaming to have fun, not to be ogled.

—Sarah M.

Welcome to the present

I noticed EGM finally published a review for a PC game [*Spore*, EGM #234]. I knew that print-media sales were falling, but I never thought I would see a PC game reviewed in a magazine famous for console coverage. Isn't that why Ziff Davis has [*Games for Windows: The Official Magazine*]? Are sales down, or can we expect a possible consolidation in the distant future?

—Chris Day

Um. You may want to sit down for this, Chris. The "distant future" pretty much happened a few months ago, when GFW moved online and we started covering PC games. It's a brave new world!

Sadness happiness

The Wii, I feel, has enormous potential to be a hardcore machine, as well as a casual system. But, sadly, it seems Nintendo doesn't share my opinion. I heard of a horror game a while back called *Sadness*, and it looked like something I could drown my "not having *Resident Evil 5* on Wii" sorrows in. But since then, I haven't seen or heard a mention that it was even still being created! Can you tell me what happened to it?

—S. Papstein

Sure thing. *Sadness* dropped off the radar for a while when developer Nibris ran into "artistic differences" with its publisher in March 2007. But as of this past July, the game's back on track, scheduled for release late next year.

Worth 1,000 words

I'm a 25-year-old art teacher, and I use videogames often in my art classes to connect art to my students on a level they can understand. An example of this would be my senior art class that did a sci-fi art project a while back where I used *Halo* to get the students' attention. I then linked *Halo* to the art design from the movie *Aliens*. After watching select scenes from both

Halo and *Aliens*, the students had to fashion a sci-fi image of their own design. I also do a mosaic project where the students need to create an image using .5-inch-by-.5-inch colored squares. I obviously touch on famous mosaic pieces of artwork, but I also touch on 8-bit- and 16-bit-era videogame sprites. I actually have the *Advent Children* movie in my curriculum to watch before I teach the students about dynamic artwork. Even if you don't believe videogames can be art, then at least understand that artistic aesthetic does exist in games.

—Matthew Horton

Good to see you teaching the kids about the things that really matter in life. Hopefully, some of them will move on to making games themselves...so we can savagely tear them apart. We're such bastards.

You don't say!

If Tenacious D is "rock," so are Spinal Tap, Wyld Stallyns, and Vesuvius.

—Tristan R.

Er, OK. But you forgot Limozeen.

The smell of napalm in the morning

Why don't more games have Vietnam as a setting? I think it would be fun with the sadistic booby-traps, snipers out of nowhere, and whole regiments disappearing into the underground tunneling network, where you can follow them for some badass close-quarters combat. Please tell me if there are any games in the works that you know of and/or why developers do not make these games.

—Robert Russell

We're not aware of any currently in the works, but the problem with games based on the Vietnam War isn't that none exist—it's that few are any good. Out of *Conflict: Vietnam*, *Shellshock: Nam '67*, *Men of Valor*, *Battlefield: Vietnam*, and *Vietcong 1 and 2*, only *Battlefield* enjoys an above-80-percent aggregate rating on Metacritic.

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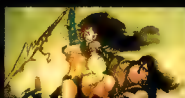
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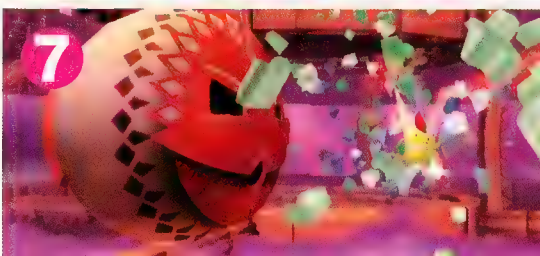
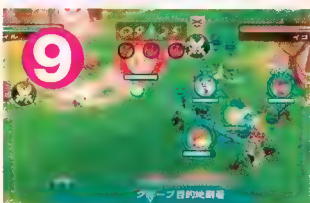
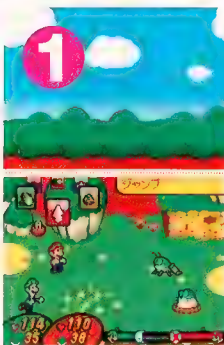
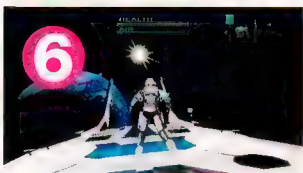
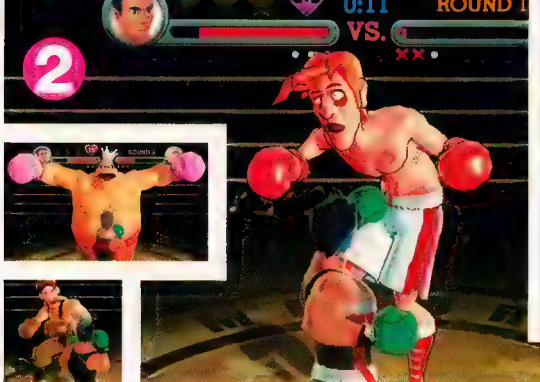
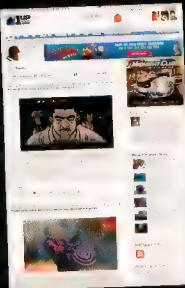


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Check out NEWS.1UP.COM for up-to-the-minute videogame news.





EASTERN FRONT

Gaming's major players battle for mindshare at the 2008 Tokyo Game Show By Shane Bettenhausen

Nintendo: A party of one

Nintendo's decision to hold its own private press conference a week before the 2008 Tokyo Game Show came as no surprise (the company historically never attends, save for a keynote appearance by President Satoru Iwata in 2005 to reveal the Wii controller), but the quantity and impact of that event's announcements certainly did. With Sony's PSP finally giving the DS some fierce competition in Japan, Nintendo wisely struck back by announcing the DSi, a revamped hardware model featuring a slightly larger screen, two digital cameras, a built-in web browser, and a WiiWare-style download service for games and apps. The DSi also sports a handy SD card slot (for photos, music, and downloads), but it no longer offers GBA

backward compatibility (sucks to be you, *Guitar Hero: On Tour*). Although the DSi will hit Japanese store shelves this November (for roughly \$190), it's not expected to make landfall in the U.S. until late 2009. Nintendo also announced a handful of new DS software titles, including *Mario & Luigi 3* (1), a 3D *Picross* offering, a *WarioWare* spin-off entitled *Made in Me*, and a pedometer-accessorized walking game featuring Mii support.

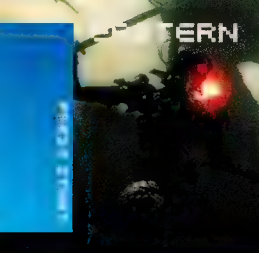
Prior to this press conference, Nintendo's slate of upcoming Wii software looked positively bleak. But now, after a slew of new title announcements, ranging from high-profile fan-favorite revivals such as *Punch-Out!!* (2) and *Sin and Punishment 2* (3) to more casual fare like *Endless Ocean 2* (4), fears have been assuaged. Nintendo revealed a hefty lineup,



including a Wii follow-up to DS cult hit *Trace Memory* (5), a spacewalking adventure called *Cosmic Walker* (6), a colorful puzzle-action title by Artoon named *Spawn Smasher* (7), and *Dynamic Slash* (8), a Norse-mythology take on *Earth Defense Force* by that series' developer, Sandlot. Nintendo rounded out the pack with two kid-friendly action-RPGs: *Wand of Magic* (9) (a successor to the DS title *Lost Magic*) and *Line Attack Heroes* (10) (by *Secret of Mana* creator Koichi Ishii).



■ While the DSi (left half) doesn't qualify as a true DS successor, it sports larger screens, two digital cameras, and direct downloads.



Sony: No alarms, no surprises
While Nintendo and Microsoft both made waves with substantial product announcements around TGS, Sony was guarded and conservative. The reveal of Fumito Ueda's (*Ico*, *Shadow of the Colossus*) long-awaited PS3 project didn't materialize, leaving lesser fare such as From Software's *Demon's Souls* (1) (a clumsy, third-person update of *King's Field*) and *dress* (an artsy fashion-designing game for guys) to feebly carry the first-party torch. With minimal announcements, Sony wisely shifted its emphasis to pushing *LittleBigPlanet* and Level 5's upcoming role-playing offering *White Knight Chronicles* (2). *WKC* will ship on Christmas Day in Japan, and it seems poised to be a crucial, make-or-break title for Sony—with an ambitious single-player campaign and a four-player online mode similar to Capcom's wildly popular *Monster Hunter*, it could be the hit that the PS3 desperately needs.



On the PlayStation Network front, *flower* and *Ragdoll Kung Fu: Fists of Plastic* continued to impress, and newcomer *Gomibako*, a quirky dropping-block puzzler, delivered bizarre, garbage-themed thrills. Unfortunately, talky, anime-filled adventure games dominated Sony's first-party PSP lineup, but both *LocoRoco 2* (3) and *Patapon 2: Don Chaka!* (4) improved on their portable predecessors.



Microsoft: The Master's return

With the Xbox 360's fortunes in Japan finally appearing to reverse (it even outsold the PlayStation 3 there in September), Microsoft seized the opportunity to gain further momentum with a TGS keynote by corporate VP John Schappert. Oddly enough, the juiciest reveal he made—*Halo 3: Recon* (5), a Bungie-helmed standalone expansion that follows an Orbital Drop Shock Trooper through the events leading up to *Halo 3*—clearly wasn't focused on the Japanese market. Microsoft showed little homegrown product: The From Software-developed *Ninja Blade* (6) disappointed with its sluggish combat and gimmicky reliance on minigames, and the lack of updates on Mistwalker's previously announced (*Cry-On*) or rumored (*Blue Dragon 2*, *Lost Odyssey 2*) projects was troubling. Plus, we harbor doubts as to whether gamers of any nationality are stoked by the announcement of *Ninety-Nine Nights 2*, but at least Microsoft has some hot Xbox Live Arcade exclusives: *R-Type Dimensions* (7), *Arkanoid Live*, *Space Invaders Extreme* (8), and *Meteos Wars*.



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Sega: Turning it around

Sega's hottest upcoming titles weren't even at TGS—we had to journey to the Osaka offices of supergroup-developer Platinum Games to see *Bayonetta* (1) (PS3/XB360) and *MadWorld* (2) (Wii) in action. For *Bayonetta*—a hyper-sexualized, even more-over-the-top take on *Devil May Cry*—Platinum revealed a new mid-boss who chases you up the side of a hill, while we were given our first hands-on access for *MadWorld*, a “Three Stooges with chain saws” style brawler rendered in stark black, white, and bloodred. We're happy to say that the controls felt as tight as we had hoped, with little of the input sloppiness seen in many Wii action games.



Back at TGS proper, Sega's PS3-exclusive *Yakuza 3* (3) found the series' beloved gangster bringing heat to a tropical Okinawan resort. Sega also showed some commendable Wii support, including the swordplay-centric *Sonic & the Black Knight* and *Let's Tap* (4), a bizarre party game developed by *Sonic* creator Yuji Naka that's played by tapping on a cardboard box upon which a Wii Remote rests.

Square Enix: Playing it safe

As usual, the role-playing powerhouse kept its most coveted objects of fanboy desire—amazing new trailers for *Final Fantasy XIII* (5) (PS3/XB360), *Versus XIII* (PS3), *Agito XIII* (PSP), and *Parasite Eve: The 3rd Birthday* (6) (PSP)—away from prying eyes in a “closed megatheater” with interminably long lines. At least a vast array of playable *Dissidia: Final Fantasy* (PSP), *Kingdom Hearts: Birth by Sleep* (PSP), and *Star Ocean: The Last Hope* (7) (XB360) kiosks picked up the slack: All three looked and played spectacularly.



Capcom: Monstrously popular

Monster Hunter—obsessed Japanese gamers unsurprisingly flocked to Capcom's booth for hands-on time with the sharp-looking *Monster Hunter 3* (8) (Wii), but we weren't terribly impressed by the repetitive new motion controls. Luckily, Capcom had plenty of fare with worldwide appeal: Surefire hits *Resident Evil 5* (PS3/XB360) and *Street Fighter IV* (PS3/XB360) (9) amazed with new demos highlighting lovely ladies, and Sheva and Sakura made their respective playable debuts. Finally, we got a chance to sample the goofy, only-in-Japan Wii offering *Tatsunoko vs. Capcom*. Anime licensing issues make a U.S. release unlikely, so otaku might have to import this one for its madcap fighting action. 🐸



■ EGM April Fools' star Gouken (left) made real



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Beautiful Bounty: Jenni Källberg



When videogame fans dress up like their favorite characters, it's usually "game over" for your eyes. But not all cosplayers are cringe-worthy. Just take a look at Nintendo dress-up lover Jenni Källberg. This talented Swedish dork designer's a pro at transforming herself into every sex-deprived game fan's fantasy. Because we're so impressed with her looks—er, *design skills*, we decided to find out more about her *Metroid*-inspired duds.

EGM: What exactly inspired you to dress up like a chick who dresses up in robotic armor?

Jenni Källberg: Because I think Samus is a pretty cool gal. I mean, she kills Metroids and isn't afraid of anything that gets in her way.

EGM: How long did it take you to create the classic Varia Suit?

JK: Six months. I didn't work on it every day in that period, though.

EGM: Many people thought Samus was a dude, only to find out that she's a chick at the end of *Metroid*. So, uh, you are a girl, right?

JK: Who tol— Oh, yeah—sure!

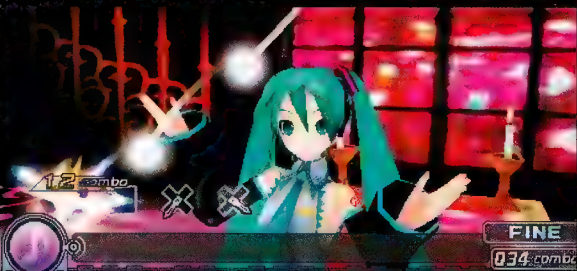
EGM: Approximately how many marriage proposals have you received from crazy Nintendo fans?

JK: Over 9,000.

EGM: Who's the sexiest Nintendo female? Samus Aran, Princess Peach, or Birdo?

JK: I'd let Samus Screw-Attack me, if you know what I mean.

EGM: Uh...



> FOREIGN OBJECT/JAPAN

MIKU HATSUNE: PROJECT DIVA

When three dimensions just don't do it for you anymore

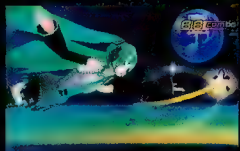
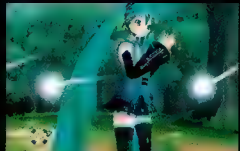
Platform: PSP
Likelihood it'll come here?

Every horny internet nerd worth his salt knows Miku. Horny internet nerds aren't known for spending money, though, which may temper Sega's enthusiasm for an overseas release.

A videogame starring an anime chick with blue hair? What will the Japanese think of next? This isn't just any blue-haired babe, though: She's Miku Hatsune, a "virtual idol" who's been pretty tough to miss if you've ever trolled YouTube—or its Japanese equivalent, Nico Nico Douga (nicovideo.jp)—for music videos. Miku's the mascot for Vocaloid, a software toy that lets you make the pretend anime lady sing whatever ditty you want in her synthesized, but completely believable, cutesy J-pop idol voice. Much of Vocaloid's popularity in Japan is thanks to Miku herself; she's starred in comics, books, and countless photos of questionable nature.

Sure, uh, so, there's a game here? Right, right, right. Similar in style to Namco Bandai's Japan-only *The Idolmaster*, *Project DIVA*'s your basic music-rhythm game—tap the buttons to the onscreen prompts and make Miku happy. Screw up and you make Miku look all pouty

and cute. Great performances reward you with unlockable story sequences and accessories to decorate Miku's virtual studio apartment. It's nothing too fancy, but if you're the sort of otaku who's lost the ability to get aroused by anything non-2D, you've undoubtedly got your preorder on file at the game shop right now.



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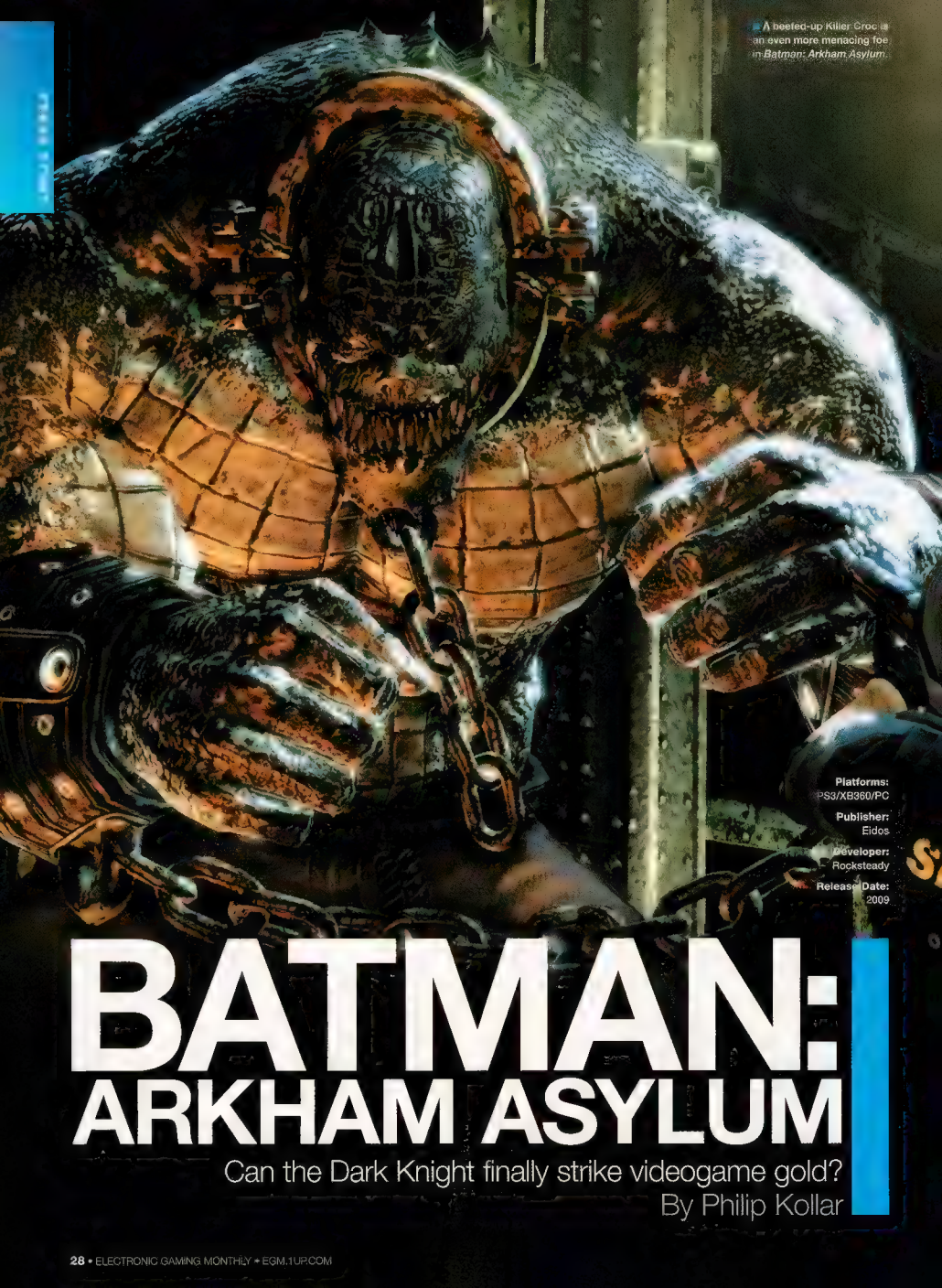
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Jump in.

 XBOX 360.



A beefed-up Killer Croc is an even more menacing foe in *Batman: Arkham Asylum*.

Platforms:

PS3/XB360/PC

Publisher:

Eidos

Developer:

Rocksteady

Release Date:

2009

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

Can the Dark Knight finally strike videogame gold?

By Philip Kollar



■ These thugs are about to discover Bruce Wayne's love of fine literature.



EARLIER THIS YEAR, rumors swirled that Pandemic and Electronic Arts were working on a *Batman* game to coincide with this summer's smash film *The Dark Knight*. Whether it was Electronic Arts, Pandemic, Warner Bros., or another company entirely, it's clear that someone dropped the ball on creating a darker *Batman* game based around the film—a game that probably would've sold like crazy. Thankfully, Eidos is ready and willing to fill that gap. Though their new stealth-action brawler, *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, takes its inspiration from the comic books instead of the movies, it openly embraces the more mature tone of Christopher Nolan's take on the Caped Crusader.

To begin with, the game uses Unreal Engine 3—always a favorite for gritty subject matter. As the

name suggests, the main locale is Gotham's famous nouthouse, home to some of Batman's most notorious foes. From what we've seen so far, we know that the Joker is the game's primary baddie, and a cadre of lower-grade rascallions join him, including Harley Quinn, Killer Croc, and...Mr. Zsasz. OK, no one really cares about Mr. Zsasz, but no matter how Z-list the supervillains get, at least they have some creepy, gothic areas in which to wreak mayhem.

A mental asylum may seem like an odd setting for a game, but Eidos is employing the talent of writer Paul Dini (*Batman: The Animated Series*) to dig into the sordid history of the Arkham facility. In other words, don't expect Batman to just roam small corridors and pace padded cells. In the beginning of the game, Batman goes deep into Arkham's underground and ends up trapped in a laboratory-like area, and he appears to explore a giant library in a later mission. Still, London-based developer Rocksteady (veterans of PS2/XB first-person shooter *Urban Chaos: Riot Response*) wants to make even central asylum areas varied and interesting even though Batman eventually leaves them to stalk the rest of Arkham Island—hopefully opening up several more areas of interest. We've already seen hints of a seemingly inevitable Batmobile trip of some sort. Now, as for what Batman does in some of these colorful locales....

Bat fu

If anyone's worried that *Arkham Asylum* focuses too heavily on the stealth side of Batman's abilities—▶





JUSTICE LEAGUE

■ Batman's X-ray goggles allow him to moonlight as airport security.

like 2005's mediocre *Batman Begins* game—try not to be too concerned. Stealth elements are certainly part of the equation, but Rocksteady's trying to build a fully developed, complex combat system. At first glance,

brawls feature lots of punch-punch-punch combos, but the game's experience system looks like it'll lead to unlocking and upgrading new signature moves.

In fact, the stealth portions of the game seem to revolve around grappling to high, shadowy locations so Batman can then swoop down to get in an early shot before engaging foes in hand-to-hand combat. Think more along the lines of *Metal Gear Solid 4*—where combat's mostly encouraged—rather than slower, sneaking-focused games like the *Splinter Cell* series.

