

EGM
RETURNS!
SPECIAL
COLLECTOR'S
ISSUE!

THE DLC DECEPTION:
BE AFRAID,
BE VERY AFRAID.

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ALAN WAKE, MAFIA 2,
HUNTED & MORE

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MAGAZINE MONTHLY

ISSUE 238.0

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-Remedy Managing Director
Matias Myllyrinne



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David Jaffe

“Fk these rules,
I’m gonna do it my way.”**

God of War/Twisted Metal Creator David Jaffe

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STEVE HARRIS

The Only Constant Is Change

I was a little more than a year ago that an unsolicited email popped into my computer containing an unexpected proposition: Did I have an interest in reacquiring the publishing rights to Electronic Gaming Monthly?

That message would reshape the next year of my life. For those who don't know the finer intricacies of EGM's history (which, for those who care, is laid out in a piece that begins on page 24 of this issue), I was the publisher of EGM prior to its sale to Ziff Davis Media in 1996. I operated a company called Sendai, that produced EGM and many "sister" magazines over the years like, Super NES Buyers Guide, Mega Play and Computer Game Review.

I was also EGM's first Editor-In-Chief, shepherding (with the assistance of many talented writers and gamers) many of the familiar sections and editorial elements that survived right up and until the magazine was shuttered, during the first week of 2009.

So, as you might expect, this opportunity held a different meaning for me than it might for someone simply looking to trade on the name of a once proud publishing franchise.

Before acting on the offer, however, I did my research. I met with many people—including former editors and those who had helmed the magazine or contributed in senior positions prior to the ZD/UGO purge—to get a sense of whether or not a market even existed for EGM. I heard many different opinions, but one in particular stuck with me. James Mielke, who had edited the magazine up until it suspended publication after the January, 2009 issue, expressed his belief that EGM was still a valuable brand—and ripe for a relaunch. It was that conversation, more than any other, that convinced me that resurrecting EGM was a risk worth taking.

Now, that's not to say that there weren't detractors (there were). Many told me that bringing a magazine back to life in the same format as before was contrarian, a fool's errand. I agree with those people wholeheartedly.

Because what few knew, when the announcement of EGM's return was made on the eve of the 2009 E3, was that it would be something different than before. Something that takes advantage of new technologies and acknowledges

the world in which we now find ourselves.

The industry insiders who warned me that getting into print, at precisely the time when most were scrambling to get out, would have been correct in their conclusions if my idea was to bring EGM back in the same form. Especially with the same business model that has proven to be so difficult for other publishers in the magazine space over the past few years.

There is still a market for print. But I'm also not trying to convert anyone who prefers to find content that is indexed on a website or presented in a digital format, on the iPad or a computer. You can make money in print provided you don't make the mistake of giving your product away (or, worse yet,

newsstand) you can enhance your digital experience by inputting the special iPASS code (emailed directly to subscribers or found on the bind-in card located in the middle of the magazine if you bought a single issue). This service brings you more content, more video and more special features that readers of the basic version of EGMi won't be able to access.

Of course, the best publishing brand in the world—even with the fanciest technology—is worthless without editors and writers who can give it a true voice. In that regard we have assembled a group of veteran gaming journalists that includes EGM alumni like Dan "Shoe" Hsu and Demien Linn, Michael Donahoe, Ryan O'Donnell and Matt Chandronait, as well as new faces like Brady Fiechter

Many told me that bringing a magazine back to life in the same format as before was contrarian, a fool's errand. I agree with those people wholeheartedly.

paying for people to read it—standard operating procedure for years in the magazine business) in exchange for heady circulation numbers that don't ultimately benefit the magazine or the advertisers that support it.

We're taking a different approach, by producing a high-quality product for those that enjoy the experience of turning a paper page. And we're focusing on what print does best by playing to the strengths of the medium.

Our plan also integrates digital and print in a brand new way, using technology that allows us to present content on computers and tablets that is not just linear, but also has depth that you can control, to dig into the areas of a story that interest you most. Our digital companion, EGMi: The Digital Magazine, uses new technology that literally brings pages to life and allows us to present gaming information in brand new ways.

Another way we're integrating EGM in print and EGMi digitally is via a new feature called the iPASS. With every copy of the print magazine (either as a subscriber or when you purchase a copy on the

(formerly EIC of Play magazine), Mark Bozon (former editor at IGN), John Keefe (formerly EIC of Crispy Gamer), Arnold Kim and Eli Hodapp (operators of the popular TouchArcade.com), and many other names you'll recognize and respect. I plan to continue the same editorial philosophy that has served every one of the 25+ magazines I've launched in the past well: Know your audience and write for them. Now, as was the case in past iterations of EGM, you the reader are the audience we will cater to without exception. If we succeed in that regard everything else will work out fine.

Finally, before I let you crack open the first issue of EGM you've seen in awhile, I'd like to extend a very special "thank you" to everyone who has offered encouragement, and sent letters of support. I really appreciate all of the kind words that have poured in from the thousands who have followed my Twitter and Facebook announcements over the past months. Your continued interest and enthusiasm are very much appreciated.

Enough of my rambling on. I hope you enjoy the new EGM. Dig in!

FROM THE PUBLISHER



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BRADY BICHTER

Journeyman

FROM THE EDITOR

It seems only fitting that *Street Fighter IV* producer Yoshinori Ono's latest chapter in this seminal fighting game series paints the cover of our relaunch issue.

Electronic Gaming Monthly's been on quite the journey these past 20 years, not unlike the game biz itself.

I was gearing up for my last year of junior high when EGM launched in the summer of 1989. Videogame magazines at the time were... I don't even really remember what they were, other than nothing much what I wanted out of a magazine dedicated to covering my growing interest in all things Sega and Nintendo. But then along came this awkward, earnest, awesome love letter to the fledgling games industry, giving it the new and exciting voice it deserved.

A few years later life took a strange and unexpected turn, forcing me to sell off every last game in my collection. (Curse you McVan's Video Game Trader!) As issues of EGM continued to roll in, I remember casually flipping through a holiday issue and came across 1992's game of the year, *Street Fighter II*. Something about the images of Capcom's infectiously colorful fighting game prompted me to take whatever scarce money I had, speed to Kay-Bee Toys, and purchase a Super NES and a copy of the game that would bring my withered obsession roaring back to life.

The pages of life keep turning, and here we are at the rebirth of Electronic Gaming Monthly, with a massive *Street Fighter* cover feature standing at the heart of the issue.

Street Fighter debuted just two years before EGM, and they have quite a storied history together. Their influences have touched a long line of gamers and game makers alike, so it seems only fitting that *Street Fighter IV* producer Yoshinori Ono's latest in this seminal fighting game series paints the cover of EGM 238.

This feature is an example of the kind of coverage you'll find in the new EGM. Introspective, retrospective, and definitive features on games and the people who make them are at the core of what we hope to accomplish within these pages.

You'll find evidence of this approach on page 64. There you'll read the first in our series of interviews with the people behind the biggest games, beginning this month with a profile of David Jaffe, the guy who created *God of War* and *Twisted Metal*. He

talks about his new game, past mistakes, and how he got his first industry job thanks, in part, to reading an issue of EGM.

Every month we'll bring you a similar interview that looks beyond the basic details of life on the job and deeper into what makes a particular game maker tick. Of course we're also sticking to all the stuff that you've come to love about EGM over the years. Everything from the Review Crew to Next Wave to Seanbaby's The Rest of the Crap, which wraps up the issue on page 97.

You'll also see some new and expanded sections that reflect the changing nature of the games industry and how we think it should be covered. More commentary and opinion, more features and interviews about the games and game creators who breathe life into your favorite titles.

The stories in this special issue reflect the spirit of big comebacks. Like the 2D *Revival* feature, beginning on page 56.

Dwelling in the past and enjoying nostalgia is always fun, but looking forward is what our industry is all about. The way we're presenting coverage is all about letting the games show themselves off while offering up the kinds of insight and opinion that you've come to expect from EGM. Among the titles we're profiling in this issue include *Alan Wake*, which you can read about on page 72, as well as new information on a slew of others. Our plans are to always highlight the big games you're interested in, as well as smaller titles deserving of attention. As our editorial calendar catches up with these game releases you can be assured that we'll have detailed coverage on the games that matter most to you.

The new EGM steps into this climate of aggressive change, where old media archetypes are disintegrating all around us, giving way to awesome new prospects like the iPad. As a gamer who is intrinsically drawn to evolving technology, it's exciting to say the least. There's a wider variety of people playing a wider variety of games than ever before, and making a little sense of it all is where we come in. The issue you hold in your hands is the warmup, but know that as we cement our return it's only going to get better. ☑

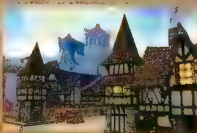


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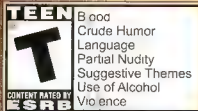
CHAPTER III

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Questions,
answers,
and wanton
debauchery

Playing Games With DLC

[REBATED] LETTER OF THE MONTH:

Delayed Gratification

Do game publishers assume gamers have wallets filled to the brim with disposable income? Apparently so, if the recent rash of releasing downloadable content merely one week after a game release is any indication. For example, was there any reason the DLC for [games like *Super Street Fighter IV*] should not have been included in the actual game itself? Yes, it was because Capcom knew gamers would shell out extra cash for it.

Sadly, it seems to me that the only way developers will stop doing this to gamers is if gamers stop letting them. Gamers must stop gobbling up the DLC released immediately after a game. Because videogames exist for the sole purpose of making money for videogame companies (what else?), the only thing that really talks to developers and publishers is the almighty dollar. Oh, sure—they say they take gamers' suggestions into consideration for future development. And sometimes, they really do consider them. But if they really were interested in what gamers want more than they were interested in profits, they would stop this nonsense with DLC that should have been in the game.

—Matthew Millsap

EGM: We wrote a response to this letter, but it'll cost you 80 Microsoft points to read it. For a different take on the issue of DLC turn to page 62.

All Hall EGM...

Hello EGM! I am glad to be talking to you again! This is the first time I have

ever wrote a letter to you, but I have been a longtime follower. I was so happy to see you return, especially with some old faces. When I found out about your demise I was crushed, I did not know what I would do, or what I would read while—ahem—taking care of business. So I (regrettably) subscribed to a competitors magazine and every day while reading it on the throne I felt lost, and confused, knowing it wasn't the same. I even felt like I was cheating on you. But, lo-and-behold, you are back! I subscribed the DAY the subscriptions came up and I can not wait to have the first issue in my hand! (And check out EGM!).

—Daniel Riegal

EGM: Where's Joey Greco when you need him?



Review Crew Rewind

Since you've been gone for awhile I thought I'd ask you for review scores on a game that was released when EGM suspended publication. What are your thoughts about *Wheelman*?

—Jeremy Smith

EGM: Seriously? You get one shot at this and you ask about *Wheelman*?

Dr. Evil Would Be Proud

The Nintendo DS has sold like a billion units worldwide. It's a no brainer that Nintendo will keep making offshoots of the DS, but can they ever go back to a single screened system? If they could, would they? Also, will we ever see the Game Boy brand ever again?

—Andrew Davis

EGM: It's doubtful we'll see another Game Boy anytime soon since the DS is still about 875 million units shy of your billion mark.

You Got Some Explaining To Do

I was once a subscriber to the former EGM. I wasn't a long-time subscriber; about 5 years I'd say. However, I thoroughly enjoyed each issue. But I don't quite understand how it wasn't possible to simply re-subscribe everyone (if they so choose) to the new EGM. Surely the list of subscribers still exists. The fact that we were sent Maxim magazines proves this. Why wasn't this possible? You've stated you weren't able to get the list of subscribers (or something to that effect). Why not?

—Evan

EGM: We'd like to give out free magazines, but that strategy doesn't seem to work so well if you want to stay in business. All kidding aside, Evan, when the rights to EGM were acquired, the subscriber list had already been sold. The list existed, but was no longer available.

The best-selling portable game system in history—but that's still not good enough for some EGM readers.

BACKGROUND NOISE

An unexpected Showtime marathon of the Martin Scorsese mob classic, *Casino*, played during the writing of this section. Hammers to hands, heads in vices and exploding cars. It's a wonder why they never adapted it to gaming. *Fallout: New Vegas* will have to suffice for now.



I used to think I was dangerous with a pen until I saw Pacino in *Casino*.

You Talking To Me?

As a longtime reader of your publication I've got to say that I'm extremely disappointed by the overly negative tone in your review of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Arcade Attack* that appeared in the December, 2009 issue.

You harp on the fact that *TMNT* doesn't take advantage of certain features found on the DS. Well, excuse me—I didn't realize that you HAD to use a stylus in every game for it to be considered worthy of your praise. Does *Street Fighter IV* use a stylus? How about *Halo*, any touchscreen-action there? I don't remember choreographing attacks with a small plastic faux pencil in *Final Fantasy XIII*, do you? I suppose those games suck in your book too.

—Jerry W.

EGM: Sorry to be the one to clue you in on this Jerry, but EGM never produced a December, 2009 issue. I think you've got us confused with someone else?

Talks It Off

Games are certainly not as tame as they used to be. *Grand Theft Auto* has just about everything a Scorsese film does: dirty language with constant F-bombs, unyielding violence, sexual themes, and so on. But what's up with the "partial nudity"? I have yet to see a mainstream game that bares all. Is this the hurdle developers aren't willing to jump? Although *GTA4* has almost-visible sexual acts and nearly nude dancers, the nudity is never in full. Do you think it'll happen eventually? It'd be nice not to have to switch over to Cinemax at midnight while gaming.

—Devyn T.

EGM: Not likely. At the moment, the console manufacturers have final say about what's released for their respective systems, and none of them have any interest in their machines being perceived as a porn haven. And the Cinemax comment? Ew. Please spare us the mental image.

USED GAMES

31.9%

The increase in used game sales between June 2008 and June 2009, according to gamesindustry.biz.

\$2.934

Billion

Total revenues reported by Gamesstop from the sales of used games at their stores.



BY THE NUMBERS

73,000,000

HDTV sales, in dollars, directly attributable to the Xbox 360, according to the Entertainment Software Association (ESA).

92,300

Average annual salary, in dollars, of a direct employee in the computer and video game industry (ESA).

DID YOU KNOW:

Sega was in negotiations with Atari to release their 16-Bit Mega Drive system in the U.S. under the brand name "Tomahawk"? An Atari producer, inspired by *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, suggested the name that Sega would eventually go on to use: Genesis.

ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY



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SAVE POINT:
3 Questions
With EGM
Publisher
Steve Harris...

You founded EGM in the 80s. What's different about (re)launching it this time?

It's actually more similar than different. The industry has changed in many ways, but I still see a lot of the same faces and franchises. It obviously helps that we're starting with a brand and writers that have a legacy with which gamers are familiar.



What's been up since you sold EGM to Ziff?

I continued to launch magazine through 2005. I then started producing and selling feature films and television. The last publishing project I worked on was with KISS bassist Gene Simmons. Called "Gene Simmons' GAME." His idea was to create sort of a Maxim meets gaming with himself as the frontman. But his TV show blew up and his energies went there.



You've been working on movies? Any we've heard of?

We developed a 3-D Amityville film starting soon, a sequel to Neil Marshall's werewolf flick Dog Soldiers, and a paranormal pic set on a submarine, with a director who recently wrapped a movie based on a gaming franchise. It's a fun industry but I'm taking a break to work exclusively on EGM.

Where You Been?

Having been a reader since issue #1, I'm curious, what the hell has Steve Harris been up to since he sold the mag, and what prompted him to buy it back for the relaunch?

—Jimmy Webb

EGM: He bought it back because his lawyers told him that relaunching the magazine without doing so was a good way to get sued.

As for what he's been up to (in areas other than weight), check out the '3 Questions' to your immediate left.

EGMi! Want More

I read the first issue of EGMi and I thought it was pretty good. I like the way it's setup to be similar to a real magazine, but with some animations. I'd like to have a way of downloading so I can archive it for myself. Also, I'd love to see digital versions of past EGM issues going back as far as possible.

—Brian Agatonovic

EGM: We're toying with a way to allow you to download future issues of EGMi. The capability is there, but we want to make sure that certain performance standards aren't lost in the transfer. As far as back issues are concerned, we plan to offer a fully searchable archive of every page of EGM every produced, probably for iPASS users, in the near future. Stay tuned.

That Pesky Extra Chromo

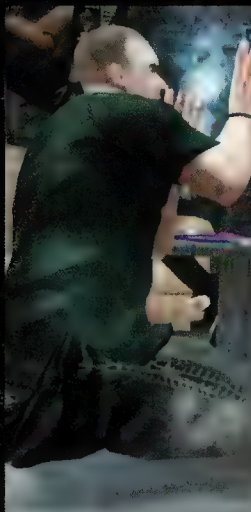
I was disgusted when I read the letter in by Sarah M. ("Gir, disgusted"). Where was the sarcastic comment at the end that I so looked forward to reading? Sarah's statement that "Roughly half of the entire gaming population is female" set you up perfectly. Proclaiming that 50 percent of the gaming community is female is just ridiculous. I went to the midnight release



of Halo 2 and GTA4. The crowd was full of smelly, sweating, heavily breathing males all talking about how when they go home, they're all going to play online until the next morning. I saw only a single girl at both releases, so it's asinine to say that half the population of videogame players is female.

—Aaron Tessler

EGM: Trouble is, the crowd at a midnight launch isn't exactly



representative of the population of gamers as a whole. It's pretty much just the hardest of the hardcore who are willing to make those kinds of time investments. And the seriously hardcore are still, for whatever reason, mostly male. Make sense?

Core Competency

The terms "hardcore game" and "hardcore gamer" are both idiotic. So-called hardcore gamers seem to call themselves such because they have nothing better to do in their spare time than play games. And so-called hardcore games don't exist. If I play Halo or GTA once or twice a week—i.e., casually—then it's a "casual game." If Joe Lunchbox buys Cooking Mama, takes two days off work, and doesn't bathe or talk to real humans in order to play the game for two straight days, then Cooking Mama could be considered a hardcore game.

The term is meaningless. Any game can be as casual or as hardcore as the player makes it. If you play videogames, you're a gamer. End of story. Calling yourself hardcore doesn't make you sound cool; to the rest of us normal people, it makes you sound like you need to leave your mom's basement and do something else with your spare time.

—Brian Di Cesare

EGM: You'd probably feel differently if you were more hardcore.

Mission

Accomplished
I'm excited to see the new EGM in action, but I'm also a little disappointed. You see, it's my life's dream to work for you. To review new games and represent EGM at E3. I know I have what it takes to be a part of your magazine, and would do almost anything to contribute to my favorite gaming publication. Seriously, I'd eat both shoes if I could just see my name in the pages of EGM.

— **Tomas Rodriguez**

EGM: Need salt with those shoelaces, Tomas?

Starting Over

I have a question about the issue numbering. Why did you decide to continue the numbering of the old magazine instead of starting from issue #1?

— **Sam Irizarry**

EGM: We did start over at #1, Sam. We just decided to skip the first 237 issues.

I Like It Hard.

I have a drawer riddled with broken controllers. Twisted, bent, mangled, all in the name of gaming. For me, a game isn't fun unless it's hard, not hard enough to make me turn it off, but hard enough to feel satisfied once it's over. Most games, I've found, are either mind numbingly easy or throttle a kitten hard; all lacking a middle ground of torment and virtue, perfectly intertwined. Yes, I could just

change the difficulty setting, but who is content with steamrolling through something on easy? I know I'm not. Plus, games hardly ever have an achievement/trophy for beating them on the lower difficulties. I feel like games nowadays get caught up in the size of explosions, and lack the attention to playability they so desperately need.

— **Joey PAYSINGER**

EGM: I wouldn't hold my breath waiting for publishers to add 'Mediocre' to the difficulty settings anytime soon.

Normal Person + Anonymity + Audience = ?

Your article ["10 Things We've Learned From Our Xbox Live Headset"] is a perfect illustration of why I do not use a

Andy Baran, 1974-2009

Last July I got the very sad news that Andy Baran, a longtime EGM contributor who was part of the core group responsible for giving the magazine a voice during its earliest days, had passed away after a battle with pancreatic cancer. He was only 35. To say word of his passing was sudden is an understatement. Through time and geography had pulled us apart, I had traded emails with him less than three weeks earlier and, while confronting a difficult prognosis, he remained upbeat when speaking about his time with the magazine. The one request Andy made in that email was that he be mentioned in the pages of EGM one more time. And while this short amount of space could never adequately capture who Andy was or what he represented to so many, it does provide the opportunity to let those who didn't know him understand what a talented individual he was, and how his dedication to life lifted everyone around him. He is sadly missed.

— **Steve Harris**

headset while playing on Xbox Live. In fact, I turn down the TV sound and turn up the music coming from my stereo to drown out the insults, background noise, and stupid comments.

If I want to listen to the other guys I'm playing with, I'll haul my PC to a LAN party. The members of those clubs, for the most part, are more respectful of their fellow members than the dregs of society you sometimes run across on Live. Part of that civility might have to do with actually being in the same room as the person they are considering "dissing;" it's not so tempting to be a major jerk when the people you're considering acting that way toward are right there—and could physically throw you out of the room if you go too far.

— **John Enfield**

EGM: Wait, you mean it's possible to not be a complete douchebag when playing games with other people? Who knew?

Playing Favorites

What is the best issue of EGM ever released?

— **Jan S.**

EGM: It's hard to pin down just one. I'd have to go with 11, 79, 127, and 201, but not necessarily in that order.

It Burred

I'm the editor of the yearbook at my school, and I would like to know how EGM handles writers who like to procrastinate, ignore work, and hide during deadline weeks. What do you do to get the troops motivated?

— **Matthew Moore**

EGM: Threaten to put them on

Letters. ☒

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Critical Mass

Reviews aggregator Metacritic has become the arbiter of "quality" in the games industry. How it impacts the games you play and how publishers are trying to hijack its influence...

By E. Ian Shamoan



The reviews aggregator site Metacritic was launched in 2001. It has steadily grown in popularity over the past nine years and has effectively become the epicenter of game criticism on the Web. It pulls together reviews of games (along with music, movies, TV shows, and DVDs) and designates each and every title a numerical score, whether or not one is provided by the reviewer. In our increasingly time-strapped culture, it has become the quick-and-dirty way of figuring out whether or not something is "worth buying."

And while the site began as an attempt to provide consumers with a snapshot of how a game, movie, or album was tracking critically, it has since become something of a barometer of a product's quality—one considered not only by consumers, but also by publishers, developers, and financial analysts. This is especially true in the games industry, where committing to a product is a significant investment in both time and money (roughly \$60 and 10+ hours for a game, versus, say, \$11 and 2 hours for a movie), and reviews are more often than not presented as a form of "Consumer Reports" for the medium.

Essentially, aggregator sites attempt to turn the rather unscientific process of reviewing a creative work—ultimately one's personal opinion based on his or her own experience with the product—into a scientific formula. If the role of criticism is to give art form, the role of Metacritic is to give it a numerical value.

Nuts and bolts

Metacritic's scores derive from the weighted average of reviews from hundreds of outlets across the media spectrum, hand-picked by its founder, Marc Doyle. For those sources that don't rate on a 100-point scale, he translates a score: An "A" becomes 100%, "3/5 stars" becomes 60%, etc. For those outlets that eschew scores altogether (often the case in movies and music, less common in videogames), Doyle and his team actually assign a score based on what they infer from the review text. Scores are weighted as well: Those from major publications may have a greater effect on the average than smaller ones. Though it has been a source of controversy, Doyle refuses to reveal how this weighting system works: "You'd just get arguments," he says. "We've taken the time to research our stuff and to know what are the most respected publications,

so we want to keep it a bit of a mystery there. It's basically our secret sauce."

Of course, Metacritic didn't invent the notion of "scoring" creative works. Ask any critic worth his or her salt (in any medium) what part of the review process irks them the most, and they'll almost always point to the grade: Trying to sum up one's impressions of a wide-ranging, multi-disciplined experience with a number or letter can be incredibly difficult, often feeling arbitrary at best or undercutting at worst.

What does the score even mean? A game can provide a technically superb but emotionally shallow experience or vice versa. It may be made by a team of four trying to express a complex idea or by a team of 400 trying to make your id say "uncle." It can succeed at being interesting but fail at being fun—or it can be something you enjoyed immensely but have no interest in keeping on your shelf.

Not every videogame is the interactive equivalent of a Van Gogh, certainly, but it still begs the question: Can you imagine looking at a painting—be it realistic, abstract, or surrealist—and then attempting to give it a number score? The more historically significant the art form, it seems, the more pronounced this absurdity becomes. Having said that, Michelangelo's *Pietà* is definitely a 97.

From reading the site and speaking to Doyle, it's clear that Metacritic has an interest in proper criticism. (From the site's "About Us"



Metacritic attempts to create a uniform review standard with mixed results.

page: "Personally, we at Metacritic like to read reviews, which is one of the reasons we include a link to every full review on our site... we want you to read them too!") But look a bit closer and you'll also notice some curious editorial absences from Metacritic, including the reviews of G4/X-Play, which are no longer factored into the site's Metascores. X-Play uses a 1-5 point scale for its reviews, which doesn't translate very well to Metacritic's 100-point scale.

"When, for example, a 3 was becoming a 60 on Metacritic, we realized it wasn't accurately representing our feelings about the game," says Adam Sessler, G4's Editor-in-Chief and co-host of X-Play. "We did reach out to Metacritic to see if they'd follow our own table—where a 3 would translate into something in the 70s, namely the C or 'average' range—but we were met with resistance and told that evaluating our own scoring system was not valid." Sessler had been approached by a very upset "high-level game developer" who informed him that X-Play's translated grade of his game (a 2/5 had become a 40% on Metacritic), in fact, bumped his own game's Metascore out of the range in which ▶

"We realized [Metacritic] wasn't accurately representing our feelings."

"All I want is for Metacritic to preserve the meaning of our score."

LUP Editorial Director Sam Kennedy

his team would receive its bonus payment. The experience brought the issue closer to home.

"Metacritic has fostered this demented logic in the brains of a lot of the readers of gaming websites and magazines—that somehow this is mathematical," says Sessler. "If I could do away with reviews, I would. But I can't, so we minimize them with our 5-point scale. When people complain to us about scores on our website, it's with this presumption that there's an inherent value, that the value is universal. And I think Metacritic furthers that unhealthy way of thinking."

1UP editorial director Sam Kennedy has similar issues with his site's standing on Metacritic, after unsuccessful attempts to convince Doyle to allow him to "more accurately" translate 1UP scores to Metacritic's 100-point scale. "All I want is for Metacritic to preserve the meaning of our score," says Kennedy. "C is average, B is good, A is excellent. I want those translated properly. If you look on the site, though, a C is translated to a 50%. If I'm saying average, I want it to communicate average. And no gamer views 50% as average—nobody is going to buy a 50% game." Kennedy says he fields calls all the time from publishers about 1UP's scores as they appear on Metacritic and believes that, as it currently stands, there's not a publisher in the industry that doesn't have a problem with Metacritic's system. "I've heard complaints from every single one."

Doyle is aware of the nature of this imperfect system and notes the challenges inherent in translating all of the diverse scales to that of Metacritic. But he argues that

consistency essentially levels the playing field. "As long as an individual publication is internally consistent with their own scoring"—he points to the UK's *Edge* magazine as an example, which is known for its consistently tough scale—"then as long as they review a representative number of games, when you have some tough graders and some easy graders, it all comes out in the wash, and the Metascore gives you a good idea of whether one game is better than another game."

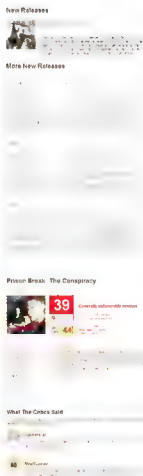
Metacritic is also something of an easy target for publishers looking for good press. Of course, public relations departments have attempted to positively skew reviews of their products since well before videogames even existed; movie studios would commonly invite only "select" critics to pre-release screenings of their films, in the hopes of creating positive buzz. A videogame PR department can, of course, send out reviewable products to whichever outlets it so desires—and in whatever order it chooses. The advent of Metacritic did not invent this practice, but it has certainly made it more effective.

"It is absolutely standard procedure for us PR folks to get our games' Metacritic rankings as high as possible, as early as possible," one PR manager, who wished to remain anonymous, told us. "There's a lot of pressure from up above to get this done, so there's really no way to avoid it." As they did in pre-Metacritic days, companies will stagger their mailings of reviewable code to critics, rather than send the code to every outlet on the same day. Which means that Metacritic scores often start higher

than they ultimately end up: By choosing outlets or individual reviewers that the PR representative deems to be either a fan of the series, developer, or style of game—or worse, outlets that may be in their pockets for all intents and purposes—publishers can significantly boost the ratings of their games in the crucial early stages of release (the "opening weekend," so to speak). "I generally try to get my games in the hands of reviewers I think are going to like it first," another PR manager at a major publisher told us. "And sometimes I know they're going to like it. If an editor s***s on a game in their preview, we won't send them review code."

Perhaps the most widely publicized instance of this sort of PR misdirection came with the release of *Tony Hawk: Ride*. The game's publisher, Activision Blizzard, told editorial outlets that in order to review the game, they'd have to come play under the supervision of both Activision PR and Tony Hawk himself (and alongside the public, which would also be in attendance as well). Nearly all invited outlets declined the offer, deciding instead to wait to buy their own copies of the game and take the time to review it on their own terms.

Some, however, including websites GameZone.com and GamingTrend.com, jumped at the opportunity: Having the first review provides obvious financial incentive, including click-throughs to the site from Metacritic visitors. Both outlets gave the game a 92%, which is where *Ride*'s Metascore stood for





the first crucial days after the game's release. As more reviews trickled in, however, the game's Metascore evened out at a rather icy 46%. "I don't regret any opportunity to get time with a game prior to it being released," says Michael Lafferty, editor-in-chief of GameZone, also adding, "The job of a reviewer is not to follow popular opinion, to follow the herd mentality, to wait until everyone has published an opinion, divine the middle ground and then write something safe. We play games and write what we think."

But could the circumstances under which the reviewers had to play the game have unfairly influenced the scores? "In retrospect, yes, I do regret accepting the offer to review on-site," says Mike Dunn, Gaming Trend's reviewer on *Ride*. "We discussed it internally and our decision was to put the disclaimer describing the circumstances of the review and reserving the right to revisit it later. When I finally got my hands on a personal copy of the game there were several issues that just didn't come forth when we played it that first time, and I was intending to make adjustments to my review, but by then things had kind of blown over and none of us really wanted

to go and stir that pot up again. Now, the review that I wrote? That enthusiasm was genuine—we had a great time playing the game."

Doyle, conversely, believes Metacritic protects the consumer from this sort of foul play. "The great thing about an aggregator is that when it's all said and done, when all the reviews come in, that score ain't gonna lie—at least, that's our take on it," he says. "If [publishers] think they can game the system, more power to them. But hey, I'm in control of the system, and I'm keenly aware of all of these things." According to Doyle, however, no outlets were removed from Metacritic after the *Tony Hawk: Ride* incident.

From speaking to journalists around the industry, it's clear that it has become common practice for PR departments to allow them to break review embargoes if their score falls in a range the publisher deems acceptable. Kennedy recalls a situation regarding the first *Assassin's Creed*: "The PR team had said, 'If you're giving the game above a 90%, feel free to break our embargo.' The entire week before the game came out [the Metacritic score] was at a 98, and the day after it came out and the embargo for everyone else was lifted, the score dropped to an 83." Again, this is not rare: This type of "conditional embargo" has become a standard issue PR tactic.

All of this can have a rather insidious trickle-down effect as well, catalyzed in part by poor journalistic ethics. Many in the industry know that

Critic-Schizm

I Give Aggregate Sites a 20%

By John Keeler

GameRankings and Metacritic were thorns in my side when I was editorial director at GameSpy, particularly when those sites take a 5-star system and rigidly convert it to a percentage ("3 stars is NOT 60%"). Then try having a conversation with the game's publisher who only looks at the score on those sites:

Publisher: "You gave our game a 70!"

Me: "No we didn't. We gave it 3½ stars. That means it is a good game. Did you read the review?"

Publisher: "No, but I saw the score."

Me: "Where did you see it as a 70?"

Publisher: "GameRankings said you gave it a 70." Sigh.

When publishers and even readers put so much emphasis on scores and don't even bother to read

I really didn't give a rat's ass whether aggregate sites included us in their metric...

the words associated with the review, then something is wrong with the system. And I believe that the aggregate sites are at the core of the problem. It's all about the numbers and not about the meaning or the context.

When I started the ill-fated *Crispy Garner*, I wanted to try to get around that. When a reader looks at a review, what do they want to know?

They want to know if they should spend their money on it. If you are creating a site for the reader and want to be useful, then get them talking about the review and not the score. *Crispy's Buy/Try/Fry* system was a simple guideline that was clear on what the site thought of the game. No arguments about a 72 versus a 77 and how the reviewer arbitrarily came to that number.

And I really didn't give a rat's ass whether the aggregate sites included us in their metric.

In the end, it was probably a bit idealistic, it's always about the eyeballs but, while the site generated a fair share of traffic and chatter, we couldn't put enough of a dent in the existing mindset.

I still believe that the scoring system is broken, and top-heavy with scores from 7-9 (70% to 90% for the aggregate impaired) and it is the emphasis on the aggregate sites by fans AND publishers that keep it from being fixed.

Unfortunately it will take more than a few isolated voices to change it.

"If [publishers] think they can game the system then more power to them."

-Metacritic Founder Marc Doyle

videogame critics—particularly those who write for “mainstream” outlets existing predominantly outside of the games industry—often look to Metacritic for their own opinions. Need to write a 250-word review of a game and assign it a number score, but you’re only getting paid \$50 to do it? The choice for some critics between spending the required 20 hours to properly play and evaluate said game or to simply sponge Metacritic for prevailing opinions and a score from the critical consensus often becomes an easy one. “I do it myself all the time, and I would call the practice pervasive in the mainstream media,” says one freelancer journalist who wished to remain anonymous.

This does not necessarily reflect a fault of Metacritic: For its own sanctity, it’s clear that it does what it can to properly vet the outlets it chooses to include on its site, and there is ultimately no way to “prove” that any particular outlet is on the take. But it does point to the holes in what often has the appearance of a scientifically sound, bulletproof system: The distillation of game criticism into aggregated scores means that a snapshot of multiple reviews from multiple outlets can often be misleading—exponentially more so than the odd disreputable review.

Because of Metacritic’s success in counseling consumers’ relationships with their wallets, it has become a major focus of attention for the industry as a whole. Publishers across the board use Metacritic as a significant indicator of the success and/or competence of their development teams, stock

analysts reference Metascores on investor conference calls, and as Sessler learned (and subsequently shared with an audience in a “GDC Rant” at 2009’s Game Developers Conference), a game’s performance on Metacritic can directly affect a developer’s pocket.

And the numbers game, some say, can be a dangerous one. “[Metacritic] can have the added side effect of enticing publishers to produce table wine rather than Château Lafite,” says one high-level publisher. “If a game’s going to be summed up in a single number, rather than fairly critiqued on its various attributes, it’s easier to incorporate ‘crowd pleaser’ elements of a game—such as focusing on the graphics or number of vehicles/weapons, etc.—that take time but less effort, than to work on more esoteric, less easily quantifiable quality issues like narrative, gameplay, and accessibility.” Issues upon which many believe the industry needs to focus its resources, if it wants to bring videogames out of their persistent cultural isolation.

Doyle’s weighting of the outlets also has an effect on a game’s Metascore. “He could be giving, say, 1UP far more significance than Eurogamer,” says another industry insider, who has worked both in marketing and as a member of the press. “And if that were accurate, given Eurogamer’s consistently harsh scoring, that would have a significant effect on the final, mean MC score for a game.” Finally, Metacritic can include multiple versions of the same site. “I’m sure they’d protest otherwise, but part

of the franchising agreement of any site from the parent company is to be roughly in step editorially,” says our insider. “So having the UK, Italian, French, and Dutch version of the same media organ in Metacritic as separate entities inevitably also skews the results.” Complicating things even further, movies and games are rated differently, and Metacritic, as well as its closest competitor, GameRankings, are both owned by CBS Interactive and sit under the same corporate umbrella as GameSpot—whose reviews are regularly included in the weighted aggregate scores.

It’s tough to argue with Metacritic’s convenience, certainly, but the same thing could be said of McDonald’s. Certainly, many games are in fact simply the interactive equivalent of a Happy Meal: licensed, interactive schlock serving little purpose other than to boost a licensor’s bottom line—and treating them as such doesn’t seem inappropriate. But many other games are decidedly *not* that; the real crime is that aggregator sites like Metacritic undermine the art of games and foster an implication that a number can encompass the “quality” of a given title. The notion of deciding whether or not to buy a song or an album based on the aggregated scores from a bunch of critics seems ridiculous, and at least for the crop of titles that aspire to be more than crass commercialism, one can hope that this perception carries over to games. If we ever want our often-pined-for *Citizen Kane*, perhaps a change in our perceptions of the critical process is in order. ☐

Development houses can be tied to an aggregate score, leading some to believe that “crowd pleaser” titles will win out over less quantifiable features.

Gaming Gets Lost in the Clouds

Why Streaming Videogames Will Have a Tough Time Changing the Way We Play

By *Kyle Orland*

The BBC is calling it a "console killer." PC World thinks it could "upend video games as we know it." Forbes magazine predicts it will make "games on DVDs and consoles like the Xbox ... as old hat as a Blockbuster store."

"It" is the concept of streaming video games over the Internet, an idea now being pursued by three different companies that want to revolutionize the way you access and play games.

Some of the details of how these services will work are still shrouded in secrecy, but the general idea behind each is simple: Games will run on powerful remote servers, which will take input from the player and return streaming game audio and video over a high-speed Internet connection. In addition to eliminating the need for expensive, high-powered hardware on the user's end, this model theoretically fixes a lot of problems with current game distribution, including inconvenient brick-and-mortar stores, lengthy downloads and easy piracy. There are concerns about lag and bandwidth requirements, of course, but live demos for each service have shown streaming games to be at least playable, if not yet perfect. And besides, proponents argue, such concerns will likely melt away as bandwidth and processing power increase in the coming years.

The first game service claiming to have licked the issues of latency, server capacity and consistency of delivery is OnLive. Planning to launch on June 17 (after several delays), the hope of streaming gaming is finally on the verge of going from idea to reality. But will these services truly be the "console killers" they've

been described as in the press? Is the current generation of traditional consoles the last Internet-connected gamers will ever need?

"Games in the cloud, if proven that they offer a compelling user experience to a mass audience, have the potential to change the market," said Lazard Capital Markets analyst Colin Sebastian. "But it's also a capital-intensive service and difficult to manage on a large scale, so I don't expect a big direct impact on the console market in the near-term."

One of the main obstacles to challenging consoles in the short term, of course, is the money players have already sunk into their favorite systems. "For Sony and Microsoft, consumers have made investments in those platforms, and are going to favor those platforms this cycle over paying another \$15 a month to access games on another platform," Sebastian said, referring to the monthly fee OnLive plans to charge users before they're allowed to buy full games on the service (OnLive says a free companion service will let players rent games and try demos).

This kind of monthly fee doesn't have to be a bamer to entry; OnLive competitor Gaikai has said they won't charge any regular fee for their streaming games.

Instead Gaikai, which has not



announced a firm launch date as of press time, will reportedly cover its costs through advertisements embedded within games and demos, which could themselves be embedded in websites or even show up on other Internet-enabled devices, like cell phones. "We're not trying to replace the consoles," Gaikai's David Perry told GamesIndustry.biz, adding that he would be happy to stream his service through existing consoles or even Internet-enabled TVs, if possible.

Moving the currently PC-focused streaming services to the living room HDTV in such a manner will be crucial to getting console gamers to try out these new services. OnLive has announced its

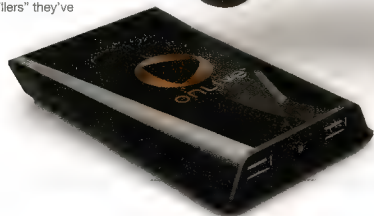
"Streaming is not a business, it's a technology."

*Online video analyst
Dan Rayburn*

intention to provide a MicroConsole that will do just that, but pricing and launch dates will reportedly be announced "later in the year." Game streaming company Otoy has shown demos with the service running through a laptop hooked up to an HDTV, but this solution seems impractical for most living-room users.

Regardless of the screen they're used on, it's clear that these services will live or die not only based on their ability to overcome some monumental technical challenges, but also the support they attract from publishers. Streaming movie services like Netflix have caused a ripple, but not an earthquake, in the movie rental market, said streaming and online video analyst Dan Rayburn, primarily because movie studios have imposed high licensing costs.

"Streaming is not a business, it's a technology," Rayburn said. "It's all that it is. A lot of people confuse that, say we're a streaming company. If that's what you are, you'll go bankrupt. You can't make money from streaming; it's just a platform. You make money from the content."



SLIP-STREAMING:
Is the oft-delayed OnLive finally ready to deliver?

Taking (Motion) Control

Can Microsoft and Sony Convert Skeptical Gamers to Go Along for The Motion Control Ride?

By Kjetil Orland

Flashback to early May 2006. Mario creator and legendary Nintendo designer Shigeru Miyamoto walks on the stage of the packed Kodak Theatre in downtown Los Angeles, wearing a full tuxedo and holding a prototype of the still mysterious (and recently renamed) Wii Remote. With a maximum of fanfare he proceeds to enthusiastically conduct a virtual orchestra of Wis in a rushed version of the familiar *Legend of Zelda* theme. The tempo stutters a bit as Miyamoto's rhythm falters (or perhaps it's the other way around), but the song ends to a round of deafening applause from the audience. "What we're unveiling is the next leap in gaming," Nintendo President Reggie Fils-Aime says minutes later. The age of motion control has arrived.

Fast forward to October 2008. *Wii Music*, the game inspired by that E3 conducting demo, launches to mostly negative reviews. Critics cite the game's limited song selection and largely shallow, directionless gameplay, but also deride the revolutionary new motion controls that were shown off to such strong effect at that E3 press conference just two years before. "Poor controls will have many players quitting the band before its first real gig," wrote GamesRadar. "The controls aren't particularly intuitive, but gimmicky," said IGN. In a financial briefing months later, Nintendo President Satoru Iwata admits that the game "has not achieved its true potential."

The story is illustrative of a common theme in the motion-control era thus far—lofty promises followed by a flood of disappointingly shallow final products. While the Wii—along with pack-in *Wii Sports*—has found purchase with many consumers who hadn't traditionally played videogames, those who grew up playing with standard controllers have generally been less than impressed by the kinds of titles the motion-control revolution has brought about. "The Wii benefited from bringing the novelty of motion control to new audiences, and that allows Wii game designers to get



"Gimmicks work with the Wii the same way they worked with the EyeToy for a time..."

away with a lot," said Concordia University Associate Professor and human-computer interaction researcher Bart Simon. "Gimmicks work with the Wii the same way they worked with the EyeToy for a time... What seems different is the market—there are now more folks that want more games they can play quickly and with friends. Multiplayer mini-games hit that spot."

Enter Microsoft and Sony, whose camera-based Natal and Move controllers are being positioned to spark yet another motion-control revolution upon their release later this year. Both companies argue that their camera-based controllers will fulfill the squandered promise of the Wii by offering more precise, accurate, full-body motion-sensing through 3D space. Demos for the controllers have included the sorts of multiplayer mini-games that have become almost synonymous with the Wii Remote, but also games like *Burnout Paradise* and *SOCOM 4* that have typically been controlled with buttons and joysticks. The promise of this new technology has already generated its fair share of hype: Lionhead's Peter Molyneux has compared the effect of Project Natal to the impact the mouse had on personal computing. Sony





CEO Jack Tretton said his company's PlayStation Move will "create franchises that nobody has ever heard of or envisioned."

But this sort of hype might be fundamentally incompatible with what many gamers expect out of motion controls. "A lot of my research is focused on this and I specifically talk about the disjunction between the expectation set up by the hype and the play experiences players report," Simon said. "Hardcore gamers are savvy folks who tend to find flaws in overall game design pretty fast."

"If Gears 3 or Halo: Reach only work with Natal, a lot of hardcore gamers will buy and use Natal."

Wedbush Morgan analyst
Michael Pachter

Simon isn't the only skeptical observer. Jesper Juul, Game Center Professor at NYU, agrees. "Traditional gamers will probably remain skeptical about motion controls for the time being," said Juul. "The original Wii controller certainly had the problem that it is quite imprecise (apart from the screen pointer)—this is something that gamers pick up quickly. With more precise controllers and some 'gamer' games to go with it, that skepticism may go away. It comes down to someone demonstrating that the motion controls can contribute something to an established genre."

Even if the new camera-based controllers are more precise than the touchy Wii Remote, Simon argues, they can't compete with the more direct, cause-and-effect relationship gamers are used to with traditional controllers. "Since the motion-control resolution will never be one-to-one, it becomes


tricky for the player to understand the relation between what they are doing and what is happening on the screen," he said. "Button presses on traditional controllers are different because you need to train your body to do something specific that the software/console wants you to do rather than the other way around. My suggestion is that greater bodily freedom will actually mean less control, and that should open up new avenues of game design that have yet to be explored."

Indeed, on the Wii, traditional games that require a certain level of precision often include support for the system's Nunchuk analog stick and face buttons, or even support for the old GameCube controller, as a concession to gamers who want more direct control. Even games that do use the system's motion-sensing capabilities often just substitute a quick jerk of the Remote for a button press, rather than requiring full-body movements. "The motion controller invented by Nintendo was a solution in search of a problem," said Wedbush Morgan analyst Michael Pachter. "Most gamers didn't appreciate why they needed to spin Mario in *Super Mario Galaxy* in order to break up rocks, as they had been accustomed to using a combination of buttons to do the same thing in the past."

Sony, at least, seems to recognize this potential reluctance among traditional gamers to accept motion controls for some types of games. "[With] *SOCOM 4*, the approach that we've taken ... is that for those hardcore, skeptical, bitter gamers who say 'ah, I've seen this already,' they can play this game the way they've always played it, on the DualShock," Sony Worldwide Vice President Scott Rohde said in an interview with Kotaku. "But on that same disc

you're going to get a new control scheme. It's going to allow those people to try it and see if they like it better, and I'm convinced that some percentage of those hardcore gamers may actually like this controller better. You're also going to get a group of new people who perhaps were intimidated by the DualShock. So I think we have the best of both worlds there."

The question, then, is whether traditional gamers will be willing to invest in a new, unproven technology when traditional controls are still an option. "I think that hardcore gamers will continue to think that the new motion controls are stupid, and most won't use them unless the game requires it," Pachter said. "That will limit use to mini-games or to controlling the dashboard. I suppose we'll see, as the software that comes out will largely determine acceptance. For example, if *Gears 3* or *Halo: Reach* only work with Natal, a lot of hardcore gamers will buy and use Natal. I doubt that either game will require it, but I'm just saying..."

Cue angry online petitions from hardcore *Halo* fans in 3, 2, 1... 

Sony and Microsoft promise to pend on the success... but as it is a little, too late?



THE LAST WORD ON VIDEO GAMES

The only constant in the videogame industry is that it's always changing. First the games came on cartridges, then on discs, and now they're streaming through the Internet. Sony and Microsoft, known mainly for the Walkman and Word respectively in 1989, have both become billion-dollar gaming kingpins. And it's no longer considered cool to play driving games with a Power Glove.

Twenty years after it launched under the Sendai banner, Electronic Gaming Monthly is one of the few constants the industry can rely on. Few gaming moments—from the rise of Mario and Master Chief to Trip Hawkins trying to convince us that buying a \$699 3DO system was a good idea—have gone unreported within its pages. But the magazine itself has also undergone massive changes over its two decades, going from a garage operation run by

suburban-Chicago fanboys to one of the most prestigious publications in the entire industry. And as the magazine business finds itself slowly, inexorably dragged online, the evolution's happening more quickly than ever before.

How about we take a moment to catch our breath and reflect back on some of the best and worst moments from our first ten years of publication before plunging forward again with the new issue you now hold?

LAUNCH

Steve Harris, EGM founder and charter member of the U.S. National Video Game Team (which held tournaments in arcades nationwide and also included Donkey Kong savant Billy Mitchell), spends time after his day job as a producer at Atari Games to launch Electronic Gaming Monthly nationwide, debuting with a Holiday Buyers' Guide in late 1988. EGM's layout,

comprised mostly of text and small screenshots, is awash in rumors of the Super NES and other upcoming 16-bit consoles, including the never-to-be-released Konix Multisystem.



1989

Six months would pass between the first two issues of EGM, an unfortunate reality for a magazine with the word "Monthly" in the title. Alas, this trend of semi-monthly releases would plague the magazine throughout its' early issues. Nintendo continues to usher in a gaming renaissance as coverage slowly migrates away from the NES and Sega Master System and the term 16-bit enters the publication's lexicon.

Jul '89 EGM's multiscore Review Crew makes its debut, although it's still a little rough at this point—Editor-in-Chief Ed Semrad gives 8-bit role-playing game Hydlide a 6 even though he "can't remember what this game was about."

I can't remember what this game was about. That's about all I can say about Hydlide.

Sept '89 EGM puts a toppers Fabio on the cover of Issue #3. We'd comment more about it, but every joke possible about this cover has already been made so we'll pass up the opportunity to pile on.



1990

It's a tumultuous time for games—the NES is still king, but Sega's Genesis and NEC's TurboGrafx-16 are threatening to break the market wide open. EGM responds by transforming itself into a screenshot-laden mag specializing in previews. Sushi-X also debuts in the Review Crew, dispensing his anti-Gameboy vitriol.



Jan '90 Harris secretly arranges to grab footage of the Batman NES game with the help of a Sunsoft producer. Shutting camera equipment in and out of a darkened hotel room prompts the manager,

fearing the group is filming a porn video, to cut the session short. Sunsoft will subsequently threaten a lawsuit over the cover before ultimately backing down.



Dec '90 Harris features the back-glass image from The Simpsons' pinball machine (the first—and most assuredly the last—instance EGM gives it's cover to a pinball machine) to circumvent a competitor's exclusive on

Acclaim's Simpsons NES game. Why he would go to such lengths remains a mystery. Inside, Quartermann speaks out against Nintendo's Dr. Mario and its casual portrayal of pills, calling it "a terrible case of bad judgment."

1991

The SNES finally gets released in America, but the hottest Japanese games just aren't getting translated into English fast enough! (The idea that a non-Asian company could produce a fun nonsports console game wasn't en vogue for another few years yet.) Responding to demand, Sendai launches spin-off mags Mega Play, Super NES Buyer's Guide, and Electronic Gaming Retail News and comes close to purchasing upstart competitor Game Informer from that magazine's parent company, FuncoLand. EGM was the mag for Japanophiles at this point, its pages filled with coverage of games months before U.S. release and ads for 1-900 game-news hotlines and Japanese importers—some of which had their advertising revoked after ripping off readers. And this was before Street Fighter II even appeared....

Mar '91 EGM publishes its first developer interview—in the way that we understand them nowadays, at least—depicting the staff of Sculptured Software as they discuss forgotten NES game Metal Mech.

Nov '91 The National Enquirer profiles Harris as the videogame geek who became a rich magazine publisher. After reviewing yet another crappy portable platform, Sushi-X cracks and admits that "I don't think I'll ever really like a Game Boy game."

1992

Street Fighter II, Street Fighter II, and more Street Fighter II—that sums up 1992 in EGM land. Capcom's arcade sensation dominates the letters and strategy-guiding sections of every issue, with hopeful readers crying for info on the million-selling Super Nintendo port and then cheats and codes to unlock boss characters and other extras after its release. Street Fighter II and Sega's Sonic the Hedgehog were the two console smashes in an otherwise disappointing year, with the Sega CD add-on proving to be a useless space-age gadget (no Sega CD game averages over 7.0 in the Review Crew in '92) and Q-Man's constant rumormongering over Sony and Nintendo's SNES CD-ROM attachment amounting to jack.

Apr '92 Harris, supported by data showing sales dipping up to 100,000 copies when the cover fails to mention a fighting game, issues a decree to the art designer to highlight one on every issue. It's slightly embarrassing, in retrospect, how many Mortal Kombat covers EGM did. Sorry about that.

Dec '92 Putting 3D holograms on the cover became an extremely short-lived fad among game magazines. EGM obliges with a semiinlaid Road Rash II sticker on the front of its holiday issue.

1993



per issue, becomes thicker than most rural phone books. Having to deal with 40 games a month, the Review Crew expands to more than four people. SF2 strategy guides give way to Mortal Kombat blood codes. Ahh, a simpler time indeed!

Mar '93 "Trickman" Terry, lord of the cheats section, has a rough summer: His car's damaged, his insurance's revoked, and he's evicted from his apartment. "Please, send in more tricks," the editors write. "We are getting very tired of seeing him sleeping in his chair."

Oct '93 The N64's revealed for the first time. In one of many Review Crew controversies, sleeper Genesis hit Zombies Ate My Neighbors outdoes the Game Boy's The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening. EA includes a free pog with every copy of NHL '94.

Everyone's trying to get a piece of the gaming pie, from 3DO to SNK to Commodore, whose CD32 barely hits the marketplace before the company goes bankrupt. EGM, ballooning to over 300 pages



1994

Both EGM and the game industry hit critical mass this year, with over a dozen active platforms to cover—and the December issue broke the 400-page mark. Mortal Kombat II's blood became "sweat" in the SNES port, dominating the minds of gamers even as the U.S. Senate had a cow about Night Trap and people's spines got ripped out. Not into violent FMV games? EGM was loaded with Saturn and "PS-X" information as well as accusations that Nintendo's "Project Reality" was nothing but vaporware.



May '94 Sendai takes EGM bi-weekly with the launch of EGM2, a sister mag specializing in strategy and arcade coverage. It eventually morphs into Expert Gamer before suspending publication in 1998.



Aug '94 Game musician Tommy Tallarico makes a pose for a soundtrack-CD advertisement that he likely still regrets to this day.

10 Things EGM is Older Than

The Nation of Slovenia

PEARL JAM

The Internet

Presidents Named Bush (Either of them)

The idea we needed more Star Wars films



Seinfeld

The Taliban in Afghanistan
Miley Cyrus

VIAGRA



The Game Boy

Killed in Concept

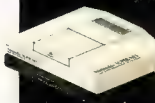
EGM's always been known for blowing the doors open on new hardware long before it's officially announced. We've successfully predicted what the next generation would look like many times, but some of the artist's concepts that we've published, or didn't quite pan out. A few of our concept masterpieces:



Sega CD, 1990

Just as bulky and onerous-looking as the real thing. Well done.

Accuracy: A



Super NES, 1991

Where does the cartridge go? We must've thought there'd be a toaster-style insertion process. Like with the NES.

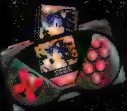
Accuracy: D+



N64 [Project Reality], 1994

From color to shape to number of controller ports, we couldn't possibly be more incorrect. Shame on us.

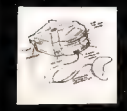
Accuracy: F



Sega Nomad, 1995

This amateur-hour render is loopy, yes, but Sega's portable Genesis doesn't look too far off from this blocky concept.

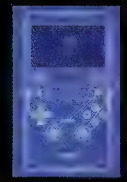
Accuracy: B-



Xbox, 2000

Damn! Except for the protruding, trayless CD drive, we got this one pretty close. And our controller's more compact, too!

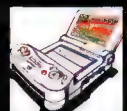
Accuracy: B



PSP, 2003

We channeled the Game Boy Advance SP for this one because that's the only way we figured dual analog sticks would be possible. Sony surprised us by including zero analog sticks. Never mind!

Accuracy: D



Nintendo DS, 2004

If this turned out to be real, Nintendo would've gone bankrupt on the warranty service for all the broken controllers and buttons.

Accuracy: F

1995

The first real "transition" year in EGM's history—and it showed in the magazine, as news of the Saturn's surprise early launch backfired and the PlayStation's subsequent domination loomed larger than any software released. (There was also the Virtual Boy, but nobody was really paying attention.) The editors took advantage of the lull to spruce up the magazine a bit—fanzine-like layouts finally gave way to professional-looking art design, although the extreme fonts (who knew you could go wrong with a typeface called "crackhouse") still look a little too "mid '90s" to our virgin eyes.