The investigation sequences provide more interesting gameplay

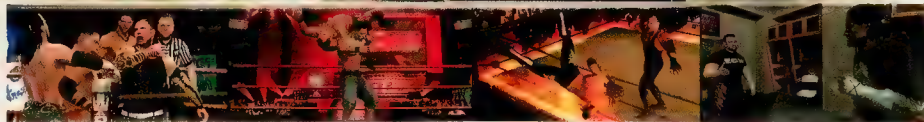
twists. These play out like something from the *Condemned* games; you can use X-ray goggles, heat tracing, alcohol sensors, and a number of other tools to scan rooms for evidence. Vigilant detectives will uncover clues to solve puzzles, paths to follow to find enemies, and glimpses at grapple-accessible vantage points.

Everything about *Arkham Asylum* looks cool at the moment, and certainly the mixture of stealth and action suits the Batman mythos well. But until we actually play the game, we won't know whether or not it does the world's greatest detective any justice. 🦇

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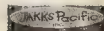
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GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE'S

GOICHI SUDA, aka Suda51, may be the mind behind edgy, violent, and gleefully vulgar creations like *Killer7* (PS2/GC) and *No More Heroes* (Wii), but he's surprisingly down to earth. Nevertheless, he's Japan's biggest rising star, riding the success of *No More Heroes* and the hype of his upcoming collaborations with marquee names like Shinji Mikami (*Resident Evil*) and Hideo Kojima (*Metal Gear Solid*). We recently visited his hip Tokyo office—armed with only an issue of *EGM*'s Japan-themed issue #232—to chat about his inspirations, approach to game development, and, of course, the mysterious "Project S."

EGM: Tell us a bit about the history of Grasshopper—where you came from and your ambitions.

Goichi Suda: This is Grasshopper's 10th year. The last title we made was *Fatal Frame IV* on Wii, which makes 11 titles in 10 years. The core group in the company consists of former staff from [*Fire Pro Wrestling* developer] Human.

EGM: Right. We saw the *Fire Pro Wrestling* boxes in the lobby.

GS: Yes, and that's where I started, too. Anyway, in general, we've been creating original titles, although there have been times that we've created anime-licensed games. Our goal from the beginning has been to carefully create each of our original titles and give them our all, and this hasn't changed since we began.

EGM: Do you find it difficult to be an independent developer with such a distinctive personality?

GS: There have been difficult times in the past, but I've always concentrated on simply creating games—I don't dwell on challenges. They do come up from time to time in the course of development, though. I find that in every case, the best thing to do is to simply focus on working through creative

difficulties to the best of our ability, and this approach has helped us get through them every time.

EGM: Grasshopper's games are very ambitious, conceptually and visually—do you think that's essential to a satisfying game experience?

GS: Graphics and game design give the first impression of a game, so obviously, these things are important. Still, with *No More Heroes*, something I realized after seeing its reception in the American and European markets is that people have learned that there's more to our games than these first impressions—the gameplay and action were praised highly overseas. So I'm happy that people think of Grasshopper Manufacture as a company that makes cool games that are fun to play now. It's a big step for our company.

EGM: The issue of *EGM* you're flipping through focuses heavily on the state of Japan's gaming industry. We're curious to hear your take—how do you think Japan's developers are faring in the current generation compared to their Western counterparts?

GS: Japanese dev teams have always had a buddy-buddy relationship—we see ourselves as allies and take care of one another, but we've never really been concerned about those outside our community. But Grasshopper is a unique company when you think about it, because we've been focused on the overseas market for a long time. In some ways, we were one of the first Japanese developers to really focus on the outside market. What we'd like to do now is bring ourselves to the point that we're no longer viewed as a Japanese developer but rather as a worldwide developer. I'd like to bring us to the same level as Bungie Studios, Valve, Criterion, Harmonix, [and] Epic—that's where we're headed, and I think many other Japanese developers are slowly starting to focus on [the] overseas [markets] as well.

EGM: The impression I've always had of the Japanese market is that it's largely insular, that only Japanese games really sell in Japan. Despite this, are you looking at Western games for inspiration?

GS: Well, in all honesty, I don't look to other games for inspiration regardless of their origins. When it comes to games, I always want to create something new and different. When I start creating games, I find myself inspired by music, movies, television, or porn....

EGM: We've noticed that the games that sell well in Japan tend to be established brands, with *Monster Hunter* being the only recent breakout hit. Do you think Japan is simply a difficult market to bring new ideas to?

GS: This might be a Japanese cultural thing, or maybe even something genetic, but brand is very important to the Japanese audience—not only for games, but also for other things, too. People here seek comfort in familiar brands, because you're promised that it's going to be good since it's familiar. You feel secure in picking it up. That's probably the reason things are that way here. But if you look at it from a different point of view, the first product in any brand has to be an original title, and it introduces a new, core way of thinking. To make a brand successful, you need to keep that core while still advancing it. That's why a brand becomes a guarantee. I definitely think creating a brand is important.... If you look at *Dragon Quest* or *Final Fantasy*, those were also original creations when they were first introduced. [*Dragon Quest* creator Yuji] Horii created several small games before his big success. People have to take their necessary steps in order to create a successful brand and have their breakthrough. This is my philosophy with Grasshopper, and our next game is going to be a huge hit because I've been following this rule closely!

EGM: Your games have thematic simil-

> IDOL CHATTER

PATIENCE, GRASSHOPPER

Goichi Suda is Japan's newest gaming luminary—a feat 10 years in the making. By Jeremy Parish

larities but no direct connections. Do you consider "Grasshopper" to be your brand, rather than the individual titles?

GS: Yes, I guess, in a sense, Grasshopper could be considered our brand rather than any single property. But I'm looking forward to the day where I can create sequels! I've been working with various different publishers—and, of course, when you begin working with a new publisher, they want a new property. They ask for something new.

EGM: Do you approach the creation of licensed titles the same way you do an original Grasshopper creation?

GS: No. Actually, when it comes to licenses, our first priority is to satisfy the fans of that property. Many people before us have built those brands and their audience, so we try not to impose the Grasshopper image and uniqueness on them. Our responsibility with these games is to help grow those series and make our contributions appealing to fans. With games like this, I always start as a fan of the series myself, so I can understand their attraction.

EGM: We've also heard rumors of a *Contact* sequel. Is that in the works?

GS: [Feigned surprise] What? Really?

EGM: Well, we heard this right after the game came out in America, so it's been a while.

GS: Oh, I see. Yeah, I did hear talk about this before as well. The director of *Contact*, Akira Ueda, is an independent contractor now with his company, Audio. They've just published *Demon Detective Neuro*

Nogami, which is based on a *Shonen Jump* manga property.

EGM: So, he's not with Grasshopper anymore?

GS: Right. So, for any *Contact* sequel to happen, we'd need to talk about it with him first.

EGM: So, what exactly is it that's keeping you busy these days?

GS: Currently, I'm creating a game with Shinji Mikami [for Electronic Arts]—he's the producer, and I'm the director on the project.

EGM: Speaking of collaborations, how's "Project S," your collaboration with Kojima, going? Now that *Metal Gear Solid 4*'s done, I'm sure Kojima has plenty of free time to work on it with you.

GS: [Laughs] I just had dinner with Kojima the other night, and it seems like he's still a bit busy! He has his follow-up work to take care of, I guess. But we both agreed that once things slow down a bit, we should do something. Truthfully, *MGS4* was a very special game for me. It was one of the rare games where I felt like I could sense the passion of the creator through the game. It had an amazing atmosphere—I could really see his vision in it. We're close friends, and I talked with him often during the game's creation. So I have a lot of insight into what Kojima went through and what went into the game. And *Metal Gear Solid 4* itself really stirred a lot of emotions in me. I think Kojima sees in me someone who shares that same level of passion for creating videogames. So, we don't know when this will happen—it could be years from now!—but we'll definitely be collaborating together [on a project] someday. 🎮

EGM Extras: As you can tell, Goichi Suda had a lot to say. Head on over to EGM.1UP.com to check out the rest of the interview.



■ Contact



■ No More Heroes



■ Fire Pro Wrestling

When I start creating games, I find myself inspired by movies, music, television, or porn.

Grasshopper Manufacture
CEO Goichi Suda





DUMB DOWNLOADS

We've got your game-related videos right here. Er, right here at GameVideos.com/EGM.

Recent release *Tales of Vesperia* got us thinking of XB360 games that offer paid downloadable content definitely not worthy of your space bucks

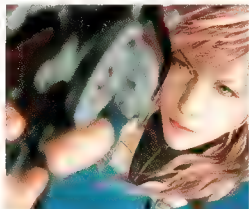
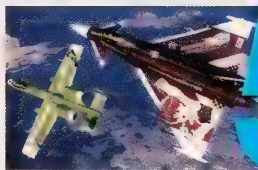
KEWL: Best user-created LittleBigPlanet levels

Clips from our favorite LBP levels. Guaranteed fun for all the Sackboys and Sackgirls out there.



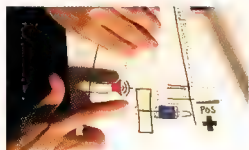
> Ace Combat 6: Fires of Liberation

Customizing characters is always fun, so we were all about pimping our planes in *Ace Combat 6*—until we found out we had to pay up to five clams just to put girly anime stickers on our manly fighter jets. We want to take to the air in fashion, but if our bank account takes a nosedive, we'd rather streak the skies naked.



ZOMG: Tokyo Game Show 2008 highlights

See the best trailers and footage from TGS, including video coverage from each day of the show!



1337: Rock Band 2 DIY instrument calibration

Cracked Rabbit Gaming's Tommy Gun demos his manual calibration technique.



LOLZ: Broken Pixels: Season Alpha Zero reprise

The first real BP season is over, and we've got the eight episodes ready for you. From *Target Terror* to *WWE: Crush Hour*, it's all crap, all the time.



> Beautiful Katamari

We don't mind spending dough to play new levels in a game that's already overflowing with content. Too bad Namco Bandai's stinginess wasn't pretty with *Beautiful Katamari*—additional levels for two bucks a piece (\$10 total). The worst part? These "new" areas were already included on the disc.

> Need for Speed: ProStreet

Part of the fun of buying a game is, y'know, *playing* it. So we have no idea why anyone would spend 10 smackers for the Ultimate Performance Bundle in *Need for Speed: ProStreet*. This pricey DLC option unlocks everything in the game with the push of a button. Perfect for those who've got a need for greed.



> Tales of Vesperia

Level grinding in a role-playing game takes *lots* of time...if you're poor. Foolishly affluent world travelers, on the other hand, can fork out a little under four bucks to bump up their stats 10 levels. If that's not enough, about four more bones will net you 360,000 worth of in-game currency—what a deal!

> The Godfather: The Game

Though we don't condone blowing cash to level up your character in *Tales of Vesperia*, at least we'll admit doing so will save you tons of time. Which is why we can't believe anyone would spend 10 meatballs to unlock everything in *The Godfather: The Game*. Come on, kids—this is an offer you can refuse.



"This is the best video game about being in the movies that I've ever seen!"

Burt Reynolds, Handsome Actor



1 The camera loves me—and now it's going to love you. It's a camera that films you while you're playing. Stand in front of it. I do. A lot. I love it. The camera's included with the game. I love that, too!



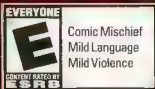
2 I don't have to audition, but you're not me. No one is. Don't worry, though—you don't have to audition, either. You're going to get in the movies by playing a few of these 30 crazy mini-games while the camera rolls!



3 Those clips get dropped into one of these 30 movies, and now you've got a masterpiece you can share online with friends and fans. Remember, an actor acts...but a movie star gets in the movies!

Come see me, Burt Reynolds, on the Internet and I'll personally show you how to be in the movies. Drop by xbox.com/STEM

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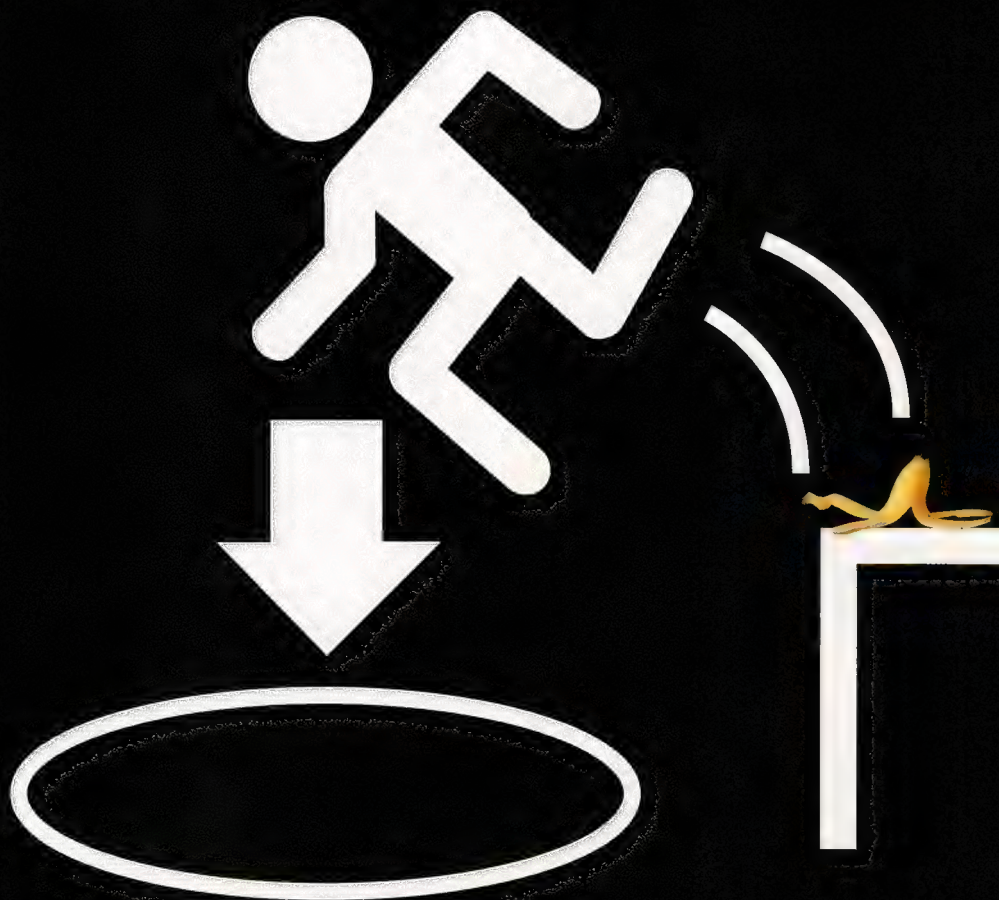


Jump In.

XBOX 360

FINDING THE FUNNY

Dying is easy. Comedy is hard By Julian Murdoch



"HELLO, AND AGAIN, WELCOME to the Aperture Science Computer-Aided Enrichment Center. We hope your brief detention in the relaxation vault has been a pleasant one. Your specimen has been processed, and we are now ready to begin the test proper." With those first few words, the Genetic Lifeform and Disk Operating System (GLADOS) welcomes players into the world of last year's surprise hit *Portal*. What could've been an overlooked puzzler, bolted onto the back end of Valve's *Orange Box* ended up as one of the most original experiences in years, largely because it was funny.

But *Portal* wouldn't have been so funny if not for the work done decades ago by folks like Steve Meretzky (behind early PC games *Leather Goddesses of Phobos* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*) and Al Lowe (the *Leisure Suit Larry* series). And it's a fair bet that Erik Wolpaw, the writer behind GLADOS' hours-long psychotic monologue, wouldn't have had the chance to make us laugh if it weren't for one game: LucasArts' 1990 PC hit *The Secret of Monkey Island*.

Monkey Island was the first in a series of fabled (and funny) pirate-themed adventure games from LucasArts, all based on the "Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion" (or SCUMM). The team behind those early SCUMM titles served as "root system" for game humor, in a sense. And that system's grown most directly from Tim Schafer, one of the *Monkey Island* designers, who's crafted a half dozen classic humor games since—most recently Double Fine's *Psychonauts* in 2005.

"Back then, we made those games that way because that's really all we knew how to do," recalls Schafer, now the head of Double Fine. "Me and Dave Grossman and Steve Purcell, we sat there all day long trying to entertain each other, and that just came through in the games." He insists this isn't the same as telling jokes. "I don't know how stand-up comedians do it. They get up on

stage and are actually announcing, 'I am about to be funny. Now!'"

But by the end of the century, though, rollicking adventure games started to fade. "There was this period which you could call 'the darkening,'" says Schafer. "Everything went dark, because everyone thought that's what people wanted." Even Schafer's own work took a darker tone—his critically acclaimed 1998 film noir skeletated adventure, *Grim Fandango* (PC), while laced with humor, was less lighthearted than earlier SCUMM titles such as *Monkey Island* (PC) or *Day of the Tentacle* (PC).

It's no coincidence that humor drained from games at precisely the same time that graphics, complexity, and budgets rose across the industry. Wolpaw, who connects to the *Monkey Island* mafia through his work on Schafer's *Psychonauts*, thinks the shift toward voice acting is what killed comedy in the dark years. "It was a pretty dismal era of not really hiring very good voice talent," he says, "which meant you had these spoken words that weren't being acted by people who had any sense of comedy. The failure rate was pretty high."

And in the game industry, failure's not an option. "As an employee, I want to work on the funny games," says Wolpaw. "But if I were investing 15 million dollars of my own money, I'm not sure I'd invest in a funny game, either."

So we entered the darkening, bracketed by Schafer's attempts to keep humor alive with *Grim Fandango* in 1998 and *Psychonauts* in 2005. That long, dark, seven-year stretch was relieved only by the casual humor of Nintendo titles and the puerile (but hilarious) *Conker's Bad Fur Day* on the Nintendo 64. Wolpaw has disdain for the era:

"People just went back to space marines when they realized how hard [humor] was."

The renaissance begins

For his part, *Monkey Island* alum Dave Grossman didn't take it lying down. In 2004, Grossman and other LucasArts refugees founded Telltale Games, with a singular focus on getting the fun (and adventure) back into games. "I don't think humor is risky, actually," he says. "My opinion is that humor is less risky than trying to be serious." Telltale's put its development money behind this thesis, relaunching the *Sam & Max* franchise with episodic content in 2006.

"With humor, you have all the latitude in the world," says Grossman. "It really lets you be sloppier with how you portray things. As long as you're being funny, people will give you a lot of rope." Of course, it's easy to say that when the hangman's funny—*IUP* gave Telltale's *Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People* an A- rating based almost entirely on the writing.

Grossman seems alone in his belief that funny can be easy, though. "I think humor's a very risky investment," says Penny Arcade's Jerry Holkins. Holkins and partner Mike Krahulik (better known by their webcomic names, Gabe and Tycho) turned to Hothead to help craft *Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness*, which came with huge expectations—after all, if the game wasn't funny, it was going to disappoint a lot of people. So Hothead brought in *Monkey Island* boss Ron Gilbert as a consultant while releasing the game in smaller, cheaper pieces, making it more palatable for consumers.

While we expect a *Penny Arcade* game to be funny, Valve's *Portal* was

They get up on stage and are actually announcing, 'I am going to be funny. Now!'
—Double Fine founder Tim Schafer



■ *Psychonauts*



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



■ *Conker's Bad Fur Day*

FUNNY GAMES? TRY THESE:

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (Infocom, 1984)

Leather Goddesses of Phobos (Infocom, 1986)

The Secret of Monkey Island (LucasArts, 1990)

Day of the Tentacles (LucasArts, 1993)

Sam & Max Hit the Road (LucasArts, 1999)

Full Throttle (LucasArts, 1995)

Grim Fandango (LucasArts, 1998)

Conker's Bad Fur Day (Rare, 2001)

Psychonauts (Double Fine, 2005)

Sam & Max: Season One (Telltale, 2006-2007)

Portal (Valve, 2007)

Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness (Hothead, 2008)

Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People (Telltale, 2008)

Brütal Legend (Double Fine, 2009)

a surprise pie in the face. Hired to bring the comedic sense he'd honed during his time with Schafer, Wolpaw took a set of clever first-person puzzle mechanics and crafted one of the first hilarious games in a decade.

"I was able to stack the deck," says Wolpaw. "It's a monologue. [GLaDOS] seems like she's reacting to you, but she doesn't do a lot of dynamic real-time reaction. So it's pure monologue," he says. And the monologue format let Wolpaw sneak in humor when players didn't expect it. "It was more deck stacking—a joke tends to work if it's surprising."

In the end, Wolpaw thinks he just got lucky. "I was able to sneak in on the back end of *The Orange Box*," he says. "I'm sure the moment I'm not funny anymore, I'm out on my ass, but I hope I can keep it going for a few years. But it's a totally different thing than making *Brütal Legend*."

A new legend

Tim Schafer's got a lot riding on his next project, the hard rock-themed *Brütal Legend*. The game was well into development when Activision unexpectedly dropped the property, putting the project in publisher limbo. It's definitely Schafer's most ambitious concoction to date, featuring a Jack Black–voiced lead character, cameos by heavy-metal legends, and a headliner soundtrack.

But Schafer seems completely unworried about meeting expectations—he's relying on the inherent comedy of heavy metal to carry the day. "Heavy metal itself is both superserious and also kind of ridiculous. I think people who like heavy



Brütal Legend

metal, actually, are fully aware of that." That kind of self-parody is what created the tension and humor of Spinal Tap and has fueled the unlikely national tour of Dethklok, the animated parody band from Adult Swim's *Metalocalypse*. "There's this weird way in which heavy metal totally encompasses the parody of heavy metal within heavy metal itself," says Schafer. He's counting on that to resonate with the gaming population—for the game to be both

funny and serious at the same time.

It's a big bet because humor is hard. "Humor has a lot of moving parts. When a joke fails, it's often taken as a personal affront," says Holkins. "Humor's a hazardous material."

And this time, Schafer's playing stand-up comic. He's telling you right up front that it's time to laugh: "I can't say when *Brütal Legend*'s going to come out or be done. But it's going to. There will be awesome music. And it'll be funny, too." 🎸

▶ GREAT MOMENTS IN GAME HUMOR

You know, I could stand to kill a few more hobos.