Apr '95 EGM starts allowing half-point increments in their review scores, giving readers yet more to complain about online. Rumors abound about Final Fantasy VII's Ultra 64 debut. Sendai launches NUKE.com, a very early game-news website. Later, an internal debate about whether or not to withhold TGS coverage from the website so it can first appear in print offers a hint of greater changes to come.



6.5

Jul '95 The first Electronic Entertainment Expo is held, and a small, surprise shipment of Sega Saturns land in stores. Q-Mann (who's gotten a lot more intelligent over the years) analyzes how much of a total money loss it proves to be for Sega—and a victory for Sony.

1996

The Saturn and PlayStation easily dominate the year's software as the 3DO and Atari Jaguar fall by the wayside—but all EGM talks about in the news section is the newly rechristened Nintendo 64. When's it coming out? How much will it cost? How many times is Nintendo going to delay the damn thing? It was a mixed blessing when it finally hit stores—Super Mario 64 was great, yeah, but after that, the system faced a software drought that should be well familiar to Nintendo console fans by now.

May '96 Steve Harris sells Sendai to Ziff Davis for an undisclosed sum. Ziff eventually closes most of Sendai's non-EGM ventures, including NUKE, so it can concentrate on GameSpot.com (which we owned at the time—it's kinda complicated)

Nov '96 Accolade puts a quote from EGM's preview of Bubsy 3D on the game's front cover that makes it sound like writer Chris Johnston gave it Game of the Year. Sushi-X gives the grinning bobcat a 2.5/10 beatdown a month later.



2.5



1997

With EGM now in Ziff Davis' hands, longtime Editor-in-Chief Ed Semrad leaves his post to take on a correspondent role. He leaves behind an editorial crew that a lot of readers should recognize: John Davison, Dan "Shoe" Hsu, Shawn Smith, Chris Johnston, and Crispin Boyer, all of whom helped contribute to what the mag is today. In the fall, Final Fantasy VIII redefines what we all expect from RPGs, and Tomb Raider creates the greatest demand for a nude code since that sword chick from Golden Axe



Aug '97 EGM touts Star Wars: Masters of Teräs Käsi in the August issue—it's up there with State of Emergency and South Park (N64) as the worst games to ever score a cover story.

Dec '97 After celebrating its 100th issue, EGM spends four pages in December on an exhaustively researched essay devoted to the mystery of Toad's gender. The conclusions drawn from the piece: inconclusive, sadly.



The Very Best...



"Forget everything you know about the term 'interactive movie.' That tired, perennially negative concept has been single-handedly redefined and made respectable by Hideco Kojima's Metal Gear Solid—easily the most cinematic masterpiece of game design on any system ever." —Crispin Boyer, December 1998

"I can't say I'm surprised in the least at how incredible *Zelda: Ocarina of Time* turned out to be. I've always had extremely high expectations for the Zelda games, and I've never been let down once. Once again, Shigeru Miyamoto and the wizards at Nintendo have delivered a truly epic gaming experience that no one should be allowed to miss." —John Ricciardi, February 1999

"Holy f***ing a***. (Sorry...I'm swearing a lot more now because of [Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas]) I can't wrap my head around how much stuff is packed into this one disc. It's grand, it's ambitious, and funny as this may sound, it's legendary." —Dan Hsu, Holiday 2004

"Plenty of other games make you think. But for all of *BioShock*'s technical triumphs, the real reason to love it is that it's one of those rare games that make you feel." —Andrew Pfister, October 2007

1990

Pokémon! Metal Gear Solid! The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time! These three titles, along with Half-Life on the PC, arguably did more to define modern videogames than any other—and they all came out in the fall of 1998, which made Davison and his EGM cronies elated and their families despondent. MGS is the first game in EGM history to earn straight 10s, a feat that seemed impossible to achieve back then, but it's something that happened a bit more regularly after this hurdle was cleared.

Feb '98 EGM spends all spring and summer reporting on the 64DD disc-drive expansion for the Nintendo 64, a peripheral that ultimately comes out only in Japan and dies a quick death. That hype's soon supplanted by word of Sega's Dreamcast, which hits Japan late this year



Frustrated at the quality of videogames that aren't *Zelda* or MGS, Davison writes in his editorial, "If I see another crappy 3D run-around-jumping-and-shooting game, I think I'm going to puke." You don't want to know how many airsickness bags he managed to fill in the ensuing six years.

1999

Sega's Dreamcast comes out nationwide on September 9, 1999, but in many ways, it's doomed before it ever leaps from the starting gate. Sony's PlayStation 2 and Nintendo's Dolphin were already laid out in Quartermann's column by the time Sonic Adventure hit readers' living rooms, and Microsoft's "X-Box" was the subject of a special two-page Q column in December. And we haven't even discussed the Game Boy Advance yet....

Jul '99 EGM modernizes its design for its 10th anniversary, dropping nothing (and only semi-anonymous) contributor Sushi-X from the masthead in the process. Che Chou (now a community manager for Microsoft) has the misfortune of joining EGM right afterward and, because he is Asian, is subsequently accused of being Sushi by the readers for the rest of his magazine career

Nov '99 Hsu and Chan kicks off its nearly nine-year run within EGM's pages. Remarkably, no game that the comic's freelance designer heroes produce ever becomes an EGM Game of the Month. Or even reviewed, for that matter.



...And The Very Worst



"A lot of bad fighting games are out there; I can say without hyperbole that [Mortal Kombat Advance] is a million times worse than all of them put together. MKA is the most incomplete, half-assed piece of [insert any expletive here] I've ever had the misfortune of playing." —Dan Hsu, March 2002

"Here's the situation: You desperately want to see women's breasts. First, you can type the magic word 'breasts' into Google Image Search. Or you can buy an issue of Playboy—for nonclassy ladies. Swank, if you're a life-hating masochist, you can waste \$40 on *The Guy Game*, spend countless hours answering dumb trivia questions—and guessing if vapid skanks can answer dumb trivia questions (usually not)—and then...maybe see breasts." —Shane Bettenhausen, November 2004

"What's next on THQ's DS agenda...Clock? Seriously, Ping Pals attempts to replace Nintendo's own packed-in-for-free PictoChat but fails to offer any incentive for users to choose it over what they already have. An abysmal failure." —Shane Bettenhausen, January 2005

2000



It was the best of times (for Sony, whose PS2 launched in time for the holidays); it was the worst of times (for SNK's American division, which folded after their NeoGeo Pocket Color portable faltered). Sushi-X may have been a defender of all things hardcore, but he definitely got one thing wrong. Nintendo proved The Game Boy was here to stay, selling an incredible 100 million in hardware sales this year.

Feb '00 EGM may have built its reputation over getting the latest arcade info and fighting-game movie lists to readers, but by 2000, even it couldn't polish a turd, publishing features like "Is Pinball Really Dead?" Nearly a decade later, things haven't improved much—unless you're into Skee-Ball and plush cranes.



How did this 1999 pinball machine that was supposedly the greatest ever made end up being the worst?

Is pinball really dead?



Nov '00 EGM publishes a massive buyers' guide for the PlayStation 2 launch even as it gives straight 10s to The Legend of *Zelda*.

Majora's Mask, a rating that causes the mailbox to fill up with irate reader mail for weeks on end.

2010

The next phase in EGM's evolution begins under the direction of its founder. Promising to deliver the respected voice you've come to count on for more than 20 years, in a brand new format that integrates print, digital, and online. Get the inside story on EGM's second decade in the April 26th issue of EGM: The Digital Magazine—available FREE to iPASS users!





PUBLISHER
UBISOFT
DEVELOPER
UBISOFT PARIS
PLATFORM
WII
GAMES
SINGLE PLAYER
ESRB
T - TEEN
RELEASE DATE
3.23.2010

Red Steel Redemption

Ubisoft's Wii-exclusive Shooter is Reborn. Don't Bother Calling it a Sequel...

The original *Red Steel* held infinite potential. Here was a mature third-party game that would launch with the Wii, promising sword fighting wrapped inside an "East meets West" motif. The final game, however, fell far short of the glory it was striving to achieve, bogged down by a mix of slow camera movement, imprecise dueling and sluggish firing that left fans wondering if such an experience could work on Wii.

It took over three years, but that experience has finally arrived.

Red Steel 2 delivers on its title with a story of redemption, casting players in the role of the last Kusagari, a clan of samurai gunslingers that have walked the world for generations. Seemingly out of nowhere these Jedi-like protectors have been all but wiped out, and it's up to you to dole out vengeance. Armed with a legendary blade and cache of guns, you set out to find those responsible for the slayings.

IN THIS ISSUE

BRADY FIECHTER

I Love Lamp

A rabid NFL fan and voracious movie watcher, Brady ruins relationships even when he's not playing games. Liking: *Heavy Rain*. Not Liking: Achievements and spr ng and A1&1—all at once. Future Plans: A microbrewery—only if the games industry fails, of course.

MARC BOZON

I Left GN For This?

Credited on 24 games before moving to journalism in 2005. No one has the heart to tell him it's supposed to work the other way around. Liking: *Monster Hunter Tri*. Not Liking: PR people who hate on n5 scores. Currently Working On: A book of na ku about his Call of Duty k lishots.

DANNY BOUTROS

I Am Not Bob Eubanks

Dan mostly plays fighting games, indie games and games his girlfriend likes to watch him play so he can avoid boring couple stuff. Liking: *Boshock 2*. Not Liking: Anything with pickles. Fun-Fact: Enjoys frankenstening foods like the choco-dacon cheese on chicken Mmm.

CASEY LOE

Decaying Organic Matter

When Casey isn't driving game magazines to ruin, you can hear his thoughts via the or monthly "Warning: A Huge Podcast" on iTunes. Liking: *Heavy Rain*. Not Liking: Spring Seasonal Beers—always the worst beer season. Working On: A machine that lets you hear thoughts on iTunes.

Still Needs Sharpening

Red Steel 2 is a great offering, but there are still some places for improvement: Hiding loading times away in doors worked for Nintendo's *Metroid Prime* series, but like *Corruption*, there are a few pesky places where you wait an extremely long time for the next area to open. Really? The all-powerful Kusagar just cut a dude to pieces, but he can't open a door to a saloon without flashing it a half dozen times? That just doesn't seem right.

Other additions could have also made a world of difference. With no overall map the game's upgrade system feels a bit too guided. Chances are if you've got \$200,000 to spend, you'll cash it all in at the next store you're guided area, rather than backtracking to find the last store you passed by. And this battle mechanic just screams multiplayer.

Red Steel 2 is the rare sequel that takes an established foundation and improves it across the board, even reworking it when necessary. The world of *Red Steel 2* has gotten a complete overhaul with Japanese architecture, music and weaponry blended with an Old West feel. You'll traverse ghost towns and storm blazing fast trains while learning how to brandish your blade. There's even a futuristic thread woven through it all, tossing cyberpunk ninjas and robotics into the mix.

The fighting style is given plenty of space to develop. You can explore and master the shooting and melee combat at any time, giving off a "gun kata" feel to the entire experience. Rather than mimicking countless other western or samurai media, *Red Steel 2* incorporates countless influences, yet it all feels distinctly natural.

It's really all about the gameplay though, and for the most part *Red*

Steel 2 has nailed it. The game requires Wii MotionPlus, so you'll need Nintendo's add-on to even see the title screen. The team's put it to good use though, adding in motion-based safe cracking, switches, and of course sword combat. The swordplay still isn't perfect, at times missing or misinterpreting a swing, but most of the time it's spot-on and feels great. Outside of *Condemned* on the 360 I'd rank *Red Steel 2* as one of the better first-person brawling experience I've had. It just works.

Red Steel 2 enjoys the same level of customization as fellow Wii shooters *Medal of Honor Heroes 2* and *The Conduit*. You can change the bounding box, turn speeds, and even swing power needed to execute weak or strong slashes. I found the game far too archaic on its default settings, but with a little tweaking it controls almost perfectly.

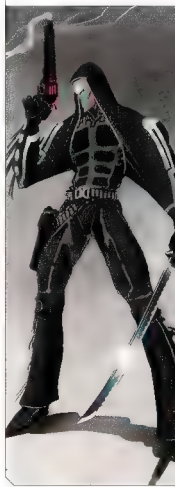
Once the controls are dialed in it's time to buckle up; *Red Steel 2* seems to offer something fresh around every corner. The linear story branches out quickly with a nice mix of side quests to earn extra cash. Busting wanted signs, sabotaging weapon caches, and hacking into communication towers are just a few examples of reward-driven alternate missions, and while you'll see repeats in the mix, these bounty-driven challenges give the game a nice RPG-lite feel.

Nearly every box, barrel, and in-level object is destructible, and most contain piles of loot that can be exchanged for a surprisingly vast amount of upgradable content. Each of the game's four guns can be upgraded a half-dozen times, ending with a weapon-specific skill such as ricocheting pistol rounds or armor-piercing shots. Plates of armor and health upgrades can be added, enemy

masks can be purchased to give you an edge against specific enemy types, and carrying an ace in your hat will revive you should you fall in battle.

Extras aside, it's what is at *Red Steel 2*'s core that makes it one of the best third-party games on the Wii, and a must-play for any hardcore action fan. The sheer amount of moves keeps even the lackluster battles engaging, and the finishers ensure that you feel like a complete badass at the conclusion of every bout. There's even a distinct change in feel when battling multiple enemies versus the more epic one-on-one duels.

The visuals are some of the best on the system. The game runs at a near-locked 60 frames per second with only minor drops, and everything from shooting to swordplay feels natural and exciting from start to finish. *Red Steel* has, quite simply, been redeemed. **B+**



GRADE
8.5

THE GOOD
Beautiful style
and refined
gameplay
THE BAD
Motion activates
THE UGLY
"Hidden" load
times at doors

BRADY FIECHTER

SECOND OPINION

GRADE
7.5

I gave up on the original *Red Steel* midway through, appreciating its intentions but never fully engaged by the control scheme and flat presentation. While I'm still not fully sold on the traditional first-person shooting action in *Red Steel 2*—that goes for any FPS on the platform because I still, despite all the tweaking, don't get with the Wii Remote in certain situations—I really appreciated the balance the melee combat brought to the concept. Wielding a sword is an obvious inclusion for a gameplay device, and here it's plenty satisfying, settling nicely within the themes of the narrative. But the real attraction is the game's fantastic art style. I absolutely love the Old West influences. This may be a minor thing to some, but the push to keep the framerate high really sells the action in *Red Steel 2*. Not bad for a sequel at all...

BYRN WILLIAMS

Is It Atari-Compatible?

Bryn's hot for racers and shooters and isn't offended by certain MMORPG titles either.
Liking *Metra 2033*
Not Liking Intrusive DRM I don't like your server and it doesn't like me
Top Secret. Bryn's a born-again hardware nerd, which means he's perpetual ly broke

JOHN KEEFER

You Can't Handle the Truth

As EGM's resident PC gaming expert Keefe has racked up thousands of hours on RPGs and strategy games
Liking *Dragon Age Origins*
Not Liking: Romance novels, hockey, and romance novels
Call Joey Greco Keefe has occasional cheats on his WoW mistress with Civilization 4 or Mass Effect

SUSHI-X

Don't You Know Who - Am?

EGM's resident ninja returns to the Crew after a ten-year hiatus Living with the monks finally got boring
Liking *Street Fighter IV* on the iPhone? Blasphemy
Not Liking Facebook gaming
Hating People who measure their worth based on the number of pigs they have in *Farmville*

ELI HODAPP

Who Took My Book?

Eli has been obsessed with mob gaming his entire life From the Tiger Electronics handhelds to the iPad and everywhere in between
Likes *Doodle Jump*, even after playing it for a solid year
Dislikes Quicktime video events
Intrigue Rumor: Hodapp won't work on iPhones because he's flash-based

PUBLISHER
CAPCOM
DEVELOPER
CAPCOM
PLATFORM

SUPER Street Fighter IV

By Daniel Boutsos

I think *Street Fighter IV*'s excellence surprised a lot of people, but I wasn't one of them. As a fan who held the classic formula in high regard, I found it relatively easy to pick up. The slowed-down pace and stripped-down move lists encouraged a greater sense of thoughtful and tactical gameplay. The new, highly nuanced focus attacks and a compilation of "best of" features from past *Street Fighter* games made for a superb fighter that partially reinvigorated America's competitive arcade scene.

The old spirit of 1-on-1 arcade fighting competition had returned, back with the series that started it in the first place. And the flawed-but-workable online play was good enough for those who wanted to smash faraway faces from the comfort of their living rooms.

Unexpectedly, another class of player was taken by surprise. Buzzed from the visual previews of the game and its obsessively detailed, beautifully stylized cartoon 3D in a 2D plane, the modern gamer who only



STRIKING DEB



knew of Hadoukens through watching their elder siblings had something new to see in these old-school conventions. A hairy were-beast being "jabbed" out of a high-speed body-launching attack...? By a school girl? There's no resisting.

Enter *Super Street Fighter IV*. One year after its re-entry into old-school 1-on-1 fighting, Capcom has repackaged, polished, tweaked and added to the already-sturdy roster in play. Featuring fan-favorites Cody, Guy and Adon from *Street Fighter Alpha 3*, Makoto, Dudley and Ibuki from *Street Fighter III: Third Strike*, T. Hawk and Dee Jay from *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* and newcomers Hakan and Juri, the roster gains a richness of variety that makes the sensation of playing *Street Fighter IV* feel that much richer and more complete.

Clearly taking notes from fans, one of the most significant changes comes to the online side. With new "Endless Battle" tournaments, "Team Battles," and the well-worn "Ranked Match" options, players now have more socially enjoyable ways to experience the game at home. Most notably, Team Battle allows for two



teams made up of two to four players, which then go head-to-head in lobby tournaments. I can't properly comment on lag and other issues as no journalists were present to share an online battle at time of press. Regardless, the true test occurs once you've got the game in your own hands and the world is online to battle it out.

The replay channel is another fan-friendly improvement. Here, the player can navigate a range of carefully categorized match videos uploaded by players from around the globe. This is an excellent way to turn a voyeuristic eye toward some inspirational, high-level play when YouTube's not handy.

Super Street Fighter IV is an incredibly generous package for \$40. As with all fighting games, its true value lies in the multiplayer aspect, and the sad rule for most fighters is that the best battles can only be fought offline. If you have a group of friends who love to battle locally—and are willing to invest in the appropriate joysticks—then this is an essential purchase. You feel like you're playing *Street Fighter Alpha 2* all over again. There's more characters than I think I can be bothered to master, but that's not a bad thing. They all feel like they're meant to be there, even Makoto, and there's very little if any of that "he's like this guy, mixed with that guy." It's all destined to make for some interesting matchups. There's definitely a richer sense of fun and playfulness in *Super Street Fighter IV*—it really does feel like a labor of love to a greater degree than *Street Fighter 4*. **A**



SCORE **8.0**

THE GOOD

More characters

and variety

THE BAD

Can't block dull shot players online

THE UGLY

Old school SF ain't for everybody

DIRK GEMINHARDT

SECOND OPINION

SCORE **8.0**

When Capcom upgraded *Street Fighter II* to "Super" status:

back in the day they also brought with it major improvements worthy of a new release. But the enhancements made to SSFIV can't be considered as comparable as past iterations.

Why? To start with the unspectacularly staged rival fights (how about more meaningful conversation in the future?), and the return of Seth, also known as the most frustrating SFIV end-boss. In Arcade Mode, are evidence of an unmotivated update. Even the returning car and barrel smash events aren't true highlights because both failed to get a true 2010-style makeover.

If you already own SFIV the minimal upgrades that are present in *Super Street Fighter IV* will probably leave you feeling more critical about the game than someone who doesn't own last year's edition. The roster of new characters is a welcome addition, of course, and *Super Street Fighter IV* is still the best fighting game available at the moment, but my expectations for "super" improvements just weren't met.

Just Cause 2

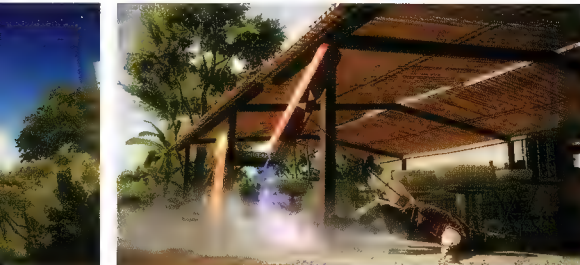
Justice Will Be Served... Again

By Marky Bozon

FRANCHISE
 DEVELOPER
 PLATFORM
 MODE
 GENRE
 RECOMMENDATION



In *Just Cause 2*, players take on the role of Rico Rodriguez—aka Scorpio—a badass agent sent out to peruse the island of Panau in search of a rouge agency officer named Tom Sheldon. Caught in the grips of political turmoil, this ecological marvel becomes a playground for Rodriguez as he attempts to woo rouge factions, uncover a hidden plot, and pull off all sorts of secret agent kick-assery in the process. Everything from over-the-top action sequences to hilariously bad voiceover work plays a part in shaping the world of *Just Cause 2*. Unfortunately, most players familiar with the open world formula



will find the trip to this virtual Eden worthy of more than a stopover.

It becomes instantly apparent where developer Avalanche spent its time almost from the moment the sequel begins. The island of Panau is simply stunning, and while some model work with secondary characters and smaller villages isn't quite up to par, the overall landscape is a feast for the eyes. You have nearly 400 square miles of jungle, desert, and snow-capped mountains to explore and destroy (expand that number if you include the airspace above your head), and a nice blend of land, sea, and air-based vehicles to accommodate your every whim.

In addition to vehicles—which have been improved over the original, but still lack some fine-tuning in the control department—Rico's grappling hook can be combined with *Just Cause's* trademark parachute for some nice emergent gameplay. You can hook onto cars for easy hijacking, slingshot yourself into the sky at any time and use your chute to glide or tether two objects together for whatever mayhem suits your interest. The entire island is open from minute one, and it's up to you to decide how to make use of it.

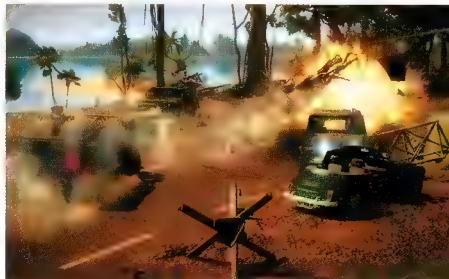
Unfortunately it doesn't take long for these exciting features to become monotonous and mundane. Thrown in-between three warring factions and a corrupt government, you'd assume there'd be no shortage of action waiting to find you. Once the missions begin, however, your primary discovery is just how repetitious the basic gameplay is and how hard it is to stay motivated in what should be more engaging.

If you aren't storming a compound or planting charges within quick-time events, you're most likely out to retrieve a random vehicle, assassinate targets, or escort a few armed buddies while they carry out their objective. There simply aren't enough unique missions here that haven't been seen time and time again in other open-world games. For a game that's all about chaos, the amount of actual destruction is a bit behind the curve.

Just Cause 2 also suffers from an overall lack of polish that further distracts from the core mechanic. Visual pop-in not only cheapens the experience but can actually get in the way. There's also seldom any visual or audio cues when Rico takes damage, so you'll need to keep your eye on the health bar or endure unexpected deaths. *Just Cause 2* is plagued with everything from dead AI that stands idle in the default "T" position to an imbalanced lock-on system when shooting from the hip to a lack of ledge grabbing for easier platforming.

Using the game's black-market system can also be a chore, as prices are too abstract (assault rifle ammo costs more than most vehicles?) and load times get in the way of what should be a seamless experience. Spend a pretty penny on an ATV or spy boat and you'll be lamenting that Rico's parachute is already faster and more versatile (without dropping \$30K). The same holds true for most of the game's other vehicles.

In the end, the level of entertainment you get from the game is directly proportionate to how willing you are to find your



own fun. If you get your kicks from exploring hundreds of locations and base jumping for hours on end then you'll get your money's worth. For everybody else, know there are open world games that do it better than *Just Cause 2*. **C**

Love or hate the missions, there's no denying the fun of Rico's grappling hook.

SCORE 6.5

THE GOOD
Gigantic

open world
playground

THE BAD
Generic,
repetitive

missions.

THE UGLY
Every line of
voiceover

MARC CAMRON

SCORE 8.5

Just Cause 2 offers a huge, diverse landscape filled with people to shoot and stuff to explode. Never did I grow bored figuring out what to do next. I enjoyed the primary focus of causing chaos, the game forcing me to explore and experiment before handing me the next story mission. It gave the game a more organic feel, as if Rico was in Panau to do more than run from point A to point B. There are still a few hit-detection issues, and the wonky camera still hasn't been perfected, occasionally resulting in a "what way is up" feel. But neither of these issues was annoying enough to make me put down my controller. Those who like sandbox games will love the overarching freedom *Just Cause 2* offers, and will spend hours trying to figure out badass stunts to impress their friends. Definitely one of the best open-world games without *Grand Theft* in its title.

Monster Hunter Tri

Wii's Loot-based Epic has Arrived, and it's Massive

By Mark Beach

Monster Hunter Tri is not your average Wii game. In an ancient world anchored by a primitive hunter/gatherer society, you'll take up arms against some of gamedom's fiercest fantasy creatures. Huge hulking beasts lumber through deserts, winged reptiles dominate the sky, while sea monsters lurk hidden beneath the ocean's break. If you want to survive and reap rewards, it's up to you to take down these hulking behemoths one-by-one, and prosper.



off every kill. With a tried-and-true loot-based formula that dates back to the series' PS2 debut, as well as enough online and offline content to last completionists well past the 500-hour mark, the question isn't whether *Monster Hunter Tri* delivers, but rather if you're up to the gigantic undertaking it presents.

During its evolution from PlayStation 2 to PSP, and now onto Wii, the *Monster Hunter* series has remained relatively unchanged, and that's either a good or bad thing depending on how dedicated you are to the franchise's longstanding design. You are dropped into a world where everything—we're talking health boosts, weapons, armor, and even basic food rations—is entirely dependent on your skill and know-how. Unfortunately for newcomers, *Tri* throws you into the mix with very little front-end tutorial, having you explore the introductory quests and cut your teeth on some basic hunting and gathering. Gone is the full-on tutorial/lesson mode, instead tossing waves of information at you within the in-game hunter guide. If you're new to *Monster Hunter* you're going to be confused and, at times, frustrated. Of course the payoff is huge when you tackle a hunt that stumped you for hours on end, but you'll need patience and a thick skin to really thrive in a series like *Monster Hunter*. Nothing is handed to you.

Monster Hunter Tri may have a steep learning curve, but it's also packed with extremely rewarding



content. You can scavenge supplies by hand, mine ore with pick axes, slay beasts for meat and rare item drops, go fishing, combine items to create new materials, and spend hundreds of hours upgrading the same weapon as it evolves down its class-specific tree.

Your home base is a small ocean-side town, and while it isn't more than a couple screens in size the sheer amount of potential is daunting. You can, of course, snag quests from the guild (the primary objective), buy or craft your own weapons and armor, and even gain some extra help in offline quests via an upgradable ally. On the battlefield you won't find enemy health bars or any monster indicators outside of the game's behavioral AI—just another reminder that you're playing a big boy's game. A hunt may seem impossible, but then you'll discover a monster's tell,

an inking you didn't notice before, and the battle will be on. It's this subtle, intricate gameplay mechanic that truly defines *Monster Hunter*.

New to *Tri* is the inclusion of underwater hunts which, combined with plenty of other mission variants, add some new wrinkles even series vets will find fresh. Underwater battling is nearly identical to on-ground combat, but with stunted control. There's no way to raise or lower yourself while keeping an eye on your target, so navigation is clunky and can become a bit awkward. Then again, humans don't belong 100 feet below the surface chasing down sharks with a dagger, so if nothing else it's true-to-life. Even the most seasoned hunters will prefer the ground controls over battling it out in the deep, though.

Persistent variations keep the game fresh despite its daunting

length. Day and night constantly cycle, with clear visibility eventually giving way to a moonlit darkness, streams of meteors raining down in the distance. Some areas, such as the Sandy Plains, even feature environment-specific effects. During the day the world is blazing hot, forcing you to bring along cool drinks and recovery items or stay entirely in the shade to avoid loss of health. During the night the world cools, exhibiting the reverse effect. You may spend dozens of hours taking on hunts just to gain new loot, but *Monster Hunter Tri* is filled with plenty of eye candy along the way.

Although there is much to praise, *Tri* isn't perfect. While the game is visually stunning and hands-down the deepest experience you'll find on Wii, it doesn't really make use of the console's advantages. Simply put, waggle sucks. Even the pointer, which is used at times for in-game monster-tagging (sort of a prehistoric Pokedex, if you will) is ignored for the main menu interface, and the bowgun class requires aiming with an analog stick cursor. This game is better served with a traditional controller and Capcom knows it, having teamed with Nintendo to add the new Classic Controller Pro into the package for only \$10 more. It's a great value, and the best way to play *Tri*.

Another downside for longtime fans is that *Tri* is more a reboot



than a sequel. With a monster list similar in size to the original game, it isn't the largest title in the bunch. Weapons like the dual swords, bow, and hunting horn have also been removed (Capcom? DLC?), though it does feature the new switch axe, which is a beast.

Yes, there are other downsides to this *Monster Hunter* package, but there's simply no way to ignore the game's place at the top of the Wii pile either. The offline mode alone will run most players a minimum 50 hours, and that's just the beginning. After a few dozen single player quests you'll find nearly 100 online exclusive hunts built specifically for co-op. Time sensitive weekly quests will keep even the most dedicated hunters coming back. And, not to worry, both keyboard and Wii Speak support is included for friend-based play.

SCORE **8.5**

THE GOOD

Massive depth spanning single and online modes

THE BAD

Not noob-friendly

THE UGLY

Widescreen leaves black sidebars

If keeping the action local is more your thing you can hook up with a friend in splitscreen mode, and even send your *Tri* data to your Wii-mote's on-board memory and bring it over to another Wii system.

It may have a steep learning curve, but if you're a veteran of the series or willing to make the commitment required to pick up its play mechanic (and the subtle intricacies that go with it), *Monster Hunter Tri* will reward you with one of the deepest console RPG experiences available on any system. **A**

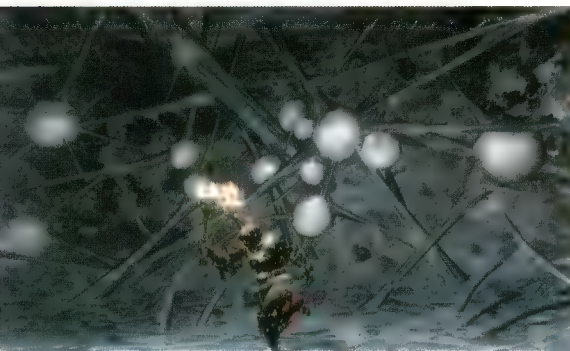
BRADY FIECHTER

SECOND OPINION

SCORE **8.0**

Is there a little *Shadow of the Colossus* in this *Monster Hunter Tri*?

Well, maybe it's a bit of a stretch to compare the two games, but there were times in *Monster Hunter Tri*, invading a giant creature's home turf, when I got flashbacks of what I found compelling in Team ICO's cult classic. There's nothing much elegiac about the monster slaying here; sure you continually scavenge loot in and around the giant, indigenous creatures you dominate, but it's more of a sense of accomplishment after a trying quest than regret for being a brutal killer. At its best, the game grabs you with its incredibly long, dedicated quests that recall the grinding nature of a classically spun RPG. I can see how someone mismatched to its demands may find the gameplay tedious at times, but there's a payoff to utilizing weapon types and gear that rewards diligence.





Cave Story

Pixel's 2D Classic Gets an Exclusive WiiWare Rebirth

The state of WiiWare has been pretty grim as of late. It's not often we get a title that makes a splash. Enter *Cave Story*—a classic indie game that feels like it was pulled directly from the golden era of gaming, and hands-down one of the best reasons to head over to the Wii Shop Channel in a long, long time.

Cave Story first emerged in 2004, when Daisuke "Pixel" Amaya released the original game as a free PC download. It took five years to create, was an instant hit, but only reached a niche audience. That has all changed now. Upstart developer Nicalis has teamed with Pixel, and are now delivering a comprehensive, definitive package, mixing options for not only



original music and art, but upgraded, interchangeable art and soundtrack options. It's the same great indie game, now supercharged for WiiWare.

Pixel's sidescrolling classic is as much an homage to greats like *Metroid* and *Mega Man* as it is its own vision. It's not just an old-school look either: *Cave Story*'s pacing is undeniably retro, constantly giving you a barrage of new weapons, health and missile increases, and plenty of enemies to blast away at. Dying comes frequently, but the game is phenomenally paced with plenty of save spots, ammo caches, and recovery beds. Multiple endings are also included, the best of which will push your 2D prowess to its limits.

As if an already impressive lost indie

game wasn't enough, Nicalis is going one step further with a last minute decision to include all would-be DLC as part of the core price. This turns a no brainer purchase into a must-own package, with a new boss rush mode, time challenge, and an alternate character playthrough with story changes. The only real downside to *Cave Story*'s WiiWare release is that the original game is already offered free of charge online, and this upgraded "special edition" is late to the game. With that being said there's simply no reason any self-proclaimed 2D fanatic should pass this one up, as it's packed to the brim with new content and easily one of the best games on Nintendo's download service

Mark Bozon

PUBLISHER
NICALIS
DEVELOPER
PIXEL
PLATFORM
WII WARE
MODES
SINGLE PLAYER
ESRB
E10+
RELEASE DATE
3/22/2010

SCORE
8.5

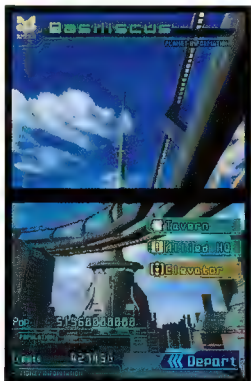
THE GOOD
Classic 2D style and gameplay
THE BAD
Original version is free online
THE UGLY
Your 2D street cred if you pass this up

Infinite Space

Sci fi Challenge...

Infinite Space may be the most offbeat entry in the DS's RPG library. While the vast majority of Japanese role-playing games have been born from the usual genre touchstones of *Dragon Quest* and *Wizardry*, *Infinite Space* finds its inspiration in a long-abandoned genre of exploration/simulation games—think *Wing Commander*, *Privateer* and *Uncharted Waters*. Attractive, anime-style graphics and an engaging space-opera storyline do an excellent job of making a complicated game accessible and engaging.

Instead of a world map, players get a list of planets linked by dotted space routes, and instead of a party, they have a fleet of battleships enhanced by Tetris-piece modules and a hand-selected crew. The customization options are fantastic (if poorly explained), and it's fun to recruit a large crew of characters that have actual



personalities and backstories instead of just numerical stats. But bringing your carefully customized fleet into battle is far less satisfying; the rock-paper-scissors battle system offers some interesting strategic elements, but too few meaningful decisions to justify its sluggish pace. The game's high level of challenge is welcome, but the drawn-out boss fights

are a chore to replay.

Infinite Space also suffers from some crude 3D graphics, an often-clumsy interface, and a soundtrack marred by shrill sound effects. But it's easy to forgive *Infinite Space*'s flaws, as in the DS's vast universe of generic sword-and-sorcery JRPGs, there's simply nothing else like it.

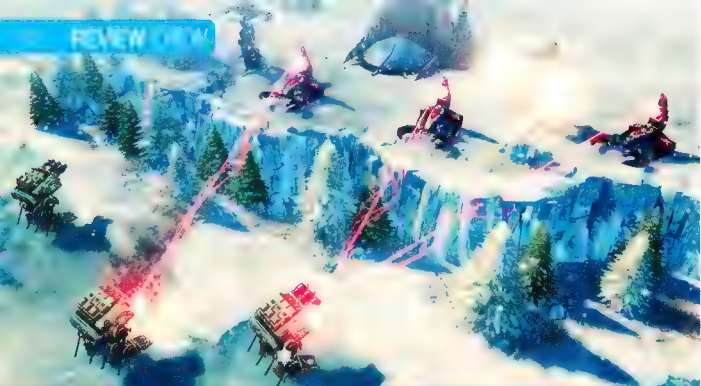
Casey Lee



PUBLISHER
SEGA
DEVELOPER
PLANETAIN GAMES
PLATFORM
DS
MODES
SINGLE PLAYER
MULTI-PLAYER
ESRB
T-TEEN
RELEASE DATE
03/16/2010

SCORE
7.5

THE GOOD
Unique and engaging structure
THE BAD
Sluggish combat
THE UGLY
Eardrum-shattering warning alarm



Command & Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight

Campy Kane Can't Save C&C4

Has there ever been a mainstream RTS series that's as weird, wild and downright strange as *Command & Conquer*? This grande dame of RTS has been with us since the earliest days of the genre, but despite its age C&C's never seemed content with the status quo, much less playing it straight. Unfortunately that tendency toward experimentation's results in a less-than-perfect finale with *Command & Conquer 4: Tiberian Twilight*.

Kane, the Brotherhood of Nod's maniacal and scenery-chewing leader, makes an enigmatic return as the proverbial cat on his ninth life as the factions of Nod and GDI square off once again. The look of the game is familiar and impressive, and the music properly sets the mood whether you're preparing for battle or engaging in it.

The similarities end there. Trying to invigorate the series for one last hurrah, EA Los Angeles tossed out many of the conventions that have kept C&C

Tiberian Twilight tries to take the series to another level, but it just doesn't cut it.

fans enthralled over the years. Base building and resource management are out and micromanagement and command points are in. If you aren't familiar with games of this style it can take some getting used to, as the learning curve makes the AI seem unforgiving on anything but the easiest setting.

At least micromanagement isn't as complicated given the game's smaller armies—you rarely have more than 20 units to control at any one time. The AI is pretty smart about making the units behave properly when your attention is elsewhere, but pathfinding problems emerge when moving large groups that tend to get hung up on smaller units and terrain.

Speaking of big changes, did I mention that C&C4 is a purely online game? Like it or not, you need to be connected at all times, even during single-player. Twice during the missions an Internet hiccup disconnected me. The game warned me that I'd lost my connection but the mission continued as if nothing had happened. After completion I was awarded the expected promotion and achievements but they apparently didn't save, as I was forced to play the mission again.

The game also crashed while starting up, and on another occasion, when I had to alt-tab, gave me the old blue screen of death when I popped back in. Infuriating, to say the least.

C&C4 shows some events from both Nod and GDI perspectives, and Joe

Fewer units make for more focused combat and extra micromanagement during the engagements.

5.0
C&C4

THE GOOD
Co-op play, multiplayer and skirmish modes

THE BAD
Online connection required to play single-player, some technical problems

THE UGLY
A lousy ending to a decent series story line

PUBLISHER
EA GAMES
DEVELOPER
EA GAMES
PLATFORM
PC
MODES
Single-Player, Multi-Player
ESRB
M
RELEASE DATE
Nov. 11, 2010

Kucan continues his masterfully cheesy portrayal of Nod's fanatical leader Kane. But the story builds anticipation for a climax that's as barren as Kane's head. With all the effort placed on the plot, it's sad that, instead of tying the series up neatly, it leaves the door open for another sequel, should EA be in a milking mood.

Despite its many flaws, C&C4 does shine in multiplayer. The addition of co-op to the traditionally single-player missions adds replay value and the ability to test unique roles and strategies. And skirmish mode is still intense, with an unrelenting AI.

Tiberian Twilight tries to take the series to another level but it just doesn't cut it. While the story and multiplayer aspects are entertaining, the online requirement, technical glitches and blasé ending combine to leave a gaping, mammoth-sized hole in a once-quality franchise. It's time to let this grande dame retire in peace. **D**

BRYN WILLIAMS

SECOND OPINION

8.5

Forget about the fact that EA's eff'd with the series' basic mechanics. Stuff the fact that the game's stupid: "must be online to play" DRM exists. Instead, think about the fact that C&C4 is actually a good-looking, competent strategy game. Seemingly like most games these days, the RPG-style progression system adds value. The single-player story is daft, but where C&C4 really wins is in its co-op and multiplayer partitions. Hooking up with a friend and decimating enemy units is a lot of fun, so while purists will balk at this final C&C effort, newcomers and the open-minded should like what it's offering.

EGM's Favorite iPhone Games

By Eli Hodapp TouchArcade.com

Five Games You Don't Want To Miss

ZombieSmash!

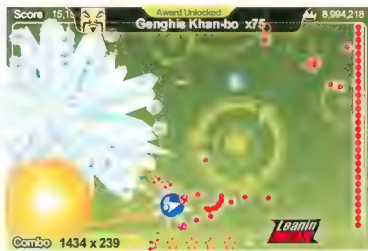
PUBLISHER GAME DOCTORS

This castle-defense style game puts you in charge of protecting a house from an onslaught of zombies. Utilizing something the developers are calling the "Splatter Engine," all of the zombies in *ZombieSmash!* are physics-powered ragdolls that spew tons of blood with each impact. There are over 20 different in-game weapons ranging from grenades to boulders to fend off the zombies. *ZombieSmash!* also forces you to defend both sides of your house, delivering a sense of urgency not found in other castle defense games. Best yet, when you are finishing off the last zombie per wave, the game enters a slow motion zoomed-in kill-cam mode where you can see every gory detail of the final undead's demise.

Game of the Month

Tilt to Live

Since the advent of third-party software on the iPhone there have been games where you control something on screen by tilting your device. *Tilt to Live* somehow manages to be better than all of them. In the game you play as a white arrow avoiding constantly spawning red dots. Those pellets may simply float around but can also merge together to form organized attacks. Survival requires the constant use of a variety of power-ups, including even more powerful weaponry that is slowly unlocked as you earn in-game achievement points. As soon as you touch a red dot the game is over, but death typically follows a series of adrenaline-building narrow escapes before you are completely overwhelmed.



Street Fighter IV

PUBLISHER CAPCOM

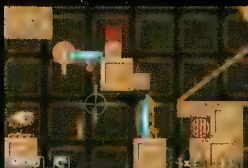
If you're at all interested in fighting games, *Street Fighter IV* is the iPhone game to have. While touch screen controls can't be as precise as playing with a real arcade stick, once you get used to them, you won't believe you're playing this game on a mobile device. Eight classic *Street Fighter* characters are included, with full in-game listing of all of their moves. There's even WiFi multiplayer if you have a friend nearby who also has the game. The graphics and sound are phenomenal, and *Street Fighter IV* even runs great on the entire iPhone and iPod touch product line.



Ragdoll Blaster 2

PUBLISHER BACKFLIP STUDIOS

This sequel to the extremely popular *Ragdoll Blaster* has the same goal as the original: Fire ragdolls out of a cannon to hit a bull's-eye. Of course, it isn't as simple as it sounds. Before you're even finished with the tutorial, you will encounter puzzles that require activating switches, engaging moving obstacles and platforms, as well as many other challenges. You are scored by how few ragdolls you use on each level, but there is no upper limit. So, if you're stuck you can often brute force your way through, though your score will suffer. Having played the first *Ragdoll Blaster* isn't required, but if you like the original, you'll also enjoy the sequel (and vice-versa).



Vector Tanks Extreme

PUBLISHER BLUETIME STUDIOS

Styled after the 1980 arcade classic *Battlezone*, the original *Vector Tanks* was a retro gamer's dream with glowing vector graphics that made the iPhone's screen feel more like an Atari Quadrascan than a 3.5" LCD. *Vector Tanks Extreme* takes this formula and turns up the volume with even faster action, more glorious retro vector graphical flare, and both multiple game modes and difficulty settings. Tons of different weapons and power ups quickly become required to stand a chance against the brutal in-game AI. If you at all consider yourself a retro gamer, *Vector Tanks Extreme* needs to be on your iPhone.



Cubetrix 3D

PUBLISHER MOBILE CO.

With how many color matching puzzle games there are on the App Store, it really takes something special to stand out amongst the sea of similar titles. In *Cubetrix 3D*, instead of swapping pairs of blocks, you control one block that moves around the perimeter of a grid of different colored cubes. When you slide this block into the square, another is pushed out the other side. Rows are cleared by lining up like colors. As you progress, new block types are introduced including bombs, stationary blocks, and numbered blocks. Each level is set against a timer, so it takes some quick thinking and fast action to clear the board before your clock expires.



ENTER NINJA

Street fighter wannabe & crossover star—no other fighter has ever matched the lasting success of Capcom's original arcade fighter. But what's the secret to its enduring ways? We asked a collection of veteran fighters—some here to find out.

By **Mark
Diamond**

CHAMP PION

SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV

PUBLISHER

CAPCOM

DEVELOPER

DIMPS, CAPCOM

PLATFORM

PS3/XBOX 360

GENRE

FIGHTER/ACT

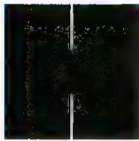
ESRB

T-TEEN

RELEASE DATE

For us, succeeding was not the goal. In my personal opinion, the market came second.

Yoshinori Ono, Producer, SSFIV



ere comes a new challenger! Pfft—yeah, right! Don't believe that iconic on-screen prompt—sure, new fighting game challengers always appear, but none of 'em have what it takes to dethrone the real king of fighters: *Street Fighter*. For almost two decades now, Capcom's prizefighter has dominated outdoor, public butt-kickings with dozens of quarter-munching (and console) iterations. It didn't just win the fight either—it started it. Hell, without the sonic boom success of *Street Fighter II* in the early '90s, we wouldn't have any of SF's biggest competitors: *Fatal Fury*, *World Heroes*, *Fighter's History*, and, well, basically any other fighter that came out in the early '90s.

STREET FIGHTER
LEGACY

ONO INTERVIEW

NEW CHARACTERS

ETERNAL CHAMPIONS

But why exactly did this arcade hit consume quarters like an E-Honda buffet binge? Something obviously clicked with gamers. Which is why it's shocking to think that the series almost retried years ago due to all-too-similar updates and fear of the fundamentals of counting. And its home turf didn't help either—when arcades couldn't continue its fight with home consoles any longer, *SF*'s success needed a new home off the streets: your living room. *Street Fighter III* tried to fight its way in, but couldn't quite bust through the door. That is, until last year's too-long-in-the-making *Street Fighter IV*. With a back, quarter-circle kick of old-school gameplay and a down-forward punch of freshness, Capcom once again proved hand-thrown fireballs will never fizzle. And with *Super Street Fighter IV* heating up both the PS3 and the 360 in a few months, it's obvious the series is still alive and kicking. All thanks to its special attack—nostalgia.

Third time's the harm

Though many fighting game freaks consider *SFIII* to be the best, punch-for-punch entry in the series, it failed to resonate with casual buttkickers. *SSFIV* producer Yoshinori Ono knows this all too well: "Since [Capcom]

needs to make a profit, *SFIII* was maybe a failure," he says. "But there are fans that just love *SFIII* and play only *SFIII*, so I don't think it really failed at all." True, but *SFIII*'s hardcore nature may have

pushed the series too far in the wrong direction. So when Capcom creative head Keiji Inafune finally shined the green light on *SFIV*, Ono had to ironically pull the series back instead of push it forward. "When working on *SFIV*, we had to come back to the most beloved series title, *SFII*, to reestablish the foundation that was neglected in *SFIII*," says Ono. Makes sense—if the gameplay still works, don't reprogram it. But he must have felt the pressure of not only pleasing fans, but also Capcom with a sales success. "For us, succeeding was not the goal," says Ono. Or not. "In my personal opinion, success in the market came second," he explains. "I just simply wanted to revive the excitement that people experienced during *SFII* and possibly establish *SFIV* to be the nuts-and-bolts of next-generation fighting games."

Blasts from the past

Reviving the excitement certainly sounds easy, but if you look at Capcom's failed attempt at a *Bionic Commando* reboot, it's obvious that sometimes nostalgia doesn't always hook back those fond memories. So when you distill the *SFII* magic, what does this punchy elixir taste like? John Tobias, co-creator of *Mortal Kombat*, thinks fun: "I believe *SFII*'s success came from pure fun factor and brilliant game design," he says. "Which arguably is 95% of why anyone plays a game." The other 5%? Easy, it's...actually, he didn't tell us. But our educated guess? Innovation.

Sure, *SFII* didn't invent the fighting game genre—it is a sequel, y'know. But it did do something special. And for some, like *Dead or Alive* creator Tomonobu Itagaki, it even made them feel, well, special: "*SFII* and *Virtua Fighter* were true innovations," he explains. "An innovation of a narcotic kind, that is." Ah-ha! So that's why all arcade games had that



"Winners Don't Use Drugs" start screens. Itagaki does have a point, though—*SFII* did innovate the 2D fighting game genre, just like *Virtua Fighter* did in 3D. Not surprising, both *Soulcalibur IV* director Katsutoshi Sasaki and *Tekken* series project director Katsuhiro Harada agree. "The *SF* franchise pioneered and laid the groundwork for the fighting game genre," says Katsutoshi. "A lot of people have enjoyed the series due to its fun and straightforward gameplay." Harada, however, thinks the innovation comes more in the form of the iconic characters: "Simply put, the characters are charismatic, original, and memorable," he says. "They have unique names and their moves have such visual impact that it leaves an impression."

It's true, really. Everyone knows and remembers Ken and Ryu based off one silly-sounding word: hadoken. And who can forget Zangief's burly build, Dhalsim's stretchable limbs,



DUDLEY



SFII and Virtua Fighter were true innovations... An innovation of a narcotic kind, that is.

Tomonobu Itagaki, Creator, *Dead or Alive*

or Blanka's shocking green skin? Hell, Chun-Li is probably 99.8% responsible for the creation of the Thighmaster. Sure, we all remember how these characters look. Or how they play. But do we really recall their backstories? Unless you relive the key moments of their lives via the now-defunct *SFII*-themed GI Joes, no, you probably don't. Which is somewhat interesting considering *SFII*'s biggest 2D competitor, *MK*, built the success of its series on its mystique-ridden storyline and characters. Oh, uh, and the blood, too. But if we liked a character in *SF*, it wasn't because we were dying to see his or her ending, it was because we (hopefully) didn't suck with them.

Or so says Tobias: "There wasn't a real story associated with the original *SFII*," he explains. "So if a player found himself attached to a particular character it came purely from his ability to play well as that character." We agree. Though, we've always wondered why these world warriors feel the need to kick the crap out of clunkers. Seriously, guys—what did that car ever do to you? Jerks.

Story, while certainly there, seems to have never mattered. "In the world of *SF*, the background story has always been somewhat 'homespun' or not too significant for that matter," says Ono. "And there are many things to pick on (in a joking way perhaps) once you start



looking into details." No, Ono—we're serious about that car discrimination! But maybe not knowing why these fighters are cold, heartless car murderers is what makes *SF* special. "I think by having something too serious or mysterious in *SF*, the

STREET FIGHTER
LEGACY

QND INTERVIEW

NEW CHARACTERS

game would lose its original quality," explains Ota. "So I would want to keep it this way as long as the SF Five. Have your way, Ota."

Copy kate

SFII's innovation and success in gameplay led to two things: 1) Mad success, and 2) Inevitable imitators. In the arcade sense. Every popular game opens a slew of wannabes. But SFII got rocked with a hurricane of cheap knockoffs. Not that any of them came close to matching the popularity of SFII, but that didn't stop Capcom from suing Data East over copyright infringement for the probably-never-heard-of-it arcade dud *Fighter's History*. And lo and behold, not every game tried to pilfer the SF playbook verbatim. Most were just, well, let's say, heavily influenced.

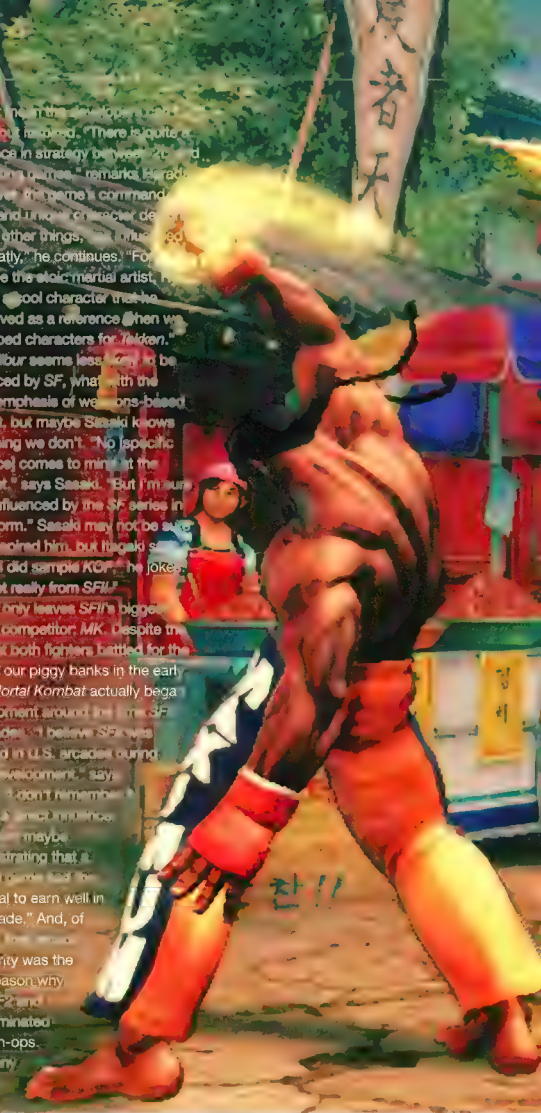
How much so? Well, we did find out that, while preparing for this story, the two developers who declined interviews happened to be the ones who make games that look and play a whole lot like that SF game we keep blabbering about: Arcadesystems' *World* (known best for the *Gully* [Gully series] and *RMK* [Playmore] known, of course, for the *KOF* series). Hmm... *World* was declined? Too busy? Yeah, you're right—probably that.

The other fighting game pros weren't afraid to admit whether or not Capcom's fighters set any marks in their creations. Even though 3D fighters are obviously played differently due to that extra-

dimension, the developers can't be faulted for that. "There is quite a difference in strategy between 2D and 3D fighting games," remarks Kikuchi. "However, the game's command inputs and timing character design, among other things, was [inspired] by me greatly," he continues. "For example the stoic martial artist, he is such a cool character that he has served as a reference when we developed characters for *Mortal Kombat*. *Soulcalibur* seems less likely to be influenced by SF, what with the heavy emphasis of weapons-based combat, but maybe Saesaki knows something we don't." No specific influence comes to mind at the moment, says Saesaki. "But I'm sure I was influenced by the SF series in some form." Saesaki may not be sure what inspired him, but he got some ideas: "I did sample *KOF*," he jokes. "But not really from SFII."

That only leaves SFII's biggest arcade competitor, *MK*. Despite the fact that both fighters battled for the belly of our piggy banks in the early '90s, *Mortal Kombat* actually began development around the time SFII hit arcades. "I believe SFII was released in U.S. arcades during MK's development," says Tobias. "I don't remember having a good opinion on either title, maybe demonstrating that a fighting game had the potential to earn well in the arcade." And, of

course, *Mortal Kombat*'s popularity was the main reason why both SFII and MK dominated the coin-ops. Not many



SFIV was made based on the idea to recall fans' fond memories of SFII.



Classic bonus stages make a return in Super Street Fighter IV.

STREET FIGHTER

LIBRARY

DIS BY FRENCH

NEW CHARACTER

know this, but that fanfare may have been started from a risky decision of allowing the winner of a player-vs.-player match to continue without paying, something the *MK* developers were afraid to implement. At first, at least. "One debate I recall was whether we should incorporate a 'winner stays, loser pays' method," Tobias explains. "Back then, everything was about maximum coin drop—literally, how many coins were dropped into the machine per minute." So, for a game like *SF*, if a dominant player keeps winning, good for them, bad for business. But that obviously wasn't the case. In fact, it made the game even more money. "SFII proved that out for us, and 'winner stays, loser pays' became the standard for fighting games in the arcade," says Tobias. Thus, we learn *SFII*'s unknown secret to success: Getting your ass kicked by some loser with way too much time on their hands and wanting way too much to get revenge. Ah, it all makes sense now.

Kicking the genre up a notch

We can't deny *SFII*'s influence on the fighting game genre. And it's obvious that *SFIV* revived the fandom that got beat down with the death of arcades. But we can admit that *SFIV*'s back-to-basics approach really didn't push the genre forward. Instead, it cessed it, gave it a kiss, and presented it flowers.