—Gabe in *Penny Arcade Adventures: On the Rain-Slick Precipice of Darkness*

It says so right here in your personnel file: **'Unlikable. Liked by no one. A bitter, unlikable loner whose passing shall not be mourned.' SHALL NOT BE MOURNED.** That's exactly what it says. Very formal. Very official. It also says you were adopted. **So that's funny, too.**

—GLaDOS' final monologue in *Portal*

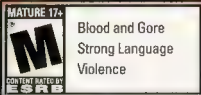
Can you believe a great battle was once fought here, on the very ground that you now so peacefully graze? Many men died. Some did it for freedom and some for justice. Others did it just because they had guns. It's a crazy world, isn't it? Hmm? Don't you think it's crazy? Hey, I'm talking to you, cow. It's because of me that you're not talking French right now. **Shame on you, ungrateful cow.**

—Raz in *Psychonauts*

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FIELD REPORT

WORLD OF WARCRAFTLAND

Blizzard fanatics and cosplayers invade Anaheim
By Demian Linn

ONLY ONE GAME DEVELOPER has the juice to pack a whole convention center with its adoring fans for two days, each paying \$100 a head for the privilege—or \$40 to watch on pay-per-view. “When we finally got our website up,” says Blizzard cofounder Mike Morhaime, “the tickets were gone in about 15 minutes.” But then, for eBay mercenaries, a BlizzCon run can be quite lucrative: The BlizzCon-exclusive *World of Warcraft* polar-bear mount was going for around \$200 last I checked, and attendees got a full goodie bag as well.

But that wasn't top of mind for the babies in Murloc suits or babes in Elf ears and the hulking man-beasts who ogled them. The *WOW: Wrath of the Lich King* expansion announcement dominated last year's show, and while no explosive news came out of this year's BlizzCon, we still got our first hands-on time with *Diablo III* and *StarCraft II*'s Zerg race. Very little new *WOW*

info came out of the show—at least not for hardcore fans who've been following *Wrath*'s development—but the developer Q&A sessions were a hit, as always.

Diablo III

Blizzard unveiled the new Wizard class (joining the previously announced Barbarian and Witch Doctor classes) and showcased a roughly 40-minute-long demo dungeon crawl, which culminated in a tough battle against a Skeleton King. My Wizard started at level 5 and was up to 8 by the time the Skeleton King croaked his second death. Along the way, I picked up more loot than my fanny pack could hold, as well as some new spells—including a handy mirror-image ability that I was able to socket with a Rune, boosting its power. Yep, spells now have sockets, too—not just items.

As for other news, *Diablo III* may not be exclusive to PC. Nothing's official, but in

an interview with gaming site Shacknews, Morhaime said, “I think there's a pretty good argument to be made that that type of game might work very well on consoles.”

StarCraft II

The biggest *StarCraft* news to come out of the show? *SC2* will be a trilogy. The first and main game, to be released “when it's ready,” is tentatively subtitled *Wings of Liberty* and will consist of the Terran campaign (with 26 to 30 missions) and a full multiplayer component, with all three races playable. Two expansions will follow, with the first, the Zerg campaign, *Heart of the Swarm*, coming approximately one to two years later, and the Protoss campaign, *Legacy of the Void*, after that. Of course, the biggest question still remains unanswered: How many Kerrigan cosplayers will attend BlizzCon 2009? ☘



Unsurprisingly, gal riding a turtle won the Jay Mohr-emceed costume contest.

GOING MOBILE

Minimalism rules in *Newtonica*



Newtonica's mechanics and visual presentation are simple and minimal.

KENICHI NISHI HAS AN INTERESTING RÉSUMÉ. While his early days at Square were spent working on legendary games like *Chrono Trigger* and *Super Mario RPG: Legend of the Seven Stars*, he left the company to join Polygon Magic, where he designed the quirky cult classic *Incredible Crisis*. From there, he cofounded Skip, which was responsible for *Chibi-Robo* and the *Bit Generations* series.

With Nishi having worked on so many offbeat games, it should come as no surprise that his newest project is equally hard to classify: *Newtonica* (out now, \$4.99) from Nishi's new studio, Route24, is an iPhone exclusive that's part puzzle game, part music game, part relaxation aid...and nothing like *Rez* or *Lumines* or anything else that might sound similar.

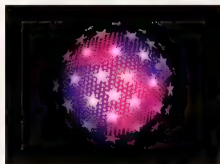
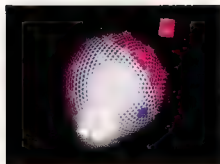
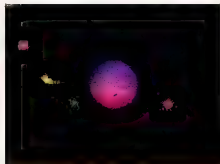
We asked Nishi about the basic concept of *Newtonica*. His response: "Minimal!" It sounds evasive, but it's actually pretty accurate. The game features an undulating sphere that pulses in time to music. Shapes fit across the sphere, alternating red and

blue. Then red and blue satellites appear, orbiting the sphere. The goal: Flick the appropriately colored shape onto the appropriately colored satellite. See? Minimal.

That's a testament to Nishi's appreciation of the iPhone as a gaming device, a platform he describes as "simple, elegant, and [unusual]." "I can develop [a game] with a few people in a short time," he says, "and distribute it all over the world."

One of the folks behind *Newtonica* is famed iconoclastic designer/composer Kenji Eno (*D*, *D2*), who gave Nishi the idea for the game by creating a minimalist wallpaper image for Nishi's iPod Touch. "It inspired me," Nishi says. "I came up with the idea that flicking a star-paneled sphere would be cool. Eno and I talked about it, and he [agreed to make] the theme music for me."

Nishi hopes this is a sign of a future direction for his new studio. Still, he's hesitant to endorse the iPhone as a full-fledged game machine. "I think the iPhone and iPod Touch are [underpowered] for hardcore games right now."



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■ *Underworld* has plenty of action to go along with the new focus on storytelling.

ALTHOUGH WE APPROVE OF *TOMB RAIDER'S* RECENT RETURN to form, Crystal Dynamics has yet to pull off one feat—getting us to care about the plot behind Lara Croft's escapades. We're weary of leaping to any precarious conclusions about how *Tomb Raider: Underworld* intends to pull us back into Croft family lore. But the new intro level certainly intrigues us.

The first hint that the story's different this time around comes in the opening menu, which now includes a "Previously..." option. This choice treats players to a movie that strings together important cut-scenes from all the previous *Tomb Raider* games, ending where *Underworld* begins. And where it begins is quite a shock.

In the game's opening cut-scene, Miss Croft—or someone who looks an awful lot like her—stands in

front of Croft Manor, scowl across her face, as she triggers a massive explosion. Inside the fiery halls of the mansion, the player takes control of...Lara Croft again, apparently. The player's immediately forced into the action, guiding Lara through the flaming wreckage to the manor's exit. Once there, our heroine confronts former allies who no longer seem to trust her—presumably because of the destructive actions of her doppelgänger.

The showdown ends with a cliff-hanger, cutting suddenly to four days prior—the game doesn't really pick up on that dramatic note until near its halfway point. We're anxious to play through that first half and unravel the mystery of what's happening in Lara's home, and we hope this is a sign that the story won't take a back-seat to the action. **A-**

Platform:
Wii/PSP/XB360/PC

Publisher:
Eidos

Developer:
Crystal Dynamics

Release Date:
November 2008

TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

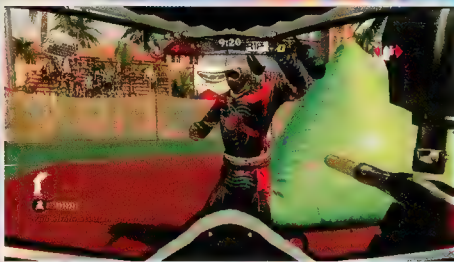
Lara goes back to her roots...and blows them up By Philip Kollar

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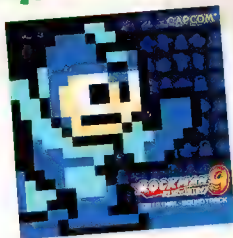
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EGM'S PRESENT DAY PICKS

Anyone can recommend a good game for the holidays (tip: Buy one that doesn't suck), but we here at EGM don't wanna waste your time pointing out the obvious. So instead, we're pointing out 10 mostly game-related random gifts we think are worth wrapping up *By Michael Donahoe*



Mega Man 9 Soundtrack
\$24 • www.play-asia.com

Too bad the blissful bleeps and boops that make up this glorious soundtrack don't emanate from a cassette tape. CDs are so 1990s.



Nintendo Wall Decals

\$75 • www.whatisbilk.com

Decorating your walls is difficult. Unless you like Nintendo, are lazy, and have \$75. If we described you, thanks for proving us wrong, jerk.



Todd Rogers Boxer Shorts

\$15 • www.cafepress.com

Golf champion Todd Rogers is one talented gamer. In order to be the best, though, you've gotta wear the best boxer shorts. Like, say, these.



Elf Ears

\$14 • www.bizzard.com

We won't make fun of you if you buy these silly Elf ears. We promise. But if you do, please send us pictures. So we can laugh. Oops. Guess we lied.

DEVELOPER DESIRES

If you think choosing gifts for your picky friends is impossible, try pleasing your favorite videogame developers. It's not easy, folks. Wait...actually, it is, especially if you just, y'know, find out what they want. And that's exactly what we did—we asked five developers the obligatory gift-giving question: "What do you want for the holidays?" Here's what they said:



Cliff Bleszinski
Lead Designer, *Gears of War 2*
"Amplified-Out-Seaway"

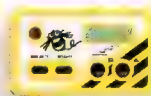


Kodak Pocket Video Camera
\$180 • www.kodak.com

Look sharp with this 1UP Show-approved pocket video camera that will record all your wacky Rock Band antics in high-def...for better or worse.

Tetris Shelves
\$1,315 • www.bravespacedesign.com

Putting things in shelves is oh-so boring. Unless your shelves are made to look like Tetris pieces. Then it's fun. Actually, never mind—it's still boring. Sorry 'bout that.



Shooting Watch
\$19 • www.shopncsx.com

Most watches just tell you time. But this watch? Oh, no. It's more than just a time-telling device. It also measures your button-pressing rate. Fancy.



Ben Sherman Space Invaders Shoes
\$42 • www.amazon.com

Everybody needs to wear shoes (preferably with a shirt) if you wanna enter a public place. Sucks, we know, but at least you can obey the law with style by sporting these.



Beats by Dr. Dre
\$350 • www.beatsbydre.com

Dr. Dre doesn't fool around when it comes to beats. Or being a doctor. So if he approves these headphones, you'd better believe they're dope.

Donkey Kong Jenga
\$25 • www.usaopoly.com

Jenga's a stupid game. So dumb. We'd never play it or recommend it. Especially in a gift guide. Unless they made a Donkey Kong version. Sigh...if only....



Tetsuya Mizuguchi
Director, *Rez*
"I want a real spacesuit for Christmas."



Kenji Eno
Director, *Q*
"A time machine."



Dan Tovar
Co-producer, *Spatterhouse*
"I want a new drum set and a Pro! look setup for my makeshift music studio."



Helen McWilliams
Producer, *Rock Band*
"Tickets for the AC/DC tour, cupcakes with that weird confetti in them and pink frosting, and Jimmy Page."

RUMOR MILL

Your monthly dose of gaming gossip By Quartermann



Resurrected Rumors:

A few months back, the Q let slip plans for a WiiWare version of *Cave Story*, an indie-darling Japanese PC adventure game. Well, score another hit for Q-Mann—this just-announced port will hit by year's end. Expect some rippin' tunes, enhanced 480p widescreen graphics, plus all-new character designs.

THE Q FINDS DIRT EVERYWHERE HE GOES.

But trade shows and fan conventions invariably offer the best assortment of loose-lipped industry bigwigs and scuttlebutt-spewing booth babes. This month, I had eyes, ears, and hands on full-alert status at both Tokyo Game Show and BlizzCon—saucy gaming chitchat surely wasn't in short supply on either side of the Pacific.

Big bigger planet

By now, Media Molecule's *LittleBigPlanet* has likely become a full-on cultural phenomenon, but we've really only just begun to see the full scope of this ambitious do-it-yourself platformer's true potential—more cool stuff's definitely on the way. At Tokyo Game Show, publisher Sony revealed adorable Sackboy versions of legendary *Final Fantasy VII* villain Sephiroth and grizzled *Metal Gear Solid 4* hero Old Snake. Apparently, these cuddly avatars are merely teasers for much larger downloadable MGS and *Final Fantasy* content packs in the works. Plus, look for the rumors of official Disney *LBP* content to come true in 2009—classic '20s Mickey Mouse vehicle *Steamboat Willie* could be the first animated feature to get the *LittleBig* treatment.

The *LBP* universe will also continue to evolve next year with the release of the PSP version: Q-Mann hears it's fantastically ambitious and will further flesh out the PS3 *LBP* experience. And what's next for Media Molecule? Suitsors are lining up at their door, and we hear they'd like to bring their revolutionary concepts to a new genre—possibly online role-playing games.

The horror, the horror

With the 360 masses happily fragging the holidays away with *Gears of War 2*, what's next on the horizon from series honcho Cliff Bleszinski?

Word from Epic HQ in North Carolina: He's hard at work on an all-new survival-horror game that's set to meld grisly, over-the-top carnage with a more nuanced, psychological brand of scares. It's unclear whether or not this new game will be an Xbox 360 exclusive published by Microsoft—Epic might take this one multiplatform.

It's bad news, however, for another big-name-developer horror project: Silicon Knights' long-in-development (yet unannounced) Sega title's now looking for a new publisher.

The running man

Mark of Kri masterminds BottleRocket have their hands full trying to get Namco Bandai's *Splatterhouse* reboot in presentable shape (it's currently looking awfully...brown), but that's not stopping them from crafting a game based on a certain fleet-footed DC superhero. Forging a compelling *Flash* game won't be an easy task—we suggest adding Wii Balance Board support or a Mark Hamill Trickster voiceover cameo. 🦇

Q-TIPS

- After unleashing travesties such as *Alvin and the Chipmunks*, *Jumper*, and *Space Chimps* on the world, publisher Brash Entertainment seems to be history.
- Capcom appears to be digging back into the archives for a PSN/XBLA revival for co-op floating-dude shooter *Forgotten Worlds*. Zenny for everyone!
- Square Enix has quietly canceled *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles—The Crystal Bearers* for Wii. Instead, look for *FF:CC—Echoes of Time* for DS/Wii.

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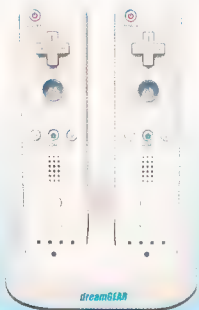
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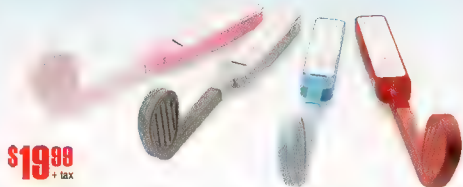
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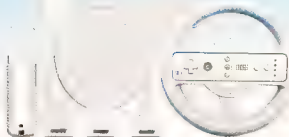
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The problem with LittleBigPlanet

By John Davison

Few games this year generate as much excitement as *LittleBigPlanet*. I've spent some time with the game, and it's clear that it's beautifully constructed and has possibly the most deeply satisfying and consistent aesthetic of just about any release this year. Everything, from the delightful protagonist Sackboy himself to the deliciously pompous Stephen Fry voiceover, displays a level of consistent creativity, wit, and—dare I say it—whimsy rarely seen in gaming.

So, what's the problem? The PlayStation 3 clearly needs its genre-defying, demographic-busting blockbuster. Something that steps outside the endless procession of shooters and racers. Something that wraps its arms around the broader audience and gives it a big, friendly hug and says, "Check me out! I'm only on PS3, and I'm everything you've wished for!"

Hardcore gamers and PlayStation fanboys alike think *LBP* is exactly the game that will do this. How could it *not* be? Look at it! It's amazing. Put it in front of someone who's *not* a gamer, though, and the response is a little different. It's not quite the unbridled enthusiasm that we all feel. How do I know? I asked.

"What? I don't get it."

"So...I have to make it myself? Why do I have to do that?"

"Can I just play the stuff other people make? It looks like a lot of work."

"It's cute but very weird."

It would appear that the *LBP* community will be divided between givers and takers. Despite the wonderfully produced tutorials and the constant reminders about expression, creativity, and individuality, it's perhaps a little bit too complicated for "normal" folk.

The onus is on us to inspire. It's on our creativity and our willingness to share. This could be one of the most important game releases of the year—and it certainly is for PS3. If it does well, it'll change the future of games.



John Davison, former editorial director of the 1UP Network, is the cofounder of family gaming website *What They Play* (www.whattheyplay.com) and a regular guest on the 1UP Yours podcast.

COMING SOON

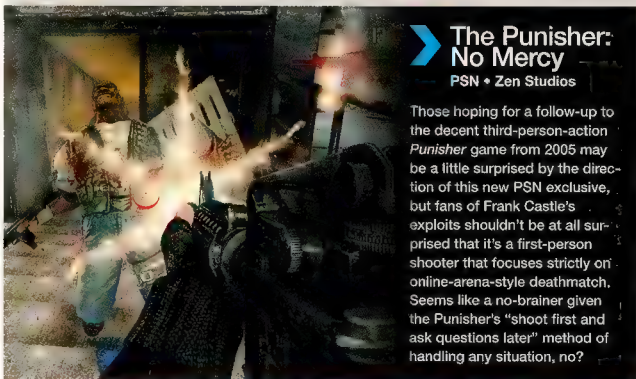
Games to soothe your December doldrums



X-Blades

PS3/XB360/PC • SouthPeak

With few nauseatingly fast action games on the immediate horizon, the 3D action-slash-em-up *X-Blades* picks a good time to strike. Its lead character, Ayumi, is a typical sassy, scantily clad, smart-talking bad girl who proves once and for all that a bikini-thong combination is suitable armor for taking on hordes of...just about anything. This may sound a little familiar to *Devil May Cry* fans (minus the bikini), but why mess with a good thing?



The Punisher: No Mercy

PSN • Zen Studios

Those hoping for a follow-up to the decent third-person-action *Punisher* game from 2005 may be a little surprised by the direction of this new PSN exclusive, but fans of Frank Castle's exploits shouldn't be at all surprised that it's a first-person shooter that focuses strictly on online-arena-style deathmatch. Seems like a no-brainer given the *Punisher*'s "shoot first and ask questions later" method of handling any situation, no?

MORE DECEMBER RELEASES

Persona 4
PS2 • Atlus

NCAA Basketball 09
PS3/XB360 • EA Sports

Deadly Creatures
Wii • THQ

Damnation
PS3/XB360/PC
• GoddardStudios

Bygar: The Battle of Argus
Wii • Teamco

Nancy Drew: The White Wolf of Icticle Creek
Wii • Sega

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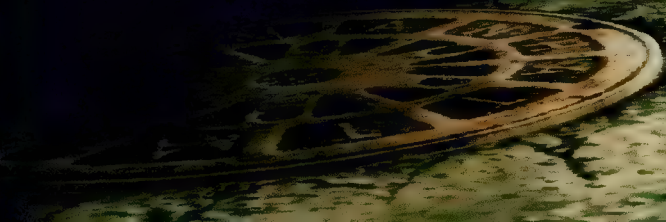
WATCHMEN

The end is nigh. Or is it? The revered Watchmen graphic novel gets a video-game prequel set in 1972, over a decade before the events portrayed in Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' classic comic.

Watchmen: The End Is Nigh

brings pivotal characters Rorschach and Nite Owl to life, and EGM went all the way to Copenhagen, Denmark, to see the game in action, discover how it raises the bar for license-based games, and, most importantly, learn why it matters

By James Mielke







■ Nite Owl's ship, *Archimedes*, is modeled after the movie incarnation.



FOR OVER TWO DECADES, *Watchmen* has cast a long shadow over the comics landscape with its reinvention of the modern comic-book hero, portraying its protagonists as a beyond-their-prime collection of would-be vigilantes in the throes of midlife crises instead of the usual caped or clawed male-fulfillment fantasies. Now, over 22 years since the 12-issue limited series' inception, *Watchmen*—often considered as the least filmable comic—is nearly ready to hit the big screen, the latest cinematic effort of 300 director Zack Snyder. Even more surprising, though, is the fact that a brand-new addition in the *Watchmen* canon's under development in videogame form. *Watchmen: The End Is Nigh* is the product of a bold, three-stage experiment by Warner Bros. Entertainment. First, it's a prequel to the original *Watchmen*. Second, it's a downloadable game. And third, it's episodic. While these topics are discussion-worthy alone, the mere existence of a *Watchmen* game begs this question: How do you make a game out of a graphic novel that features minimal action? To get the answer, we went to Copenhagen, Denmark, to visit *The End Is Nigh* developer Deadline Games for an up-close look. We also spoke to *Watchmen*

visionary Zack Snyder to ascertain his role in the game's development, as well as *Watchmen* artist Dave Gibbons to learn about his contribution to the game. Then we tracked down veteran comic-book author Len Wein to discuss his approach to writing the *Watchmen* prequel.

The first episode of *The End Is Nigh* will arrive as a substantial download on PlayStation Network, Xbox Live Arcade, and Steam for PC in March 2009, coinciding with the release of the film, but the real challenge for Warner Bros. isn't the game's release—it's convincing both the curious onlookers and hardcore *Watchmen* fans alike (a noisy minority of which think that turning the book into a movie is blasphemous enough) that an unexpected prequel—of writer Alan Moore and artist Gibbons' masterwork—is not only a risk worth taking but playing as well. After seeing a handful of the first downloadable episode's six chapters running on an Xbox 360, we've come away impressed with both Deadline's ambitious vision and their execution of the concept.

The End Is Nigh Producer Søren Lund understands the project's significance. "We know that it's a milestone in comic history. It's something that's remained unaltered

since its inception," he says. "The universe hasn't changed or anything, so obviously, there's a lot of obligation that goes with that. And because of that, we've been very faithful to the comic in that we haven't overstepped anything that the comic didn't state. Our universe and our locations and our story—they're all based on facts from the comic."

Watchmen director Snyder, a gamer himself, is going out of his way to make sure that the game's up to snuff. He's been burned before—like most movie-based titles, the PSP game for his most recent film, 300, was a poor adaptation. Serving as an adviser, he views *The End Is Nigh* as a truly complementary experience to the book and movie. "Not to be mean, but *Pirates of the Caribbean*—I mean, let's just be real about it for a second. It was really a marketing thing," he says. "But I don't see *The End Is Nigh* as a marketing tool. I really don't. I want to be able to say, 'This is a movie. This is a videogame. And this is a comic book. All as good as they can be. None of them compromised for the other.'"

Prelude to the '80s

Set in 1927 New York City, five years before the establishment of the graphic novel's

DAVE GIBBONS

Watchmen's artist tells us how the famed graphic novel changed his life and gives some thoughts on the upcoming movie and game

WATCHMEN ARTIST DAVE GIBBONS

has received endless, deserved praise for the intricate, detailed layouts that define the graphic novel. We spoke with the legendary comic artist (and writer) about his views on the reinvention of the comic in movie and videogame form.

EGM: It's now been over two decades since the original *Watchmen* graphic novel and comic series. With that perspective, how do you feel about being a cocreator of such a groundbreaking, critically acclaimed work?

Dave Gibbons: Well, I was a fan of comics before I was a creator of comics, and that fan's still alive inside me. And to be associated with one of the most popular and critically acclaimed comics of all time is obviously a huge thrill. I'm really pleased, also, that it's brought people into reading comics who might not otherwise have done so, and that it's been a presence in bookshops over all those years. In the "real world"—you know, beyond the comics world.

EGM: As an artist, do you feel that *Watchmen* ever overshadowed your other work, both before and after, or did it open doors for you that might not have otherwise appeared?

DG: Well, I've had quite a long career, and I've done all kinds of things—some of which have been very popular, and some of which less so. And I happened to have done *Watchmen*, which has been incredibly, unbelievably popular. So, I suppose if you look at it one way, it does overshadow the other work I've done. Although, you know, it's better to be remembered for that than for nothing. Yeah, it's definitely given me opportunities and given me a degree of celebrity that's led on to other interesting things. I'm just happy doing comics. That's all I ever wanted to do, and that's what I have been doing, and that's what I hope to continue doing for a long time to come.

EGM: What sort of guidance did you offer as an adviser for the film, and what elements did you ensure remained true to the original graphic novel? Let's put it this way: What were you willing to "let go of" in terms of the translation of the visual

side of the book to the movie?

DG: I gave some input on an early draft of the script, which was gladly received by director Zack Snyder and the other people involved in the film. It's obvious that in adapting something from one medium to another, compromises are going to have to be made: Things are going to have to be omitted, things are going to have to be added, and things are going to have to be amalgamated. And that's been done, I think, in a very effective and intelligent way.

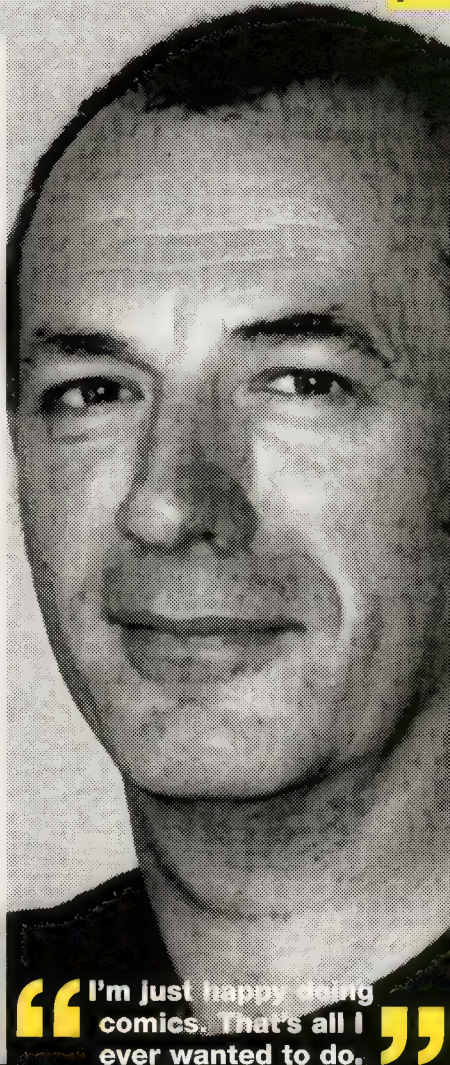
I'm quite happy with the redesigns of the costumes; I actually think that's something that had to be done. I think that the reference point for the costumes is, actually, superhero movies. Just as *Watchmen* the graphic novel was a commentary on comic books, *Watchmen* the movie is a commentary on superhero movies. So I think that the costumes have to be seen and designed in that light. There's a lot of outcry [from fans] because Ozymandias has got nipples on his costume. Well, you know, think about it for a bit. That's an obvious reference to the later *Batman* movie with George Clooney with a nipples Batsuit. So, I think the points of reference are congruent with the points of reference in the comic book.

EGM: What do you think of the videogame medium? It must be cool to see your character designs take life as 3D models, and it must be even cooler to be able to take control of Rorschach and Nite Owl.

DG: I think the videogame medium is a great medium, and the people I've met in the videogame industry have the same kind of enthusiasm and the same kind of "fannish" attitude that many of the people in comic books do. I think people have graduated to videogames as a living in the way that, say, my generation gravitated toward comic books. My son, who's now in his late 20s, has always been a great fan of videogames, and I know he'll want to be one of the first people to play the *Watchmen* game.

EGM: Lastly, if *V for Vendetta* and *Watchmen* got in a fight, who would win, and why?

DG: The Hulk, because he would.



“I'm just happy doing comics. That's all I ever wanted to do.”



■ *Watchmen's* co-op multiplayer extends to both the battlefield and puzzle-solving.



Keene Act, which outlaid adventuring by costumed heroes and vigilantes), *The End Is Nigh* explores the peak years of Rorschach and Nite Owl's partnership as a crime-fighting duo, fleshing out the pre-*Watchmen* mythology briefly touched upon in Moore's original plot. Playable as a solo effort with an AI partner or cooperatively with a friend in splitscreen format (you can't play co-op online), the game sees you work your way through six distinct chapters built around events and situations referenced in the graphic novel. For example, eagle-eyed

Watchmen devotees should recognize the names Jimmy the Gimmick and Underboss, two characters mentioned in the comic but now brought to life and given proper context. Gamers will also appreciate the work put into the re-creation of New York City, with its crisply detailed, neon-lit, rain-soaked environments. This game looks so good in high-def on a huge 50-inch television that you'll easily forget it's a downloadable title.

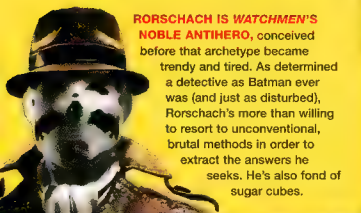
Still, *The End Is Nigh* is, at its heart, a brawler, and the first level—a prison—is the perfect stage for bringing the player up to speed with the game's mechanics. While the fundamental controls are pretty basic (fast attack, heavy attack, throw, and, depending on the character, block or evade), the potential combos are layered and deep, and the finishing moves are brutal—provided you enter the appropriate quick-time commands when prompted. Additionally, the fighting mechanics are designed so that button mashing will suffice for novice gamers, but more skillful play offers greater rewards, like Rorschach's counterattacks. It's also worth mentioning for those unfamiliar with *Watchmen* that few superpowers are on display here. Both Rorschach and Nite Owl are heroes of the

human variety; neither are mutants, and they're certainly not from another planet. They're overachieving, "regular" humans. Rorschach suffered through a troubled youth, came from a broken home, and gets his edge from the adrenaline rush that comes with being a borderline psychopath, while Nite Owl grew up idolizing the hero. He eventually succeeded, utilizing Batman-style gadgets to gain the upper hand.

The mean streets

Playing through *The End Is Nigh* as either character produces significantly different results: Rorschach's a faster but slightly weaker character—preferring a feral, stick-and-move, streetwise style of fighting—who's got no aversion to using items he finds (2-by-4s, pipes, crowbars, baseball bats, knives, etc.) as weapons, all of which have different attributes. Baseball bats have more range and durability than a knife, and each has its own finishing move. Nite Owl, on the other hand, can disarm his opponents but prefers to discard the weapons (which Rorschach can pick up and use). He's a more refined fighter, using his martial arts expertise to combat opponents, but he'll use high-tech wizardry—like a Screacher Grenade—to

WHO'S WHO



RORSCHACH IS WATCHMEN'S NOBLE ANTIHERO, conceived before that archetype became trendy and tired. As determined a detective as Batman ever was (and just as disturbed), Rorschach's more than willing to resort to unconventional, brutal methods in order to extract the answers he seeks. He's also fond of sugar cubes.

EMOTION IN MOTION

The other *Watchmen* movie



IN CASE YOU CAN'T GET ENOUGH of the *Watchmen* revival, consider the motion comic, available on iTunes—it's literally the entire, original graphic novel, but given the "digital comic" treatment similar to *Metal Gear Solid: Digital Graphic Novel* on the PSP. "I think it's awesome," says *Watchmen* director Zack Snyder. "I think it was a really cool idea, and [artist] Dave [Gibbons] has been so involved with it. I mean, you should hear his notes. They're awesome. You know, he does everything in audio, so you sync 'em up and you let it go. So [when we're editing it], you can watch the motion comic, and you can hear him go, 'Um, that newspaper that blows by, I feel like it's a little too wrinkly.' It's a kind of a treat for fans. I think it's, first of all, ■ treat for fans who never read it. Because it's easy, it just washes over you in ■ mesmerizing way. And if you have read it, it's a really cool

refresher because you'll actually notice things that you might not have noticed before."

Jake Hughes, director/producer of the motion comic, elaborates on the project: "We're doing all 12 chapters, slated to release every two weeks," he says. "The thing with *Watchmen* is it's a perfectly thought-out storyboard—pacing happens by way of layout and panel real estate. It's just phenomenal. The scene where Rorschach investigates the Comedian's apartment, you can feel the rhythm of the entire sequence as your eyes pass over it. For curiosity's sake, I wondered if a motion-comic treatment could be done with the existing art. So I took *Absolute Watchmen*, scanned it in, and that first page was a doozy. I thought it worked great. I pitched the idea of a motion comic to director Zack Snyder and producer Lloyd Levin, and they approved it right there on the spot."



■ Rorschach duels a Topknot gang member, later seen in the graphic novel.

ET TU, SABERTOOTH?

WATCHMEN DIRECTOR ZACK SNYDER, pointing to a saber-toothed skull mounted in his Burbank, CA, office, told us to look out for a similar cranium hidden in the wreckage of New York City following the catastrophic "alien attack" conceived by Ozymandias in the film. We're guessing it'd be pretty hard to spot a tiny prehistoric animal skull amid all of the chaos, but maybe a frame-by-frame crawl through the eventual Blu-ray edition will even the odds.





■ Play with enough skill, and you'll bust out finishing moves in no time.

neutralize his foes. Tutorial "posters" are scattered throughout the first level, and upon inspection, they enable the player to learn more moves or teach them how to solve puzzles cooperatively with Nite Owl.

Both characters have a meter under their respective health bars (both the menus and the heads-up display are designed in the bold, minimal style of the graphic novel), but they represent different abilities. Rorschach's secondary bar indicates his Rage Meter, which fills as he successfully lands an attack or when an enemy strikes him. Triggering his Rage gives Rorschach heightened physical abilities, meaning faster, more powerful moves like the Bull Rush—it both damages and knocks over enemies—which proves handy when surrounded by thugs. Nite Owl's secondary gauge works differently; it indicates the charge level of his armor's electrified attacks, which he can utilize in the form of lightning bolts or as electrified armor. This both protects him and punishes any enemy foolish enough to touch him while active, and unlike Rorschach's, Nite Owl's gauge refills automatically over time.

The game's cooperative elements aren't just for show—you'll need both characters to progress through some areas, like at a

dead end in the first prison stage where Nite Owl must use his electric-powered suit to lift a prison gate so that Rorschach can slip under and flip the switch to open it from the other side. Both characters have different paths through the game at times, too. Nite Owl's able to access areas that Rorschach can't, using his grappling hook (the graphic novel mentions that Nite Owl eventually gives it to Rorschach) to scale heights that lead him down unique areas. According to Lund, the game's QA team is basically split down the middle in terms of which of the two characters they favor playing, and this could help ensure *The End Is Nigh's* replayability.

At the same time, some fans may be wondering why these two are the focus of the game and question why others, like the Comedian, won't take the spotlight. We asked Lund if the team was tempted to go beyond making Rorschach and Nite Owl the leads. "Oh, yeah—we wanted to make all of them," he says. "Because all of them, if you look at them from a game-mechanics point of view, have something special that would be really cool to explore in the game world. But we knew it was going to be a downloadable title. We knew that we had about a year until it had to be released, so

we had some limits to the actual scope to this. So we decided quite early on to just focus on those two characters."

But *Deadline's* done more than just re-create characters and locations from the graphic novel for these previously unseen events; they're creating entirely new areas that reflect the visual diversity of the source material. The sewer stage, for example, could be an exercise in redundancy, so the team made sure that no two areas in the sewers looked alike. There are dry areas, wet areas, areas with different lighting, big >

WHO'S WHO

THE NICE GUY IN WATCHMEN'S ODD COUPLE, Nite Owl's actually the second man to wear the getup. This overtime fan of the original Nite Owl eventually succeeded his mentor, inheriting a gadget belt and an owl-themed aircraft, the *Archimedes*. But don't take him for some Bruce Wayne-style playboy—this dude's painfully shy around the ladies.





LEN WEIN

Alan Moore's mentor takes a stab at authoring the *Watchmen* prequel—and lives to tell the tale



Photograph by Lee Leary

LEN WEIN, THE WRITER FOR THE

WATCHMEN VIDEOGAME, isn't some lightweight flunky that Warner Bros. pulled in to give words to the game's events; he's Alan Moore's original mentor, editing Moore's work while the pair both worked at DC Comics back in the day. He also created Swamp Thing and that popular little mutant you know as Wolverine. We reached out to Wein to see his approach to the videogame prequel of the *Watchmen* graphic novel.

EGM: You've been writing and editing comics for almost four decades now, and you've either created or collaborated on some of the most successful comics and comic characters of all time, including Wolverine, Swamp Thing, and the X-Men. As editor of the original *Watchmen* comic-book series, you're obviously quite close to the source material. Even still, did you find it daunting to continue Moore's critically acclaimed work by writing a prequel to *Watchmen* for the videogame?

Len Wein: When you're dealing with anything that's become this iconic, there's always a moment of "Boy, I'd better get this right." But I figured Alan [Moore] has followed my work on a number of different titles over the years, so turn-about is fair play. It was actually quite liberating.

EGM: Are you concentrating on any particular aspects of Rorschach and Nite Owl? Are you painting Rorschach as a vigilante on the

edge, or are you casting him as a slightly different character than the one we see in the graphic novel?

LW: In the game, which is set about a decade before the events of the *Watchmen* graphic novel, I think Rorschach is a character about a block-and-a-half [away] from the edge. He's not quite the relentless vigilante he is in the graphic novel, but he's really close.

Nite Owl has a lot more confidence in the game, since this is before he's had what makes him feel special taken from him by the Keene Act. They'll still be recognizably the characters from the book—only even more so, if that's possible.

EGM: Since the game's levels are episodic in nature, what approach are you taking to keep the game's pacing fresh? Are you centering each chapter on a key event and filling in the space around that event with clues pointing to the overarching storyline?

LW: Essentially, we thought of each game level as a chapter in the greater story we were telling. The levels worked well in giving us natural break points in the story, allowing us to build the mystery and the suspense.

EGM: When does the game take place, and how did you decide on which time period you'd explore with the game? The graphic novel takes place in the '80s, but the back-

story with the Comedian, for example, takes place during the Vietnam War. Since your own comic career began in the '60s, you must have a very insightful understanding of the political and social climate of the time, which could help enrich your plot for the game.

LW: Heaven help me, yes. I did indeed live through those tumultuous days, so there are a number of points along the way when I had a little flash of déjà vu.

EGM: As you know, *Watchmen* fans, and Moore fans in general, are a pretty rigid bunch, and some of them even believe the book should've never been made into a movie—I'm sure Shakespeare probably has a few of those—and certainly even more who believe that the book should've never been made into a videogame. What would you say to hardcore fans like that to help change their minds about it?

LW: I think I'd ask them to keep an open mind until they actually see what we've all done. I'm a fan myself, and there's always an inclination to despise change just for the sake of despising it. We love and respect the original graphic novel every bit as much as you do—maybe more, if that's possible. Nothing we've done has been done lightly and without much serious consideration. Loosen up, and you're in for a heck of a ride.



■ The game begins in a prison level that Rorschach and Nite Owl must infiltrate.



rooms, small rooms, and more to make sure that it's not only a fun area to look at while playing but that the player wouldn't get lost. The same goes for the game's Brooklyn dockyard level as well as the others, where you encounter and fight enemies first established in the graphic novel, like the Topknobs gang. Incidentally, since the fuzz are also on the lookout for the costumed vigilantes half of the time, they're tough opponents, requiring more skill and effort to defeat than run-of-the-mill foes.

And while the combat's fun, without context it could reduce *The End Is Nigh* to a basic *Streets of Rage* brawler with Rorschach and Nite Owl skins. So it's important that the six chapters are prefaced, interlaced, and bookended with new "motion comic" cut-scenes—which stylistically mirror the graphic novel-based motion comics on iTunes and are portrayed as entries into Rorschach's journal in the game—that provide setup for Rorschach's and Nite Owl's missions. *Watchmen* fans should also appreciate the game's Mature rating, allowing for the adult language used liberally throughout the cut-scenes and the bloody violence that punctuates each stage. With Rorschach doing most of the narration (as voiced by *Watchmen* film star Jackie Earle Haley, alongside Nite Owl's Patrick Wilson), you can imagine how frank

the assessment of each scenario will be, keeping the game's narrative directly in line with the tone of the graphic novel. Speaking of which, *Watchmen* illustrator Dave Gibbons reveals to us what influence he has over the cut-scenes and the game's general look: "I keep an eye on it, and if I see anything I really don't like, I let people know," he says. He also reminds us that this isn't the first time that *Watchmen*'s been made into a game: "A long, long time ago, before the days of sophisticated computer games, role-playing games—you know, with dice and paper—were very popular and...Alan [Moore] did collaborate to a great extent, as did I, with a company called Mayfair on three *Watchmen* game modules, which actually seem to cover similar ground, although in a different way, to that which is being covered by the [upcoming] videogame."

In good hands

Despite their location in the bitter cold of Scandinavia, *Deadline* consists of a more talented and international crew than you might imagine. While the team has about 60 members, they only needed four to create the game's lush, detailed environments. One member of the team is Junichi Yamada, a level designer for *The End Is Nigh* who originally hails

from Sega as a level designer on Sega's *Super Monkey Ball* games, as well as on *Shenmue* and the Sega/Nintendo collaboration *F-Zero GX* for GameCube. Other members are from places as far away as South America and the United States. Regardless of where they come from, though, the one thing they all share is a deep appreciation for *Watchmen*. The game's details are so on point that Rorschach's mask constantly morphs into an ever-evolving pattern of Rorschach-test inkblots.

What we've seen of *The End Is Nigh* has us excited. While much of the remaining work lies in tweaking and polishing the game's cut-scenes, the fluidity of the character animations, the carefully considered combat, and the beauty of the expansive environments has us pinning for more. We'll all be able to get our hands on the first salvo in the new *Watchmen* canon in just a few months' time, and based on the participation of the core creative group involved—and their eager enthusiasm to make sure the project is handled right—it can't come fast enough. 🦇

EGM Extras: Want more? Read the full-length interviews with Zack Snyder, Dave Gibbons, and Len Wein on EGM.1UP.com, where we'll have an entire month's worth of *Watchmen* content.

ZACK SNYDER

The director of the *Watchmen* movie weighs in on fan reactions and the process of making a *Watchmen* game

ZACK SNYDER'S HIGHLY REGARDED WORK on *Dawn of the Dead* and Frank Miller's *300* has earned the film director a legion of fans, which bodes well for the effort he's been putting into the movie adaptation of *Watchmen*. We flew down to his Burbank, CA, studio for a chat about the challenge of turning the graphic novel into a movie and a game.

EGM: So, the *Watchmen* graphic novel. The least filmable comic ever, according to some, is finally a film. Was it intimidating knowing what you were up against? That mighty geek culture? Are you just a big ol' geek?

Zack Snyder: *Watchmen*, as a product overall, is incredibly daunting and scary. You're thinking about, "Oh, we're going to make this into a movie, right?" But for all of that initial fear, once you get over that fear...it becomes about what is probably a piece of cinema, or whatever you want to call it—this thing that we've created. It's more directly aimed at geek culture than probably any mainstream movie ever in history, just because it's so specific. I don't think about it in those terms, but when you step back, you can't help but see the geek in yourself and just start to have a boner.

EGM: If you're a fan of *Watchmen* and you think it's some Holy Grail that should never be touched again, you don't have to go see the movie. But for people who are curious to see how it gets transformed, it's like the best thing ever.

ZS: Also, you've got to imagine, for me, it's not like the movie's meant to replace the book, by any means. There's still a lot in the book that isn't covered in the movie. If you see the movie and then decide to go buy the book, you have it right. When you start to read it, you'll go, "Oh, my god—it's even richer [than I imagined].... I thought this giant, rich world in the movie was thick. That's nothing. That's like a wafer." But, I guess for me, as a fan of the comic book, in the last two months, another million copies of the book have shipped. My work's done as far as that's concerned. Even if no one saw the movie, the amount of people who are now becoming exposed to the book, that's what I would've hoped for.

EGM: Since the *Watchmen* game is actually a prequel, it focuses on things briefly discussed in the graphic novel: the good old days with Rorschach and Nite Owl. "Remember when we took down Underboss?" and all that. Now, people who want to experience those days will actually get the chance.

ZS: That's the thing. The paradox is that for a lot of comic-book fans, for whatever reason, they sort of view videogames as like, "Oh, it's like a toy of the movie." They see it that way, like we're creating a toy that they feel belittles the intellectual property of the movie, and I personally don't see it that way. I think it's up to the game maker to make the game test your brain and your brawn at the same time. That's the game. Some hardcore fans have criticized me for wanting to make a videogame of the movie. I still think that for all the protection we give to the smarts of it, when you get the controller in your hand and you're running Rorschach down an alley, it's just cool. You geek out.

EGM: When we first saw the game at E3, we wondered how this was going to fit into the context of things. But once we realized that it's set in 1972, five years before the Keene Act—which forbids costumed adventuring—when Nite Owl and Rorschach are a team, and before Rorschach really goes off the deep end, it really puts it into context. Now, all of a sudden, it's very cool.

ZS: I guess the thing for me is that I need, exactly as you say, I want the game and the fighting and all that to be cool, and the environments to be bullet-proof. Hopefully, that's the first thing. But then, beyond that, I just wanted to make sure that the game fit in context to the rest of the tone of everything else we were creating, and that it made sense. I felt the same way when we were first looking at it, and I was like, "Yeah, that's cool, a brawler's cool, and I guess that can be fun, but is that the game?" No, that can't be the game. That's just...too light. So that's when we really started to explore these storylines and the "why." Like in the "why" of what Rorschach and Nite Owl were trying to accomplish, and also how they were manipulated.



“When you step back, you can't help but see the geek in yourself and just start to have a boner.”