Understandable, too, especially when you realize Capcom wanted to invoke nostalgia instead of true fisticuff innovation. "I think the problem is that as players we pick up a controller with certain expectations and publishers and developers are averse to doing anything that would upset those expectations," says Tobias. "There's a reason why every fighting game released today is a sequel,"

he goes on to explain. "These games have almost 20 years worth of iterations behind them. Trying to compete with that in an 18-month development cycle is not easy." Itagaki also agrees it's hard to ignore negativity when thinking about the future: "It's probably quickest to talk about the problems with this genre," he says. "Many fighting games are static and too digital. It is about time

REAL-LIFE FIGHTER

We find out just how strong the World Warriors really are.

Street Fighter may dominate the fighting game genre, but can its cast of ass-kickers take on the brawlers of *Mortal Kombat*? Or *Tekken*? Or even *Soulcalibur*? In real-life fights? No, of course they can't (stupid reality!). But, say, it was possible. Who would win? We asked the men behind of each game to find out.

SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV PRODUCER YOSHINORI OKO

"I talked about this with the project leader of the *Tekken* team, Harada-san. Who is stronger? That will definitely be the *Street Fighters* like Ryu and others. They even fought the world's greatest X-Men, and I think all the *Street Fighters* fought pretty well, don't you think? They fought a Sentinel, Magneto, and Wolverine. I have never seen any martial artist who can guard Wolverine's claws with their bare hands."

WINNER: STREET FIGHTER

MORTAL KOMBAT CO-CREATOR JOHN TOBIAS

"The cast of *Street Fighter* would hold its own against the cast of *Mortal Kombat*—until of course the fatalities. Then it would get ugly. No contest."

WINNER: MORTAL KOMBAT

SOULCALIBUR DIRECTOR KATSUTOSHI SASAKI

"I place my bet on the *Soulcalibur* cast. You know why? Because they've got weapons! [Laughs]."

WINNER: SOULCALIBUR

DEAD OR ALIVE CREATOR TOMONBU ITAGAKI

"Well, at least in terms of appearance, the female characters of *Dead or Alive* win 100 to 0 [Laughs]. Other than that, they will just have to fight it out."

WINNER:

LOOKS: DEAD OR ALIVE

ACTUAL FIGHT: UNDECIDED

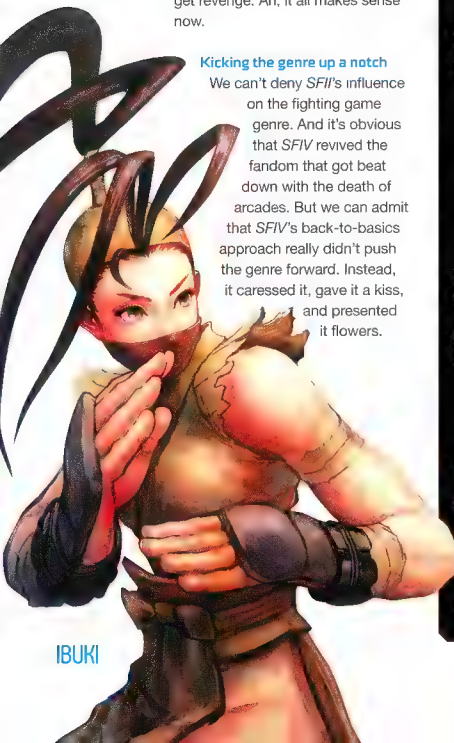
KATSUHIRO HARADA



TEKKEN PRODUCT DIRECTOR

"In a real life fight, I doubt that the cast of *Tekken* could compete with the cast of *Street Fighter*, who has fought the likes of the X-Men as equals. I think Jin Kazama would panic if he saw the inhuman power of Ryu's Shinkuu Hadouken. In addition to simple hand-to-hand combat, I think the *Tekken* characters would use other means to fight. For example, they may resort to the use of military forces and weapons, money, or political power. They would soon realize that the *Street Fighter* cast is all very formidable fighters that command respect."

WINNER: STREET FIGHTER



IBUKI



I believe SFII's success came from pure fun factor and brilliant game design.

John Tobias, Co-Creator, Mortal Kombat

MORTAL
KOMBAT

SEARCH FIGHTER

LEADER

2000 REVIEW

100% CHARACTER

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TOP 5 WORST FIGHTERS

EGM and a couple outspoken fighting game developers kick around their lists for the crappiest fighting games ever.

OK, so we all know the *Street Fighter* games are good. Really good. Err, well, except for *Street Fighter: The Movie*—that *Mortal Kombat* wannabe is terrible. Really, really terrible. But, for the most part, the *Street Fighter* series doesn't have too many stinkers. That can't be said for the fighting game genre, however. With so many god-awful fighters out there, we took the time to pick five of the worst. And even asked a couple of our friends to pick theirs, too.

EGM PICKS



5. Urban Champion (NES)

You punch dudes into a manhole. Talk about dirty work.



4. Fighter Maker (PSX)

You know a game is bad when the developer wants you to create it. Good luck with that.



3. Survival Arts (Arcade)

Would have been a real *Mortal Kombat*-killer if the fighters were all artists. Hey, it worked for the *Ninja Turtles*.



2. Violence Fight (Arcade)

With a title like that, we had to include it. Better than the original name: GOGONI! BOGON!

1. Strip Fighter 2 (PC Engine)

Not as good as the first one. Wait, there isn't even a first one. What do they take us for? A bunch of boobs?



TOMONOBU ITAGAKI

CREATOR OF THE DEAD OR ALIVE SERIES



"I don't mean to deny the hard work that the Tekken staff have put into their games. However, there is no way this hate list will ever, ever change. Ever."

(Bonus Mention) 6. Tekken 6 (PS3/XB360)

5. Tekken 5 (PS2)
4. Tekken 4 (PS2)
3. Tekken 3 (PSX)
2. Tekken 2 (PSX)
1. Tekken (Arcade)

JOHN TOBIAS

CO-CREATOR OF MORTAL KOMBAT



5. Time Killers (Arcade)

Proof that blood and gore doesn't equal a good game or success

4. Blood Storm (Arcade)

Because they didn't learn their lesson with *Time Killers*

3. Kasumi Ninja (Atari Jaguar)

Why do I remember this Atari Jaguar game? Oh yeah... it scarred my retinas

2. Shaq Fu (SNES/Genesis)

The name says it all

1. Tattoo Assassins (Arcade)

OMFG this game is the all time S U C K leader

that the developers and players realize that this confined playability is narrowing the possibility of fighting games."

Not everyone is so pessimistic, however. Both *Tekken* and *Soulcalibur*'s directors both believe the genre still has some fight left in it. "The games where you face off against a human opponent, and the fighting genre as a whole, will continue to maintain a certain level of popularity for at least the next five years," says Harada. Sasaki see innovation more as an on-going battle with fun: "I think the words 'innovation' and 'fun' have different meanings and trying to satisfy

There's a reason why every fighting game released is a sequel...

—John Tobias

both aspects in terms of game development is difficult," he says. "The fact that we, as developers, have been challenged to add both into a game has helped the continuous evolution of the fighting game genre—so, I always try to incorporate new ideas into a game."

One also hopes to incorporate new ideas, well, eventually. But at least he's thinking past minor updates: "I think that there could be more innovative systems or tools for battling players in different skill levels," he says. "In the future it will be fun if we could add a feature that would ultimately be a threat to all the hardcore gamers, so the casual gamers can play the game as good as the hardcore gamers and both can enjoy the game equally."

Sounds great! Maybe we'll see that in *Street Fighter V*. That is, if Capcom doesn't take another ten years to smack out a sequel. Not that they really have to worry too much about competition in the meantime. Because, when it comes to blows, *SF*'s biggest competitor isn't a rival series, but its own success.



The Street Fighter
franchise pioneered the
...fighting game genre.

Soulcalibur IV Director Katsutoshi Sasak

SOUL CALIBUR

STREET FIGHTER

CONTACT

CEO REVIEW

NEW THING TO

001

FIGHTING WORDS

sequel?

YO: *SFIV* was made based on the idea to recall fans' fond memories of *SFII*. In *SSFIV*, we want to recapture the remaining portion of goodness that was left out, but we requested from fans in the original *SFIV*. We want to bring back more fans of *SF* by completing the form of the original game. So instead of it just being a minor updated version, this *SSFIV* will be a game with major additional content and changes. It's not too much to call it *Street Fighter 4.9*.

challenger: our hard-hitting questions. Let's see how he handles the attack.

EGM: Developer Dimps did a helluva job with *SFIV* considering they were working on such an important title. Did they ever feel the pressure of living up to the legacy of *Street Fighter*? Or did they act as stoic as Ryu after a hard-fought victory?

Yoshinori Ono: Nishiyama-san, a head of Dimps, is actually a creator of *Street Fighter I*. He is someone who I looked up to for a long time. I think he is the person who established today's fighting game standard. The staff who work for Nishiyama-san had no problems working with Capcom since they strongly inherit Nishiyama-san's "working-style genes." All of our Capcom workers carry the important Capcom history with us. We worked closely with Nishiyama-san and his creativity, and also worked with former SNK staffers. Looking back, we all knew what has been done and what went right. We were able to work within this friendly competition, which was great.

EGM: Now that we know *SFIV* is a success, are you worried that gamers will experience déjà vu with *SSFIV*, in the sense that it's a minimal update (like the past *Street Fighter II* upgrades) instead of a full

EGM: In *SSFIV*, you're adding new ultra combos and characters. Apart from those (and minor gameplay tweaks), there aren't a lot of new gameplay features. Are you afraid to mess with the *SF* formula or are you saving any innovative ideas for potential sequels?

YO: To speak about features as a tool, every tool has its purpose of use. You probably wouldn't need to add any other function to a hammer if you just want to master how to use a hammer. New function isn't always a good thing unless it is necessary, I think.

EGM: It's very cool the bonus stages are coming back. Was there ever any talk to create new ones? Or at least tweak the existing ones? Like, say, allow the fighters to beat up a truck or bus?

YO: I wanted to implement the bonus stages in the original *SFIV*, and I said I would, but unfortunately it didn't happen. People called me a liar back then. [Laughs] So, this time we've decided to have the Car stage and Barrel stage based on the idea to recapture the original bonus games. My idea for the future is to have

Ducking it out on fictional streets may sound tough, but try winning a real fight: Recapturing the magic of a once-insanely popular videogame series. Not as easy as throwing a few fireballs, huh? Well, unless you're *Super Street Fighter IV* producer Yoshinori Ono, that is. With the help of developer Dimps and the support of Capcom, Ono won his toughest battle yet: making *Street Fighter* relevant again with last year's *Street Fighter IV*. And he's back at it again this year with *SSFIV*.

But he now faces a new

SSFIV will be a game with major additional content and changes. It's not too much to call it *Street Fighter 4.9*.

[i]
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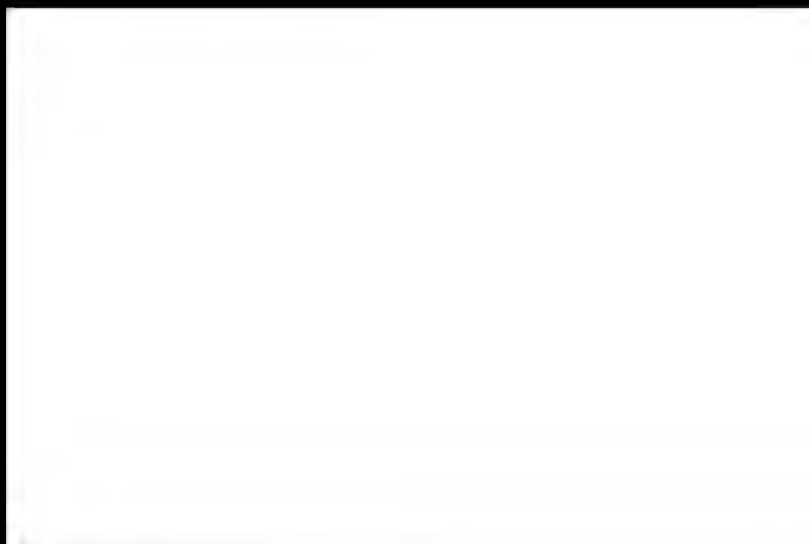


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EGM [i]

THE DIGITAL MAGAZINE

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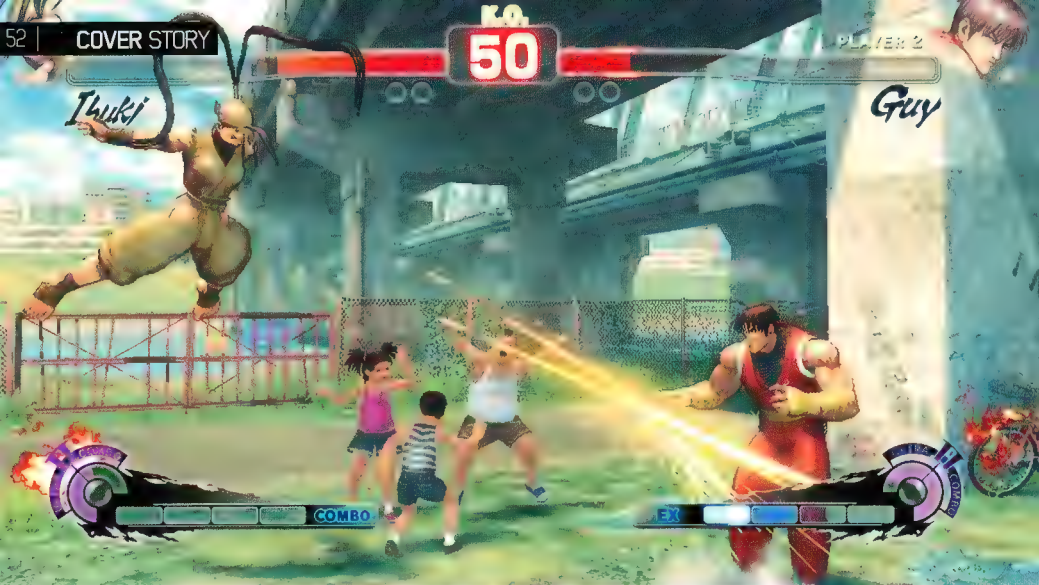
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players complete all the bonus stages from the past series, which will then unlock the original bonus stage as a mini game. I might incorporate the idea of destroying trucks or buses like you suggested.

EGM: Even though *SF4* recaptures the magic of *SF2*, it failed to incorporate the iconic background stages that fit with each specific character like in *SF2*. And it appears as though the stages aren't changing much in *SSFIV*. How come it seems less attention was paid to this?

YO: We have thought a lot about the stage background implementation. It was a discussion between whether we design stages for each character or not. In the original *SFIV*, we've selected stages based on the game itself and not the characters. However, we later discovered that people were hoping for more character stages. In *SSFIV*, even though we weren't fully able to add stages based on requests, we did add a few stages that were inspired by certain characters. I hope you enjoy the change!

EGM: EGM covered *SF2* and *Mortal Kombat* more than any other game in the early '90s. Tell



us: Have you ever played any of the *MK* games? If so, what did you think?

YO: We played a lot of *MK*. I think it's really an entertaining fighting game, where *SF* is more like a fighting tool to me. Almost all the elements in *MK* represent quality entertainment in my opinion. Although, the game is not aiming for the same direction as *SF* or *Tekken*.

EGM: It took over 10 years for Capcom to make a sequel to

Street Fighter III. Are we going to have to wait another 10 years for *Street Fighter V*?

YO: Perhaps. [Laughs] Well, *SSFIV* is really closer to *Street Fighter 4.9*, I think. So we might need some days off before *SFV*. I personally feel that 10 years might be too long. Like Gouki says, "I slept really well for too long," and there are consequences for being left out from the rest of the world like him. That might not be fun... so I will try to get back to it sooner.



I personally feel that 10 years might be too long [until Street Fighter V.]

SUPER STREET FIGHTER V

STREET FIGHTER
LEGACY

QND INTERVIEW

NEW CHARACTERS

EGM



T. HAWK

T.Hawk's Pros

Justin Wong: T.Hawk's pokes are good, like his standing roundhouse or even his low strong. His command throw leads into a perfect mix-up for him to do it again or go for a cross up. He also has a good dragon punch-move (Tomahawk Buster) and a safe vertical air dive, which leads into more tricky mix-ups.

T.Hawk's Weaknesses

JW: T.Hawk's weakness is that he needs to take a lot of risk and he also cannot focus cancel out of his Tomahawk Buster.

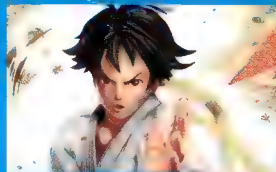
T.Hawk Strategy

JW: My strategy would be to play the mix-up game, and in crucial situations, rely on my good poking game to deceive my opponent to gather the win.

Will T.Hawk replace his default character?

JW: Probably not, because I don't use grappler characters. They revolve too much on the command throws for me.

MAKOTO



Makoto's Pros

Seth Killian: Makoto's command throw is one of the good damaging command throws, and his mix-up of juggle, standing, command throw, and low attack is a good poking game. His command throw is also a good one. It can be used to do offensive setups.

Makoto's Cons

SK: The only way to deal with Makoto is to land in his command throw, and then you can do a mix-up. It's a good game to play if you're good at the mix-up game.

Makoto's Strategy

SK: Makoto's all about his command throw. It's a good game to play if you're good at the mix-up game. It's a good game to play if you're good at the mix-up game. It's a good game to play if you're good at the mix-up game.

Will Makoto replace his default character? SK: Probably not, because Makoto is a grappler. It's a good game to play if you're good at the mix-up game.

CODY



Cody's Pros

JW: Cody's main strength is that he has a solid cross up into nice combos, and he has good pokes. To top it all off, he also has a way to deal with fireballs.

Cody's Cons

JW: Cody's main weakness is that he may not do that much damage just because his other moves are really good.

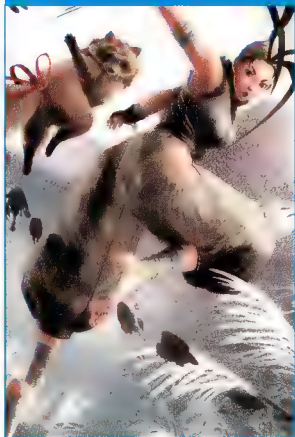
Cody Strategy

JW: I would try to play Cody very annoying; hit here and there and try to frustrate my opponent by throwing rocks and knife projectiles.

Will Cody replace his default character?

JW: Maybe, because he was the first *Street Fighter Alpha* 3 character I used.

IBUKI



Ibuki's Pros

SK: Ibuki has dangerous attack options at virtually every range so you can never relax when you're facing her. While she does have good ranged moves, doing big damage with her requires her to be in your face, so don't play hard to get for too long.

Ibuki's Cons

SK: Ibuki's major weakness is how easily she takes damage. She can dish it out, but she can't take it, and she has one of the weakest defense ratings in the game, so either keep rushing them down or stay far away.

Ibuki Strategy

SK: Ibuki can pretend to play runaway with her kunai knives, but they're a little too slow to keep an opponent out forever. Once they do get in, she also takes a lot of damage, so winning with Ibuki is going to require using some offensive tricks. Fortunately for her, she does have a ton of really sneaky setups that can lead to big damage, so frustrate the opponent from far away, then when they come after you and let their guard down, let the tricks begin!

Will Ibuki replace his default character?

SK: Possibly. Ibuki is very stylish, but I'm more of a "get-in-your-face-and-bash-you" kind of a player. I don't know if I'm elegant enough to get wins with her.

DEEJAY



DeeJay's Pros

JW: DeeJay has a good poking game and a nice fireball. Plus, he has many links into some good, damaging combos.

DeeJay's Cons

JW: DeeJay's weakness is his inability to have a proper comeback strategy, meaning if DeeJay is down on life, it's harder to pull off a win.

DeeJay Strategy

JW: My strategy with DeeJay is to play really cautious so I can always have the life lead. And I'd do that by throwing fireballs and keeping the opponent annoyed.

Will DeeJay replace his default character?

JW: He will not, because I am not a charge character-user—I prefer motions. 🙅

STREET FIGHTER

LET'S

DISCUSS

ON

THESE

CHARACTERS

AND

THEIR

MOVES.



Back From The Second Dimension

While the gaming industry is looking for the next big thing,

By Kris Pina



some developers are finding success by living in the past. ▶



ART: CRESQUIN / TOTO

Everything old has a good chance of eventually being new again, assuming it's beloved by enough 18-35-year-olds (even magazines!). That's no surprise to gamers who grew up seeing their favorite 2D mascots and series reinvented with each new console generation, but a growing trend reverses that progress by booting updated franchises back to their 2D roots.

From *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* to *Street Fighter IV*, *Bionic Commando: Rearmed* to *Mega Man 10*, 2D gaming isn't just back—it's acting like the last 15 years never happened. Sega is the latest on the time-traveling bandwagon, with *Sonic the Hedgehog 4: Episode 1* set for release this summer

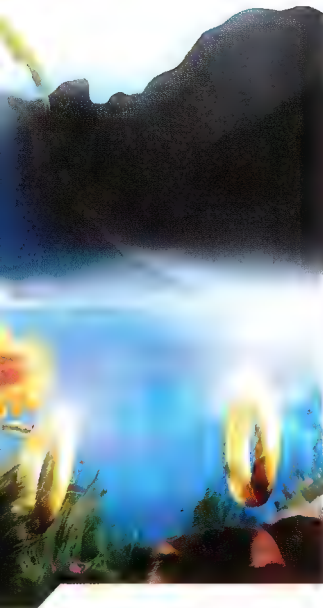
Sonic 4 is a typical example of what you could call the "2D revival." It features a classic character, old school 2D gameplay, modern 3D graphics, tons of fan service, and the key distinction: It's not just any "new 2D Sonic" but the canonical sequel to *Sonic the Hedgehog 3*. "With *Sonic 4*, the approach we're taking is, if we were doing new Genesis games today, what would they look like?" explains Ken Balough, Sonic brand manager at Sega. "If we kept that formula

going, what would they feel like? And essentially that's where we get *Sonic 4*. It's 2D, but it's got that modern look to it."

Bringing the team back

Although Dimps (makers of the *Sonic Rush* games for the Nintendo DS) is co-developing *Sonic 4*, a few Genesis-era staffers are on the project to help capture as much of the 16-bit spirit as possible, including a level designer for *Sonic the Hedgehog 3* and the original music

"I think it's a huge opportunity for the industry that most are overlooking..."



composer for the Genesis *Sonic* games. "We don't want all of a sudden for Sonic to have rock music or something—we want to make sure *Sonic 4* feels like a genuine extension of the first three *Sonic* games," Balough says. "If you're a long-time fan of the Genesis days, when you play *Sonic 4*, I think you'll be like, 'Holy crap, I remember when that thing came out' or 'I remember that and there's a new twist on it.'"

This fan service will even include a classic character not seen since the Genesis days, although Balough is keeping its identity a closely guarded secret. "When you get to the very end of the game...you're going to be seeing the return of a character that you haven't seen in a very, very long time," he



explained. "It's a character fans have been asking us to include in *Sonic* games for as long as I can remember, and we will be bringing that character back."

But Sega isn't the only company listening to fans and putting dollar signs to nostalgia—Capcom's using the same strategy with a slate of 2D revivals. As three of the five games mentioned near the start of this article show, it's a trend Capcom helped pioneer.

"Our digital strategy has been a lot about fan service and trying to imagine if the arcade still existed—what would arcade games on current hardware look like?" explains Christian Svensson, VP of strategic planning and business development at Capcom. That strategy

Sonic 4 is the direct sequel to *Sonic 3*, released more than 15 years ago.

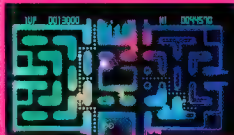
SONIC 4

5 Great Games Inspired by the Retro Revival..



Contra/Castlevania

Choosing a 2D, side-scroller and Super Contra is a classic for the very top of the list, inspired as it is by the original. The developers kept the formula in place, albeit now in first-person, a 3D—minus the 3D. “The single twist we decided on for Contra was that there are a good 30,000 other of these games.”



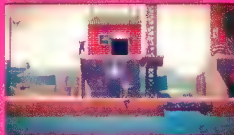
Pac-Man CE

That classic maze game got a graphical bump 20 years earlier, but making it new for today’s audience, Pac-Man CE follows the original’s whimsy while adding a few new features, like a power-up and a blueberry, and the presence of an insect-like (but A-List) antagonist, the Ghostbusters.



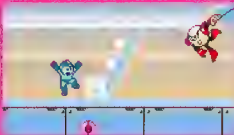
Shadow Complex

Not many games had a first-person, 3D platformer. That’s where Shadow Complex stands out, a genre that others copied. In *Shadow Complex*, the *Half-Life* and *Super Mario* game developers, not the video game, “to be more accurate, it was that started in 2001 and it had a hell of a heavy impact.”



Bionic Commando Rearmed

That classic action game got a graphical bump 20 years earlier, but making it new for today’s audience, *Bionic Commando Rearmed* follows the original’s whimsy while adding a few new features, like a power-up and a blueberry, and the presence of an insect-like (but A-List) antagonist, the Ghostbusters.



Mega Man 9/10

Choosing a 2D, side-scroller and Super Mega Man 9/10 is a classic for the very top of the list, inspired as it is by the original. The developers kept the formula in place, albeit now in first-person, a 3D—minus the 3D. “The single twist we decided on for Mega Man was that there are a good 30,000 other of these games.”

began modestly with a port of *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting* for Xbox Live Arcade in 2006, and its success paved the way for ambitious remakes (*Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* and *Bionic Commando Rearmed*) and full-blown sequels (*Mega Man 9* and *Street Fighter IV*).

“What we’re learning is, for fans of the games and brands we have here, they’re eager for a new twist on something they already know and love,” says Svensson. “And for the people who aren’t familiar with these brands, there’s a timeless quality to the gameplay that a new audience is ready to accept.”

The catch-22

One consistent “twist” in these 2D revivals,

“Nostalgia is a draw for some gamers, but I think ultimately an appeal of a game comes from how good it actually is.”

though, seems paradoxical to the stated intent: If the goal of these games is to stick as close to the originals as possible, why are so many going the “2.5D” route—using 2D gameplay with 3D graphics? In fact, *Sonic 4*’s 3D visuals already got Sega in trouble with some superfans who complained Sonic’s running animation in the teaser trailer looked slower compared to his speedy strides in the original Genesis games.

“The running animation that was shown in the trailer wasn’t exactly taken from in-game, because we were still tweaking the game at the time,” Balough explains. “But I think once you see the final running animation, most fans will be happy with what was polished.” And Balough maintains the 3D visuals are necessary to making *Sonic 4* a successful revival: “I think that’s what’s really essential—keeping that core gameplay element but really modernizing the graphics. I think, personally, that’s essential if you want the brand to keep going forward.”

But according to Svensson, time and manpower can factor just as much as customer expectations into a game's graphical style—and the upswing in 2.5D.

"For us to do a new costume in a 2D game, you have to redraw the entire sprite set," says Svensson. "That's not as easy, quite frankly, as swapping a model and using the existing character animations. So what using 2.5D allows for in, say, *Street Fighter IV* is very rapid and frequent updates to costume looks and balancing."

This isn't without a downside, though: Despite making parts of the development process easier, it turns out 3D still costs more money. "That's not to say sprites aren't expensive these days, too, because that's definitely a lost art," Svensson says. "But 3D generally means a larger budget and bigger risk on a project as well. *Street Fighter IV* was not an inexpensive game to make by any stretch."

Games like *Mega Man 9*, which appeal to nostalgia with deliberately ancient 8-bit-style graphics, are on the opposite end of the spectrum. The risk there, though, is in alienating younger gamers who don't have a built-in appreciation for pixelated blue booties.

"A friend of mine who's a prominent executive at a major hardware company sat down with his kids to play *Mega Man 9*, as a *Mega Man* fan," says Svensson, dipping into an anecdote. "He's probably about, say, 45 years old, and his kids just didn't get it—they didn't understand. They just looked at the graphics and instantly tuned out. Whereas he was just overjoyed and in little nerd heaven."