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REVIEWS

Bloody gears, musical bears, vertigo fears, and boys of sack

The holiday season is an interesting, crazy time for videogames, what with some pretty big expos (like Tokyo Game Show and BlizzCon) and a substantial percentage of the year's game releases compressed into a maddening five-week time period. Who has time for all these games, anyway? How do you decide what makes the cut in the end-of-year game pile? Let us know at [EGM@1UP.com!](mailto:EGM@1UP.com)

—Ryan Scott
Executive Editor, Reviews

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78 GEARS OF WAR 2





THIS MONTH'S REVIEW CREW

Check out all editor blogs and bios at ReviewCrew.1UP.com



James "Milkman" Mielke
Editor of All the Starways
 Denmark, Tokyo, and *Fable II* have all conspired to keep Milky awake for longer periods of time than any wussy MMORPG player.
Now Playing: *LittleBigPlanet*



Jennifer Tsao
Senior Editor
 Hot tip for loving *Wii Music*: Play it with babies. Or with adults who like to act like babies.
Now Playing: *Fable II*, *Topple* (iPhone), *Wii Music*



Greg Ford
Senior Editor
 Wait, holiday season again? Ford's still trying to catch up on last year's pile of shame.
Now Playing: *Gears of War 2*, *Mega Man 9*, *Resistance 2*



Giancarlo Varanini
Senior Editor
 Giancarlo really, really hopes Lionhead makes some crazy cowboy game using the *Fable II* engine. Pretty please!
Now Playing: *Fable II*



Ryan Scott
Senior Editor
 Last seen: Praying for the end of the November release rush.
Now Playing: *World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King* (PC), *Mother 3* (GBA)



Nick Suttner
Senior Editor
 The holiday rush of games has left Nick a withered shell of a man, unable to distinguish between quality and...Babyz.
Now Playing: *Everything*



Justin Hayward
Senior Editor
 As a new Review Crew member, Justin wonders why the place smells like stale corn chips and whiskey. He'll soon learn.
Now Playing: *Halo* (the original)



Michael Donahoe
Senior Editor
 Man, Michael is manly this month. Between shooting guns and grappling dudes, he has it covered. Next up: dog kissing.
Now Playing: *Castle Crashers*

Also on deck...

Shann Bettenhausen
Senior Editor

Robert Ashley, Tyler Barber, John Davison, Eric Neigher, Todd Zuniga
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Ray Barnholt, David Ellis, Anthony Gallegos, Phillip Kollar, Matt Leone, Richard Li, Demian Lim, Mike Nelson, Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen, Andrew Pfister, Yina Sanchez
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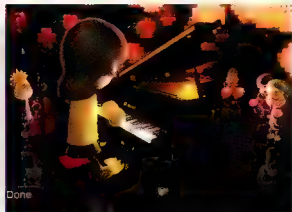


ABOUT OUR REVIEWS
 We believe that games are more than the sum of their parts, so we tackle them subjectively, as experiences.

You can always find our reviews (or lead reviews, in the case of three-man reviews) on 1UP.com, as well as reviews we didn't have room for in print.

GRADES/AWARDS
 A+ to A- EXCELLENT
 B+ to B- GOOD
 C+ to C- AVERAGE
 D+ to D- BAD
 F TERRIBLE

The following awards are based on these grades:
 Platinum: All A+'s
 Gold: All A-'s and up
 Silver: All Bs and up
 Game of the Month: Highest-rated game with all "Good" scores
 Shame of the Month: Lowest-rated game with all "Bad" scores



Wii

WII MUSIC

■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ Developer: Nintendo
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

The Wiiiiii is aliiiiive with the sound of muuuuusic

JENNIFER

A-
EXCELLENT

RAY
B-
GOOD

TINA
C
AVERAGE

The Good: Culturally edifying

The Bad: Not enough songs
Utterly Rad:

Customizable album covers and videos

✦ **JENNIFER:** Shocker! *Wii Music* gets this whole fake-music thing right! Using the Wii Remote and Nunchuk to mimic playing real instruments works amazingly well. Take time to learn the basic motions (drums, guitar, horns, and violin), and you'll be rewarded—knowing how to play makes the crucial difference between a stupid-silly and a fulfilling experience.

The minigames challenge you in legitimate ways—they're based just enough in classical theory that actual musical training helps. And when you get a band together for a custom jam (personalizing musical style, instruments, etc.), the game offers surprising depth and flexibility. It's mostly easy to play, and the way it fills in the

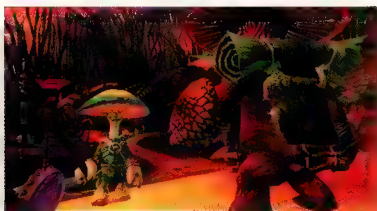
notes gives an astonishing sensation of performing a real song.

Wii Music's biggest downfall, oddly, is its music. With a few exceptions, it relies too much on public-domain pabulum ("Do Re Mi"—ugh)...and the best minigames, sadly, have just five songs each.

✦ **RAY:** *Wii Music's* more of a toy than any rhythm game, and I'm fine with that—but not satisfied. The song selection's definitely wack (I'd have liked many more Nintendo tunes), and some of the "instruments," like the rapper voice, are difficult to use effectively—at least the Balance Board adds a drum kit that ends up as the most accurate instrument in the whole

package. And since it teaches enough basic theory to spark an interest in kids, and because you can endlessly arrange the *Super Mario* theme, well, it can't be all bad.

✦ **TINA:** *Wii Music's* really about free-form experimentation. Unlike other music games, this one doesn't try to turn you into a rock star—the only measure of success is how ear-pleasing your creativity is. The thing is, that's *boring as hell*. Improvising beats is fun for a little while, but it's ultimately devoid of forward progress or long-term satisfaction. Jen's assertion that *Wii Music* offers "depth and flexibility" is a positive way of saying "no direction or incentive to do well."



Wii

MUSHROOM MEN: THE SPORE WARS

■ Publisher: Gamecock ■ Developer: Red Fly
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Spores and bores

NICK

C
AVERAGE

The Good: Great art, even better soundtrack

The Bad: Archaic design, sloppy combat

Can We Please Get: A high-def, PS3/XB360 sequel?

✦ **NICK:** *Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars* is what it is—an aesthetically imaginative action-platformer on the Wii developed by a new studio—and bears the markings and scars of these associations. Uniquely envisioned it may be, but such a fully realized world deserves a more cohesive execution.

Mushroom Men's gallery of concept art is the best place to enjoy the purity of the art design—the creepy-crawly hordes of anthropomorphic fungi and their dim subterranean haunts summon volumes of potential adventures at a glance. Clearly a creative vision, the earthy creatures and environments make their way into the game world itself with fair success. Everyday objects serve as sprawling terrain for hero Pax—gazing

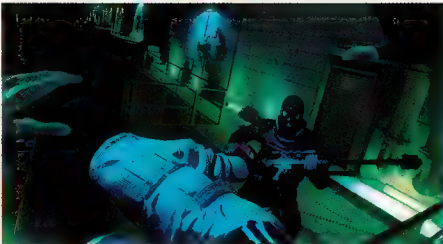
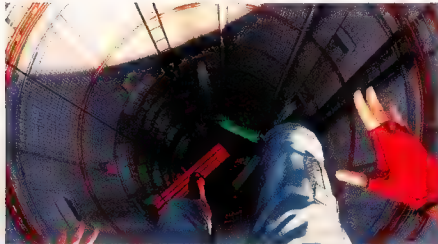
over a grungy kitchen from atop a refrigerator inspires exploration.

The rich presentation fills out its half of the game just fine—aided by a fantastically moody soundtrack—but the core mechanics and regressive design simply can't back it up. In the end, *Mushroom Men* breaks down visually intriguing environments into straightforward jumping and switch-flipping puzzles, falling right alongside a forgotten swath of PS1 platformers.

Serving as the primary motivation for item-collecting, a forge system allows Pax to turn household objects into new weapons, such as a shard of glass stuck to a pencil with gum or a screwdriver wrapped in a spiky dog collar. The resulting weapons are certainly inventive, but they

ultimately add little to the experience. Sure, flailing the Wii Remote results in different attacks for each, but hitting them the same; broken down, combat's simply a matter of interrupting enemy animations by hitting them before they hit you.

If *Mushroom Men's* mindless combat and touchy platforming did any justice to its artistry and ambitions, we'd have something special. Instead, we're left with a somewhat archaic, unpolished platformer belied by a novel premise and seemingly interesting world to explore. I enjoyed it enough as an introduction to a very cool, deliberate aesthetic, but it's tough not to desire a *Mushroom Men* game that executes its ideas more skillfully.



MIRROR'S EDGE

PS3/XB360

Leap of Faith

Publisher: EA Games ■ Developer: EA Dice ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

NICK
A-
EXCELLENT

GIANCARLO
B+
GOOD

ANDREW P.
B
GOOD

The Good: First-person parkour, gorgeous presentation
The Bad: Frustrating retries, iffy combat
For Puking: Try Breakdown on Xbox

✦ **NICK:** Innovation is risk, and *Mirror's Edge* puts everything on the line. It's a first-person adventure like no other, where the world's viewed as more than a shooting gallery or a tactile means to an end.


You deftly maneuver main gal Faith with the game's sublimely simple control scheme. One button governs all "up" actions and one governs all "down" actions. This allows the level design to take center stage, as the strikingly monochromatic world subtly funnels you down exhilarating paths across rooftops and through office buildings, sewers, and subways.

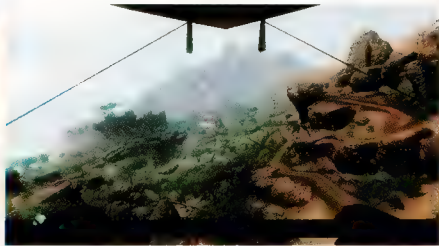
When Faith slows down, the seams show—retries break the illusion, and enemy encounters frustrate (when they're not avoidable). Still, as an

experience steeped in immediacy, *Mirror's Edge* is an absolute must-play despite its idiosyncrasies.

✦ **GIANCARLO:** After some bumbling, you experience a moment of clarity in *Mirror's Edge* where everything just clicks. Faith's movement feels natural, and combining her agility with hand-to-hand combat—while usually inelegant in execution—delivers a sense of satisfaction that guns don't offer. Still, as Nick said, *Mirror's Edge* is at its best when it motivates you to move quickly and fluidly—this is exactly why the time-trial mode's so consuming and addictive. Slower moments only exaggerate issues like cheap enemy A.I. and a sense of déjà vu in some levels.

✦ **ANDREW P.:** *Mirror's Edge* is all about first-person navigation. Fears about moving fluidly through an obstacle course of a city are quickly assuaged by a natural control scheme and level design that cleverly funnels you in the correct direction, making you believe that you figured it out yourself. The outstanding music and the tension of pursuit make this a first-person experience like few others. But I lost faith in Faith when that pursuit got jammed up by clumsy hand-to-hand encounters with the brutal Blues—a reminder that I'd much rather be running than gunning. 🐾

 **EGM Extras:** Looking for those hidden messenger bags? Run, hurdle, and leap to EGM.1UP.COM for our helpful SuperGuide.



This wasn't the travel brochure.

PS3/XB360

FAR CRY 2

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Developer: Ubisoft Montreal ■ Players: 1-16 ■ ESRB: Mature

Ubisoft drops us into Grand Theft Auto: Mogadishu

SCOOTER

B+
GOOD

ERIC

B
GOOD

ANTHONY

B-
GOOD

The Good: Open-world gameplay, beautiful world

The Bad: Lots of little things detract from overall feel
Grossest Omission: No lions, just gazelles and water buffalo

➔ **SCOOTER:** *Far Cry 2's* on the short list of best first-person shooters I've played this year. Depending on whom I'm talking to, I'd describe it as either a first-person *Grand Theft Auto* with a crazy, fictionalized African backdrop, or a more polished, easier-to-play *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl* (PC). In the end, though, *Far Cry 2's* a total "this, but *this*" experience: While it does many things well, it also does so many things...well, *boneheadedly*. It's got gorgeous vistas, great mission objectives/setups, open-ended gameplay, and solid firefights. But it's also got enemies who are either idiotic (way too many random U-turns during chases) or obscenely tough (a dude in a wifebeater can shrug off a .50 cal?), annoying weapon degradation, and

an even more irritating implementation of malaria (which requires constant medication). Even multiplayer falls victim to this trap: The map editor may be fantastic...but the gameplay itself is far too pedestrian.

➔ **ERIC:** It may be on Scooter's "best FPS" short list, but *Far Cry 2's* designers should be relegated to the detention center for all the idiocy they infused into this otherwise awesome game. The malaria and weapon-degradation dynamics are hair-on-the-tongue annoying and remind me of old-school role-playing games where you had to make sure to feed your characters constantly or suffer some dire consequence. On the other hand, wide-open missions,

a beautiful setting, and an engaging storyline make favorable comparisons to *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* inevitable—and will likely offer FPS fans thrill enough to justify the \$60 price tag.

➔ **ANTHONY:** Weapon degradation and superhuman enemies aren't the worst things in *Far Cry 2*. No, the most annoying aspect is how long it takes to move around the damn map. Traveling someplace new for the first time is fine, but I would've loved a fast-travel option to quickly and conveniently reach places I'd already explored. Still, despite the tedious travel periods, *Far Cry 2* features some truly gorgeous environments, (mostly) satisfying combat, and a lengthy, entertaining campaign. **A-**

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Jump In.

XBOX 360 LIVE



XB360 (also on PS3)

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERCOVER

■ Publisher: EA Games ■ Developer: EA Black Box
 ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Teen

A mashup of the franchise's last five years

JOHN

B
GOOD

The Good: Great visuals; that "Need for Speed" feel!

The Bad: Grinding in a racing game? No thanks

The Aggressive: The cop A.I. is just nuts

➔**JOHN:** In a lot of ways, *Need for Speed: Underground* is like a "greatest hits" package of ideas and concepts that we've seen the franchise play around with since *Underground*: It's got the cars of *Carbon* and the cop-fueled gameplay of *Most Wanted*. On paper, it seems like a slam dunk.

Structurally, the game shares a lot in common with *Most Wanted*. While the city of Palm Harbor offers you the freedom to cruise around hunting for events, you can instantly hop from race to race without wasting any time cruising around if you don't want to.

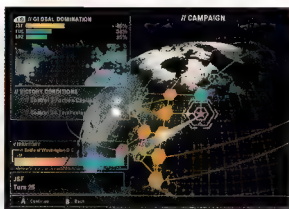
New to the franchise is a fully transparent "leveling" system that borrows heavily from role-playing games (and even *World of Warcraft*). Successful

completion of "missions" boosts stats; these stats, in turn, allow you to level up your driving skills. The higher your level, the more cars you can drive and the more upgrades you can access. Even if you have enough in-game cash to buy that GT-R, if you're not sufficiently leveled up, you can't buy it yet. Unless, of course, you want to buy it with real money. See? Not only is this a *Need for Speed* with something that's essentially grinding, but it also has microtransactions for "cheating," too.

While these may sound like what could be *Undercover*'s greatest crimes against fun, the real offenders are yet to come. Anyone that worked their way to the end of the "Blacklist" in

Most Wanted will recall that the cop chases got a little aggressive toward the end. In *Undercover*, the difficulty ramps in even more unfriendly ways. Though things start off very easy, by the time you've become just a level 5 driver, both the opponents and the cop A.I. are so obnoxiously aggressive that they border on the absurd. From that point on, it just doesn't let up—and it can be a deterrent to progressing in the game.

As a mashup of *Carbon* and *Most Wanted*, *Undercover*'s fairly successful. For many, though, in a post-*Burnout: Paradise* world, the question becomes "What does this give me that *Paradise* doesn't?" The answer to that is "cops and robbers."



PS3/XB360

ENDWAR

■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Developer: Ubisoft Shanghai
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen

Adventures in babysitting

JUSTIN

C
AVERAGE

MIKE N.

C-
AVERAGE

ANTHONY

C+
AVERAGE

The Good: Voice commands that work
The Bad: Micromanaging your mindless soldiers
The Truth: Yelling into your headset does not make you a real general

➔**JUSTIN:** *Civilization: Revolution* took a historically PC-only game and made it work on consoles; *EndWar* attempts a similar console real-time-strategy coup—with mediocre results. Instead of dealing with the genre's typical resource-management and unit-building tropes, you command a battalion through small-scale skirmishes, using an impressive voice-recognition system.

But *EndWar*'s biggest flaw? Insane micromanagement. If an enemy tank flanks your infantry while they're on the move, your men just walk on by without doing anything intelligent. And unit special abilities are equally annoying. What's the point in deploying SAM-equipped tanks if you have to tell 'em when to fire?

It's a shame, since moving around the battlefield and launching attacks works seamlessly. Voice commands almost always register the first time, and they feel natural. But *EndWar* just doesn't have enough substance to sway the hardcore crowd away from superior alternatives.

➔**MIKE N:** The point of strategy is managing units on a tactical plane. The near-flawless voice-command system's great for this, but *EndWar* insists on a rock-paper-scissors approach to every unit's strength and weakness. Those "rules" are thrown out the window when I'm allowed to steamroll my opponents with a fleet of tanks. Such imbalances hinder any interesting tactical prospects. The

tethered unit camera that limits visibility on the battlefield doesn't help, either—nor does the lack of a detailed overhead view.

➔**ANTHONY:** Justin's definitely right about *EndWar*'s fantastic voice-recognition controls. Not only do they work almost every time, but they also allow you to issue complex orders at a speed that other console RTS games simply can't follow. Unfortunately, the voice mechanics got attached to a tactically drab game with combat situations that feel more like math problems and less like opportunities for strategic genius. Multiplayer's a lot better, as human opponents are much less predictable—but that doesn't save single-player from mediocrity.



XB360 (also on PS3)

FALLOUT 3

Learn to love the bomb

■ Publisher: Bethesda ■ Developer: Bethesda ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Mature

DEMIAN

A

EXCELLENT

SCOOTER

B+

GOOD

PHILIP

A+

EXCELLENT

The Good: Fewer bugs than *Oblivion*
The Bad: Inventory system is a pain
Time: Expect to spend up to 40 hours on this one

➔ **DEMIAN:** *Fallout 3* begins with your character's literal birth, and it ends with...well, that's up to you. What happens in between in this action-role-playing game, from your formative years in the shelter of Vault 101 and well beyond your eventual escape into the irradiated, postapocalyptic Wild West outside, evolves via a nice mix of guided narrative and player choice.

But whatever path you take, be it do-gooder or night-walking cannibal, a whole lot of mutants are gonna die. *Fallout 3*'s V.A.T.S. combat system—pause time, target specific body parts—is fun and works well. Real-time first-person shooting feels less polished (and skip third-person, which is ruined by both camera problems and horrific character animation).

Bethesda fixed leveling issues that plagued its previous game, *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, but *Fallout 3*'s occasional quirks and glitches sometimes offer an unwanted peek behind the curtain. Still, it's the kind of hugely ambitious game that doesn't come around very often.

➔ **SCOOTER:** I explored the Wasteland as a complete sociopath, but a few down notes popped up during my morally dark journey: The move to first-person makes the game almost too bleak at times, and the numerous subway dungeons are a bit too copy-and-paste for my liking. I'm also sad over the loss of little *Fallout* touches, like low Intelligence resulting in idiot dialogue options. Still, it's a

great RPG—even if it's not the sequel die-hard *Fallout* fans wanted.

➔ **PHILIP:** Leveling issues aren't the only thing Bethesda's addressed; *Fallout 3* is also considerably more engaging—if only for the much more interesting world that it takes place in. Stumbling onto various national monuments savaged by nuclear blasts gave me a feeling of awe and dread unmatched by even the most moving generic fantasy RPGs. Add in the exciting combat system Demian mentioned, and you have my clear choice for the must-have game of the fall. 🎮

EGM Extras: *Mutants getting you down?* Our SuperGuide at [EGM.1UP.COM](#) will help you deal with them.



PS3/XB360

DEAD SPACE

■ Publisher: EA Games ■ Developer: EA Redwood Shores
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Mature

MATT

B+
GOOD

SCOOTER

B-
GOOD

ROBERT

B+
GOOD

The Good:

Disembodiment's not just hype

The Bad: The objectives need variety

Ministrategy:

Save ammo

'Horror' might be a stretch, but stick with it

➔ **MATT:** I find *Dead Space* to be fairly conflicted. In many ways, it wants to be a horror game—blood all over the walls, friends telling you how scared they are—but in others, it wants to be an action game, like in how you wield a gravity gun and time-stopping Stasis power. Look past this, though, and you'll find satisfying combat based around strategically shooting off enemy limbs and some of the best visuals and sound anywhere. You'll spend a lot of time moving through corridors and taking out a few enemies, but the game gets difficult (and really good) when it locks you in a room and forces you to kill everything before you can advance. I would've enjoyed more variety—the much-discussed zero-gravity

segments don't show up very often—but the limb-chopping and overall polish work wonders and make up for it.

➔ **SCOOTER:** I'll take that "*Dead Space* is conflicted" idea a bit further: It desperately wants to be a spooky spaceship creeper like *System Shock* (PC)—and stumbles in that regard—while it excels at being a monster-closet-fest like *Doom 3*. The production values are fantastic, but overall, I find *Dead Space* to be more of a rip-off of the developers' favorite moments from various horror movies/games rather than a true idea of its own. It's a fun, beautiful, and intense alien-zombie game wrapped around a mediocre sci-fi-horror center.

➔ **ROBERT:** Isaac Clarke is the galaxy's most overworked super. When not dissecting aliens with a futuristic nail gun, *Dead Space's* leading man spends his time fixing doors, engines, satellite arrays, and a host of other ho-hum spaceship maintenance issues. These tasks move the player along the game's spaceship of screams, but they have little bearing on the game's story, which withers on the vine. What works here, however, runs like a sports car: challenging, thoughtful combat that rewards surgical precision under pressure, terrifying enemies, iPod-slick interface and control scheme—all displaying incredible polish. It's not art, but the craft's undeniable.



PS3/XB360

SPIDER-MAN: WEB OF SHADOWS

■ Publisher: Activision ■ Developer: Shaba/Treyarch
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

NICK

C+
AVERAGE

The Good: Seamless swinging/combats, some fun bosses and cut-scenes

The Bad: Boring objectives, awful third act

Capcom School of Game Design:

Fighting every boss twice

The crawler hits a wall

➔ **NICK:** *Spider-Man: Web of Shadows* starts off with a serious bang—an elegant tutorial, told amid a series of beautifully choreographed, explosive cut-scenes and combat scenarios that show off Spidey's new moves. But *Shadows* can't stick with it for the long haul, and it winds up as yet another underwhelming web-slinging adventure.

When *Spider-Man* went to a fully open-world formula in 2004's *Spider-Man 2*, simply swinging around the city was a revelation—even if the combat and missions were an afterthought. The situation didn't improve much in subsequent games, but developers Shaba and Treyarch finally fix the combat; for the first time in two generations of *Spider-*

Man titles, it's fun to fight. More importantly, swinging through the city and engaging pockets of foes are no longer mechanically disparate elements. Thanks to a few handy new moves, you can go straight from twisting through the air to kicking a thug in the chest.

Regrettably, *Shadows* assumes that combat can carry the entirety of the experience—and it can't. While side missions don't have you chasing stray balloons anymore, they aren't much better, giving you numerical goals of baddies to kill and people to save. Defeat 10 thugs, then defeat 50, then defeat 150...all in the same static, unpolished New York City.

The main story path is C-grade comic runoff, an underdeveloped

story of the symbiote alien taking over NYC and its inhabitants, as a random selection of *Spider-Man's* pals and foes come out of the woodwork to play their parts. A few excellent boss fights punctuate the first half of the game, but they aren't anywhere near as entertaining when you have to fight every one of them again in their symbiote forms. By the end, the entire plot just feels like an excuse to make you fight everyone twice.

Shadows is halfway there, with plenty of cool "*Spider-Man*" moments. But it never really hits any sort of stride, instead settling into repetition and dragging out its poor third act. *Shadows* might be the best *Spider-Man* game yet, but the standard should be so much higher by now.

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PlayStation 3

LITTLEBIGPLANET



The world in your hands

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Media Molecule ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Everyone

NICK
A+
EXCELLENT

MILKMAN
A
EXCELLENT

PHILIP
A
EXCELLENT

The Good: Insanely charming, an infinite supply of new levels

The Bad: Imperfect controls

Let's Hear It For: Meerkat strippers

✦ **NICK:** *LittleBigPlanet* examines the very nature of games—the dialogue between creators and players and the relationships possible between them. It lifts the curtain on design as we know it, allowing the big, beautiful brains of everyone involved spill out in a two-way conduit of creativity. Yes, it's the most charming game I've ever played, and it's one of the most enjoyable. But the real beauty of *LBP*'s even less tangible: creative empowerment at its finest and an unparalleled motivator to want to create.

At face value, *LBP* is a left-to-right side-scroller—*Mario* with even fewer options. You can jump, you can grab, and that's it. But the simplicity endears and perseveres; the perilously clever levels kept me smiling with glee

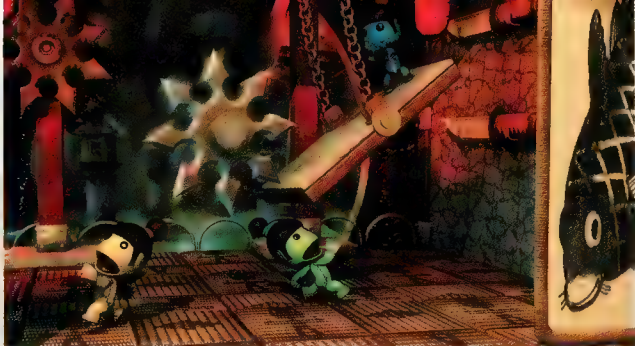
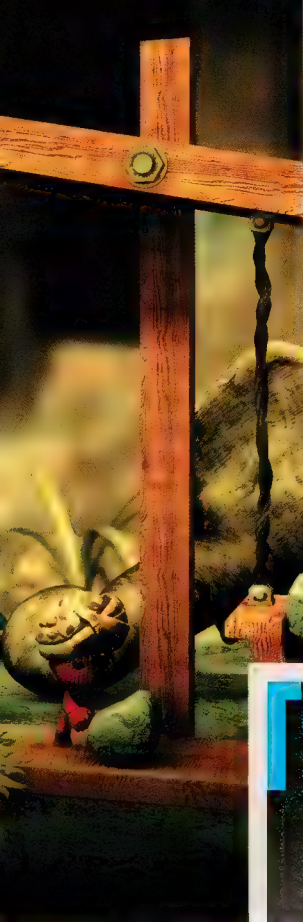
straight through to the end (and again in the hilariously hectic co-op). The hip patchwork aesthetic, phenomenally funky soundtrack, and instantly lovable Sackboy characters all cohere into one of the most universally likable presentations of...well, anything I've ever seen.

But the game's level creator is where the real adventure begins: This ridiculously powerful suite of tools and decorations allows you to create almost anything of your own and share it with the world. Platformers are a good starting point—but why stop there? Within a scant few days of consumption, I played through logic games, murder mysteries, music videos, and more.

Yes, the editor has its quirks, and

the Sackboys can be finicky when changing between the game's three planes of movement—but I don't care about perfection when I'm having this much fun. And the longer it's out, the better it'll become. I can hardly wait!

✦ **MILKMAN:** The way Nick talks about *LBP*, you'd think he's going to marry it tomorrow. But while I don't think *LBP*'s simplicity is so much endearing as mere common sense on the part of Media Molecule to keep this admittedly untested excursion into "game design as game," well, simple (gotta save double-jumps for the sequel, apparently), I do think that *LBP* oozes more character and charm than the last five *Super Mario* games combined. This is like shareware with



DO-CREATORS

While you can play online with up to three friends through countless player-made stages right now, you can only create your own levels together from the same couch... for the moment. Expect a patch for online co-op creation by mid-December. So get your best ideas brewin'—you'll need 'em!



a big-ass budget, combining sheer, breathless innovation with spectacular production values (the narration's particularly excellent). The Sackboys' puppy-dog enthusiasm and wagging tongues hooked me from the start, and taking my "sack" through the multitude of endlessly inventive levels found both online and off has me convinced that this is the PS3's killer app. While the *LBP* experience bursts with creativity at every turn, next time I'd hope for better, more precise platforming controls.

➔ **PHILIP:** If Nick's gonna tie the knot with *LBP*, the game had better be polygamous—because I'm most definitely in, too. As Milky says, Sony's killer app is finally here, and somehow,

it's a 2D platformer.

As someone who's generally much more interested in just playing a game than making it myself, I'm happy to report that *LBP*'s single-player offerings hold up. Media Molecule shows off just how flexible the creation toolset is, while at the same time showcasing some of the most original and interesting level design I've seen in years. From hot-air-balloon rides to

car races to giant-robot battles, the variety and imagination on display is endless—literally, if you take player-created levels into account.

If the beta was any indication, the best user-made levels will rise to the top, whether it's through the game's built-in voting process or pure word-of-mouth. With that in mind, I'm ready to keep checking in on Sackboy for a long time to come. 🐶



EGM Extras: Collecting LittleBigPlanet's object bubbles unlocks more stuff to use in the creator—so, naturally, you'll want to find 'em all. Hit up our LittleBigPlanet SuperGuide at EGM.1UP.COM for help with nabbing every last one.



PS3/XB360

SAINTS ROW 2

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Volition
 ■ Players: 1-12 ■ ESRB: Mature

Less copy, more carbon

TYLER

B
GOOD

MIKE N.

B-
GOOD

G. FORD

B+
GOOD

The Good: None of the frustrating bits of *Grand Theft Auto*
The Bad: None of the style, either
The Fugly: A flexible character creator allows for abominable avatars

→ **TYLER:** Gamers considered the first *Saints Row* a *Grand Theft Auto* clone—but compared to the PS2-era entries in that series, *Saints Row 2*'s actually more *GTA* than *GTA4* is.

Unexpected objectives boost otherwise boilerplate missions in this open-world crime game (in one job, you evict homeless people from their shantytowns), they're playable in online co-op, and they focus on action—no annoying tailgating sequences, awkward stealth segments, or ridiculously unfair races. *Saints 2*'s also extraordinarily forgiving, whether it's the generous health bar or the liberal use of checkpoints throughout multistage missions. My favorite *Saints 2* addition: The vehicles sport cruise control!

But as much as it rivals *GTA*'s action, *Saints 2* doesn't match *GTA*'s style. The characters are banal, the city's uninspired and washed out (this is disappointing, since *GTA*'s cities are characters themselves), and the satirical radio banter isn't clever—it's just pedestrian and annoying.

→ **MIKE N:** Tyler, the world of *Saints* is hardly uninspired—it's one that necessitates the use of unabashed violence and deliberate sexism. The game requires you to cast your morality aside, and I'm sure the intended audience (you know who you are) will relish this celebration of depravity. Still, *Saints 2* evolves the genre with its character creator and the ability to play the entire game cooperatively

online. Additional online modes—faking injuries for cash, for example—serve to please the masochists in us, even if the graphics can't.

→ **G. FORD:** Tyler's right—*Saints 2* derives much of its spirit from last gen's *GTA*s. It's packed with so many side activities and collectibles that I'm still expecting to come across *San Andreas*' hidden jetpack as I cruise to the excellent, *Vice City*-evoking '80s radio station. Hi, flattery! And damned if it isn't enjoyable to just explore this world; I can't help but get pulled in like I did with those classics. Still, the generic story and characters need upgrades, and despite the solid shooting system, I'd love a decent cover solution during big shootouts.



PS3/XB360

WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2009

■ Publisher: THQ ■ Developer: Yuke's
 ■ Players: 1-4 ■ ESRB: Teen

MICHAEL

A-
EXCELLENT

The Good: Compelling storylines, WWE Highlight Reel mode
The Bad: Can only choose from seven Superstars in Road to WrestleMania mode
Career Story: Santino Marella

The champ is here

→ **MICHAEL:** *Smackdown vs. Raw 2009* versus *TNA Impact!* is a total squash: THQ's annual grappler make Midway's debut competitor look like a curtain-jerk jobber. The win's well deserved, too—*SVR09* is by far the best game in the series. OK, I know, that should be as obvious as a screw-up from *Raw* General Manager Mike Adamle, but it's well known that THQ's been slow to fix the nagging complaints that tore up *Smackdown*'s tights: piss-break-long load times, wonky animations, and ho-hum story modes. Well, this year THQ patched up all of the problems to create an awesome package any fan will surely want to grab.

The first thing you'll notice when booting up *SVR09* is the surprising

lack of load times. Past games in the series were plagued with waits so painfully long that it felt like you were watching a Great Khali Iron Man match. Thankfully, things are a lot quicker now.

Along with faster load times and smoother animation comes the best improvement: the revamped story mode, entitled "Road to WrestleMania." Last year's career mode—while ambitious—was a complete mess. So developer Yuke's opted to focus on a few popular Superstars. While it's a bummer that only seven fan-favorite grapplers made the cut, the storylines for the top-carders are almost WWE quality.

Gameplaywise, *SVR09* hasn't changed much from last year's game.

And that's a good thing, because the previous iteration was a great in-ring performer. The intuitive, flick-the-analog-stick grapple system works so well that it's hard to imagine a wrestling game that doesn't utilize it.

If you're still not sold, then you'll surely mark out for these innovative new features: Create-a-Finisher and the WWE Highlight Reel. The former's self-explanatory, while the latter lets you record in-game clips and cut 'em up for all of your friends to see.

To all of the *Smackdown* haters out there: If you're gonna jump back in the ring, this is the year to do it. Both of these exciting new additions—along with the aforementioned improvements—make *SVR09* this year's grapple-game champ.



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PlayStation 3

MOTORSTORM: PACIFIC RIFT

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ Developer: Evolution ■ Players: 1-12 ■ ESRB: Teen

SHANE

A-
EXCELLENT

JOHN

A
EXCELLENT

NICK

B+
GOOD

The Good: Stellar track variety and design, addictive online play
The Bad: Slightly uneven graphics
What The...?: AWOL motion controls

The surprise of elements

➔**SHANE:** With follow-up *Pacific Rift*, it's instantly clear that *MotorStorm* developer Evolution learned from its launch-title oversights. The fundamentals haven't changed; it's still all about discovering the best racing lines and shortcuts for your specific vehicle type—and then besting the aggressive enemy A.I. by mastering the risky boost system. But by equally dividing the action across four elementally themed “zones,” this sequel brilliantly eradicates the first game's one-note geographical fatigue, effortlessly bouncing between lush jungles, water-logged beaches, windswept cliffs, and magma-covered mountainsides. Also, *Pacific Rift*'s more open-ended and less-daunting single-player Festival mode continually dishes up a multi-

tude of different race options, better preparing racers for the addictive online free-for-alls.

But while *Pacific Rift* offers an array of inventive track designs, all that variety comes at a price: Each of the delightfully labyrinthine layouts contain a few ugly, low-res textures just waiting to snap you out of your blissful HD-gen reverie.

➔**JOHN:** An improvement in every possible way over the original *MotorStorm*, this is what we all knew the original *could* be. If anything, *Pacific Rift* almost overcompensates for the shortcomings of its predecessor by addressing just about every concern ever expressed about it—except one. Why does this world full

of smashable, breakable, exploding goodies feature a handful of randomly distributed, inexplicably indestructible items? I can smash through a building unscathed, but a limp sapling's somehow an immovable truck-wrecker?

➔**NICK:** I didn't play the first *MotorStorm*, and I don't generally have much interest in racing games that aren't called *Burnout: Something or Other*. I have to admit, though, that *Pacific Rift* earns its place in the genre with a fiercely satisfying learning curve and—with the right TV—ridiculously good looks. It still feels a bit light on variety for my tastes, and it constantly reminds me *why* I love *Burnout* so much (crashing here is controller-throwingly frustrating). 🚗



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Xbox 360

GEARS OF WAR 2



Can't break these chains of gore

■ Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios ■ Developer: Epic ■ Players: 1-10 ■ ESRB: Mature

G. FORD

A

EXCELLENT

MICHAEL

A+

EXCELLENT

DAVID

A

EXCELLENT

The Good: Beefed-up campaign and multiplayer.

The Bad: Cover system has minor problems; turret sections Stylin': Cowboy hats

+G. FORD: After the first hour of our three-day off-site *Gears of War 2* review marathon, my initial impressions had me thinking "Gears 1.5." This third-person shooter's unmistakable cover-based combat instantly feels familiar—it even brings over the same minor problems, like occasionally "sticking" you to the wrong object or wall. The visuals once again stun (but haven't they always?), and the campaign proceedings open in a dreary hospital with beefy Delta Squad members Marcus and Dom falling into their light-on-talk, big-guns ways. But it's when you start hacking into the meat of this epic-expectations sequel that you appreciate what a more in-depth story, juiced-up multiplayer, and new

enemies, modes, and weapons can add to what still stands as one of this generation's best core gameplay systems (not to mention the always-satisfying active-reload mechanic).

This time through, the humans' struggle against the Locust focuses on the fate of the last human stronghold of Jacinto. The 10-to-15-hour journey is far more diverse this time, with varied backdrops (from a snowy outpost to a scene that drops you into the midst of a razorhail storm); not-always-enjoyable turret-based and Reaver-riding sections; a surprisingly entertaining platformer-like stage, of all things; and some memorable showdowns. One, for example, has you taking on a gigantic, lumbering Brumak with the powerful

new mortar at your disposal. (The Scorcher flamethrower and poison-gas-spewing ink grenades are also great ordnance additions.) The story, meanwhile, leans on ample action-movie clichés, but it adds some character to the characters and should pique your interest enough to keep you moving at a gallop through the end. Naturally, the action's even better if you play co-op with a friend. Once again, a cohort can join or leave a game at will, with the iffy computer A.I. taking over as needed.

And while I don't have room here to delve deeply into multiplayer, I can say that I love what it offers. From the excellent and tense two-per-team Wingman matches to the addictive and strategic co-op Horde mode,



GEARED UP

We debated, fought, and revved some chain saws to come up with a list of our favorite new things:

Mortar

Easy to use, this new heavy weapon is always a couple of clickity-clicks away from big boom-booms.

Avalanche

This map seems like an ideal setting for a team-building luxury retreat...until a midgame wall of snow eliminates half of your squad.

Boomshield

Useful when it comes to protection from razorhail, this deployable cover is of utmost help for setting up choke points in the unrelenting Horde mode.

Wingman

Sure, the Execution, revamped Annex, and Guardian matches are good, but this two-man-per-team multiplayer mode is ace.

what felt like a hugely entertaining afterthought in the first *Gears* now easily stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the single-player campaign.

➔ **MICHAEL:** Tearing into *Gears 2* is a treat—this blood-soaked sequel offers a smorgasbord of sadistically entertaining content. It doesn't take long to rev up, either: Once you start the single-player campaign, it's hard to stop and wipe your drool-covered mouth. Trust me—I blazed my way through the entire solo adventure in one 15-hour sprint (not by choice, mind you!), but I never got bored. In fact, I still wanna play more, because playing through *Gears 2* all by your lonesome (like I did) just doesn't compare to the joy of dismembering

Locust limbs with a trigger-happy chap. But whether you Rambo it solo or not doesn't matter; what matters is that the new additions (outside of the insanely varied campaign that Greg already noted) really make this a true sequel. Even the little things—like the helpful pop-up Achievement trackers—show the shine that a couple of years of polish can create.

➔ **DAVID:** I totally agree with you guys on the single-player campaign; *Gears 2* does things that I've never seen in a shooter. One of my favorites is a platforming sequence that could've come straight out of a *Super Mario* game. Of course, the real action takes place in the chain saw-wielding, curb-stomping

multiplayer arena (full disclosure: All of our multiplayer sessions were conducted via LAN rather than real Internet connections), and although I noticed occasional recurrences of classic *Gears* shenanigans—chain saws slicing their way through melees and gunfire—the “host advantage” from the first game was thankfully MIA. The five-player Horde co-op mode is a big highlight: Fighting through waves of encroaching enemies while trying to protect your squadmates is both nerve-racking and exhilarating, and survival requires constant teamwork. No other universe offers the same primeval pleasure as *Gears 2*, and I plan on practically living in it for the foreseeable future. 🍻

EGM Extras: *Dizzy's wild ride driving you batty? Locusts have you cussing? Our Gears of War 2 SuperGuide, found at EGM.1UP.COM, will help you through those tough times.*



Xbox 360

FABLE II



The story of the moral

■ Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios ■ Developer: Lionhead ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Mature

MILKMAN

A
EXCELLENT

GIANCARLO

A-
EXCELLENT

JENNIFER

A-
EXCELLENT

The Good: So deep, almost like an MMO

The Bad: Glitchy player interaction, long load times

Sacrifice: It's lame—save the dog!

➔ **MILKMAN:** The first *Fable*, with its (in theory) world-altering consequences and moral choices—which, in turn, affected the appearance of your character and the populace's reactions to him or her—was one of my favorite action-role-playing games in recent years. *Fable II*'s even better. This isn't just because of the major visual overhaul; characters aren't nearly as *Wallace & Gromit*-y anymore, and the detailed game world is full of pollen, butterflies, rippling water, and lush green forests. Combat's so vastly improved—and so much better than what's found in most third-person action games—that having an RPG attached to the action almost feels like a bonus.

I attribute this to the initially

awkward—but eventually elegant—five-tier “Will” (read: magic) system that lets you cast up to five charged types of spells in battle. How you arrange them is up to you; for example, my tier 1 Will would be Time Control, a quickly executed spell that slows down all enemy attacks, allowing me to set up a higher-tier area-of-effect whopper of a spell or a melee assault or buy time and use a healing potion. The ability to tweak your weapons with bonus-granting Augments is just the tip of the epic iceberg. The moral choices at game's end carry even more impact than ever (especially when it comes to your dog, who's an amazing adventuring partner), which made *Fable II* resonate with me far more than its predecessor

ever did.

But what *Fable II* adds, it also takes away. It has fewer Demon Doors and distinct armor types and saddles you with a sluggish, poorly designed menu system and no overhead minimap—which you'll have to live with unless Microsoft releases another *Lost Chapters*-esque expansion.

➔ **GIANCARLO:** *Fable II* is *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* for folks who hated (and liked, too) the latter. Both share moral quandaries and that go-anywhere, do-anything sensibility, and though the world of Albion isn't quite as sprawling (most areas have main paths with several branching paths attached), *Fable II*'s other mechanics are far more focused and enjoyable



WITH OR WITHOUT YOU

'Online co-op isn't included in the retail release of *Fable II* (it's only available as a patch), but two people can play on the same system at once—though, sadly, you're not really missing all that much if you don't take advantage of it. While the co-op mode gives you an opportunity to check out your friends' characters and their own version of Albion, you don't actually play as your own character; you take on the role of one of several prefabricated henchpersons that reflect the skill level of the hosting hero. So if you just started *Fable II* and happen to join in a game with a veteran hero, then you'll get a sneak peek at some of the high-level weapons and spells. It's cool to visit another player's world, but it's incredibly disappointing that you can't use your own character. And it's even more disheartening that the great single-player experience doesn't really translate that well into multiplayer—there's constant fighting over the camera since players share the same claustrophobic perspective, and long-range combat feels less useful without the aid of the over-the-shoulder camera. Ultimately, co-op serves its purpose as a method for earning some quick cash (much like the other jobs in the game) as opposed to a full experience.

PLAYERS



Finally, a glimpse out combat is one of the best things about *Fable II*.



in just about every respect. The main quest not only progresses at a brisk pace (if you want it to), but it's also engaging and often quite funny. The dozens upon dozens of side quests often share the same traits, making them worthwhile and not just throwaways. But the one thing that impressed me the most is the combat. It offers an astounding level of flexibility and strategy thanks to the fact that the individual combat mechanics—melee, long-range, and magic—work so well with each other.

➔ **JENNIFER:** I didn't love the first *Fable*; it wasn't deep enough as an RPG. So I approached this one warily, a bit more inured to creator Peter Molyneux's wonderful hyperbole. But


this time, *Fable* delivers! It's thoroughly engaging—richer than ordinary action-RPGs, yet simpler and more elegant than many hardcore ones. I really enjoyed meandering about and discovering characters, quests, and minigames purely by accident. And the game's clock—you have a discrete period of time to finish quests, and loading new areas takes in-world



time—kept me immersed in this beautifully imagined world rather than just acting as a gimmick to hide the (often genuinely slow) loading. The near-complete lack of cut-scenes helps, too. And any game that brings out the degenerate gambler I didn't even know I had in me is doing something very right—or wrong. But isn't that what *Fable*'s all about? 🐾



EGM Extras:

 **Having trouble getting through those *Demon Doors* or finding a specific quest item? Your dog can't do everything for you, so check out EGM.1UP.com for tips on these in our *SuperGuide*.**



PlayStation 3

VALKYRIA CHRONICLES

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sega WOW
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Teen

Tactical action goes action-tacular

➔ **ERIC:** Like most of you, I wear my socks firmly ensconced within a pair of sneakers, which are themselves strapped tightly to my feet with strong, cordlike shoelaces. Imagine my disappointment in my footwear-securing preparations, then, when *Valkyria Chronicles* knocked those same socks clean off my feet. This is, without question, the best tactics game on the PlayStation 3, and it's one of the best games on PS3, period. Even if it's forcing me to purchase some new foot condoms.

Taking place in an alternate Europe around the 1930s, *Valkyria Chronicles* tracks the exploits of a group of youths as they fight to defend their homeland, Gallia, from the invading forces of the Empire. Yes, "the Empire." Blah. Fortunately, *Chronicles* has enough plot twists to keep things from getting too hackneyed.

What it doesn't have, though, is the ability to tell its story without gobs of expository cut-scenes. Look, I like anime as much as the next guy, and *Chronicles'* beautiful artwork will keep you enthralled longer than most games would, but even Otaku McLolicon, PhD, would balk at the amount of talking-head watching here.