What allows Capcom to continue with such niche projects is that making a small group very happy may be all that the company needs. "We don't necessarily have to line up 2 million units of something for it to be strategically valuable," Svensson says. "As long as a project helps push the brand forward and keeps it cool and relevant to an audience that's large and lucrative enough to keep making more, that's good enough for us."

For Sega, the generational split is at

least partly why it's making *Sonic 4* to begin with. "This is sort of recognition that *Sonic* is a brand that has a wide variety of fans in a wide variety of age groups," says Balough. "We have a fan base that's very young, and they want a little more of a Looney Toons-ish kind of gameplay." Balough compares this to the "werhog" levels in *Sonic Unleashed*, which he says kids enjoyed but older gamers hated.

"But we also have an older fan base who liked *Sonic* as he was in the Genesis days," he continues. "And if we want to keep that fan base happy, we should provide games that cater to them as well. So it's more of a splitting a little bit of the brand."

Oldie, goodie

Another question, though, is whether developers can keep even older gamers interested once the novelty of the nostalgia begins to fade. Hiroshi Kamide, an analyst at KBC Securities Japan, thinks it's a danger that publishers must consider. "Although the casual gamer market may find 2D gaming easier to get to grips with, adopting 2D for the sake of it does not make sense," he says. "Nostalgia is a draw for some gamers, but I think ultimately an appeal of a game comes from how good it actually is"

To that end, Kamide believes maintaining interest in 2D revivals is just like any other video game sequel: create appealing, new features while maintaining a consistently high quality. "Making novelty and nostalgia as the key selling points would not work. It depends how good the games are, how well they can keep people entertained."

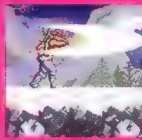
Despite such reservations, though, Svensson sees plenty of mileage still left in this trend—and not just for Capcom. "Giving up some of the secret sauce, I think it's a huge opportunity for the industry that most are overlooking. If I had advice for other publishers, I would look at your back catalog, see what has a fan base, what your fans are asking for."

So hey, Nintendo, how about that *Kid Icarus* sequel? ☑

...and 5 More We Want to See

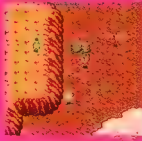
Strider

The original *Strider* was one of the most impressive titles on the NES, and it's a shame that it's never been remastered or re-released. It's time to give it the love it deserves.



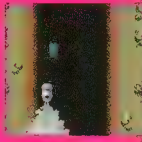
Gunsmoke

Gunsmoke is a classic Western-themed platformer that's been largely forgotten. It's a great example of a game that was ahead of its time.



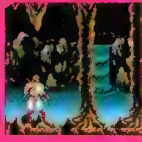
Spy Hunter

Spy Hunter is a classic spy-themed platformer that's been largely forgotten. It's a great example of a game that was ahead of its time.



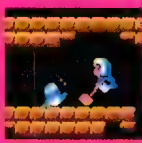
Shinobi

Shinobi is a classic ninja-themed platformer that's been largely forgotten. It's a great example of a game that was ahead of its time.



Ice Climber

Ice Climber is a classic ice-themed platformer that's been largely forgotten. It's a great example of a game that was ahead of its time.



Honorable Mentions...

Game Boy Advance: *Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros. 3*
Game Boy Advance: *Super Mario Advance 5: Super Mario Bros. 2*
Game Boy Advance: *Super Mario Advance 6: Super Mario Bros. 3*
Game Boy Advance: *Super Mario Advance 7: Super Mario Bros. 4*
Game Boy Advance: *Super Mario Advance 8: Super Mario Bros. 4*
Game Boy Advance: *Super Mario Advance 9: Super Mario Bros. 4*
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Game Boy Advance: *Super Mario Advance 100: Super Mario Bros. 4*

The

Deception?

How the Future of Downloadable Content Could Reshape Gaming Forever

Since the launch of the current generation of consoles, the notion of downloadable content has become as much a part of modern gaming as high scores, extra lives and headshots. At one time it was impossible to imagine that a game could continue to change and adapt after leaving the store shelf. Now the opportunity to access extra levels, new vehicles, bigger guns and entirely new chapters post-launch is not only the norm, it's expected. In fact, it's getting more likely that the most-anticipated, high-profile games of the near-future will be choking to death on their own bloated DLC rollout plans long before the titles are even announced.

On the surface DLC sounds like a great idea—the ultimate service plan to keep your investment in games and characters and storylines from

ever dying. Unfortunately, the power to unlock additional content also provides the ability to lock any content and, according to some, that may be the ultimate goal.

An example of this reality surfaced when 2K Games announced its first round of DLC for *BioShock 2*. The problem stemmed from the fact that the data being touted as "downloadable" was, in fact, already stored on the retail disc. Put simply, if you bought *BioShock 2*, you technically already owned the DLC. 2K defended its \$3 tariff to "unlock" the DLC by saying that it wanted to make sure the game's multiplayer user-based didn't get split up. Three bucks for a 100k unlock file? For shame.

But profits, while understandable, need not be the only goal of the DLC promoters. One reality that has plagued publishers for years is the

burgeoning market for used games through retailers such as Gamestop and Blockbuster.

Among the first, and most widely reported, warning shots came from Epic Games president Michael Capps in an interview with the industry website GamesIndustry.biz. He made his disdain for rentals and used games crystal clear.

"The secondary market is a huge issue in the United States," Capps said. "Our primary retailer makes the majority of its money off of secondary sales... we don't make any money when someone rents [our games], and we don't make any money when someone buys [our games] used—way more than twice as many people played *Gears* than bought it."

Capps' received special criticism for openly discussing developer conversations regarding the use of tactics to force renters and second-hand buyers to fork over money directly to the publisher as well. If a player wanted to fully experience a product, some reasoned, then limiting access for anyone other than

Unfortunately, the power to unlock additional content also provides the ability to lock any content...



The Good

The games that have gotten the spirit of downloadable content right:

Burnout Paradise (EA)

Team Fortress 2 PC (Valve)

Portal 2 (Bethesda)

Borderlands (2D Games)

Grand Theft Auto: The Lost and Damned



the original purchaser was not only fair, it was a right that publishers should exercise.

Ultimately Epic, and other publishers, have opted for a softer approach that stops short of rendering a game unplayable or incomplete, but the drum beat is growing louder.

Issues related to Digital Rights Management, and the need to have a persistent connection to a publisher's servers—even in single-player mode—have become more commonplace in the PC gaming business. Many now fear that console game publishers will follow that lead using DLC as their DRM Trojan Horse.

EA employed a technique with *Mass Effect 2* that rewarded those

who bought the game new with “free” DLC from day one, while those that seek out cheaper used copies are charged to access the same content.

Although this leads to the same frustrating conclusion for frugal gamers that can't keep up with the glut of great releases during tough economic times, it also incentivizes and even rewards

those who do buy without punitive effects. Provided the bonus content holds real value for the player it can still work as intended—as a bonus that has perceived value.

Examples of DLC that lives up to the promise of enhancing the overall experience include *Soul Calibur IV*, which drew praise by offering players access to play as both Darth Vader and Yoda (depending on which version you owned). It proved for many to be one of the game's biggest draws.

The coming years will present the gaming public with a critical test of just how far players are willing to be pushed to get more from their favorite titles. DLC is definitely here to stay,

The Bad

And the games that should be ashamed for getting downloadable content all wrong:

Modern Warfare 2 (Activision)

The Elders Scrolls IV: Oblivion (Bethesda)

Beautiful Katamari - (Namco Bandai)

Street Fighter IV (Capcom)



but what form it takes—especially in high-profile, big-budget games—will go a long way towards determining just how high publishers can construct the DLC walls around their intellectual properties. **D**

THE EGM EXPERIMENT

David Jaffe

By Brady Fiechter

The cramped Peruvian restaurant almost worked, but after way too much coffee and a need to take in an ocean view, David Jaffe and I found a pizza spot overlooking the Pacific in Del Mar. What unfolded was a revealing conversation with the creator of *God of War* and *Twisted Metal* about his next project, finding a career in the pages of EGM (while on the toilet, of course), and realizing that, at age 38, he has yet to truly arrive.

You'll be pleased to know that you've already made a contribution to the new EGM. I just had a conversation about how we're going to handle the use of the word "F*k" in the magazine knowing I would be interviewing you.

[laughs] Well yeah, I assume a PG-13 rating will do.

Do you remember the first time you used that word? It must have been a glorious day for you.

Oh man. Maybe I was like 10 or 11?

And now it's commonplace in gaming.

Yeah, you know, every day we're at this point where, how do we push it so our game still has some teeth? It's tough, because at least with the kind of game we're doing now, that T rating really makes a difference.

Do you see that side of your personality in the games and characters you create?

Yeah, to an extent. But then in some ways, it's becoming less and less true. Games

are getting so big and it's now more team-centric. Where I'm working right now, I wouldn't say that's the case because of the type of game we're making. I imagine a David Cage looks at *Heavy Rain* and [sees] his spirit is in that game. So I'll agree with that.

We've argued that before; that you don't see much of yourself in your games.

Well, OK, if you're talking about *Gears of War*, and *God of War*, and *Twisted Metal*, and *Halo*, anything [like that] you do is going to be a reflection of who you are. That's true of the games you design to the characters you create to how messy your car ends up being.

How messy your car is?

People say you go into someone's car and if it's a total mess or if it's totally pristine, that it's a reflection of their spirit. Who they are and how they see themselves.

I remember the first time I got in your car it looked like a tornado had hit it.

Well, that was probably more of a reflection of where I was with work. I like a clean house, I like a clean car, but it's an issue of priorities. Sometimes I have other things going on and can't keep up. I love to exercise. Do I do it enough? No. Why? Because I have other things I put higher on my list. Writing a story, creating a game, working with the team, taking a walk with my kids, whatever. And in games you can certainly say that as well. But yeah, I'm definitely reflected in my games. But I don't know. I do think about that, but I don't have answers.

Maybe it's not for you to decide.

Yeah, I think that's the better way to think about it. I certainly have an attachment to my games. They are very personal to me. And you could say, well, *Twisted Metal*, how could that be personal? Because it is, that's the way I see the world. I've had people say about *God of War*, they kind of say it mockingly, that it's like a 14 year-old ▶

I think when
you become
less afraid,
you become
more honest
with what you
want and what
you need.
As I get older,
I get less afraid.





There are some publishers you hear about that do things that sound pretty f**king negative and shady, but that hasn't been my experience.

boy's fantasies. I like that, I still like that. I was listening to a song by Nickelback and it totally hit those same notes in my brain. That kind of junior high-school energy, angst drive. Thinking girls were cool but at the same time thinking dragons were cool under a black light at Spencer's Gifts at the mall.

What were your earliest memories of gaming as a kid in Alabama?

I was at [this year's] DICE awards, with David Crane, and we were going backstage together. They were going to present

an award, and were flashing up on the screen all the [art from the games] he had done. And one of the games was called *Outlaw*, which was an Atari 2600 [title], with two really awfully pixelated cowboys, standing face-to-face. Basically you could move left and right, and up and down, that was it. I remember when I saw *Outlaw* after a baseball game. I didn't want to play baseball at the time, but [my father] said "If you play I'll buy you a game," or something. I remember seeing just the box, it evoked such a sense of adventure.

If you play this game, the promise of it was this big adventure you're gonna have. That was really the first memory I have of being wowed. I remember salivating over *Odyssey's Quest for the Rings* too. It was that promise of adventure, especially as a kid—this idea that you're gonna buy this product and escape.

Did you need to escape as a kid?

I had a very loving, but at the same time tumultuous homelife. And yeah, maybe there was more of a desire to go to those places and get away from that. I really did

JAFFE'S
GAME BIOGRAPHY

want to go to those fantasy worlds. Or there was this game called *Black Tower*, the Milton Bradley game, it was just a promise to escape and go to these amazing worlds where you can be a star. I loved it. I just loved it.

Did anything else fuel that fantasy? Give us that escape? Did something come before gaming that hit you in that way?

When you grow up in a house with a lot of fighting everything is an escape. Comics, books, movies, Lucas, video games, Spielberg, arcade games, all that stuff.

So you grew up surrounded by conflict?

Oh, it was like WWE. It wasn't abusive, but it was just a lot of arguing. My parents argued a lot, and when you're a kid that stuff is very scary. You know, I'm a pretty even tempered, even keeled person. And I was at Disneyland with my kids the other day, and it starts raining. And I told my oldest, "OK, put this poncho on." She's a very spirited kid, thank God. And I had it on her and she was yelling and crying, and finally I just got really mad, and I said "F--- it," and I grabbed it and just ripped the poncho apart. It was one of those cheap things you get at Disney Land, but you can tell she will never forget that now. I apologized, I sat her down, and I said "Sweetheart, I am so sorry." It wasn't that I was being [like] my parents, but I'm so sensitive now to any kind of outburst as a parent that when you see it affecting your kid, I stop, pause, and make it clear that sometimes grown-ups have outbursts too.

You know, you created Kratos, ripping that poncho apart...

[laughs] Yeah, yeah, exactly, you're the minotaur. I saw this little circle above my daughter's head and I had to do it.

How has that dynamic of growing up in a home filled with conflict impacted you later in life?

As much as my parents argued and fought, and that house was a very loud house, they were tremendously supportive. And tremendously loving. I would not be doing what I'm doing without them. I remember when me and a design partner at Sony, the first year we were there as testers, had gone in and taken LEGO blocks—this was before 3D modeling—and we were building levels out with LEGO blocks. We'd taken over the entire conference room, and this guy comes up and goes, "Why do you think you're going to get to be a designer?" I don't remember my specific words, but I remember the intent behind the words: why would I

ever think I wouldn't? That I get from my parents, the idea that you really can have anything you want. I know you have to work hard, you have to be smart.

My father was the same in that regard. I still remember when he brought home a ColecoVision and we lost the entire weekend together.

Yeah, my dad brought home the Atari [2600], and I remember being excited the whole day, looking through the Atari catalogs with my buddies. We were flipping through all the games we were going to get. When he brought it home that night, it was for my birthday party, my sister got me a game called *Flag Capture*, which I loved. As a child, going back to that beautiful box art, really painted the experience. I got *Superman*, *Combat*, and *Space Invaders*. That was the first batch. I totally remember waking up at 5 in the morning before school so me and my brother could play. It's funny though, I'm getting older, I'll be 39 next year, and a couple years ago, those memories were still so powerful and fresh. They drove me, they did something to me. Now when I talk to you about them, they're still very warm, but they seem like they've crossed some threshold. It's almost like they happened to someone else. I think in some ways, me making *God of War* was making something that paid homage to those memories. And now I've been on this quest [to discover] what inspires me now. What motivates me now? I'm kind of glad to be done with those early memories and not have them motivate me like they used to.

Have you replaced them with something else?

I just don't need them anymore. I have enough of a mastery of the world I live in now—not a lot, but enough—I don't need to run to those memories and think "that's when things were safe."

You've told me in the past about your desire to be as vocal as you are, wanting to be as honest as you can. That comes from your youth and growing up?

Oh yeah, hell yeah. All of that [traces] back to growing up. You grow up in very conservative Alabama and my family is Jewish, with very liberal parents. They started out with a lot of money, and they lost a lot of money. So I got to see both sides. We lived in a pretty ritzy area of town, and I remember that being really important to everyone. I'm painting everybody with the same brush, but there was a sense of money and status. [I saw]

my parents go through a phase where they didn't have any of that. It certainly made me very liberal and very protective of people who weren't like everybody else. I have a brother who is gay. He didn't come out until he was out of high school, but there was a sense that he was different. There was a sense of protectiveness about that as well, not wanting to see him get hurt. I had very good friends who were African-Americans and [I saw] the racism that was happening toward them. You were either going to conform to that system, or take up arms and fight. I fought. My arms were my logic and my voice and my ability to not care what the consequences were. I was going to stand up for all of that.

What were your personal goals through high school and into college? What did you want to be when you grew up?

I grew up wanting to be a poet. Not a poet but a poet laureate, but I could rhyme. Shel Silverstein kind of stuff. Then I wanted to be a writer, and then I wanted to make movies, and it's only recently that I've gone, "OK, 40 is coming up, are you doing what you really want to be doing?" I love making games, but I also do think I'm getting interested in some kind of fiction. Video games are one of two things to me: they are either the path I should be on, and I am on, and I'm grateful for, or this thing that allows me to express my creativity, pay off my student loans, buy a house and have some sort of notoriety, that at a time was really important. It was really easy, very seductive, to say that's my path and to leave behind that desire to create fiction.

This path came into focus as a teenager?

No, I was a terrified teenager who hid behind my ambition. I was going to be the next Steven Spielberg come hell or high water. And I used that to define me in my relationships with other people. And that was safe.

So you didn't want to be a doctor or an astronaut? You wanted to be Steven Spielberg?

I didn't even want to be a filmmaker. I wanted to be Steven Spielberg. If I'd had seen a shrink at the time, they would have been like, "OK, you have dementia. We have to work with you on this." It was a protection mechanism for what was happening in my life and growing up. I don't want to paint my childhood as this horrible experience, because I had many great moments, but there were times it was really rough. But those rough points could

1994
Mickey Mania
SNES
Genesis/SegaCD
Sony Imagesoft1995
Twisted Metal
PS
SCE1996
Twisted Metal 2
PS
SCE2001
Twisted Metal
Black
PS2
SCE2001
Kinectica
PS2
SCE2005
God of War
Sony
SCE2007
Calling All Cars
PS3
SCE2008
Twisted Metal
Head On.
Extra Twisted
Edition
PS2
SCE



EGM: Do game publishers get a bad rap?

DJ: Some of them. I think they're an easy target because they have the money. Any developer worth their weight is gonna want more money, just like every publisher...worth their weight wants to give less money. There are some publishers you hear about that do things that sound pretty f**cking negative and shady, but that hasn't been my experience.

EGM: Where do you see the industry 5 years from now?

DJ: Continued diversification. A whole array of price points, console games and everywhere in between. I think that kind of fragmentation is only beginning. It's not dissimilar to what you saw when cable came along, and suddenly you went from three major networks and PBS to 800 channels. And the audience for those channels got smaller and smaller as everybody found their own niche that they gamers.

EGM: What's the one thing wrong with the gaming press?

DJ: Hyperbole.

be so bad, you get to a point that the only light you can see to escape the box you are in is this thing out there called fame and fortune and success. As a teenager, it was really a psychological cocoon I was wrapping myself in. To the outside world I was going to be this great filmmaker. My films were terrible. There was no indication I had any skill or talent, but under all that fighting and desire for success, underneath all that remains a very pure, creative force. That's what I'm trying to reconnect with. I think I'm getting to an age where I see the pure part of that.

It's interesting to hear someone with outward success question themselves. You really do question yourself?

Oh hell yes. Because I don't fit in with other designers. I went out to dinner the

other night with a group of designers I know, we talk on the Internet all the time, but this was the first time we'd gotten together for dinner. And some of the names are... [pauses] OK, you know who these people are. I've never felt at home talking traditional design. I feel at home talking about my designs, but when you sit me in a room and say, "let's talk about the economic system of *Farmville* and how psychologically that system creates a play mechanic loop that does X, Y, Z," I can follow it, and I can contribute, but that's not my where my spirit goes. It requires some effort on my part. These guys, it just comes so natural to them. They are a better fusion of creativity and math. In most cases they're like 70 percent math, 30 percent creative. I tend to be more like 90 percent creative, 10 percent math. When I sit down with other designers, there's really a sense of not fitting in with that. Now when I sit down with the writers I work with, I feel much more even. I feel like I can carry on a conversation.

Let's get back to your roots for a moment. At what point did you decide game design would be your career?

That was totally accidental. I remember when my dad called me in college, I was using one of the phones, I think in Taper Hall at USC. It was basically my senior year, last semester, and there were one or two classes I still didn't have. I kept dropping out of this one class, I hated this professor they kept assigning me. I was a terrible student and I was out of money. The student loans were up, the grants were up, [and he said], "We can't afford to send you another semester." I was terror stricken, what am I going to do? I had put all my eggs in this basket. Someone was going to come along and make me a filmmaker. And I remember reading an issue of *EGM* actually, sitting on the crapper. The one that had *Dracula* on the cover. You can mock prayer, and God, and [the motivational book and video] "The Secret," and New Age stuff all you want. Maybe it's just the way the brain finds patterns in chaos. I don't know and I don't care. But somehow in this magazine, in the back of it, was [an advertisement from] the only game company [Sony Imagesoft] in Santa Monica run by this guy Rich Robinson. I had no money and no prospects. I heard about video game testers and I called them. I started making 20 thousand dollars a year.

I was like, "that's like a real f**king job." I couldn't fathom that. Immediately that same type of drive kicked in as a tester. Some were testers for life, some waited for someone to come and pull them out. For me, I remember waiting at the cafe at Sony and I was reading *Variety*, and this producer came up to me, she said, "You're not like normal testers, what are you doing reading *Variety*? Most of them are reading fan magazines or whatever." And her thoughts were, you know, most of these guys aren't giving thought to their lives and careers five years from now, they're just smoking out and having a good time. But it was clear to me that I could use my desire to be creative and do it here. On the one hand I was phenomenal, and on the other hand, had I been a little less fearful, I wouldn't have walked away entirely from more linear media. I may never get back there, but I'm starting to become more aware that that I did walk away from it, and that's the start.

What did you start testing on?

The first game was *Hook*. I remember walking in and all I had was a Genesis in my apartment. And I remember looking at the SNES controller and saying, Oh my God, look at all these buttons! The SNES had the four face buttons and the two shoulder buttons. Even the other testers went to Rich Robinson and said, "Don't f**king hire this guy. He's intimidated by a f**king SNES controller." But for whatever reason he hired me, thank God he did. So I tested *Hook*, *Last Action Hero*, and we did *Dracula* and we did *Three Ninjas Kick Back*, which was the sequel to *Three Ninjas*. And we did *Ground Zero Texas*. At that point I had pitched *Mickey Mania* with my partner Mike Giam, who went on to do *Jet Moto*, now he's at *Free Realms*. They had promoted us pretty quickly out of test and into these assistant producer roles. And from there it was all drive and ambition.

Mickey Mania was your first game?

There were four designers. There was me and Mike from ImageSoft, and there were the guys from *Traveler's Tales*. This was our very first experience. I'm grateful that my ideas and Mike's ideas got into that game. It was a really tough game. The producer at Sony was caught in the middle. The head of Sony had promised us that "if you get this deal from Disney, you can be the designers." The guys making the game

When I sit down with other designers, there's really a sense of not fitting in...

were like, who are these punks who have never made a game in their lives, telling us what to do? I mean, we co-designed it, but I wasn't going out to England to do pick ups. It was more high level. Here's what a level could look like, here's a mechanic, here's this rough idea. Then, two months later, we'd get back a build that had that reflected. It was really a lot of high level—with a little bit of low level—design.

Then off you went to *Twisted Metal*?

Well, it led to a couple of other things. My design partner and I were getting an awful reputation. We were doing stuff with Malibu Comics, like the *Strangers* and stuff like that. We thought we were the s**t. [Our attitude was like] we were movie directors, and you're just a f**king programmer—do exactly what I tell you or shut the f**k up. Not even [an established] movie director on a set acts that poorly, but we didn't know, we had never really made a game.

You thought you were a badass.

Oh yeah, no question. I remember being called into Rich's office after he had found these sim guys from the military who wanted to go off and do games, which ended up being *SingleTrac*. I remember the conversation, he said, "We found a [team to do this], and my feet are to the fire on this. You have to get your s**t together. You can't just go in there and be assholes." So I shifted my [mindset] and now my business partner is the guy I was working with back then on the first *Twisted Metal*.

But it could be said that one person's asshole is another person's perfectionist. Do you still catch yourself being a bulldozer when it comes to design?

Yeah, I'll give you an example. We're working on a game now, and multiplayer is a big component. You have three kinds of multiplayer people—you have the people who love what's already out there and who want to emulate it or improve it, and that's the majority of people who work in games. They love what's already being offered. They love *Modern Warfare 2*, and they love *Battlefield: Bad Company 2*, and they love *Mario Kart* on the Wii. And I like and respect a great amount of a lot of those games, but then you have the kind of people who just don't get online multiplayer. Then you have people like me who see something there that's really appealing, but you don't want to go down the path that's already laid out.

Not because you want to be different, but because there's something there that's not being done the way you want to do it. It was the same thing when we did *God of War*. People were saying, "Just make it combat-centric, make it like *Ninja Gaiden*, make it like *Devil May Cry*." No, no, no. I want to blend some things together. Those things are great, but they're not giving me personally what I want out of the experience. I'm having those same arguments and debates now with people on the team and people at Sony: what does a great multiplayer online title need? How much [do you dwell on the] stats and meta game? We have a mode in the game that I really want to be team-centric. And so we're making a lot of choices where some of the team comes back to me and challenges, saying, "nobody uses head sets for that kind of stuff." But for me to do this mode, I want to build it around the assumption that the audience that wants to play a team mode and play it as a team will really show up for each other. So we have a mechanic—[I'll describe it] in the abstract, because I know this interview will be coming out before we really announce the game—in one of the modes you have to transport this thing from A to B. I designed with Scott Campbell, my design partner and co-owner of *Eat Sleep Play*, these units that will aid in that transportation. It requires some coordination, getting on your headset and planning that, and a lot of people [claim] no one likes to do that. Everybody just likes to do it on the fly. I don't want this game to fail. I don't want it to fail for me personally, for the team, for Sony, but I'm not interested in just making what already works. Again, it's not because I want to be so original, it's because if I liked what already worked, I wouldn't be making this. Because it's already out there. So when I say I don't really fit in with other designers, there is that sense that 9 out of 10 designers I talk to would look at what *Modern Warfare 2* is doing or whatever, *Team Fortress*, and say let's do that and

give it our own twist.

Knowing what you're talking about I can safely say that if you nail it, you're gonna make a lot of people happy.

You know, it's kind of like anything else, you have visions of your ultimate goal. I have visions of people on headsets, having those little neurons firing in their brains. Like in the *A-Team*, you love it when a plan comes together. The same thing goes with our version of *Deathmatch*, which I can speak about more specifically. I keep wanting to up the hit points on the characters and some people are like, "I f**king hate that. I wanna just kill as many people as I can, and I want four or five shots and they're dead and I move on." That's how most shooters are and I hate that. I just hate that. I hate it because I want an online game to give me the same kind of feeling I got when I was playing split-screen games. Where I really can form a relationship with someone. I could chase them, and they could chase me, or we could be running toward the same power-up and [whoever gets] it is going to turn the tables. When you're killed in four or five shots, or one single head shot, that kind of relationship can't happen. It happens at a much quicker level, and it happens on a meta level, because it's you versus 30 guys over the course of a minute and a half. I'm trying to kind of bring that into it, and there is resistance to that. Because people are used to what they like.

I think many gamers will welcome this. It gives them a reason to be there.

I agree, and it may not work for everyone, and it may not work at all. It's easy when it's one-on-one, but nobody's gonna buy a one-on-one multiplayer. Well, they will, but not enough to justify the budget. If you've got 32 people in there, or 18, or 16, you get into this challenge of how do you create meaningful relationships with all these people you come across and, at the same time, you don't want to make the match last forever. For me, I'm just looking for something different. So far we've only become good at eliciting a very



narrow spectrum of human emotion with our games, but even within that narrow spectrum it's an amazing feeling when they work. Nintendo has been the best at it. It's just [working] pleasure centers, like a reward to a rat in a maze. I was playing the latest Mario and Luigi RPG on my DS, and the screen they designed when you rank up and after a fight, with that flag going up the flag poll is just an amazing way to make people happy.

Given your creative drive, I wonder what would have happened if you had gotten into film school. Think you would have been Spielberg by now?

I wanted to be Steven Spielberg. I actually met him at USC. My freshman year he had come with Lucas. They were doing some sort of dedication, I don't remember exactly. So he shows up as I was directing a film. I never got into film school, but I had all the keys to all the buildings because I worked there. So we had taken over a bunch of the rooms to shoot our

If you're honest with yourself, you will never feel you've fully arrived...

movie, unbeknownst to USC, and when we found out they were there, me and my f*cking producer made a b-line to the reception. We just went up to him and said, "look, we're shooting a movie, it's been a really long couple of days and it would be really great for the crew if you came by and said 'hey.'" I don't know what the f**k we were thinking, but he said, "Sure, I'll come by." We ran back from there to our set so fast! Lo and behold, Spielberg and Lucas showed up on my set about an hour later! I literally was in a daze. I had built him up in my mind, well beyond the man that he was. I mean, he was a force, he was a God, he represented everything. So to meet him, and to speak with him, for him to ask, "What's your movie about? Walk me through the shot you're setting up," my brain couldn't process what was happening. He wasn't just someone coming up and saying, "Hey, I liked your movie." He represented that escape from the life I was trying to get away from. And he was the

first person I'd met at that level.