When you're controlling the action, though, you get an innovative blend of strategy, tactics, roleplaying, and action that rocks harder than *Metallica*. While the core of *Chronicles* mirrors the rock-paper-scissors dynamic of games like Nintendo's brilliant strategy series *Fire Emblem*, the manner in which you access that core is radically different. You select your units via an overhead map, but once you pick a unit, *Chronicles* drops you into a third-person action-game interface in which you move, aim, and shoot with the thumbsticks. It's not exactly real time, though: Every active character's limited by an action bar that depletes with any movement, and typically, weapons can only be fired once per activation.

Other than that, combat's freer and more visceral than in any tactics game I've ever played. The only real complaint's that, like most tactics games, *Chronicles* relies on numerical advantage and preexisting conditions to provide most of the challenge, because the enemy computer A.I.'s about as clever as a soup sandwich. But, honestly, *Chronicles* is such an innovative and polished game that if you pass it up, the real moron is you.

ERIC

A-
EXCELLENT

The Good: Sweet strategy with pretty visuals
The Bad: Too much jibber-jabber, weak enemy A.I.
Otaku Freak-out Warning Level: Charteuse



PlayStation 3

NARUTO: ULTIMATE NINJA STORM

■ Publisher: Namco Bando ■ Developer: CyberConnect2
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Teen

A beautiful, yet imperfect, storm

➔ **RICHARD:** Sometimes brilliant but oftentimes maddening, *Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm* (based on the wildly popular *Naruto* anime series) is a game of conflicting ideas that leverages its only key strength: its visuals. Gorgeous character animations, carefully constructed cut-scenes, and consummately directed choreography give *Ninja Storm* plenty of style—but what about substance? Fancy graphics can provide immediate enjoyment, but without meaningful game design, the flashiness isn't sustainable.

Beyond the bombastic—yet entertaining—cut-scenes, *UNS* wants to be two different things: 1) a serious fighter and 2) an adventure game. Neither of the two receives exceptional execution, though the fighting portion shows some promise. Combat's set in third-person with 25 characters, exaggerated special attacks, supporting characters that temporarily assist the fight, and battle mechanics emphasizing meter-management and spatial planning. Combo attacks initially appear long and impressive, but that's a deception—the system's shockingly devoid of complexity. By mashing a single button repeatedly, you, too, can bang out 20-plus-hit combos!

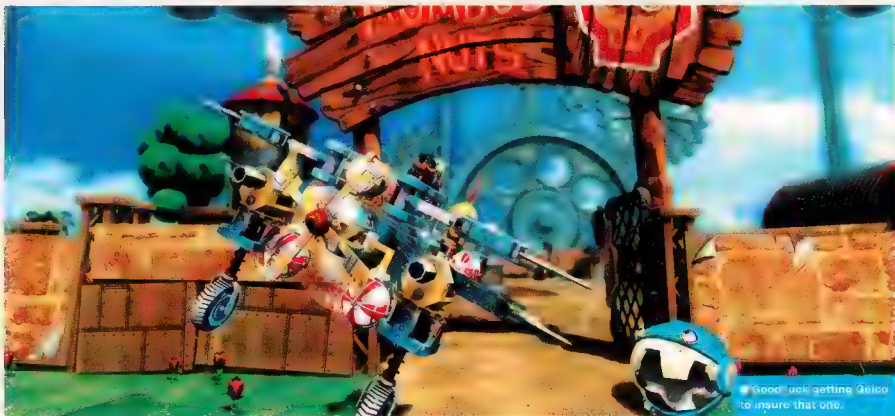
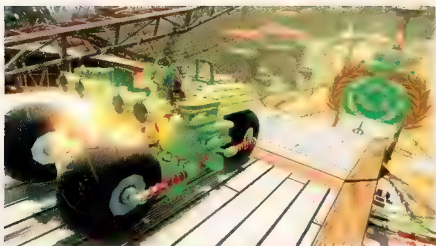
Sure, accessibility's a common problem in many fighting games, but executing combos should involve a hint of skill and timing; otherwise, simplicity just devalues the effort. Even worse, the substitution jutsu—a defensive ability that teleports the defender behind the attacker after a blocked attack—is a potentially harmful exploit that's performed with little risk, which makes offense dangerous and deters any momentum gained by attacking. Fights can be rewarding, but you'll have to put up with a lot of nonsense.

The adventure portion's dubbed "Ultimate Mission mode," but it doesn't nearly live up to that title. Set from the anime series' Chunin Exam arc to the Chasing Sasuke arc, the adventure lasts about 14 hours...and that's if you blast through the game without completing all of the side missions. The trouble is that the mission objectives try to acclimate you to specific skills, but the objectives repeat throughout the mode with little variation, other than increased difficulty. Repetition leads to burnout, but if you manage to trudge through it all, you're rewarded with awesome boss fights that are as incredible to play as they are to watch.

RICHARD

B-
GOOD

The Good: Sweet visuals, engaging boss fights
The Bad: Tiring, boring mission objectives
Japanese Dialogue: Turn it on—you'll thank us



Good luck getting Geico to insure that one.

Xbox 360

BANJO-KAZOOIE: NUTS & BOLTS

■ Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios ■ Developer: Rare ■ Players: 1-8 ■ ESRB: Everyone 10+

Make your own fun

ANTHONY
A-
EXCELLENT
JUSTIN
B-
GOOD
RYAN
C
AVERAGE

The Good: Awesome vehicle creation, great multiplayer mode

The Bad: Timed elements are repetitious

Dead Rising 2.0: Non-HDTV owners are in for some serious frustration here

➔ **ANTHONY:** Rare's done more than I could've imagined with *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts*, crafting a genre-bending platformer that no one should overlook. Everything that made the franchise famous back in the Nintendo 64 days is still present, facilitated by highly customizable, user-created vehicles and strings of small challenges (ranging from straight-up races to fetch quests, and beyond) rather than open-world exploration.

The only part I didn't enjoy: Every task in the game's essentially timed, which makes for a lot of repetition when confronted with a challenge that you just can't pass. The single-player and multiplayer are both addictive—and a heckuva lot of fun. If you enjoy the piecemeal vehicle-creation pro-

cess, you can easily get lost in *Nuts & Bolts*. This is one game that everyone *should* be playing long after it comes out, both online and off.

➔ **JUSTIN:** With the vehicle system, Rare successfully drives the franchise in a *completely* new direction. It takes some time, but once you get the hang of creating and controlling these sometimes unwieldy vehicles, you'll find a surprising level of depth. Getting your character to lock on to a specific item is a lesson in frustration, and the innumerable minichallenges get repetitive pretty quickly. But taken in small doses, it's really enjoyable. Crafting vehicles, in particular, gets more complex (in a good way) as you unlock new parts and accessories.

It's not the game that I expected, but that's definitely not a bad thing.

➔ **RYAN:** This game is in dire need of a font size increase; it's practically impossible to read the fuzzy dialogue when playing on a standard-def TV. Mission objective rundowns flew by before I hardly had the chance to squint, and the wacky characters speak in inaudible jibber-jabber, which means—as I'm not part of the minority that's shelled out for an HDTV—my single-player *Banjo* sessions amounted to little beyond high-tech guessing games. The multiplayer mode offers a substantial array of options (culled from single-player), and it's fun—though the default vehicles suck. I just wish *Nuts & Bolts* didn't carry such a steep buy-in. ❌



DS

CHRONO TRIGGER

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

ANDREW P.

A

EXCELLENT

The Good: Stellar sound quality

The Bad: Realizing a sequel probably won't happen

Ozle: In ■ picklet

Timeless

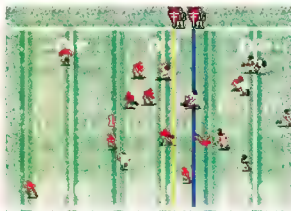
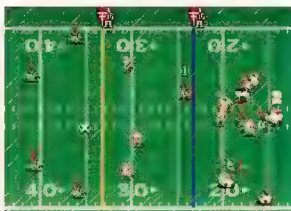
➔ **ANDREW P:** Toward the end of high school, my friend proposed a temporary trade: his copy of *Final Fantasy VI* (well, *III* at the time) for my copy of *Chrono Trigger*—one of Square's most beloved RPGs. It's a 1995 all-star collaboration of Japanese developers that revolves around a group of time-traveling adventurers. Before we could return the games to their rightful owners, graduation day came, and life had already placed us on separate paths—I suddenly couldn't play one of my favorite games of all time. The eventual *Chrono Trigger* PlayStation rerelease (and other...less savory methods of playing) rolled around, but those experiences were decidedly inferior to the real thing.

Chrono Trigger for the DS is different, too—but in a superior way. Most of it's familiar: the character designs, the distinct and colorful backdrops of each era, the epic soundtrack, the teamwork-based Tech system—all of the fun and charm of the original Super NES *Chrono Trigger* is preserved, with certain aspects improved. Square Enix took the anime cut-scenes included in the aforementioned PS1 rerelease and folded them back into the game, and the localization team polished up the script a bit—with new names for items and techs and more dramatic readings of the more serious moments. The touch-screen functions are convenient but ultimately inessential, simply because

the game wasn't made with them in mind. What's nice is that the dual-screen setup creates breathing room in the battlefield for text boxes and spell effects, while it also improves inventory and party management.

This remake also includes two new dungeon areas—though it's always nice to have more content, these also seem inessential. Similarly, the monster-raising game's a clever idea... but having to wait for these beasts to return from training stutters the game's momentum.

For fans, the reason to pick up *Chrono Trigger* is simply because it's available, intact, and enhanced. For newcomers, it's because the game has easily withstood the test of time.



DS

TECMO BOWL: KICKOFF

■ Publisher: Tecmo ■ Developer: Polygon Magic
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone

TODD

C

AVERAGE

GIANCARLO

C+

AVERAGE

DAVID

B+

GOOD

The Good: Shutdown defense is a blast

The Bad: Ear-stabbing music needs to go
Down, Set, Cut!
 Goofy, joy-inducing cut-scenes

Goal-line fumble

➔ **TODD:** The moment I turned on *Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff*, I was flush with sentimentality. But while I wanted it to be the greatest comeback in sports-gaming history, the joy and simplicity didn't overcome *Kickoff*'s many frustrating fumbles. For starters, the passing's dated, as you've gotta scroll from receiver to receiver, which leads to many misthrows. And if you *do* connect on a long bomb, forget about high-steppin' your way to an 80-yard score; over the course of an entire season, my biggest gain was a measly 38 yards—the elephant-herd defense caught up and chased me down every time. The game's great gift is defense, as you can shut down offenses with enough effort, but it's a bear to score in multiplayer. Expect an '85 Chicago

Bears vs. '00 Baltimore Ravens-type struggle (two of the greatest NFL defenses of all time), where one touchdown wins it all.

➔ **GIANCARLO:** This latest incarnation of *Tecmo Bowl* has lots to like, specifically that it feels and plays almost like the 16-bit versions of *Tecmo Super Bowl*. And even some of the stuff that's new to the series—like skillfully eluding previously inescapable blitzes and the occasional power-up-induced play—is cool. But *Kickoff* carries plenty of annoying characteristics, too. Stats can be a little hard to read, especially those shown during games, and while multiplayer matches are often defensive struggles, single-player games are usually blow-

outs—the unusually high number of interceptions and fumbles in some games only makes it that much easier to run up the score.

➔ **DAVID:** *Tecmo Bowl*'s a game that we old-timers fondly remember, as it was simple to pick up and play—even for nonsports gamers. For better and worse, this version perfectly captures the arcade style of the original. I'm not quite sure what game Todd was playing, but I certainly had my fair share of long-bomb touchdowns. If anything, it's *too* easy to score; if you want a real challenge, multiplayer's definitely the way to go. *Kickoff* does a great job of satiating my hunger for old-school videogame football—a yearning I didn't even know I had.



DS

KORG DS-10 SYNTHESIZER

■ Publisher: XSEED ■ Developer: AQ
 ■ Players: 1 ■ ESRB: Everyone

Music-making that anyone can afford

➔ **MILKMAN:** *Korg DS-10 Synthesizer* is an interesting beast. It's not quite a videogame...yet it's also the ultimate interactive experience. It's infinitely replayable (in that give-a-monkey-a-typewriter-and-eternity way), primarily because it's an actual musical instrument, and its limits aren't defined by the software but by the user—or, I should say, musician. Essentially a superpowered, professional Korg keyboard—stripped of its plastic knobs and dials and sliders and distilled into a DS cartridge—*DS-10* is almost surreal in its execution. It doesn't come at you with a bunch of wacky cartoony fonts and one-touch features aimed at the “consumer market”—instead, it offers an almost intimidating, matter-of-fact, bare-bones interface modeled after the vintage Korg IMS-10 keyboard.

Bottom line: To extract the most accomplished results out of *DS-10*, you should probably be musically inclined—and, in the best-case scenario, something of a piano player. However, the music-curious can still find enjoyment futzing around with the keys. While the game offers a somewhat small-buttoned, gray-on-black, minimalist interface, it's certainly more user-friendly than sewing together eight NES sound chips. In fact, *DS-10* boasts two analog synthesizers, four drum machines, and an insanely tweakable bank of sounds, and you can reshape, remodel, and reinvent every tone and tune via a vast array of knobs, faders, and wires—all of which are adjustable via the touch screen. You can hear the sounds that you're creating in real time, tap them into *DS-10*'s adjustable sequencer (don't like the house-music speeds you're working in? Simply bring it down to hip-hop tempo), and then edit on the fly. Even nonmusicians can create professional-sounding tunes with some effort.

Of course, the truly devoted can link up multiple *DS-10*s for near-orchestral levels of musical complexity, with each daisy-chained DS handling a specific role. For such a tiny DS card to potentially do so much is nothing short of astounding. You won't sound like the next Oakenfold or Tiësto without a decent amount of practice, but the more time you invest, the more surprised you'll be at exactly what you can accomplish with this innovative, groundbreaking piece of software. Keyboard? DJ tool? Game? It's all of these things.

MILKMAN

A-
EXCELLENT

The Good: A true music synthesizer for a handheld system
The Bad: Like real synthesizers, it's tough to master
You Could Be: A Flock of Seagulls



DS

NINJATOWN

■ Publisher: SouthPeak ■ Developer: Venan/Cashmere
 ■ Players: 1-2 ■ ESRB: Everyone

100% less blood than Ninja Gaiden

➔ **JUSTIN:** Fact: Ninjas are bad mothers—just look at *Ninja Gaiden*'s Ryu Hayabusa, stacked *Soulcalibur* fighter Taki, or even the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. It's common knowledge that ninjas are always on the verge of flipping out and chopping off heads. So it's too bad that *Ninjatown*'s fluffy, friendly aesthetic—the brainchild of ex-EGM staffer Shawn Smith, now firmly ensconced in his cuddly, collectible Shawnimals plushie line—may turn off some gamers from a very solid strategy title.

Ninjatown's standard tower-defense play style (build towers to stop waves of enemies from getting from one side of the stage to the other) intuitively uses both DS screens for monitoring your units, keeping an eye on enemies, and finding your way to the action. But the limited stage area and restrictions on unit placement create the sense that only one or two possible setups—with little room for improvisation—can effectively stymie waves of enemies. Otherwise, the learning curve across the 36 stages is soothingly gradual. While it's nowhere near as challenging as the unforgiving *PixelJunk Monsters*, the steady, measured pace starts out easy and presents a satisfying challenge toward the end.

After clearing each level, you're graded on your performance, which provides some extra incentive to return to previous levels to improve your ranking; your grade decreases as more enemies make it all the way across the playing field. Thankfully, though, you merely need to pass a particular level to progress—you're not forced to achieve a certain grade in order to move the story forward and unlock the next stage. The multiplayer mode adds some cutthroat fun and longevity; you challenge a friend to see who can fight off waves of approaching enemies the fastest. Unfortunately, *Ninjatown* lacks co-op, but with the excellent pick-up-and-play single-player experience, that certainly doesn't feel like an overwhelming loss.

Ninjatown's layered in a coating of sickly sweetness that no amount of scrubbing will ever rub out of your DS slot—but this obviously wasn't a game rushed out just to peddle Shawnimals merchandise. If you can get past the saccharine coating of the *Ninjatown* world, you'll find a surprisingly sweet tower defense-style filling hidden inside of that hard candy shell.

JUSTIN

B+
GOOD

The Good: Intuitive command and deployment options
The Bad: Too cute, even by Teletubbies standards
The Real Ultimate Power: Kick-ass cuddly blob ninjas

DOWNLOAD/WRAP-UP

Last-minute looks at late-breaking games and downloadable content



PS3

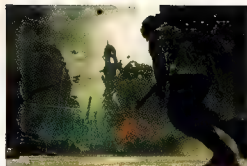
RESISTANCE 2

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ ESRB: Mature

We didn't get final copies of this highly anticipated sequel before going to press, but we played a near-complete version not too long ago and came away impressed. The campaign makes use of creative weapons and engaging choke-point showdowns. Competitive multiplayer errs on the side of a PC-style shooter twitchfest...

and it feels good. And the eight-player co-op offers an addictive balancing act among three classes and randomly generated stages.

Bottom Line: *Resistance 2* looks primed to successfully deliver on its three-tiered assault. Check back next month for our final verdict.



PS3/XB360

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR

■ Publisher: Activision ■ ESRB: Mature

Our favorite thing coming out of the recent *World at War* multiplayer beta? Dogs. Get seven kills without dying, and you can sic a pack of relentless canines so one-minded that, hopefully, even PETA won't shudder when the pups get popped.

Bottom Line: Activision hopes to mimic *COD4*'s astronomical success, and *WAW* feels a lot like that game in terms of its addictive multiplayer leveling-up system but with less-accurate WWII-era weapons. The solid maps—and those pooches—give us hope.



PS3

SOCOM: CONFRONTATION

■ Publisher: Sony CEA ■ ESRB: Mature

The launch of the online-only *Confrontation* has been plagued with server issues, so we're holding off on the review until things settle down enough to give us a chance to clock more playtime. But so far, the fundamentals seem spectacularly strong: more responsive weapons, more realistic damage and bullet penetration, and levels more complex and detailed than any other game in the series.

Bottom Line: When it's working right, *Confrontation* rivals *SOCOM II* as the pinnacle of the series. But as of press time, it's just not working properly.



XB360/PC

LEFT 4 DEAD

■ Publisher: Valve ■ ESRB: Mature

Gunning down dreadfully mannered zombies with your buddies is a sure way to have a great time. On the flipside, playing as the Infected allows you to be as crude and brutal as possible. *Left 4 Dead*'s versus mode tests everyone's ability to survive or destroy, offering a hearty portion of action on both sides. Either way, you'll be inflicting endless waves of gruesome damage.

Bottom Line: It's a shooter with zombies, blood, and repulsive green vomit. Prefer being the aggressor or scoff at danger? This game's for you.



PS3/XB360

MORTAL KOMBAT VS. DC UNIVERSE

■ Publisher: Midway ■ ESRB: Teen

Mixing the beatdown-happy *Mortal Kombat* characters with the superheroes of DC Comics reeks of a desperate gimmick to pull people back into the long-disappointing fighting series. Amazingly, though, *MK vs. DCU* is entertaining, if somewhat shallow.

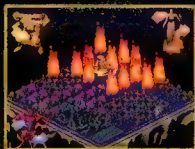
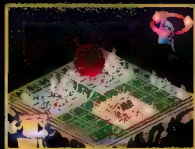
Bottom Line: We need to spend some more time with the game for a final verdict, but for now, we're suggesting that hardcore fighting fans look elsewhere. But for more casual players who just want the game for (Batman versus Scorpion) parties, it looks like it could be a surprise hit.

NINTENDO DS

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Wii

ANIMAL CROSSING: CITY FOLK

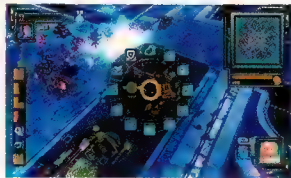
■ Publisher: Nintendo ■ ESRB: Everyone

As the basics go, *City Folk*'s not much different from its predecessors. You still owe a substantial debt to Tom Nook, and your days are largely spent collecting bugs, fruit, shells, and furniture. But *City Folk* adds a few new things: namely, a new city area where you can find characters that previously only



visited towns once in a while, as well as new stores and an auction house.

Bottom Line: *City Folk* evokes a profound sense of déjà vu...but the new city area and Wii/DS interaction capabilities help enhance the community aspects.



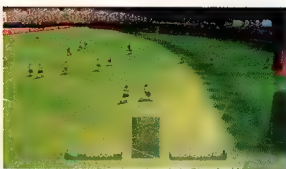
PS3/XB360/PC

COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3

■ Publisher: EA Games ■ ESRB: Teen

Red Alert 3 continues the series' commitment to full-motion video and fast-paced strategic action. Featuring the dramatic stylings of Mr. Sulu, Karl Hungus, and Miss October 1993, *RA3*'s single-player campaigns put you in a world where the Soviets control Europe and the Japanese Empire is a major military power. To its credit, EA didn't simply slap a different plot on the *C&C3* engine—new features include co-op in single-player campaigns and true differences in the way factions play.

Bottom Line: If you're a *C&C* fan or just enjoy strategizing, you'll dig *RA3*.



PS3/XB360

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2009

■ Publisher: Konami ■ ESRB: Everyone

On the field, *Pro Evolution Soccer*'s ever-improving organic gameplay is king—though that margin of victory's thinning. But it's off the pitch where this title flops: *FIFA 09*'s features are thought-out and focused, while *PES 2009*'s additions feel like last-second tape-on jobs—particularly the Become a Legend mode, embarrassingly poor compared to *FIFA*'s Be a Pro. And what's with the lack of Master League progress? That mode's gone shamefully stale.

Bottom Line: *PES* falls by a narrow margin of victory to its glitzier, überlicensed competition. More effort needs to be put into the off-field experience.



Wii

CASTLEVANIA: JUDGMENT

■ Publisher: Konami ■ ESRB: Teen

Castlevania: Judgment culls notable franchise figures in a 3D fighting game, starring Trevor and Simon Belmont, Alucard, and Dracula. With an unwieldy camera, difficult controls, bland visuals, and turgid combat, *Judgment*'s a muted attempt at a weapons-based fighter whose execution needs a lot more polish. Let's not beat around the bush: Don't expect *Judgment* to dethrone *Soulcalibur*—or even come close to challenging it.

Bottom Line: A misstep in 3D fighting, *Castlevania: Judgment*'s hard to look at...and even harder to play. We're skeptical that Konami can pull this off without hurting the Belmont legacy.



PS3/XB360

GUITAR HERO: WORLD TOUR

■ Publisher: Activision ■ ESRB: Teen

With *Rock Revolution* and *Rock Band 2* already released this year, *Guitar Hero* arrives fashionably late to the music party—but the wait's worth it. The cartoony, over-the-top style's toned down a little, but it's still a game with huge-mouthed rock avatars and ridiculously elaborate stages. The biggest addition: a song creator that lets you make playable tracks and share them with your friends online!