That's pretty awesome.

Yeah, it was a huge deal. Lucas wasn't that big of a deal. He was kind of an asshole.

Yeah, *Star Wars* was great, but he just didn't represent who Spielberg was to me. Since then I've bumped into [Spielberg] a couple times, he doesn't remember me and I didn't talk to him. He doesn't hold that sway over me like he used to by any means. But at the time? Just amazing.

Now you're the one inspiring people.

Which is amazing. Because it doesn't feel like it at all

I don't buy that.

No, it's true,

At some point you realized you had arrived.

Oh, I haven't arrived. I've never said that. **Not even to yourself?**

I've never said that. No, I've never felt that. I'll be 40 in less than two years. I'm very aware of that. I've never felt that.

I was getting a drink at 7-11 over the weekend and noticed Kratos on the Slurpee machine. The Slurpee machine.

God of War 3, it's a great achievement, one of the best games I've played in a long time. I still recognize very much what I brought to that world, and that game and that formula. I definitely look at it with a sense of pride, a lot of me is still very much in that franchise. I love seeing that stuff. Love seeing Slurpee cups, that's what I saw growing up.

Burger King and the *Empire Strikes Back* cups. It feeds into popular culture. When I was at my daughter's school a couple nights ago, there was a little kid, probably a 4th grader, running around with a [Kratos] Slurpee cup. Now that's not good, because he's way too young, but the fact that the work I've done and the team has done is permeating popular culture is a great thing.

Would you allow yourself to say you've arrived in that regard? Your creations are on billboards, they're mainstream.

Here's the cliché. The cliché you hear from people who do things in any industry, certainly the creative industry, is "Oh I'm just a fraud waiting to be found out." I genuinely [believe] it's been luck. If you're honest with yourself, you will never feel you've fully arrived. Over the holidays I went through my office and took all the awards we had won, and put them in the garage. I took my Kratos statues, my Sweet

Tooth action figures, I just got rid of them all. I didn't throw them away, they're in the garage, but I loved that I got rid of them.


Your life's work? Tossed away? Just like that?

I had this epiphany a year ago. I was kind of like an actor, [thinking] "What's my motivation. Why am I doing this?" Yeah I'd like to make a lot of money — but beyond that? For a while I was having this thought that I want to do this for people, to bring them happiness. I want to have this vision of people setting in front of games I've worked on and they're laughing. Things like me and my girlfriend playing *Calling All Cars* brought us closer. Or I had this friend, he's dead now, and we played *Calling All Cars* together and that makes me think of him. Yeah, that moves you. But the epiphany was, that's a bulls**t, dishonest motivation. The motivation has to be personal, what am I getting out of this? What pleasure am I getting from this creativity? I wanna be good to people to make myself feel good. I'm becoming less afraid and I think when you become less afraid, you become more honest with what you want and what you need. As I get older, I get less afraid. I want to go back to what I might have walked away from [in the past].

Do you find that element of your personality in the games you make?

Well, Kratos, Sweet Tooth, they are violent, angry killers. They are not nice people, they are killers. I think I'm a pretty nice guy, but I do carry a sense of aggression and drive and ambition. F**k these rules, I'm gonna do it my way. F**k it.

It also helps to carry a nice supply of f-bombs to get the point across.

I told my daughter the other day that she's spending a lot of time combing her hair. She's six-years-old, and I'm like "Dude, your hair is beautiful, you're a beautiful little girl, let's go to school." [She says,] "But sometimes people make fun if your hair looks bad." So I pulled her over and I said, if somebody ever says that to you, tell them to go f**k themselves. Her eyes got really big, and she said, they'll put me in time out. I said I don't care, tell them to call your dad. I'd rather you get a time out and shake these little f**king six-year-olds to their core with a really well-placed "go f**k yourself" than allow them to treat you or your friends in any way that doesn't show you the respect you deserve. 



What was your favorite moment from the book? *It was the moment when I realized that I was not alone in my feelings.*

What do you think is the most important lesson you learned from the book? *That it's okay to feel the way you do, and that you're not alone in your feelings.*

What was the most interesting fact you learned from the book?

That the most common reason for divorce is the loss of love. *It's not just a cliché, it's a fact. And it's something that we should all be aware of.*

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ALAN WAKE

How Are Born in Endless Night

By Brady Fiechter

A tortured writer attempts to mend his fractured marriage in a peaceful Pacific Northwest town. But when his latest manuscript turns into a nightmarish reality, a new Resident Evil is born.

Why should you care about Alan Wake? Sure, it's creators have promised an amazing, perhaps even groundbreaking, experience that will redefine the idea of a video game "thriller." They've even gone so far as to reveal a few glimpses here and there, most recently to yours truly. Not often does a game come along that holds the possibility of creating an entirely new genre of gaming. Even less often does talent come together around a project that makes you believe there's a chance they might pull it off. In the case of Alan

Wake, and the development team at Remedy, a group that has toiled on the intricacies of Alan Wake's play mechanics for years and worked to develop a decidedly complex Stephen King-inspired storyline, the answer appears to be encouraging. Having experienced the game firsthand I can say that Alan Wake is on a trajectory to deliver.

Alan Wake begins with the title character arriving in the Pacific Northwest town of Bright Falls. The reason for his arrival provides hints of the experience to come (and the adult tone that its creators hope to capture). Wake is trapped

by writer's block, struggling in a marriage on the rocks, and troubled by a hardcore case of *deja vu*. This small wooded haven represents his last, best chance to address these demons (real or imagined).

This may all sound like familiar territory, but before you go and ask yourself if Microsoft somehow managed to screw up the video game rights to *The Shining* or *Twin Peaks*, understand that there are many unique elements interwoven into Alan Wake. They represent both the opportunity and the challenge for a product that is more than half a decade in the making.

ALAN WAKE
 THE SHINING
 TWIN PEAKS
 RESIDENT EVIL
 THE DARK TRIANGLE
 THE DARK MOUNTAINS
 THE DARK MOUNTAINS



PUBLISHER
MICROSOFT
DEVELOPER
REMEDY
PLATFORMS
XBOX 360
MODIES
SINGLE PLAYER
ESRB
M/MATURE
RELEASE DATE
05.18.2010

Bright Falls was supposed
to be a healing refuge...

Light and dark is the tapestry that drapes every corner of this world...

Alan Wake, at its core, is a mystery that begins with a disturbing entry point for a greater thriller: His wife, Alice, suddenly goes missing, events from his latest novel seem to be seeping into his reality, and, most unsettling of all, the inhabitants of Bright Falls are turning into deranged killers, possessed by some sort of demonic being.

Managing director Matias Myllyrinne is glad to finally be able to shed light on his game. "Hopefully we're building a real psychological

thriller," he says. "A game where uncovering secrets makes you feel. We really don't want to fill in too many of the blanks, but what we have introduced is an everyman being pushed into an extreme situation. Without going into too much of the fiction, it's about an artist's work coming to life, and what it would be like if your imagination started to manifest around you. There are obviously both good and bad things about that."

The duality of good and bad, light and dark, is the tapestry that drapes



DISSECTING
THE DEVELOPMENT
OF ALAN WAKE

2005

Alan Wake is announced for PC and Xbox 360 at E3.

2006

Alan Wake is announced for PS3.

2007

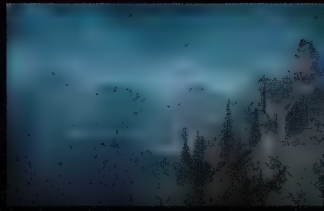
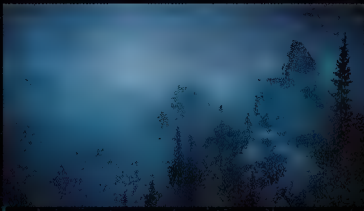
So what is Alan Wake? Screenshots show a sunnier side; little is revealed.

every corner of Alan Wake's world. "Light and darkness was really something we wanted in the fiction. We wanted to do [it] in the gameplay, we wanted to match those up. We were inspired by classic literature—lines like, 'some were born into endless night...' And we were building [on] our inspirations, thinking we could really tap into that. One poet said—I'm paraphrasing—'don't go into that gentle light.' We started playing around with those ideas, and we thought, 'yeah, yeah, we can go here.'



Not every moment in Alan Wake happens in the dark. Even during the day, there is an unmistakable foreboding

"We've been in the lucky position where we've been able to pursue our vision."



The Night Shift

As day moves to night, an area can shift dramatically in tone, but it's the more subtle changes that sometimes set the mood. Weather patterns, like fog moving in off the mountains, or moonlight straining to pierce a cloudy night sky, are true to life and help establish some of the game's more cinematic qualities. There is indeed, as Myllyrinne describes, a sorrow intertwined with beauty in Alan Wake that bubbles up from the imagery and situations.

2008

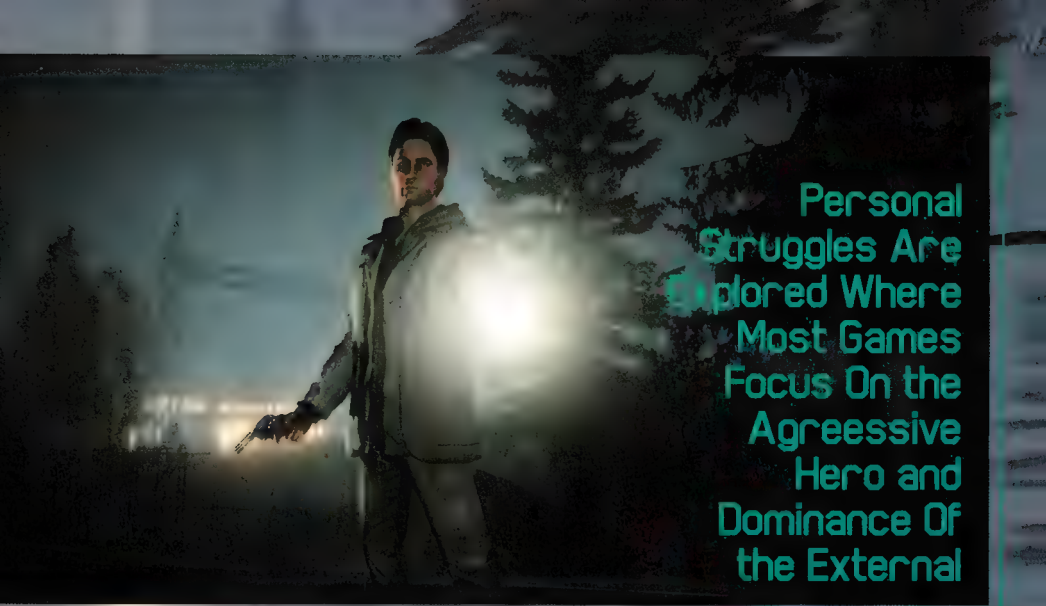
Development continues full force, focused as a more linear, directed thriller.

2009

The brakes are put on PC version.

2010

You are about to find out if the wait was worth it...



Personal Struggles Are Explored Where Most Games Focus On the Aggressive Hero and Dominance Of the External

the character's something that's not meant to be a threat to a friend."

MySims Kingdom's character design is a blend of the two styles. "I think it's a mix of the two styles," says Mylyrinne. "I think you can have visual impact, you can mix styles, and especially now that we're playing around with light and darkness, you fight with light, why not make that cool and unique? Nobody else is doing that. I like horror. But when you think of a thriller, there is something more cerebral."

In contrast to those archetypal archetypes, Alan is obviously vulnerable; his animations show him stumbling, he falls easily, he

expresses discomfort the first time he fires a weapon. Internal struggle is explored where most games focus on the aggressive hero and dominance of the external.

"The outward and inward," says Mylyrinne. "They are kind of reflected on each other. There are interpretations we bring to the table, but my feeling is, in Alan's mindset, if he's able to make a moral choice, he's able to make a moral choice. That's the point. The point is that the player and the character are both making the same choice."

MySims Kingdom

MySims Kingdom has suffered a notoriously prolonged production schedule, even grinding to a halt when EA decided that slotting a thriller into a sandbox setting just didn't work. In their eyes, the larger emotional beats didn't be adequately controlled when the player is allowed too much freedom to bend the narrative and control a scene.

Mylyrinne makes an analogy to an open coffin attracting grieving attention at a wake: "There's always going to be that player who wants to jump on the coffin, just because they can." The emotional

part of a sequence can be easily fractured by player choice. One of Alan's moral choices is to

In the end, it was Palmer's choice to take almost six years to reach his personal goal. "It's a feeling of that kind of freedom, no matter the outcome, is something that's been taken for granted."

"With that kind of liberty, you have a responsibility to yourself and the audience," says Mylyrinne. "But especially to yourself, to see things through, and to do them right. And you can't really justify cutting corners. [After years of work] you get to the point, where you just want to make things work. It's easier said than done, but we had to wipe the slate clean. Even if you're talking six months' work, a lot of money, and a lot of emotional investment—those hard decisions are what make you strong in the end."

"Any piece of art, any piece of entertainment, is a reflection of the team that creates it. We've been in the lucky position where we've been able to pursue our vision. To create a game that we would want to play, to tell a story that we wanted to tell. And you can't take that kind of liberty for granted. It's not terribly common in games these days." ■

Hunted!

The Demon's Forge
Going For the Kill

By Mark Bozon



The state of dungeon crawlers these days is—dare I say it—a little on the abysmal side. Everyone seems to be waiting for Blizzard's up-and-coming *Diablo III* while getting their loot-based kicks by firing off a few thousand sniper rounds in 2K's *Borderlands*. I'm right there with you. *Diablo* looks great, and *Borderlands* will more than suffice for the time being—odd as it is to refer to a game as a “loot-based shooter.” Whatever happened to the good old days when stat-grinding hack-and-slash games were a dime a dozen?

PUBLISHER
REFINED
DEVELOPER
TITLE
PLATFORM
OS
MODES
SINGLE PLAYER
MULTIPLAYER
ESRB
RELEASE DATE

Enter Bethesda's latest acquisition, *Hunted: The Demon's Forge*.

Developed by inXile Entertainment, *Hunted: The Demon's Forge* is a two-player co-op action/RPG that blends the co-op style and attitude found in modern action shooters like *Gears of War* and *Army of Two* with an old-school feel, relying on team-based combat and plenty of spells, weapons, and stat upgrades. While our first look at the game showed a lot more of the action elements at the forefront, fans should wholeheartedly keep the faith, as *Hunted* seems to be in the right hands at inXile. For some gamers the name Brian Fargo speaks for itself. For

everybody else, rest assured knowing that your next big dungeon crawler prospect is being crafted by the mind behind *Baulder's Gate*, *The Bard's Tale*, and *Fallout*.

How do you bring the classic dungeon crawler genre to today's average gamer? We caught up with Fargo to get his take on that very challenge: “Nobody has gone back and said, ‘What would that kind of gameplay look like with today's technology, using the Unreal Engine, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and a really high-end PC?’ So I wanted to bring back that experience to today's gamer, and today's gamer is very different then they were

back then. *Hunted* has been geared towards a more *Gears of War* kind of audience.”

Our hands-off demo of the game followed *Hunted*'s two main characters, and we're told that the game will stick to that twosome for the duration of the adventure, with players able to switch their current character at will. For ranged players the femme fatale E'lara combines both a hearty mix of magic and long distance prowess to the battlefield—cover system and all. If your battle savvy finds you rushing the front lines more often than not, the hulking brute Caddoc will be more your style. It's all about playing the game how you want, and Fargo reinforced that point, stating that “Even the melee has range, and the range has

Hunted blends a mixture of classic dungeon crawling with modern-day shooters.



melee. So ultimately, you do get a bit of that choice. To me, good games let you sort of decide your gameplay style anyway, so each experience feels unique.”

The game has been crafted entirely with co-op in mind, so if you don't have a friend to lend a hand you'll be waging war with an AI-controlled partner at your side. inXile assured us, however, that their AI is no slouch. Computer controlled partners know to scout out sniper positions, actively heal and resurrect you, and know their way around the advantages each player relies on.

As for what you can expect within the forgotten ruins, dank dungeons, and demolished towns, *Hunted*

Who's Your Buddy?

When pairing up with friends you've got two options. The guest can use the host's own characters and then bring back any experience crystals earned while they play, or instead bring over their own character from the get-go and dole out experience on the fly that'll then be brought back with them. Regardless of what option players decide on, any experience used by your teammate within your game will be given back to you when you go into single player, assuring that you always have the final say when leveling up your team of two.

blends a mixture of classic dungeon crawling with modern-day shooters. E'lara's bow aiming resembles the often-emulated *Resident Evil 4* camera, complete with a tactical zoom, while Caddoc sticks to a more traditional behind-the-back view for melee-based offense.

Outside of their expected weapons both E'lara and Caddoc can master different sets of magic, use either to blast enemies with a pulse of fire or electricity or, instead, "battle charge" their team-mate, resulting in an elemental-based attack buffer. Fargo elaborated on the importance of team-based spell casting, stating, "I think that with any good action game or RPG, you want to feel like your character is growing in power. So you get swords that are better and better throughout, you get arrows that can shoot further than before, and that kind of classic damage stuff. But the main focus is on the spells."



It isn't just about offense either. Downed teammates can also be resurrected with ranged spell casting, streamlining the experience and ensuring that as long as you have line of sight you can act as one cohesive unit. Even the demo's final boss battle highlighted the game's distance co-op theme. E'lara first battle charged Caddoc, who then ran in for a killing blow. With the demon on the outs, the hulking warrior held its head in place, creating the

Step Into the World...

...and you'll see the look we took as into a world that seemed to mix the best of fantasy and sci-fi worlds with lush environments normally reserved for titles like *Uncharted* or the *Tomb Raider* series. After following a treasure map of dark caves the world opened up into some sort of forgotten ruins with rock structures and looming statues bathed in dense jungle foliage. inXile looks to be using the Unreal 3 engine to its fullest, mixing in plenty of visual effects and lighting with natural, lush environments.

"I sort of jokingly call it the 'Single White Barbarian' mode."

—inXile CEO Brian Fargo

perfect target for a bullet time bow shot from across the arena.

Most of *Hunted*'s level-up and interface system has been left behind the curtain thus far, with the short demo instead focusing on in-game combat and magic use. Fargo did mention, however, that there's plenty of customization to be had in the magic and skills department, and that players should never shy away from hooking up with friends online to take to the haunted depths as a newly

forged team. Random partners can be found online, but not before a quick questionnaire about play style and skill level is set up. If you're a speed player and don't want to spend time looking for the game's massive stash of secrets, you'll be paired with a like-minded buddy. If you plan on scouring the area and taking things slow, inXile hopes to find you the right co-op partner for the job. "I sort of jokingly call it the 'Single White Barbarian' mode," stated Fargo. "Co-op can be great

when you find people, but if they don't really play like you, if they want to explore, and you want to run forward, it's kind of frustrating. This helps bridge that problem."

Teaming the intensity of a modern-day shooter with the addictive nature of hack-and-slash dungeon crawling is no easy task, but from our initial look at the game inXile and Bethesda Software are making a promising go at it with *Hunted: The Demon Forge*. [▶](#)

Scare Bears: Frighten the other bears enough and they'll do



NAUGHTY BEAR

This Bear Set Doesn't Care

By Mark Berman

Who among us hasn't daydreamed about hitting the gas and splaying the old lady in the crosswalk across the hood? That's the wicked sensibility at work in 505 Games' *Naughty Bear*.

The game follows the exploits of a good teddy bear gone bad, as he romps about Paradise Island. This beautiful pastel world is reminiscent of an old Saturday morning cartoon show, filled with stuffed (don't call them Care) bears who run around in fields of flowers. Naughty, how-

ever, doesn't quite fit in. Each of the game's nine episodes hosts a half-dozen or so chapters in which the title character is pushed over the edge, *Falling Down* style, leading him to wreak havoc on anyone who gets in his way.

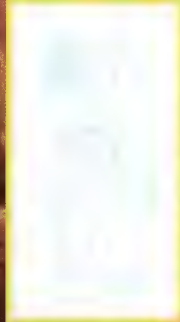
Beneath its seemingly childish exterior, *Naughty Bear* holds a heart of darkness. There's not a drop of blood to be found throughout the game, and the entire tone is puppy-kickin' cute, but you can bet its darker nature will draw the ire of a few cultural commentators on

release. That's partially due to the fact that *Naughty Bear*'s not just out to kill the residents of Paradise Island—who return with nothing but smiles despite the carnage inflicted upon them—he wants to really screw with their minds in the process.

Each level is an open sandbox of possibilities, whether you're taking a baseball bat to another teddy's head, setting up bear traps to inflict **psychological damage on the poor** plushies, or purposefully ending one of the resident's lives in front of the others. *Naughty Bear* is a little

PUBLISHED BY
55 GAMES
BY
AND COVER
FROM
PS2, XBOX
PC
MAY 18, 2006
RELEASING
06.08.2010

Naughty Bear's Sadistic Style



Whether you're dealing with outrageous scenarios like waves of "zombears" or going solo on a town of happy-looking teddies, there's always a dark, playful nature to the action. The game leans on that humor long after the violent shock factor runs its course.

Deliver a well-aimed crotch-shot with your pistol and the stuffing will flow.

sick, but it gleefully falls back on its "no gore" safety net. Deliver a well-aimed crotch-shot with your pistol, and stuffing will flow from the wound—pure, white, innocent stuffing. It's an approach that the designers get away with in spite of the over-the-top application.

Once you get a handle on the controls it's all about adding your own style. You can run around killing everybody if you want, but that won't raise your mayhem-based score multiplier. The different traps, sabotage items, and circumstances help make the game feel unique over

extended plays. Give a cuddly bear a light whacking on the knees and he'll crawl around, scaring other bears as he begs for help. Pushbears too far and—brace yourself—they'll even kill themselves in gore-free, cute and cuddly ways. Maybe they knock themselves in the head with a bat one too many times, or decide to do themselves in with a revolver. Either way, that kind of sick triumph scores you huge points and pumps your multiplier, which in turn rockets you up the game's online leaderboards. Is it brazen? Sure. But it makes good on its goals—and then some. [E3](#)



PUBLISHER
ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER
MOON STUDIOS
PLATFORM
XBOX360
GAMES
RATED
TEEN
ER
CO-OP
R
RELEASE DATE
06.22.2010

TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON

Taking the Autobots and Decepticons Back to Their Roots

By Brady Fiechter

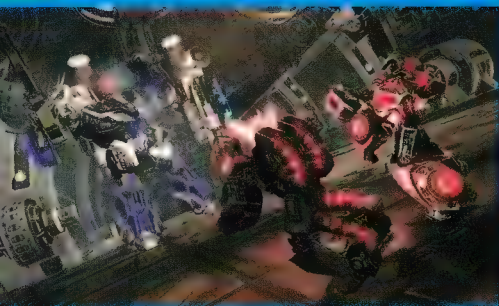
What does it feel like to get into a turret as a Transformer?" asks game director Matt Tieger, demonstrating the answer by guiding his giant robot onto the loading pad—and it becomes the turret.

In *Transformers: War for Cybertron*, there's plenty of shapeshifting going down, in all the ways you'd imagine in a game based off the Transformers franchise. But the most aggressive transformation is behind the scenes, where developer High Moon Studios has been granted

great liberty apply their own perspective on the established universe populated by Autobots and Decepticons. They've created a shadowy 3D Cybertron as the centerpiece for their design. Inspired by the iconic cartoon (and not the Michael Bay films), the artists brought their own angle to the character designs, modernizing Bumblebee as a concept car—streamlined and rounded—competing with the aggressive muscle-car motif of a Decepticon. High Moon revealed in the opportunity to craft their personal imagination

onto the Transformers homeworld. Hasbro established guard rails, "and we definitely bumped up against those, but we always came back," expresses Tieger.

The campaign follows separate story paths, switching between the Decepticon and Autobot stories at midpoint. We are not on earth; in fact, in the *War For Cybertron*, the title says it all, predating the fiction before humans were even in the picture. Cybertron is envisioned as a robot sanctuary. "We wanted it to be a utopia of its time," says Tieger.



"Hasbro established guard rails, and we definitely bumped up against those."

But it's also a planet littered with secrets. In one of my favorite moments of the demo, an in-air battle penetrates the Cybertron underground, revealing a network of tunnels neither side has been to before. The enemies here are like deep-sea creatures, evolving in this place of eternal darkness. It's a nice touch that invites exploration.

Once you lock into your character of choice—pick from any three per mission—you can load out a pair of weapons and abilities, choosing, for example, to combine a hover with a shockwave to dictate your style of play. It works to some degree, though additional hands-on time is required to determine the impact such selections have on the events that transpire. Transformations from vehicle to on-foot can happen at any time (it's up to you to discover the proper mode for the situation).

Transformers sticks the two unselected Autobot and Decepticon buddies by your side at all times. This is a pure-bred co-op action experience, during which friends can drop in and out on the fly. "We had multiplayer on the brain from the start; we really want you to sink your teeth into it," says Tieger.

While this is an action experience rounded in moments of spectacle, it's not just a game of incessant war. *High Moon* is pushing the franchise mythology forward by showing key events—for example, how Optimus and Bumblebee met as well as how Megatron and Starscream join forces—for the first time. The level design plays to these revelations with a story split into two parts (you play half as the Decepticons, then try to save the day as the Autobots) of four levels each.

Despite some rough edges that Tieger promised would be fixed in the final build, he remains confident in his work: "I know this game is good."

See More
Transformers
War For Cybertron
Concept Art
In EGMI:
The Digital
Magazine



Transformers

PUBLISHER
2K GAMES
DEVELOPER
2K CZECH
PLATFORM
PS3/XBOX360
MODES
SINGLE PLAYER
ESRB
M-MATURE
RELEASE DATE
FALL 2010

MAFIA II

Time to Pay a Visit to La Famiglia

By Douglas Perry

There's a very good reason why Italian-American Mafioso movies, TV shows, and videogames are so popular. The deep, compelling, and often operatic world of the mafia is still ripe with engaging stories. That's why after selling more than 2 million copies of the original *Mafia* nearly 10 years ago, 2K Czech is composing the sequel to its original *Mafia* ensemble.

Mafia II starts where you'd expect it to, at the end of World War II in a fictitious metropolis called Empire

City, based on Chicago, New York, and San Francisco. Just like the first *Mafia*, 2K Czech is putting an emphasis on storytelling and cinematic flourishes. Techniques such as foreshadowing, character development, and real repercussions to your actions resonate in this sandbox-style game right from the beginning. (The trademark cigarette smoke will make its return, too.)

"With *Mafia II*, we're very focused on getting the music, the weather, the true-to-life essence of the time right,"

said Senior producer Denny Czaic. "The mood is important, and the story filled with scripted events that are... motivations for these characters."

Backing up that statement, 2K Games has carefully littered key environments with officially backdated issues of *Playboy Magazine* with the real McCoy inside. The girly magazines do capture a time and a place, and they're both risqué and a little cheesy. Sonically, the game is less scandalous, but just as relevant. Each time you hop in a car you'll find the

radio blares originally licensed tunes from the likes of Little Richard (Long Tall Sally) to Chuck Berry (No Particular Place to Go) to Fats Domino (Blueberry Hill), and more.

You'll follow the exploits of an Italian American, Vito Scaletta, who leaves active duty due to injury. You begin when he takes his first dark step down the crime-ridden road to lift his family from debt. A nuanced cutscene portrays how Vito is welcomed home by his widowed mother and young sister. The mother scolds Vito for not saying prayer before dinner, and afterward his sister explains how they owe \$2,000 to a loan shark left unpaid by their recently deceased father.

Shortly afterward, Vito's friend, Joe Barbaro has just the remedy—selling illegal smokes in an empty parking lot—which just happens to be in another gang's territory. The rival gang (which loves its juiced up hot rods) arrives, warns them off, and quickly torches their truck with a Molotov Cocktail. Barbaro returns the favor with a gunshot to the gang leader's face, and the situation instantly ignites. The game takes place on both foot and in vehicles, which feel markedly faster than the rickety old boats from the original. Yes, you'll drive big, slow Buicks and some forgettable



sedans, but you'll have easy access to any car in the game, including Convertible T-Bird Coupes. And, after you face off with the hot rod gang on their turf in a heavy gun battle, you'll get their expensive jalopies.

True, this isn't *Grand Theft Auto IV*. There is no multiplayer or online mode, and it doesn't take place in the present. This is a classic mafia tale told much in the vein of Francis Ford Coppola's movie, *The Godfather*, the movie that started it all. When you think about it, it's not such a bad place to re-start a series. [E](#)

KILLER TIMES

A good smoke and a good daze are all you need after a long day at the office.



STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

Is the Force With It?

By John Keefer

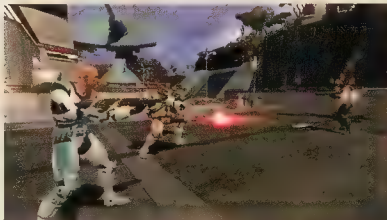
If any game has a chance of carving into *World of Warcraft*'s massive fanbase it's this one. Melding the storytelling chops of BioWare with the tremendous wealth of back-story created for the Star Wars universe, *Star Wars: The Old Republic* could end up the blockbuster that *Star Wars Galaxies* never was.

But so far, I'm not seeing it.

I recently got some extended hands-on time with the new Trooper class, a level-6 pre-built model that the press got to mess around with at LucasArts' San Francisco offices. Given all the hype—not to mention my own Star Wars geekdom—I was interested to see how this fully voiced, story-driven MMO was shaping up.

Upon starting my 30-minute session I was tasked with finding a quest-giver's missing partner. At least, I think that was the idea—the quest-giver talked so fast she sounded like a disclaimer for a pharmaceutical commercial. Once I got the hang of the controls (hot keys to fire, launch grenades, throw stickies and smack someone with my rifle butt, with some attacks using a combo point system), I proceeded to wade through at least 50 Imperial troops, which came in groups of twos and threes. As long as I healed after every few fights I had nothing to worry about. I even picked up another quest, to blow up an underground generator, which I wasn't able to complete in the time allotted.

I finally found the missing partner after killing about half of the troops



Bioware and LucasArts have huge expectations to live up to.

protecting the base I needed to infiltrate. There was a hint of storyline involving switched loyalties, and my next quest was to retrieve two propaganda disks. I did so fairly quickly, but by that time my session was over.

Verdict? Aside from being in the Star Wars universe, all I saw was more of the same. Yes, I got to see a few of the fully voiced cut-scenes, but what I'm really craving is a compelling story. Ever since *The Old Republic* was announced it's been touted as a story-driven MMO, which wasn't much in evidence during our playtest. The CG trailers have been glorious, but I really need to see how the game will take MMO storytelling beyond the basic level seen in *WoW*.

That's not to say I wasn't entertained, as there's definitely something amusing about watching an enemy frantically try to brush off a sticky grenade. But BioWare and LucasArts have huge expectations to live up to, and I want to be impressed as well as entertained.

Maybe the purpose of these preview sessions is to leave me wanting more. If so they've succeeded, as I really want more. Much more. **68**

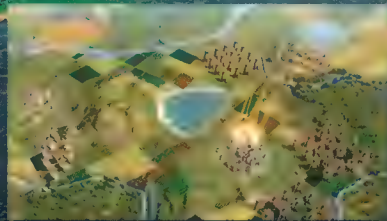


CIVILIZATION V

A New Return to the Past



Two major changes: One unit per hex (top), and leaders in their familiar surroundings (bottom).



HE'LL BE BACK. The new game will be a return to the past, a return to the original game's focus on strategy and diplomacy. The new game will be a return to the past, a return to the original game's focus on strategy and diplomacy. The new game will be a return to the past, a return to the original game's focus on strategy and diplomacy.

but the fact remains that a bunch of features that *Civilization IV* players took for granted are being improved or outright changed in *Civilization V*.

Pulling from his love of the old SSI game *Panzer General*, lead designer Jon van Canhoven says that the new game's hexes "the idea is to give a more refined look to the terrain, and to let the lay of the land play a bigger role in strategy." The demo we saw offered a small glimpse of how this might play out, with a spearman unit stationed in a mountain pass holding off push after push by their enemies. It was a *Civilization* version of 300.

Also gone is the massive unit stack that could sweep across the field, wiping out everything in its path (including those damn Spartans in the mountains). Now the rule is "one hex, one unit" and players will need to be more judicious in planning attacks. For example, you'll need to support warriors with ranged units several hexes away, or move spearman to the front lines to counter mounted units.

City-states add another new foible. Befriending a city-state through the donation of gold or units can provide a civilization with buffs or extra resources

war you weren't planning on waging. Diplomacy is going to play a bigger part in the new game as well. Advisers offer more advice (including mind-blowing ProTips like "use your units to explore the map—oh, what are we paying that guy again?) and you'll find yourself having interactions with other civilization leaders in their native environments.

In the demo Washington spoke to me from his office and Otto von Bismarck from his office and Cleopatra from her office and so on. This time around, you can't even have a simple leader who represents to the bi-polar choice.

The AI has also been tweaked to give each civilization its own distinct play style, and the leaders have their own agendas. While Gandhi may be all about peaceful resistance, don't be surprised if he threatens to nuke you back to the Stone Age if you don't play your cards right.

Finally, the designers wanted to further embrace the mod community, so the game will feature more accessible tools that let upload and download mods within the game itself. An in-game browser is also being added so that players can visit forums or chat within the confines of the game.

Having played *Civ IV* so much that "just one more turn" became a standing joke, I'm anxious to get my hands on *Civ V* to see all the changes in action. They make sense in concept, but given that these are changes to an already-great game, I'm hoping I won't end up wishing Firaxis had left well enough alone. ■

PUBLISHED
BY
WORLD
OF
WARGAMES
ELECTRONIC
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LAUNCH DATE

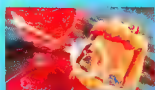
5.18.2010

After more than four years in development, Rockstar Games marries their RAGE engine with the Old West in *Red Dead Redemption*. The open world environment provides plenty of opportunities to pick a fight, or you can focus on your character's morality to change the way you're perceived in the world.

04.27.2010	PixelJunk Monsters Deluxe	PSP	SCEA
	Dead to Rights: Retribution	Multi	Namco/Bandai
	Nier	Multi	Square/Enix
	Record of Agarest War	360	Aksys Games
	FFA World Cup 2010	Multi	EA
Super Street Fighter IV	Multi	Capcom	
05.01.2010	Ninety-Nine Nights 2	360	Konami
	Dance Dance Revolution	Multi	Konami
05.04.2010	LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4	Multi	Warner
04.27.2010	Picross 3D	DS	Nintendo
	Iron Man 2	Multi	Sega of America
05.31.2010	3D Dot Game Heroes	PS3	Atlus
	Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja 3	PSP	Namco/Bandai
	Skate 3	Multi	EA
	Lost Planet 2	Multi	Capcom
	Batman: Arkham Asylum GOTY 3D	Multi	Warner
05.18.2010	Split Second	Multi	Disney
	Pure Futbol	Multi	UbiSoft
	Alan Wake	360	Microsoft
	Red Dead Redemption	Multi	Rockstar
	Shrek: Forever After	Multi	Activision
	Prince of Persia: Forgotten Sands	Multi	Ubisoft
All Star Karate	Wii	THQ	
05.23.2010	Super Mario Galaxy 2	Wii	Nintendo ▶
05.25.2010	ModNation Racers	Multi	SCEA
	Blur	Multi	Activision
	UFC: Undisputed 2010	Multi	THQ
	Sniper: Ghost Warrior	Multi	Navarre
	Backbreaker	Multi	505 Games
05.31.2010	Green Day: Rock Band Plus	Multi	EA
06.01.2010	R.U.S.E.	Multi	Ubisoft
	Alpha Protocol	Multi	Sega of America
	Majesty 2: The Fantasy Kingdom	360	Southpeak
	Hot Shot Tennis	PSP	SCEA
	Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels	DS	Nintendo
	The Sims 3: Ambitions Expansion	PC	EA
	Max Payne 3	Multi	Rockstar Games
	Swarm	360	505 Games

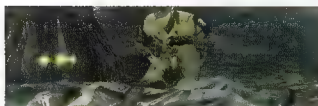


5.23.2010
SUPER
MARIO
GALAXY 2



For more information on the latest in gaming, visit us at www.ign.com or follow us on Twitter @IGN.

METAL GEAR SOLID: PEACE WALKER



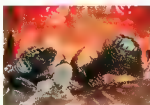
PSP 06.08.2010

TIGER WOODS 2011



Multi 06.08.2010

QUANTUM THEORY



Multi 07.01.2010

NAUGHTY BEAR



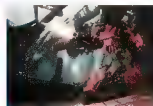
Multi 06.15.2010

CRACKDOWN 2



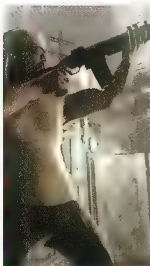
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TRANSFORMERS: WAR FOR CYBERTRON



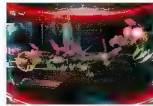
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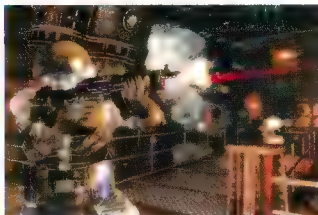
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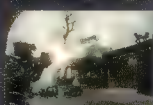
SINGULARITY



Multi 06.29.2010

06.02.2010
HALO: REACH

The Halo Saga continues in this preview to *Cinematic Evolved* that unfolds on the planet Reach.



TIME CAPSULE

10 YEARS AGO
(May, 2000)



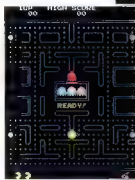
Tony Hawk takes flight on the cover of issue 130 with an expanded preview of *Pro Skater 2* (a game that would later go on to earn a coveted Platinum Award). The shifting winds in the console war took center stage this month with confirmation of Microsoft's mysterious "X-Box" project, and new details on Nintendo's "Dolphin,"—which would go on to become the GameCube. This issue also saw the departure of Dan "Shoe" Hsu (who would return to the position of EIC a year later).

20 YEARS AGO
(May, 1990)



Super Contra graces the cover of EGM #10, a benchmark issue that shows the results of our (sometimes misfortunate) first steps of going completely digital with the design. Trust us, the large pixelated screen shot looked *great* on the computer monitor. Inside, *Super C* garnered straight B's from the Review Crew, Quartermann dished on Nintendo's follow-up to the NES and questioned its 16-Bit credentials, and we offered up the first detailed preview of Mattel's imperfect motion controller, the Power Glove.

30 YEARS AGO
(May, 1980)



The golden age of video gaming began this month, thirty years ago, with Namco's unveiling of the original *Pac-Man* (entitled *Puck-Man* in Japan). The game would find its audience (and a new name—coined by executives worried that vandals would be tempted to alter the first letter of the original Japanese title) in the US courtesy of Midway and ultimately spawn more than a dozen spin-offs. It took nearly twenty years before *King of Kong* star Billy Mitchell "beat" the game by playing through to the infamous split-screen without losing a single life.



DAN "SHOE" HSU

The Case Against The Gaming Press



Out of the 1,765,356,198 other careers in the world, I can think of maybe three that I'd enjoy more than what I do now. I'm not cool (or good) enough to be a professional snowboarder. I don't have the physique to be a football player for the University of Michigan—plus that's not a paying gig anyways. The third option...wouldn't be appropriate for me to say out loud.

That leaves 1,765,356,195 occupations I would like a lot less than my current one. I believe most of them are featured regularly on Discovery Channel's *Dirty Jobs*.

So games journalism it is.

I love my job. I knew I would the first day I stepped into EGM's original offices in Lombard, Illinois for an interview. I didn't spot one suit, tie, penny loafer (this was back in the '90s), spreadsheet, binder, nameplate, time-punch clock,

Montblanc pen, or "hang in there" motivational poster (though if there were one, it'd be for ironic purposes).

Instead, I walked into Willy Wonka's Dream-Job Factory. Cubicles housed action figures, game posters, and most awe-inspiring: televisions, PlayStations, Saturns, Super Nintendos, and Genesis systems (it was the '90s, remember?). People were playing video games at their desks. Video games! Suddenly, my old job

checking people in at Enterprise Rent-A-Car seemed like a cruel joke designed to make me extra-appreciate what EGM was offering.

The next few years of my new career were simply amazing. I got to play Mario 64 before any Americans even got to touch the radical new N64 controller. I saw Street Fighter 3 while people were still duking it out in Alpha 3 in the arcades. I got to experience the Dreamcast, PlayStation 2, Xbox, Wii, etc. etc. months before they hit stores.

Yeah, I love my job.

Believe it or not, however, I'm not actually writing all this to make anyone jealous or to piss off Enterprise Rent-A-Car employees. I've been in this biz for 14 years now, and I still can't believe how fortunate I am—and I know most of my peers feel the same way. But what I don't get is this rising trend of "journalists" who don't seem to give two craps about their roles in this industry.

Case #1: A press guy going on a rant, upset that a company wouldn't give him a special, limited-edition console for free because he came from afar to cover their event. He didn't seem to care that they needed to give the one system they had on hand away to a consumer for a contest.

Case #2: I've seen people rudely ignoring the producers that are talking directly to them during private demos and presentations, because they couldn't be pulled away from texting their friends at that very moment.

Case #3: I've seen journalists abuse their positions to get all their personal friends into press events — ones outsiders have no business being in. Perhaps they don't see the harm in that, but it's costing *someone* money to host these additional heads at any rented venue. Here's a hot tip: Pretty much no one enjoys having uninvited guests at their party.

Case #4: I've seen journos beeline it to the open bar and spend the entire night drinking and taking pictures with geek- or Internet-famous personalities, never once bothering to check out or learn about the games in attendance. The resulting coverage is more suitable for Facebook than any gaming website. Hey, if the products aren't worth covering, they're not worth covering. But I'm pretty sure these writers wouldn't even know, as all their hands-on time went to booze.

Case #5: I know media who have slept with developers—not so much to get information out of them (hmm...I wonder if I'd be more forgiving if that were the case), but because they're star f**ers. Yes, some people are *that* enamored with highest-pecking geeks in our industry. Sad, huh?

Case #6: As bad as those real-life examples are, the worst may be the ones who have somehow fooled themselves into thinking the world must bow down to their self-entitled asses. I've seen "famous" journalists dismiss fans and normal people, as if they were Hollywood stars. I've literally heard, "Do you know who I am?" used on more than one occasion by different editors. One

even followed that up with, "You'll never work in this industry again!" during an altercation.

Wow... are we really that big of a deal? Answer: nope.

These guys and girls need a serious reality check. We're in one of the coolest industries imaginable, and we're lucky to have access (not *that* kind of access, case #5s) to these game makers and to be able to share our supposedly fair and unbiased thoughts with the world. Shouldn't we be doing this because we're curious and passionate about games—and not because we want to socialize, avoid paying for stuff, and exert power over others?

Look, I'm no role model of a journalist. I get plenty of free games, systems, and extra-extra-large t-shirts. And I don't want to give the wrong impression that this is an out-of-control and widespread problem — the vast majority of my peers are on the up and up. But every time I attend a press event, I see a few more examples of this behavior, and that should concern everyone associated with this field. It should certainly concern anyone who relies upon coverage from these offenders.

Yes, this is a multibillion-dollar business, and our words can alter analyst projections and move stock needles. But maybe if these few journalists-gone-wild would remember what working life was like before getting into this business, they'd get those egos down to a more manageable level and remember how good we have it here—and why we shouldn't take advantage. ■



...what I don't get is this rising trend of "journalists" who don't seem to give two craps about their roles in this industry.



JOHN KEENER

Your Game Can Go To Hell

When I was a kid I had a hell of a vivid imagination. I could be a soldier rescuing princesses, and have a squadmate that had three heads and peanut butter for blood. I'd swing my grandfather's cane like a sword and use tubes of wrapping paper as rocket launchers.

There were no bounds to my imagination. I think that's why I eventually gravitated towards games, because they had a way of taking me places that I imagined as a kid.



But the more I play games these days, the more I realize that the games are not keeping up with an ever-changing imagination. Games keep revisiting the Greatest Hits of Imagination Past and it's becoming a tired refrain.

Characters both futuristic and (supposedly) fantastic need a new coat of mental imagery. Worlds ostensibly far removed from Earth offer voluptuous females with two slender legs and ample breasts, and denizens with two eyes, a nose and a mouth. No matter what color the skin or how misshapen the ears, these are all recognizable human characteristics. Where are the characters that see with their hands, grasp things with their minds and make love by rubbing eyeballs?

We have games set in space, hell, the future, the past, the Wild West, bad neighborhoods, and fantasy worlds with orcs and elves, or variations thereof. Is there anything left to explore? My buddy Gus Mustrapa recently bashed *Dante's Inferno* for being derivative. But these days, when it comes to fully envisioned game worlds and indigenous peoples, everything is derivative.

Maybe there are no game worlds left to imagine. Maybe it is a matter of taking existing worlds and reimagining them and forcing the player to experience them in different ways

Assassin's Creed and its sequel forced us to explore historically familiar cities

and landmarks as a way to achieve goals in the game. I have to admit that I got a bit of a chill when wandering the streets of Renaissance Italy and interacting in a way that textbooks could never allow. And there was a certain excitement at having Leonardo da Vinci as my collaborator. Granted, the game has a futuristic back-story, but the gameplay experience was invigorating.

I would have loved to be in the meetings where Disney decided that a darker version of Mickey Mouse should actually be greenlit. *Epic Mickey*, in the capable hands of Warren Spector, looks to take characters and environments we are all too familiar with and set them on their large rodent ears. Who wouldn't want to play an angry, possibly deranged Mickey?

It's easy for me to sit here and pontificate that designers need to be more creative in engaging gamers in their worlds. Yes, you still need the gameplay to back up the imagination, but there also needs to be more creativity from the outset, and you can build the gameplay and story off that. Honestly, why are space marines always our last line of defense? How often can you save a lost love from pirate ninja zombies? And why must our heroes look like Megan Fox and Matt Damon instead of Jack Skellington? More Sackboy and Oddworld would *not* be a bad thing.

And neither would a character who bleeds peanut butter. Just sayin'. ☒

...when it comes to fully envisioned game worlds and indigenous peoples, everything is derivative.

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Motion Sickness

Hey Nintendo, whatever happened to us, man? Why'd you have to go and get all crazy on me? There was a time when I worshipped the very ground you walked on. You remember that, right? Y'know, when I bought my first SNES and we rocked *Super Mario World* and *F-Zero*? And what about the time we nailed *Super Mario 64*, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *GoldenEye* on my Nintendo 64? Surely you can't have forgotten all those hours we spent with *Super Smash Bros. Melee* on the GameCube?

First of all, why the hell are you making me get up off my ass? That's just not cool, man. I mean, I can appreciate the mind-boggling motion-sensitive technology that you've jammed into those little white remotes, but have you seen what you've inspired the other guys do? Yeah, Sony and Microsoft are whipping themselves up into a frenzy to try and compete with your wiggly wand. Soon they're going to release their own motion sensitive controllers for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360... two more machines that I happen to own and love, by the way.

So now what? I'm going to be forced to plug a little black camera into my 360 and then act like a demented mime trying to steer an imaginary car? The only reason this horrifying scenario is even a possibility is because you had to go and show that money could be made

off of forcing people to move around when they play a game. I know, I know, it was a LOT of money and imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, to be sure, but I just want to play some friggin' videogames, man! Not act them out!

And oh boy, Sony wants me to buy a camera AND a new controller! How much is all that gear gonna cost? Sony's Move controller looks like a giant scary lollipop, and I do not want to drain my taquito fund purchasing giant scary lollipops. What I do want is games like *God of War 4* and *Killzone 3* to be left the hell alone, and for that all I need is my DualShock 3. And some taquitos

See what you've done, Nintendo? How long will it be before I'm running fake marathons in front of my TV instead of "playing" the new Track & Field. Whatever happened to a guy sitting down on his couch with a few beers, a wireless game pad and some spare time to waste?

Now it's no longer a case of just playing *Super Mario Bros.*—I've gotta juggle my controller like I'm having a seizure just to pull off a spin attack. What gives? And something tells me that if I want to play your new *Zelda* game later this year I'm gonna have to pay for one of your Wii MotionPlus doo-dads.

I get what you're doing, I really do. It's great that you've captured the hearts of millions of octogenarians, but do you know what it feels like to have your own

parents snatch a controller out of your hands just so they can throw a friggin' Frisbee to a big-eyed dog? Not good, Mr. N. Not. Good.

I guess I'm really just pissing in the wind at this point. Even when you finally get around to tellin' me about your next console none of this will have sunk in, will it? Is there really any way that the Wii 2 or whatever you're going to call it won't have waggle-based controls? I know, I know, you occasionally make concessions to your hardcore loyal fanbase, and for that I should be grateful, but have you seen the amount of shovelware third-party crap that's hitting your console from all angles?

What happened to the cute little Nintendo Seal of Approval?

Maybe it's me. Maybe I'm just not able to move on from the past. I guess, maybe, you're looking to the future while I'm stuck in the past.

Ahh, screw it... I'm givin' you one more chance. The DSI XL looks pretty cool, and I've been looking for a reason to blow my cash on something y'know, retail therapy so yeah, I'ma give us one more shot. Maybe I'll even try to bond a bit more with that dust-trap of a waggle box that's sitting in my kid's bedroom just promise me you won't do anything "new" for awhile that revolutionizes the games industry and forces everyone else to follow your lead.

Healing takes time, you know. ■

Whatever happened to a guy sitting down on his couch with a few beers, a wireless game pad and some spare time to waste?

RISE FROM YOUR GRAVE, CRAP!



The realism of 2000 rearing is captured on the *Imagine Baby-sitters* box.

For several years, I headed up EGM's bad games department. If a game was about Sea Monkeys or Burger King, it was my job to play it. There were consequences. I found my Gameboy with a gun in its mouth every morning, and my XBOX 360 took enough anti-depressants to cheer up a septic tank prisoner.

Since EGM was cancelled I've learned that it's possible to play Nintendo without screaming, but that's just me being selfish. The world needs *The Rest of the Crap*. This column is the last line of defense between your video game system and *That's So Raven*. Do you realize *Imagine Babysitters* came out and it went entirely unmocked? Not anymore: Why make a game about something as dull as imaginary babysitting? Was imaginary oatmeal holding out for too much money? Mission accomplished.

As a welcome back to EGM, the sadistic editors of this magazine, in coalition with the ghosts of evil scientists, have given me a pile of impossibly bad games, mostly to see if I'll survive. If they're wrong and I live, three Nintendo DS reviews should be below. All review scores will be measured on a scale of one to five. *Babysitters* baby heads: the baby head so cool it has sunglasses worn on the

SEANBABY

REST OF THE CRAP

Barbie and the Three Musketeers

When 1 Barbie meets 3 Musketeers, the next thing you're going to need is 1 DNA test. You start the game as a girl named Corrine, not Barbie, because people who buy games like this deserve to be lied to. It's a platform game with boredom elements like constant backtracking, pacifism, and featureless plastic crotches.

Crappiness of Gameplay:

○○○○○

I've played many Barbie games and the unifying theme among them is that everything hates Barbie. Normally harmless animals and objects will defy every law of nature and science to kill her. This game is no exception. Mice, bats, falling fruit, scarecrows—they want her dead. You will too, but she's virtually impossible to kill. It takes a simple rat so long to chew you to death in this game that Barbie fans will be on their fourth teen pregnancy before they see a Game Over screen.

Even the bottomless pits scattered throughout her own barn can't kill her. Her immortality spits in the face of three decades worth of video game science! It's as if the game designers have you on suicide watch, knowing you'd run Corrine's face into the first dangerous thing you saw.

Maybe it's easy because it's targeted at attention deficit, flipper-handed children, but if that's the case, why are all the puzzles complicated 12-step procedures of switching to a kitten and navigating mazes to flip switches? You don't design puzzles like that for children. That's like making a kid eat with a pulley system because they can't be trusted with a fork.

Crappiness of Graphics:

○○○○○

There is an extra frame of animation as Corrine turns from side to side. It adds a realistic inertial effect to her swinging



bosom, but it makes it extremely difficult to change directions and jump. Any complicated maneuvering feels like a passive aggressive argument between you and the controls. You might want to jump across a gap, but Corrine's chest animation would rather dive into the bottomless and harmless pit. It's a visual metaphor to let kids know that luscious, swinging breasts win almost every argument.

M&M's Adventures

If you're already operating under the pretense that talking candy products are on an adventure, you can literally make their game about anything. Cowboys, dinosaurs, late onset diabetes...

anything. So with an entire world of possibility and fun open to them, what's the plot to their game? Buckle up.

Here's the plot: A spoof of the Y2K bug called the M&M bug—yes this game is just that funny—caused some kind of problem in their office building's candy storage and you have to collect 120 misplaced candies. It's like they asked a janitor in 1999 to list his worst possible Y2K scenarios and then they made a game based on his 40,578th choice. This is horrible. The only way you can have less fun with chocolate is to feed it to your dog.

Crappiness of Gameplay:

○○○○○

Most of your "Adventures" involve crossing empty rooms and trying to remember to breathe. Because there is so little stimuli in M&M's *Adventures* that your body will start to mistake itself for dead. If you can tolerate the crushing bleakness and four-second loop of xylophone music, and feel free to stop here because you won't, you may run into a few videogame-like elements such as coin trails and floating platforms. These are only sad reminders of the actual games someone else might be playing while you're stuck in a bad 1990-era 3D platformer dressed as a commercial. And it even fails at being a commercial—after playing this for several hours, all M&M's taste like fish.

Crappiness of Graphics:

○○○○○

Aside from the gameplay, the graphics are so dated that your hair will feather itself. I don't think this was even meant to be a game. It probably started off as a 3D video on clinical depression that the Mars Corporation showed to its employees. It's that bad. If an M&M ever asks you to go on an adventure, kill it and stay home.



Jonas

This game is about, and I quote, "what it like to be fabulously popular rock stars...

WHO ALSO HAPPEN TO BE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS!"

You know how they say there are no bad ideas during a brainstorming session?

They invented that saying before the brainstorming session for *Jonas*. No ideas were thrown away here. Just as the Native Americans in *Dances with Wolves* took away the top of every soldier they scalped, the *Jonas* team used every part of every stupid idea that came off the top of their heads. I'll explain below.

Crappiness of Gameplay:

○○○○○

The first mission you go on is called "Keepin' It Real," but it gets worse. You explore a giant closet to change outfits.



Not teen rock star enough for you? Well, you get past every obstacle by playing guitar at it. Note: That's not an adaptation of anything. That's vomit from a designer's brain that immediately gave up when it was told to think up a Jonas Brothers videogame.

Also, to say *Jonas* has the worst guitar mini game ever is completely inadequate. I had to invent an entirely new term to describe it: "Bargain Diarrhea Cancer." Or put another way: if someone attached electrodes to your genitals every time someone playing this game and smiled, it would put electrode companies out of business.

Crappiness of Graphics:

○○○○○

The graphics are competent, which only adds to the tragedy because it means there were talented artists involved in this interactive violation of the Geneva Convention. The game design sucks like an octopus in a Japanese love story, and the writing is so bad that it wouldn't have surprised me at all if one of the Jonas Bros. suddenly said, "I hope this message reaches someone. Help. The zookeeper forces us to write videogames at night." In fact, I think it would have helped the plot.

I know these games sell even when they suck, but it seems inhumane. Why not make poisoned Jonas fruit drink and then sell twens the antidote? Or you could design a Jonas hammer and attack birthday parties. All I'm saying is that there's got to be a less evil way to steal money from children. ■

REST OF THE CRAP

If an M&M ever asks you to go on an adventure, kill it and stay home.



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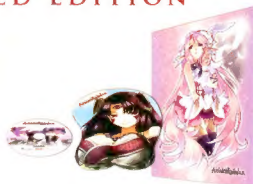
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