Bottom Line: In our limited playtime with *World Tour*, the game shows an amazing level of polish. And the *GH* drum peripheral can't be beat. Can you make room for two plastic drum kits?

THE SALES CHART

Amazon.com's Top 20 for Sept./Oct.

If You Purchased A Defective Nyko Intercooler 360 From March 2006 To August 2007, Please Read This Notice Carefully

You May Be Entitled To An Extended Warranty On Your Nyko Intercooler.

Nyko Technologies, Inc., seller of the Intercooler 360 product for use with the Microsoft Xbox 360, has entered into a proposed settlement with Plaintiff in the lawsuit *Coles v. Nyko Technologies, Inc.*, U.S.D.C., C.D. Cal. Case No. 2:07-cv-02977-FMC-Rx (the "Action"), under which you may be entitled to have the warranty on your Intercooler 360 product extended to three years from your original date of purchase.

What is the Lawsuit About?

Plaintiff alleged that the Intercooler 360 was defective and that Nyko refused to honor warranty claims for defective Intercooler 360s in violation of its warranty obligations and consumer laws, and engaged in unfair competition by misrepresenting the ability of the Intercooler 360 to reduce the Xbox 360's operating temperatures. Nyko denies all of Plaintiff's claims in the Action. However, to avoid the uncertainty and expense of litigation, Nyko and plaintiff have reached a proposed settlement.

What are the Terms of the Settlement?

Nyko has agreed to extend the warranty on version 1 and version 2 of the Intercooler 360 from 90 days to three years, and will provide each original purchaser of a defective version 1 or version 2 Intercooler 360 who makes a warranty claim within the extended warranty period with a new Intercooler 360 or other Nyko product of equal or lesser value.

Who Can Benefit From the Settlement?

If you purchased a defective new Intercooler 360 version 1 or version 2 between March 20, 2006 and August 25, 2007, you could be a member of the settlement class. If the settlement is approved, you may make a warranty claim if you are in this group by requesting shipping authorization from Nyko and sending your defective Intercooler 360 to Nyko, who will pay standard domestic U.S. shipping costs related to the exchange.

What are My Legal Rights?

If you wish to remain a member of the settlement class, you do not need to take any action. If the court approves the settlement, you will not be able to file any legal claims or lawsuits that you have against Nyko relating to the conduct alleged by Plaintiff in the Action. Personal injury claims are not released by this settlement. If you do not wish to remain a member of the settlement class, you must mail a written request to exclude yourself by January 19, 2009, to Dan Sedor, Jeffery Mangels, Butler & Marmaro LLP, 1900 Avenue of the Stars, 7th floor, Los Angeles, California 90067. A final hearing on the proposed settlement will be held on February 2, 2009 at 10:00 a.m. in Courtroom 750 of the Honorable Florence-Marie Cooper at the United States District Court, Central District of California, Western Division, 255 East Temple St., Los Angeles, California. If you are a settlement class member and wish to object to the settlement, you must take the steps detailed in the complete Notice of Proposed Settlement by January 19, 2009. Copies of the Settlement Agreement and other related documentation, including a form for requesting exclusion from the settlement, are available for download at www.nyko.com/settlement, or may be requested from Nyko at the address, telephone number and email below.

This is Only a Summary. For Complete Information and a Copy of the Notice of Proposed Settlement:

**Call: 1-866-333-6741 or
Email: settlement@nyko.com or
Visit: www.nyko.com/settlement
Or Write: Nyko Technologies, Inc.
1990 Westwood Blvd., Penthouse Suite
Los Angeles, California 90025**

#	Name	Platform	EGM Scores		
1	Wii Fit 	Wii	B+	B-	B
	Demand remains high for exercise equipment you can use once... and then discreetly store in your closet.				
2	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	XB360	C	C	B-
3	Mario Kart Wii with Wii Wheel	Wii	B+	C+	C
4	Rock Band 2	XB360	A-	A-	A
5	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	Wii	C- (on 1UP.com)		
6	Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection	Wii	Not Reviewed		
7	Guitar Hero: On Tour 	DS	B-		
	When rocking out at home alone in your underwear just isn't enough.				
8	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	PS3	C	C	B-
9	Active Life: Outdoor Challenge	Wii	Not Reviewed		
10	Lego Batman: The Videogame	Wii	C (on 1UP.com)		
11	Mario Kart DS	DS	A	A-	A
12	Rock Band: Special Edition	Wii	B- (on 1UP.com)		
13	Lego Batman: The Videogame	PS2	C (on 1UP.com)		
14	Mystery Case Files: MillionHeir	DS	C+ (on 1UP.com)		
15	We Ski	Wii	A (on 1UP.com)		
16	Lego Batman: The Videogame	XB360	C (on 1UP.com)		
17	God of War II 	PS2	A	A	A
	We think sales are up because college mythology courses are adding Kratos to the curriculum.				
18	Infinite Undiscovery	XB360	B	B	C+
19	Super Mario 64 DS	DS	B+	B+	A
20	Mario Super Sluggers	Wii	B		

GAME OVER

Press continue for wussy videogame heroes, invaders, rays that are blue, and racism



92 Retro: Taito Invasion



94 Blu-ray Bungalow



98 Top 10: Things we've learned from our Xbox Live headset

DESPITE COMMON SENSE TELLING US OTHERWISE, comics are difficult to adapt into movies and games. Somewhere on the journey from comic book to Nintendo, superheroes pass through some kind of wuss ray. Like the one Superman used in *Superman II*, or the one George Clooney used when he installed nipples on his body armor. Of course, there were reasons for those two: Superman wanted to truly live as a human, and Batman wanted you to milk him. But unlike those cases, developers have no reason to make any superheroes weak.

So this month, we're looking at powers lost in adaptation. First, we'll look at the heroes' abilities in their comic books. Then we'll see how very badly those powers are represented in each game. We'll rate this on a scale of 1 to 10 on the Super Nerf scale, with being a slight difference and 10 being significant. For example, if you make a Hulk game and Hulk loses to a out-of-reach ledge, you get a 10. And if you make a *Blacula* game and Blacula loses to The Man's institutionalized racism, you get a 7. And so on.



Seanbaby may not be a superhero, but he does have "special" abilities: like the one that allows him to recite every line from the movie *Gymkata*.



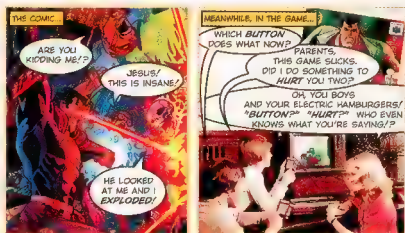
Silver Surfer

Game: *Silver Surfer* (NES) • *Super Nerf*: 10

Let me try to explain the Silver Surfer's powers. First off, if you already saw the film *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer*, I wish your mother knew more about the dangers of kickboxing during pregnancy. You're what's wrong with the world. Back to the nerd crap: Galactus granted Silver Surfer absurd powers so he could scout around the cosmos, naked, for delicious planets for Galactus to eat. Silver Surfer is invincible, can rearrange molecular structures, and can land on the sun. He's as strong as the Hulk, and his hands are energy-beam hands. Obviously, it would take a very creative cast of enemies to make this game challenging. Instead, they just made it so you die when anything touches you, and most of it is fish.

And it's not only a fish to the head that kills you. It's game over if something glances your surfboard, which on many levels stretches across a third of the screen. My average game of Silver Surfer lasts seven seconds, and that's bragging. I wasn't expecting a game where death is impossible, but this is like some astronaut's grandpa got sucked out through a hull breach in surfboard storage. Only it's worse, because I don't even think regular surfers are killed when their board brushes up against fish. If they're going to make my guy this fragile, why not have him suffocate in deep space at the title screen and save the two weeks it took to make this trash?

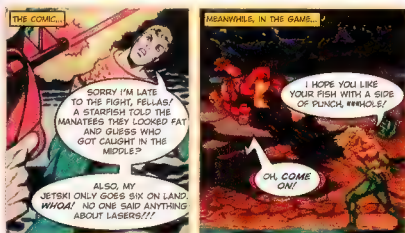
SUPER



Superman

Game: **Superman 64 (N64) • Super Nerf: 9**

Through the course of thousands of comics, cartoons, and movies, Superman has probably done everything. He can freeze things with his breath, see through walls, and crush coal into a diamond. In the unauthorized Turkish *Superman* movie, he can even type with his mind. Though that power was probably written in for the affordability of its special effect rather than its dazzling otherworldliness. The point is, it would take a team of designers years to put all these abilities into one *Superman* videogame. And yet, we'll still never forgive *Superman 64*. It's named that because you spend its first 64 hours jamming a cardboard cutout of Superman through hula hoops. And no one will ever bother to know what happens in the 65th hour. Not even the guys who made it.



Aquaman

Game: **Justice League: Task Force (SNES) • Super Nerf: -85**

When Aquaman punches Superman, two things should happen. First, nothing, and, second, Aquaman goes to the hand doctor. And then the doctor tells him, "What do you even need that hand for, Aquaman? Do dolphins speak sign language now? There are people with real problems in my waiting room." Well, in *Justice League: Task Force*, it's not like that at all. There, representing the hybrid marital art of Breaststroke and Fishcalling, Aquaman actually manages to win fistfights against Superman all the time.



Magneto

Game: **X-Men (Arcade) • Super Nerf: 6**

Magneto controls magnetism, which in the comic-book world can mean many different things from writer to writer. Some writers put him in fights near metal spikes so he can levitate them at the X-Men. Others may have him create an impenetrable magnetic force field and shut down the electromagnetic signals in their brains. But the one thing that remains consistent is that Magneto is supposed to be a brilliant megalomaniac. Well, when you get to his asteroid base in the *X-Men* arcade game, he screams, and I quote, "X-Men! Welcome to die! I am Magneto! Master of magnet!" While I'm on the subject, congratulations to the writing team on their D+ in Conversational Battle Phrases as a Second Language.

My personal favorite is when he takes a moment to analyze your strategy before concluding "X-Chicken." Really, X-Chicken? Did "Poopeclops is a homo!" not make it past standards?



Wolverine

Game: **Wolverine (NES) • Super Nerf: 11**

Wolverine seems easy to put in a game. He doesn't do much more than have claws and heal fast—pretty videogame friendly, if you ask me. Well, in his first appearance on the Nintendo in *X-Men*, he didn't heal, and he kicked. That game had a worse research department than the mobile phone game *Paris Hilton's Diamond Quest*, which has nothing at all to do with trying to apply lipstick while doing her best professional hot-dog-eating impersonations.

When Wolverine got his own game, they took failure to the next level. Not only did he not heal, but having your claws out actually *kills* you. You got, in fact, the opposite of his superpowers. They took a guy who can heal from anything and gave us a game where he dies from everything, including nothing. And it's not like his incredible mutant powers are undocumented. They put out books on what comic-book guys can do all the time. Even when it's pointless, like how DC's "Who's Who" describes Clock King as "An average athlete.... He has no special weapons or powers." If they went by Wolverine's example and made a *Clock King* game, you'd have to start as a bloodstain, and the A button would make you trip. Also, no clocks. ☹

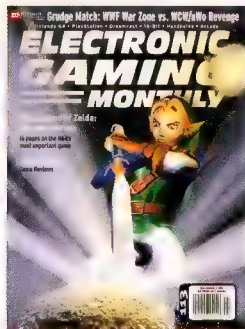
> SEANBABY'S REST OF THE DRAFT

ADAPTATION

Games that made superheroes into superpanies

10 Years Ago...

GAME COVER



On the cover: 48 Hours in Hyrule

A few lucky EGM editors spent two days exploring the world of Hyrule for the first time in 3D. The 16-page blowout on *Ocarina of Time* detailed fantastical visits to the Temple of Time and Death Mountain—and pretty much cemented the hype for what's still one of the best games ever made.



Billiard battle

While *Metal Gear Solid* raked in some high praise this month, the real Reviews excitement was the battle for billiards dominance between *Pool Hustler* and *Backstreet Billiards*. *Pool Hustler* won by a nose thanks to an extra point for visuals.



How-to: Modding your system

We showed you how to risk breaking your expensive game system while voiding the warranty so you could play the cool games the U.S.A. didn't get. It was a small price to pay for the ability to play hot imports like *Sin and Punishment* or *Radiant Silvergun*.



2008 MARKS THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF *SPACE INVADERS*—an impressive landmark for the industry. *Invaders*' iconic, cephalopod-like alien attackers are a cultural mainstay that show up everywhere, from *Futurama* to angry political artwork to the pages of EGM. The arcade classic marked Japan's debut as a creative juggernaut of game design, too.

Invaders' publisher, Taito, has marked the occasion in fine style. The company's ubiquitous Japanese arcades sport a bold new look that emphasizes white-on-maroon *Invader* characters; even in the neon glare of Tokyo, they're an eye-catching sight. The series' slick new portable entry, *Space Invaders Extreme*, has netted universal acclaim, hailing it as a fresh reinvention of an aging franchise. The episodic *Space Invaders Get Even* recently hit WiiWare in Japan, marrying *Extreme*'s stylish look with a cool conceptual twist: This time, players control the alien armada and bomb human cities. Taito's even rereleasing a limited run of classic arcade machines in which the bonus saucer's been replaced with a likeness of retro-game warrior Shinya Arino (of cult Japanese TV show *GameCenter CX* fame).

In short, *Invaders*' 30th anniversary is a far cry from its pitiful celebration five years ago; back then, all we got was a simple repackaging of the arcade games—which, despite its breadth of options, mainly served to demonstrate just how long in the tooth the 1978 masterpiece had grown over the years. If the series' 30th birthday celebration is an extravagant surprise party, its 25th was a night alone with tears, a bottle, and a gun.

It's all a positive turn of events for one of gaming's most influential franchises—most of all because it mirrors its creator's own change in fortunes. Taito's been developing videogames for nearly as long as the medium's been around, but the company faded from relevance more than a decade ago. Gamers ultimately have none other than Square Enix to thank for Taito's reinvigorated fortunes.

"When Square Enix and Taito merged, one of the main objectives for Square Enix Business Manager Shinji Hashimoto was to focus on restoring the Taito brands," says *Exit* Producer Seiji Kawakami. "Up until then, we'd been licensing out a lot of our properties, and as a result, the Taito image wasn't very positive."



Not enough Taito for you? Head to EGM.1UP.com for a guide to the company's 25 most essential creations.



RETURN OF THE INVADERS

How former arcade powerhouse Taito is reinventing itself for the modern gaming market By Jeremy Parish

It's fitting, then, that *Space Invaders Extreme* stands as the herald of Taito's new development philosophy, since the original *Invaders* was the publisher's breakout hit—literally, as *Invaders* combined the structure of Atari's *Breakout* with the space-shooter genre, creating an addictive challenge highlighted by slick, memorable graphics and hypnotic sound. *Invaders* sparked a creative renaissance. It was quickly followed by hits like *Jungle Hunt*, *Qix*, and *Elevator Action*, which built toward Taito's incredible mid-'80s pinnacle.

It wasn't until the traditional arcade faded from prominence during the PlayStation era that Taito's output began to lose steam. "We realized that arcade and console hardware had become more or less on par with one another," says Kawakami. "Home systems were catching up, so it made sense to shift over to those."

The company didn't entirely abandon the arcades; its Japanese game centers remain profitable even now while competitors like Sega hemorrhage money. "We're one of the largest arcade-game providers in Japan, and our sales [in Japan] are some of the highest in the nation as well," claims Kawakami. But arcades shifted in focus from traditional games to more specialized, pay-for-play forms—redemption machines,



card titles, casino games, and a small selection of networked fighting games; Taito produces a number of them, but these games don't translate well to consoles. "One of the biggest trends in Japan's arcades are card-based games," says Kawakami. "We've put a lot of thought into how to bring that over to the consoles."

Admittedly, change was afoot even before the Square Enix merger; early 2005 saw the release of the spectacular PSP puzzle platformer *Exit*, one of the best original creations Taito had produced in roughly a decade. A year later came *Cooking Mama*, an all-ages DS game that became a surprise international hit. But *Space Invaders*

Extreme encapsulates Square Enix's vision for its subsidiary, a success echoed in the recently released *The Legend of Kage 2* for DS.

While Kawakami won't say which other franchises Taito plans on revitalizing in the near future, he admits that the company's paying careful attention to retro revivals and the performance of Taito's back catalog on Nintendo's Virtual Console.

"We [need] to make sure that the people who played the original game will enjoy the new version even more," he says. "That means bringing new graphics and new technologies to enhance the experience, and that's something we're always doing." 🐱

Space Invaders' 25th anniversary was a night alone with tears, a bottle, and a gun.



> WE LIKE TO WATCH

BLU-RAY BUNGALOW

Cities, kingdoms, and kings By James Mielke

Dark City

Publisher: New Line
Details: As a purveyor of gothic sci-fi flicks with darker-than-*Star Wars* level grist, director Alex Proyas has made a name for himself as a visionary auteur, crafting films like *The Crow*. But thus far, his greatest effort is 1998's *Dark City*. Borrowing the shadowy overtones of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* to conjure up a pre-*Matrix* real/not-real world, Proyas does a fantastic job of creating a believable city that's at once edgy and unnerving. You're always aware that something's not right, but it's not until the film's shocking finale that he fully lifts the veil. *The Matrix* revealed that element relatively early in the film, as it was that dynamic that set the stage for its two sequels. In *Dark City*, it's the payoff in and of itself. At every turn, protagonist John Murdoch, a man with no memories, finds himself on the run from the police, from his wife, and from the pale humanoid known as the Strangers, who transform the city, literally, once an evening in order to determine what gives human beings their souls. It sounds pompous, but it's so inventive that the minutes fly by. A stellar cast (barring a sniveling, pre-24 Kiefer Sutherland) hits all of the right notes in this sci-fi masterpiece. **Director:** Alex Proyas
Rating: A Bonus Material: A



repeated viewings thanks to some trite dialogue and a cast of cookie-cutter villains. But this doesn't stop the first runthrough from being an energetic blast of hard-boiled fun. Directed by *Training Day* scribe David Ayer, *Street Kings* sets anti-hero Tom Luclow (Reeves) up in a domino effect of tense "who's screwing who" scenarios, from the opening, pulse-pounding firefight with some Korean thugs to the film's final blood-soaked showdown. What adds gravity to Luclow's character is that he's a hard-drinking, hard-hitting cop who frequently crosses ethical boundaries, an undercover brother who ignores the rules but always gets the bad guys. He's a cop superstar, but he's also in the crosshairs of an internal-affairs captain. *Street Kings* features enough plot twists, double-crosses, cameo appearances (say hello, Common), and fake Brooklyn accents to keep the tempo brisk. But despite a mostly solid performance by an ever-improving Reeves, the flick falls short of achieving film noir. It's mostly entertaining the first time around, but too many shaky plot devices prevent it from reaching the upper echelon of classic crime dramas.

Director: David Ayer
Rating: B Bonus Material: B



Street Kings

Publisher: Fox
Searchlight Pictures
Details: *Street Kings*, as performed by Hollywood thespian Keanu Reeves, crumbles under the weight of

The Forbidden Kingdom

Publisher: Lionsgate
Details: *The Forbidden Kingdom* somehow rises above the potential disaster that miscast director Rob Minkoff (*The Lion King*, *Stuart Little*) might have wrought and emerges as a mildly entertaining kung fu farce. Attribute the credit to the world's most bankable kung fu actors, Jackie Chan and Jet Li. Seeing Li jump around the screen is a delight, and the ageless Chan's a wonder to behold as he revisits the famous "drunken master" persona that first brought him Hong Kong fame. The electricity of this duo, alongside the brilliant cinematography of Peter Pau (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*) and the combat choreography of Yuen Woo-Ping (*Iron Monkey, Kill Bill*), makes for an audiovisual showcase. With some clunky elements—like the ham-fisted transformation of a wallflower to an overnight martial-arts sensation—*Forbidden Kingdom* was never destined for greatness, but thanks to the irrepressible charisma of Chan and Li, it's much more watchable than expected.

Director: Rob Minkoff
Rating: C+ Bonus Material: B+



■ "Kid, you are this close to completely f***ing this movie up. You need to shut it."

TO SING YOUR SONG
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LIPS!



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10 THINGS WE'VE LEARNED FROM OUR XBOX LIVE HEADSET

Online culture at its finest By Scott Sharkey

Your Mother......has a long, storied, colorful, checkered past. She's corpulent and has performed innumerable sexual favors for little compensation. In the case of your opponents, she's done so for no reason other than the joy of bearing their children. Which leads to No. 9, except in the case of No. 4.

Your Daddy......was born many years before you. Anyone you encounter on Xbox Live may well be in possession of a time machine, and his shrill, preadolescent insults should be received with appropriate respect. Filial piety demands that you let him take your head off with a needlegun.



The Flag......should not be camped. Doing so is unsportsmanlike and only enrages those who are honorably attempting to capture it. One should always behave as though one's own flag is the freshly opened Ark of the Covenant and must never make the mistake of gazing upon it or its surroundings. Upon learning of the capture of one's flag, one must count 10 Mississippi before giving chase.

South Central......is in Arkansas, judging from the peculiar combinations of slang and accent you'll probably encounter. The district is known for geographic fickleness, though, and may occasionally surface anywhere from the fabled Canadas to the flowering kingdoms of the Orient.



Babies......do not require maintenance. They may scream ceaselessly in the background of your conversations with Arkansas gangstas, but given the inexhaustible multitude of children who've plagued you—and will continue to do so over the years—it's apparent that their feeding and other upkeep is entirely optional.

Robots......are the future, and their distorted voices may be incomprehensible to you, but you must allow them to shoot you in your imaginary videogame brain. All the while thanking your weak, human gods that your future masters presently occupy themselves playing *Halo* rather than crushing the multitudes of simpering fleshlings beneath their steely tread.

Girls......may be vocally indistinguishable from 12-year-old boys. Mistaking the former for the latter and accosting them verbally will make you feel bad about yourself. At least, until you realize that the possession of ovaries does not make anyone any less of an idiot.

Chocolate Milk......is a delicious nectar, and you should never cease your pursuit of it. Your obese, promiscuous mother will provide it on demand—you have only to shriek to her of your need for it.

Vents......exist to provide opportunity for your teammates to blockade you within while they giggle at your predicament. Allow them to do so until you descend into pure animal rage. It is right to indulge them in this, for they are your friends and allies.

Homosexuality......is within all of us. Our screaming, 10-year-old daddy said so. Its presence is made more apparent by our inability to recognize the truths presented in the above list—and complemented by its occasional companions: femininity and low IQs. Take these lessons to heart, for they will completely and utterly fail to make you a better person. ☹

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TOMB RAIDER

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